



## International Day of Sign Languages

Did you know that there are roughly 72 million deaf people around the world? This is a statistic from the World Federation of the Deaf. Collectively, these people use over 300 different sign languages. There is also an international sign language. This is used by deaf people when they are socializing. International Day of Sign Languages celebrates all of these amazing sign languages, paying homage to the incredible difference they have made to deaf people all around the world and increasing awareness about them.

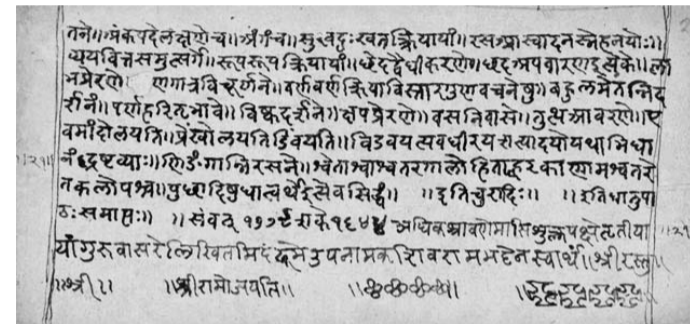
### #LANGUAGE

## What's the World's Oldest Language?

Debate rages over which languages can claim to have the earliest origin



Akkadian Empire Sumerian cuneiform tablet-Erech-Mesopotamia



Sanskrit Language

The globe hums with thousands of languages. But when did humans first lay out a structural system to communicate, one that was distinct to a particular area? Scientists are aware of more than 7,100 languages in use today. Nearly 40 percent of them are considered endangered, meaning they have a declining number of speakers and are at risk of dying out. Some languages are spoken by fewer than 1,000 people, while more than half of the world's population uses one of just 23 tongues.

These languages and dead ones that are no longer spoken weave together millennia of human interactions. This means the task of determining the world's oldest language is more than a linguistic curiosity. For instance, in order to decipher clay tablet inscriptions or trace the evolution of living tongues, linguists must grapple with questions that extend beyond language. In doing so, their research reveals some of the secrets of ancient civilizations and even sparks debates that blend science and culture.

"Ancient languages, just like contemporary languages, are crucial for understanding the past," says Claire Bowerman, a Professor of Linguistics at Yale University. "The words that we can trace back through time give us a picture of the culture of past societies." Language comes in different forms—including speech, gestures and writing—which don't all leave conclusive evidence behind. And experts use different approaches to determine a language's age.

Tracing the oldest language is "a deceptively complicated task," says Danny Hieber, a linguist who studies endangered languages. One way to identify a language's origins is to find the point at which a single tongue with different dialects became two entirely distinct languages, such that people speaking those dialects could no longer understand each other. "For example, how far back in history would you need to go for English speakers to understand German speakers?" he says. That point in time would mark the origins of English and German as distinct languages, branching off from a common proto-



Hebrew calligraphy

# Have you been chaired properly?



Dr. Goutam Sen  
CTVS Surgeon  
Traveller  
Story teller

The other day the Chief Justice of India (CJI) was faced with an unusual question by an observant person in the audience. It occurred when he was doing a question and answer session in the UK. The question was simple but it had immense depth in it. "Why do the chairs of the Judges in your Supreme Court have variable heights?"

Although this sounded simple. It had many important points raised without being said. All the Judges are equal in stature and authority. The chair they sit on is a statement of their position and power. Even as such they are placed on an elevated platform (Something like the high table in academia). Even the Chief justice is one of them except for his additional administrative

responsibilities. So why should the height of the back of chairs of judges vary? It was found that no one had really looked into the matter. The judges chose their chairs according to their comfort while conforming to certain regulations laid down from the beginning. The width and spacing had been regularised but the height was never taken into consideration. The CJI then issued instructions that the back of the chairs should have a uniform height keeping in mind that all the other conditions make sure of the comfort of the judges. This was very important as they have to sit for long and discomfiting hours.

Ever since a chair has been designed for sitting it has been modified according to the stature of the person who sits on it. It is even given a different name. Rulers do not sit on chairs. They have thrones. The more powerful the ruler more ornate the throne. Some of the thrones were so beautifully crafted that they became an eternal symbol of the ruler of the kingdom. The Peacock throne of the Mughals was so envied that once the battle was lost it was quickly pillored and shifted to Iran by Nader Shah. It is another



Ghulam Murtaza Khan The Delhi Darbar of Akbar II

One of the tales that keep coming to my mind is about Indra Gandhi when she was the Prime minister. One day she called her cabinet to her office to discuss some matter. There were enough chairs in the room but the cabinet preferred to stand in her august presence. The PM seeing that the chairs were not being used instructed the staff to remove them from her office forthwith. Thereafter there was only one chair in her office. I cannot verify the truth of this tale but it is plausible.



## #KISSA KURSI KA

Thrones are not just designed for rulers. In India all our deities sit on thrones made of precious metals. Costly stones are often embedded on them to add to their majesty. In the bigger temples there is a throne for every occasion. The temple of Balaji at Tirupati is an example. Coming down to the present day the chair has a great significance.

A chair which is different from the ones placed in front of the desk. I remember one astute officer of short stature telling me that it is very important that the chair you sit on gives you a height benefit. He made sure that his chair had a higher seat than the ones in front of him. He went to the extent of making sure that the chairs in front were less than the regulation height. The dictum is looking into the eye is OK but it is even better to look down!

The office chair has gone through a few incarnations since the engineers have studied the structure of the human back along with the doctors. None of them have straight backs anymore. The lower back has a lumbar curve which is usually curving to the front. Hence the chairs too now curve forward. The back of the chest also require equal pressure. The ergonomically designed chairs take this into consideration. The neck and head too

require support. One of the most important things is the height of the chair. If the thigh does not sit comfortably on the seat it becomes very tiring. The whole length needs to be rested. It is very common in Indian offices to have a towel placed on the back of the chair. I am not sure what purpose it has. It certainly does not add to the comfort or elegance. It has been suggested that it prevents the oil stain from the head. Another comment is that varying its colour and texture improves the drabness of the office. In an interesting study it was noted that an officer tends to put in more hours if he has a comfortable chair. Contrarily the visitor comes to the point earlier if the chair is uncomfortable.

There is now a trend to have chair-less offices. Officers who work while standing come to a decision faster. Communications are briefer. Fatigue level at the end of the day is less. The companies are happier as they can put in more people in the same space. Chairs have always been designed according to the purpose. Take for example chairs in an eating place. If it is a busy and take-away place the number of chairs will be limited and not much attention is paid to the design. The expectation is that the person is unlikely to stay for long. On the other hand if one goes to a fine dining place the chairs have to match the ambience. They are plush and hug the body that sits on it. Once one is seated the expectation is that it will be at least a cou-

ple of hours before getting up. They are heavier and the luxury of the chair being pushed forward by the waiter while being seated adds to the atmosphere. Contrarily bars never have chairs against the counter. They provide stools to allow the person to turn on either

side leading to an easy familiarity. In some restaurants there are two kinds of seating. The usual being chairs around the table but the other one is a sofa cum table. In that case the table is much lower and when the meal is served the diner tends to lift the plate off the table. I detest this kind of setup. The comfort lies in having not to hold on to the platter while eating!

Have you noticed a funny thing? When one eats in the outdoors there is a bench instead of a chair. There are tables but they are built but most parks do not have them.

In a whole lifetime most of us have sat on many chairs both in the physical and metaphorical sense. To begin with it was probably a four-wheeled perambulator. While eating we were shifted to a high chair with a fixed food tray in the front. Less was eaten and more was spilled. Later when in school we sat on those peculiar chairs which had an extended handle on one side. A small square formed the front for us to place a book or copy. The extra books and the bag were placed on a platform underneath the seat. As time passed and we attended meetings in larger auditoriums the seats were cushioned. The cushioning tended to increase until the chairs became so comfortable that snoozing in them became a norm. Finally a day came when we were back on wheels on a wheel chair!

How can one write about chairs without mentioning the infamous 'Kissa Kursi Ka' affair? In 1975, Amrit Nahta – a former Congressman produced a film parodying Sanjay Gandhi and the Maruti Udyog. He also exposed the corruption behind its establishment. The annoyed Gandhi scion forced Vidya Charan Shukla, the I&B Minister, to ban the film. All the prints of the film were brought to Maruti Udyog and burnt. The case went up to the Supreme Court. Sanjay Gandhi was found guilty and sentenced to jail for one month. The chair has always been an important part of our lives. The British during their rule in India had converted its use into a fine art of distinction. Indians were normally not allowed to sit in front of the white man. In fact, it was considered an honour if one was allowed to sit in their presence. In some states a formal written order was issued allowing certain distinguished Indians to sit in the 'august' presence of the white man! So always keep in mind on what kind of a chair you sit on!

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In India marble thrones with intricate Lapuz lazuli are also seen.



In India marble thrones with intricate Lapuz lazuli are also seen.

### #ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

# Health Impact Of Climate Changes

Current clinical terminologies lack the necessary depth to capture the full range of hazards associated with climate change

Monash University-led study has proposed a solution for the urgent need to capture real-time data on the impact of climate change-related events on human health, healthcare workforces, and healthcare systems at the point of care. As the global community faces growing climate challenges, the study calls for action, collaboration, and innovation to safeguard human health and wellbeing in the face of environmental crises. Published in the Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association, it highlighted key climate and natural disaster-related concepts, such as heatwave and drought that need to be integrated in standardised medical terminology.

Monash University's Nursing and Midwifery Associate Professor Zerin Lohmic-Tomkins led the project with an international group of researchers.

"Climate change, a critical risk driver of natural disasters, is rapidly jeopardising global environmental sustainability, planetary health, population health, and sustainable development goals," Associate Professor Lohmic-Tomkins said.

"Our research indicates that current clinical terminologies lack the necessary depth to capture the full range of hazards associated with climate change, particularly those linked to environmental and meteorological factors.

"This gap hinders our ability to genuinely understand the extent of the impact of climate-related natural disasters on human health, but also how we plan to deliver effective healthcare during disasters, and plan interventions to support healthcare systems in times of crisis."

The study highlighted the need for comprehensive clinical terminologies to capture climate-driven disaster and hazard-related events that impact human health and the provision of sustainable healthcare services across preparation, response and recovery associated with these events.

It mapped the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction International Science Council (UNDRR-ISC)'s Hazard Information



Profiles (HIP) to SNOMED CT International, a widely used clinical terminology for electronic health records.

The resulting paper called for global collaboration to expand SNOMED CT International to include unique geographical and regional hazard contexts disproportionately experienced in countries most affected by climate change.

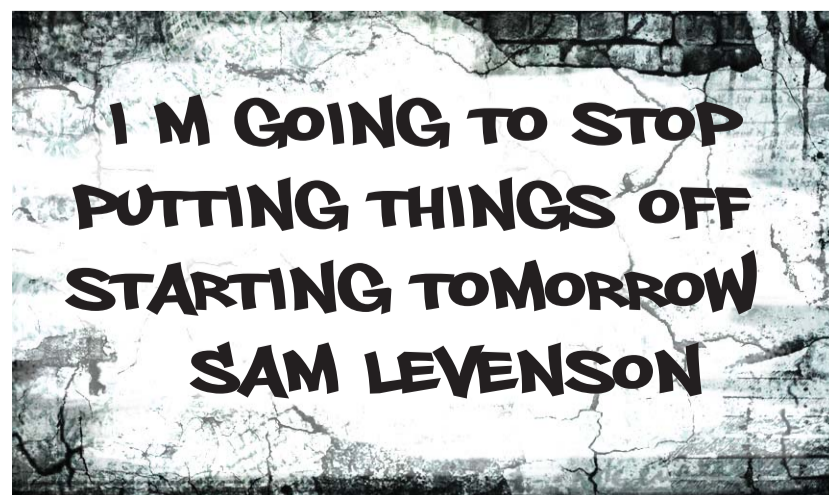
"By including diverse perspectives and contributions globally, the clinical terminology can better reflect global health needs and improve disaster preparedness and response efforts," Associate Professor Lohmic-Tomkins said. "This means capturing hazards linked to meteorological clusters, such as heatwaves and droughts, which have significant impact on human health across the lifespan."

"Enhancing globally agreed terminology would enable clinicians, public health officials, and health informaticians to manage vast volumes of clinical data, and retrieve, analyse, and contextualise it to specific climate-related situations.

"These phenomena have intensified due to climate change and have significant impacts on human health, migration patterns, and armed conflict situations globally," she said. "Correcting this deficit in SNOMED CT is crucial to capturing these events as causative factors of health-related issues."



## THE WALL



## BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

## ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman