

MANY LANGUAGES ARE IN THE WORLD?

BY Skye, age 9

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There are between 6,000 and 7,000. It's not possible to give an exact figure, and it's interesting to think about why. Here are three reasons.

Occasionally discover new languages. In some remote mountains, valleys and forests of the world there are small groups of people who may speak a language we don't yet know about. It's really exciting when we find one of these. But it doesn't happen very often.

Sometimes we find groups of people living near each other, and we can't be sure whether they speak the same language or not. We notice that each group uses slightly different words and sounds and sentences. Each group understands some of what the other groups say, but not all of it. So, do we call these 'different languages'? Or do we call them 'different dialects' of the same language? There are

lots of cases like this around the world.

But the main reason we can't give an exact figure is because many languages are dying out. Hundreds of languages have very few speakers left – sometimes only one or two – and when they die, their language disappears. This is happening all the time. A language is dying out somewhere in the world every few weeks. So the answer to the question is always going to change.

One thing is certain: the figure is getting smaller and smaller, as the months and years go by. It's probably nearer 6,000 now.