

Khoikhoi originated in the northern area of modern Botswana. The ethnic group steadily migrated to the south, reaching the Cape approximately 2,000 years ago. Khoikhoi subgroups include the Korana of mid-South Africa, the Namaqua to the west, and the Khoikhoi in the south. Husbandry of sheep, goats and cattle provided a stable, balanced diet and allowed related Khoikhoi peoples to live in larger groups than the region’s previous inhabitants, the San. Herds grazed in fertile valleys across the region until the 3rd century AD when the advancing Bantu encroached into their traditional homeland. Khoikhoi were forced into a long retreat into more arid areas. Today, in the southwest country of Namibia, the majority of the Khoikhoi people are mixed with one of the Bantu groups known as the Damara. They have a mixed-light skin tone, resulting from the light color of Khoikhoi people and the darker color of Bantu people. This group of people known as either Damara or Khoikhoi live around the Erongo region of Namibia. They speak the language known as “Khoikhoigobab” or simply “Damara”.

Religious mythology of Khoikhoi gives special significance to Moon, which may have been viewed as physical manifestation of a supreme being associated with heaven. Tsui’goab is believed to be the creator and guardian of health, while Gunab is primarily an evil being, who causes sickness or death.

### COMMON KHOIKHOI PHRASES

| morning greeting          | !gái ||goas            |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| afternoon greeting        | afternoon greeting    |
| evening greeting          | evening greeting      |
| Good luck                 | !Gái!gāb.            |
| How are you?              | Matisa? (inf)        |
|                           | Mîre? (frm)          |

### STUDYING NAMA IN THE UNITED STATES

Please contact the National African Language Resource Center, or check the NALRC web site at http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu/

**NATIONAL AFRICAN LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTER (NALRC)**

701 Eigenmann Hall, 1900 E. 10th St.
Bloomington, IN 47406 USA
T: (812) 856 4199 | F: (812) 856 4189
E-mail: nalrc@indiana.edu
Website: www.nalrc.indiana.edu
WHO SPEAKS NAMA?

Nama are an African ethnic group of South Africa, Namibia and Botswana. They traditionally speak the Nama language although many Nama also speak Afrikaans. The Nama are the largest group of the Khoikhoi people. Khoikhoi (“people people” or “real people”) or Khoi are native pastoralist people of southwestern Africa. They had lived in southern Africa since the 5th century AD. When European immigrants colonised the area after 1652 AD, Khoikhoi were practising extensive pastoral agriculture in the Cape region, with large herds of Nguni cattle. European immigrants labelled them Hottentots, in imitation of the sound of the Khoekhoe language but this term is today considered derogatory by some.

Archaeological evidence shows that Khoi entered South Africa from Botswana through two distinct routes travelling west, skirting the Kalahari to the west coast, then down to the Cape, and travelling south-east out into the Highland and then southwards to the south coast. Most of Khoikhoi have largely disappeared as a group, except for the largest group, the Namas. Many of the Nama clans live in Central Namibia and other smaller groups live in Namaqualand, which today straddles the Namibian border with South Africa.

WHY STUDY NAMA?

The Khoekhoe language, also known by the ethnic term Nama and formerly as the Hottentot, is the most widespread of those languages of southern Africa that contain many “click” sounds and have therefore been loosely classified as Khoisan languages. Nama belongs to the Khoe language family, and is spoken in Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa by three ethnic groups, the Nama, Damara, and Hailom.

It appears that the Damara picked up the language from Nama in Botswana, and that they migrated to Namibia separately from the Nama. The Hailom, who had spoken a Juu language, later shifted to Khoekhoe. The name for Nama speakers, Khoekhoen, is from the Nama word khoe “person”, with reduplication and the suffix -n to indicate the plural. Georg Friedrich Wreede was the first European to study the language, after arriving in Cape Town in 1659.

Khoekhoe is a national language in Namibia. In Namibia and South Africa, radio programs are broadcast in it. In Namibia, it is used for teaching up to the university level as well as in the administration. UNESCO has recognised Khoikhoi culture through its inscription of the Richtersveld as a World Heritage Site. This important area is the only place where transhumance practices associated with the culture continue to any great extent.