

## Chapter 5. Language

Earth's heterogeneous collection of languages is one of its most obvious examples of cultural diversity. Estimates of distinct languages in the world range from 2,000 to 4,000. Including the 10 largest ones, altogether only about 100 languages are spoken by at least 5 million people, and another 70 by between 2 million and 5 million people.

### Key Issues

1. Where are English-language speakers distributed?
2. Why is English related to other languages?
3. Where are other language families distributed?
4. Why do people preserve local languages?

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**Language** is a system of communication through speech. Many languages also have a **literary tradition**, or a system of written communication. The lack of written record makes it difficult to document the distribution of many languages. Countries designate at least one language as their **official language**. A country with more than one official language may require all public documents to be in all languages.

We start our study of the geographic elements of cultural values with language in part because it is the means through which other cultural values, such as religion and ethnicity, are communicated. The study of language follows logically from migration, because the contemporary distribution of languages around the world results largely from past migrations of peoples. The final section of the chapter discusses contradictory trends of *scale* in language. On the one hand, English has achieved an unprecedented **globalization**. On the other hand, people are trying to preserve **local diversity** in language. The global distribution of languages results from a combination of two geographic processes—interaction and isolation. The Indo-European language family developed as a result of migration and subsequent isolation of people that can only be reconstructed through linguistic and archaeological theories.

### Key Issue 1. Where Are English-Language Speakers Distributed?

- **Origin and diffusion of English**
- **Dialects of English**

A language originates at a particular place and diffuses to other locations through the migration of its speakers.

#### Origin and Diffusion of English

English is spoken fluently by one-half billion people, more than any language except for Mandarin. Whereas nearly all Mandarin speakers are clustered in one country—China—English speakers are distributed around the world.

#### English Colonies

The contemporary distribution of English speakers around the world exists because the people of England migrated with their language when they established colonies during the past four centuries.

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English first diffused west from England to North America in the seventeenth century. Similarly, the British took control of Ireland in the seventeenth century, South Asia in the mid-eighteenth century, the South Pacific in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and southern Africa in the late nineteenth century. More recently, the United States has been responsible for diffusing English to several places.

#### Origin of English in England

The British Isles had been inhabited for thousands of years, but we know nothing of their early languages, until tribes called the Celts arrived around 2000 B.C. Then, around A.D. 450, tribes from mainland Europe invaded, pushing the Celts into the remote northern and western parts.

**German Invasion.** The invading tribes were the Angles, Jutes, and Saxons. All three were Germanic tribes. England comes from Angles' land. In Old English, Angles was spelled Engles. The (Angles) came from a corner, or angle, of Germany known as Schleswig-Holstein.

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Other peoples subsequently invaded England and added . . . to the basic English. Although the Vikings failed in their attempt to conquer the islands, many remained in the country to enrich the language with new words.

**Norman Invasion.** English is . . . different from German . . . because England was conquered by the Normans in 1066. The Normans, who came from present-day Normandy in France, spoke French, which they established as England's official language for the next 150 years. The majority of the people continued to speak English.

In 1204 . . . England lost control of Normandy and entered a long period of conflict with France. Parliament enacted the Statute of Pleading in 1362 to change the official language of court business from French to English.

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During the 300-year period that French was the official language of England, the Germanic language used by the common people and the French used by the leaders mingled to form a new language.

### **Dialects of English**

A **dialect** is a regional variation of a language distinguished by distinctive vocabulary, spelling, and pronunciation. English has an especially large number of dialects. One particular dialect of English, the one associated with upper-class Britons living in the London area, is recognized in much of the English-speaking world as the standard form of British speech, . . . known as **British Received Pronunciation (BRP)**.

### **Dialects in England**

English originated with three invading groups . . . who settled in different parts of Britain. The language each spoke was the basis of distinct regional dialects of Old English. Following the Norman invasion of 1066, . . . by the time English again became the country's dominant language, five major regional dialects had emerged.

From this large collection of local dialects, one eventually emerged as the standard language . . . the dialect used by upper-class residents in the capital city of London and the two important university cities of Cambridge and Oxford . . . first encouraged by the introduction of the printing press to England in 1476.

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Grammar books and dictionaries printed in the eighteenth century established rules for spelling and grammar that were based on the London dialect. Strong regional differences persist . . . in the United Kingdom, especially in rural areas. Several dozen dialects . . . can be grouped into three main ones: Northern, Midland, and Southern. Further, distinctive southwestern and southeastern accents occur within the Southern dialect.

### **Differences between British and American English**

The earliest colonists were most responsible for the dominant language patterns that exist today in the English-speaking part of the Western Hemisphere.

**Differences in Vocabulary and Spelling.** English in the United States and England evolved independently during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. U.S. English differs from that of England in three significant ways: vocabulary, spelling, and pronunciation. The vocabulary is different . . . because settlers in America encountered many new objects and experiences, . . . which were given names borrowed from Native Americans. As new inventions appeared, they acquired different names on either side of the Atlantic. Spelling diverged . . . because of a strong national feeling in the United States for an independent identity. Noah Webster, the creator of the first comprehensive American dictionary and grammar books, was not just a documenter of usage, he had an agenda. Webster argued that spelling and grammar reforms would help establish a national language, reduce cultural dependence on England, and inspire national pride.

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**Differences in Pronunciation.** Differences in pronunciation between British and U.S. speakers are immediately recognizable. Interaction between the two groups was largely confined to exchange of letters and other printed matter rather than direct speech. Surprisingly, pronunciation has changed more in England than in the United States. People in the United States do not speak “proper” English because when the colonists left England, “proper” English was not what it is today.

### **Dialects in the United States**

Major differences in U.S. dialects originated because of differences in dialects among the original settlers.

**Settlement in the East.** The original American settlements . . . can be grouped into three areas: New England, Middle Atlantic, and Southeastern. Two-thirds of the New England colonists were Puritans from East Anglia in southeastern England. About half of the southeastern settlers came from southeast England, although they represented a diversity of social-class backgrounds. The immigrants to the Middle Atlantic colonies were more diverse . . . because most of the settlers came from the north rather than the south of England or from other countries.

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**Current Dialect Differences in the East.** Today, major dialect differences within the United States continue to exist, primarily on the East Coast. Every word that is not used nationally has some geographic extent . . . and therefore has boundaries . . . known as an isogloss. Two important isoglosses separate the eastern United States into three major dialect regions, known as Northern, Midland, and Southern. Some words are commonly used within one of the three major dialect areas but rarely in the other two. In most instances, these words relate to rural life, food, and objects from daily activities. Many words that were once regionally distinctive are now national in distribution. Mass media, especially television and radio, influence the adoption of the same words throughout the country.

**Pronunciation Differences.** Regional pronunciation differences are more familiar to us than word differences, although it is harder to draw precise isoglosses for them. The New England accent is well known for dropping the /r/ sound, . . . shared with speakers from the south of England. Residents of Boston . . . maintained especially close ties to the important ports of southern England. Compared to other colonists, New Englanders received more exposure to changes in pronunciation that occurred in Britain during the eighteenth century.

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The mobility of Americans has been a major reason for the relatively uniform language that exists throughout much of the West.

### **Key Issue 2. Why Is English Related to Other Languages?**

- **Indo-European branches**
- **Origin and diffusion of Indo-European**

English is part of the Indo-European language family. A language family is a collection of languages related through a common ancestor that existed long before recorded history.

### **Indo-European Branches**

Within a language family, a **language branch** is a collection of languages related through a common ancestor that existed several thousand years ago.

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Indo-European is divided into eight branches. Four of the branches—Indo-Iranian, Romance, Germanic, and Balto-Slavic—are spoken by large numbers of people. The four less extensively used Indo-European language branches are Albanian, Armenian, Greek, and Celtic.

### **Germanic Branch of Indo-European**

A **language group** is a collection of languages within a branch that share a common origin in the relatively recent past. English and German are both languages in the West Germanic group. West Germanic is further divided into High Germanic and Low Germanic subgroups, so named because they are found in high and low elevations within present-day Germany. High German, spoken in the southern mountains of Germany, is the basis for the modern standard German language. English is classified in the Low Germanic subgroup. The Germanic language branch also includes North Germanic languages, spoken in Scandinavia. The four Scandinavian languages—Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, and Icelandic—all derive from Old Norse.

### **Indo-Iranian Branch of Indo-European**

The branch of the Indo-European language family with the most speakers is Indo-Iranian, . . . more than 100 individual languages . . . divided into an eastern group (Indic) and a western group (Iranian).

**Indic (Eastern) Group of Indo-Iranian Language Branch.** The most widely used languages in India, as well as in the neighboring countries of Pakistan and Bangladesh, belong . . . to the Indic group of the Indo-Iranian branch of Indo-European. Approximately one-third of Indians, mostly in the north, use an Indic language called Hindi. Hindi is spoken many different ways—and therefore could be regarded as a collection of many individual languages—but there is only one official way to write the language, using a script called Devanagari.

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Pakistan's principal language, Urdu, is spoken very much like Hindi but is written with the Arabic alphabet, a legacy of the fact that most Pakistanis are Muslims, and their holiest book (the Quran) is written in Arabic. Hindi, originally a variety of Hindustani spoken in the area of New Delhi, grew into a national language in the nineteenth century when the British encouraged its use in government.

India has four important language families: Indo-European (predominantly in the north), Dravidian (in the south), Sino-Tibetan (in the northeast), and Austro-Asiatic (in the central and eastern highlands). India's constitution as amended recognizes 18 official languages, including 13 Indo-European, 4 Dravidian, and 1 Sino-Tibetan language (Manipuri). As the language of India's former colonial ruler, English has an "associate" status, even though only 1 percent of the Indian population can speak it.

**Iranian (Western) Group of Indo-Iranian Language Branch.** Indo-Iranian languages . . . spoken in Iran and neighboring countries . . . form a separate group from Indic.

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The major Iranian group languages include Persian (sometimes called Farsi) in Iran, Pathan in eastern Afghanistan and western Pakistan, and Kurdish, used by the Kurds of western Iran, northern Iraq, and eastern Turkey. These languages are written in the Arabic alphabet.

### **Balto-Slavic Branch of Indo-European**

Slavic was once a single language, but differences developed in the seventh century A.D. when several groups of Slavs migrated from Asia to different areas of Eastern Europe.

**East Slavic and Baltic Groups of Balto-Slavic Language Branch.** The most widely used Slavic languages are the eastern ones, primarily Russian. With the demise of the Soviet Union, the newly independent republics adopted official languages other than Russian, although Russian remains the language for communications among officials in the countries that were formerly part of the Soviet Union. After Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian (sometimes written Byelorussian) are the two most important East Slavic languages. The desire to use languages other than Russian was a major drive in the Soviet Union breakup a decade ago.

**West and South Slavic Groups of Balto-Slavic Language Branch.** The most spoken West Slavic language is Polish, followed by Czech and Slovak. The latter two are quite similar, and speakers of one can understand the other. The two most important South Slavic languages are Serbo-Croatian and Bulgarian. Although Serbs and Croats speak the same language, they use different alphabets. Slovene is the official language of Slovenia, while Macedonian is used in the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia.

In general, differences among all Slavic languages are relatively small. However, because language is a major element in a people's cultural identity, relatively small differences among Slavic as well as other languages are being preserved and even accentuated in recent independence movements. Since Bosnia and Croatia broke away from Serb-dominated Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, regional differences within Serbo-Croatian have increased.

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#### **Romance Branch of Indo-European**

The Romance language branch evolved from the Latin language spoken by the Romans 2,000 years ago. The four most widely used contemporary Romance languages are Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Italian. The physical boundaries such as mountains are strong intervening obstacles, creating barriers to communication between people living on opposite sides.

The fifth most important Romance language, Romanian, is the principal language of Romania and Moldova. Two other official Romance languages are Romansh and Catalán. Sardinian—a mixture of Italian, Spanish, and Arabic—once was the official language of the Mediterranean island of Sardinia. In addition to these official languages, several other Romance languages have individual literary traditions. In Italy, Ladin (not Latin) . . . and Friulian . . . (along with the official Romansh) are dialects of Rhaeto-Romantic. Ladino—a mixture of Spanish, Greek, Turkish, and Hebrew—is spoken by 140,000 Sephardic Jews, most of whom now live in Israel.

**Origin and Diffusion of Romance Languages.** As the conquering Roman armies occupied the provinces of this vast empire, they brought the Latin language with them.

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The languages spoken by the natives of the provinces were either extinguished or suppressed. Latin used in each province was based on that spoken by the Roman army at the time of occupation. Each province also integrated words spoken in the area. The Latin that people in the provinces learned was not the standard literary form but a spoken form, known as **Vulgar Latin**, from the Latin word referring to "the masses" of the populace.

By the eighth century, regions of the former empire had been isolated from each other long enough for distinct languages to evolve. Latin persisted in parts of the former empire. People in some areas reverted to former languages, while others adopted the languages of conquering groups from the north and east, which spoke Germanic and Slavic.

**Romance Language Dialects.** Distinct Romance languages did not suddenly appear. They evolved over time. The creation of standard national languages, such as French and Spanish, was relatively recent. The dialect of the Île-de-France region, known as Francien, became the standard form of French because the region included Paris. The most important surviving dialect difference within France is between the north and the south. The northern dialect, **langue d'oïl** and the southern **langue d'oc** . . . provide insight into how languages evolve. These terms derive from different ways in which the word for "yes" was said. Spain, like France, contained many dialects during the Middle Ages. In the fifteenth century, when the Kingdom of Castile and León merged with the Kingdom of Aragón, . . . Castilian became the official language for the entire country. Spanish and Portuguese have achieved worldwide importance because of the colonial activities of their European speakers. Approximately 90 percent of the speakers of these two languages live outside Europe. Spanish is the official language of 18 Latin American states, while Portuguese is spoken in Brazil. The division of Central and South America into Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking regions is the result of a 1493 decision by Pope Alexander VI. The Portuguese and Spanish languages spoken in the Western Hemisphere differ somewhat from their European versions.

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Difficulties arise in determining whether two languages are distinct or whether they are merely two dialects of the same language.

A creole or creolized language is defined as a language that results from the mixing of the colonizer's language with the indigenous language. A creolized language forms when the colonized group . . . makes some changes, such as simplifying the grammar. The word creole derives from a word in several Romance languages for a slave who is born in the master's house.

#### **Origin and Diffusion of Indo-European**

If Germanic, Romance, Balto-Slavic, and Indo-Iranian . . . are all part of the same . . . language family, then they must be descended from a single common ancestral language. The existence of a single ancestor . . . cannot be proved with certainty, because it would have existed thousands of years before the invention of writing or recorded history. The evidence that Proto-Indo-European once existed is "internal." Individual Indo-European languages share common root words for winter and snow but not for ocean. Therefore, linguists conclude that original Proto-Indo-European speakers probably lived in a cold climate, or one that had a winter season, but did not come in contact with oceans.

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One theory argues that language diffused primarily through warfare and conquest, while the other theory argues that the diffusion resulted from peaceful sharing of food. One influential hypothesis, espoused by Marija Gimbutas, is that the first Proto-Indo-European speakers were the Kurgan people, whose homeland was in the steppes near the border between present-day Russia and Kazakhstan. Between 3500 and 2500 B.C., Kurgan warriors, using their domesticated horses as weapons, conquered much of Europe and South Asia.

Not surprisingly, scholars disagree on where and when the first speakers of Proto-Indo-European lived. Archaeologist Colin Renfrew argues that they lived 2,000 years before the Kurgans, in eastern Anatolia, part of present-day Turkey.

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The Indo-Iranian branch . . . originated either directly through migration from Anatolia, or indirectly by way of Russia north of the Black and Caspian seas. Renfrew argues that Indo-European diffused . . . with agricultural practices rather than by military conquest. After many generations of complete isolation, individual groups evolved increasingly distinct languages.

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**Key Issue 3. Where Are Other Language Families Distributed?**

- **Classification of languages**
- **Distribution of language families**

Although several thousand languages are spoken, they can be organized logically into a small number of language families, . . . further divided into language branches and language groups.

### **Classification of Languages**

About 50 percent of all people speak a language in the Indo-European family. About 20 percent speak a language in the Sino-Tibetan family.

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About 5 percent each speak a language in one of these four families: Afro-Asiatic (in the Middle East); Austronesian (in Southeast Asia); Niger-Congo (in Africa); (and) Dravidian (in India).

### **Distribution of Language Families**

Half the people in the world speak an Indo-European language. The second-largest family is Sino-Tibetan, spoken by nearly one-fourth of the world. Other major language families include Afro-Asiatic, Altaic, Austronesian, Japanese, and Niger-Congo.

### **Sino-Tibetan Family**

The Sino-Tibetan family encompasses languages spoken in the People's Republic of China . . . as well as several smaller countries in Southeast Asia.

**Sinitic Branch.** There is no single Chinese language. Spoken by approximately three-fourths of the Chinese people, Mandarin is by a wide margin the most used language in the world.

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Other Sinitic branch languages are spoken by tens of millions of people in China. The Chinese government is imposing Mandarin countrywide. Unity is also fostered by a consistent written form for all Chinese languages. Although the words are pronounced differently in each language, they are written the same way. The structure of Chinese languages is quite different (from Indo-European). They are based on 420 one-syllable words.

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This number far exceeds the possible one-syllable sounds that humans can make, so Chinese languages use each sound to denote more than one thing. The listener must infer the meaning from the context in the sentence and the tone of voice the speaker uses.

In addition, two one-syllable words can be combined. The other distinctive characteristic of the Chinese languages is the method of writing . . . with a collection of thousands of characters. Some . . . represent sounds. Most are ideograms, which represent ideas or concepts, not specific pronunciations.

**Austro-Thai and Tibeto-Burman branches of Sino-Tibetan family.** In addition to the Chinese languages included in the Sinitic branch, the Sino-Tibetan family includes two smaller branches, Austro-Thai and Tibeto-Burman.

### **Other East and Southeast Asian Language Families**

Japanese and Korean both form distinctive language families. Chinese cultural traits have diffused into Japanese society, including the original form of writing the Japanese language. Japanese is written in part with Chinese ideograms, but it also uses two systems of phonetic symbols. Korean is usually classified as a separate language family. Korean is written not with ideograms but in a system known as hankul. In this system, each letter represents a sound. Austro-Asiatic, spoken by about 1 percent of the world's population, is based in Southeast Asia. Vietnamese (is) the most spoken tongue

of the . . . language family. The Vietnamese alphabet was devised in the seventh century by Roman Catholic missionaries.

### **Afro-Asiatic Language Family**

The Afro-Asiatic—once referred to as the Semito-Hamitic—language family includes Arabic and Hebrew, as well as a number of languages spoken primarily in northern Africa and southwestern Asia.

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Arabic is the major Afro-Asiatic language, an official language in two dozen countries of North Africa and southwestern Asia, from Morocco to the Arabian Peninsula.

### **Altaic and Uralic Language Families**

The Altaic and Uralic language families were once thought to be linked as one family because the two display similar word formation, grammatical endings, and other structural elements. Recent studies, however, point to geographically distinct origins.

**Altaic Languages.** The Altaic languages are spoken across an 8,000-kilometer (5,000-mile) band of Asia between Turkey on the west and Mongolia and China on the east. Turkish (is) by far the most widely used . . . . Other Altaic languages with at least 1 million speakers include Azerbaijani, Bashkir, Chuvash, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Mongolian, Tatar, Turkmen, Uighur, and Uzbek. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, Altaic languages became official in several newly independent countries. Enthusiasm for restoring languages long discouraged by the Soviet Union threatens the rights of minorities in these countries to speak other languages that are not officially recognized. Problems also persist because the boundaries of the countries do not coincide with the regions in which the speakers of the various languages are clustered.

**Uralic Languages.** Every European country is dominated by Indo-European speakers, except for three: Estonia, Finland, and Hungary. The Estonians, Finns, and Hungarians speak languages that belong to the Uralic family, . . . first used 7,000 years ago by people living in the Ural Mountains . . . north of the Kurgan homeland.

### **African Language Families**

No one knows the precise number of languages spoken in Africa, and scholars disagree on classifying the known ones into families. Nearly 1,000 distinct languages and several thousand named dialects have been documented. In northern Africa . . . an Arabic . . . dominates, although in a variety of dialects. Other Afro-Asiatic languages spoken by more than 5 million Africans include Amharic, Oromo, and Somali in the Horn of Africa, and Hausa in northern Nigeria.

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In sub-Saharan Africa . . . languages grow far more complex.

**Niger-Congo Language Family.** More than 95 percent of the people in sub-Saharan Africa speak languages of the Niger-Congo family, which includes six branches with many hard to classify languages. The remaining 5 percent speak languages of the Khoisan or Nilo-Saharan families. Several million South Africans speak Indo-European languages. The largest branch of the Niger-Congo family is the Benue-Congo branch, and its most important language is Swahili. Its vocabulary has strong Arabic influences. Swahili is one of the few African languages with an extensive literature.

**Nilo-Saharan Language Family.** Nilo-Saharan languages are spoken by a few million people in north-central Africa, immediately north of the Niger-Congo language region. Despite fewer speakers, the Nilo-Saharan family is divided into six branches.

**Khoisan Language Family.** The third important language family of sub-Saharan Africa—Khoisan—is concentrated in the southwest. Khoisan languages . . . use clicking sounds.



**Austronesian Language Family.** About 6 percent of the world's people speak an Austronesian language, once known as the Malay-Polynesian family. The most frequently used Austronesian language is Malay-Indonesian. The people of Madagascar speak Malagasy, which belongs to the Austronesian family, even though the island is separated by 3,000 kilometers (1,900 miles) from any other Austronesian-speaking country.

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**Nigeria: Conflict among Speakers of Different Languages.** Africa's most populous country, Nigeria, displays problems that can arise from the presence of many speakers of many languages. Groups living in different regions of Nigeria have often battled. Nigeria reflects the problems that can arise when great cultural diversity—and therefore language diversity—is packed into a relatively small region.

#### **Key Issue 4. Why Do People Preserve Local Languages?**

- **Preserving language diversity**
- **Global dominance of English**

The distribution of a language is a measure of the fate of an ethnic group. As in other cultural traits, language displays the two competing geographic trends of globalization and local diversity.

#### **Preserving Language Diversity**

Thousands of languages are **extinct languages**, once in use—even in the recent past—but no longer spoken or read in daily activities by anyone in the world. The eastern Amazon region of Peru in the sixteenth century . . . (had) more than 500 languages. Only 57 survive today, half of which face extinction. Gothic was widely spoken . . . in Eastern and Northern Europe in the third century A.D.

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The last speakers of Gothic lived in the Crimea in Russia in the sixteenth century. Many Gothic people switched to speaking the Latin language after their conversion to Christianity. Some endangered languages are being preserved. Nonetheless, linguists expect . . . that only about 300 languages are clearly safe from extinction.

#### **Hebrew: Reviving Extinct Languages**

Hebrew is a rare case of an extinct language that has been revived. Hebrew diminished in use in the fourth century B.C. and was thereafter retained only for Jewish religious services. When Israel was established . . . in 1948, Hebrew became one of the new country's two official languages, along with Arabic. The effort was initiated by Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, . . . credited with the invention of 4,000 new Hebrew words—related when possible to ancient ones—and the creation of the first modern Hebrew dictionary.

#### **Celtic: Preserving Endangered Languages**

Two thousand years ago Celtic languages were spoken in much of present-day Germany, France, and northern Italy, as well as in the British Isles. Today Celtic languages survive only in remoter parts of Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, and on the Brittany peninsula of France.

**Celtic Groups.** The Celtic language branch is divided into Goidelic (Gaelic) and Brythonic groups. Two Goidelic languages survive: Irish Gaelic and Scottish Gaelic. Only 75,000 people speak Irish Gaelic exclusively. In Scotland fewer than 80,000 of the people (2 percent) speak it. Over time, speakers of Brythonic (also called Cymric or Britannic) fled westward to Wales, southwestward to Cornwall, or southward across the English Channel to the Brittany peninsula of France. An estimated one-fourth of the people in Wales still use Welsh as their primary language, although all but a handful know English as well.

Cornish became extinct in 1777, with the death of the language's last known native speaker, Dolly Pentreath. An English historian recorded as much of her speech as possible so that future generations

could study the Cornish language. In Brittany—like Cornwall, an isolated peninsula that juts out into the Atlantic Ocean—300,000 people still speak Breton. Only about 10,000 actually use Breton more than French. The Celtic languages declined because the Celts lost most of the territory they once controlled to speakers of other languages. In the 1300s the Irish were forbidden to speak their own language in the presence of their English masters.

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**Revival of Celtic Languages.** Recent efforts have prevented the disappearance of Celtic languages. Britain's 1988 Education Act made Welsh language training a compulsory subject in all schools in Wales, and Welsh history and music have been added to the curriculum. The number of people fluent in Irish Gaelic has grown in recent years as well, especially among younger people. An Irish-language TV station began broadcasting in 1996. A couple of hundred people have now become fluent in the formerly extinct Cornish language, which was revived in the 1920s. Cornish is taught in grade schools and adult evening courses and is used in some church services. . . . However, a dispute has erupted over the proper way to spell Cornish words.

### **Multilingual States**

Difficulties can arise at the boundary between two languages. The boundary between the Romance and Germanic branches runs through the middle of . . . Belgium and Switzerland. Belgium has had more difficulty than Switzerland in reconciling the interests of the different language speakers.

**Belgium.** Southern Belgians (known as Walloons) speak French, whereas northern Belgians (known as Flemings) speak a dialect of the Germanic language of Dutch, called Flemish.

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Historically, the Walloons dominated Belgium's economy and politics. In response to pressure from Flemish speakers, Belgium was divided into two independent regions, Flanders and Wallonia. Belgium had difficulty fixing a precise boundary between Flemish and French speakers. During the late 1980s, this problem jailed one town's mayor and collapsed the national government.

**Switzerland.** In contrast, Switzerland peacefully exists with . . . four official languages: German, French, Italian, and Romansh. Swiss voters made Romansh an official language in a 1938 referendum, despite the small percentage who use the language. Other languages are used by nearly 10 percent of the Swiss population, mostly guest-worker immigrants.

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### **Isolated Languages**

An **isolated language** is a language unrelated to any other and therefore not attached to any language family. Isolated languages arise through lack of interaction with speakers of other languages.

**A Pre-Indo-European Survivor: Basque.** The best example of an isolated language in Europe is Basque. Basque is spoken by 1 million people in the Pyrenees Mountains.

**An Unchanging Language: Icelandic.** Unlike Basque, Icelandic is related to other languages. Icelandic's significance is that over the past thousand years it has changed less than any other in the Germanic branch.

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### **Global Dominance of English**

One of the most fundamental needs in a global society is a common language for communication. Increasingly in the modern world, the language of international communication is English.

When well-educated speakers of two different languages wish to communicate with each other in countries such as India or Nigeria, they frequently use English.

### **English: An Example of a Lingua Franca**

A language of international communication . . . is known as a **lingua franca**. The term, which means *language of the Franks*, was originally applied by Arab traders during the Middle Ages to describe the language they used to communicate with Europeans, whom they called *Franks*. A group that learns English or another lingua franca may learn a simplified form, called a **pidgin language**. Two groups construct a pidgin language by learning a few of the grammar rules and words of a lingua franca, while mixing in some elements of their own languages. Other than English, modern lingua franca languages include Swahili in East Africa, Hindustani in South Asia, and Russian in the former Soviet Union.

### **Expansion Diffusion of English**

In the past, a lingua franca achieved widespread distribution through migration and conquest. In recent centuries use of English spread around the world primarily through the British Empire. In contrast, the current growth in use of English around the world is a result not of military conquest, nor of migration by English-speaking people. Rather, the current growth in the use of English is an example of expansion diffusion, the spread of a trait through the snowballing effect of an idea rather than through the relocation of people. Unlike most examples of expansion diffusion . . . recent changes in English have percolated up from common usage and ethnic dialects rather than directed down to the masses by elite people. Examples include dialects spoken by African-Americans and residents of Appalachia. African-American slaves preserved a distinctive dialect in part to communicate in a code not understood by their white masters.

In the twentieth century . . . living in racially segregated neighborhoods within northern cities and attending segregated schools, many blacks preserved their distinctive dialect. That dialect has been termed Ebonics, a combination of ebony and phonics. The American Speech, Language and Hearing Association has classified Ebonics as a distinct dialect, with a recognized vocabulary, grammar, and word meaning. Natives of Appalachian communities, such as in rural West Virginia, also have a distinctive dialect.

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Use of Ebonics is controversial within the African-American community. Similarly, speaking an Appalachian dialect produces both pride and problems.

### **Diffusion to Other Languages**

English words have become increasingly integrated into other languages.

**Franglais.** The French are particularly upset with the increasing worldwide domination of English. French is an official language in 26 countries and for hundreds of years served as the lingua franca for international diplomats. The widespread use of English in the French language is called **franglais**, a combination of *français* and *anglais*, the French words for French and English.

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**Spanglish.** English is diffusing into the Spanish language spoken by 17 million Hispanics in the United States, a process called **Spanglish**.

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For example, shorts (**pants**) becomes **chores**, and vacuum cleaner becomes **bacuncliner**. Spanglish is a richer integration of English with Spanish than the mere borrowing of English words. New words have been invented in Spanglish that do not exist in English but would be useful if they did. Spanglish has become especially widespread in popular culture, such as song lyrics, television, and magazines aimed at young Hispanic women, but it has also been adopted by writers of serious literature.

### **Key Terms**

British Received Pronunciation (BRP) (p.152)

Creole or creolized language (p.162)