

BONJOUR!

HELLO!

你好

International Mother Language Day



Language

Every person has to learn his language. A human baby raised by apes would learn only the language of apes and other animals. To learn a human language, a human baby would have to hear it from humans.

With any human language, people can talk about the future and the past. They can discuss ideas—kindness, truth, honesty, justice. They can make almost any number of sentences—including sentences they never heard before. No animal language is so rich in uses and possibilities.





Different Kinds of Language

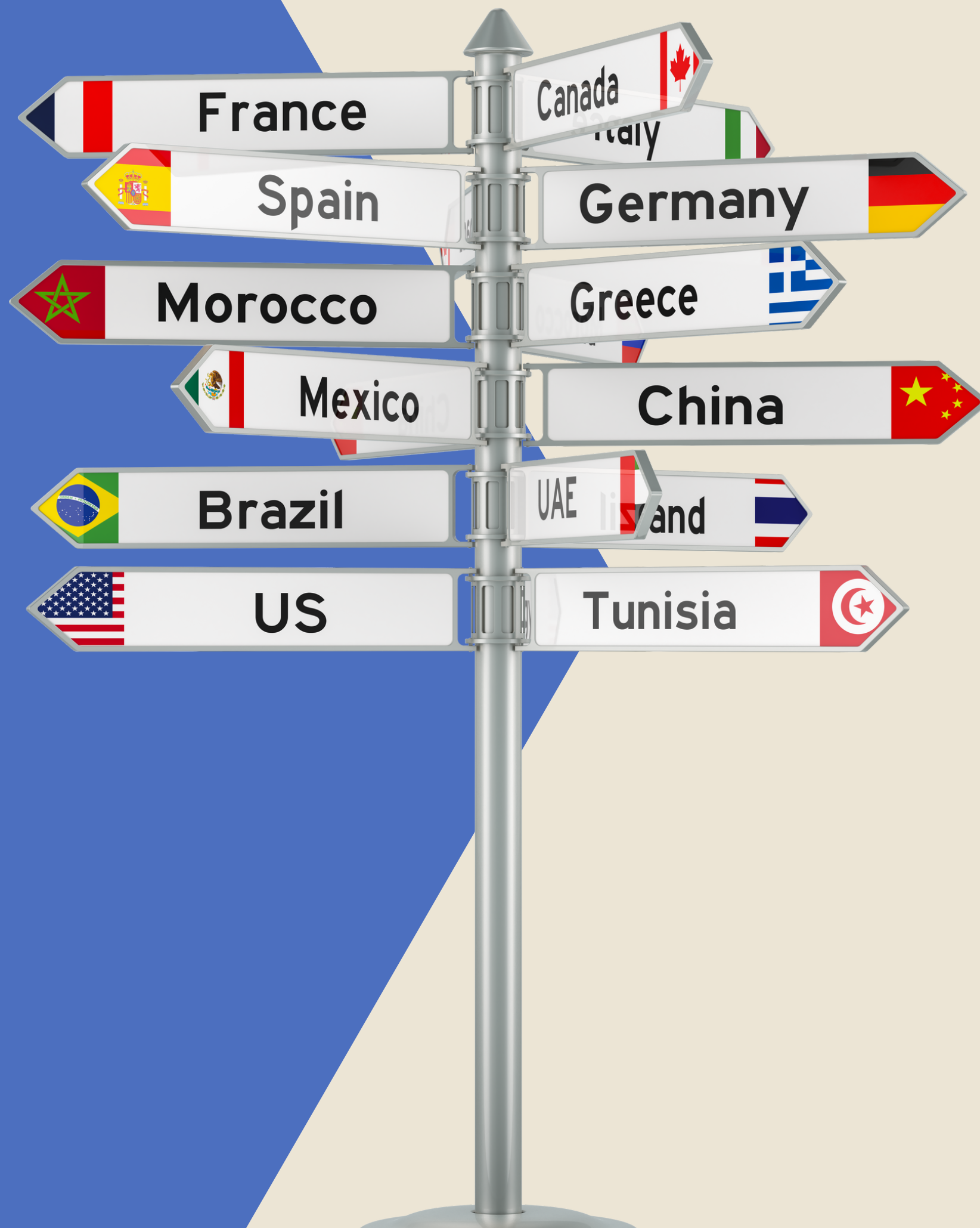
A country's boundaries can be marked on a map. But language boundaries can't be readily distinguished—at least, not in the same way. A line between two languages would mean everyone on one side of the line spoke one language. It would also mean everyone on the other side of the line spoke another language. But language just doesn't work that way.

Some people use two or more languages. For instance, French and English are spoken by many Canadians, especially by those living in Quebec. Quite a few Swiss can speak both German and French.

Standard Languages

Language has no boundaries. Speakers of the same language may live in many countries. And every country has many languages. But often, one of the languages of a country is chosen as the standard language. And this is the language taught in the schools and used for official business. The standard language is used for easier communication. It is also used to unite the people of a country.





World Languages

French

At the beginning of the 21st century, French was an official language of more than 25 countries. In France and Corsica about 60 million individuals use it as their first language, in Canada more than 7.3 million, in Belgium more than 3.9 million, in Switzerland more than 1.8 million, in Monaco some 80,000, in Italy some 100,000.



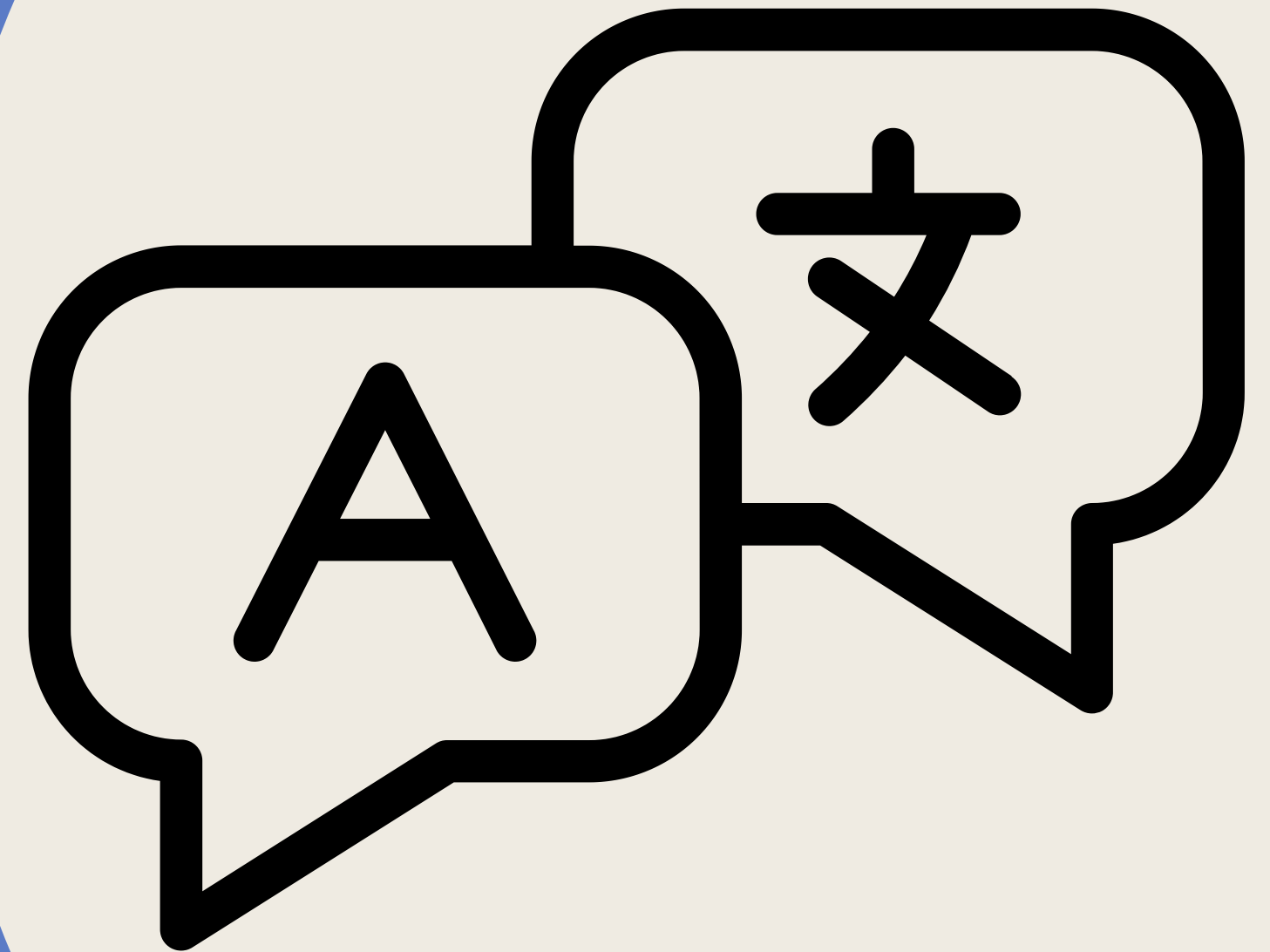
Italian

Italian language is spoken by 66,000,000 people, the vast majority of whom live in Italy. It is the official language of Italy, San Marino and Vatican City. Italian is also an official language of Switzerland, where it is spoken by 666,000 individuals. Italian is also used as a common language in France.



Chinese

Chinese languages are the principal language group of eastern Asia. There are many varieties of the Chinese language. More people speak a version of Chinese as their native language than any other language in the world, and Modern Standard Chinese is one of the six official languages of the United Nations.



Irish

The Irish language, also called Gaelic is a member of the Goidelic group of Celtic languages. As one of the national languages of the Republic of Ireland, Irish is taught in the public schools and is required for certain civil-service posts.

Grammatically, Irish still has a case system, like Latin or German, with four cases to show differing functions of nouns and pronouns in a sentence. In phonology it exhibits initial sandhi, in which the first consonant of a word is modified according to the prehistoric final sound of the previous word in the phrase (e.g., an tobar “the well,” mo thobar “my well”).



DIA DUIT

English

Geographically, the most widespread language on Earth is English, and it is second only to Mandarin Chinese in the number of people who speak it. English is the national language of the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. It is one of the two national languages of Canada and of Ireland. It is an official or semiofficial language in many former and present British possessions such as South Africa, India, and Hong Kong.



African Languages

There are between 800 - 1,000 languages spoken across Africa. In Africa the 20 most widespread languages are spoken by considerably less than half of the people. This means that multilingualism, or the ability to use more than one language, is a fact of life in almost every community in Africa. One exception to this is North Africa, where Arabic is used to the general exclusion of other languages.



German

Standard German is spoken widely across Germany. However, some people, especially older Germans and people who live in rural areas, speak local dialects in everyday life. Germans from Munich and from Berlin have considerable difficulty in understanding one another if they speak their local dialects. In northern Germany in particular, a form of German known as Low German is very different from standard German, and it has been used by some writers and poets. The influence of television, radio, and other mass media, however, has helped to spread the use of standard German.





Spanish

Spanish is the official language of Spain and 18 Latin American nations as well as about a million Filipinos. The dialect spoken in these areas is usually Castilian, and Castellano is the name used for the language in some Latin American countries. There are other Spanish dialects in Spain, including Aragonese and Asturo-Leonese. Galician, spoken in the northwest, is more properly a dialect of Portuguese; and Catalan, spoken in the area around Barcelona, is another language altogether.

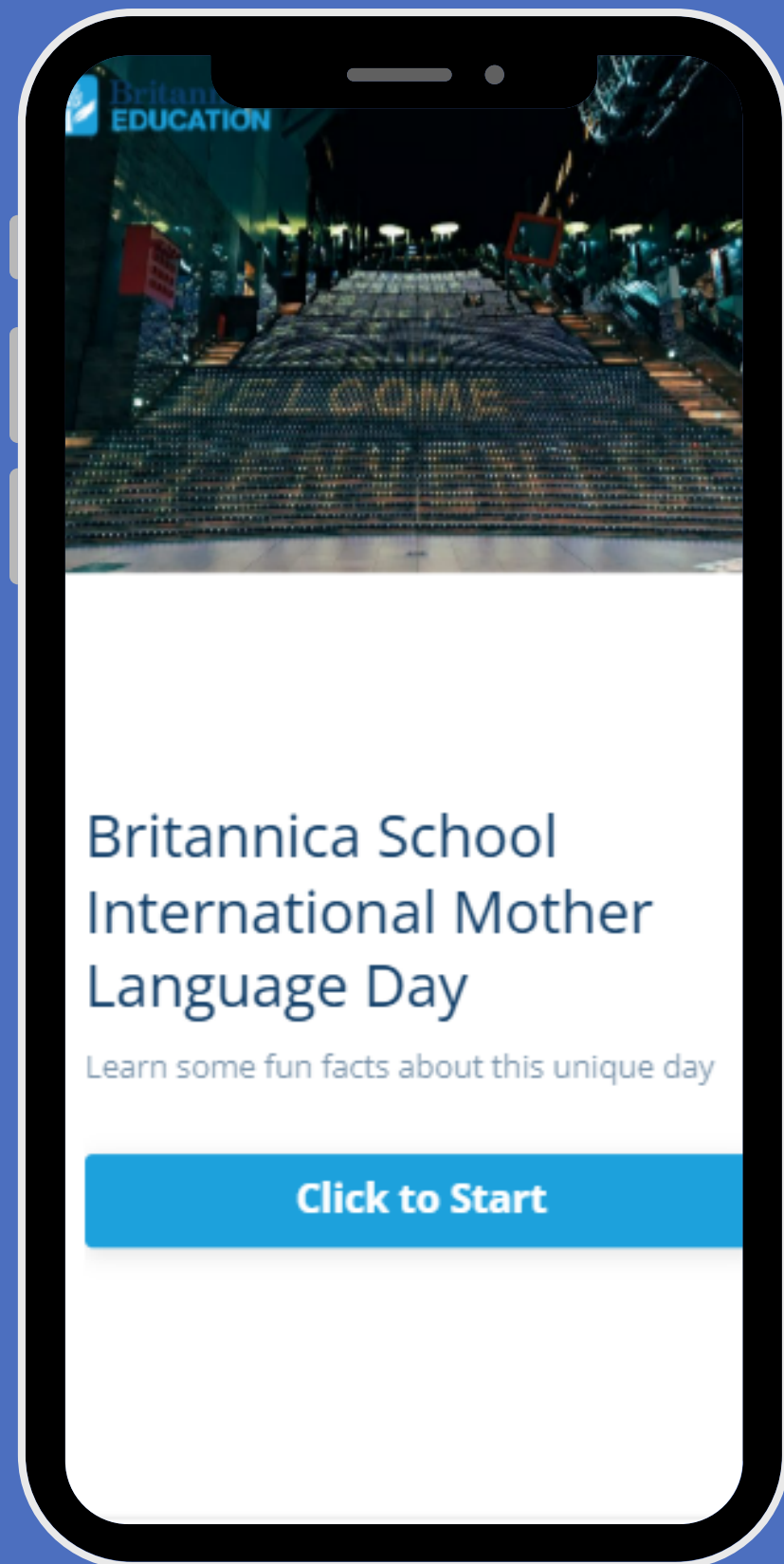


*olé!



Sign Language

Sign language is the use of bodily movements to communicate instead of talking. The practice is probably older than speech. Sign language may be coarsely expressed as grimaces, shrugs, or pointings; a more-advanced sign language may use a combination of coded hand signals reinforced by facial expression and perhaps by words spelled out in a hand alphabet. If vocal communication is impossible—for example, between speakers of different languages or when one or more of the communicators are deaf—sign language can be used to express oneself.



Test your knowledge

Take our International Mother Language Day Quiz to assess your understanding of this resource.

SCAN ME

