How Many Languages are there in the World

- Encyclopedia Britannica 1911 (11th edition): around ______.
- 1997: Translations of the Bible: ______.
- Ethnologue (see link): ______ Languages.

Families of Languages

- Family of Languages = group of languages genetically related to each other.
- Example: *Indo-European* family (includes English)
  - About 200 Indo-European Languages exist in Europe.
- Non Indo-European Languages in Europe:
  - Family of *Finno-Ugric Languages*
    - E.g. Finnish, Hungarian, Estonian.
  - Family of *Turkic Languages*
    - E.g. Turkish
  - *Basque* (Isolated Language)
  - *Semitic Languages*
    - Arabic, Hebrew and many others
    - In Europe: Maltese.
  - *North Caucasian Family* and *South Caucasian Family*.
- There exist approximately *250 Families of Languages*.

Distribution of Languages

- Ethnologue:
  - In Europe approx. **230 languages** spoken
  - In Asia **2,197 languages** spoken.
  - In Papua-New Guinea **823 languages** spoken.
    - Population of Papua-New Guinea: **3.9 Million**.
    - Average number of speakers per language: **4,500**.
    - Approx. 40 - 50 distinct families.

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Languages in France

- French governments tried to make the country linguistically uniform.
- Still there exist 10 distinct Roman languages in France:
  - E.g. Picard, Gascon, Provençal, French.
- Non-Roman languages in France:
  - Alémanisch (Alsace)
  - Breton (Celtic)
  - Basque.
  - Probably more.

Native American Languages in North America

- Before Columbus:
  - Approx. 300 languages spoken in North America.
- Currently:
  - Approx. 165 native American languages spoken.
  - Only 8 spoken by more than 10,000 people.
- Approx. 75 spoken by a handful of older people.

Extinction of Languages

- 25% of languages in the world spoken by fewer than 1,000.
- Estimated extinction of languages in this century: about 3,000.
- Example of resurrection of a language:
  - Hebrew.

What is a Language?

- **Norwegian** vs **Swedish**
  - Two different languages.
  - Norwegians and Swedish understand each other without much problem.
- **Swiss German**.
  - Most Germans won’t understand Swiss Germans.
  - Swiss Germans consider German as a separate language.
  - But officially Swiss German is a dialect, not a separate language
    - Swiss German is not a written language (except for some local dialect texts).
  - Even Swiss Germans don’t understand each other.
What is a Language?

- Chinese "dialects" such as Cantonese, Hakka, Shanghainese are as different as French, Spanish, Italian.
  - Not considered as distinct languages.
  - Not mutually intelligible.
  - Share writing system which is mutually intelligible.
    - Logographic systems of writing: Symbols represent words.
    - As opposed to a phonographic systems of writing: Symbols represent phonemes (speech sounds)
- Hindi and Urdu the same but spoken in different countries (India vs. Pakistan)

Birth of new languages in former Yugoslavia:
- Before splitting up of Yugoslavia one language “Serbo-Croatian”.
  - Written with Latin alphabet in Croatia.
  - Written with Cyrillic alphabet in Serbia.
- After splitting up:
  - Birth of Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian.
  - No linguistic changes.

Max Weinreich:
- “A language is a dialect with an army and a navy”.

What counts as a language determined by
- statehood,
- economics,
- literary traditions,
- writing systems,
- power systems,
- authority,
- culture,
- etc
  - not primarily by linguistic considerations.

What about:
- language A is the same as B, if speakers of A understand B.
- But lots of cases where
  - A understands B but B understands not A.
  - E.g. Bulgarian vs. Macedonian.
    - Bulgarians consider Macedonian as a dialect they can understand.
    - Macedonians consider Bulgarian as distinct language.
    - Macedonian president using an interpreter when visiting Bulgaria.
  - E.g. Kalabari vs. Nembe in Nigeria:
    - Nembe claim to understand Kalabari.
    - Kalabari regard Nembe as unintelligible.
    - (Kalabari are rich, Nembe poor).
What is a Language?

▶ What about: Language A is the same as B, if speakers of A understand B.

▶ Example Danish vs. Swedish.
  ▶ Danish understand Swedish.
  ▶ But Swedish have big difficulties understanding Danish.
  ▶ “Parsing” of Danish more difficult than parsing of Swedish.

Continuum of mutual intelligibility:
▶ If one moves from Berlin to Amsterdam, in a distance of 10 miles, people understand each other.
▶ But people in Berlin and Amsterdam won’t understand each other.
▶ So “equality of languages” using this criterium not transitive.

What is Language?

▶ What about: counting languages by distinct grammars.
▶ Northern Italy:
  ▶ Two forms of negation:
    ▶ Form one: negation before verb (standard Italian):
      Maria non mangia la carne
      (= Maria not eats the meat).
    ▶ Form two: negation after verb (Piedmontese dialect):
      Maria a mangia nen la carn
      (= Maria she eats not the meat).
  ▶ One can easily find 10 parameters for distinguishing dialects spoken in Northern Italian.
  ▶ $2^{10} \cdot \ldots \cdot 2 = \ldots$ different languages.
  ▶ 300 - 500 distinct possibilities actually do exist.
  ▶ So Northern Italy could have 300 - 500 different languages.

Only one language

▶ From a Biologist point of view: only one language.
▶ Clearly distinguished from all languages of animals.
▶ Human language uses a finite system of units to combine hierarchically and recursively to larger units.
▶ Encyclopedia Britannica 11th edition:
  ▶ “[…] all existing human speech is one in the essential characteristics which we have thus far noted or shall hereafter have to consider, even as humanity is one in its distinction from the lower animals; the differences are in nonessentials.”
Languages by Number of Native Speakers

1. _____________, _______ Million native speakers.
2. _____________, _______ Million native speakers.
3. _____________, _______ Million native speakers.
4. _____________, _______ Million native speakers.
5. _____________, _______ Million native speakers.
6. _____________, _______ Million native speakers.
7. _____________, _______ Million native speakers.
8. _____________, _______ Million native speakers.
9. _____________, _______ Million native speakers.
10. _____________, _______ Million native speakers.