Chapter 6
What Are Languages, and What Role Do Languages Play in Culture?

- **Language**: A set of sounds, combinations of sounds, and symbols used for communication

- **Standard language**: A language that is published, widely distributed, and purposefully taught

- Role of government in standardizing a language
The Internet: Globalization of Language

INTERNET CONTENT, BY LANGUAGE

INTERNET USERS, BY LANGUAGE SPOKEN

TOP 10 LANGUAGES, BY MILLIONS OF SPEAKERS
Language and Politics

PERCENT OF PEOPLE 5 YEARS AND OLDER WHO SPOKE A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH AT HOME BY COUNTY

- 60.0 or more
- 35.0 to 59.9
- 17.9 to 34.9
- 4.6 to 17.8
- 4.5 or less
Non-English Speakers

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

Political issue of speakers of Spanish and other languages vs. those desiring English only
Mutual Intelligibility

- **Isogloss**: A geographic boundary within which a particular linguistic feature occurs
- **Criterion for a language**: Speakers can understand each other
  - **Problems**
    - Measuring “mutual intelligibility”
    - Standard languages and government impact on what is a “language” and what is a “dialect”
  - **Dialect**: variant of standard language by ethnicity or region
    - Vocabulary
    - Syntax
    - Cadence, pace
    - Pronunciation
Example of Dialect

COMMON NAME FOR A SOFT DRINK, 2002

- **Pop**
- **Soda**
- **Coke**
- **Pop and Soda**
- **Coke and Soda**
- **Coke and Pop**
Why Are Languages Distributed the Way They Are?

Classification by language families (groups of related languages)
LANGUAGE FAMILIES OF THE WORLD

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

OTHERS
UNPOPULATED AREAS
Language Formation

• Linkages among languages marked by sound shifts, slight changes in a word across languages over time
  
  Milk = lacte in Latin  leche in Spanish  
  lait in French  latta in Italian

• Language divergence: Breakup of a language into dialects and then new languages from lack of interaction among speakers

• Language convergence: When peoples with different languages have consistent interaction and their languages blend into one
The Study of Historical Languages

Backward reconstruction: Tracking sound shifts and the hardening of consonants backward to reveal an “original” language

- Can deduce the vocabulary of an extinct language
- Can recreate ancient languages (deep reconstruction)
Historical Linkages among Languages

- Indo-European language family
- Proto-Indo-European language
- Nostratic Language (ancient ancestor of Proto-Indo-European Language)
Origins of Proto-Indo-European

*Renfrew Hypothesis*: Began in the Fertile Crescent, and then

- Europe’s languages from Anatolia
- North Africa and Arabia’s languages from the Western Arc of Fertile Crescent
- Southwest Asia and South Asia’s languages from the Eastern Arc of Fertile Crescent
THE RENFREW HYPOTHESIS
Agriculture Theory

With increased food supply and population, migration of speakers from the hearth of Indo-European languages into Europe.
Dispersal Hypothesis

- From the hearth eastward into present-day Iran
- Around the Caspian
- Into Europe
The Languages of Europe

- Romance languages
- Germanic languages
- Slavic languages
The Case of Euskera

Spoken by the Basque and in no way related to any other language family in Europe
Languages of Subsaharan Africa

- Dominant language family: Niger-Congo
  - Relatively recent migration
  - Continued recognizable similarities among subfamilies
- Displacement of Khoisan family, now in southwestern Africa
LANGUAGE FAMILIES OF AFRICA

1. INDO-EUROPEAN FAMILY
   1A Germanic Subfamily
   1B Romance Subfamily

2. AFRO-ASIATIC FAMILY
   2A Semitic Subfamily
   2B Berber Subfamily
   2C Cushitic Subfamily

3. NIGER-CONGO FAMILY
   3A Atlantic Subfamily
   3B Voltaic Subfamily
   3C Guinea Subfamily
   3D Hausa Subfamily
   3E Bantu Subfamily

4. SAHARAN FAMILY

5. SUDANIC FAMILY
   5A Central and Eastern Subfamily
   5B Nilotic Subfamily

6. KHOISAN FAMILY

13. AUSTRONESIAN FAMILY
   13A Indonesian Subfamily
Nigeria

- More than 400 languages
- Nigeria a colonial creation
- Choice of English as “official” language rather than any indigenous language
How Do Languages Diffuse?

- Human interaction
- Print distribution
- Migration
- Trade
- Rise of nation-states
- Colonialism
Effects of Spatial Interaction

- **Lingua franca**: A language used among speakers of different languages for 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

- **Monolingual state**: A country in which only one language is spoken.
- **Multilingual state**: A country in which more than one language is in use.
- **Official language**: Government-selected language or languages to try to enhance communication in a multilingual state.

![Language Families of India](image)
Global Language

- English as lingua franca for
  - Commerce
  - Science
  - Travel
  - Business
  - Popular culture
- Continued use of native languages for day-to-day activities
What Role Does Language Play in Making Places?

- **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

- **Toponym:** A place name
  - Imparts a certain character on a place
  - Reflects the social processes in a place
  - Can give a glimpse of the history of a place
Changing Toponyms

Major reasons people change toponyms

- After decolonization
- After a political revolution
- To commodify or brand a place
- To memorialize people or events