

All Graduates

Emerging languages: the languages of East Africa

Among the many languages in Australia that have arrived with East African immigrants, the 2011 Census found the three most widely spoken were:

- Somali 9,914 speakers
- Shona 8,004
- Swahili 6,885

Somali is the most established of these languages in Australia. Somali, while it is written with a Latin script, is a Semitic language, close to Arabic. It is the dominant language of Somalia, which has relatively few other minority languages. There is now relatively good access to Somali interpreters and translators in Australia.

Shona is a language few Australians may have heard of. It is a native language widely spoken in Zimbabwe and surrounding countries. It is spoken by many as a second language, making it a lingua franca of trade and social life. However, the majority of Shona speakers will also be literate in English, making the need for language services less critical.

Swahili (Kiswahili) is very much a recently emerging language in Australia, with still a shortage of translators and interpreters. It is an even more significant lingua franca as it was originally a trading language of Zanzibar and is now spoken by many along the central East African coast. It is the official national language of Tanzania. Swahili is also widely spoken in surrounding countries, particularly Kenya and as far inland as the Congo, and is a language of instruction in primary and secondary education.

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