

## Celebrating Human Language and Languages

*"If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart."* – [Nelson Mandela](#)



Human language is unique. It is a system of conventional spoken, manual (signed), or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves. The functions of language include communication, expression of identity, play, imaginative expression, and emotional release. In short, our ability to communicate is essentially limitless, and there is no other natural communication system like it. Since spoken language does not leave a fossil record, we will probably never know with certainty when our ancestors developed the physical ability to speak. Estimates range from [25 million years](#) to [2 million years](#), to as recently as [100,000 to 50,000 years](#) ago. Some of the oldest languages still spoken today include: [Tamil](#), [Sanskrit](#), [Chinese](#), [Hebrew](#), [Greek](#), [Arabic](#), and [Basque](#).

According to "[Ethnologue: Languages of the World](#)", there are 7,139 known living languages in the world. The most spoken languages include: English, Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, Hindi, French, Bengali, Standard Arabic, and Russian. Some of the rarest languages are: [Turkish Bird Language](#), [Kalasha-mun](#) (Pakistan), and [Chamicuro](#) (Peru). According to [UNESCO](#) and the [Endangered Languages Project](#) there are close to 3000 endangered languages that may become extinct by the turn of the century. Since written language leaves a record, we know that around 3200 BCE, Sumerian scribes in the ancient city-state of [Uruk](#), in present-day Iraq, developed the first writing system, [cuneiform](#). This ancient form of writing was created by using a reed stylus to make wedge-shaped indentations in clay tablets. The "[Epic of Gilgamesh](#)", is one of the world's oldest pieces of epic literature.

[Esperanto](#) is the world's most widely spoken constructed language. In 1887, Warsaw ophthalmologist, Dr. L.L. Zamenhof, introduced the language with the goal of fostering international understanding by allowing speakers of different languages to communicate as equals. Esperanto is easier to learn than other languages because its vocabulary consists of international words, and it has a simple grammatical structure.

### Click or Khoisan Languages

The "Click," or [Khoisan languages](#), also known as Khoesan or Khoesaaan, are a group of languages found only in Africa in which [clicks](#) function as normal consonants. The sole report outside Africa of a [language](#) using clicks involves the special case of Damin, a ritual vocabulary of the Lardil of northern Queensland, Australia. While clicks are an extensive and original feature of the [Khoisan languages](#), they have spread through linguistic contacts into a number of other languages of the [Bantu](#) and [Cushitic](#) groups. Clicks are very distinctive sounds, that are [articulated](#) in the mouth by a suction mechanism that produces either a sharp popping or smacking sound between the tongue and the roof of the mouth or a sucking sound between the lips (the kiss click) or teeth or at the side of the mouth.

Most Khoisan languages use four clicking sounds; the Southern languages use a fifth, the "kiss" click, as well. Geiriku and Yei, which are [Bantu languages](#) of Botswana and Namibia, have incorporated the four-click Khoisan system, but [Zulu](#) and [Xhosa](#) (also Bantu languages) have incorporated only three clicks. Dahalo, a Cushitic language of Kenya, uses only one click. Khoisan languages are best known for their use of [click consonants](#) as [phonemes](#). Consequently, the languages with the greatest numbers of consonants in the world are Khoisan.

APRIL 2021

Division Director's Message



**U. Desmond Alufohai**  
Director

Protocol & International Affairs Division  
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We join the United Nations in celebrating human language this month. My affinity for languages stems from my home country - Nigeria, with a population of 200 million and more than 250 languages, and dialects. Human language is unique and fascinating. The most enthralling of all the languages that I have encountered is the "Click" or "Khoisan," during my visits to Southern Africa.

Miami-Dade County has a diverse, multilingual, and multicultural population where more than 139 languages are spoken in households. If you are bilingual, multilingual or a polyglot, you will feel at home in Miami-Dade County.

We also join Arab Americans and Scottish Americans, in celebration of their National Heritage Month, and for their contributions to this country.

Finally, we salute all the countries celebrating their Independence or National Days in April 2021.

As always, please be safe!

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# BRIEFS & NOTES

## Scottish American Heritage Month (Tartan Day)

Each April, Scottish American Heritage Month highlights Scottish heritage and remembers the Scottish-Americans who have had an impact on U.S. society. In 2008, President George W. Bush declared April 6<sup>th</sup> as [Tartan Day](#). The date was chosen to commemorate the [Declaration of Arbroath](#), signed on April 6, 1320. The Declaration was a letter written by the barons and the entire community of the kingdom of Scotland, who asked Pope John XXII to recognize Scotland, an independent kingdom, and to acknowledge Robert the Bruce as the country's lawful king.

Almost 30 million U.S. citizens claim Scottish or Scottish-Irish heritage. Tartan Days are celebrated with parades, signature pipe bands, and Highland dancing. In the U.S., New York City is the leading Tartan Day celebration followed by St. Charles, Missouri.



Since the first [Earth Day](#) on April 22, 1970, marked the birth of the modern environmental movement and inspired 20 million Americans to demand action on environmental issues, the movement has grown exponentially and is now widely recognized as the largest secular observance in the world. More than

a billion people, from more than 190 countries, mark the day each year and call for action to change human behavior and create global, national, and local policy changes to protect our environment.

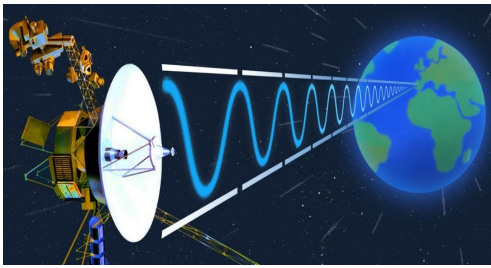
## National Arab American Heritage Month

April is [National Arab American Heritage Month](#) (NAAHM) for celebrating the history, contributions, and culture of the diverse population of Arab Americans. In 2019, Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-MI), Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) and Rep. Donna Shalala (D-FL) issued a congressional resolution for NAAHM to be recognized on a national scale. NAAHM is extremely meaningful for recognizing the contributions of the 3.7 million members of Arab American community in the United States in medicine, law, business, technology, civic engagement, government, and culture. Arab Americans have been, and continue to be, an invaluable part of the mosaic of American life.

Arab Americans have ancestry in one of the world's 22 Arab nations, which are located from northern Africa through western Asia. The people of these nations are ethnically, politically, and religiously diverse but share a common cultural and linguistic heritage. The world's 22 Arab nations are Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoro Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, and Yemen.

In the U.S., many people conflate "Arab" and "Middle Eastern," but linguistic and geographical factors mean that these terms are not fully interchangeable, according to the [Arab American National Museum](#) (AANM). The Middle East includes non-Arabic nations such as Iran, Israel, and Turkey. Similarly, not all Arabic nations are in what is considered the Middle East — including Egypt, Algeria, and Morocco. A common misconception is that all Arab Americans are Muslim. Approximately 25 percent practice Islam, and an estimated 63 to 77 percent are Christian, according to the [Arab American Institute](#). A [2016 study by the Pew Research Center](#) found that Arabic is the fastest growing language in the U.S. The number of people who speak Arabic at home increased by 29 percent between 2010 and 2014. There are approximately 3.7 million Arab Americans in the United States.

## Languages in Interstellar Solar Space



The [Golden Record](#) carried on Voyager I contains spoken greetings in fifty-five languages, beginning with Akkadian, which was spoken in Sumer approximately six thousand years ago, and ending with Wu, a modern Chinese dialect. In addition, it contains a variety of natural sounds, including surf, wind, and thunder, whale song, and bird chirps. Musical selections from different cultures and eras, as well as messages from President Jimmy Carter and U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim, are also included. Since [Voyager 1](#) was launched on 5 September 1977, it has travelled through our solar system and has reached interstellar space, more than 14, 130, 837, 880 miles away from earth, taking our voices and languages to the furthest reaches of space.

## A Diverse and Multilingual County

Miami-Dade County has a diverse, multilingual, and multicultural population. More than 51 percent of the County's residents were born outside the U.S. Spanish, English, and Creole are the most common languages spoken, along with French and Portuguese. In May 1993, the 13-member Board of County Commission voted unanimously to repeal the 1980 ordinance that passed in a voter referendum and declared English the official language of local government. The repeal paved the way for County funds to be spent in translating documents and offering non-emergency services in Spanish or any other language.

According to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS 2019), there are 139 languages spoken in households in the County. The top 30 languages are: Spanish, English, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, French, Russian, Chinese, Hebrew, Italian, Arabic, German, Tagalog, Hindi, Vietnamese, Urdu, Filipino, Farsi, Bengali, Korean, Thai, Japanese, Mandarin, Turkish, Dutch, Jamaican Creole English, Greek, Other Central and South African languages, Polish, and Yoruba.

## ABOUT US

The core mission of MDAD's Protocol and International Affairs Division is - *To facilitate the movement of official guests, delegations, dignitaries and VIPs through MIA and support the airport's international programs and initiatives.*

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# DIPLOMATIC & CONSULAR RELATIONS

## Language Days at the United Nations



In 2010, the United Nations took an important step towards its multilingualism commitment and decided to celebrate its cultural diversity through the establishment of the “[Days of Languages](#)”, for its six official languages. The six languages are: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. The purpose of the UN’s language days is to celebrate multilingualism and cultural diversity, by entertaining and informing, thereby increasing awareness and respect for the history, culture, and achievements of the people and their language. Three of the six official UN languages are celebrated in the month of April: [Chinese](#) (April 20), [English](#) (April 23) and [Spanish](#) (April 23).

April 20<sup>th</sup> was chosen as the date for the Chinese language day because it corresponds to Guyu ("Rain of Millet"), the 6<sup>th</sup> of 24 solar terms used in traditional East Asian lunisolar calendars. It pays tribute to Cangjie, a very important figure in ancient China. Legend has it that Cangjie, the official historian of the Yellow Emperor and inventor of Chinese characters, had four eyes and four pupils, and when he invented the characters, the deities and ghosts cried, and the sky rained millets. Since then, Chinese people celebrate the day of Guyu in honor of Cangjie. In the Gregorian calendar, it usually begins around the 20<sup>th</sup> of April.

The Spanish and English language days are both celebrated on April 23<sup>th</sup>, because two of the most important literary figures in history died on this date, the great genius of Spanish letters, Miguel de Cervantes, and the most prestigious English playwright, William Shakespeare.

### Bilingualism, Multilingualism, Polyglotism, and Hyper polyglotism

A bilingual person is someone who speaks two languages. A person who speaks more than two languages is called ‘multilingual’ - although the term 'bilingualism' can be used for both situations. Multilingualism is not unusual; in fact, it is the norm for most of the world's societies. Polyglotism is the ability to master numerous languages. Multilingualism is a word with a similar meaning. Richard Hudson, professor emeritus of linguistics at University College London, coined the term "hyperpolyglot" for a person who can speak twelve or more languages fluently.

### Braille

Although [Braille](#) is not a language, but a code, it is an important form of communication for people who are blind or have low vision. It was created in 1821 by a French boy named Louis Braille when he was just eleven years old. It is used in dozens of languages, including Arabic, Chinese, English, Spanish. Each Braille cell uses a combination of 6 raised dots arranged in 3 lines to represent different letters of the alphabet that can be read with the fingers. [The National Federation of the Blind](#) offer programs and resources to help children and adults learn and have fun with Braille.

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## Countries Celebrating Independence and National Days in April

**April 1, 1979 – Iran:** The Islamic Republic of Iran was proclaimed.

**April 4, 1960 – Senegal:** Senegal gained independence from France. Complete independence was achieved once the federation with Mali was dissolved on August 20, 1960.

**April 9, 1991 – Georgia:** On May 26, 1918, Georgia achieved independence from Soviet Russia, and on April 9, 1991, it achieved independence from the Soviet Union.

**April 15, (2021) – Israel:** Yom Ha'atzma'ut, Israeli Independence Day: On May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion, publicly read Israel’s Declaration of Independence, establishing the State of Israel, and ending the British Mandate. According to the Jewish calendar, this was the fifth day of Iyar, the eighth month of the civil year, in the year 5708. Since the Jewish calendar is lunar, the holiday may occur in April or May.

**April 16, 1940 – Denmark:** Queen Margrethe II’s birthday is celebrated throughout the country.

**April 17, 1946 – Syria:** France governed Syria through a League of Nations mandate until the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 1946, when Syria declared full independence, and the last French troops withdrew from its territory.

**April 18, 1980 – Zimbabwe:** On this date, Zimbabwe gained independence from the United Kingdom.

**April 26, 1964 – Tanzania:** Union Day: On April 26, 1964 Tanganyika united with Zanzibar to form the United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, which was renamed the United Republic of Tanzania on October 29, 1964.

**April 27, 1960 – Togo:** On this day, Togo gained independence from the French-governed UN trusteeship.

**April 27, 1961 – Sierra Leone:** On this date, Sierra Leone gained independence from the United Kingdom.

**April 27, 1967 – The Netherlands:** King’s Day celebrates King Willem-Alexander’s birthday.

**April 27, 1994 – South Africa:** Freedom Day, South Africa’s National Day, is an annual celebration of the country’s first non-racial democratic elections held in 1994.