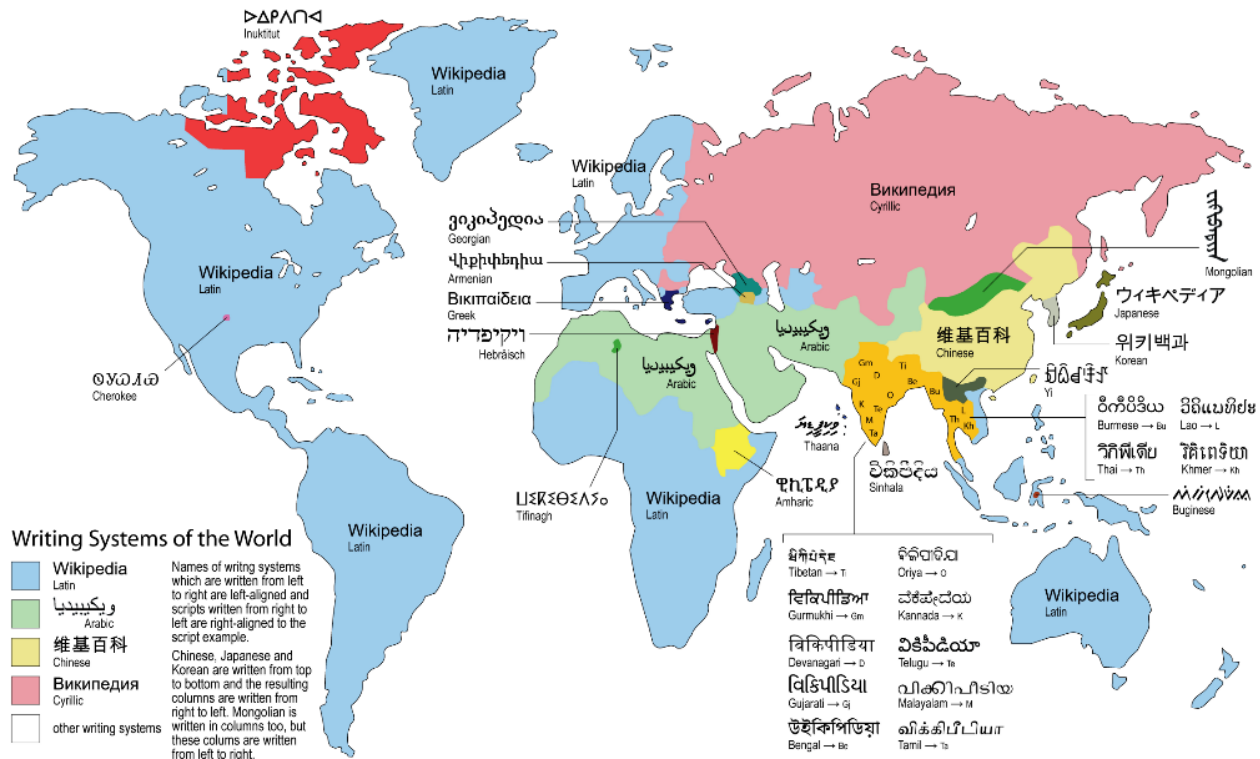


Which language has the most words?



There is no certain answer to this because we often define 'language' and 'word' in different ways. Chinese, for example, is a single language in terms of its written form. In the spoken form, however, it is a family of languages or dialects.

Spoken Mandarin is as distinct from Cantonese as Spanish is from Portuguese.

What is a logographic language?

Different languages also use different writing systems. English is alphabetic; Chinese is logographic.

- An alphabetic language has letters, which help guide pronunciation.
- A logographic language separates the written and spoken forms. Chinese characters do not guide pronunciation.

Quick Check: True or False

1. Mandarin and Cantonese share the same written form.
2. French is an alphabetic language.

Is there any way to compare the size of languages?

We can compare alphabetic languages by the size of their dictionaries..

- The OED is the largest dictionary. It has 23 volumes and defines 615,100 words
- A similar German dictionary offers around 180,000 words.

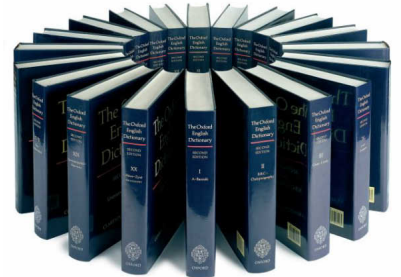
- ❑ A Russian language dictionary has around 160,000 words
- ❑ A French edition has less than 150,000 words.

This suggests English probably has the biggest vocabulary of all the European languages. However there is another problems in making this comparison

What is a word?

One issue is how what we define as a word. For example, the **OED distinguishes** 430 senses for the verb *set*. Is each form of *set* a separate word? **Linguists** make the distinction between words and lexemes. The lexeme 'run', for example, includes all its forms: *run, running, ran* etc.

And what about numbers? If you count to a million, do you have a million words?



Are all the words in OED in use?

41,700 OED words are **obsolete**. This means that you are unlikely to use them. 240 are ghost words. A ghost word has never existed outside dictionaries.

Quick Check: True or False

1. The OED has over 600,000 words in a single volume
2. Words and lexemes are different.
3. Not all the words in OED are still used.

Vocabulary: Complete this table with the words in bold above

Word	Meaning
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
	Someone who studies language
	No longer in use
	a word and all its different forms
	to note a difference