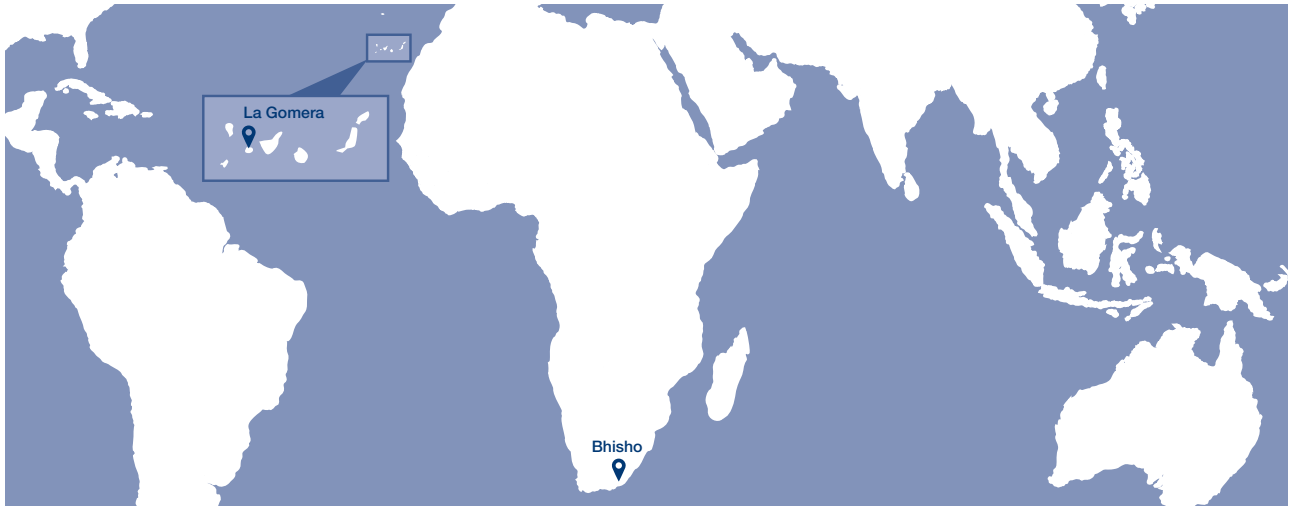


## Language

### 1 Work with a partner and discuss this question:

What do you know about the places labelled on the map?

### 2 In the text you are going to read, both places have unusual languages. What would you like to know about these languages? Write four questions. Then read the text quickly to see if your questions are answered.



## Very Different Languages: Languages of the World

There are about 7,000 different languages spoken around the world. Some have millions of speakers – like English, and others have only a few – like some tribal languages in Brazil. There are languages that are more difficult to learn than others, and some that are very different from any other language that we know. Let's learn about two languages spoken in Spain and South Africa.



### Naira

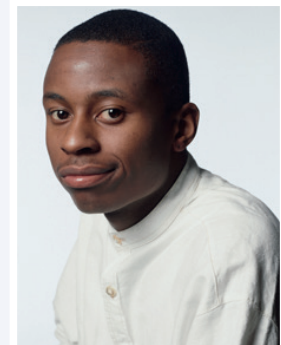
I'm 15 years old and I live on the island of La Gomera. I speak a local language called Silbo. I've spoken Silbo since I was at primary school. Although it isn't really a language which we speak, it's a language that's made up of whistle sounds!

On my island, people have used Silbo for hundreds of years because whistling was a useful way for the islanders to communicate with each other across the hills and valleys. By the end of the 20th century though, Silbo was a dying language because many of the older speakers went to other islands for work. But now they teach the language at school so everybody can learn it again. There aren't any words in Silbo, it's a whistled form of Spanish with only two vowel and four consonant sounds. It's difficult to learn and you need a lot of practice. I practise Silbo with my grandfather who lives in the mountains. Sometimes I make a mistake, but it's fun to learn and I think it's important to understand this ancient language of my island.

### Malusi

I'm 16 years old and I live in Bhisho, South Africa. I speak Xhosa, which is an official language in my country. Approximately 18% of South Africans speak Xhosa – that's about eight million people – and, like many African languages, it uses a lot of clicking sounds, as well as words, which makes it unusual. There are 10 vowels and 18 click consonants in Xhosa. A click consonant means we use our tongue in different positions in our mouth to make clicking sounds, e.g. on the inside of our cheeks, against our teeth, at the back of our throat. In fact, the word 'Xhosa' begins with a clicking sound because 'x' is a click consonant made with the tongue placed inside the cheek. Can you say 'Xhosa'? Maybe it's impossible if you've never learnt an African language, but it's easy when you know how!

Both Silbo and Xhosa are still very much a part of their countries and it is wonderful that the new generations are using these languages so that they continue to thrive.



**3 Read the text. Then read the sentences and write Silbo (S), Xhosa (X) or both (B).**

- 1 It's one of very few non-verbal languages in the world. ....
- 2 Creating sounds using your mouth produces the language. ....
- 3 It's becoming more popular again thanks to an increase in speakers. ....
- 4 The word for this language starts with an unusual sound. ....
- 5 There are vowels and consonants to create the unusual sounds. ....
- 6 It isn't the only language which contains a mix of verbal and other sounds. ....

**4 Read the text again. What do these numbers in the text refer to?**

- 1 8,000,000 .....
- 2 20th century .....
- 3 18 .....
- 4 7,000 .....
- 5 13 .....

**5 Work with a partner and discuss the questions in pairs.**

- 1 How many languages are spoken in your country? Are any of these languages considered unusual?
- 2 Can you speak more than one language fluently? What are the advantages of learning more than one language?

**?? DID YOU KNOW?**

One of the rarest languages in the world today is Chamicuro, which is spoken by less than ten people! The Chamicuro tribe live in an isolated region of Peru. The Chamicuro children speak Spanish, so when the older generation of the Chamicuro people die, their language will die with them.

**PROJECT**

- 1 Work in groups. Choose one of these languages:

Pawnee • Esperanto • Sentinelese  
Pirahã • Lemerig • Majang

- 2 Find out information and find photos if possible about these aspects of the language:

where it is spoken and how many people speak it  
which language family it belongs to  
what people are doing to keep the language alive  
what is unusual about it

- 3 In your group, prepare a presentation of your language for the class.

**VOCABULARY FOCUS**

- ancient [adj]:** very old.
- click [n, v]:** a short sound, made e.g. with your tongue or fingers.
- consonant [n]:** a speech sound that stops some or all of the air escaping the mouth.
- dying [adj]:** not likely to live much longer.
- islander [n]:** somebody who lives on an island.
- official [adj]:** decided by people in authority or the government.
- rather [adv]:** to quite a large degree.
- thrive [v]:** become successful, popular, healthy.
- tongue [n]:** soft fleshy organ in the mouth that allows us to speak, eat, etc.
- tribal [adj]:** relating to a group of people living in the same area and sharing a common language and customs.
- vowel [n]:** a speech sound produced without closing the mouth/throat, also a letter-type in the alphabet.
- whistle [n, v]:** a sound made by forcing air out of the mouth.