

# **ENDANGERED LANGUAGES**

**PROF. NICOLE NAU, UAM 2017**

Twelfth lecture  
(22/05/2017)

# LANGUAGES IN AFRICA: WHAT ARE THEY AND WHY ARE THEY ENDANGERED?

Language families and branches

Colonialism and its effects on the language situation

Multilingualism in Africa

Writing systems

Case studies



# LANGUAGES IN AFRICA

«At least 25 per cent of the world's languages spoken today are situated in Africa, the continent from which modern humans – and presumably human language – originated.»

(Dimmendahl & Voeltz 2007)

«There are 1,250 to 2,100<sup>[1]</sup> and by some counts over 3,000 languages spoken natively in Africa.<sup>[2]</sup> »

(Wikipedia)

=> Can you name 10 of them?

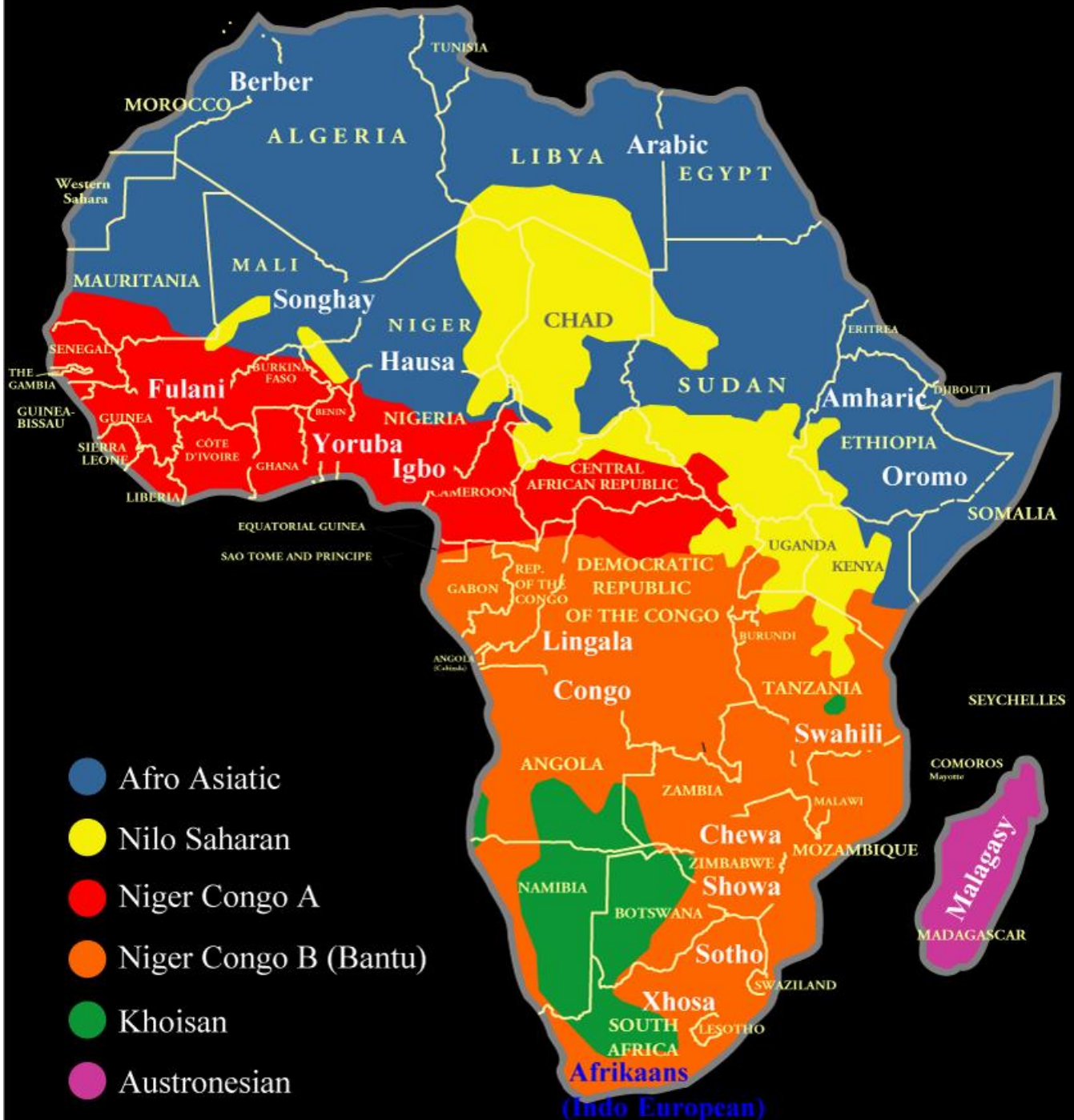
# AFRICAN STATES WITH GREAT LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

State	Number of indigenous languages (Ethnologue)
Nigeria	510
Cameroon	275
Chad	125
Tanzania	117
Ethiopia	85
Congo	75
Sudan	70
Central African Rep.	65
Kenya	60



# Language families in Africa

[http://www.nationonline.org/oneworld/african\\_languages.htm](http://www.nationonline.org/oneworld/african_languages.htm)



# THE BANTU EXPANSION (FROM 1000 BC)

WIKIPEDIA



# HOW ENDANGERED ARE THE LANGUAGES IN AFRICA? EXAMPLES FROM ETHNOLOGUE

Nigeria: Of the living languages, **510 are indigenous** and 10 are non-indigenous. Furthermore, 20 are institutional, 78 are developing, 350 are vigorous, **28 are in trouble, and 44 are dying.**

Cameroon: Of the living languages, **275 are indigenous** and 4 are non-indigenous. Furthermore, 12 are institutional, 102 are developing, 88 are vigorous, **56 are in trouble, and 21 are dying.**




# EFFECTS OF COLONIALISM ON NATIVE AFRICAN LANGUAGES

«When white settlers first appeared in southern Africa after 1600, for example, a radical decline in the number of Khoisan languages set in as a result of **genocide** as well as new **diseases** such as smallpox. **Such scenarios appear to constitute the exception rather than the rule as far as Africa is concerned**; instead gradual shift as well as ethnic fusion appear to have constituted the norm.»

(Dimmendahl & Voeltz 2007)

=> Compare with the Americas



«in sharp contrast to the ‘fourth world’ situation in the Americas or Australia, where indigenous communities occasionally were turned into guests in their own countries, and were sometimes forced to give up their first language, the impact of European languages in the language shift process in Africa appears to have been limited both during colonial as well as in postcolonial times.»

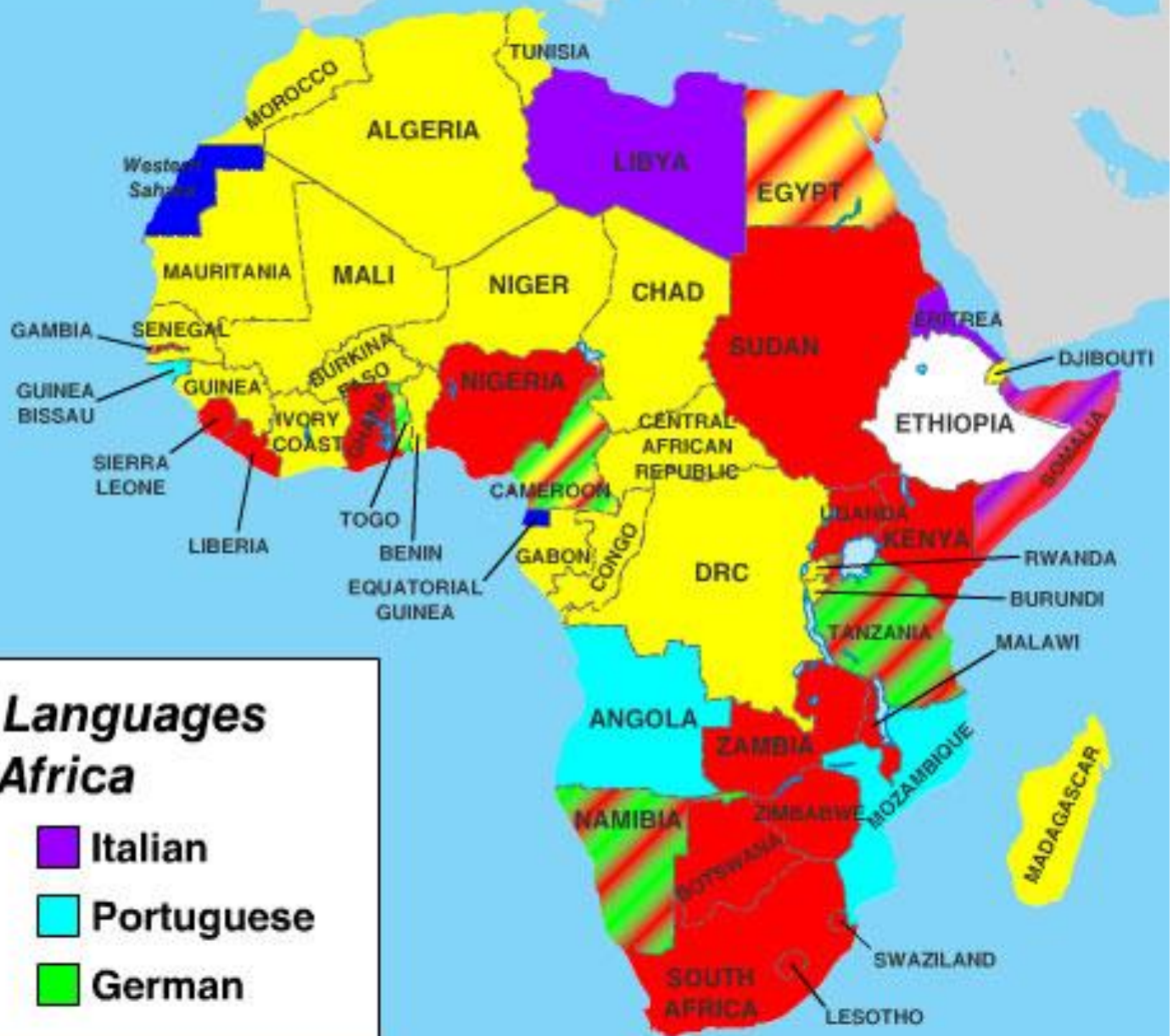
(Dimmendahl & Voeltz 2007)

But colonialism DID have an important impact on other aspects of the language situation =>



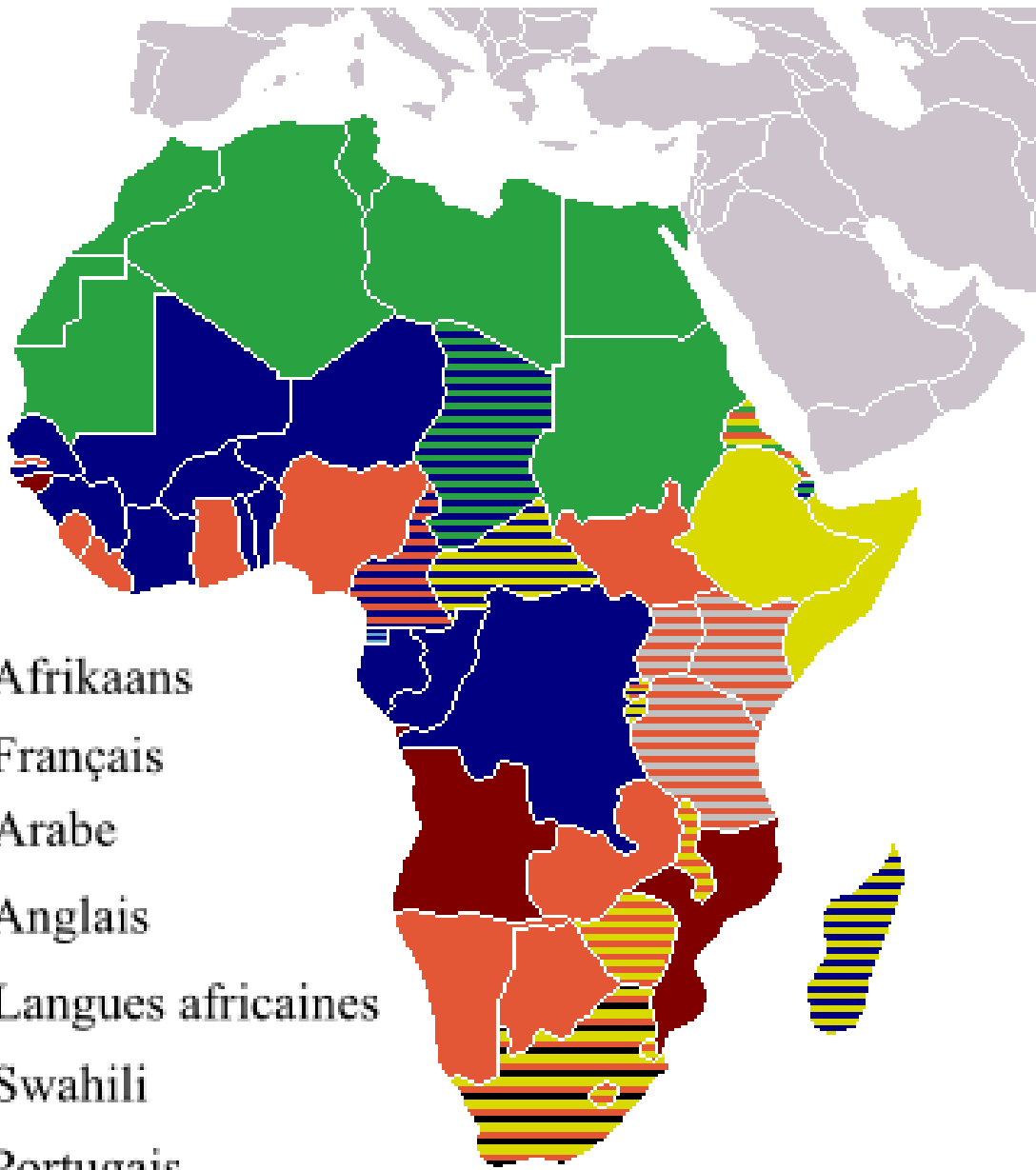
**African Colonies after the Berlin Conference of 1884**

[https://saylordotorg.github.io/text\\_world-regional-geography-people-places-and-globalization/s10-subsaharan-africa.html](https://saylordotorg.github.io/text_world-regional-geography-people-places-and-globalization/s10-subsaharan-africa.html)



## Colonial Languages of Africa

- |   |  |
|---|--|
|  English |  Italian    |
|  French  |  Portuguese |
|  Spanish |  German     |



## Official languages in Africa

- Afrikaans
- Français
- Arabe
- Anglais
- Langues africaines
- Swahili
- Portugais
- Espagnol

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Langues\\_officielles\\_en\\_Afrique.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Langues_officielles_en_Afrique.png)

# THE LANGUAGE OF BUSINESS IN AFRICA

- English
- French
- Portuguese
- English & French
- Arabic
- Arabic & French
- Spanish
- Amharic (some English)
- English & Swahili
- English & Arabic

*Please note: These are not always the official languages of the countries, but are the languages prevalent in business communication.*



Designed by: **halo**media

<https://www.halo-media.com/graphic-design-agency-africa/>

# EFFECTS OF (BRITISH) COLONIALISM (DIMMENDAHL & VOELTZ 2007)

«The most important effect of this approach has been the **development of a multilingual pattern of national communication** in different countries where English plays a role. Nevertheless, English continues to be the official language of Ghana, for example, and Ghanaian languages are used in other ways. Consequently, the scale of **political dependence** on the former imperial languages in African countries is much larger than in Asia, also with respect to the **educational system**. As pointed out by Bamgbose (1991: 49), **the production of books in African languages represents only 16 per cent of total book production.**»

# NON-COLONIAL LANGUAGES OF WIDER COMMUNICATION (FROM WIKIPEDIA)

«Around a hundred languages are **widely used for inter-ethnic communication**. Arabic, Somali, Berber, Amharic, Oromo, Swahili, Hausa, Manding, Fulani and Yoruba are spoken by tens of millions of people. If clusters of up to a hundred similar languages are counted together, twelve are spoken by 75 percent, and fifteen by 85 percent, of Africans as a first or additional language.<sup>[3]</sup>»



# IF NOT COLONIALISM, THAN WHAT?

«With respect to many endangered African languages, it is clear that it is not necessarily major lingua francas of the region, or national languages, which triggered language shift. Instead, assimilation to larger, more powerful or prestigious neighbouring groups may cause a shift in language solidarity.»

(Dimmendahl & Voeltz 2007)

# LANGUAGE AND GROUP IDENTITY

«There appears to be a widespread view among social scientists and linguists that language constitutes the most important identifying property in the social symbolization of ethnic identity. At the same time, it has been argued by Schlee (1989) as well as other social anthropologists, that **specific social groups in eastern Africa often see their clan identity** (based on a putative group descent line) **as much more pervasive than ethnic identity**. Interestingly, however, such clans are often distributed over distinct ethnic groups speaking distinct languages.»

(Dimmendahl & Voeltz 2007)

‘Africans south of the Sahara are nationalistic about their race, and often about their land; and of course many are nationalistic about their particular “tribe”. But **nationalism about African languages is relatively weak** as compared with India, the Middle East or France’, according to Mazrui and Mazrui (1998: 5). The explanation is to be found, according to the authors, not only in linguistic diversity and linguistic scale, but also in the distinction between the oral tradition and the written (Mazrui and Mazrui 1998: 5). The presence of a long written tradition (with sacred literature) helps to deepen a propensity for linguistic nationalism; this is obvious, for example, when looking at Arab nationalism. Consequently, it is not language by itself that matters but rather the symbolism attached to it.

(Dimmendahl & Voeltz 2007)

# THREE LANGUAGES, THREE WRITING SYSTEMS (NORTH OF THE SAHARA)



# SYLLABARY OF THE VAI LANGUAGE, LIBERIA (WAS IT COPIED FROM CHEROKEE??)

▶	𐄂	𐄃	𐄄	𐄅	𐄆	𐄇	𐄈	𐄉	𐄊	𐄋	𐄌	𐄍	𐄎
pi	pa	pu	pe	peh	poh	po	bi	ba	bu	be	beh	boh	bo
𐄏	𐄐	𐄑	𐄒	𐄓	𐄔	𐄕	𐄖	𐄗	𐄘	𐄙	𐄚	𐄛	𐄜
bi	ba	bu	be	beh	boh	bo	mbi	mba	mbu	mbe	mbeh	mboh	mbo
𐄝	𐄞	𐄟	𐄠	𐄡	𐄢	𐄣		𐄤		𐄥	𐄦	𐄧	𐄨
kpi	kpa	kpu	kpe	kpeh	kpoh	kpo		mgba		mgbe	mgbeh	mgboh	mgbc
𐄩	𐄪	𐄫	𐄬	𐄭	𐄮	𐄯	𐄰	𐄱	𐄲	𐄳	𐄴	𐄵	𐄶
gbi	gba	gbu	gbe	gbeh	gboh	gbo	fi	fa	fu	fe	feh	foh	fo
𐄷	𐄸	𐄹	𐄺	𐄻	𐄼	𐄽	𐄾	𐄿	𐅀	𐅁	𐅂	𐅃	𐅄
vi	va	vu	ve	veh	voh	vo	ti	ta	tu	te	teh	toh	to
𐅅	𐅆	𐅇	𐅈	𐅉	𐅊	𐅋	•	𐅌	𐅍	𐅎	𐅏	𐅐	𐅑
di	da	du	de	deh	doh	do	li	la	lu	le	leh	loh	lo
•	𐅒	𐅓	𐅔	𐅕	𐅖	𐅗	𐅘	𐅙	𐅚	𐅛	𐅜	𐅝	𐅞
dj	dja	dju	dje	dkeh	doh	djo	ndj	nda	ndju	ndje	ndkeh	ndoh	ndjo
𐅟	𐅠	𐅡	𐅢	𐅣	𐅤	𐅥	𐅦	𐅧	𐅨	𐅩	𐅪	𐅫	𐅬
si	sa	su	se	seh	soh	so	zi	za	zu	ze	zeh	zoh	zo
𐅭	𐅮	𐅯	𐅰	𐅱	𐅲	𐅳	𐅴	𐅵	𐅶	𐅷	𐅸	𐅹	𐅺
ci	ca	cu	ce	ceh	coh	co	ji	ja	ju	je	jeh	joh	jo
𐅻	𐅼	𐅽	𐅾	𐅿	𐆀	𐆁	𐆂	𐆃	𐆄	𐆅	𐆆	𐆇	𐆈
nji	nja	nju	nje	nkeh	noh	njo	yi	ya	yu	ye	yeh	yoh	yo
𐆉	𐆊	𐆋	𐆌	𐆍	𐆎	𐆏	𐆐	𐆑	𐆒	𐆓	𐆔	𐆕	𐆖
ki	ka	ku	ke	keh	koh	ko	jgi	jga	jgu	jge	jgeh	jgoh	jgo