



## How Can Anyone Write an Unwritten Language?

**Did you know over 1.5 billion (1,500,000,000) people today still do not have the whole Bible in their language?**

Missionary linguists study unwritten languages. They listen carefully to strange new sounds and write them all down.

But how can anyone write an unwritten language? Here is how it works:

Linguists do not use the English alphabet. Instead, they write with the *International Phonetic Alphabet*. It has one symbol for every sound possible to human beings.

Here is John 3:16 in the ICB version: 'For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son. God gave his Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost but have eternal life.'

This is how the same verse looks in the International Phonetic Alphabet:

fɔ:      gɒd      lʌvd      ðə      wɜ:lɪd      səʊ      mʌtʃ      ðæt      hi:

.....

geɪv      hɪz      'əʊnli:      sʌn.      gɒd      geɪv      hɪz      sʌn      səʊ

.....

ðæt      hu:'evə      bɪ'li:vz      ɪn      hɪm      meɪ      nɒt      bi:

.....

lɒst,      bʌt      hæv      i:'tɜ:nəl      laɪf.

.....



Now write John 3:16 underneath each phonetic word above. Can you figure out which phonetic symbols represent our English sounds?

Listen carefully. Can you hear the difference between the first two vowels? How is the 'o' in *for* different from the 'o' in *God*? Look in a mirror. You don't even open your mouth the same way for each one, do you?

What about the 'o' in the next word, *so*? Is it the same as either of the first two?

Now, what about the 'o' in *Son*? How is it different from the other three?

And finally, the 'o' in *world*, and in *whoever*.

You found six different sounds and phonetic symbols for our English letter 'o'!

Write them out here:

For.....

God.....

Son.....

so.....

world.....

whoever.....