

Chapter 6: Language

*Concept Caching:
Burmese Script -
Burma*



© Barbara Weightman

Field Note:

What Should I Say?

“In stores throughout Brussels, Belgium, you can see the capital city’s bilingualism all around you—literally. From McDonald’s to health insurance offices to the metro, signs in Brussels are posted in duplicate, with one in Flemish (a variant of Dutch) and one in French.”



Figure 6.1

Key Question

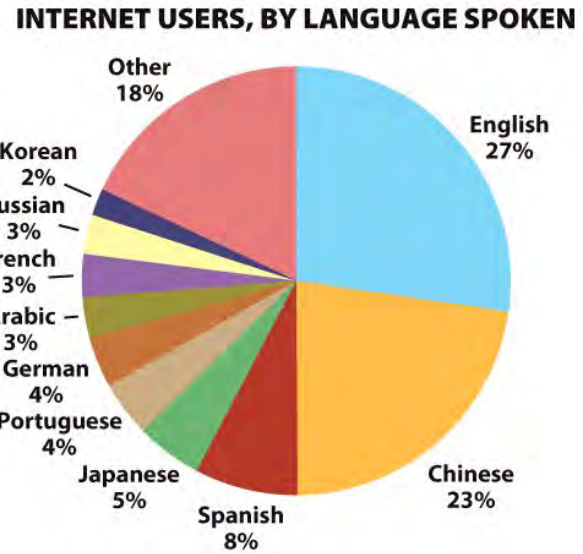
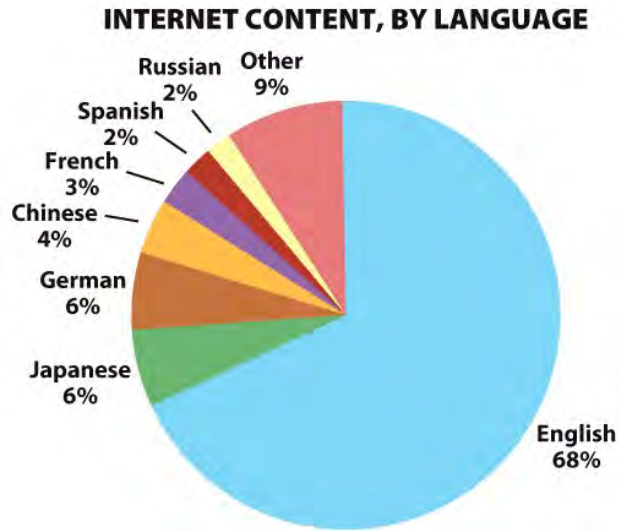
What Are Languages, and What
Role Do Languages Play in
Cultures?

What Are Languages, and What Role Do Languages Play in Cultures?

- **Language** is a set of sounds and symbols that is used for communication.
- Language is an integral part of culture.

Language and Culture

- Language reflects where a culture has been and what it values.
- Language makes people in a culture visible to each other and to the world.



TOP 10 LANGUAGES, BY MILLIONS OF SPEAKERS

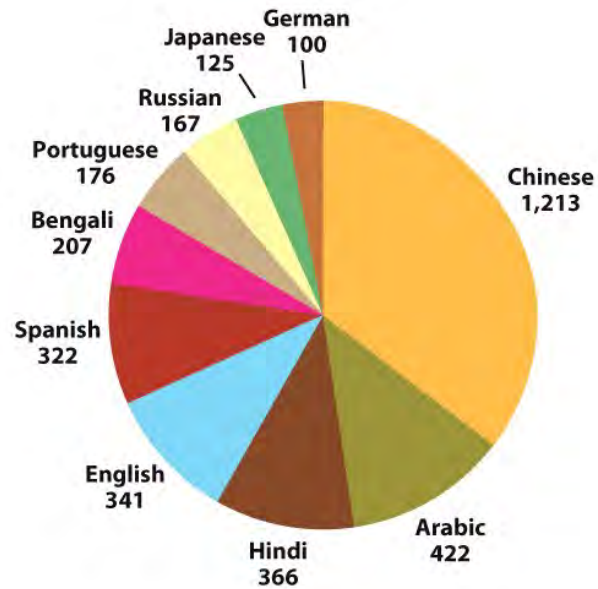


Figure 6.4
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What Are Languages, and What Role Do Languages Play in Cultures?

Language and Culture

- American, Canadian, Australian, Russian, and New Zealand governments had policies of forced assimilation during the twentieth century, including not allowing indigenous peoples to speak native languages.
- Language is so closely tied to **culture** that people use language as a weapon in cultural conflict and political strife.

- In 1993, the Quebec government passed a law requiring the use of French in advertising.



Figure 6.6
© Andre Jenny/Alamy

What Are Languages, and What Role Do Languages Play in Cultures?

What Is a Language?

- **Mutual intelligibility:**
 - Two people can understand each other when speaking.
 - Is almost impossible to measure.
 - Some languages are separate but are mutually intelligible.
 - Decision of what a standard language will be has to do with influence and power.

What Are Languages, and What Role Do Languages Play in Cultures?

Dialects

- Variants of a standard language along regional or ethnic lines
- Differences in vocabulary, syntax, pronunciation, cadence, and pace of speech
- **Dialect chains** across space
- Dialects frequently marked by actual differences in vocabulary
- **Isogloss:** geographic boundary within which a particular linguistic feature occurs

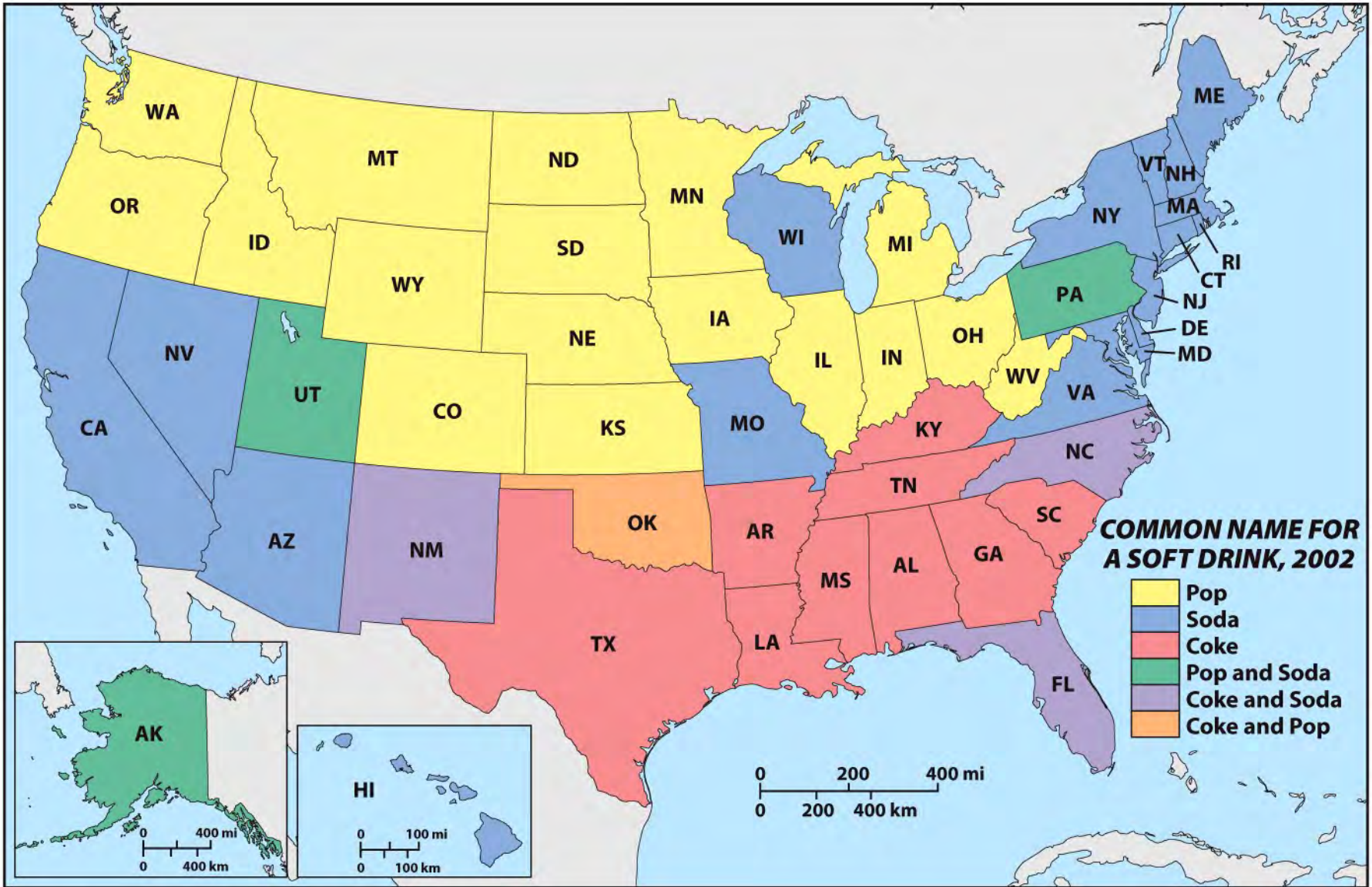


Figure 6.7

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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 the word you used. Where did the person with whom you were speaking come from? 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?

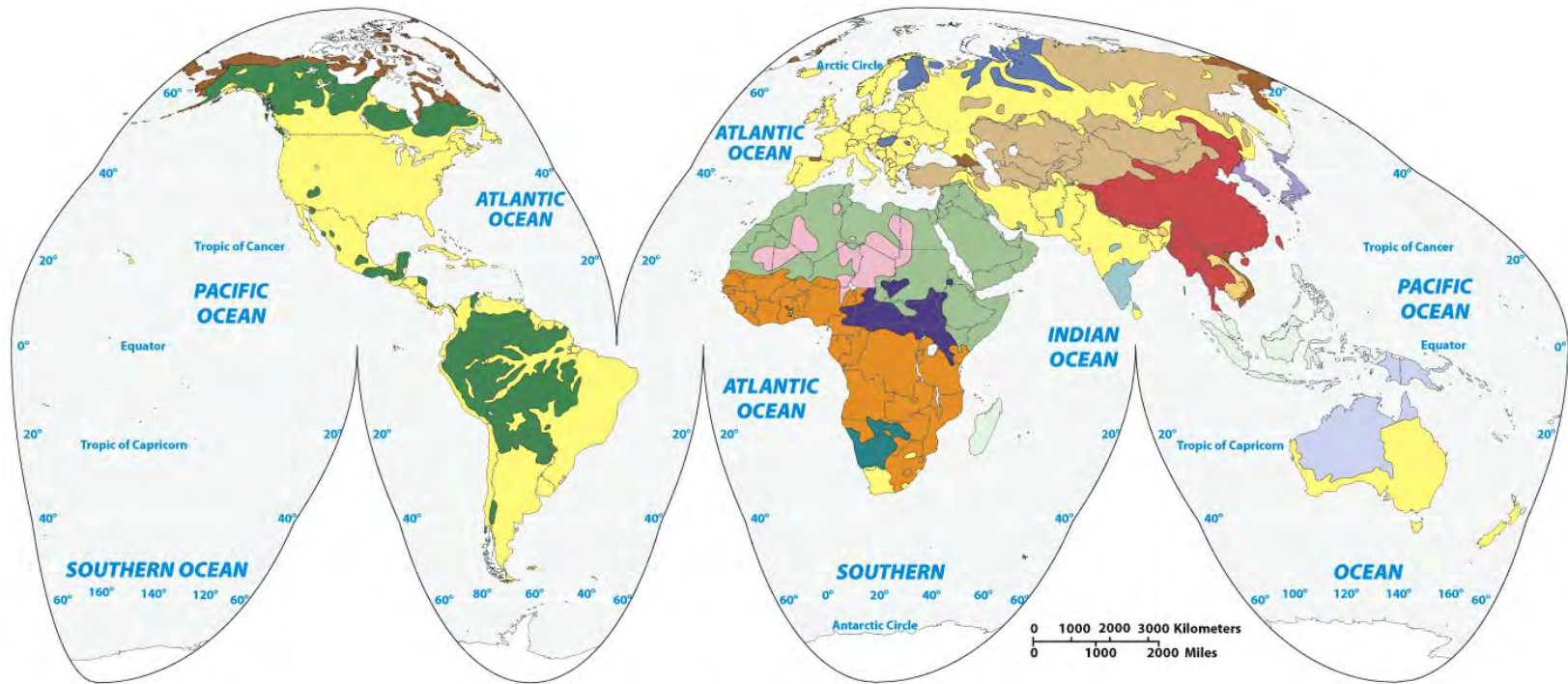
Key Question

Why are languages distributed
the way they are?

• Language families



Subfamilies



LANGUAGE FAMILIES OF THE WORLD

1	INDO-EUROPEAN	8	ALTAIC	15	AMERINDIAN
2	AFRO-ASIATIC	9	SINO-TIBETAN		OTHERS
3	NIGER-CONGO	10	JAPANESE AND KOREAN		UNPOPULATED AREAS
4	SAHARAN	11	DRAVIDIAN		
5	SUDANIC	12	AUSTRO-ASIATIC		
6	KHOISAN	13	AUSTRONESIAN		
7	URALIC	14	TRANS-NEW GUINEA AND AUSTRALIAN		

Figure 6.8

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Why Are Languages Distributed the Way They Are?

Definition and Debate

- The classification of languages is subject to intense debate.
- Some linguists argue that there are not just a few but many dozens of language families.

Why Are Languages Distributed the Way They Are?

Language Formation

- **Sound shift** is a slight change in a word across languages within a subfamily or through a language family from the present backward toward its origin
- Ex.: Italian, Spanish and French as members of the Romance language subfamily
- **Proto-Indo-European** language: first major linguistic hypothesis; from studies of Jakob Grimm and William Jones

Why Are Languages Distributed the Way They Are?

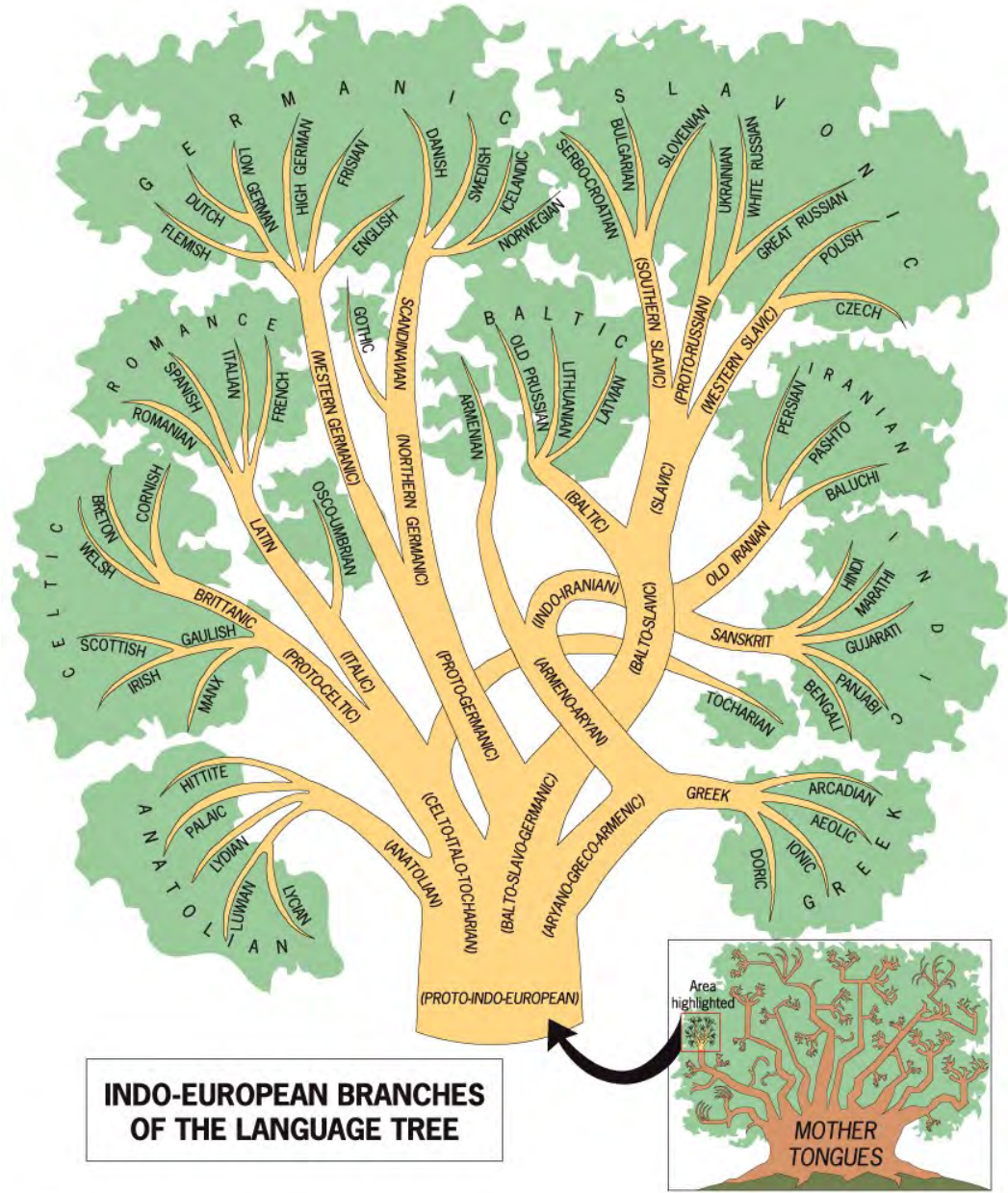
Reconstructing the Vocabulary of Proto-Indo-European and Its Ancient Ancestor

- **Backward reconstruction:** to track sound shifts and hardening of consonants “backward” toward the original language
- **Extinct language**, a language without any native speakers
- **Deep reconstruction:** recreating the language that preceded it
- Vladislav Illich-Svitych and Aharon Dolgopolsky: **Nostratic** language

Why Are Languages Distributed the Way They Are?

Locating the Hearth of Proto-Indo-European

- German linguist August Schleicher: **language divergence**, where new language forms from old one.
- **Language convergence**: collapsing two languages into one.
- Language extinction occurs when all descendants perish or they choose to use another language (typically occurs over several generations).
- Linguists theorize that the hearth of the Proto-Indo-European language was somewhere in the vicinity of the Black Sea or east-central Europe.



INDO-EUROPEAN BRANCHES OF THE LANGUAGE TREE

Figure 6.9
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Figure 6.10
©Eye Ubiquitous/Superstock

Figure 6.10 Northwest Amazon, Colombia.

The Barasana people, who live in the northwest Amazon in Colombia, have maintained their language and land-use systems despite external pressures. In 1991, the government of Colombia recognized the legal right of the Barasana to their land, which has aided the maintenance of their language. ©Eye Ubiquitous/Superstock

Why Are Languages Distributed the Way They Are?

Tracing the Routes of Diffusion of Proto-Indo-European

- Commonality among language diffusion theories is a focus on Europe.
- For Proto-Indo-European, it is clear that that the language diffused into Europe over time, and that a significant body of historical research and archaeology focuses on the early peopling of Europe.

Tracing the Routes of Diffusion of Proto-Indo-European

- **Conquest theory:** early speakers of Proto-Indo-European spread east to west on horseback, overpowering earlier inhabitants and beginning the diffusion/differentiation of Indo-European tongues.
- An alternative agricultural theory proposes that Proto-Indo-European diffused westward through Europe with the diffusion of agriculture.
- **Dispersal hypothesis:** the Indo-European languages that arose from Proto-Indo-European were first carried eastward into Southwest Asia, next around the Caspian Sea, and then across the Russian-Ukrainian plains and on into the Balkans.

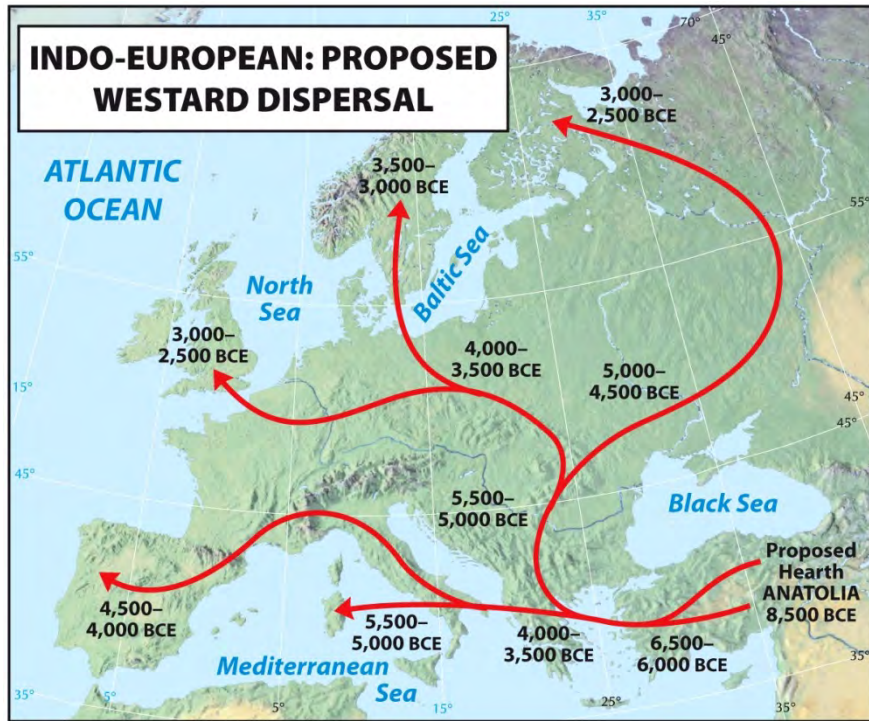


Figure 6.11
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Figure 6.11 Indo-European Language Family: Proposed Westward Dispersal. Approximate timings and routes for the westward dispersal of the Indo-European languages.



Figure 6.12
© John Wiley & Sons, Inc. All rights reserved. Adapted with permission from: Gamkrelidze and Ivanov, 1990, p. 112.

Figure 6.12 Indo-European Language Family: Proposed Hearth and Dispersal Hypothesis. This theory proposes that the Indo-European language family began in the Caucasus Mountain region and dispersed eastward before diffusing westward. *Adapted with permission from: Gamkrelidze and Ivanov, 1990, p. 112.*

The Languages of Europe



Figure 6.2

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The Languages of Europe

The Subfamilies

- **Romance languages:**
 - French, Italian, Spanish, Romanian, and Portuguese
 - Have much in common because of their Latin connection, but are not mutually comprehensible
- **Germanic languages** (English, German, Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish) reflect the expansion of peoples out of northern Europe west and south.
- **Slavic languages** (Russian, Polish, Czech, Slovak, Ukrainian, Slovenian, Serbo-Croatian, & Bulgarian) developed as Slavic people migrated from a base in present-day Ukraine about 2,000 years ago.

The Languages of Europe

Language and Politics

- A comparison of Europe's linguistic and political maps shows a high correlation between the languages spoken and the political organization of space.
- A few important exceptions: French speakers in Belgium, Switzerland, and Italy; German speakers in Hungary; Hungarian speakers in Slovakia Romania and Yugoslavia; Romanian speakers in Moldavia and Greece; Turkish speakers in Bulgaria; Albanian speakers in Serbia.
- The Basque language of Euskera covers a very small land area and is *in no way related* to any other language family in Europe.



Figure 6.13
© Denise Powell

Figure 6.13

San Sebastián, Spain. Graffiti on the wall of this building uses the English language, "Freedom for the Basque Country," to show support for the Basque separatist movement. © Denise Powell

Why Are Languages Distributed the Way They Are?

Languages of Subsaharan Africa

- Niger-Congo language family dominates.
- Oldest Subsaharan languages are the Khoisan languages, which include a “click” sound.

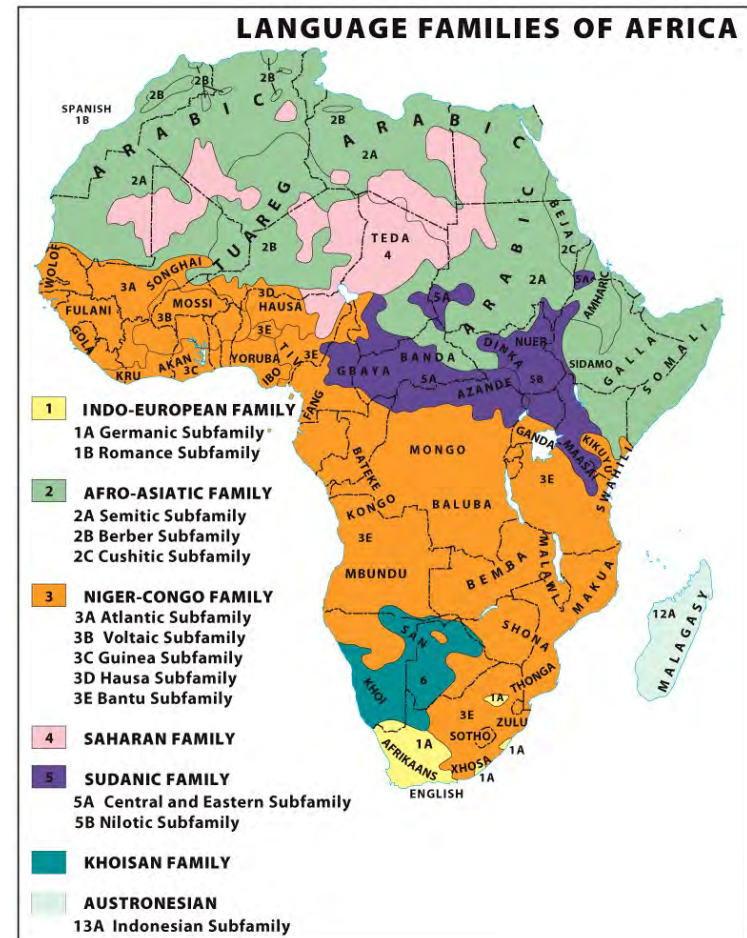


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Why Are Languages Distributed the Way They Are?

Languages of Subsaharan Africa

- Nigeria's 141 million people speak more than 500 different languages.
- The three most prominent languages are distributed regionally:
 - Hausa in the north; 35 million people
 - Yoruba in the southwest; 25 million people
 - Ibo in the southeast; over 25 million people
- When Nigeria gained independence in 1962, it adopted English as the "official" language, as the three major regional languages are too politically charged and thus unsuitable as national languages.



Education also affects the distribution of languages across the globe and within regions and countries. Thinking about different regions of the world, consider how education plays a role in the distribution of English speakers. Who learns English in each of these regions and why? What role does education play in the global distribution of English speakers?

Key Question

How do languages diffuse?

How Do Languages Diffuse?

- By 2,000 years ago, languages such as Chinese and Latin had successfully diffused over large regions.
- In the late Middle Ages, the invention of the Gutenberg printing press and the rise of nation-states worked to spread literacy and stabilize certain languages through widely distributed written forms.
- The rise of relatively large independent states was equally important, for these political entities had a strong interest in promoting a common culture, often through a common language.
- Globalization is shrinking the world's linguistic heritage.

How Do Languages Diffuse?

Lingua Franca

- A **lingua franca** is a language used among speakers of different languages for the purposes of trade and commerce.
- Can be a single language or a mixture of two or more languages.
- **Pidgin language:** When people speaking two or more languages are in contact and they combine parts of their languages in a simplified structure and vocabulary.
- **Creole language** is a pidgin language with a more complex structure and vocabulary that has become the native language of a group of people.



Figure 6.16
© Alexander B. Murphy

Figure 6.16
Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The message on the back of the bench is written in the lingua franca known to virtually all Indian migrants to the Arabian Peninsula. © Alexander B. Murphy.

How Do Languages Diffuse?

Multilingualism

- **Monolingual states** are countries where almost everyone speaks the same language. Ex.: Japan, Uruguay, Iceland, Denmark, Portugal, Poland, Lesotho
- Countries in which more than one language is in use are called **multilingual states**.

How Do Languages Diffuse?

Official Languages

- Countries with linguistic fragmentation often adopt an **official language** (or languages) to tie the people together.
- A State adopts an official language in the hope of promoting communication and interaction among peoples who speak different local and regional languages.
- The official languages in a country are a reflection of the country's history.

How Do Languages Diffuse?

Global Languages

- The principal language people use around the world in their day-to-day activities
- A common language of trade and commerce used around the world

Field Note

“English is an important part of the curriculum even at a small school for deaf children in remote Bhutan. The children and I began communicating by writing questions to each other on the blackboard. Their English is quite good, and I am reminded once again of the incredible global reach of English, despite its idiosyncrasies. In English, light is pronounced as if it were lite, the past tense of the verb to read is read, but the past tense of the word to lead is led.”



Figure 6.18
© Alexander B. Murphy



Choose a country in the world. Imagine you become a strong leader of a centralized government in the country. Pick a language used in the country other than the tongue spoken by the majority. Determine what policies you could put in place to make the minority language an official language of the country. What reactions would your initiative generate? Who would support it and who would not?

Key Question

What Role Does Language Play
in Making Places?

What Role Does Language Play in Making Places?

- Cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has studied the role and function of language in the shaping of places.
- Each **place** has a unique location and constitutes a reflection of human activities, ideas, and tangible, durable creations.
- Tuan argued that by simply naming a place, people in effect call that place into being, and thereby impart a certain character to it = **toponyms**.

The Ten Toponyms

- English Professor George Stewart

TABLE 6.2

Type of Toponym	Example
<i>Descriptive</i>	Rocky Mountains
<i>Associative</i>	Mill Valley, California
<i>Commemorative</i>	San Francisco, California
<i>Commendatory</i>	Paradise Valley, Arizona
<i>Incidents</i>	Battle Creek, Michigan
<i>Possession</i>	Johnson City, Texas
<i>Folk</i>	Plains, Georgia
<i>Manufactured</i>	Truth or Consequences, New Mexico
<i>Mistakes</i>	Lasker, North Carolina
<i>Shift</i>	Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Table 6.2
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What Role Does Language Play in Making Places?

Toponyms and Globalization

- The toponyms we see on a map depend in large part on who produced the map.
- Some embattled locales have more than one name at the same time.
- Ex.: Argentines refer to a small cluster (archipelago) of islands off the southeast coast of South America as the Malvinas, but the British call the same cluster of islands the Falkland Islands.

Changing Toponyms

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



Figure 6.19
© Alexander B. Murphy

What Role Does Language Play in Making Places?

Changing Toponyms

- **Postcolonial Toponyms:** New governments renamed several countries and newly independent countries also changed the names of cities and towns to reflect their independence.
- **Postrevolution Toponyms:** Changes in power through coups and revolutions prompt name changes.
- **Memorial Toponyms:** People change a toponym to memorialize an important person or event.

Guest Field Note

Greenville, North Carolina

“Greenville, North Carolina, changed West Fifth Street to Martin Luther King Jr. Drive in 1999. Originally, African American leaders wanted all of Fifth Street renamed—not just part of it—but residents and business owners on the eastern end strongly opposed the proposal. After driving and walking down the street, I quickly realized that King Drive marked an area that was predominantly black with limited commercial development, whereas East Fifth was mostly white and more upscale. When I interviewed members of Greenville’s African American community, they expressed deep frustration over the marginalization of the civil rights leader.”



Figure 6.21
Derek Alderman, East Carolina University



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.

Additional Resources

- Bert Vaux's Survey of American Dialects:
<http://www4.uwm.edu/FLL/linguistics/dialect>
- Learning Foreign Languages On-Line:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages>