# Ch. 5 Language

Key Issue 1: Where are English-language speakers distributed?

*Language- a system of communication through speech, or other conventional methods, that groups of people understand to have the same meaning.*

*Literary tradition- a system of written communication.*

Many languages lack a literary tradition, therefore impeding advancement and documentation.

*Official language- language designated for use by a country’s government.*

English is spoken by one-half a billion people across the globe. It is the official language of at least 42 countries; two billion people live in one of these countries.

The widespread diffusion of English is thanks, in large part, to the colonial practices of the British. Through their colonization of the Earth, English was spread eventually to N. America, Ireland, S. Asia, S. Pacific, S. Africa, and numerous other remote locations.

Little is known of the British Isles until the Celts arrived around 2000 B.C., speaking languages that we appropriately call, Celtic. Around 450 B.C. Germanic tribes, the Anglos, Saxons, and Jutes, invaded and pushed the Celts farther north and ruled “England” for several hundred years. Modern English would resemble German to a large degree had not the Normans invaded in 1066 A.D. These French ruled for nearly 300 years, and made their language the official language of the Isles. Once they were driven out, few people wished to speak the

“enemy’s” language anymore, but the French influence on the language had already taken place. Today’s English can be seen as a hybrid of the original Germanic languages, with some Celtic and French mixed in. (along with varying degrees of influence from a large number of other languages.)

*Dialect- a regional variation of a language distinguished by a distinctive vocab, spelling, and pronunciation.* English has the largest # of dialects b/c of its wide diffusion. *Standard language- a dialect well-established and recognized for government use.*

*British Received Pronunciation- the official dialect of English used by politicians, broadcasters, and actors in Great Britain.*

“My Fair Lady” was a musical in the 50’s that depicted social effects of dialect.

Differences between British and American English are:

1. Vocab- different mainly because settlers in America encountered new objects and experiences, many of which were assigned Native American names.
2. Grammar- distinctly different because Americans had a strong national feeling for an independent identity. The first American dictionary, published by Noah Webster was purposely altered from British spelling to differentiate the two languages.
3. Pronunciation- the most obvious reason for differences is that large expanse of water that seems to separate the U.S. from the U.K. The extreme physical separation caused the language to diverge into two very distinct dialects.

Dialects within the States are numerous and varied due to the number of people in the U.S., the wide land area across which the language is spoken, the historical mobility of the American people as they ventured across the West, and the varied ethnicity of the English-speakers within this country.

Three main dialects exist in England:

-Northern

-Midland

-Southern

These are used to classify many of the dialects within the U.S.

*Isogloss- the word-usage boundary that can be constructed for any word.*

Key Issue 2: Why is English related to other languages?

*Language family- a collection of languages related through a common ancestor that existed long before recorded history.*

*-Language branch- a collection of languages within a family that are related through a common ancestor that existed several thousand years ago.*

*--Language group- collection of languages within a branch that share a common origin in relatively recent history.*

Largest family is Indo-European, spoken by nearly 3 billion people.

Below is an example of the break-down of a language family: INDO-EUROPEAN

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| GERMANIC | ALBANIAN |
| -English, German, etc. | ARMENIAN |
| INDO-IRANIAN | GREEK |
| -Indic (eastern) Hindi, Urdu, etc. | ARMENIAN |
| -Iranian (western) Farsi, Kurdish, etc. |  |
| ROMANCE | \*These 4 are used less |
| -Med. Sea languages, French, Italian, etc. | extensively than the others. |

BALTO-SLAVIC

-Russian, Polish, Czech, etc.

*Vulgar Latin- the Latin that people in the provinces learned; substandard.*

Evidence exists that a “superfamily” language once was used, known as Proto-IndoEuropean. However, little conclusive evidence has been found, and the issue is hotly debated among linguists. Most theories on the diffusion of language are conjecture and invalidated.

Key Issue 3: Where are other language families distributed?

The main language families of the world, other than Indo-European (spoken by 50% of world population) are:

-Sino-Tibetan spoken by 20% of pop; in China and S.E. Asia

-Afro-Asiatic spoken by 5% of pop; N. Africa and S.W. Asia and Mid East

-Austronesian spoken by 5% of pop; S.E. Asia

-Niger-Congo spoken by 5% of pop; sub-Saharan Africa -Dravidian spoken by 5% of pop; in India -Remaining 10% speak one of following:

-Nilo-Saharan

-Amerindian

-Caucasian (Georgian)

-Altaic

-Uralic

-Japanese

-Korean

-Ausro-Asiatic

Key Issue 4: Why do people preserve local languages?

*Ideogram- “letters” that represent ideas or concepts, not specific pronunciations.*

*Extinct language- language no longer spoken or used in daily activities by anyone in the world.*

*Isolated language- a language unrelated to any other and not attached to any specific branch.*

Ex. Basque, spoken by over 1 million people in the Pyrenees Mts. of Spain. Icelandic, spoken by the Norwegians who originally emigrated to Iceland and remained isolated for several hundred years.

*Lingua franca- a universal language understood globally.*

*Pidgin language- a simplified version of a lingua franca, used to communicate typically in areas where contact is just beginning.*

*Ebonics- the dialect spoken by many blacks who migrated from the South to the large cities in the North who wished to preserve their distinctive accents.*

*Franglais- the hybrid English-French language resulting from a combination of the two. Spanglish- similar to franglais, only a English-Spanish hybridization.*

The most obvious, and the main, reason for preserving a language is to preserve language diversity and to promote a self-identity. Many groups have revived their languages recently in order to help preserve an integral part of their culture.

Examples include Hebrew and Celtic.