

GEOGRAPHY OF CULTURE RELIGION AND LANGUAGE

Culture is a learned behavior and a human construct. Culture exists to answer questions. Some of the questions that are answered are philosophical or ideological, for example, “Where did we come from?” or “What is acceptable behavior?” Other questions revolve around daily life. “How do we secure shelter, clothe ourselves, produce food, and transmit information?” Culture provides us with guidance for our lives. It both asks and answers questions. Children, from an early age, start asking “What is my place in the world?” Culture helps to answer that.

The word culture itself comes from the Latin word **cultura**, meaning cultivation or growing. This is precisely what humans do with both their material and abstract cultural components. Humans, since early childhood, learn to shape, create, share, and change their culture. Culture is the very vehicle we use to navigate through our environments. Culture is a form of communication and it evolves. And as a type of compass, it leads.

Components of Culture

At the most simplistic levels, culture can be either concrete and tangible, or abstract. Either way, culture is used to express identity for both individuals and groups. And whether it is concrete or abstract, again it is a human construct used as a way to create a sense of belonging. People convey culture through various outlets such as festivals, food, and architecture. They are able to meet their worldwide fundamental needs while maintaining individual group qualities. ***Culture can be classified into three different categories: mentifacts (ideas or beliefs), artifacts (goods or technology), and sociofacts (forms of social organization).***

Technology is a human construct. From our earliest inventions (fire, weapons) to a supercomputer, the things that people build are products of their perceived needs, their technical abilities and their available resources. Technology includes clothing, foods and housing. Another name for technology is material culture. Think of material culture as the material that archaeologists study. The materials that we use are often left behind for later people to study, like the clay tablets the Sumerians used to record their writing or the remnants of an Iroquois longhouse used for shared living. Other components of culture (like ideas) leave fewer traces. We can find material culture related to burial practices that date back millennia but may not always have the material evidence to show how people grieve.

Lifestyle is a component of culture that can be overlooked, but it is vitally important. In many cultures, a family is a very large unit and people can tell in great detail their exact relationship to everyone else in a place. In the modern context, a family could consist of a single parent and a child and it is possible to live in a neighborhood filled with unrelated people and not know the name of a single neighbor.

Culture can be seen either through the lens of a microscope or through that of a telescope. **Folk culture** is local, small and tightly bound to the immediate landscape. **Popular culture** is large, dispersed, and globalizing. These two forms of culture are not totally separated. They are related and both currently exist in the world. Prior to about 2008, most people on Earth lived in rural communities, often practicing a folk culture. The world as a whole is moving toward popular culture.

Cultural Reproduction

As human beings, we reproduce in two ways: biologically and socially. Physically we reproduce ourselves through having children. However, culture consists solely of learned behavior. In order for culture to reproduce itself, it has to be taught. This is what makes culture a human creation. How is culture transmitted? Human beings are natural mimics. This is the way we learn to speak, and it is the way we learn the rest of our culture as well. We learn through observation and, subsequently, through practice. At another scale, mimicry is the mechanism that drives cultural diffusion. Human beings copy the things we like. The old line “Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery,” perfectly describes the human desire to incorporate successful adaptations.

How people have shared culture has changed drastically over time. This can partly be attributed to the channels in which we share culture. In the past, culture was shared orally and in person. Words eventually became written, the written became electronic, and we now have access to things from anywhere at any time.

Culture Hearths

Human beings have always had learned behaviors, it's one of the defining characteristics of human beings. Cultural evolution describes the increasing complexity of human societies over time. Our earliest cultures were simple. We lived in small groups, ranged across fairly large areas, and lived off the natural landscape. Human impact on the environment is less than it is now, but there was an impact. Earlier peoples burned forests to clear land and flush game, and in some places hunted the mega fauna to extinction.

Recognizable cultures have places of origin. The word culture refers to cultivation or growing. We care for something; we nurture an idea as it grows. All cultural elements have a place of origin. Some places have been responsible for a great deal of cultural development. We call these

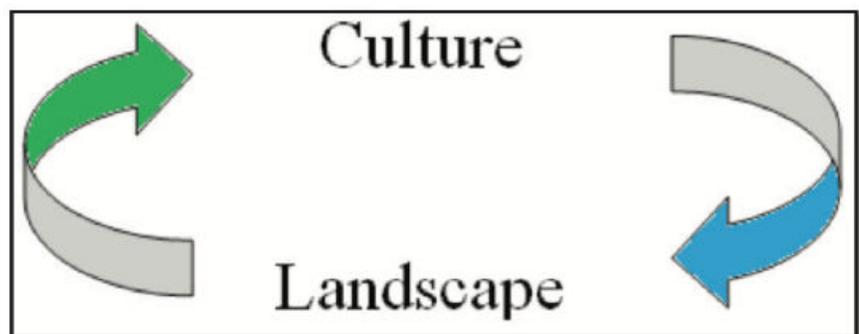
places culture hearths. Culture hearths provided many of the cultural elements (technologies, organizational structures, and ideologies) that would diffuse to other places and later times. Cultural hearths provide operational scripts for societies.

Culture hearths are closely associated with the foods that they domesticated. Food is an important cultural element due to the fact that it is both a technology as well as form of expression. Although the preceding map shows areas of ancient civilization, these are not the only places that have contributed to contemporary cultures. Ideas can arise anywhere, but ancient ideas collected in these places.

Cultures incorporate pieces of other cultures. Some recognizable themes in creation myths are stories of great floods or other cataclysmic events, and these types of stories recycled through history. Languages without writing will often reuse another language's writing system. Once again, desirable characteristics get copied.

Cultures' beings rely on natural resources to survive. In the case of rural cultures, those resources tend to be local. For urban cultures, those resources can either be local, or they can be products brought from great distances. Either way, cultures influence landscapes and in turn landscapes influence cultures.

The physical landscape consists of places like the Appalachian Mountains that stretch across a large portion of North America, the Mongolian-Manchurian grasslands, the Amazon river basin, or any other environment. These are landscapes that have been formed over thousands, if not millions of years by forces of nature. In order to live in places a different as these, humans have needed to adapt their lifestyles. The relationship between people, their culture, and the physical landscape is known as human-environment



interaction. This relationship is reciprocal; culture adapts to a particular place, and that place is changed by people. *Cultural ecology refers to the types of landscapes created by the interaction of people and their physical environment.*

Landscapes are cultural byproducts. The way that we use the local resources generates the visible landscape. Architecture, economic activities, clothing and entertainment are all visible to anyone interested in looking at a place. Because the physical landscape varies across space, and because culture varies across space, then the cultural landscape is variable as well. Different

people can have different adaptations to similar places. Conversely, places far from one another may have similar adaptations to climate or other factors.

Cultural landscapes can be considered as both history and narrative. Power is written into the landscape. We make statues to commemorate the wealthy and the politically connected in rich places. We place garbage dumps and airports in poor places. Looking at the landscape as a record of history, power, and representation is known as landscape-as-text. The landscape can be read in the same that a book can be read.

The largest differences between landscapes that we see now are the differences between the rural and the industrial and between places that are less integrated with the rest of the world and those that are heavily integrated (globalized). Global places are becoming homogenized.

Cultural Change

A sensible question to ask might be “Where did all the cultures come from?” As people moved into new places, they adapted and changed, and the new places were changed in turn. People change over time as well. Circumstances change in a place. Groups who move into a forest will need to adapt if they cut down all the trees. Groups that adopt a new crop will see their lives change. Divergence could be as simple as borrowing a word to describe an invention. All cultures change.

Culture Regions

We can sort the world into regions based on cultural characteristics. A region is an area characterized by similarity or a cohesiveness that sets it apart from other regions. Regions are mental constructs; the lines between places are imaginary. When someone talks about the English-speaking world or Latin America, they are referring to culture

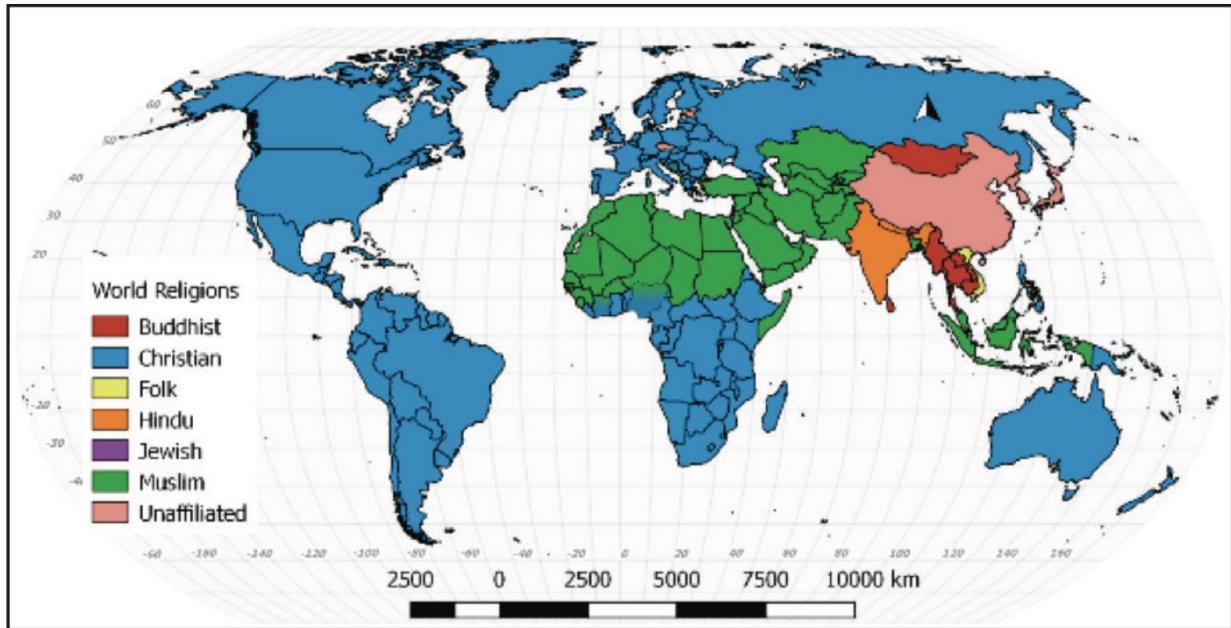
RELIGION

We often break religions into one of two basic types: **ethnic and universalizing**. Ethnic religions are associated within one group of people. They make little to no effort at proselytizing (converting others), although that possibility may exist. The largest ethnic religion is Hinduism. Judaism is another well-known ethnic religion. Through migration, both of these religions have become dispersed around much of the world, but they are closely tied to their own ethnic groups.

Universalizing religions seek to convert others. For some religions, it is a requirement for practitioners to spend part of their lives in missionary work attempting to convert others.

Another way of dividing religions is into the categories of **polytheistic** (many gods) and **monotheistic** (one god). Although the difference between monotheistic religions and polytheistic

religions seems unbridgeable, there are religions that have managed to combine elements of polytheism and monotheism into the same religion. **Combining two religions to create a new religion is known as syncretism.**



The Religious Contribution to Culture and Identity

Religions are not isolated social phenomena. They exist within a cultural complex that nurtures and sustains them, or conversely, demeans and undermines them. Religion can be closely bound to other elements of identity -language, or nationality. In many societies, the boundaries between religion and social life, family structure, and law and politics are nonexistent. Religion in those places is the center of all life and everything else revolves around religious concepts. A place that is purely governed by a religious structure is known as a theocracy. There are very few of these in the modern world, although many states have strong religious influence. Many modern societies have built barriers between religious influence and political life. These places are called secular and are much more common in the developed world.

Religion, along with ethnicity and language, are very often core components of an individual's identity. It can define the way a person sees the world, what clothing is appropriate, gender roles, employment, and even your position within the greater society. As such, it has tremendous cultural influence, and this influence is visible in the landscape.

Esthetics and religion

Religion has a motivating factor that few other social phenomena can match. When people are doing something for God, they generally have fewer limits than in other spheres of life. One of the ways this lack of limits is manifest in the landscape is through religious architecture.

Sacred spaces can be religious structures, but they can also be historic battlefields, cemeteries, mountains, or rivers. Anything that humans use to generate a sense of the divine can be considered a sacred space. Sacred spaces have expectations of behavior. In some places, it is still possible to claim sanctuary in a sacred place. The small altars that mark roadside fatalities in the United States can be considered sacred spaces, as could a closet that is used as a prayer room.

Elements of culture may be manifest in different types of churches, temples on the landscape, as well as clothing, the food grown, and small home devotionals. Another way that religion manifests in the visible sphere is through codes of acceptable dress as well as acceptable public behaviors.

A less obvious way that religions may influence the landscape is through religious influences on **dietary choices**. Food production can be influenced by religions. Many religions have doctrine regarding what is acceptable food, and what is not. Religions that prohibit the consumption of pork will probably not have swine farms. Cattle wander through the countryside in India, since they are religiously protected from harm.

Another effect that religion has on the landscape is the **effect of pilgrimage**. Many religions have an activity that requires gathering at a particular place. Probably the best-known pilgrimage is the Hajj of Islam, but this isn't actually the largest in the world. That would be the Hindu Kumbh Mela. Pilgrimage is not just visible through the pilgrims, but in the entire infrastructure that develops to support the pilgrims.

Major Religions

Christianity is a monotheistic religion centered on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. It dates to sometime in the first century AD since the Western world uses the Christian calendar. Christianity began as an offshoot of Judaism, and includes the Hebrew Bible (known to Christians as the Old Testament) as well as the New Testament as its canonized scriptures. It has three main branches: Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. Catholic and Orthodox Christianity split roughly one thousand years ago, while the Protestant/Catholic Schism began in the sixteenth century. The split between the Orthodox and Catholic hierarchies centered on whose authority in the church was final. The split between Protestantism and Catholicism mostly centered on practices conducted by the Catholic Church that the future Protestants did not believe were suitable for a religious organization.

The three branches of Christianity have their own spatiality, with a great deal of overlap between them. Orthodox Christianity is mostly seen in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Southern Europe with notable examples in Africa (Ethiopia) and in places where large numbers of people from these places have migrated (the United States, Canada). Catholic Christianity is seen in a wider range of places. It largely formed around the historic Roman Empire, then spread to the north and west of Europe. Catholicism did not stop there, however. The age of colonial expansion transplanted Catholicism to such widespread places as the Philippines, much of the Americas and Caribbean, and large parts of Africa. Protestantism is the most recently developed Christian branch, but it has also diffused widely. The initial Protestant countries were in northern Europe, but again due to colonialism, Protestant Christianity was exported to places like the United States, South Africa, Ghana, and New Zealand. The current expansion of Christianity, particularly in Asia, is largely due to the growth of Protestantism.

Each Christian branch has developed a distinct appearance in the landscape. Orthodox churches are meant to invoke a sense of the divine. Buildings are elaborate, both inside and outside. Catholic churches also tend to be elaborate, in a similar vein to Orthodox churches, but with a different architectural tradition. This is understandable due to the fact that these two branches of Christianity arose in different places with different ideas of architectural grandeur and beauty. Protestant churches as a collective are less elaborate than their close relatives. This is a reflection of the early history of Protestant churches, which were often specific rejections of the elaborate ceremony and ostentatious display of the Catholic Church.

Islam is a monotheistic religion originating with the teachings of Muhammad , an Arab religious and political figure. The word Islam means “submission”, or the total surrender of oneself to God. An adherent of Islam is known as a Muslim, meaning “one who submits (to God).” Both Islam and Christianity inherited the idea of the chain of prophecy from Judaism. This means that figures such as Moses (Judaism) and Jesus (Christianity) are considered prophets in Islam. Muslims believe that Muhammad is the very last in that chain of prophecy. Islam has two main branches, and many smaller ones. Of the two main branches -**Sunni and Shi’a**, Sunni is much larger, comprising roughly 80% of all Muslims .The split between the two largest branches of Islam centered on the question of succession, that is to say, who would be the rightful leader of the Muslim world. Currently, there is no single voice for the global Muslim community. *Other forms of Islam include Sufi (mystical) Islam and Ahmadi Islam*. India is the number three Muslim country, but there are five times as many Hindus in India as there are Muslims.

The Muslim world is somewhat more contiguous than the Christian world. This is mostly due to the fact that the Muslim expansion did not occur in two phases in the same way that Christianity did. As can be seen in the following map, Sunni and Shi’a countries are somewhat spatially

separated. Only the countries of Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan, and Bahrain are majority Shi'a. There are sizable minority Muslim sects in the world. Many of these groups, such as the Ahmadiyya, are subject to discrimination by other Muslim populations and/or governments. The world's most theocratic governments are Muslim, particularly those of Iran and Saudi Arabia. This is notable in that these two countries are also regional rivals and the two most powerful states in the Muslim world.

Buddhism is an offshoot of Hinduism that dates to the fifth century BCE. It was founded by Siddhartha Gautama near the modern border between Nepal and India. The three largest branches of Buddhism are Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. The main differences between the branches are their approaches to canonized doctrine.

Hinduism is a religious tradition that originated in the Indian subcontinent .Its origins can be traced to the ancient Vedic civilization (1500 BCE), a product of the invasion of Indo-European peoples. A conglomerate of diverse beliefs and traditions that assembled organically over a period of centuries, Hinduism has no single founder. Due to its concurrent growth with Indian civilization, Hinduism has historically been tightly bound to the caste system, although the modern Indian state has worked to ameliorate the more damaging effects of this relationship.

Chinese Religions Not strictly located in China, Chinese religions are closely tied to Daoism (a nature religion), Confucianism (a philosophy of living), and ancestor worship. Chinese religious structures are associated with people of Chinese descent within and external to China. Because of the diversity of religious practices and beliefs, this category is best thought of as a complex of beliefs, rather than a defined set of beliefs and practices.

Sikhism is a 15th Century amalgamation of Islam and Hinduism. It is in many ways emblematic of syncretic religions. Syncretic religions are created by the combination of two or more religions, with the addition of doctrinal elements to create cohesion between the disparate pieces. Sikhism reconciles Hinduism and Islam by recasting Hindu gods as aspects of a single god, in a manner similar to the Catholic Trinity. Although heavily associated with the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent, Sikhism has spread widely through relocation diffusion

Judaism is a monotheistic religion originating in the Bronze Age in the eastern Mediterranean. Although it has no single founder, it holds the Torah as its holy book. In the modern context of Judaism, there are three major forms—Orthodox, Conservative and Reform—each with their own set of interpretations of correct practice. Judaism, as the initial Abrahamic religion, influenced other religions (particularly Christianity and Islam).

Animism, Jainism, Bahai, Shinto and Others

This catch-all category combines together religions that are all quite different. They are here due to their similar ties to places or ethnicities, not because they share any doctrinal or historical connections. Before continuing on a discussion of the following religions, it is important to make a point clear. It is possible to practice more than one religion. Many people in the world practice two or more religions with no sense of contradiction. In many parts of the world, pre-Christian or pre-Islamic beliefs persist alongside the newer religions.

Animism is a broad category, found in a variety of environments. The underlying theme is the idea that almost anything in the environment—people, mountains, rivers, rain, etc.—is alive and worthy of recognition as such. Animism is frequently practiced with other ideologies or philosophies.

Baha’i was an offshoot of another religion, Babism, that in itself was a derivative of Islam. Although traditional Muslims believe that Muhammad was the last of the prophets (the seal of the prophets) many religions have been founded on the idea that there could be other, later people who also spoke for god. Baha’is believe that new messengers would be sent to humanity to remind people of their universal relationship to god and one another.

Jainism is another ancient religion that arose in India. It is best known for its concept of ahimsa, or nonviolence.

Shinto, the ethnic religion of Japan is often practiced in conjunction with Buddhism. It is polytheistic and dates back centuries. The most important consideration of Shinto is that the rituals are so ingrained in Japanese national identity that the religion can either be considered vibrant and relevant, or moribund and ritualistic, depending on the perspective of the viewer.

Nonreligious

Sometimes the nonreligious are considered a religion unto themselves. This is generally not true. The nonreligious category is amorphous. There are no documents of beliefs that all nonreligious people must abide by. There is no overarching nonreligious creed. It is another catch-all category that contains a large, diverse population with divergent beliefs and practices. Within these categories, however, there are notable manifestations.

First, there are those places which are officially atheistic or non-religious. This label is problematic. It provides only the perspective of the government of these places. In many places that officially have no religions, practitioners simply do not advertise their religious affiliations. In other places, religious attendance has declined to a point that many people have no connection to a particular religious tradition. The label agnostic refers to the idea that the existence of a higher power is unknowable. It is important to point out that religions do not necessarily require the existence of a god-like force. Daoism relies on nature as its driving force.

LANGUAGE

Language is central to daily human existence. It is the principal means by which we conduct our social lives at home, neighborhood, school, work place and recreation area. It is the tool we use to plan our lives, remember our past, and express our cultural identity. We create meaning when we talk on the cell phone, send an e-mail message, read a newspaper and interpret a graph or chart. Many persons conduct their social lives using only one language. Many others, however, rely on two languages in order to participate effectively in the community, get a job, obtain a college degree and enjoy loving relationships. We live in a discourse world that incorporates ways of speaking, reading and writing, but also integrates ways of behaving, interacting, thinking and valuing. Language is embedded in cultural practices and, at the same time, symbolizes cultural reality itself.

Diffusion of Languages

Language, like any other cultural phenomenon, has an inherent spatiality, and all languages have a history of diffusion. As our ancestors moved from place to place, they brought their languages with them. As people have conquered other places, expanded demographically, or converted others to new religions, languages have moved across space. Writing systems that were developed by one people were adapted and used by others. Indo-European, the largest language family, spread across a large expanse of Europe and Asia through a mechanism that is still being debated. Later, European expansion produced much of the current linguistic map by spreading English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian far from their native European homelands.

Language is disseminated through diffusion, but in complex ways. Relocation diffusion is associated with settler colonies and conquest, but in many places, hierarchical diffusion is the form that best explains the predominant languages. People may be compelled to adopt a dominant language for social, political or economic mobility. Contagious diffusion is also seen in languages, particularly in the adoption of new expressions in a language. One of the most obvious examples has been in the current convergence of British and American English.

Classification of Languages

There is no precise figure as to the total number of languages spoken in the world today. Estimates vary between 5,000 and 7,000, and the accurate number depends partly on the arbitrary distinction between languages and dialects. Dialects (variants of the same language) reflect differences along regional and ethnic lines. In the case of English, most native speakers will agree that they are speakers of English even though differences in pronunciation, vocabulary and sentence structure clearly exist. English speakers from England, Canada, Australia, New

Zealand and United States of America will generally agree that they speak English, and this is also confirmed with the use of a standard written form of the language and a common literary heritage. However, there are many other cases in which speakers will not agree when the question of national identity and mutual intelligibility do not coincide.

The most common situation is when similar spoken language varieties are mutually understandable, but for political and historical reasons, they are regarded as different languages as in the case of Scandinavian languages. While Swedes, Danes and Norwegians can communicate with each other in most instances, each national group admits speaking a different language: Swedish, Danish, Norwegian and Icelandic. There are other cases in which political, ethnic, religious, literary and other factors force a distinction between similar language varieties: Hindi vs. Urdu, Flemish vs. Dutch, Serbian vs. Croatian, Gallego vs. Portuguese, Xhosa vs Zulu. An opposite situation occurs when spoken language varieties are not mutually understood, but for political, historical or cultural motives, they are regarded as the same language as in the case of Lapp and Chinese dialects.

Languages are usually classified according to membership in a **language** family (a group of related languages) which share common linguistic features (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar) and have evolved from a **common ancestor** (proto-language). This type of linguistic classification is known as the genetic or **genealogical approach**. Languages can also be classified according to sentence structure, this type of classification is known as **typological classification**, and is based on a comparison of the formal similarities (pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary) which exist among languages.

Language families around the world reflect centuries of geographic movement and interaction among different groups of people. The Indo-European family of languages, for example, represents nearly half of the world's population. The language family dominates nearly all of Europe, significant areas of Asia, including Russia and India, North and South America, Caribbean islands, Australia, New Zealand, and parts of South Africa. The Indo-European family of languages consists of various language branches (a collection of languages within a family with a common ancestral language) and numerous language subgroups (a collection of languages within a branch that share a common origin in the relative recent past and exhibit many similarities in vocabulary and grammar).

Indo-European Language Branches and Language Subgroups

Germanic Branch

Western Germanic Group (Dutch, German, Frisian, English)

Northern Germanic Group (Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Icelandic, Faeroese)

Romance Branch

French, Portuguese, Spanish, Catalan, Provençal, Romansh, Italian, Romanian)

Slavic Branch

West Slavic Group (Polish, Slovak, Czech, Sorbian)

Eastern Slavic Group (Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian)

Southern Slavic Group (Slovene, Serbo-Croatian, Macedonian, Bulgarian)

Celtic Branch

Britannic Group (Breton, Welsh)

Gaulish Group (Irish Gaelic, Scots Gaelic)

Baltic-Slavonic Branch

Latvian, Lithuanian

Hellenic Branch

Greek

Thracian-Illyrian Branch

Albanian

Armenian Branch

Armenian

Iranian Branch

Kurdish, Persian, Baluchi, Pashto, Tadjik

Indo-Iranian (Indic) Branch

Northwestern Group (Panjabi, Sindhi, Pahari, Dardic)

Eastern Group (Assamese, Bengali, Oriya)

Midland Group (Rajasthani, Hindi/Urdu, Bihari)

West and Southwestern Group (Gujarati, Marathi, Konda, Maldivian, Sinhalese)

Other languages spoken in Europe, but not belonging to the Indo-European family are subsumed in these other families: Finno-Ugric (Estonian, Hungarian, Karelian, Saami, Altaic (Turkish, Azerbaijani, Uzbek) and Basque. Some of the language branches listed above are represented by only one principal language (Albanian, Armenian, Basque, Greek), while others are spoken by diverse groups in some geographic regions (Northern and Western Germanic languages, Western and Eastern Slavic languages, Midland and Southwestern Indian languages).

The number of language families distributed around the world is sizable. The linguistic situation of specific member groups of the language family might be influenced by diverse, interacting factors: settlement history (migration, conquest, colonialism, territorial agreements), ways of living (farming, fishing, hunting, trading) and demographic strength and vitality of the speaker groups. Some languages might converge (many local varieties becoming one main language), while others might diverge (one principal language evolves into many other speech varieties). When different linguistic groups come into contact, a pidgin type of language may be the result.

A pidgin is a composite language with a simplified grammatical system and a limited vocabulary, typically borrowed from the linguistic groups involved in trade and commerce activities.

With increased globalization and interdependence among nations, English is rapidly acquiring the status of lingua franca for much of the world. In Europe, Africa and India and other geographic regions, English serves as a lingua franca across many national-state boundaries. The linguistic consequence results in countless numbers of speaker groups who must become bilingual (the ability to use two languages with varying degrees of fluency) to participate more fully in society.

Some continents have more spoken languages than others. Asia leads with an estimated 2,300 languages, followed by Africa with 2,138. In the Pacific area, there are about 1,300 languages spoken and in North and South America about 1,064 languages have been identified. Europe, even with its many nation-states, is at the bottom of the list with about 286 languages.

Ten Major Languages of the World in the Number of Native Speakers

Other important languages and related dialects, whose total number includes both native speakers and second language users, consist of following: Korean (78 million), Wu/Chinese (71 million), Telugu (75 million), Tamil (74 million), Yue/ Chinese (71 million), Marathi (71 million), Vietnamese (68 million) and Turkish (61 million).

- Language is a mental capacity that allows members of a speech community to produce and understand countless number of utterances which include grammatical elements like words, phrases and sentences.
- Language as a means of communication makes use of different communicative acts (orders, questions, apologies, suggestions) performed during conversational situations across varied social contexts. Language is a symbol of social identity and serves to express ideas, beliefs and attitudes shared by a cultural group. It is reflected in cultural stereotypes, notions about different languages, and behaviors during speech situations which presuppose the use of cultural schemata and cultural scripts.
- Languages are commonly classified according to membership in a language family such as Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan, Indo-Pacific, Mayan, Niger-Congo. Members within a family are further subdivided into branches (Germanic, Slavic, Finno-Ugric, Indo-Iranian) and the branches into subgroups (English in the Germanic branch; Spanish in the Romance branch).
- The distribution of languages around the world is influenced by numerous factors: settlement history, demographic strength, ways of living and contact with other ethno linguistic groups. Some languages become more dominant and as a result displace others that may eventually become extinct, leading to language death. The world's ten most widespread languages

include Chinese, Spanish, English, Hindi, Arabic, Portuguese, Bengali, Russian, Japanese, and Javanese.

- The number of dialects or varieties of American English has changed over time due to settlement histories, political changes (Louisiana Purchase, Mexican American War, Spanish-American War, territory annexation). Language diversity and multilingualism continue to be prevalent in the United States. Recent 2015 Census data reveal extensive language diversity in states like California, Texas, New Mexico, New York, New Jersey, Nevada, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois and Massachusetts.
- Place names provide us with cultural insights about the significance of geographic locations, important features of the landscape, the recognition of famous personalities, and local reference to distant places and times. Diverse forms of advertisement are used to inform and convince customers that the products and services offered are the worthiest in the marketplace.
- The use of different social media technologies (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat, among others) allows for online interaction between many senders and receivers. Users can create and share information, ideas, photos, career interests, and other concerns via virtual communities and networks.
- Geographic mapping of the use and users of web-based technologies (desktop computers, smart phones and tablet computers) is unattainable at this time. Research methods from the social science (questionnaires, oral interviews, focus group sessions) may reveal some insights about the pervasive ways individuals, communities and organizations communicate in the virtual world.

Language Spread and Language Loss

Of the top 20 languages of the world, all these languages have their origin in south or east Asia or in Europe. There is not one from the Americas, Oceania or Africa. The absence of a major world language in these regions seems to be precisely where most of the linguistic diversity is concentrated.

- English, French and Spanish are among the world's most widespread languages due to the imperial history of the home countries from where they originated.
- Two-thirds (66%) of the world's population speak 12 of the major languages around the globe
- About 3 percent of the world's population accounts for 96 percent of all the languages spoken today. Of the current living languages in the world, about 2,000 have less than 1,000 native speakers.

- Nearly half of the world’s spoken languages will disappear by the end of this century. Linguistic extinction (language death) will affect some countries and regions more than others.
- In the United States many endangered languages are spoken by Native American groups who reside in reservations. Many languages will be lost in Amazon rain forest, sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania, aboriginal Australia and Southeast Asia.
- English is used as an official language in at least 35 countries, including a number of countries in Africa (Botswana, Kenya, Namibia, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda among others), Asia (India, Pakistan, Philippines), Pacific Region (Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Zealand), Caribbean (Puerto Rico, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica), Ireland and Canada.
- English is not by law (de jure) the official language in the United Kingdom, United States and Australia. English does enjoy the status of “national language” in these countries due to its power and prestige in institutions and society.
- English does not have the highest number of native speakers, but it is the world’s most commonly studied language. More people learn English than French, Spanish, Italian, Japanese, German and Chinese combined.

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