

# Interpreting in a multicultural world

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Why interpreting services in over 180 languages is the new normal



# Introduction



In 2011, Statistics Canada reported that more than 200 languages are spoken in Canada as a home language or mother tongue.

According to recent census data, 21% of Canada's population spoke a language other than English or French as their mother tongue. Over 13% did not speak English with native fluency. Statistics Canada projects that immigration will be the primary factor in population growth—these numbers will only increase.

If you require interpreting services daily, or just once in a while, you're facing a tough challenge. Could you even predict which languages will need to be supported and when?

This is also a challenge for your interpreting services provider, who must continually recruit to keep a large roster of professional interpreters readily available.

Another challenge is ensuring only the best and most reliable interpreters are offered assignments, and that requires customer feedback. Be sure to provide it whenever possible!

*This document will help you meet the challenges of purchasing interpreting services in our increasingly diverse country and give you a better understanding of what it takes to deliver quality interpreting services in over 180 languages.*



# Most common languages

The number of interpreting assignments per language varies from year to year. At the same time, the demand for services in some languages is growing faster than others. Supporting less diffused languages such as Laotian, Somali, Cambodian, Harari and Igbo continues to be a challenge as few qualified interpreters are available.

The chart below provides an overview of the top 10 languages based on percentage of orders we completed in 2017 compared to 2018.



Language	% orders in 2017	% orders in 2018
Mandarin	19.9%	18.3%
Cantonese	9.9%	10.0%
Tamil	6.9%	6.6%
Arabic	4.8%	6.3%
Spanish	5.3%	5.8%
Korean	6.5%	5.3%
Punjabi	5.3%	5.0%
Farsi	4.7%	4.5%
Russian	3.4%	4.3%
Vietnamese	4.1%	4.0%



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# Language is variable

Throughout history the spoken word has allowed us to differentiate individuals, groups, communities, states and countries. Today, language variability is everywhere even though the world is a much smaller place thanks to affordable travel, the Internet, governments that are pro immigration, etc.

If everyone in the world spoke the same language, variability would still exist from town to town, and region to region. When you consider that over 6,500 languages are spoken around the world, you can see why the range of variables is enormous.

## UNIFYING THE FEATURES OF A LANGUAGE

People who study language variation, and interpreters who must deal with variation in the real world, will focus on differences that have social significance to a broad group versus personal nuances. This approach helps unify the features of a language and define the boundaries of what is, or is not, significant in terms of sound (phonetics) and structure (grammar).

In practice, this also allows effective communication with many members of a group despite slight variations between forms of a language—such as minor pronunciations of words or shifts in grammatical structure.



## LANGUAGE VARIETY EXAMPLES

Primary Language Group	# Speakers Worldwide	Variations
Chinese	1.3 Billion	Cantonese, Gan, Hakka, Huizhou, Jin, Mandarin, Min, Pinghua, Wu, Xiang, Yue
Spanish	460 Million	Andean-Pacific, Canarian, Caribbean, Central-Southern Peninsular, Central American, Chilean, Mexican, Northern Peninsular, Rioplatense, Southern Peninsular
English	1.5 Billion	American (multi-regional), Australian, Bahamian, Bay Islands, Belizean, Bermudian, British (mutli-regional), Bruneian, Burmese, Cameroonian, Canadian, Caribbean, Hong Konger, Indian, Irish, Jamaican, Kenyan, Liberian, Malawian, Malaysian, Namibian, Nepali, New Zealander, Nigerian, Pakistani, Phillipine, Singaporean, South African, Sri Lankan, Trinidadian, Ugandan
Arabic	274 Million	Algerian, Andalusian, Bahrani, Central Asian, Chadian, Egyptian, Emirati, Hassaniya, Iraqi, Jordanian, Judeo-Arabic, Kuwaiti, Lebanese, Levantine, Libyan, Maghrebi, Mesopotamian, Moroccan, Nigerian, Omani, Palestinian, Peninsular, Qatari, Sa'idi, Sahrawi, Saudi, Somali, Sudanese, Syrian, Tunisian, Yemeni
Hindi	615 Million	Awadhi, Bagheli, Braj Bhasha, Bundeli, Chhattisgarhi, Haryanvi, Hindustani, Kannauji
Bengali	265 Million	Barisal (Bakerganj), Bogra, Chakma, Chittagong, Chuadanga, Comilla, Dinajpur, East Maldan, Faridpur, Hajong, Jessore, Khulna, Manbhumi, Manikganj, Munshiganj (Bikrampur), Mymensingh, Noakhali (Feni, Hatia, Ramganj, Sandwip, Pabna, Rangpur, Sylhet
Portuguese	234 Million	Angolan, Brazilian, Cape Verdean, Damanese Dialecto Portugueses del Uruguay (DPU), East Timorese, European, Galician-Portuguese, Goan, Guinean, Macanese, Mozambican, São Tomean
Russian	258 Million	Central, Northern, Southern
Japanese	128 Million	Eastern, Hachijō, Kyushu, Western
German	132 Million	Brazilian, Central, Chilean, High, High Franconian, Hunsrik, Hutterite, Low ("Plautdietsch"), Pennsylvania Dutch, Sathmarisch, Siebenbürgisch, Standard, Texan, Upper, Wymysorys



## Languages evolve

Languages exist for the purposes of useful communication and evolve as individual needs, locations and social perspectives change. Languages naturally evolve so they harmonize relationships in a homogenous group, distinguish one group from others, and enable individual expression through innovation and creativity.



Throughout history, the world's population has grown and migrated around the globe. Languages evolved slowly in isolated cultures, and quickly in places where immigration and population growth were high.

When social activities involved people who spoke different languages, a decision had to be made. Should one language dominate? Should each party learn the other's language so that both languages survive? Should a hybrid version of the more widely used language develop? All these options were viable solutions to help people communicate.

Regardless of the speed or degree of evolution, all languages are complex. There are more words and grammatical structures in use than the human brain can store and utilize.

## Languages disappear



The world is rapidly becoming a smaller place with the advent of low cost travel, immigration policies, the Internet, and cellular and satellite networks. One hundred years from now, the 6,500+ languages that are spoken in the world today are expected to fall to a few thousand or less.

Smaller communities that were once disconnected to the outside world are under pressure to integrate with neighbours, and the world at large, which inevitably leads to the loss of their native languages and an erosion of their ethnic identity.

Approximately 2,000 of the languages spoken in the world are used in small communities and account for most of the linguistic diversity over the course of history. For example, the tribes of Papua New Guinea speak hundreds of languages, as do America's native peoples. National and tribal minorities in Africa and Asia also speak hundreds of languages.



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## CONSEQUENCES OF INTOLERANCE FOR DIVERSITY

Language loss is frequently a consequence of intolerance for diversity, especially when the process involves powerful forces attempting to influence the weak, resulting in a loss of social identity and tradition. Much of the cultural, spiritual, and intellectual life of a people is facilitated by language.

You could argue that language loss is a consequence of progress and promotes understanding among groups, but language loss could be avoided by the learning of second and third languages.

## Ongoing interpreter recruiting



By this point you probably realize that keeping a large database of professional interpreters working in over 180 languages is an enormous challenge for an interpreting service provider.

Recruiting is a process that happens every day and never stops—because the world never stops changing and languages do too!

## Summary

1. Over 200 languages are spoken in Canada, and over 6,500 around the world.
2. Approximately 2,000 of the languages spoken are in small communities.
3. Every language is complex and has more or fewer variations depending on the size of the community and locale.
4. Languages have always evolved, and in the future, many will disappear.
5. Vigorous ongoing recruiting of interpreters is required to keep pace with the large number of languages spoken in the diverse communities across the GTA.

