

A Geographical Overview of Language Family

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Abstract

Language is a mean of communication among people including speech, writing, and singing. Language is an important factor in geographical diversity. The English word language derives from the Indo-European. Language is the human ability to acquire and use complex systems of communication. The scientific study of language is called linguistic. Language is a strong element of culture.

"Language is a systematic means of communicating ideas and feeling by the use of conventionalized signs, gestures, marks or especially articulate vocal sounds". At present 5-6, thousands of languages are present in the world. Between them 1200, languages are present in Africa and 600 languages in India.

Language provides the single most common variable by which cultural groups are identified. Language provides the main means by which learned customs and skills pass from one generation to the next. Facilitates cultural diffusion of innovations. Because languages vary spatially, they reinforce the sense of region and place. Study of language called linguistic geography and geolinguistics by geographers.

Keywords: Language Family; Classification; Nature; Geographical Area.

1. Introduction

Language is a system that consists of the development, acquisition, maintenance and use of complex systems of communication, particularly the human ability to do so; and a language is any specific example of such a system.

The scientific study of language is called linguistics. Questions concerning the philosophy of language, such as whether words can represent experience, have been debated at least since Gorgias and Plato in ancient Greece. Thinkers such as Rousseau have argued that language originated from emotions while others like Kant have held that it originated from rational and logical thought. 20th-century philosophers such as Wittgenstein argued that philosophy is really the study of language. Major figures in linguistics include Ferdinand de Saussure and Noam Chomsky.

Estimates of the number of human languages in the world vary between 5,000 and 7,000. However, any precise estimate depends on a partly arbitrary distinction between languages and dialects. Natural languages are spoken or signed, but any language can be encoded into secondary media using auditory, visual, or tactile stimuli – for example, in whistling, signed, or braille. This is because human language is modality-independent. Depending on philosophical perspectives regarding the definition of language and meaning, when used as a general concept, "language" may refer to the cognitive ability to learn and use systems of complex communication, or to describe the set of rules that makes up these systems, or the set of utterances that can be produced from those rules. All languages rely on the process of semiosis to relate signs to particular meanings. Oral, manual and tactile languages contain a phonological system that governs how symbols are used to form sequences known as words or morphemes, and a syntactic system that governs how words and morphemes are combined to form phrases and utterances.

Human language has the properties of productivity and displacement, and relies entirely on social convention and learning. Its complex structure affords a much wider range of expressions than any known system of animal communication. Language is thought to have originated when early hominines started gradually changing their primate communication systems, acquiring the ability to form a theory of other minds and a shared intentionality. This development is sometimes thought to have coincided with an increase in brain volume, and many linguists see the structures of language as having evolved to serve specific communicative and social functions. Language is processed in many different locations in the human brain, but especially in Broca's and Wernicke's areas. Humans acquire language through social interaction in early childhood, and children generally speak fluently by approximately three years old. The use of language is deeply entrenched in human culture. Therefore, in addition to its strictly communicative uses, language also has many social and

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cultural uses, such as signifying group identity, social stratification, as well as social grooming and entertainment.

2. Language Family

There are various types of language families. These are given below

2.1. The Indo-European Language Family

- Largest most wide-spread family
- Spoken on all continents
- Dominant in Europe, Russia, North and South America
- Subfamilies- Romance, Siavic, Germanic, Indic, Celtic and Iranic
- Subfamilies are divided into individual languages
- Seven Indo-European tongues are among the top 10 languages spoken in the world
- By comparing vocabularies in various languages one can see the kinship



Figure 1: The Indo-European language family

2.2. The Afro-Asiatic Language Family

The Afro-Asiatic Language Family has two major Divisions-Semitic and Hamitic

- a) Semitic covers the area from Tigris- Euphrates valley westward through most of the north half of Africa to the Atlantic coast
- b) Domain is large but consists of mostly sparsely populated deserts
- c) Arabic is the most wide-spread Semitic language
- d) Arabic has the most number of native speakers-about 186 million
- e) Hebrew was a “dead” language used only in religious ceremonies

- f) Today Hebrew is the official language of Israel
- g) Amharic a third major Semitic tongue has 20 million speakers in the mountains of East Africa

Smaller number of people speak Hamitic languages

- a) Share North and East Africa with Semitic speakers
- b) Spoken by the Berbers of Morocco and Algeria
- c) Spoken by the Tuaregs of the Sahara and Cushites of East Africa
- d) Originated in Asia but today only spoken in Africa
- e) Expansion of Arabic decreased the area and number of speakers



Figure 2: The Afro-Asiatic language family

2.3. Niger-Congo Language Family

- a) The Niger-Congo family dominates Africa South of the Sahara desert.
- b) Spoken by about 200 million people
- c) Greater part of the Niger-Congo culture region belongs to the Bantu sub-groups
- d) Includes Swahili-the lingua franca of East Africa

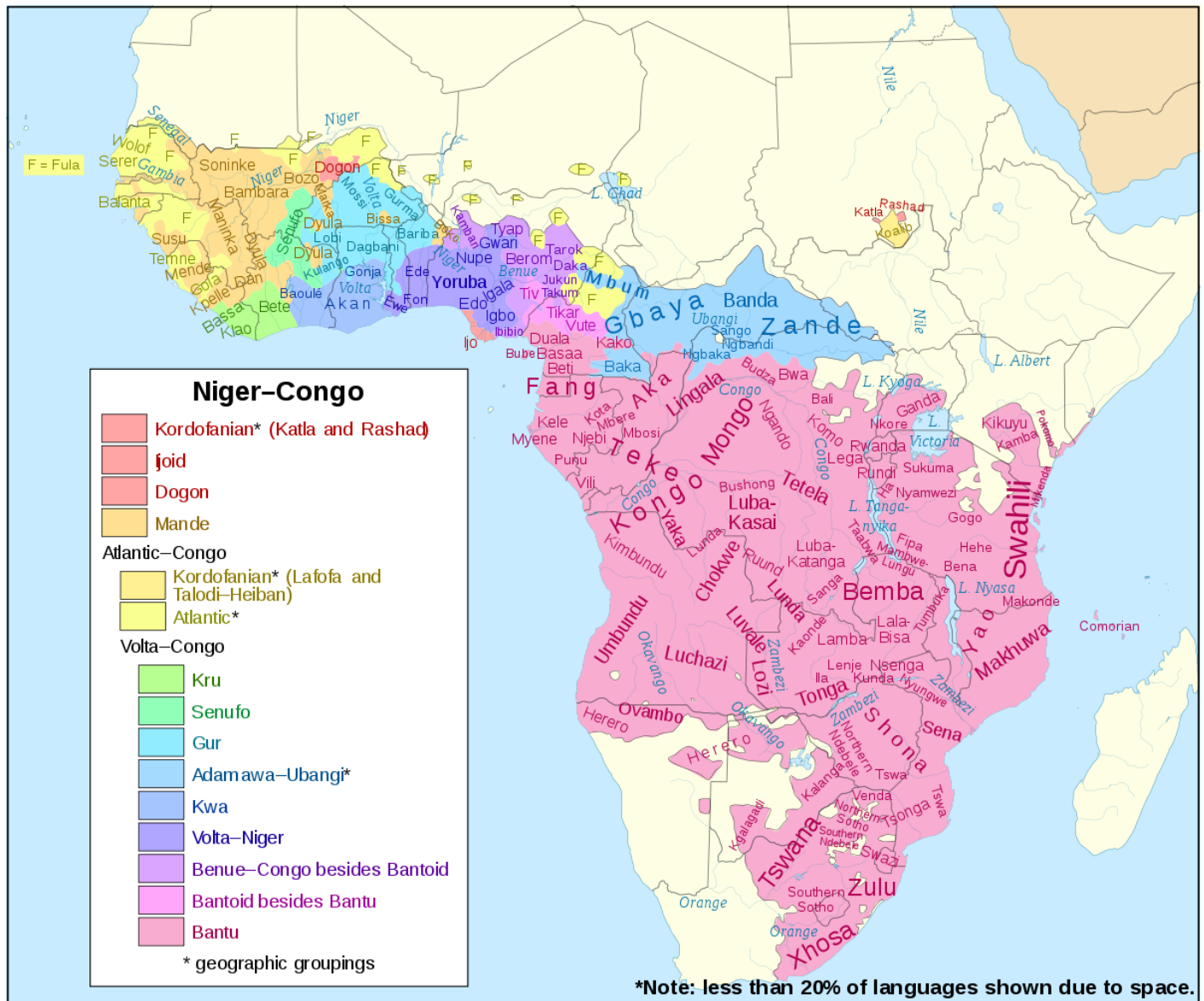


Figure 3: Niger-Congo language family

2.4. Altaic Language Family

- Includes Turkic, Mongolic, and several other subgroups
- Homeland lies largely in deserts, tundra's, and coniferous forests of northern and central Asia

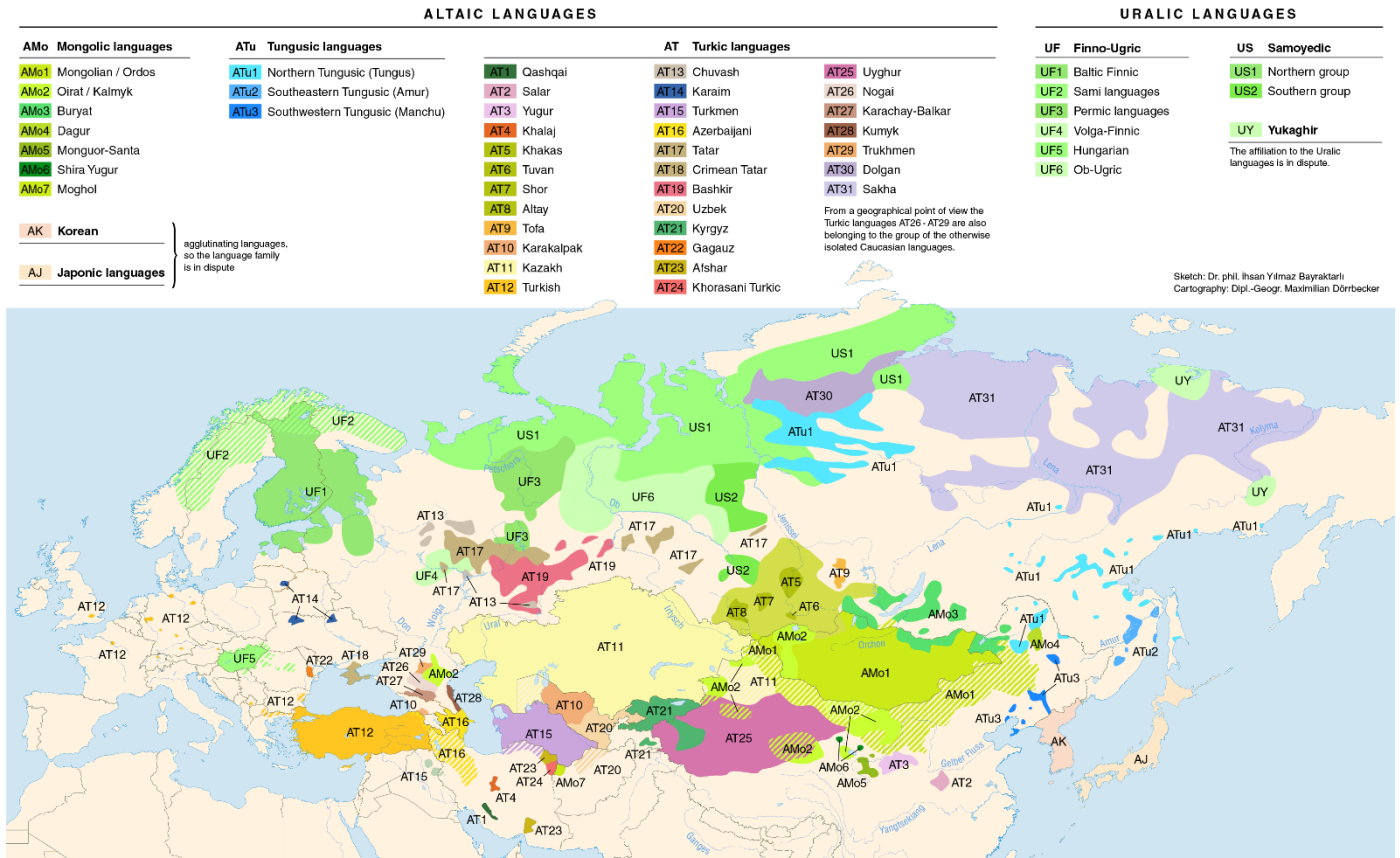


Figure 4: Altaic Language Family

2.5. Uralic Language Family

- Finnish and Hungarian are the two most important tongues
- Both have official status in their countries



Figure 5: Uralic language family

2.6. Austronesian Language Family

- a) Most remarkable language family in terms of distribution
- b) Speakers live mainly on tropical islands
- c) Ranges from Madagascar, through Indonesia and the Pacific islands, to Hawaii and Easter island
- d) Longitudinal span is more than half way around the world
- e) Latitudinal, ranges from Hawaii and Taiwan in the north to New Zealand in the south
- f) Largest single language in this family is Indonesian-50 million speakers
- g) Most wide-spread language is Polynesian



Figure 6: Austronesian Language Family

2.7. Sino-Tibetan Language Family

- a) One of the major language families of the world
- b) Extends throughout most of China and Southeast Asia
- c) Han Chinese is spoken in a variety of dialects as a mother tongue by 836 million people
- d) Han serves as the official form of speech in China



Figure 7: Sino-Tibetan language family

2.8. Japanese/Korean Language Family

- a) Another major Asian family with nearly 200 million speakers
- b) Seems to have some kinship to both the Altaic and Austronesian



Figure 8: Japanese/Korean language family

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- This map illustrates the geographical and climatic diversity of South and Southeast Asia. The legend identifies various climate zones: Tropical (orange), Subtropical (yellow), Temperate (green), and others. Major cities and regions are labeled, including India, China, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Malaysia. The map also shows the Bay of Bengal, Andaman Sea, and surrounding islands. A scale bar at the bottom indicates distances in miles and kilometers.

2.10. Other Major Language Family

- Khchisan-found in the Kalahari desert of southwestern Africa, characterized by clicking sounds
- Dravidian-spoken by numerous darker-skinned people of southern India and northern Sri Lanka
- Others include-Papuan, Caucasia, Nilo-Saharan, Paleo Siberian, Inuktitut and a variety of Amerindian
- Basque-spoken on the borderland between Spain and France is unrelated to any other language in the world

Language is particularly very important because speech is as basic as aspect of culture and creating a sense of place. Languages evolve and diversify over time, and the history of their evolution can be reconstructed by comparing modern languages to determine which traits their ancestral languages must have had in order for the later developmental stages to occur. A group of languages that descend from a common ancestor is known

as a language family. The Indo-European family is the most widely spoken and includes languages as diverse as English, Russian and Hindi; the Sino-Tibetan family includes Mandarin, Bodo and the other Chinese languages, and Tibetan; the Afro-Asiatic family includes Arabic, Somali, and Hebrew; the Bantu languages include Swahili, and Zulu, and hundreds of other languages spoken throughout Africa; and the Malayo-Polynesian languages include Indonesian, Malay, Tagalog, and hundreds of other languages spoken throughout the Pacific. The languages of the Dravidian family, spoken mostly in Southern India, include Tamil Telugu and Kannada. Academic consensus holds that between 50% and 90% of languages spoken at the beginning of the 21st century will probably have become extinct by the year 2100.

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