

Ethnologue: Languages of Mauritania

Twenty-sixth edition data

David M. Eberhard, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig, Editors

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| A | Agent in constituent word order |
| ACHPR | African Charter on Human Peoples' Rights (1987) |
| <i>alt.</i> | alternate name for |
| <i>alt. dial.</i> | alternate dialect name for |
| AOV | Agent-Object-Verb |
| C | Consonant in canonical syllable patterns |
| <i>Class</i> | Language classification |
| CPPDCE | Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) |
| CSICH | Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) |
| <i>dial.</i> | primary dialect name for |
| ICCPR | International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) |
| km | kilometer(s) |
| L1 / L2 | first language / second (or other additional) language |
| <i>Lg Dev</i> | Language development |
| <i>Lg Use</i> | Language use |
| m | meter(s) |
| P | Patient in constituent word order |
| PARADISEC | Pacific And Regional Archive for Digital Sources In Endangered Cultures |
| <i>pej.</i> | pejorative |
| pl. | plural |
| S | Subject in constituent word order |
| sg. | singular |
| SIL | SIL International |
| <i>Type</i> | Typological information |
| UNCRPD | United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization |
| V | Vowel in canonical syllable patterns |

How to Use This Digest

This *Ethnologue* country digest provides an extract of the information about the language situation in Mauritania that is published in the 26th edition of *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (see <http://www.ethnologue.com>), including some ways of presenting the information that are not available in the online version. The digest begins with a “Country Overview” (page 6) and “Statistical Summaries” (page 8) of languages and number of speakers by language size, by language status, and by language family.

The “Alphabetical Listing of Languages” (page 11) provides detailed information on the 9 languages listed in the *Ethnologue* for the country of Mauritania. This includes languages that are indigenous to the country, languages that have developed well-established multigenerational speaker communities after immigrating in the past, and languages that have a significant presence in the country but are not established (that is, not being transmitted to the next generation within the country). A complete language entry has the following form and content:

Primary language name [ISO 639-3 code] (Alternate names). Autonym. *Users*: Country user population. Population stability comment. Population remarks. Monolingual population. Ethnic population. *Location*: Location. *Status*: EGIDS level. Special cases. Language function in country. *Class*: Linguistic classification. Macrolanguage membership. *Dialects*: Dialect names. Intelligibility and dialect relations. Lexical similarity. *Type*: Linguistic typology information. *Lg Use*: Remarks on use of the language. Domains of use. User age range. Language attitudes. Bilingualism remarks. Use as second language. *Lg Dev*: Literacy rates. Literacy remarks. Use in education. Publications and use in media. Revitalization efforts. Language development agencies. *DLS*: Digital support. *Writing*: Scripts used. *Other*: Non-indigenous. General remarks. Religion. *Map*: Map page. *Worldwide*: Total population in all countries. Other countries where used.

See <http://www.ethnologue.com/methodology/#languagePages> for a full description of these information elements. If the autonym contains the “?” character, this indicates a complex non-Roman character that the PDF-creating software we are using is not able to render. We regret the inconvenience.

The “Language Map” (page 15) shows the locations of the listed languages. If the location of a language is given on a map, the *Map* element of the language entry indicates the page number of the map. If the language is identified on a map by name, but that name differs from the primary name in the language entry, the name on the map is given in parentheses. If the language is represented on the map by an index number, rather than by its name, the index number is given following the page number (with a colon as separator).

Many ways of finding languages are provided. “Languages by Population” (page 16) lists the languages in order of their first-language speaker populations. “Languages by Status” (page 18) lists the languages by their level of development or endangerment as measured on EGIDS, the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (Lewis and Simons 2010). “Languages by

Region” (page 20) lists the top-level administrative subdivisions of Mauritania and the languages located within each. “Languages by Family” (page 21) lists the languages by their linguistic classifications. “Language Code Index” (page 22) gives an alphabetical listing of all the three-letter codes from ISO 639-3 that are used in this digest to uniquely identify languages. “Language Name Index” (page 23) lists every name that appears in the language listings as a primary or alternate name of a language or dialect. A total of 41 unique names are associated with the 9 languages described in this digest.

Finally, a listing of all the published sources cited within this digest is found in “Bibliography” (page 25). The published sources are cited using standard in-text citations enclosed in parentheses, consisting of the author’s or editor’s surname followed by the year of publication. Unpublished sources including personal communications and unpublished reports are also acknowledged when specific statements or facts are attributed to them. They are identified using in-text citations enclosed in parentheses in which the year of the communication is given first, followed by the source’s first initial and surname. In such a case, there is no corresponding entry in the bibliography.

This digest is designed for use in both digital and print formats. The cross-references are thus rendered as page numbers that are hyperlinks. When using the document in printed form, simply turn to the referenced page by number. When using it in digital form, click on the blue text to jump to the cross-referenced location.

If you believe any of the information about a language in this digest is in error or if you are able to supply missing information, please send your proposed change to the editor using one of the means given below. Provide as much information as possible about the source of your information. Full bibliographic details of published sources are especially helpful.

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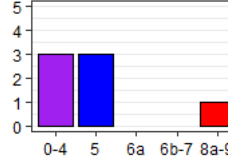
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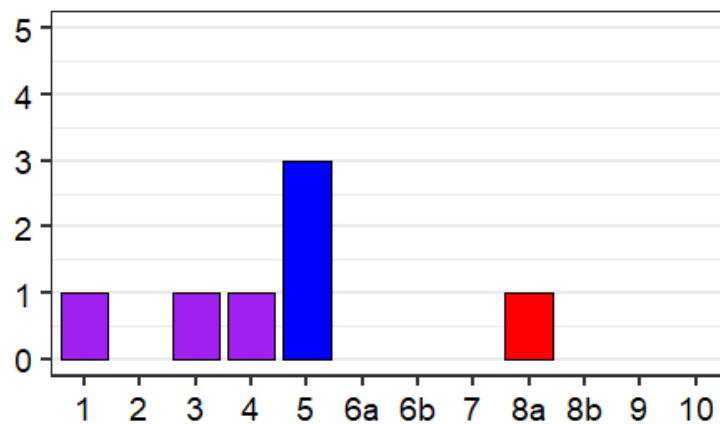
Country Overview

| Name of country | Mauritania | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--|-------------------|-------|-----|---|---|---|----|---|------|---|------|---|
| Other names | Islamic Republic of Mauritania | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Population | 4,650,000 (2020 World Bank) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Principal languages | French, Standard Arabic | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Literacy rate | 54% (2017 UNESCO) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| International conventions | ACHPR (1986), CPPDCE (2015), CSICH (2006), ICCPR (2004), UNCRPD (2012) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| General references | Applegate 1970, Gerteiny 1967, Welmers 1971b | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Language counts | <p>The number of established languages listed for Mauritania is 7. All are living languages. Of these, 5 are indigenous and 2 are non-indigenous. Furthermore, 3 are institutional, 3 are developing, and 1 is dying. Also listed are 2 unestablished languages.</p>  <table border="1"> <caption>Language Vitality Counts for Mauritania</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Vitality Category</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>0-4</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>6a</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>6b-7</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>8a-9</td> <td>1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Vitality Category | Count | 0-4 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 6a | 0 | 6b-7 | 0 | 8a-9 | 1 |
| Vitality Category | Count | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 0-4 | 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6a | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6b-7 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8a-9 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | |

See the next page for an explanation of the summary categories for language vitality used in the above counts and graph.

Language Status Profile

The following histogram gives a graphic profile of the established languages in Mauritania with respect to their status of language development versus language endangerment. This includes all of the languages appearing in the “Alphabetical Listing of Languages” (page 11) that report an EGIDS level after *Status*; macrolanguages and unestablished languages are not included in the profile. The horizontal axis plots the estimated level of development or endangerment as measured on the EGIDS scale (Lewis and Simons 2010). The height of each bar indicates the number of languages that are estimated to be at the given level. Consult “Languages by Status” (page 18) in order to see the specific languages for each level.



The color coding of the bars in the histogram above matches the color scheme used in the summary profile graph on the preceding page. In this scheme, the EGIDS levels are grouped as follows:

- Purple = Institutional (EGIDS 0–4) — The language has been developed to the point that it is used and sustained by institutions beyond the home and community.
- Blue = Developing (EGIDS 5) — The language is in vigorous use, with literature in a standardized form being used by some though this is not yet widespread or sustainable.
- Green = Vigorous (EGIDS 6a) — The language is in vigorous use among all generations and remains unstandardized.
- Yellow = In trouble (EGIDS 6b–7) — Intergenerational transmission is in the process of being broken, but the child-bearing generation can still use the language so it is possible that revitalization efforts could restore transmission of the language in the home.
- Red = Dying (EGIDS 8a–9) — The only fluent users (if any) are older than child-bearing age, so it is too late to restore natural intergenerational transmission through the home; a mechanism outside the home would need to be developed.
- Black = Extinct (EGIDS 10) — The language is no longer used and no one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language.

Statistical Summaries

The “Alphabetical Listing of Languages” (page 11) provides a detailed listing of all the languages of Mauritania. This section steps back from the detail to offer a summary view of the language situation in the country. Specifically, it offers three numerical tabulations of the living established languages of Mauritania and their users: by language size, by language status, and by language family.

Summary by language size

Table 1 summarizes the distribution of living established languages in Mauritania by number of L1 speakers. The *Population range* column categorizes the sizes of the languages by order of magnitude (in terms of the number of digits in the population of first-language speakers). Consult “Languages by Population” (page 16) for a listing of the specific languages in each range category.

The *Count* column gives the number of living established languages within the specified population range. The *Percent* column gives the share of the count for that population range as a percentage of the total number of languages given at the bottom of the Count column. The *Cumulative* column gives the cumulative sum of the percentage of languages going from top to bottom in the column.

The *Total* column gives the total L1 population of all the languages in the given range category. The second *Percent* column gives the percentage of the total country population as estimated at the bottom of the Total column. Note that if the table has a row for Unknown, representing languages for which the *Ethnologue* does not have a population estimate, the calculation of population percentage is not able to take those languages into account. The final *Cumulative* column gives the cumulative sums of the population percentages going from top to bottom in the column.

Table 1: Distribution of languages by number of first-language speakers

| Population range | Living languages | | | Number of speakers | | |
|------------------------|------------------|---------|------------|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| | Count | Percent | Cumulative | Total | Percent | Cumulative |
| 1,000,000 to 9,999,999 | 1 | 14.3 | 14.3% | 3,750,000 | 87.45213 | 87.45213% |
| 100,000 to 999,999 | 2 | 28.6 | 42.9% | 511,000 | 11.91681 | 99.36895% |
| 10,000 to 99,999 | 1 | 14.3 | 57.1% | 20,300 | 0.47341 | 99.84235% |
| 1,000 to 9,999 | 1 | 14.3 | 71.4% | 6,560 | 0.15298 | 99.99534% |
| 100 to 999 | 1 | 14.3 | 85.7% | 200 | 0.00466 | 100.00000% |
| Unknown | 1 | 14.3 | 100.0% | | | |
| <i>Totals</i> | 7 | 100.0 | | 4,288,060 | 100.00000 | |

Summary by language status

Table 2 summarizes the distribution of living established languages in Mauritania by their status in terms of language development or language endangerment. The *EGIDS* column categorizes the languages by their level on the EGIDS scale. Consult “Languages by Status” (page 18) for a listing of the specific languages that have been assigned to each level. Note that the EGIDS level reported here is for the status of the language in Mauritania. Languages that are also used in other countries may be assigned to a different EGIDS level in those countries.

The next six columns are as in Table 1. In addition, the *Mean* column gives the average L1 population of all the languages with the given EGIDS level and the *Median* column gives the median L1 population for the languages at that level, that is, half of the languages at that level have a higher population and half have a lower population. If there are any languages with an unknown population, these are ignored in the calculation of the mean and the median.

Table 2: Distribution of languages by vitality status

| EGIDS | Living languages | | | Number of speakers | | | Mean | Median |
|---------------|------------------|---------|------------|--------------------|----------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| | Count | Percent | Cumulative | Total | Percent | Cumulative | | |
| 1 | 1 | 14.3 | 14.3% | Unknown | | | | |
| 3 | 1 | 14.3 | 28.6% | 3,750,000 | 87.4521 | 87.4521% | 3,750,000 | 3,750,000 |
| 4 | 1 | 14.3 | 42.9% | 6,560 | 0.1530 | 87.6051% | 6,560 | 6,560 |
| 5 | 3 | 42.9 | 85.7% | 531,300 | 12.3902 | 99.9953% | 177,100 | 230,000 |
| 8a | 1 | 14.3 | 100.0% | 200 | 0.0047 | 100.0000% | 200 | 200 |
| <i>Totals</i> | 7 | 100.0 | | 4,288,060 | 100.0000 | | | |

Summary by language family

The genealogical classifications given in the language entries of the “Alphabetical Listing of Languages” (page 11) name 3 different top-level groups. Table 3 summarizes the distribution of living established languages and their L1 populations within these families. The columns are as for table 2, with the exception that *Cumulative* is excluded since there is no inherent ordering of the families.

Table 3: Distribution of languages by language family

| Language family | Living languages | | Number of speakers | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|---------|--------------------|---------|-----------|-----------|
| | Count | Percent | Total | Percent | Mean | Median |
| Afro-Asiatic | 3 | 42.9 | 3,750,200 | 87.5 | 1,250,067 | 1,875,100 |
| Indo-European | 1 | 14.3 | 6,560 | 0.2 | 6,560 | 6,560 |

| Language family | Living languages | | Number of speakers | | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|---------------------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|
| | <i>Count</i> | <i>Percent</i> | <i>Total</i> | <i>Percent</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Median</i> |
| Niger-Congo | 3 | 42.9 | 531,300 | 12.4 | 177,100 | 230,000 |
| <i>Totals</i> | 7 | 100.0 | 4,288,060 | 100.0 | | |

Alphabetical Listing of Languages

Arabic, Standard [arb]. *Users*: 1,840,000 in Mauritania (2013 SIL), all users. *Location*: Widespread. *Status*: 1 (National). Statutory national language (1991, Constitution, Article 6). *Class*: Afro-Asiatic, Semitic, Central, South, Arabic. *Type*: VSO; prepositions; noun head initial; gender (masculine/feminine); dual number; definite and indefinite affixes; case-marking (3 cases); verb affixes mark number, gender of subject; aspect; 28 consonant and 6 vowel phonemes; non-tonal; stress on first syllable; trilateral roots, few affixes. *Lg Use*: Education, official purposes, formal speeches. *Lg Dev*: Taught in all primary and secondary schools, and with French [fra] beginning in grade 2. Fully developed. Bible: 1645–2008. *Writing*: Arabic script, Naskh variant, primary usage. Braille script. *Other*: Non-indigenous. *Worldwide*: Total users in all countries: 273,989,700. Global EGIDS level: 0 (International). Indigenous in: Saudi Arabia. Also established in 30 other countries and unestablished in 1 more.

Bambara [bam]. Autonym: Bamanankan. *Users*: 22,200 in Mauritania (2020). *Status*: Unestablished. *Class*: Niger-Congo, Mande, Western, Central-Southwestern, Central, Manding-Jogo, Manding-Vai, Manding-Mokole, Manding, Manding-East, Northeastern Manding, Bamana. *Type*: SOV; postpositions; passives; tense; causatives; 21 consonant and 14 vowel phonemes; tonal (2 tones: high, low). *Lg Use*: All also use French [fra], as the language of education, media and government. Most also use Hassaniyya [mey], as the language of commerce and interethnic communication. Many also use Standard Arabic [arb], as the language of government, media, and religion (Ould Ahmed 2012). *Lg Dev*: Literature. Newspapers. Radio. TV. Videos. Dictionary. Grammar. Texts. Bible: 1961–1987. *Writing*: Latin script. N’Ko script, used in Mali. *Other*: Non-indigenous. *Worldwide*: Total users in all countries: 14,181,650 (as L1: 4,179,190; as L2: 10,002,460). Global EGIDS level: 3 (Wider communication). Indigenous in: Côte d’Ivoire, Mali (Bamanankan). Also established in: Senegal. Unestablished in: Canada (Bamanankan), Gambia, Niger (Bamanankan).

French [fra] (Français). Autonym: français. *Users*: 662,560 in Mauritania, all users. L1 users: 6,560 in Mauritania (2020). L2 users: 656,000 (Marcoux et al 2022). *Location*: Widespread. *Status*: 4 (Educational). De facto national working language. *Class*: Indo-European, Italic, Romance, Italo-Western, Western, Gallo-Iberian, Gallo-Romance, Gallo-Rhaetian, Oil, French. *Type*: SVO; prepositions; noun head final for common adjectives, numbers, possessives, but most attributive adjectives come after the noun; gender (masculine/feminine); definite and indefinite articles; verb affixes mark person, number; passives; tense; comparatives; 20 consonant and 14 vowel phonemes; non-tonal; syllable-timed stress. *Lg Use*: Used as L2 by Bambara [bam], Hassaniyya [mey], Pulaar [fuc], Soninke [snk], Tamasheq [taq], Wolof [wol], Zenaga [zen]. *Lg Dev*: Taught in all primary and secondary schools from grade 2, taught with Standard Arabic [arb] as second language of instruction. Fully developed. Bible: 1530–2000. *Writing*: Braille script. Duployan shorthand. Latin script, primary usage. *Other*: Non-indigenous. *Worldwide*: Total users in all countries: 309,804,220 (as L1: 80,770,190; as L2:

229,034,030). Global EGIDS level: 0 (International). Indigenous in: Andorra, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Monaco, Switzerland. Also established in 95 other countries and unestablished in 24 more.

Hassaniyya [mey] (Hasanya, Hasanya Arabic, Hassani, Hassania, Hassaniya, Hassaniyya Arabic, Klem El Bithan, Maure, Moor). *Users*: 3,750,000 in Mauritania (2020), increasing. *Location*: Widespread. *Status*: 3 (Wider communication). Statutory language of national identity (1991, Constitution, Article 6). Hassaniyya comes from the name of the Beni Hassan tribes who invaded North Africa and settled in modern Mauritania in the 15th to 17th centuries. Used in trade and religion. Spoken throughout northwestern Africa. *Class*: Afro-Asiatic, Semitic, Central, South, Arabic. *Dialects*: None known. Not intelligible with other Arabic varieties. The Nemadi (Ikoku) are an ethnic group of 200 (1967) that speak Hassaniyya, but they have special morphemes for dogs, hunting, and houses. Nomadic between Mali and Mauritania. *Lg Use*: Vigorous. All domains. Used by all. Positive attitudes. All also use French [fra], as the language of education, media and government. Many also use Standard Arabic [arb], as the language of government, media, and religion (Ould Ahmed 2012). Used as L2 by Bambara [bam], Pulaar [fuc], Soninke [snk], Tamasheq [taq], Wolof [wol], Zenaga [zen]. *Lg Dev*: Literacy rate in L2: 40% in Arabic [arb], 25% in French [fra]. Literacy in Hassaniyya not encouraged by the government. Literature. Radio. Dictionary. *DLS*: Emerging (0.04). *Writing*: Arabic script, Naskh variant. Latin script, in development. *Other*: White Maure are called Bithan, also used for Maures in general. Black Maures are called Haratine. Muslim. *Map*: 15. *Worldwide*: Total users in all countries: 5,189,980. Also indigenous in: Algeria (Hassaniyya Arabic), Mali (Hasanya Arabic), Western Sahara (Hassaniyya Arabic). Also established in: Morocco (Hassaniyya Arabic), Niger (Hassaniyya Arabic), Senegal. Unestablished in: Gambia, Libya (Hassaniyya Arabic), United States.

Pulaar [fuc] (Peul). Autonym: Pulaar. *Users*: 281,000 in Mauritania (2020). *Location*: Brakna, Gorgol, and Trarza regions, near Senegal. *Status*: 5 (Developing). Statutory language of national identity (1991, Constitution, Article 6). *Class*: Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Atlantic, Northern, Senegambian, Fula-Wolof, Fula, Western. *Dialect*: Toucouleur (Haalpulaar, Pulaar, Tukolor). *Lg Use*: Home, religion, market. Used by all. Positive attitudes. All also use French [fra], as the language of education, media and government. Most also use Hassaniyya [mey], as the language of commerce and interethnic communication. Many also use Standard Arabic [arb], as the language of government, media, and religion (Ould Ahmed 2012). Used as L2 by Soninke [snk]. *Lg Dev*: Literacy rate in L2: 30% in Arabic [arb], 40% in French [fra]. Radio. Dictionary. Grammar. Texts. NT: 1997. *Writing*: Arabic script, Naskh variant. Latin script. *Other*: Fuuta Tooro (Fouta Toro) was a major Toucouleur geopolitical state, with center in northern Senegal. Muslim. *Map*: 15. *Worldwide*: Total users in all countries: 5,912,700. Also indigenous in: Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau (Fula), Mali, Senegal.

Soninke [snk] (Aswanek, Aswanik, Azer, Gangara, Genger, Maraka, Marka, Sarakole, Sarakolle, Sarakule, Sarakulle, Serahule, Soninkanxanne). Autonym: Sooninkanxanne. *Users*: 230,000 in Mauritania (2020), increasing. *Location*: Dakhlet Nouadhibou, Gorgol, and Guidimaka regions: Kaedi and Selibaby towns; 45 villages. *Status*: 5 (Developing). Statutory language of

national identity (1991, Constitution, Article 6). *Class*: Niger-Congo, Mande, Western, Northwestern, Soninke-Bobo, Soninke-Boso, Soninke. *Dialects*: Azer (Adjer, Aser), Kinxenna, Kinbakka. *Lg Use*: Vigorous. Used by all. Positive attitudes. All also use French [fra], as the language of education, media and government. Most also use Hassaniyya [mey], as the language of commerce and interethnic communication. Many also use Standard Arabic [arb], as the language of government, media, and religion. Also use Pulaar [fuc]. *Lg Dev*: Literacy rate in L2: 20% in French [fra], 10% in Arabic [arb]. Used as a language of instruction in a few experimental schools (2010 J. Leclerc). Literature. Newspapers. Radio. TV. Videos. Dictionary. Grammar. Texts. Bible portions: 2001–2012. *Writing*: Arabic script, Naskh variant. Latin script. *Other*: Muslim. *Map*: 15. *Worldwide*: Total users in all countries: 2,251,700. Also indigenous in: Guinea (Sarakolé), Mali, Senegal. Also established in: Gambia (Serahule), Guinea-Bissau. Unestablished in: Côte d’Ivoire, United States.

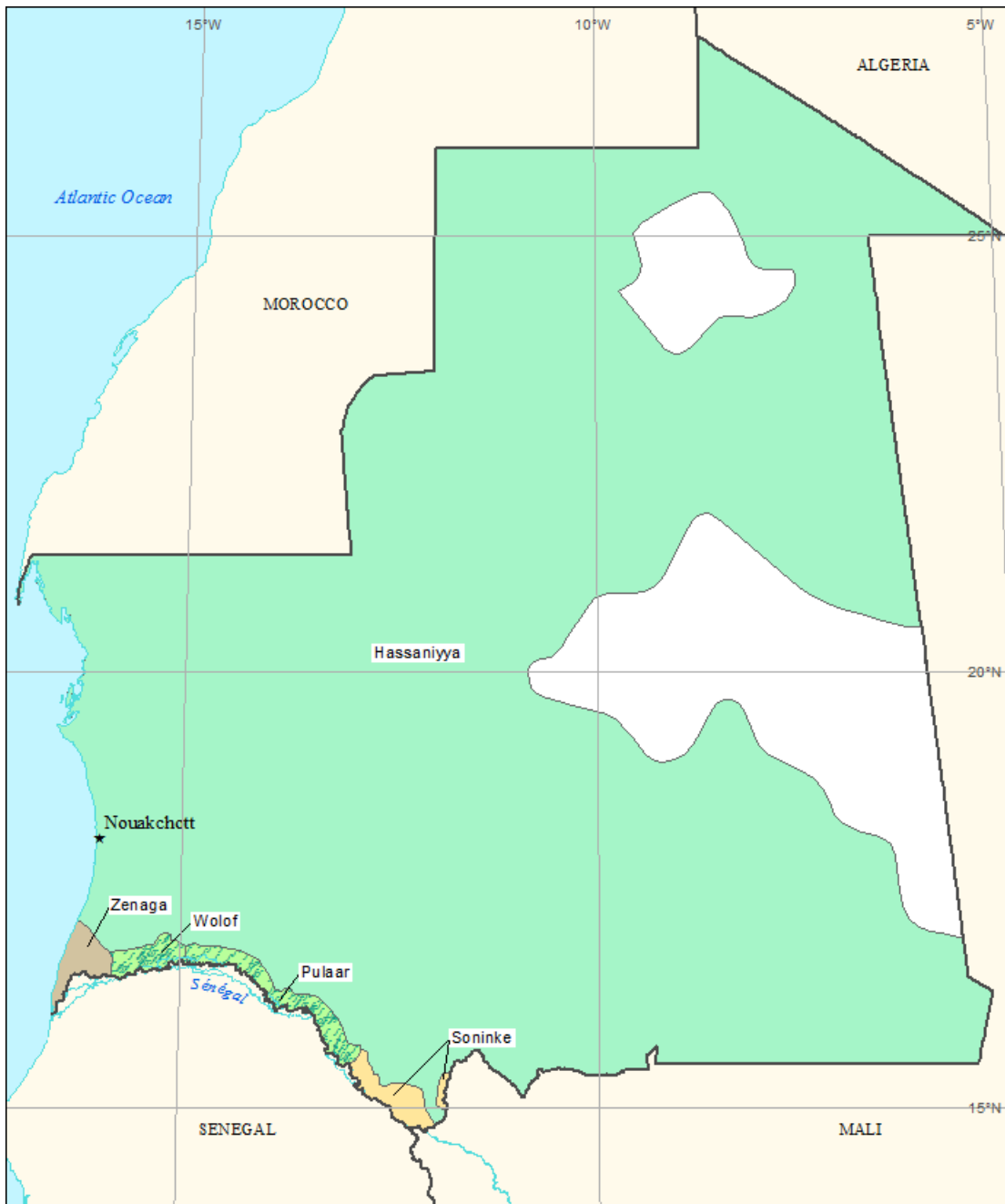
Tamasheq [taq]. Autonym: Təmajaq. *Users*: 123,000 in Mauritania (2020). *Status*: Unestablished. *Class*: Afro-Asiatic, Berber, Tamasheq, Southern. *Lg Use*: All also use French [fra]. Most also use Hassaniyya [mey]. Many also use Standard Arabic [arb]. *Lg Dev*: Grammar. NT: 2003. *Writing*: Latin script. Tifinagh (Berber) script. *Other*: Non-indigenous. *Worldwide*: Total users in all countries: 900,000. Global EGIDS level: 5 (Developing). Indigenous in: Burkina Faso (Kidal Tamasheq), Mali.

Wolof [wol] (Ouolof, Volof, Walaf, Yalof). *Users*: 20,300 in Mauritania (2020), increasing. *Location*: Brakna and Trarza regions. *Status*: 5 (Dispersed). Statutory language of national identity (1991, Constitution, Article 6). *Class*: Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Atlantic, Northern, Senegambian, Fula-Wolof, Wolof. *Dialects*: Baol, Cayor, Dyolof (Djolof, Jolof), Lebou, Ndyanger. *Type*: SVO; prepositions; no noun classes, but class particles; definite article; passives; tense and aspect; 25 consonant and 16 vowel phonemes; non-tonal. *Lg Use*: Trade. Used by all. Positive attitudes. All also use French [fra], as the language of education, media and government. Most also use Hassaniyya [mey], as the language of commerce and interethnic communication. Many also use Standard Arabic [arb], as the language of government, media, and religion (Ould Ahmed 2012). *Lg Dev*: Literacy rate in L2: 50% in French [fra]. Radio. Dictionary. Grammar. NT: 1988–2010. *Writing*: Arabic script, Naskh variant, called Ajami. Latin script, primary usage. *Other*: Muslim. *Map*: 15. *Worldwide*: Total users in all countries: 12,397,200 (as L1: 6,050,920; as L2: 6,346,280). Global EGIDS level: 3 (Wider communication). Also indigenous in: Senegal. Unestablished in: Canada, France, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, United Kingdom, United States.

Zenaga [zen] (Mauritania Berber, Mauritanian Berber, Zenaga Berber). *Users*: 200 in Mauritania (2018), decreasing. *Location*: Trarza region: Atlantic coast to Mederdra. *Status*: 8a (Moribund). *Class*: Afro-Asiatic, Berber, Zenaga. *Dialects*: None known. Related to other Berber languages in basic structure though specific features are quite different. *Lg Use*: Mainly adults. Community. Shifted to Hassaniyya [mey]. Many also use Standard Arabic [arb], as the language of government, media, and religion (Ould Ahmed 2012). Also use French [fra], as the language of education, media and government. *Lg Dev*: Literacy rate in L2: 10% in Arabic [arb]. Grammar. *DLS*: Emerging (0.02). *Writing*: Tifinagh (Berber) script. *Other*: Bedouins,

reported to travel mainly in caravans. Racially, both white and black; the latter are descendants of slaves captured centuries ago. Muslim. *Map:* 15. *Worldwide:* Unestablished in: Senegal.

Language Map

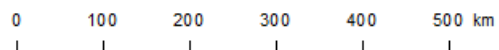


Language Families

- Arabic
- Atlantic
- Berber
- Mande

MAURITANIA

Note:
White areas are sparsely populated or uninhabited.



Languages by Population

In this section the languages of Mauritania are listed in order of their population of first-language speakers within the country, from highest to lowest. The entries report just the population and status elements.

1,000,000 to 9,999,999

Hassaniyya [[mey](#)] *Users:* 3,750,000 in Mauritania (2020), increasing. *Status:* 3 (Wider communication). Statutory language of national identity (1991, Constitution, Article 6). *Worldwide:* Total users in all countries: 5,189,980.

100,000 to 999,999

Pulaar [[fuc](#)] *Users:* 281,000 in Mauritania (2020). *Status:* 5 (Developing). Statutory language of national identity (1991, Constitution, Article 6). *Worldwide:* Total users in all countries: 5,912,700.

Soninke [[snk](#)] *Users:* 230,000 in Mauritania (2020), increasing. *Status:* 5 (Developing). Statutory language of national identity (1991, Constitution, Article 6). *Worldwide:* Total users in all countries: 2,251,700.

Tamasheq [[taq](#)] *Users:* 123,000 in Mauritania (2020). *Status:* Unestablished. *Worldwide:* Total users in all countries: 900,000.

10,000 to 99,999

Bambara [[bam](#)] *Users:* 22,200 in Mauritania (2020). *Status:* Unestablished. *Worldwide:* Total users in all countries: 14,181,650 (as L1: 4,179,190; as L2: 10,002,460).

Wolof [[wol](#)] *Users:* 20,300 in Mauritania (2020), increasing. *Status:* 5 (Dispersed). Statutory language of national identity (1991, Constitution, Article 6). *Worldwide:* Total users in all countries: 12,397,200 (as L1: 6,050,920; as L2: 6,346,280).

1,000 to 9,999

French [[fra](#)] *Users:* 6,560 in Mauritania (2020). 662,560 in Mauritania, all users. L2 users: 656,000 (Marcoux et al 2022). *Status:* 4 (Educational). De facto national working language. *Worldwide:* Total users in all countries: 309,804,220 (as L1: 80,770,190; as L2: 229,034,030).

100 to 999

Zenaga [[zen](#)] *Users:* 200 in Mauritania (2018), decreasing. *Status:* 8a (Moribund).

Unknown

Arabic, Standard [[arb](#)] *Users:* 1,840,000 in Mauritania (2013 SIL), all users. *Status:* 1 (National). Statutory national language (1991, Constitution, Article 6). *Worldwide:* Total users in all countries: 273,989,700.

Languages by Status

In this section the languages of Mauritania are listed in order of their status within the country as represented by their level on the EGIDs scale (Lewis and Simons 2010). The language entries are reduced to just the information elements that are relevant to assessing the EGIDS level: population, status, language use, language development, and writing.

1 (National)

Arabic, Standard [arb] *Users:* 1,840,000 in Mauritania (2013 SIL), all users. *Status:* Statutory national language (1991, Constitution, Article 6). *Lg Use:* Education, official purposes, formal speeches. *Writing:* Arabic script, Naskh variant, primary usage. Braille script. *Worldwide:* Total users in all countries: 273,989,700.

3 (Wider communication)

Hassaniyya [mey] *Users:* 3,750,000 in Mauritania (2020), increasing. *Status:* Statutory language of national identity (1991, Constitution, Article 6). Hassaniyya comes from the name of the Beni Hassan tribes who invaded North Africa and settled in modern Mauritania in the 15th to 17th centuries. Used in trade and religion. Spoken throughout northwestern Africa. *Lg Use:* Vigorous. All domains. Used by all. Positive attitudes. All also use French [fra], as the language of education, media and government. Many also use Standard Arabic [arb], as the language of government, media, and religion (Ould Ahmed 2012). Used as L2 by Bambara [bam], Pulaar [fuc], Soninke [snk], Tamasheq [taq], Wolof [wol], Zenaga [zen]. *Lg Dev:* Literature. Radio. Dictionary. *Writing:* Arabic script, Naskh variant. Latin script, in development. *Worldwide:* Total users in all countries: 5,189,980.

4 (Educational)

French [fra] *Users:* 662,560 in Mauritania, all users. L1 users: 6,560 in Mauritania (2020). L2 users: 656,000 (Marcoux et al 2022). *Status:* De facto national working language. *Lg Use:* Used as L2 by Bambara [bam], Hassaniyya [mey], Pulaar [fuc], Soninke [snk], Tamasheq [taq], Wolof [wol], Zenaga [zen]. *Writing:* Braille script. Duployan shorthand. Latin script, primary usage. *Worldwide:* Total users in all countries: 309,804,220 (as L1: 80,770,190; as L2: 229,034,030).

5 (Developing)

Pulaar [fuc] *Users:* 281,000 in Mauritania (2020). *Status:* Statutory language of national identity (1991, Constitution, Article 6). *Lg Use:* Home, religion, market. Used by all. Positive attitudes. All also use French [fra], as the language of education, media and government. Most also use Hassaniyya [mey], as the language of commerce and interethnic communication. Many also

use Standard Arabic [arb], as the language of government, media, and religion (Ould Ahmed 2012). Used as L2 by Soninke [snk]. *Writing*: Arabic script, Naskh variant. Latin script. *Worldwide*: Total users in all countries: 5,912,700.

Soninke [snk] *Users*: 230,000 in Mauritania (2020), increasing. *Status*: Statutory language of national identity (1991, Constitution, Article 6). *Lg Use*: Vigorous. Used by all. Positive attitudes. All also use French [fra], as the language of education, media and government. Most also use Hassaniyya [mey], as the language of commerce and interethnic communication. Many also use Standard Arabic [arb], as the language of government, media, and religion. Also use Pulaar [fuc]. *Writing*: Arabic script, Naskh variant. Latin script. *Worldwide*: Total users in all countries: 2,251,700.

5 (Dispersed)

Wolof [wol] *Users*: 20,300 in Mauritania (2020), increasing. *Status*: Statutory language of national identity (1991, Constitution, Article 6). *Lg Use*: Trade. Used by all. Positive attitudes. All also use French [fra], as the language of education, media and government. Most also use Hassaniyya [mey], as the language of commerce and interethnic communication. Many also use Standard Arabic [arb], as the language of government, media, and religion (Ould Ahmed 2012). *Writing*: Arabic script, Naskh variant, called Ajami. Latin script, primary usage. *Worldwide*: Total users in all countries: 12,397,200 (as L1: 6,050,920; as L2: 6,346,280).

8a (Moribund)

Zenaga [zen] *Users*: 200 in Mauritania (2018), decreasing. *Lg Use*: Mainly adults. Community. Shifted to Hassaniyya [mey]. Many also use Standard Arabic [arb], as the language of government, media, and religion (Ould Ahmed 2012). Also use French [fra], as the language of education, media and government. *Lg Dev*: Grammar. *Writing*: Tifinagh (Berber) script.

Unestablished

Bambara [bam] *Users*: 22,200 in Mauritania (2020). *Lg Use*: All also use French [fra], as the language of education, media and government. Most also use Hassaniyya [mey], as the language of commerce and interethnic communication. Many also use Standard Arabic [arb], as the language of government, media, and religion (Ould Ahmed 2012). *Writing*: Latin script. N’Ko script, used in Mali. *Worldwide*: Total users in all countries: 14,181,650 (as L1: 4,179,190; as L2: 10,002,460).

Tamasheq [taq] *Users*: 123,000 in Mauritania (2020). *Lg Use*: All also use French [fra]. Most also use Hassaniyya [mey]. Many also use Standard Arabic [arb]. *Writing*: Latin script. Tifinagh (Berber) script. *Worldwide*: Total users in all countries: 900,000.

Languages by Region

This index gives an alphabetical listing of the top-level administrative subdivisions within Mauritania. Under the name of each region is a list of the language communities that are located within its area.

Brakna

Pulaar [fuc], [12](#)

Wolof [wol], [13](#)

Dakhlet Nouadhibou

Soninke [snk], [12](#)

Gorgol

Pulaar [fuc], [12](#)

Soninke [snk], [12](#)

Guidimaka

Soninke [snk], [12](#)

Trarza

Pulaar [fuc], [12](#)

Wolof [wol], [13](#)

Zenaga [zen], [13](#)

Languages by Family

This index gives an alphabetical listing of the linguistic classifications used for the established languages of Mauritania. The entries in this index represent the full path in the linguistic family tree from the highest level grouping down to the lowest. All the languages listed in the same entry are members of the same lowest-level subgroup. The referenced page contains the main entry that describes the language.

Afro-Asiatic, Berber, Zenaga

Zenaga [zen], [13](#)

Afro-Asiatic, Semitic, Central, South, Arabic

Arabic, Standard [arb], [11](#)

Hassaniyya [mey], [12](#)

Indo-European, Italic, Romance, Italo-Western, Western, Gallo-Iberian, Gallo-Romance, Gallo-Rhaetian, Oïl, French

French [fra], [11](#)

Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Atlantic, Northern, Senegambian, Fula-Wolof, Fula, Western

Pulaar [fuc], [12](#)

Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Atlantic, Northern, Senegambian, Fula-Wolof, Wolof

Wolof [wol], [13](#)

Niger-Congo, Mande, Western, Northwestern, Soninke-Bobo, Soninke-Boso, Soninke

Soninke [snk], [12](#)

Language Code Index

This index gives an alphabetical listing of all 9 three-letter codes that are used in this work to uniquely identify languages. The referenced page contains the main entry that describes the language. All codes listed are part of the ISO 639-3 standard; see <http://www.sil.org/iso639-3/>.

arb Arabic, Standard, [11](#)

bam Bamanankan, [11](#)

fra French, [11](#)

fuc Pulaar, [12](#)

mey Hassaniyya, [12](#)

snk Soninke, [12](#)

taq Tamasheq, [13](#)

wol Wolof, [13](#)

zen Zenaga, [13](#)

Language Name Index

This index lists every name that appears in the language listings as a primary or alternate name of a language or dialect. The following abbreviations are used in the index entries: *alt.* ‘alternate name for’; *alt. dial.* ‘alternate name for a dialect of’; *dial.* ‘primary name for a dialect of’; *pej. alt.* ‘pejorative alternate name for’; and *pej. alt. dial.* ‘pejorative alternate name for a dialect of’. Each index entry resolves to the primary name for the language with which the indexed name is associated, followed by square brackets containing the unique three-letter language code from ISO 639-3. The referenced page contains the main entry that describes the language. If the language appears on a map, the entry for the primary name also lists page numbers for the maps on which the language occurs.

- Adjer**, *alt. dial.* Soninke [snk], 12
- Arabic, Standard** [arb], 11
see Arabic, Standard [arb], 11
- Aser**, *alt. dial.* Soninke [snk], 12
- Aswanek**, *alt.* Soninke [snk], 12
- Aswanik**, *alt.* Soninke [snk], 12
- Azer**, *alt.* Soninke [snk], 12
dial. Soninke [snk], 12
- Baol**, *dial.* Wolof [wol], 13
- Cayor**, *dial.* Wolof [wol], 13
- Djolof**, *alt. dial.* Wolof [wol], 13
- Dyolof**, *dial.* Wolof [wol], 13
- Français**, *alt.* French [fra], 11
- French** [fra], 11
- Gangara**, *alt.* Soninke [snk], 12
- Genger**, *alt.* Soninke [snk], 12
- Haalpulaar**, *alt. dial.* Pulaar [fuc], 12
- Hasanya**, *alt.* Hassaniyya [mey], 12
- Hasanya Arabic**, *alt.* Hassaniyya [mey], 12
- Hassani**, *alt.* Hassaniyya [mey], 12
- Hassania**, *alt.* Hassaniyya [mey], 12
- Hassaniya**, *alt.* Hassaniyya [mey], 12
- Hassaniyya** [mey], 12, 15
- Hassaniyya Arabic**, *alt.* Hassaniyya [mey], 12
- Jolof**, *alt. dial.* Wolof [wol], 13
- Kinbakka**, *dial.* Soninke [snk], 12
- Kinxenna**, *dial.* Soninke [snk], 12
- Klem El Bithan**, *alt.* Hassaniyya [mey], 12
- Lebou**, *dial.* Wolof [wol], 13
- Maraka**, *alt.* Soninke [snk], 12
- Marka**, *alt.* Soninke [snk], 12
- Maure**, *alt.* Hassaniyya [mey], 12
- Mauritania Berber**, *alt.* Zenaga [zen], 13
- Mauritanian Berber**, *alt.* Zenaga [zen], 13
- Moor**, *alt.* Hassaniyya [mey], 12
- Ndyanger**, *dial.* Wolof [wol], 13
- Ouolof**, *alt.* Wolof [wol], 13
- Peul**, *alt.* Pulaar [fuc], 12
- Pulaar** [fuc], 12, 15
alt. dial. Pulaar [fuc], 12
- Sarakole**, *alt.* Soninke [snk], 12
- Sarakolle**, *alt.* Soninke [snk], 12
- Sarakule**, *alt.* Soninke [snk], 12
- Sarakulle**, *alt.* Soninke [snk], 12
- Serahule**, *alt.* Soninke [snk], 12
- Soninkanxanne**, *alt.* Soninke [snk], 12
- Soninke** [snk], 12, 15
- Toucouleur**, *dial.* Pulaar [fuc], 12
- Tukolor**, *alt. dial.* Pulaar [fuc], 12
- Wolof**, *alt.* Wolof [wol], 13
- Walaf**, *alt.* Wolof [wol], 13
- Wolof** [wol], 13, 15

Yallof, *alt.* Wolof [wol], [13](#)

Zenaga [zen], [13](#), [15](#)

Zenaga Berber, *alt.* Zenaga [zen], [13](#)

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