

Language

Chapter 6

Key Question:

What are Languages, and what Role do Languages Play in Cultures?

Language

Language – a set of sounds, combinations of sounds, and symbols that are used for communication.



Language and Culture

“No one was allowed to speak the language – the Dena’ina language. They [the American government] didn’t allow it in the schools, and a lot of the women had married non-native men, and the men said, ‘You’re American now so you can’t speak the language.’ So, we became invisible in the community. Invisible to each other. And, then, because we couldn’t speak the language – *what happens when you can’t speak your own language is you have to think with someone else’s words, and that’s a dreadful kind of isolation* [emphasis added].”

- Clare Swan, elder, Kenaitze band, Dena’ina

Language and Cultural Identity



Language and National Identity

Standard Language

a language that is published, widely distributed, and purposefully taught.

Government usually plays a big role in standardizing a language.



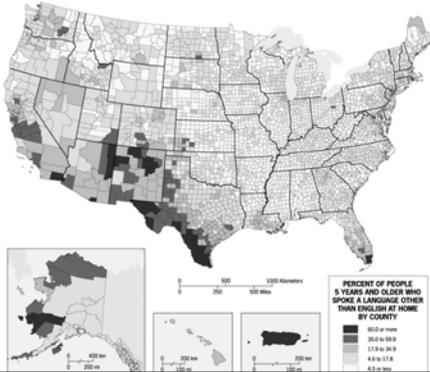
Language and Political Conflict



Belgium:
 Flanders (Flemish language)
 Wallonia (French language)



Percent of People 5 Years and Older Who Speak a Language other than English at Home



TOP TEN LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT HOME BY NON-ENGLISH SPEAKERS

Language	Total	Percent
1. Spanish	28,101,052	59.9
2. Chinese	2,022,143	4.3
3. French	1,643,838	3.5
4. German	1,382,613	2.9
5. Tagalog	1,224,241	2.6
6. Vietnamese	1,009,627	2.1
7. Italian	1,008,370	2.1
8. Korean	894,063	1.9
9. Russian	706,242	1.5
10. Polish	667,414	1.5

Dialect

variants of a standard language along regional or ethnic lines

- vocabulary
- syntax
- pronunciation
- cadence
- pace of speech



Isogloss

A geographic boundary within which a particular linguistic feature occurs

Mutual Intelligibility

- Means two people can understand each other when speaking.
 - Problems:
 - Cannot measure mutual intelligibility
 - Many "languages" fail the test of mutual intelligibility
 - Standard languages and governments impact what is a "language" and what is a "dialect"

World Language Families



THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY

Linguist Bert Vaux's study of dialects in American English points to the differences in words for common things such as soft drinks and sandwiches. Describe a time when you said something and a speaker of another dialect did not understand word you used. Was the word a term for a common thing? Why do you think dialects have different words for common things, things found across dialects, such as soft drinks and sandwiches.

Key Question:

Why are Languages Distributed the way they are?

How are Languages Formed?

- Can find linkages among languages by examining sound shifts – a slight change in a word across languages over time.

eg. Milk =lacte in Latin
latta in Italian
leche in Spanish
lait in French

How are Languages Formed?

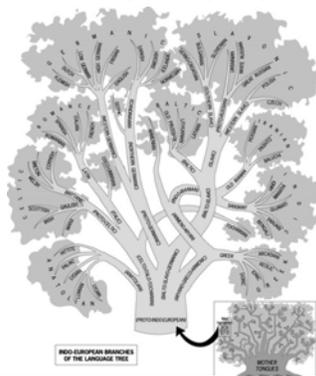
- Language divergence –
when a lack of spatial interaction among speakers of a language breaks the language into dialects and then new languages.
- Language convergence –
when peoples with different languages have consistent spatial interaction and their languages collapse into one.

How do Linguists Study Historical Languages?

- Backward reconstruction – tracking sound shifts and the hardening of consonants backward to reveal an “original” language.
 - Can deduce the vocabulary of an extinct language.
 - Can recreate ancient languages (deep reconstruction)

Historical Linkages among Languages

- Indo-European language family
- Proto-Indo-European language
- Nostratic Language



THE RENFREW HYPOTHESIS

Renfrew Hypothesis:
 Proto-Indo-European began in the Fertile Crescent, and then:
 From Anatolia diffused Europe's languages
 From the Western Arc of Fertile Crescent diffused North Africa and Arabia's languages
 From the Eastern Arc of Fertile Crescent diffused Southwest

Agriculture Theory

With increased food supply and increased population, speakers from the hearth of Indo-European languages migrated into Europe

INDO-EUROPEAN: PROPOSED WESTWARD DISPERSAL

Dispersal Hypothesis

Indo-European languages first moved from the hearth eastward into present-day Iran and then around the Caspian and into Europe.

INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGE HEARTH AND DISPERSAL HYPOTHESIS

The Languages of Europe

Romance languages

Germanic languages

Slavic languages

Euskera

The Basque speak the Euskera language, which is in now way related to any other language family in Europe.



How did Euskera survive?

Languages of Subsaharan Africa

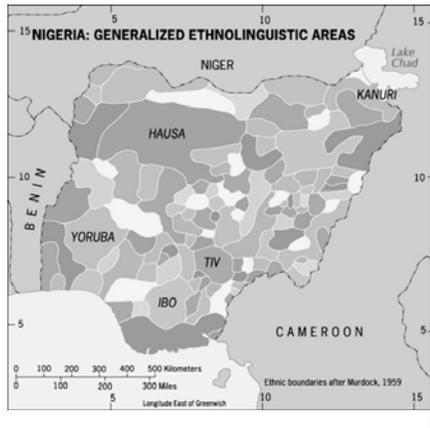
- extreme language diversity

- effects of colonialism



Nigeria

more than 400 different languages.



Key Question:

How do Languages Diffuse?

How do Languages Diffuse?

- human interaction
- print distribution
- migration
- trade
- rise of nation-states
- colonialism

Spatial Interaction helps create:

- **Lingua franca** –
A language used among speakers of different languages for the purposes of trade and commerce.
- **Pidgin language** –
a language created when people combine parts of two or more languages into a simplified structure and vocabulary.
- **Creole language** –
a pidgin language that has developed a more complex structure and vocabulary and has become the native language of a group of people.

Monolingual State
a country in which only one language is spoken

Multilingual State
a country in which more than one language is in use

Official Language
should a multilingual state adopt an official language?



Global Language

Is a global language the principle language people use around the world in their day-to-day activities?

OR

Is a global language a common language for trade and commerce used around the world?

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY

Choose a country in the world. Imagine you become a strong leader of a centralized government in the country. Pick a language other than a current language spoken in the country. Determine what policies you could put in place to replace the country's language with the new language. How many years, or how many generations, would need to pass before your program achieves your desired outcome?

Key Question:

What Role does Language Play in Making Places?

Place

- Place – the uniqueness of a location, what people do in a location, what they create, how they impart a certain character, a certain imprint on the location by making it unique.

Toponym

- Toponym – a place name
 - A toponym:
 - Imparts a certain character on a place
 - Reflects the social processes in a place
 - Can give us a glimpse of the history of a place

Changing Toponyms

- When people change the toponym of a place, they have the power to “wipe out the past and call forth the new.”
- Yi-Fu Tuan



Changing Toponyms

- Major reasons people change toponyms:
 - After decolonization
 - After a political revolution
 - To memorialize people or events
 - To commodify or brand a place

Martin Luther King, Jr. Streets

Geographer Derek Alderman asks:

- * Where are MLK streets?
- * Why are they where they are?
- * What controversies surround memorializing MLK with a street name?



Where are MLK Streets in the US?





This place was first named by Gabrielino Indians. In 1769, Spanish Franciscan priests renamed the place. In 1850, English speakers renamed the place. Do not use the Internet to help you. Use only maps in this book or in atlases to help you deduce what this place is. Maps of European exploration and colonialism will help you the most. Look at the end of the chapter summary for the answer.
