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Just like half of the world's spoken tongues, most of the 2,300-plus computer programming languages are either endangered or extinct. As powerhouses C/C++, Visual Basic, Cobol, Java and other modern source codes dominate our systems, hundreds of older languages are running out of life.

An ad hoc collection of engineers-electronic lexicographers, if you will-aim to save, or at least document the lingo of classic software. They're combing the globe's 9 million developers in search of coders still fluent in these nearly forgotten lingua frangas. Among the most endangered are Ada, APL, B (the predecessor of C), Lsp, Oberon, Smalltalk, and Simula.

Code-raker Grady Booch, Rational Software's chief scientist, is working with the Computer History Museum in Silicon Valley to record and, in some cases, maintain languages by writing new compilers so our ever-changing hardware can grok the code. Why bother? "They tell us about the state of software practice, the minds of their inventors, and the technical, social, and economic forces that shaped history at the time," Booch explains. "They'll provide the raw material for software archaeologists, historians, and developers to learn what worked, what was brilliant, and what was an utter failure." Here's a peek at the strongest branches of programming's family tree. For a nearly exhaustive rundown, check out the Language List at [HTTP://www.informatik.uni-freiburg.de/Java/misc/lang_list.html](http://www.informatik.uni-freiburg.de/Java/misc/lang_list.html). - Michael Mendeno

Key	
1954	Year Introduced
Active: (green)	Active: thousands of users
Protected: (red)	Protected: thousands of users, but not available
Endangered: (orange)	Endangered: thousands of users, but not available
Extinct: (black)	Extinct: no longer available
Compilers: (blue)	Compilers: no longer available
Lineage: (grey)	Lineage: no longer available

