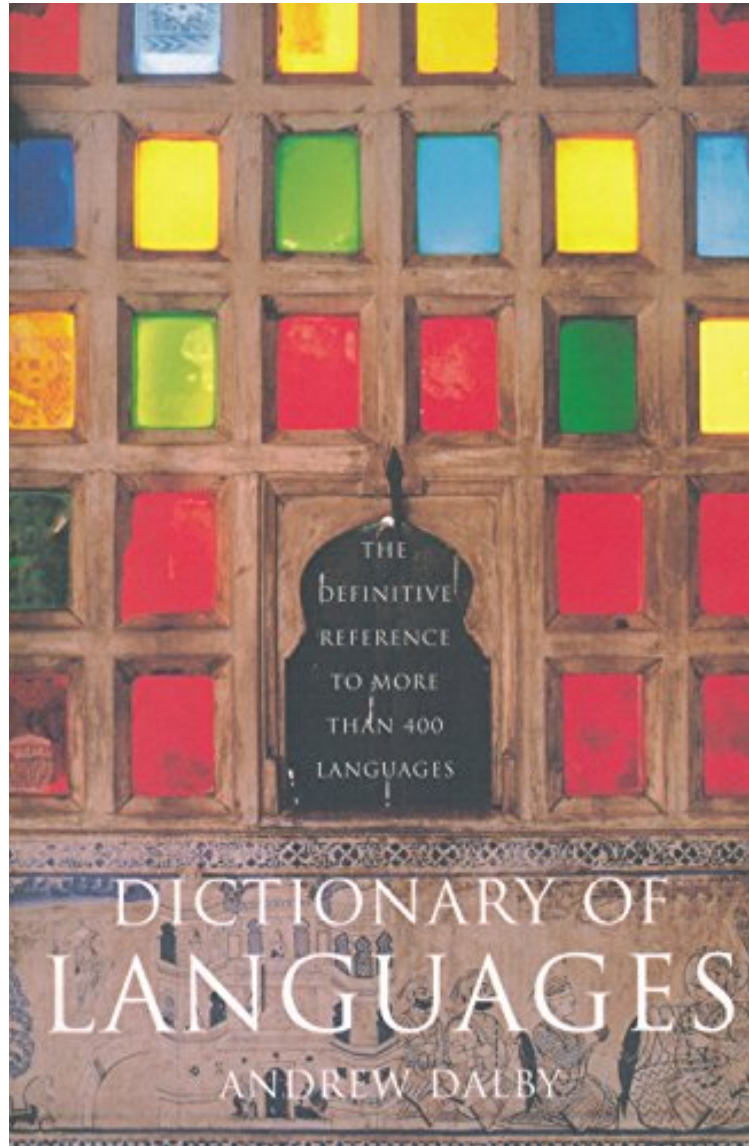


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Dictionary of Languages: The Definitive Reference to More Than 400 Languages

Andrew Dalby

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Andrew Dalby : Dictionary of Languages: The Definitive Reference to More Than 400 Languages before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dictionary of Languages: The Definitive Reference to More Than 400 Languages:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. a great book, but not enough info on pronunciation
By S.W.I had previously bought Akira Nakanishi's "Writing Systems Of The World" and Kenneth Katzner's "Languages Of The World," and although I enjoy those, this book is better. It includes lots and lots of languages that I didn't even know existed (or in some cases, used to exist), and there a lot of interesting types of script that I didn't know about. (Out of all the scripts in the book, my very favorite might just be that of the Lisu language, which uses upside-down and backwards versions of Roman letters!) The information about the different cultures of the world, which Nakanishi's and Katzner's books didn't discuss, is also very interesting, in many cases at least (and I thought Americans had some strange ideas and customs!). However, I am a bit disappointed, as I was hoping that the book would tell more about the pronunciations of foreign letters, at least the Roman letters that have special marks. Many "special" letters appear for which the pronunciations are not given. Still, this is a great book, even though the numbers given in it are probably outdated by now.
3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Languages but no grammar
By Charles Perry This is a handy guide to a whole lot of the world's languages (it includes quite a few little-known ones) ... in terms of location (there are handy maps), number of speakers, genetic affiliations etc. But it disappointed me because says next to nothing about their structure. There are no samples of verb or noun morphology, nothing about syntax, nothing that would give the reader a sense of the personality of the language. The briefest sort of grammatical sketch would have made it more nearly definitive.
That said, it's on my reference shelf.
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent book, though it made you want more examples
By R. MAY While comprehensive, really made me want examples not just for some but for all in the book. And some of the examples book did give were rather random, and didn't illuminate language. Still, a fine book in its thoroughness, and chock full of interesting information.

Approximately how many languages compose the Bantu language group of central and southern Africa? What is the name of the language spoken in Hawaii by an estimated two thousand people? What Western European language is not known to be related to any other language family in the world and is considered by linguists to be one of the most difficult to learn? These are only a few of the questions language lovers, linguists, and lay readers will be able to answer with the Dictionary of Languages an easy-to-navigate, authoritative guide to the world's languages and language groups at the end of the twentieth century. Andrew Dalby had the needs and interests of general readers in mind when he compiled this comprehensive reference work most other language guides are written for scholars, and many include little or none of the absorbing social, cultural, geographic, and historical details that are brought together here. In the Dictionary of Languages, readers will find: a selection of four hundred languages and language groups, arranged alphabetically, with rich, detailed descriptions of the genesis, development, and current status of each; more than two hundred maps displaying where the languages are spoken today; sidebars showing alphabets, numerals, and other enriching facts; a comprehensive index listing additional languages, guiding readers to the nearest language groups with full writeups and maps; charts breaking down large language groups such as Bantu or Austroasiatic languages by geographic region and approximate number of speakers. In a world where geopolitical boundaries often explain little about the people that live within them, where we may read about Kurd and Khmer in the same newspaper and be expected to be conversant about each if not conversant in each Dalby's single, information-packed volume helps us make sense of the rich mosaic of world languages.

.com This new tome of tongues is one of the most remarkable general reference works of the century. From Abkhaz and Abaza (300,000 speakers in Georgia, Turkey, and Russia) to Zulu (8,800,000 speakers in South Africa and Lesotho), Dalby comprehensively details more than 400 languages (living and dead), arranged A-to-Z for easy access, and delving into the political, social, and historical background of each. In addition, more than 200 maps indicate where the languages are spoken today, while sidebars show alphabets, numerals, and anecdotes. If you've got even a passing interest in linguistics, this work of erudition is addictively browsable. In the entry on Greek is an insert on the dialect of Tsakonian. Spoken only in an inaccessible mountain district in the Peloponnese, it's a direct descendant of the ancient Greek Doric dialect. And Fulani is spoken by some 15,000,000 individuals in West Africa, thanks to the migrant, pastoral lifestyle of the Fulani people, which spread the language across the Western Sudan such that it is now a national language in Guinea, Niger, and Mali. The section on Australian languages notes that when Europeans first began to explore the continent, there were about 300 languages spoken by the people who lived there, with up to 12 existing on the island of Tasmania alone. In addition, Dalby explains "mother-in-law languages," separate speech registers that most Australian tongues have, with different vocabulary and sometimes even different sound patterns, for use in the presence of a taboo relative, such as a man's mother-in-law. Honorary Librarian at the Institute of Linguists and a regular contributor to their journal *The Linguist*, Andrew Dalby makes it both easy and inviting to learn about the languages of the world. --Stephanie Gold
From Library Journal This encyclopedic dictionary offers an overview of over 400 alphabetically arranged living and extinct languages and language families. Introductory material provides background information on why languages grow apart and converge, some basic methodologies of historical linguistics, views on learning other languages, and frequently asked questions/answers about language. As in his *Guide to World Language Dictionaries* (LJ 3/15/99), Darby clearly describes and explains the book's many

reference features, which include a glossary of 100 linguistic terms. He also explains positions taken on linguistic disagreements and considers each language's history, relationships to other languages, and estimated current speakers. To illustrate where a language is presently spoken and its proximity to related languages, 200 maps are included, along with examples of script, numerals, and alphabets. Cross references point to additional coverage, e.g., from "Latvian" and "Lithuanian" to "Baltic Languages." An extensive index gives access by languages and dialects referred to in the text or by major languages spoken within a country. Less technical than the International Encyclopedia of Linguistics (LJ 4/1/92), this highly practical work intended for the nonspecialist is an excellent source for browsing or reference. A Stanley P. Hodge, Ball State Univ. Lib., Muncie, IN Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist

Language is both a means of communication and a source of insight into culture. Because languages are linked to political, social, and technological events, they evolve with the changes that occur in society. A basic knowledge of the languages used in an area will enrich understanding of its life and culture. This dictionary, written by a linguist, provides an introduction to the world's languages. The subtitle of the book demonstrates its scope. The alphabetical entries cover all languages with official status as well as those with a written literature and 175 minor languages with significant historical and/or anthropological interest. A preface explains the author's pronunciation scheme. He does not use the International Phonetic Alphabet, but he does use pinyin transliterations for Chinese. An introduction offers a basic overview of linguistics and the study of languages. The entries themselves are from two to four pages long. Each one discusses a specific language (Diola, Chinese, Zapotec) or language family (Afroasiatic languages, Indo-Aryan languages, Niger-Congo languages). Entries for individual languages include the language name, estimated number of speakers, the country or countries in which it is spoken, an essay on the origin of the language, its characteristics and cultural links, a map, a list of dialects and related languages, and an example of the script and/or alphabet. Some entries also have quotations of proverbs or poetry. The entries for historical languages that are no longer spoken (Gothic, Old Slavonic, Sumerian) are briefer and do not have maps. The extensive range of languages covered makes this an extremely useful source. The alphabetical arrangement is, for the most part, a good feature, but some languages are hard to find. There is no entry for Farsi within the text or the index. The article Persian, Dari, and Tajik explains that Farsi is the name of the Persian language, but the lack of cross-references may be frustrating for users. The use of variant spelling (e.g., Panjabi for Punjabi, Pashto for Pushtu) with no cross-referencing in the text and very few cross-references in the index may be confusing. Perseverance will bring success. The Atlas of Languages (Facts On File, 1996) covers similar material but discusses only 200 languages. It has color illustrations and maps, but Dictionary of Languages has more-detailed articles on a greater number of languages as well as a glossary of linguistic terms. The two works complement each other. With coverage of languages from Abkhaz to Zulu, explanations of Egyptian hieroglyphics and Sumerian script, and a discussion of Chinese dialects and characters, Dictionary of Languages is a welcome addition to public and academic library collections.