



# The Nature of Indigenous Languages

There are many distinctions between English and Indigenous languages.

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\* Indigenous languages are **polysynthetic**, which means:  
 These languages are comprised of **longer and more complex words**  
 Each word contains **many morphemes**

English is an **isolating** language, which means:  
 It has **few morphemes per word**  
 Sentences are comprised of **many separate words** (you need to put together more separate words to convey an idea)

## Important Information About Indigenous Languages:

- There are at least **290** known Indigenous languages on Turtle Island
- Indigenous languages are **descriptive** rather than directive
- Understanding the polysynthetic, verb-based nature of Indigenous languages allows us to better understand Indigenous worldviews
- Indigenous languages are **directly linked to spirituality**
- Indigenous languages are shaped by a Nation's **interaction with the land**
  - "Over time and many generations of their people, it is their distinctive interaction with a **precise geography** which forms the way Indigenous language is shaped and subsequently how the world is **viewed, approached, and expressed verbally** by its speakers"-Jeanette Armstrong, *Land Speaking*

## Did You Know:

In polysynthetic languages, a single verb can contain as much information as one sentence in English.

For example, in English, you would say "I will answer you", while in Anishinaabemowin you would say "Giwiaazhidemin".

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## Other Important Distinctions Between English and Indigenous Languages

Indigenous languages are verb-based, while English is noun-based. This means that Indigenous languages are intrinsically more descriptive and the interconnectedness of all life is entrenched within the language.

Indigenous worldviews are contained in language



### Resources:

- Kell, S. (2014). Polysynthetic language structures and their role in pedagogy and curriculum for BC Indigenous Languages: Final Report. British Columbia Ministry of Education.
- McCall, S., Reder, D., Gaertner, D., & Hill, G. L. H. (2017). Land Speaking- Jeanette Armstrong. In Read, Listen, Tell: Indigenous Stories from Turtle Island. essay, Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Morcom, L. (2022, January). The Linguistics of Turtle Island . Lecture, Kingston; Queen's University.
- TEDx Talks . (2019). Why Indigenous Languages Matter and What We Can Do to Save Them | Lindsay Morcom | TEDxQueensU. Retrieved from [https://youtu.be/g2HiPW\\_qSrs](https://youtu.be/g2HiPW_qSrs).