

Quick Facts About Language

Celebrate International Mother Language Day!

Did you know that languages have families, too?

A **language family** is a group of languages that all come from a single original language. The original language is called the **proto-language**, and the languages that descend from it are called its **daughter** languages.

Did you know that North America was already home to many languages before Europeans came?

The continent was home to hundreds of languages, belonging to more than 20 unrelated language families, including Athabaskan, Algonquian, Uto-Aztecan, and Eskimo Aleut. Many of these languages are still being spoken today, being reclaimed, or being revitalized!

Did you know that Hindi, Irish Gaelic, Lithuanian, and English are part of the same family of languages?

They are all part of the Indo-European language family which includes over 400 languages. Some other family members are Pashto, Marathi, Spanish, and Russian.

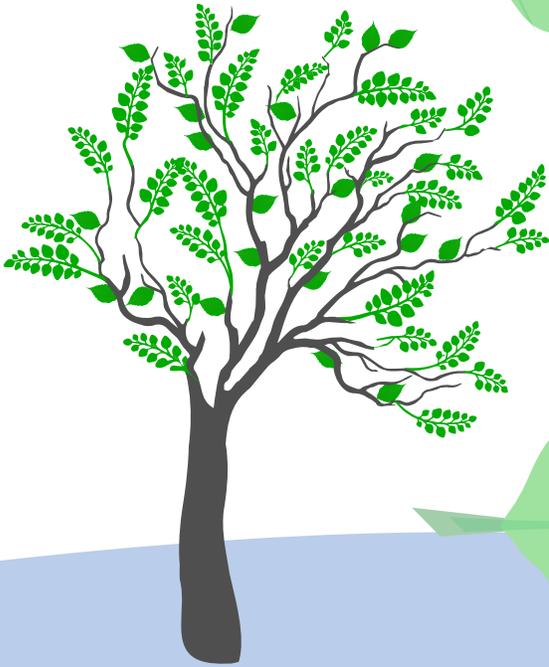
Ideas for using *Quick Facts About Language*:

- ◆ Cut the leaves out and post them on the program's bulletin board.
- ◆ Add these facts to your family newsletter or website.
- ◆ Have individuals read facts out loud at your International Mother Language Day Celebration and at training events.



Did you know languages “borrow” words from each other?

We have many Native American words in English today, including “tomato” from Nahuatl “tomatl,” “raccoon” from Powhatan “arahkun,” “squash” from Narragansett “askutasquash,” and “hurricane” from Taino (via Spanish) “hurakan.” The history of a particular word is called its **etymology**.



What is a dialect?

A **dialect** is a variant of a language spoken by a group of people who live in the same place or share some other characteristics, such as age, social class, or religion. Speakers of different dialects of a language, such as British English and American English, can still understand each other. There are many dialects of English, and everyone who speaks English uses one of these dialects!

Did you know that all languages change over time?

Over time, small changes accumulate and the language sounds more and more different from how it originally sounded. This is how **dialects** form. With enough time, these dialects will become separate languages.

What are pidgin languages?

A **pidgin language** is a simplified language spoken by people who do not share a common language. Pidgin languages are often used in the market place. Everyone who speaks a pidgin language has another home language; so a pidgin language does not have any native speakers. Sometimes children start learning a pidgin language from birth, and then it develops into a creole language.



Where are creole languages spoken?

A **creole language** is a blended language that does have first language speakers. Many Caribbean creole languages are based on English or French, such as Haitian Creole. But creole languages based on Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Malay, and other languages are spoken all over the world. Andaman Creole Hindi is based on three languages of India—Hindustani, Bengali, and Malayalam.

Interested in learning more about language?

Download these useful NCCLR language resources from the Office of Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website:

- ◆ *Celebrating Family Heritage*. <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/mother-language.html>
- ◆ International Mother Language Day Resources. <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/mother-language.html>
- ◆ *The Importance of Home Language Series*. <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/home-language.html>
- ◆ *Code Switching: Why It Matters and How to Respond*. <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/code-switching.html>
- ◆ Head Start Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness Resource Catalogue, volumes one and two. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/HeadStartCultur.htm>