

## 5. TOPONYMIC IMPORTANCE OF LINGUISTIC STATUS

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The following language variants exist:

- An **official** (#248) language is 'a language expressly adopted by the government of a country ... and employed as a language of administration'

Example: Dutch is an official language in the Netherlands, Flanders (the northern part of Belgium), Suriname, Aruba, Curacao and the BES islands in the Caribbean.

- A **non-official** (#152) language is 'a language that lacks official status in a particular legally constituted entity'

Example: Although about 500 000 people in the Netherlands have Arab as their mother tongue, Arab is no official language in the Netherlands

- A **dialect** (#066) is 'a variety of language which is distinguished by phonological and/or morphological characteristics that give it a distinctive identity'.

Example: In the eastern part of the Netherlands, the local vernacular is a dialect that is in-between standard Dutch and lower German.

- A **literary** (#149) language is a 'written form of language regarded as the desirable standard for works of literature'

Example: the vernacular spoken in Tuscany, and used by Dante in his Divina Commedia, became the standard form for the Italian language.

- A **national** (#151) language is a 'language in widespread current use throughout a given country or in part of its territory ...', and it '... may have or may not have the status of an official language'.

Example: The national languages in Cameroon are French and English, as these languages are used in administration, education and as a means of communication in-between the various different language communities in the country.

- A **minority** (#150) language is 'any language not used by a significantly large part of the country's population'

Example: In the Netherlands (16 million inhabitants), with its official language Dutch, in the province of Frisia the 500 000 inhabitants speak a minority language, Frisian. Within this province, the Frisian language has official status in education, administration and the courts of law as well.

- A **principal** (#154) language is 'in a linguistic community where more than one language is in use, that language which has greatest currency'.

Example: Two languages are spoken in the Netherlands, Dutch and Frisian. The whole population speaks Dutch, although 500 000 inhabitants of Frisia province have Frisian as their main language. So Dutch would be the principal language of the country.

- A **living** resp. **dead** language is 'any language spoken today, resp. not longer spoken as someone's main language'.

Example: Coptic, Old Church Slavonic and Latin are still used for religious purposes but no longer are used as people's main language.

- A **lingua franca** (#172) is a medium of communication for people who speak different first languages.

Examples: English is the lingua franca of international business; in the 17th and 18th century French used to be the lingua franca of diplomacy.


- A **pidgin** (#262) is a language with a reduced range of structure and use, with no native speakers.

Example: Beach-la-Mar or Bislama is an English-based pidgin used in the Central Pacific Islands.

- A **creole** (#047) is a pidgin that has become the mother tongue of a speech community.

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Example: Papiamentu is a language based on Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch, spoken on the Leeward isles; Sranan Tongo is a language based on English and Dutch spoken in Suriname.

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