

Language

Field Note What should I say?

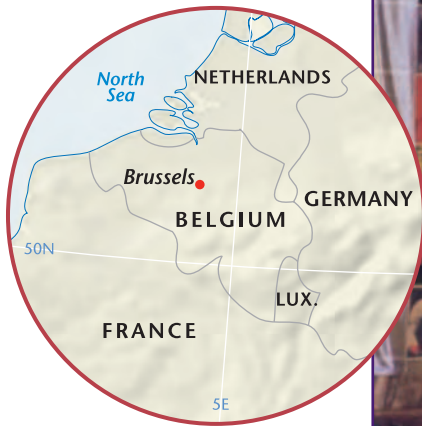


Figure 6.1

Brussels, Belgium. A McDonald's restaurant in the bi-lingual capital city of Brussels displays two signs for each advertisement, one in French and one Flemish. © Erin H. Fouberg.

In stores throughout Brussels, Belgium, you can see the capital city's bilingualism all around you—literally. From McDonald's (Fig. 6.1) to the metro, signs in Brussels are posted in duplicate, with one in Flemish (a variant of Dutch) and one in French.

Walking into a travel agency in Brussels one afternoon, I immediately noticed the signs in duplicate: two signs towered over the woman behind the counter; two signs advertised a new budget airline carrier that would be serving the Brussels airport; two signs labeled the restrooms; and two signs announced the travel agency's hours of operation.

I debated for a minute whether to speak to the person behind the counter in French or Flemish. She was speaking Flemish with the person in front of me, but I decided to use French since my knowledge of that language is better. The student from Italy who stood behind me in line apparently had no such debate. She stepped up to the counter, asked her question in English, and received a reply in excellent English.

Many geographers are initially drawn to the discipline through maps. However, maps, especially at the world or continental scale, generalize so much information that they hide the complexities of everyday life. Once you become a geographer, you begin to question every map you examine. Look at the European map of languages (Fig. 6.2), and zero in on Belgium. The map shows a neat line dividing Flemish speakers (a Germanic language) in the northern region of Flanders from French speakers (a Romance language) in the southern region of Wallonia.

Behind this neat line on the language map lies a complicated, at times contentious, linguistic transition zone. To understand language patterns in Belgium, we must also study the issue at the local scale. Although the bilingual capital of Brussels is located in the Flemish-speaking north (Flanders), for an estimated 85 percent of the locals, French is the mother tongue (Fig. 6.3).

In Belgium, language has been a divisive issue for generations. During the nineteenth century, French speakers controlled the industrial economy and government of the country. The concentration of industry in southern Belgium strengthened their position. The French-speaking elite in Brussels and other Flemish cities began a process of “Frenchification.” They promoted French and used it when interacting with their counterparts in other countries. By the twentieth century, a majority of the people in Brussels spoke French, although people in the areas surrounding Brussels continued to speak Flemish.

Many in northern Belgium (surrounding Brussels) opposed the growing Frenchification of Flanders. The leaders of the Flemish movement initially sought linguistic rights—the right of Flemish speakers to use their language in public affairs, court proceedings, and schools. Yet they were constantly frustrated with the opposition of French speakers to their demands. By the 1920s, the Flemish leadership began calling for the country to be partitioned along linguistic lines so that those living in northern Belgium could control their own affairs.

By the 1960s, a fixed partition scheme came into being—dividing the country into Flemish-speaking Flanders in the north and French-speaking Wallonia in the south. The government recognizes Brussels as a distinct region—a bilingual capital—but places strict limits on the use of French in the rest of northern Belgium.

The partitioning process produced upheavals throughout the country. The experience helped strengthen the sense of Flemish identity and fueled a counter-movement among the French Walloons. With language-group identity on the rise, conflicts between linguistic “communities” became a central feature of Belgian political life. After the 1960s, Belgian heavy industry became less competitive, and the country’s economy began a shift to high technology, light industry, and



Figure 6.2
Languages of Europe. Generalized map of language-use regions in Europe. Adapted with permission from: A. B. Murphy, "European Languages," T. Unwin, ed., *A European Geography*. London: Longman, 1998, p.38.

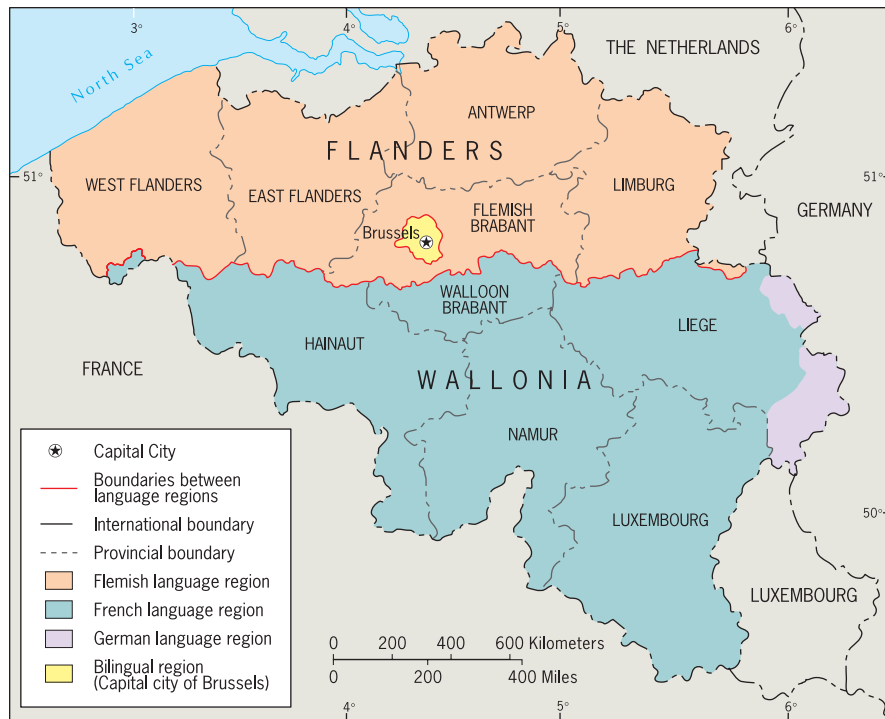


Figure 6.3
Divided Belgium. Flemish, French, and German dominate the different administrative areas in Belgium. *Adapted with permission from: A. B. Murphy, "Belgium's Regional Divergence along the Road to Federation," in G. Smith, ed., *Federalism: The Multiethnic Challenge*. London: Longman, 1995, p. 82.*

services—much of it concentrating in Flemish-speaking Flanders. As a result, the economic power in Belgium flipped, with the French-speaking industrial south taking a back seat to the Flemish-speaking north. Today, Wallonia has an unemployment rate of 17 percent, whereas Flanders has one of the lower unemployment rates in Europe.

Currently, the vast majority of power and decision making rests with the individual governments of Flanders and Wallonia rather than in a centralized government in Brussels. With their newfound wealth, many in Flanders wanted to see a greater federalization of the country, which would put even more power in each of the two regions. Today, no political party in Belgium operates at the national scale. Wallonia and Flanders each have their own political parties that vie for power in their respective regions. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that it took Belgium nine months to form a government after the spring 2007 elections.

Brussels is going in another direction entirely, serving as the principal capital of the European Union (EU). Brussels is home to the EU Council and Commission. Moreover, much of the committee work done by the European Parliament takes place in Brussels (the formal home of the Parliament is in Strasbourg, France). The role Brussels serves as the European Union capital may prevent Belgium from splitting into two countries. Both Flanders and Wallonia have vested interests in Brussels, so neither would abandon it lightly. And the French-speaking majority in Brussels has little interest in casting its lot with the region in which it is situated—Flanders. Some have proposed making Brussels a capital district for the European Union, like the District of Columbia (Washington, D.C.), in the United States.

The example of Belgium gives us a multitude of insights into language. Language questions are often politicized. Language frequently is tied to other identity issues such as socioeconomic status. And while all of the debates about

national and local language preservation abound, English continues to expand as a global language for commerce, trade, and popular culture.

In this chapter, we question what languages are and examine the roles languages play in cultures. We study the spatial distribution of the world's languages and learn how languages diffuse, change, and even become extinct. Finally, we examine how language contributes to making places unique.

Key Questions For Chapter 6

1. What are languages, and what role do languages play in cultures?
2. Why are languages distributed the way they are?
3. How do languages diffuse?
4. What role does language play in making places?

WHAT ARE LANGUAGES, AND WHAT ROLE DO LANGUAGES PLAY IN CULTURES?

A scene in Quentin Tarantino's cult classic movie *Pulp Fiction* shows Vincent and Jules in the front seat of the car talking about France. Vincent, trying to demonstrate his knowledge of French culture, turns to Jules and says, "You know what they call a . . . a . . . a quarter pounder with cheese in Paris?" Jules replies, "They don't call it a quarter pounder with cheese?" Vincent, ever the expert, explains in a few choice words that France uses the metric system and that the French would not know what a quarter pounder is. Then, he explains, "They call it a 'royale' with cheese." Jules, surprised, asks, "What do they call a Big Mac?" Vincent explains, "Well a Big Mac is a Big Mac, but they call it 'Le Big Mac.'"

This humorous exchange shows the juxtaposition of two opposing forces in our globalized world: globalization of culture and preservation of local and national culture. Are the two contradictory, or can we have globalization of restaurants, food, music, and culture while preserving local languages?

Language is a fundamental element of local and national culture. The French government has worked diligently, even aggressively, to protect the French language, dating back to 1635 and the creation of the Académie Française, an institution charged with standardizing and protecting the French language. In the last few decades, diffusion of globalized terms into France has posed a huge challenge for the Académie Française.

With the support of many French people, the French government passed a law in 1975 banning the use of foreign words in advertisements, television, and radio broad-

casts, and official documents, unless no French equivalent could be found. In 1992, France amended its constitution to make French the official language. In 1994, the French government passed another law to stop the use of foreign (mainly English) words in France, with a hefty fine imposed for violators. The law mandates French translations for globalized words, requiring the use of official French terms in official communications rather than le meeting, le weekend, le drugstore, or le hamburger. The Internet, where more than 85 percent of all websites are in English (Fig. 6.4), has posed another set of challenges for the Académie Française. Some of the translations the Académie requires are somewhat cumbersome—for example, the official translation of e-mail is "courrier électronique" and the official translation of hacker is "pirate informatique."

In addition to demonstrating the conflicting forces of globalized language and local or national language, the example of France reveals that language is much more than a way of communicating. A **language** is a set of sounds and symbols that is used for communication. But language is also an integral part of culture, reflecting and shaping it.

Language and Culture

Language is one of the cornerstones of culture; it shapes our very thoughts. We can use vast vocabularies to describe new experiences, ideas, and feelings, or we can create new words that represent these things. Who we are as a culture, as a people, is reinforced and redefined moment by moment through shared language. Language reflects where a culture has been, what a culture values,

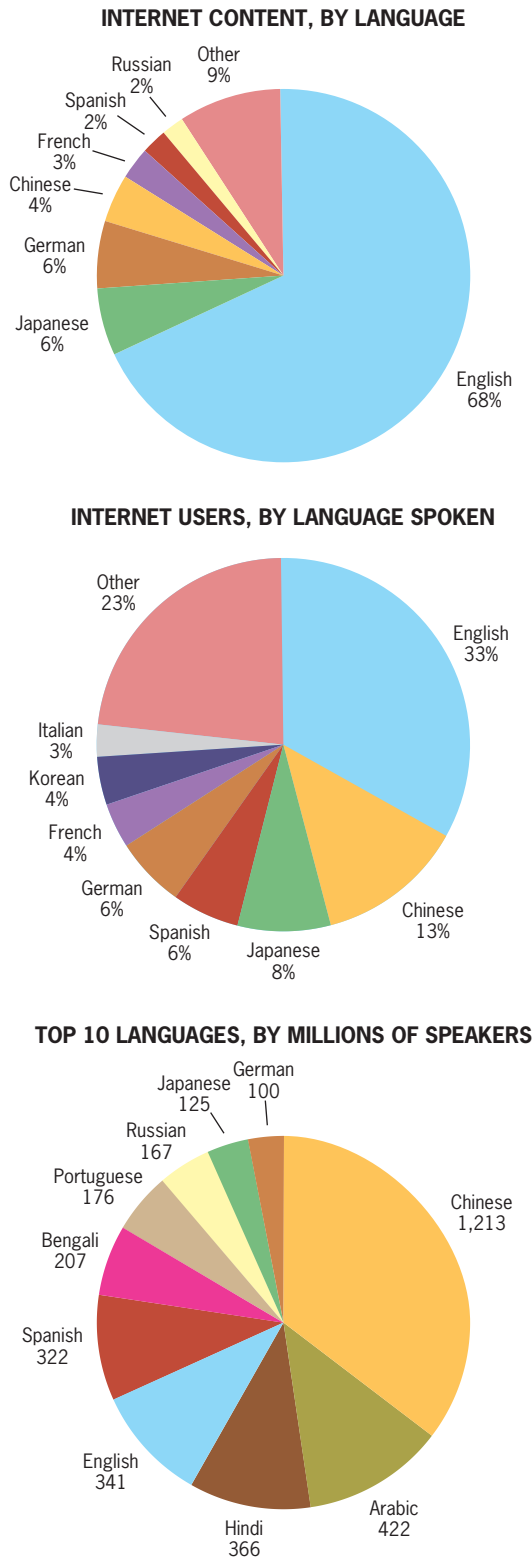


Figure 6.4
Languages used on the Internet. Adapted with permission from: World Resources Institute (WRI) in collaboration with United Nations Development Program, United Nations Environment Program, and World Bank. 2005. *World Resources 2005: The wealth of the Poor—Managing Ecosystems to Fight Poverty*. Washington, DC: WRI.

even how people in a culture think, describe, and experience things.

Perhaps the easiest way to understand the role of language in culture is to examine people who have experienced the loss of language under pressure from others. During colonization, both abroad and within countries, colonizers commonly forced the colonized people to speak the language of the colonizer. These language policies continued in many places until recently and were enforced primarily through public (government) and church (mission) schools.

American, Canadian, Australian, Russian, and New Zealand governments each had policies of forced assimilation during the twentieth century, including not allowing indigenous peoples to speak native languages. For example, the United States forced American Indians to learn and speak English. Both mission schools and government schools enforced English-only policies in hopes of assimilating American Indians into the dominant culture. In an interview with the producers of an educational video, Clare Swan, an elder in the Kenaitze band of the Dena’ina Indians in Alaska, eloquently describes the role of language in culture:

No one was allowed to speak the language—the Dena’ina language. They [the American government] didn’t allow it in 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].

Shared language makes people in a culture visible to each other and to the rest of the world. Language helps to bind a cultural identity. Language is also quite personal. Our thoughts, expressions, and dreams are articulated in our language; to lose that ability is to lose a lot.

Language can reveal much about the way people and cultures view reality. Some African languages have no word or term for the concept of a god. Some Asian languages have no tenses and no system for reporting chronological events, reflecting the lack of cultural distinction between then and now. Given American culture’s preoccupation with dating and timing, it is difficult for many in the United States to understand how speakers of these languages perceive the world.

Language is so closely tied to culture that people use language as a weapon in cultural conflict and political strife. In the United States, where the Spanish-speaking population is growing (Fig. 6.5), some Spanish speakers and their advocates are demanding the use of Spanish in

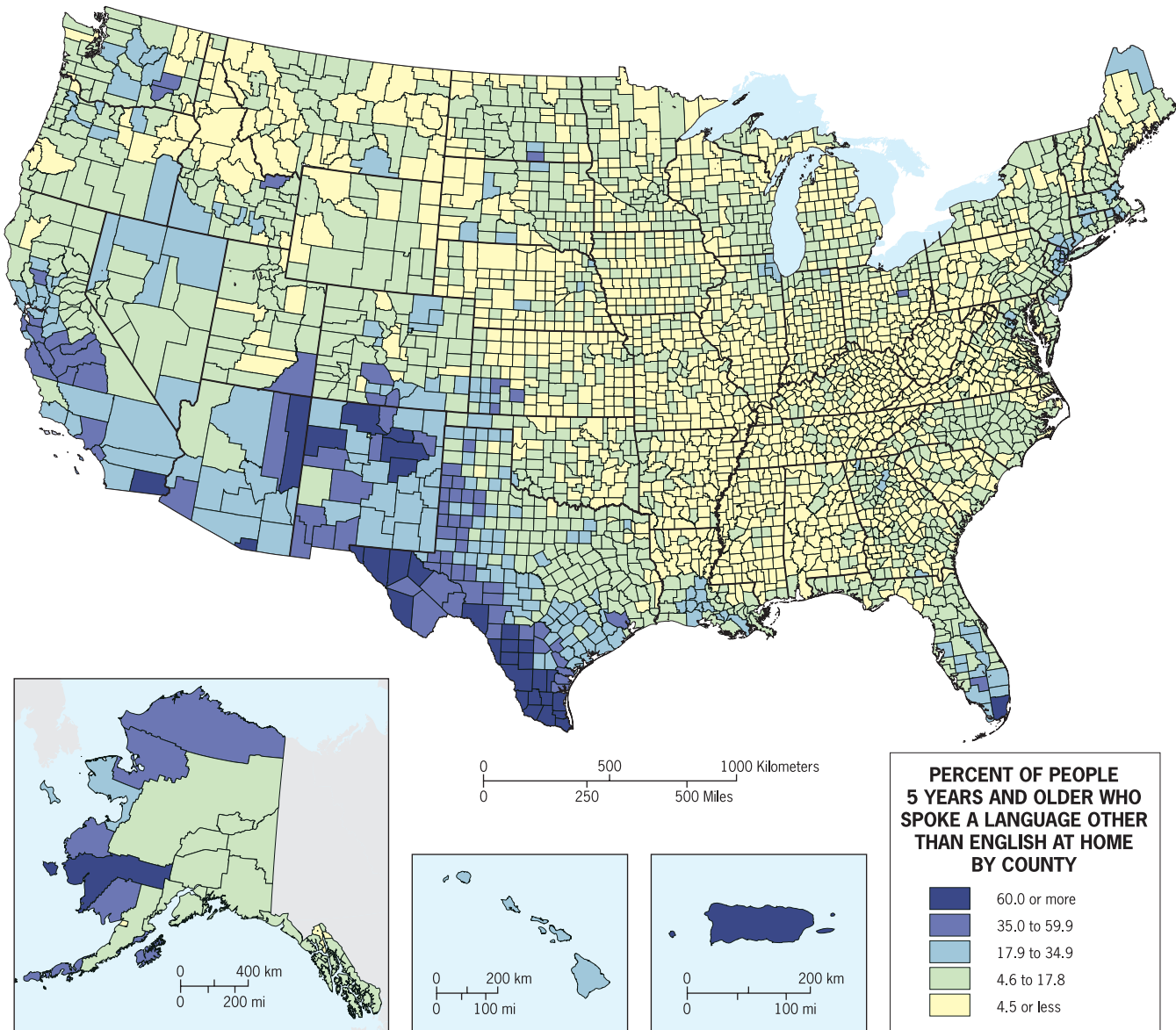


Figure 6.5
Percent of People 5 Years and Older Who Speak a Language Other than English at Home in the United States. The data presented include all non-English languages by county. *Data from:* United States Census Bureau, 2000.

public affairs. In turn, people opposed to the use of Spanish in the United States are leading countermovements to promote “Official English” policies, where English would be the official language of government. Of course, Spanish is not the only non-English tongue spoken in the United States, but it overshadows all others and is therefore the focus of the English first movement (Table 6.1). During the 1980s, over 30 different States considered passing laws declaring English the State’s official language. Some 30 States today have declared English the official language of the State either by statute or by amending the State constitution (one law was subsequently overturned by the courts). A few States have passed English-plus laws,

encouraging bilingualism for non-English speakers, and a few other States are officially bilingual, such as Hawai’i (Hawai’ian and English), and New Mexico has bilingual education (Spanish and English).

In Quebec, Canada, the focus is on passing laws that promote the use of the province’s distinct version of the French language. The country of Canada is officially bilingual, a reflection of the colonial division of the country between France and Great Britain. Government documents and even scholarly journals are printed in both English and French. Most of the country’s French speakers live in the province of Quebec. The majority of people in Quebec speak French at home.

TABLE 6.1
Top Ten Languages Spoken at Home by Non-English Speakers in the United States.

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

Data from: United States Census Bureau.

In recent history, the Quebecois (people of Quebec) have periodically called for more independence for their province within Canada, even voting on secession at times. Although a majority has never voted for secession, the provincial government has passed several laws requiring and promoting the use of French in the province. In 1977, the Quebec government compelled all businesses in the province to demonstrate that they functioned in French. Upon passage of this law, many businesses and individuals moved out of the province of Quebec into neighbor-

ing Ontario. In 1993, the Quebec government passed a law requiring the use of French in advertising (Fig. 6.6). The Quebec law allows the inclusion of both French and English (or another language) translations on signage, as long as the French letters are twice the size of the other language's letters.

Not all of Quebec's residents identify with the French language. Within the province, a small proportion of people speak English at home, others speak indigenous languages, and still others speak another language altogether—one



Figure 6.6
Quebec Province, Quebec. The imprint of the French Canadian culture is evident in the cultural landscape of Rue Saint-Louis in Quebec. Here, the architecture and store signs confirm that this region is not simply Canadian; it is French Canadian. © Michelle Burgess/SUPERSTOCK.

associated with their country of origin. When the Quebec Parliament passed several laws promoting French during the 1980s and 1990s, members of Canada's First Nations, such as the Cree and Mohawk (who live in Quebec), expressed a desire to remain part of Canada should Quebec secede from the country. During the same period, Quebec has experienced a flow of international migrants, many of whom seek residence in Quebec as a way to enter Canada and North America at large. These new immigrants must learn French under Quebec law.

Quebec, like any other place, is susceptible to change. Calls for independence in Quebec are waning, as the separatist political party has captured fewer seats in recent parliamentary elections for the province. Nonetheless, the Quebecois still feel a connection to France. The province even has a presence in Paris in the *Maison Quebec* (House of Quebec), an embassy-like entity of the province. As people, ideas, and power flow through the province, change will continue. Yet, the province's laws, programs, presence in France, and the desire of the Quebecois to remain loyal to their French language will at the very least keep the language alive as the province continues to experience change.

What Is a Language?

Many geography textbooks differentiate languages based on a criterion of mutual intelligibility. **Mutual intelligibility** means that two people can understand each other when speaking. The argument goes that if two of us are speaking two different languages, say Spanish and Portuguese, we will not be able to understand each other, but if we are speaking two dialects of one language, we will achieve mutual understanding. Yet linguists have rejected the criterion of mutual intelligibility as strongly as geographers have rejected environmental determinism.

First, mutual intelligibility is almost impossible to measure. Even if we used mutual intelligibility as a criterion, many languages would fail the test. Famous linguist Max Weinreich once said: "a language is a dialect with an army." Think about it. How could we possibly see Mandarin Chinese and Cantonese Chinese as dialects of the same language, when two people speaking the language to each other cannot understand what each other is saying? Both can read the standard form of Chinese that has been built up by a strongly centralized Chinese government. But the spoken dialects are not mutually intelligible. Yet, we see Chinese as one language because of the weight of political and social institutions that lie behind it.

A further complication with the mutual intelligibility test is revealed in Scandinavia, where, for example, a Danish speaker and a Norwegian speaker (at least if they come from Oslo) will be able to understand what each other is saying. Yet we think of Danish and Norwegian as distinct languages. Having a Norwegian language helps Norwegians identify themselves as Norwegians rather

than as Danes or Scandinavians. Other languages that are recognized as separate but are mutually intelligible in many (or nearly all) aspects are Serbian and Croatian, Hindi and Urdu, Spanish and Portuguese, and Navajo and Apache.

Given the complexities of distinguishing languages from dialects, the actual number of languages in use in the world remains a matter of considerable debate. The most conservative calculation puts the number at about 3000. However, most linguists and linguistic geographers today recognize between 5000 and 6000 languages, including more than 600 in India and over 1000 in Africa.

Standardized Language

Language is dynamic: new discoveries, technologies, and ideas require new words. Technologically advanced societies are likely to have a **standard language**, one that is published, widely distributed, and purposefully taught. In some countries, the government sustains the standard language through official state examinations for teachers and civil servants. Ireland promotes the use of the Irish (Celtic) language by requiring all government employees to pass an Irish-language examination before they can be hired. The phrase "the King's English" is a popular reference to the fact that the English spoken by well-educated people in London and its environs is regarded as British Received Pronunciation (BRP) English—that is, the standard.

Who decides what the standard language will be? Not surprisingly, the answer has to do with influence and power. In France, the Académie Française chose the French spoken in and around Paris as the official, standard language during the sixteenth century. In China, the government chose the Northern Mandarin Chinese heard in and around the capital, Beijing, as the official standard language. Although this is China's official standard language, the linguistic term *Chinese* actually incorporates many variants. The distinction between the standard language and variations of it is not unique to China; it is found in all but the smallest societies. The Italian of Sicily is quite different from the Italian spoken north of Venice, and both tongues differ from the standard Italian spoken in Florence and Tuscany, the region where many leaders of the Italian Renaissance wrote and published in what became the standard Italian language.

Dialects

Variants of a standard language along regional or ethnic lines are called **dialects**. Differences in vocabulary, syntax (the way words are put together to form phrases), pronunciation, cadence (the rhythm of speech), and even the pace of speech all mark a speaker's dialect. Even if the written form of a statement adheres to the standard language, an accent can reveal the regional home of a person



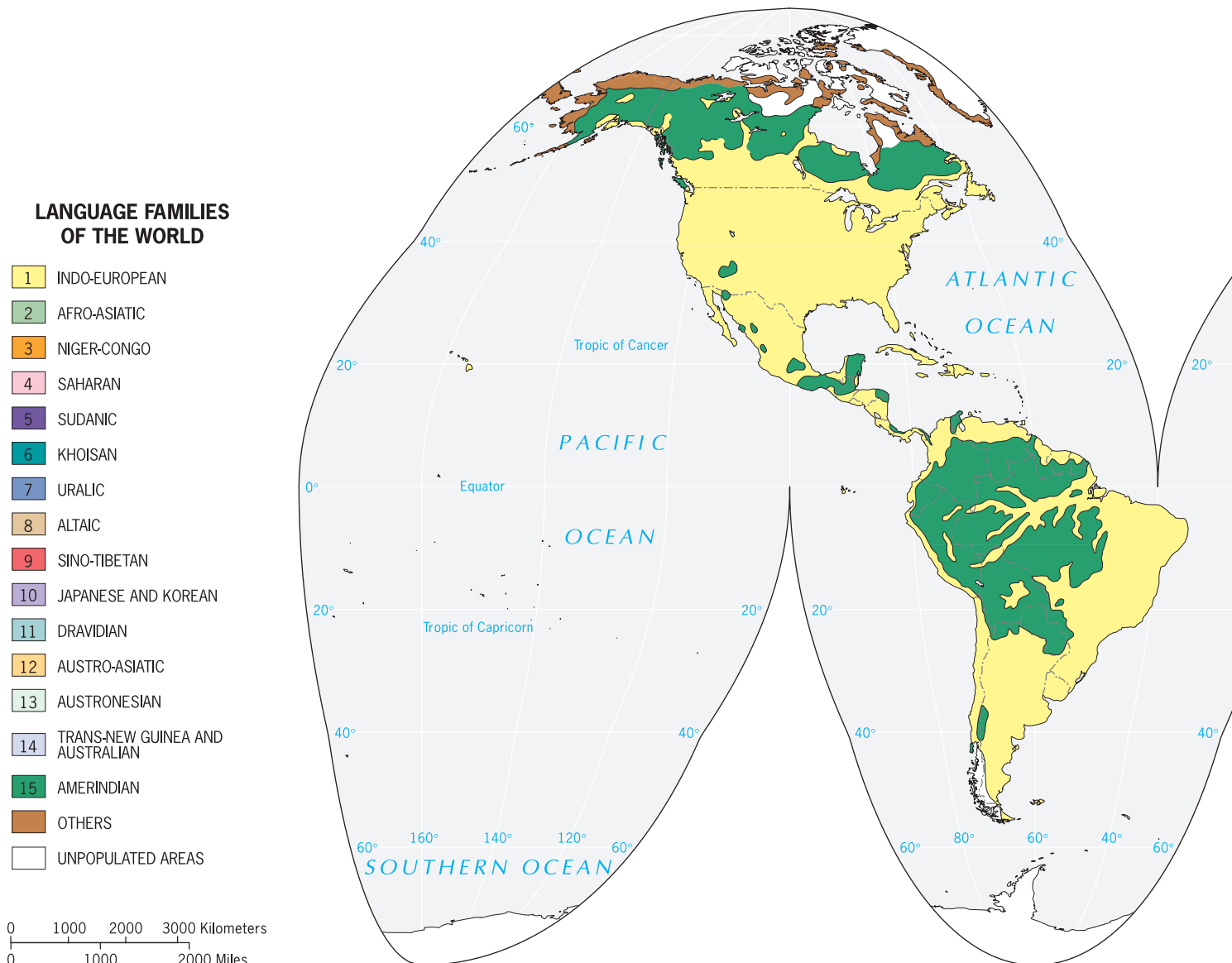
Linguist Bert Vaux's study of dialects in American English points to the differences in words for common things such as soft drinks and sandwiches. Describe a time when you said something and a speaker of another dialect did not understand the word you used. Where did the person with whom you were speaking 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?

WHY ARE LANGUAGES DISTRIBUTED THE WAY THEY ARE?

The first step in mapping the distribution of world languages is to classify languages. Linguists and linguistic geographers classify languages in terms that are also used in biology and for the same reasons: like species, some languages are related and others are not. At the global scale, we classify languages into **language families**. Within a single language family, the languages have a shared but fairly distant origin. We break language families into **sub-families** (divisions within a language family), where the

Figure 6.8

Language Families of the World. Generalized map of the world distribution of language families. Adapted with permission from: Hammond, Inc., 1977.

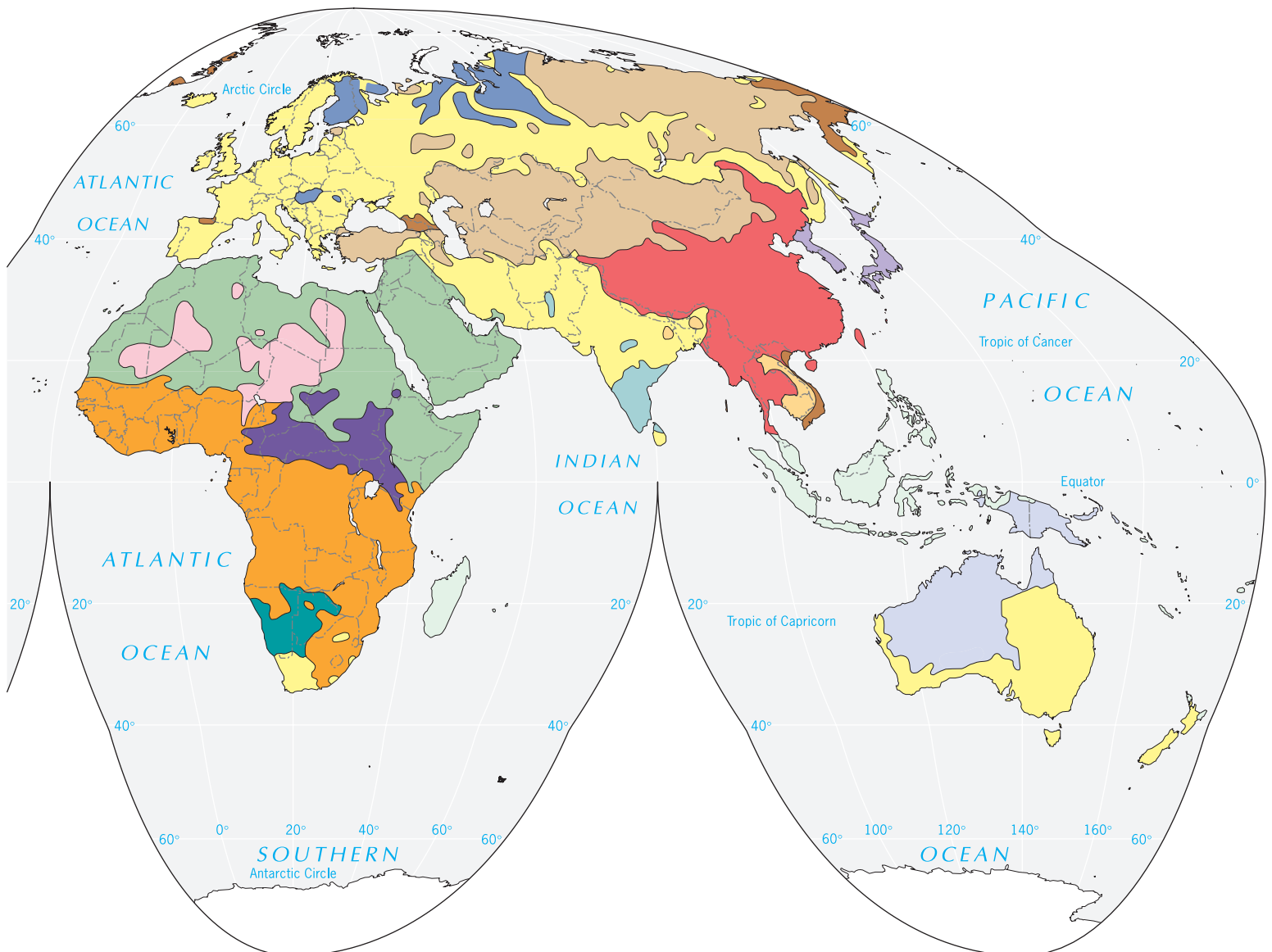


commonalities are more definite and the origin is more recent. Completing the categorization are individual languages, covering a smaller extent of territory, and dialects, covering the smallest extent of territory.

The world map of languages, Figure 6.8, actually maps 20 major *language families*. The Indo-European language family stretches across the greatest extent of territory and also claims the greatest number of speakers. Within the Indo-European language family, English is the most widely spoken language (of all languages in the world, Chinese claims even more speakers than English). Speakers of English encircle the world, with 300 million in North America, 64 million in Great Britain and Ireland,

and 22 million in Australia and New Zealand. Hundreds of millions of people in India, Europe, and Africa use English as a second language.

The world map of language families shows several language families spoken by dwindling, often marginally located or isolated groups. The Indo-European languages of European colonizers surround the language families of Southeast Asia. Languages in the Austro-Asiatic language family survive in the interior of eastern India and in Cambodia and Laos. Languages in the Austronesian family are numerous and quite diverse, and many of the individual languages are spoken by fewer than 10 million people. Remoteness helps account for the remaining



languages in the Amerindian language family. These languages remain strongest in areas of Middle America, the high Andes, and northern Canada.

If we look carefully at the map of world language families, some interesting questions arise. Consider, for example, the island of Madagascar off the East African coast. The primary languages people in Madagascar speak belong not to an African-language family but to the Austronesian family, the languages of Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands. Why is a language from this family spoken on an island so close to Africa? Anthropologists have found evidence of seafarers from the islands of Southeast Asia crossing the Indian Ocean to Madagascar. At the time, Africans had not sailed across the strait to Madagascar, so no African languages diffused to the island, preserving the Southeast Asian settlements and language for centuries. Later, Africans began to come to Madagascar, but by that time the language and culture of Southeast Asia had been well established.

Language Formation

In the process of classifying languages, linguists and linguistic geographers study relationships among languages, looking for similarities and differences within and among languages. One way to find and chart similarities among languages is to examine particular words, looking for sound shifts over time and across languages. A **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. For example, Italian, Spanish, and French are all members of the Romance language subfamily of the Indo-European language family. One way linguists and linguistic geographers can determine this is by looking at sound shifts for single words across time (all three languages are derived from Latin) and across languages. For example, the Latin word for milk, *lacte*, became *latta* in Italian, *leche* in Spanish, and *lait* in French. Also, the Latin for the number eight, *oto*, became *otto*, *ocho*, and *huit*, respectively. Even if linguists did not already know that Italian, Spanish, and French are languages rooted in Latin, they could deduce a connection among the languages through the sound shifts of particular words.

More than two centuries ago William Jones, an Englishman living in South Asia, undertook a study of Sanskrit, the language in which ancient Indian religious and literary texts were written. Jones discovered that the vocabulary and grammatical forms of Sanskrit bore a striking resemblance to the ancient Greek and Latin he learned while in college. “No philologist [student of words] could examine all three,” Jones wrote, “without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which,

perhaps, no longer exists.” His idea was a revolutionary notion in the 1700s.

During the nineteenth century Jakob Grimm, a scholar and a writer of fairy tales, suggested that sound shifts might prove the relationships between languages in a scientific manner. He explained that related languages have similar, but not identical, consonants. He believed these consonants would change over time in a predictable way. Hard consonants, such as the *v* and *t* in the German word *vater*, softened into *vader* (Dutch) and *father* (English). Using Grimm’s theory that consonants became softer as time passed and sounds shifted, linguists realized that consonants would become harder as they went “backwards” toward the original hearth and original language.

From Jones’s notions and Grimm’s ideas came the first major linguistic hypothesis, proposing the existence of an ancestral Indo-European language called **Proto-Indo-European**. Discovery of a Proto-Indo-European language would give us the hearth of ancient Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit. A single Proto-Indo-European hearth would link modern languages from Scandinavia to North Africa and from North America through parts of Asia to Australia. Several research tasks followed from this hypothesis. First, the vocabulary of the proposed ancestral language had to be reconstructed. Second, the hearth of the language had to be located. Third, the routes of diffusion needed to be traced.

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

Linguists use a technique called **backward reconstruction** to track sound shifts and hardening of consonants “backward” toward the original language. If it is possible to deduce a large part of the vocabulary of an **extinct language** (a language without any native speakers), it may be feasible to go even further and re-create the language that preceded it. This technique, called **deep reconstruction**, has yielded some important results.

The work of two Russian scholars in particular has had great impact on the deep reconstruction of the Proto-Indo-European language and even the ancestral language of the Proto-Indo-European language. Vladislav Illich-Svitych and Aharon Dolgopolsky began working in the 1960s, each using deep reconstruction to re-create ancient languages. Using words they assumed to be the most stable and dependable parts of a language’s vocabulary, such as those identifying arms, legs, feet, hands, and other body parts, and terms for the sun, moon, and other elements of the natural environment, they reconstructed an inventory of several hundred words. Remarkably, they worked independently, each unaware of the other’s work for many years. When they finally met and compared their inventories, they found that the inventories were amazingly

similar. The scholars agreed that they had established some key characteristics not only of the Proto-Indo-European language but also of its ancient ancestor, the **Nostratic** language.

The Nostratic vocabulary the researchers reconstructed revealed much about the lives and environments of its speakers. Apparently, they had no names for domesticated plants or animals, so Nostratic speakers were hunter-gatherers, not farmers. The Nostratic words for dog and wolf turned out to be the same, suggesting that the domestication of wolves may have been occurring at the time people were speaking Nostratic. The oldest known bones of dogs excavated at archaeological sites date from about 14,000 years ago, so Nostratic may have been in use at about that time, well before the First Agricultural Revolution.

Nostratic is believed to be the ancestral language not only of Proto-Indo-European, and thus the Indo-European language family as a whole, but also of the Kartvelian languages of the southern Caucasus region, the Uralic-Altai languages (which include Hungarian and Finnish, Turkish and Mongolian), the Dravidian languages of India, and the Afro-Asiatic language family, in which Arabic is dominant (Fig. 6.8).

Locating the Hearth of Proto-Indo-European

German linguist August Schleicher was the first to compare the world's language families to the branches of a tree (Fig. 6.9). In the mid-nineteenth century, he suggested that new languages form through **language divergence**, which occurs when spatial interaction among speakers of a language breaks down and the language fragments first into dialects and then into discrete tongues. The process of language divergence has happened between Spanish and Portuguese and is now happening with Quebecois French. Each new language becomes a new leaf on a tree, its branches leading back to the hearth, the trunk of the tree. Through backward reconstruction, linguists and linguistic geographers can find how languages fit together and where the branches were once joined. Tracing backward far enough, linguists and linguistic geographers can find the hearth of a language family.

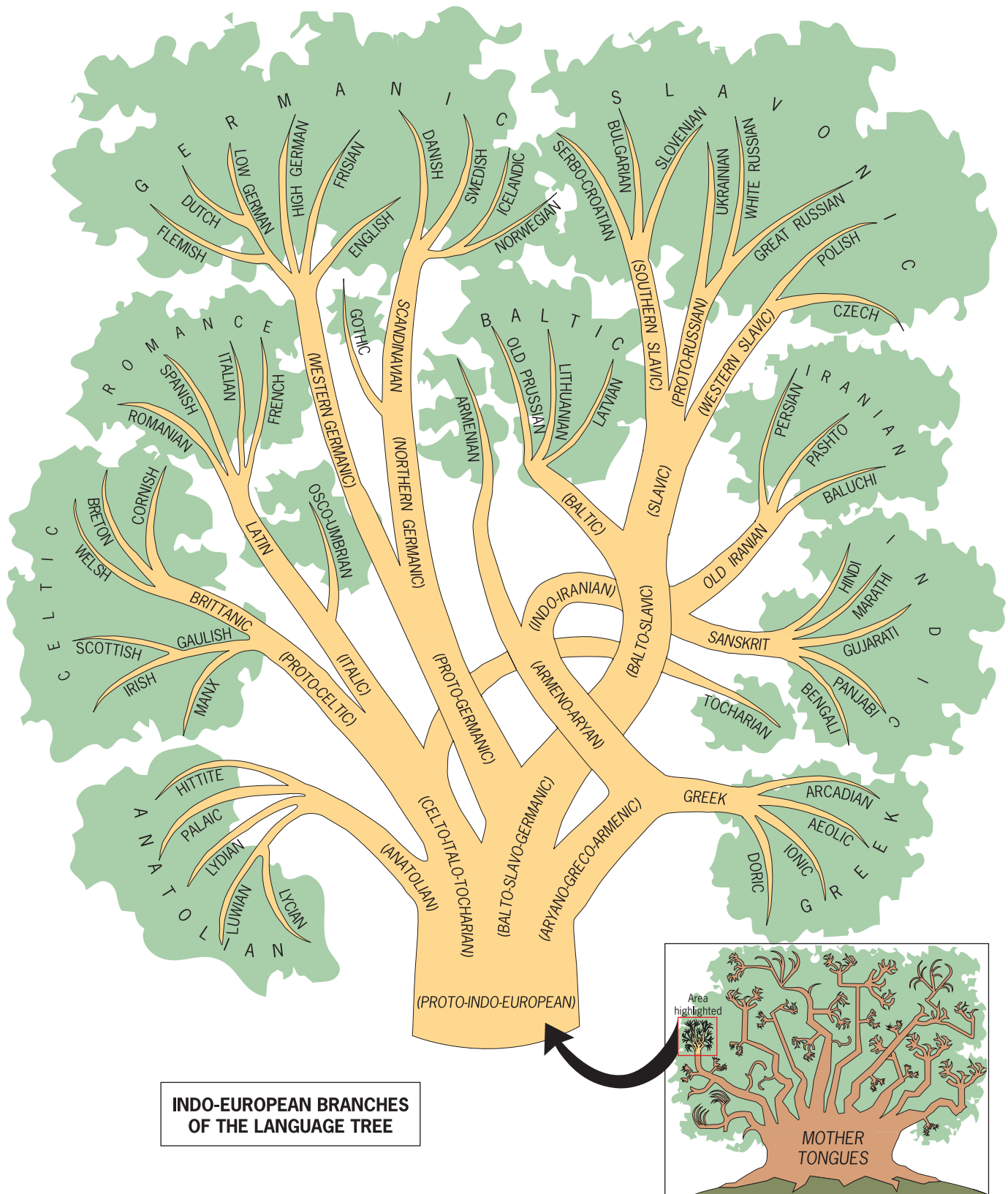
If linguists and linguistic geographers can find the hearth of the Proto-Indo-European language, they will find a major part of the tree's trunk. Finding the trunk is a daunting task, as reconstructing even a small branch of the language tree is complicated. Languages do not change only through divergence (the splitting of branches); they also change through convergence and extinction. If peoples with different languages have consistent spatial interaction, **language convergence** can take place, collapsing two languages into one. Instances of language convergence create special problems for

researchers because the rules of reconstruction may not apply or may be unreliable. Language extinction creates branches on the tree with dead ends, representing a halt in interaction between the extinct language and languages that continued. Languages become extinct either when all descendants perish (which can happen when an entire people succumb to disease or invaders) or when descendants choose to use another language, abandoning the language of their ancestors. The process of language extinction does not occur overnight; typically, it takes place across generations, with degrees of bilingualism occurring in the interim.

Tracking the divergence, convergence, extinction, and locations of the languages derived from Proto-Indo-European, linguists theorize that the hearth of the Proto-Indo-European language was somewhere in the vicinity of the Black Sea or east-central Europe. From this hearth, Proto-Indo-European speakers dispersed, vocabularies grew, and linguistic divergence occurred, spurring new languages. By analyzing the vocabulary of the Proto-Indo-European language, linguists and geographers can discern the environment and physical geography of the language's hearth and also deduce aspects of the peoples' culture and economy. Judging from the reconstructed vocabulary of Proto-Indo-European, it appears that the language dates back to a people who used horses, had developed the wheel, and traded widely in many goods.

British scholar Colin Renfrew developed his own theory regarding the diffusion of Proto-Indo-European and agriculture. He proposed that three areas in and near the agricultural hearth of the Fertile Crescent gave rise to three language families (Fig. 6.10). The **Renfrew hypothesis** claims that from Anatolia (present-day Turkey—to which agriculture diffused early from the nearby Fertile Crescent) diffused Europe's Indo-European languages; from the western arc of the Fertile Crescent came the languages of North Africa and Arabia; and from the Fertile Crescent's eastern arc ancient languages spread into present-day Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, later to be replaced by Indo-European languages.

Others now contrast Renfrew's location of the hearth of the Proto-Indo-European language and even the role of agriculture in its diffusion. Using genetic evidence, Stephen Oppenheimer argues that people came out of Central Africa, following now-flooded coastlines of East Africa, the southern Arabian Peninsula, and into India about 80,000 years ago. Oppenheimer's research supports theories by some linguists indicating that the hearth of the Proto-Indo-European language could lie in India. He claims that people from India migrated into Europe and Renfrew's hearths less than 50,000 years ago. If additional research supports this hypothesis, other linguists may rethink the origins and hearth of the Proto-Indo-European language.



INDO-EUROPEAN BRANCHES OF THE LANGUAGE TREE

Figure 6.9
Indo-European Branches of the Language Tree. Adapted with permission from: T. V. Gamkrelidze and V. V. Ivanov. "The Early History of Indo-European Languages," *Scientific American*, March 1990, p. 111.

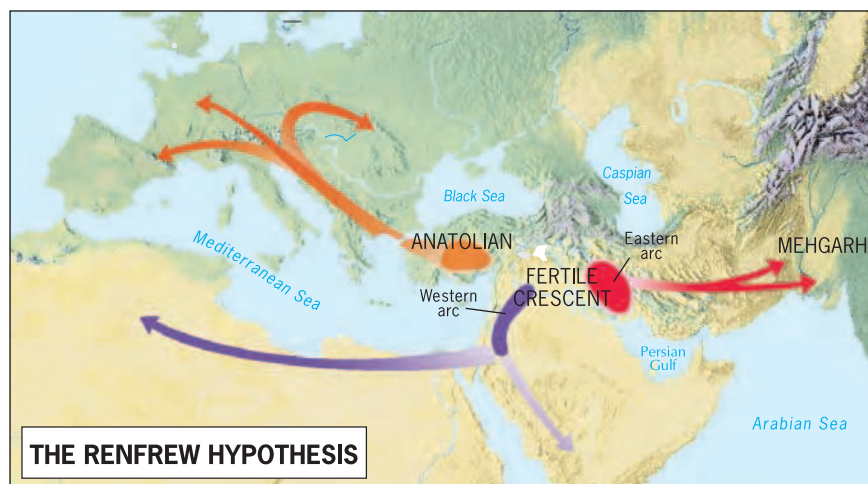


Figure 6.10

The Renfrew Hypothesis. The Renfrew Hypothesis proposes that three sources of agriculture each gave rise to a major language family. Adapted with permission from: “The Origins of Indo-European Languages,” *Scientific American*, 1989, p. 114.

Tracing the Routes of Diffusion of Proto-Indo-European

Several major theories hypothesize how, why, and where languages diffuse over time. Each theory varies according to the main impetus for diffusion, and each theory leads us back to different hearths. One commonality among the theories is a focus on Europe. When studying the diffusion of Proto-Indo-European, the focus is typically on Europe for two reasons: one, it is clear the language diffused into Europe over time; and two, there is a significant body of historical research and archaeology focused on the early peopling of Europe.

The presence of Europe’s oldest languages (Celtic) in the far west supports the idea that newer languages arrived from the east. But how and where did they spread through Europe? The **conquest theory** provides one explanation. This theory holds that early speakers of Proto-Indo-European spread from east to west on horseback, overpowering earlier inhabitants and beginning the diffusion and differentiation of Indo-European tongues. The sound shifts in the derivative languages represent a long period of divergence in languages as one moves west through Europe.

An alternative agricultural theory proposes that Proto-Indo-European diffused westward through Europe with the diffusion of agriculture. Citing the archaeological record, Luca Cavalli-Sforza and Albert Ammerman proposed that for every generation (25 years) the agricultural frontier moved approximately 18 kilometers (11 miles). This means farmers would have completely penetrated the European frontier in about 1500 years, which is close to what the archaeological record suggests. But some of the nonfarming societies in their path held out, and their languages did not change. Thus, Etruscan did not become extinct until Roman times, and Euskera (the Basque language) survives to this day as a direct link to Europe’s pre-farming era.

In 1991, the agriculture theory received support from analyses of the protein (that is, gene) content of individuals from several thousand locations across Europe. This research confirmed the presence of distance decay in the geographic pattern: certain genes became steadily less common from southern Turkey across the Balkans and into western and northern Europe. This pattern was interpreted as showing that the farming peoples of Anatolia moved steadily westward and northward (Fig. 6.11). With established farming providing a more reliable food supply, population could increase. As a result, a slow but steady wave of farmers dispersed into Europe and mixed with nonfarming peoples, diluting their genetic identity as the distance from their source area increased.

Despite the genetic gradient identified in Europe, some linguistic geographers continue to favor the **dispersal hypothesis**, which holds that 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 (Fig. 6.12). As is so often the case, there may be some truth in each hypothesis. If Anatolia were the hearth, the diffusion of Proto-Indo-European could have occurred both westward across southern Europe and in the broad arc shown in Figure 6.12.

We still do not know where the Proto-Indo-European language was born, or the location of its hearth. Like all other languages that gave rise to language families, Proto-Indo-European has deeper roots that link it to languages outside of the Indo-European family. Some scholars have even suggested that Nostratic (and its contemporaries, variously named Eurasiatic, Indo-Pacific, Amerind, and Austric) is a direct successor of a proto-world language that goes back to the dawn of human history, but this notion is highly speculative. The inset in Figure 6.9 reminds us how little of the human language tree we know with any certainty.

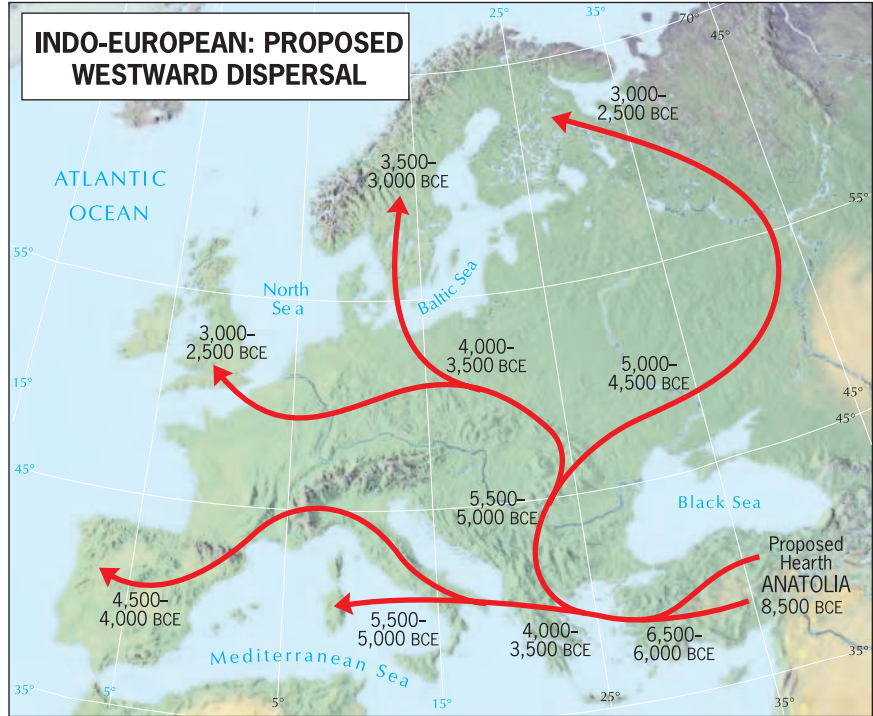


Figure 6.11
Indo-European Language Family: Proposed Westward Dispersal. Approximate timings and routes for the westward dispersal of the Indo-European languages.

Figure 6.12
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: T. V. Gamkrelidze and V. V. Ivanov, *Scientific American*, March 1990, p. 112.



The Languages of Europe

The map of world languages (Fig. 6.8) demonstrates how widely spread the Indo-European language family is across the globe, dominating Europe, significant parts of Asia (including Russia and India), North and South America, Australia, and portions of Southern Africa. About half the world's people speak Indo-European languages. The Indo-European language family is broken into subfamilies such as Romance, Germanic, and Slavic. And each subfamily is broken into individual languages, such as English, German, Danish, and Norwegian within the Germanic subfamily.

The language map of Europe (Fig. 6.2) shows that the Indo-European language family prevails in this region, with pockets of the Uralic family occurring in Hungary (the Ugric subfamily) and in Finland and adjacent areas (the Finnic subfamily), and a major Altaic language, Turkish, dominating Turkey west of the Sea of Marmara. Celtic people brought Indo-European tongues into Europe when they spread across the continent over 3000 years ago. Celtic speech survives at the western edges of Europe, but in most places Celtic tongues fell victim to subsequent migrations and empire building. These historical developments led to the creation of a European linguistic pattern characterized by three major subfamilies: Romance, Germanic, and Slavic.

The **Romance languages** (French, Spanish, Italian, Romanian, and Portuguese) lie in the areas that were once controlled by the Roman Empire but were not subsequently overwhelmed. The **Germanic languages** (English, German, Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish) reflect the expansion of peoples out of northern Europe to the west and south. Some Germanic peoples spread into areas dominated by Rome, and at the northern and northeastern edges of the Roman Empire their tongues gained ascendancy. Other Germanic peoples spread into areas that were never part of an ancient empire (present-day Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and the northern part of the Netherlands). The Germanic character of English bears the imprint of a further migration—that of the Normans into England in 1066, bringing a Romance tongue to the British Isles. The essential Germanic character of English remained, but many new words were added that are Romance in origin. The **Slavic languages** (Russian, Polish, Czech, Slovak, Ukrainian, Slovenian, Serbo-Croatian, and Bulgarian) developed as Slavic people migrated from a base in present-day Ukraine close to 2000 years ago. Slavic tongues came to dominate much of eastern Europe over the succeeding centuries. They, too, overwhelmed Latin-based tongues along much of the eastern part of the old Roman Empire—with the notable exception of an area on the western shores of the Black Sea, where a Latin-based tongue either survived the Slavic invasion or was reintroduced by migrants. That tongue is the ancestor of the modern-day Romance language: Romanian.

A comparison of Europe's linguistic and political maps shows a high correlation between the languages spoken and the political organization of space. The Romance languages, of Romanic-Latin origin, dominate in five countries, including Romania. The eastern boundaries of Germany coincide almost exactly with the transition from Germanic to Slavic tongues. Even at the level of individual languages, boundaries can be seen on the political map: between French and Spanish, between Norwegian and Swedish, and between Bulgarian and Greek.

Although Figure 6.2 shows a significant correlation between political and linguistic boundaries in Europe, there are some important exceptions. The French linguistic region extends into Belgium, Switzerland, and Italy, but in France, French coexists with Basque in the southwest, a variant of Dutch in the north, and a Celtic tongue in the northeast. The Celtic languages survive in the western region of France called Brittany (Breton), in the northern and western parts of Wales (Welsh), in western Ireland (Irish Gaelic), and in the western Highlands and islands of Scotland (Scots Gaelic). The use of Romanian extends well into Moldavia, signifying a past loss of national territory. Greek and Albanian are also Indo-European languages, and their regional distribution corresponds significantly (though not exactly) with state territories. Figure 6.2 underscores the complex cultural pattern of eastern Europe: German speakers in Hungary; Hungarian speakers in Slovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia; Romanian speakers in Greece and Moldavia; Turkish speakers in Bulgaria; and Albanian speakers in Serbia.

Although the overwhelming majority of Europeans and Russians speak Indo-European languages, the Uralic and Altaic language families are also represented. Finnish, Estonian, and Hungarian are major languages of the Uralic family, which, as Figure 6.8 shows, extends across Eurasia to the Pacific Coast. The Altaic family to which Turkish belongs is equally widespread and includes Turkish, Kazakh, Uigur, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek languages.

One language on the map of Europe stands out for two reasons: first, it covers a very small land area, and second, it is *in no way related* to any other language family in Europe. Did you find it? This tantalizing enigma is the Basque language, Euskera. Isolated in the Andorra Mountain region between Spain and France, the Basque people and their Euskera language survived the tumultuous history of Europe for thousands of years—never blending with another language or diffusing from the Andorra region. (Some recent genetic evidence points to a link between Euskera and an extinct language in the Middle East, but this is uncertain.) The Basques have a strong identity tied to their language and independent history, an identity that was cemented by the horrid treatment they received under fascist dictator Francisco Franco, who ruled Spain during and after World War II. After Franco died in 1975, a Basque separatist group

demanded autonomy within Spain. The Spanish government recognized Basque autonomy in its 1979 constitution, granting the Basque region its own parliament, giving their language official status, and transferring some taxation and education powers from the capital to the Basque region. A group of Basque separatists continue to demand more, waging a campaign of violence against Spanish targets and even moderate Basque leaders (Fig. 6.13).

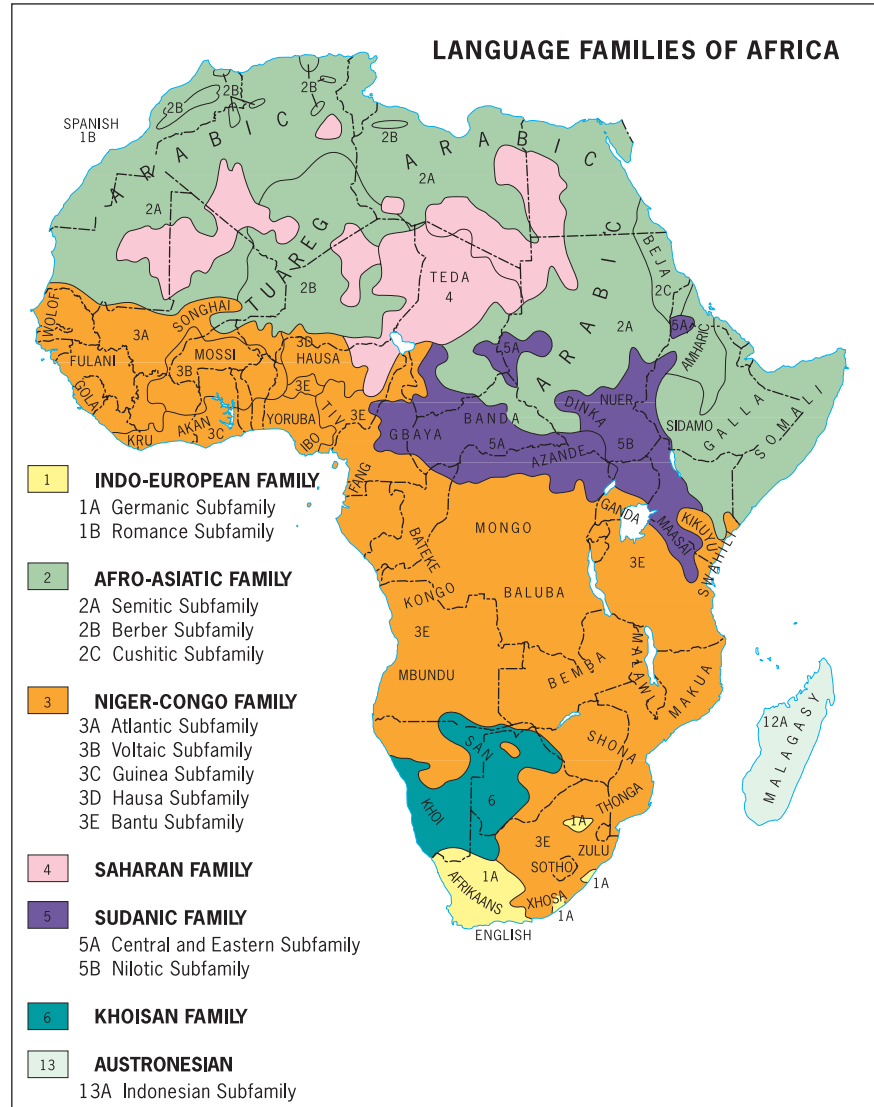
Languages of Sub-Saharan Africa

The world map of language families masks the extreme fragmentation of languages in parts of the world such as Sub-Saharan Africa. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the map of world language families reflects the dominance of the Niger-Congo language family. By including language subfamilies, we can gain a more meaningful picture of Sub-Saharan Africa's linguistic diversity (Fig. 6.14).



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.

Figure 6.14
Language Families of Africa. Regional classification of African Language Families. Adapted with permission from: Hammond, Inc., 1977.



Studying language subfamilies helps us understand migration and settlement patterns in Sub-Saharan Africa. The oldest languages of Sub-Saharan Africa are the Khoisan languages, which include a “click” sound. Although they once dominated much of the region, Khoisan languages were marginalized by the invasion of speakers of the Bantu languages. Studying the languages in the Bantu subfamily, we can see that the languages are still closely related, with similar prefixes and vocabularies. Similarities among the Bantu languages mean that the languages have been in Sub-Saharan Africa for a shorter time—typically, the longer a language has been in a place, the more likely sounds will have shifted and languages splintered.

Linguistic diversity is evident not just at the world regional scale, but at the country scale. Nigeria encompasses several subfamilies of the Niger-Congo family, and its population includes speakers of two major Sub-Saharan African language families. Indeed, Nigeria’s 141 million people speak more than 500 different languages. The three most prominent languages are distributed regionally: Hausa is in the north and is spoken by some 35 million, Yoruba is in the southwest and is spoken by 25 million speakers, and Ibo is in the southeast and is spoken by more than 25 million people (Fig. 6.15). Of the remaining languages spoken in Nigeria, the vast majority are spoken by fewer than one million people. These minor languages persist because daily survival, community, and culture are tied closely to the local scale in Nigeria. Even people who leave

their hometowns for work send money back to their hometown associations to support their culture and economy.

Were it not for British colonialism, the country of Nigeria would never have existed. The diverse people of this place have been amalgamated into the Nigerian borders for less than a century. European colonists are responsible for the arbitrary borders of most of Africa—borders that ignore cultural divides. When Nigeria gained its independence in 1962, the government decided to adopt English as the “official” language, as the three major regional languages are too politically charged and thus unsuitable as national languages.

When Nigeria’s children go to school, they first must learn English, which is used for all subsequent instruction. Certainly, the use of English has helped Nigeria avoid some conflicts based on language, but Nigerian educators are having second thoughts about the policy. Upon entering school, children who have grown up speaking a local language are suddenly confronted with a new, unfamiliar tongue. The time and energy spent learning English are taken away from learning other subjects. Moreover, for many students, knowledge of English is irrelevant when they emerge from school (as many do after only six years) unable to function in local Nigerian society. Nigeria is having serious doubts about its relationship with the English language brought there by the colonists who arbitrarily established their multilingual and multiethnic country in the first place.

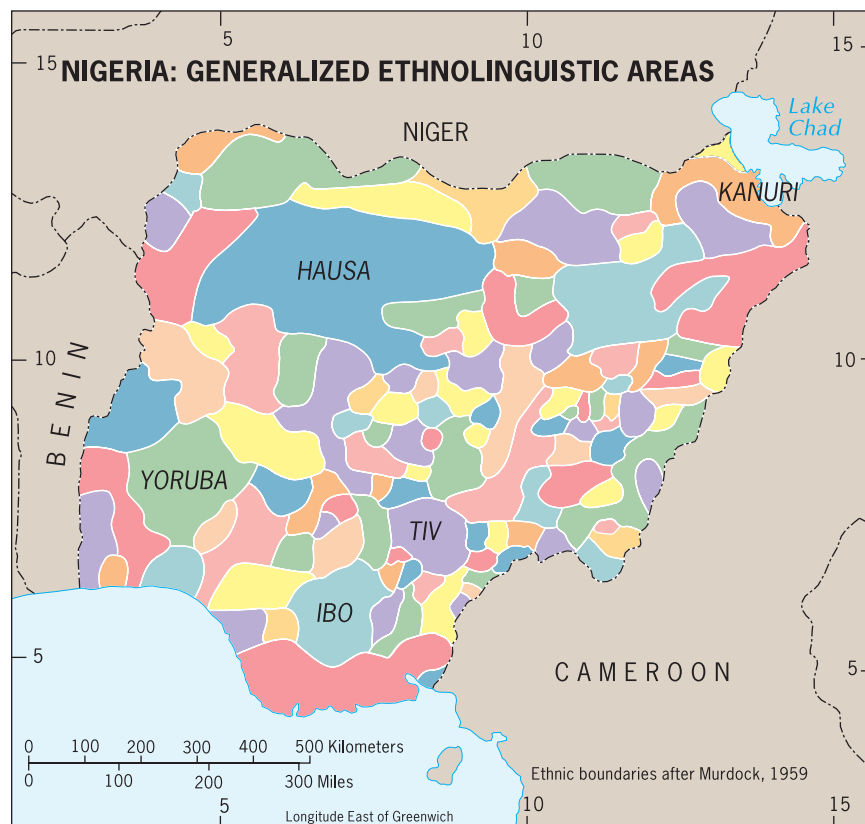


Figure 6.15

Nigeria: Generalized Ethnolinguistic Areas. This map demonstrates the mosaic of languages in Nigeria by shading each of the country’s ethnolinguistic areas. The colors represent diversity; they do not show associations among ethnolinguistic areas. *Data from:* ethnolinguistic area boundaries are based on a map in G. P. Murdock, *Africa: Its Peoples and Their Culture History*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972.



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?

HOW DO LANGUAGES DIFFUSE?

Just a few thousand years ago most habitable parts of the Earth were characterized by a tremendous diversity of languages. With the rise of empires, of larger-scale, more technologically sophisticated literate societies, some languages began to spread over larger areas. By 2000 years ago, languages such as Chinese and Latin had successfully diffused over large regions. The Han Empire in China and the Roman Empire in Europe and North Africa knit together large swaths of territory, encouraging the diffusion of one language over the regions. The most powerful and wealthiest people were the first to learn Chinese and Latin in these empires, as they had the most to lose by not learning the languages. Local languages and illiteracy continued among the poor in the empires, and some blending of local with regional languages occurred. When the Roman Empire disintegrated, places within the region discontinued interaction, prompting a round of linguistic divergence.

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. Johann Gutenberg perfected the printing press, inventing the movable type printing press, the Gutenberg press, in Germany in 1440. In 1452, Gutenberg printed the first Gutenberg Bible (the sacred text for Christians), which brought the scriptures out of churches and monasteries. The Gutenberg press diffused quickly in the century following—throughout Europe and beyond. The printing press allowed for an unprecedented production of written texts, in languages besides Latin. Gutenberg's press made it possible to print the Bible in one's own language, such as French or German, rather than Latin, helping to standardize European languages. The Luther Bible played this role for German, as did the King James Bible for English.

The rise of relatively large independent states was equally important (see Chapter 8), for these political entities had a strong interest in promoting a common culture,

often through a common language (such as French or Dutch). Political elites who were literate and had access to written texts brought peoples together and played a key role in distributing printed texts. Moreover, as the leaders of countries such as England and Spain sought to expand their influence overseas through mercantilism and colonialism, they established networks of communication and interaction, helping to diffuse certain languages over vast portions of the Earth's surface.

Over the last 500 years, the world's people have had innumerable opportunities for spatial interaction, and thus contact between and among languages. The increasing contact among people has encouraged the formation of new languages to bridge linguistic gaps in trade and commerce, has spurred language replacement (one language replaces another), and has encouraged language extinction (a language with no native speakers). The modern world also provides technology to preserve and stabilize languages and supports institutions that teach languages to large numbers of people.

Lingua Franca

Even before the expansion of trade encouraged the global diffusion of languages such as English and Spanish, regional trade encouraged people speaking different tongues to find ways to communicate with one another. A **lingua franca** is a language used among speakers of different languages for the purposes of trade and commerce. A lingua franca can be a single language, or it can be a mixture of two or more languages. When people speaking two or more languages are in contact and they combine parts of their languages in a simplified structure and vocabulary, we call it a **pidgin language**.

The first widely known lingua franca was a pidgin language. During the 1200s seaborne commerce in the Mediterranean Sea expanded, and traders from the ports of southern France (the Franks) revitalized the ports of the eastern Mediterranean. But the local traders did not speak the seafarers' language. Thus began a process of convergence in which the tongue of the Franks was mixed with Italian, Greek, Spanish, and Arabic. The mixture came to be known as the Frankish language, or lingua franca, and it served for centuries as the common tongue of Mediterranean commerce.

The term *lingua franca* is still used to denote a common language used for trade and commerce that is spoken by peoples with different native tongues. Arabic became a lingua franca during the expansion of Islam, and English did so in many areas during the colonial era. English is the only linguistic common denominator that binds together multilingual India—both in India itself and among those from subcontinent who have migrated to other areas (Fig. 6.16).



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.

A different sort of a lingua franca in wide use today is Swahili, the lingua franca of East Africa. Through centuries of trade and interaction, Swahili developed from an African Bantu language mixed with Arabic and Persian, encompassing 100 million speakers from southern Somalia to northern Mozambique and from coastal Kenya and Tanzania to Uganda and the East African Great Lakes region. Swahili has a complex vocabulary and structure, and while millions of East Africans communicate in the language, most still learn and speak a local language as their first or primary language.

Over time a pidgin language may gain native speakers, becoming the first language children learn in the home. When this happens, we call it a creolized or Creole language. A **Creole language** is a pidgin language that has developed a more complex structure and vocabulary and has become the native language of a group of people. The word *Creole* stems from a pidgin language formed in the Caribbean from English, French, and Portuguese languages mixed with the languages of African slaves. The language became more complex and became the first language of people in the region, replacing the African languages.

Pidgin and Creole languages are important unifying forces in a linguistically divided world. They tend to be simple and accessible, and therefore disseminate rapidly. In Southeast Asia a trade language called Bazaar Malay is heard from Myanmar (Burma) to Indonesia and from the Philippines to Malaysia; it has become a lingua franca in the region. A simplified form of Chinese also serves as a language of commerce even beyond the borders of China.

Multilingualism

Widespread diffusion and mixing of languages over the last 500 years, combined with the division of the world into more than 200 countries, has left the idea of a single language being spoken in a single country unrealizable. For that to happen, we would need a world of contiguous, discrete languages territorially divided into upwards of 3000 countries.

Only a few **monolingual states**—countries in which only one language is spoken—exist. They include Japan in Asia; Uruguay and Venezuela in South America; Iceland,

Denmark, Portugal, and Poland in Europe; and Lesotho in Africa. Even these countries, however, have small numbers of people who speak other languages; for example, more than a half-million Koreans live in Japan. In fact, as a result of migration and diffusion, no country is truly monolingual today. English-speaking Australia has more than 180,000 speakers of Aboriginal languages. Predominantly Portuguese-speaking Brazil has some 1.5 million speakers of Amerindian languages.

Countries in which more than one language is in use are called **multilingual states**. In some of these countries, linguistic fragmentation reflects strong cultural pluralism as well as divisive forces. This is true in former colonial areas where colonizers threw together peoples speaking different languages, as happened in Africa and Asia.

Multilingualism takes several forms. In Canada and Belgium, the two major languages each dominate particular areas of the country. In multilingual India, the country's official languages generally correspond with the country's States (Fig. 6.17). In Peru, centuries of acculturation have not erased the regional identities of the American Indian tongues spoken in the Andean Mountains and the Amazonian interior, and of Spanish, spoken on the coast.

Official Languages

Countries with linguistic fragmentation often adopt an **official language** (or languages) to tie the people together. In former colonies, the official language is often one that ties them to their colonizer, as the colonizer's language invariably is one already used by the educated and politically powerful elite. States adopt official language in the hope of promoting communication and interaction among peoples who speak different local and regional languages.

Many former African colonies have adopted English, French, or Portuguese as their official language, even though they have gained independence from former imperial powers. Thus, Portuguese is the official language of Angola, English is the official language of Nigeria and Ghana, and French is the official language of Côte d'Ivoire.

Such a policy is not without risks. As we noted earlier in this chapter in the case of Nigeria, the long-term results of using a foreign language may not be positive. In some countries, including India, citizens objected to using a language (English in India) that they associated with colonial repression. Some former colonies chose not just one but two official languages: the European colonial language

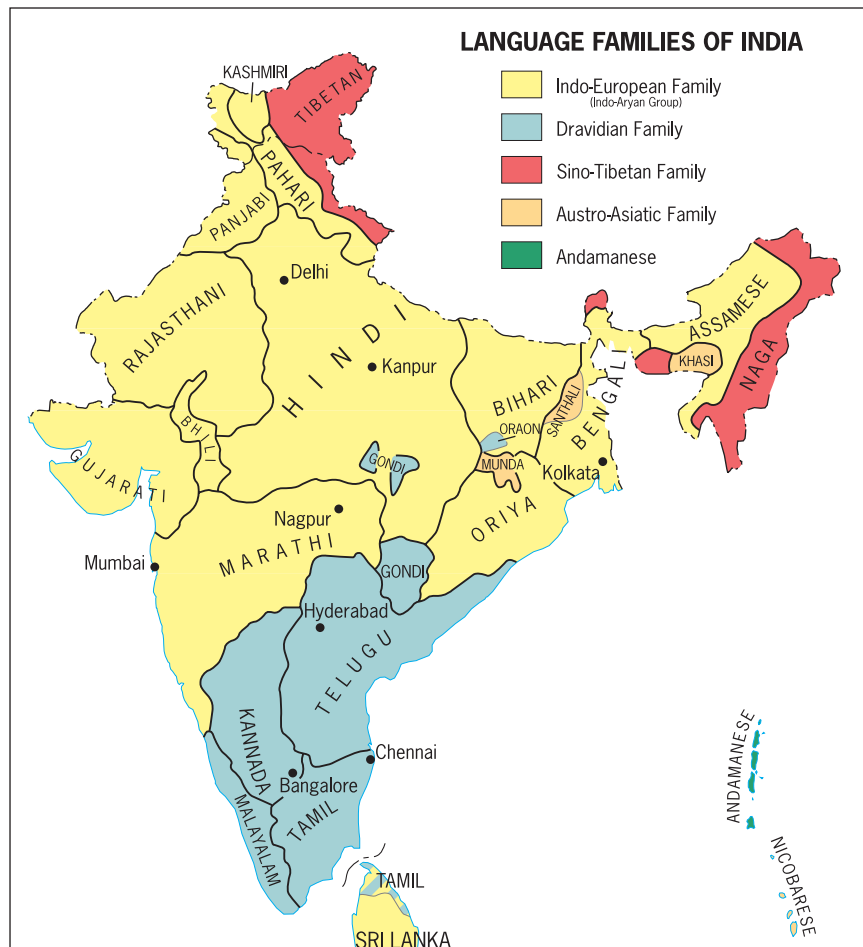


Figure 6.17

Language Families of India. Regional classification of Indian Language Families. India's states generally coincide with a major language family or language. *Adapted with permission from: Hammond, Inc., 1977.*

plus one of the country's own major languages. English and Hindi are official languages of India. Similarly, English and Swahili are official languages of Tanzania. In Mauritania, French and Arabic are official languages. But this solution was not always enough. When India gave Hindi official status, riots and disorder broke out in non-Hindi areas of the country. Kenya, which at first made English and Swahili its official languages, decided to drop English in the face of public opposition to rules requiring candidates for public office to pass a test of their ability to use English.

The official languages in a country are a reflection of the country's history. In Peru, Spanish and the Amerindian language Quechuan have official status and are found in distinct regions. In the Philippines, English (spoken primarily in Manila) and a creolized Spanish called Pilipino are both official languages. Tiny Singapore, the city-state at the tip of the Malay Peninsula, has four official languages: English, Chinese, Malay, and Tamil (an Indian tongue). India is the country with the largest number of official languages—22 if we include both official languages listed in the country's constitution and official languages proclaimed by States within India.

The European Union is not a country, but it recognizes 23 official languages, and the United Nations has 6 official languages. In each of these cases, the international organization offers simultaneous translation among the official languages to any member of the parliament (European Union) or the general assembly (United Nations) who requests it. Each international organization also publishes paper documents and maintains its website in all official languages.

Global Language

What will the global language map look like 50 years from now? More and more people are using English in a variety of contexts. English is now the standard language of international business and travel (the *lingua franca*), much of contemporary popular culture bears the imprint of English, and the computer and telecommunications revolution relies heavily on the use of English terminology. Does this mean that English is on its way to becoming a global language?

If global language means the principal language people use around the world in their day-to-day activities, the geographical processes we have examined so far emphatically do not point to the emergence of English as a global tongue. Population growth rates are generally lower in English-speaking areas than they are in other areas, and little evidence shows people in non-English speaking areas willing to abandon their local language in favor of English. Indeed, since language embodies deeply held cultural views and is a basic feature of cultural identity, many people actively resist switching to English.

Yet if **global language** means a common language of trade and commerce used around the world, the picture looks rather different. Although not always welcomed, the trend throughout much of the world is to use English as a language of cross-cultural communication—especially in the areas of science, technology, travel, and business. Korean scholars are likely to communicate with their Russian counterparts in English; Japanese scientific journals are increasingly published in English; Danish tourists visiting Italy may use English to get around; and the meetings of most international financial and governmental institutions are dominated by English. Under these circumstances, the role of English as an international language of commerce will grow.

We must be careful in this conclusion, however. Anyone looking at the world 200 years ago would have predicted French as the principal language of cross-cultural communication in the future. Times are different now, of course. The role of English in the computer revolution alone makes it hard to imagine a fundamental shift away from the dominance of English in international affairs. Yet, economic and political influences on language use are always in flux, and nothing is inevitable.



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?

WHAT ROLE DOES LANGUAGE PLAY IN MAKING PLACES?

Over a decade ago, geographer Yi-Fu Tuan researched the importance of language in making places. He emphasized how people use language as a tool to give meaning to points on the Earth's surface. Each **place** is a unique location—a reflection of people's activities, ideas, and tangible creations.

Tuan explains that by simply naming a place, people call the place into being and impart a certain character to it. Geographers call place names **toponyms**. People are responsible for making places; places do not exist in a vacuum, nor are they organic. The social processes going on in a place determine whether a toponym is passed down

or changed, how the people will interpret the history of a place, and how the people will see a place. Tuan contrasts the examples of “Mount Prospect” and “Mount Misery” to help us understand that a name alone can color the character of a place and even the experiences of people in a place. If you planned to travel to “Mount Prospect,” your expectations and even your experiences might well be quite different than a trip to “Mount Misery.”

A toponym can give us a quick glimpse into the history of a place. Simply by knowing who named the place and how the name was chosen helps us understand the uniqueness of a place. In his book, *Names on the Land: A Historical Account of Place-Naming in the United States* (1982), English professor George Stewart recognized that certain themes dominate American toponyms. Stewart developed a classification scheme focused on ten basic types of place-names, including: *descriptive* (Rocky Mountains); *associative* (Mill Valley, California); *commemorative* (San Francisco); and *commendatory* (Paradise Valley, Arizona). Toponyms also reflect *incidents* (Battle Creek, Michigan); a claim of *possession* (Johnson City, Texas); or a *folk* culture (Plains, Georgia). Stewart explains that some of the most interesting toponyms are *manufactured*, such as Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, or are simply *mistakes*, such as Lasker, North Carolina, named after the State of Alaska. Stewart’s final category of toponyms is *shift names*. Shift names include relocated names, such as those found in migrant communities (Lancaster, England to Lancaster, Pennsylvania) and double names, which occur when a place has two names that mean the same thing (Alpine Mountains).

Knowing Stewart’s ten categories of toponyms at the very least helps us understand that a story lies behind every toponym we encounter in our travels. The stories of toponyms quite often have their roots in migration, movement, and interaction among people. When languages diffuse through migration, so too do toponyms. Studying the toponyms in a place can tell us much about the historical migration of peoples. George Stewart’s classic book on toponyms reveals many clusters of migrants and corresponding toponyms. Often the toponyms remain long after the migrants moved on. Clusters of Welsh toponyms in Pennsylvania, French toponyms in Louisiana, and Dutch toponyms in Michigan reveal migration flows and also can provide insight into language change and evolution of dialects.

Brazil provides an interesting case study of migration flows and toponyms. Most Brazilian toponyms are Portuguese, reflecting the Portuguese colonization of the land. Amid the Portuguese toponyms sits a cluster of German toponyms in the southern state of Santa Catarina. The map of the state is marked by the place-naming activities of German immigrants. For example, the German word for flower is “Blume,” and several last names in German begin with “Blum.” The German immigrants had a fondness for the tropical flowers they saw in Brazil: southern Brazil is therefore dotted with towns named Blumenau, Blumberg, Blumenhof, Blumenort,

Blumenthal, and Blumenstein. Brazilian toponyms also reveal the enormous flow of forced migration from West Africa to Brazil during the slave trade. The Brazilian State of Bahia has a number of toponyms that originated in West Africa, especially Benin and Nigeria.

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. 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. In 1982, Argentina invaded the Malvinas, but the British forces fought back, and the islands remain under British control. British, American, and other allies call and map the islands as the Falklands, but Argentines continue to call and map the islands as the Malvinas. The war ended in a matter of weeks, but the underlying dispute lingers, and so do both names.

In the United States, an agency called the United States Board on Geographic Names, established by President Benjamin Harrison in 1890, is responsible for deciding what toponyms appear on government-produced maps. The board anglicizes place-names from around the world. Some translations have the same spelling as the foreign country, such as Paris and London. Others are off a letter or more, resulting in some confusion for American tourists when they are looking for the train to Rome or Prague but only find trains to Roma or Praha.

Changing Toponyms

Tuan explained that when people *change the toponym* of a place, they have the power to “wipe out the past and call forth the new.” For example, people in a small town in Wales feared the loss of the Welsh language and despised the role the English had played in diminishing the use of the Welsh language. They also wanted to boost their local economy by attracting tourists to their town. A century ago, the people renamed their town with a Welsh word unpronounceable by others: Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoch (Fig. 6.18). The name accurately describes the town in northern Wales, “The Church of St. Mary in the hollow of white hazel near the rapid whirlpool by the church of St. Tysilio of the red cave.” For the last two decades, Wales has had an official policy of teaching both Welsh and English in the schools in order to preserve and boost usage of the Welsh language. Pronouncing the name of this town correctly is now a benchmark for students learning Welsh, and the residents of the town take pride in their ability to pronounce it.

Toponyms are part of the cultural landscape. Changes in place-names give us an idea of the layers of history, the layers of cultural landscape in a place. For example, on the Kenai Peninsula in Alaska, where Clare Swan (whom we cited earlier in this chapter) is from, the changing place-names give us insight into identity questions in the place. Natives in one



Figure 6.18

Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogoch, Wales. The town with the self-proclaimed longest name in the world attracts hordes of tourists each year to a place whose claim to fame is largely its name. © Alexander B. Murphy.

town on the Kenai Peninsula called their home Nanwalek in the early 1800s; when the Russians came in and took over the peninsula, they changed the name to Alexandrof. Americans mapped Alaska and then made it a State, and in the process, they changed the name to English Bay. Recently, the townspeople changed the name of their home back to Nanwalek. When you arrive in Nanwalek, you will see native people, see signs of the Russian Orthodox religion, hear them speak English, and then talk with the native people who are reviving their native language and culture. The changes in the place-name provide insight into the cultural landscape.

Post-Colonial Toponyms

The question of changing toponyms often arises when power changes hands in a place. When African colonies became independent countries, many of the new governments immediately changed the toponyms of places named after colonial figures. The new governments renamed several countries: Upper Volta to Burkina Faso, Gold Coast to Ghana, Nyasaland to Malawi, and Northern and Southern Rhodesia to Zambia and Zimbabwe, respectively. Countries in Asia also chose new toponyms to mark their independence and separate themselves from their past: East Pakistan became Bangladesh, and the Netherlands East Indies became Indonesia.

Newly independent countries also changed the names of cities and towns to reflect their independence. Thus, Leopoldville (named after a Belgian king) became Kinshasa,

capital of the Congo; Salisbury, Zimbabwe, named after a British leader, became Harare; and Lourenço Marques, Mozambique, commemorating a Portuguese naval hero, became Maputo. However, newly independent countries did not wipe all colonial names and references from their maps. Etoile (the Congo), Colleen Bawn (Zimbabwe), and Cabo Delgado (Mozambique) remain on the postcolonial map.

Post-revolution Toponyms

Independence prompts name changes, and so too do changes in power through coups and revolutions. During his reign, authoritarian dictator, General Mobutu Sese Seko, changed the name of the Belgian Congo in Sub-Saharan Africa to Zaïre. At first, other governments and international agencies did not take this move seriously, but eventually they recognized Mobutu's Zaïre. Governments and companies changed their maps and atlases to reflect Mobutu's decision. The government of Zaïre changed the name of their money from the franc to the zaïre, and they even changed the name of the Congo River to the Zaïre.

In 1997, the revolutionary leader Laurent Kabila ousted Mobutu and established his regime in the capital, Kinshasa. Almost immediately, he renamed the country. Zaïre became the Democratic Republic of the Congo (reflecting the colonial name). Again, governments and companies reacted, changing their maps and atlases to reflect Kabila's decision.

Recent revolutions in power in Russia and South Africa led to many changes in toponyms in these countries. When the Soviet Union began, the communist government changed many places named for czars who were in power before them, replacing them (of course) with Soviet names. Once the Soviet Union collapsed, a new round of name changes occurred, often going back to Czarist-era names. In the new Russia, Leningrad reverted to St. Petersburg, Sverdlovsk went back to Yekaterinburg (its name under the czars), and Stalingrad was renamed Volgograd (for the river). Reformers, nationalists, and lingering communists argued bitterly over the toponym changes, and many people continued to address their mail according to their city's former name.

In the same time frame, South Africa experienced a major revolution that also resulted in a fundamental change in governance. Today, the government of South Africa is wrestling with pressures for and against toponym changes. The government restructured the country's administrative framework, creating nine provinces out of four and giving some of the new provinces African names (Mpumalanga for the new Eastern Transvaal, Gauteng for a new central province). One of the old provinces, Natal, has become Kwazulu-Natal. The government also changed some names of towns and villages, but South Africa's map still includes many names from the Boer-British and Apartheid periods. Name changes can evoke strong reactions from people, and the South African government is trying to move slowly and carefully to avoid arousing emotions in their still-divided country.

Memorial Toponyms

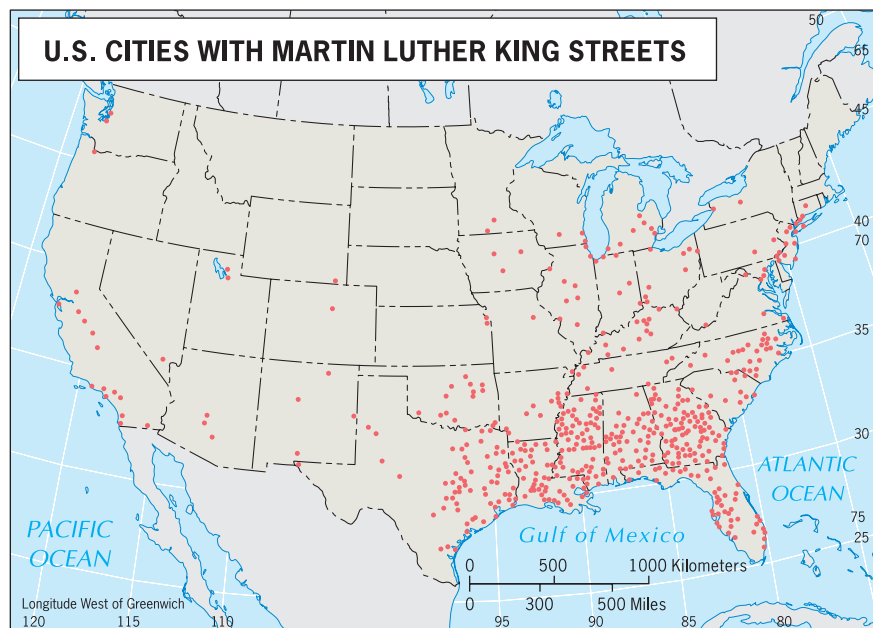
People can choose to change a toponym to memorialize an important person or event. Hundreds of parks in the United States are named Memorial Park for hundreds of

such persons and events. Towns or government agencies can vote to change the name of a school, a library, or a public building to memorialize people who have played a role in shaping the place or who have had an enormous influence on people in the place.

Certain events such as decolonization or a political revolution can spur changes in toponyms, and so too can revolutions in thought and behavior. The civil rights movement of the 1960s in the United States left many lasting impressions of people and events, especially in the South, where many protests, sit-ins, and marches occurred. Geographer Derek Alderman explains that, in recent decades, African Americans in the South have “taken a particularly active role in reconstructing commemorative landscapes—from calling for the removal of Confederate symbols from public places to the building of memorials and museums honoring the civil rights movement.” Streets are often the focal point of commemoration in the cultural landscape because so many people travel along them daily, serving as a constant reminder of the person or event being memorialized.

Alderman studied the practice of changing street names to memorialize Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK), the major African American leader of the civil rights movement. Although streets named after MLK are found throughout the United States, the greatest concentration of memorial streets are in the South, especially in Georgia (King's home state) and Mississippi (Fig. 6.19). Alderman studied the distribution of MLK streets in the South, comparing their locations with census data on race and socioeconomics. He found that although MLK streets are found in both cities and rural areas, “MLK streets are located—whether by choice or by force—in census areas that are generally poorer and with more African Americans than citywide averages.” (Fig. 6.20) Alderman tempers this

Figure 6.19
Cities in the United States with a Street Named for Martin Luther King Jr. *Data from:* Data drawn from several sources by Derek Alderman, Matthew Mitchelson, and Chris Philamy, East Carolina University, 2003.



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. In the words of one elected official, “The accomplishments of Dr. King were important to all Americans. A whole man deserves a whole street!” Naming streets for King is a controversial process for many cities, often exposing continued racial tensions and the potential for toponyms to function as contested social boundaries within places.



Figure 6.20

Credit: Derek Alderman, East Carolina University

finding with a caution that not all MLK streets are located in poorer areas of cities. Even when MLK streets are located in depressed areas, the African American population may have purposefully chosen a street because it runs through an African American neighborhood. Alderman's subsequent studies explore the scale of the city and the contested views of what kinds of streets should be named for MLK—be they residential, commercial, major thoroughfares (perhaps those that connect white and African American neighborhoods), or residential streets in largely African American neighborhoods.

The presence of streets named for civil rights leaders in the cultural landscapes of the American South creates a significant counterbalance to the numerous places of commemoration named for leaders of the Confederacy during the Civil War (see Chapter 1).

Commodification of Toponyms

The practice of commodifying (buying, selling, and trading) toponyms is growing, especially in areas largely within the fold of popular culture. International media corporations that reach across the globe bring known names to new places, drawing consumers to the place based on what they have heard or experienced elsewhere. For example, the Disney Corporation opened Tokyo Disneyland in 1983 and Disneyland Paris in 1990, both places that capitalize on the success of Disneyland and Disneyworld in

the United States. As corporations spread their names and logos to other places, they seek to “brand” places, creating or re-creating places that consumers associate with places of the same brand.

In recent years, the activities of corporations with a global reach have been stamped on the landscape. Stadiums are especially susceptible to this form of commodification: FedEx Field, MCI Center, Fleet Center, and Coors Field are perfect examples. In 2004, the Metropolitan Transit Authority in New York City proposed renaming the metro stops, bridges, and tunnels after corporate sponsors. Instead of the Lincoln Tunnel, we could be traveling through the Target Tunnel, and instead of stopping at Times Square, we could be stopping at Disney Times Square (which, ironically is already named for a company—the *New York Times*).



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.

Summary

The global mosaic of languages reflects centuries of divergence, convergence, extinction, and diffusion. Linguists and linguistic geographers have the interesting work of uncovering, through deep reconstruction, the hearths of the world's language families. Some languages, such as Basque, defy explanation. Other languages are the foci of countless studies, many of which come to differing conclusions about their ancient origins.

As certain languages, such as English and Chinese, gain speakers and become global languages, other languages become extinct. Some languages come to serve as the lingua franca of a region or place. Governments choose official languages, and through public schools, educators entrench an official language in a place. Some countries, faced with the global diffusion of the English language, defend and promote their national language. Whether requiring signs to be written a certain way or requiring a television station to broadcast some proportion of programming in the national language, governments can preserve language, choose a certain dialect as the standard, or repel the diffusion of other languages.

Regardless of the place, the people, or the language used, language continues to define, shape, and maintain culture. How a person thinks about the world is reflected in the words used to describe and define it.

Answer to Final Thinking Geographically Question: Los Angeles, California.

Geographic Concepts

language	backward reconstruction	Slavic languages
culture	extinct language	lingua franca
mutual intelligibility	deep reconstruction	pidgin language
standard language	Nostratic	Creole language
dialects	language divergence	monolingual states
dialect chains	language convergence	multilingual states
isogloss	Renfrew hypothesis	official language
language families	conquest theory	global language
subfamilies	dispersal hypothesis	place
sound shift	Romance languages	toponym
Proto-Indo-European	Germanic languages	

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About the Loss of Native Languages in Alaska
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 click on Video On Demand for "Alaska: The Last Frontier?"