

From

words to worldviews

Indigenous peoples' languages constitute the vast majority of the world's linguistic diversity.

Languages are a reflection of a people's worldview. The things that a society chooses to name reveal the nature of its engagement with the world around it. Elaborate vocabularies are constructed around topics of particular ecological, economic and socio-cultural importance.

The multitude of terms for snow and ice developed by Inuit, Sami and other Arctic peoples is a classic example. Their elaborate and highly-specialised lexicons (terms) and taxonomies (ways to classify) constitute high-resolution conceptual frameworks for observing the environment and noting subtle transitions and trends.

Today's rapid erosion of linguistic diversity is doubly devastating. The disappearance of a language is accompanied by the loss of a unique system of knowing and comprehending the natural world.



INUIT IN ARCTIC CANADA

possess over 100 terms for sea ice types and conditions.



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BAHIMA PASTORALISTS in Uganda

have many words for rain, depending on time of day, season, strength and distribution across the landscape.



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YANOMAMĪ IN VENEZUELA

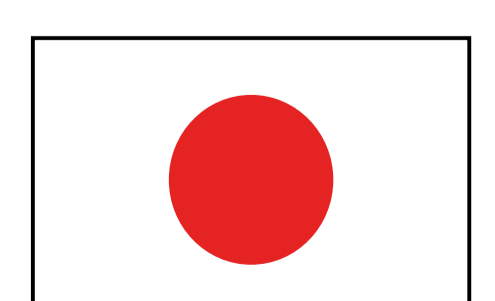
name 50 types of bees that provide a variety of honey for food and medicine.



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