



Press Release

April 21, 2008

**World Atlas of Language Structures (WALS)  
now freely available online**

**WALS Online**

Already when it was published as a book in 2005, The World Atlas of Language Structures (WALS) represented a giant step forward in scientists' access to information on the diversity of human languages. On 142 maps displaying on average 400 languages from all over the world, it shows the geographical distribution of the most important patterns of sounds, word structure and sentence structure.

**Open Access to  
Linguistic Data**

Through a joint effort of the Max Planck Digital Library and the Department of Linguistics of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, all the data and analytical texts from The World Atlas of Language Structures are now freely available online ("WALS Online"), at <http://wals.info>. The materials are published under a Creative Commons License, guaranteeing open access for users and inviting scientists to use them for their work. WALS Online is by far the most important web site on the world's linguistic diversity.

**Data on over  
2500 languages**

The site shows data on over 2500 languages, for which more than 6500 references have been used. Searching and browsing is possible by structural feature, by language name or language family, by reference and by author. The analytical texts contain links to all the references and all the languages. The maps can be shown at any zoom level, and the map symbols can be displayed in various shapes and colours. A wide range of export options is available.

As in the book version, all languages are equal in WALS Online: each language, regardless of number of speakers, is represented on the map by the same circular symbol. For linguists, small and endangered languages threatened with imminent extinction are fully as interesting as large national languages.

WALS Online provides information on a vast range of structural variables: number of consonants (from 6 to 122), presence of rare sounds like ö and ü, tone systems, gender categories, plural formation, number of cases, verbal future and past forms, imperatives, word order, passives, numerals, colour terms, writing systems, and more.

**Links**

WALS Online: <http://wals.info>  
MPI for Evolutionary Anthropology: <http://www.eva.mpg.de/>  
Department of Linguistics: <http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/>  
Max Planck Digital Library: <http://www.mpdlib.mpg.de>

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