Chapter 5: Language
Language

- definition
- not just a way of communication
- way to preserve culture
Language and Culture

- Who we are as a people reinforced and redefined through shared language
- Reflects where the culture has been, its values, etc.
- Easiest way to examine the impact of language on culture is to examine loss of language as a result of pressure from others (colonization)
“No one was allowed to speak the language – the Dena’ ina language. They [the American government] didn’t allow it in the schools, and a lot of the women had married non-native men, and the men said, ‘You’re American now so you can’t speak the language.’ So, we became invisible in the community. Invisible to each other. And, then, because we couldn’t speak the language – what happens when you can’t speak your own language is you have to think with someone else’s words, and that’s a dreadful kind of isolation [emphasis added].”

- Clare Swan, elder, Kenaitze band, Dena’ ina Indians
Language and Culture cont.

- Shared language makes people visible to each other and to the world
- Binds cultural identity
- Personal
- Reveals how people/cultures view reality
Language and Culture cont.

- Language often used as a cultural weapon (English vs. Spanish)
- many states have adopted “Official English” policies as a result
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>28,101,052</td>
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<td>Chinese</td>
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<td>French</td>
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<td>German</td>
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<td>Tagalog</td>
<td>1,224,241</td>
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<td>Vietnamese</td>
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<td>Italian</td>
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<td>Korean</td>
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<td>Russian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>667,414</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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</table>
Language and Cultural Identity

Quebec Province, Quebec

French Canadian culture is evident in the cultural landscape.
Standardized Language

- Language that is published, widely distributed and purposefully taught
  - ex. “the King’s English”-reference to the fact that the English spoken by well-educated people in London and its environs is regarded as British Received Pronunciation

- Who decides the standard language?
Standard Language

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

Government usually plays a big role in standardizing a language.
Dialect

- Geographers are interested in dialect b/c they reflect the distinctive features of the environments in which groups live
- Accents can reveal regional home of the person
- Marked by differences in vocabulary, syntax, pronunciation, cadence and pace of speech
Dialect cont.

- Isogloss-used by linguistic geographers-why?
- Definition
- Fuzzy isoglosses signify the dialect has expanded or contracted
- What do they examine to determine isoglosses?
Dialect cont.

- Hans Kurath-linguistic geographer
  - Published atlases of dialects in U.S.
  - Defined northern, southern, and midland dialect
  - Drew distinct isoglosses among the 3 dialects based on pronunciation

- Burt Vaux-linguist
  - More recent study of American dialects
Mutual Intelligibility

- Means two people can understand each other when speaking.

- Problems:
  - Cannot measure mutual intelligibility
  - Many “languages” fail the test of mutual intelligibility
  - Standard languages and governments impact what is a “language” and what is a “dialect”
Why are languages distributed the way they are?

- Need to classify languages first
  - Done in terms also used in biology and b/c some languages are related and some are not
- Globally: language families
- Single-language family: have shared but fairly distant origin
  - Broken into subfamilies (divisions w/in a language family)
- Individual languages: cover a smaller extent of territory
- Dialect: covers the smallest extent of territory
Several language families are dwindling

Interesting questions arise from map

- Madagascar - primary language is not an African language family, rather it is an Austronesian family (SE Asia and the pacific Islands) Why?
How are Languages Formed?

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

  eg. Milk = lacte in Latin
  latta in Italian
  leche in Spanish
  lait in French
Formation of language cont.

- Jakob Grimm
  - Sound shifts—scientific relationship b/t languages
  - Related languages have similar not identical consonants
  - Would change over time in a predictable way
    - ex. Vater German)=vader Dutch)=father (English)
    - Consonants became harder as went backwards towards the hearth
1st linguistic hypothesis proposed the existence of an ancestral Indo-European language called **Proto-Indo-European**

Gives hearth to ancient Latin, Sanskrit and Greek
Reconstructing Language

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

- August Schieicher-1st to compare world’s language families to branches of a tree
- **Language divergence** – when a lack of spatial interaction among speakers of a language breaks the language into dialects and then new languages.
- **Language convergence** – when peoples with different languages have consistent spatial interaction and their languages collapse into one.
Historical Linkages among Languages

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

Also see pp. 166-167
Renfrew Hypothesis: Proto-Indo-European began in the Fertile Crescent, and then:

From Anatolia diffused Europe’s languages
From the Western Arc of Fertile Crescent diffused North Africa and Arabia’s languages
From the Eastern Arc of Fertile Crescent diffused Southwest Asia and South Asia’s languages.
Proto-Indo-European diffusion to Europe

Conquest Theory or Agriculture Theory

Dispersal Hypothesis
The Languages of Europe

Romance languages
- French, Spanish, Italian, Romanian and Portuguese
- Areas once controlled by the Roman Empire but not overwhelmed by the empire

Germanic languages
- English, German, Danish, Norwegian and Swedish
- Reflect expansion of people out of Northern Europe to the west and south
- Areas dominated by Rome
The Languages of Europe cont.

- Slavic languages
- Russian, Polish, Czech, Slovak, Ukrainian, Slovenian, Serbo-Croatian, and Bulgarian
- Developed as Slavic people migrated from Ukraine
- Dominates Eastern Europe except for western shores of Black Sea
  - Romanian is spoken there
African Language Families

- Studying the language subfamilies helps us understand:
  - Migration and settlement patterns
  - Linguistic diversity

- Why is it so difficult to document African languages?
African Language Families cont.

- Northern Africa: Arabic
- Subsaharan Africa:
  1. Niger-Congo
     - Most subsaharan people speak this type of language
     - Benue-Congo-Swahili
  2. Nilo-Saharan-north-central Africa
     - Divided into 6 branches
     - Several of those divisions are further divided
3. **Khosian**-concentrated in the southwest
   - Distinctive characteristic: use of clicking sounds
4. **Austronesian**-Madagascar
   - Speak Malagasy
   - Shows evidence of migration from the South Pacific to this area
Nigeria

- More than 200 languages spoken there
- Problem: none of those languages a widely used
- Why is English the official language?
- Adopted in 1962 after Nigeria gained its independence
Nigeria cont.

- Predominant languages: Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and Edo
- Minor languages continue to exist b/c daily survival, community and culture are tied to the local scale here
- Result of British colonization
Students basically waste time learning English - takes away from other subjects
Knowledge of English is irrelevant for most students after they leave school
  Cannot function in the local society
How do Languages Diffuse?
How do Languages Diffuse?

- human interaction
- print distribution
- migration
- trade
- rise of nation-states
- colonialism
Spatial Interaction helps create:

- **Lingua franca** –
  A language used among speakers of different languages for the purposes of trade and commerce.

- **Pidgin language** –
  a language created when people combine parts of two or more languages into a simplified structure and vocabulary.

- **Creole language** –
  a pidgin language that has developed a more complex structure and vocabulary and has become the native language of a group of people.
Multilingualism

- Few monolingual states exist-Japan, Uruguay, Venezuela, Iceland, Denmark, Portugal, Poland, Lesho
  - Still have small # of residents that speak another language
  - No country today is monolingual due to migration and diffusion
Multilingual states are most common

- Linguistic fragmentation due:
  - Cultural pluralism
  - Divisive forces (examples?)

- Takes several forms:
  - Different language dominates a different area
  - Official language corresponds with country’s states
  - Acculturation has not destroyed regional identities
Official Languages

- Official languages identified to tie people together
- In theory, allows people to communicate and interact with each other
- Implementation of an official language is not without risks!
  - What are some of the risks?
Global Language

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

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

What is the global language?
What Role does Language Play in Making Places?
Place

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

Toponym – a place name

A toponym:
- Imparts a certain character on a place
- Reflects the social processes in a place
- Can give us a glimpse of the history of a place
- Has its roots in migration
Changing Toponyms

When people change the toponym of a place, they have the power to "wipe out the past and call forth the new."

- Yi-Fu Tuan
Changing Toponyms

- Major reasons people change toponyms:
  - After decolonization
  - After a political revolution
  - To memorialize people or events (Martin Luther King Jr.)
  - To commodify or brand a place (amusement parks, stadiums)

- Also changes the cultural landscape
Martin Luther King, Jr. Streets

Geographer Derek Alderman asks:

* Where are MLK streets?
* Why are they where they are?
* What controversies surround memorializing MLK with a street name?
Where are MLK Streets in the US?