

## Let's Talk!



Humans show how they feel and explain their thoughts and ideas using body gestures, facial expressions and, most importantly, sound. Although nearly all animals can communicate with each other in some form, human speech is the most highly developed form of communication. We can use language to communicate whatever ideas or emotions we wish.

Primitive people likely communicated using grunts and roars. Very few words were probably needed by primitive people as their main concerns were simply finding shelter and food to survive. After a time, particular sounds came to be understood as meaning particular things. This was how words were invented. The first languages were probably nothing more than labels for everyday things such as food, danger and shelter.

Languages have progressed a lot since primitive times, and there are now over six thousand languages used throughout the world. Chinese, Russian, Hindi, English and Spanish are major languages that are spoken by millions of people throughout the world. Many other languages are much more minor, and some, such as the American Indian languages, are only spoken by a few hundred people. These languages are in great danger of dying out altogether. Indeed, some languages are now extinct. If a language is not written down, it dies when the last person who can speak it dies.

There are some languages, such as Latin (the language of the Roman Empire) and Ancient Greek, that are still alive in written form, but nobody speaks them in daily life anymore. However, it is the languages that are spoken by many people that are considered to be the most useful, and these are the languages most likely to survive. Television helps the spread of these popular languages. By the end of this century, many of the world's less-spoken languages will have become extinct.

A living language is constantly changing. New words are added as new machines, inventions and ideas are discovered. Words that we use every day, such as 'mobile phone', 'computer', 'fridge', 'astronaut', 'traffic jam', 'commuting', 'blogging' and 'surfing the web' would all have been meaningless to a person living 100 years ago.

Just as new words are invented, old words are dropped after they fall into disuse. For instance, very few people say 'din', 'behold', 'hark', 'pail' or 'wee' nowadays. Other words can change their meaning over time. For instance, 'nice' used to mean foolish, and 'bold' used to mainly mean brave. Modern languages also borrow from one another. For example, 'restaurant' was originally a French word. People texting on their mobile phones have practically invented a whole new language and spelling of their own!



## Question Time

### A

1. In what different ways do humans communicate with each other?
2. What is the most developed form of communication?
3. How did primitive people communicate?
4. What did primitive people communicate about?
5. What did the first languages probably consist of?
6. Approximately how many languages are there in the world today?
7. What are the most popular languages?
8. What did 'nice' once mean?
9. What happens when the last speaker of a language dies?
10. What language was spoken by the Ancient Romans?

### B

1. In what way has television aided the spread of the 'big' languages?
2. List ten words we use nowadays (not words from the passage) that would have been meaningless to somebody living 100 years ago.
3. Write down words that we would use today instead of these words.

din behold hark pail wee

4. Why, do you think, are languages such as Chinese, English and Spanish so popular?
5. What is the old word for 'brave'?
6. Name a French word that has been 'adopted' by the English language.
7. Write the full words for this 'text' language.

ltr u luv txt cu

Add to the list if you know more text talk.

### Think and Talk

1. Some words in English have been borrowed from Irish.  
Write each of these words in a sentence to show its meaning.
2. Find modern words for these old-fashioned English words.
3. Although Americans speak English, some of the words that they use are different from the ones we use. What words do we use instead of these 'Americanisms'?

trash trunk (of car) cell phone diner fries cookie cab  
sneakers mailman fall (the season) highway

Give a reason why so many of these American words are so familiar to us.