Cultural Geography

Language and the Landscape

Linguistic Geography
Objectives

• Students will recall common linguistic and dialect patterns in the United States.
Introduction

• Language is a powerful shaper of who we are, commonly considered the central core of cultural identity.

• Where is this evident in a recent “cultural war”? – “Illegal Alien vs. ___________?”

• Geolinguistics is a growing subdiscipline in geography.

• In the last decade, cultural theory has increasingly argued that language and the control of systems of meaning as the primary source of political power.
Some Definitions

• What is a language?
• Language families are large and old
• Language branches are smaller and formed more recently
• Language groups are more closely related and aren’t that old
Language Tree

- Leaves are languages
- Language families are depicted as trunks.
- Groups and Branches are in between.
Chart

- Note the large percentage of Indo-European speakers.
- Includes?
- What about Sino-Tibetan?
Map of Languages

**Indo-European Family**
- Spoken across an expanse (5,000 kilometers) of land between Turkey and China
- Turkish, by far the most widely used, is written with Arabic letters.
- In 1928, the Turkish government, led by Kemal Atatürk, introduced its own alphabet with the Roman alphabet as a symbol of modernization of the culture and economy.

**Altaic Family**
- Spoken across an expanse (5,000 kilometers) of land between Turkey and China
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**Sino-Tibetan Family**
- Spoken in China
- No single Chinese language is spoken, the most important is Mandarin (or, as in the Chinese call it, pu tong hua, or common speech).
- Chinese languages are based on 6700 one-syllable words, which in turn can be combined to form an unlimited number of words.
- Chinese languages are written with a collection of thousands of characters, mostly ideograms, which represent ideas or concepts rather than specific pronunciations.

**Japanese**
- An example of an isolated language, unrelated to other language families.
- Japanese is written in part with Chinese ideograms, but it uses two systems of phonetic symbols, like Western languages.

**Austronesian Family**
- Spoken in Southeast Asia
- Vietnamese, the most spoken Austro-Asiatic language, is written with the Roman alphabet.
- The Vietnamese alphabet was derived in the 17th century by Roman Catholic missionaries from Europe, who brought with them their form of writing.

**Afro-Asiatic Family**
- Includes Arabic and Hebrew.
- Arabic is the major Afro-Asiatic language, an official language in 22 African countries of the Middle East, and the language of Islam's holiest book, the Koran.
- Hebrew, the language of much of the Jewish Bible and Christian Old Testament, is a rare case of an extinct language that was revived in the 19th century as a modern language used in Israel (see page 114).

**Dravidian Family**
- Languages spoken in southern India and northern Sri Lanka.
- Between 150 and 200 million people speak four languages in this family.
- Origin of Dravidians is unknown, but scholars generally believe that the language family was once spoken across much of South Asia.

**Niger-Congo Family**
- More than 3,000 distinct languages have been documented in Africa, but no one knows the precise number, and scholars disagree on classifying these known into families.
- Most lack a written tradition and only 3% are spoken by more than 1 million people.
- More than 95% of the people in sub-Saharan Africa speak languages that are generally classified as belonging to the Niger-Congo family.

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Language Families - West
Indo-European Speakers Worldwide

- Note the main groups.
- English is closely related to what other language?
Germanic Languages

- Share both common words and structural similarities.
Romance Languages

- Evolved from Latin
- Notice the gray patches on the map.
- To what do they correspond?
Indo-Iranian Languages

- More speakers than other branches.
- Very confusing mix of languages and alphabets.
- Dravidian?
- Hindi
Which of the following languages is LEAST related to English?

- A. German
- B. Farsi
- C. Hindi
- D. French
• Why is English so widespread?
• English is used for a variety of technical and legal matters worldwide.
• It’s also good for business!
• How did it get this way?
Preservation

- Many languages are becoming extinct.
- Canada?
- United States?
- What language was resurrected from the dead?
Quebecois

• Two separatist referenda failed during the last 20 years.
• Arête!
Quebec City (Ville de Quebec?)

- The irony of the sign?
Basque

• What do you know about this linguistic minority here in California?
Spanglish

• The US has a number of linguistic challenges as well.
• Difficult to preserve culture without language.
• Difficult to enter mainstream without language.
• Irony?
LA!

• How does the size of Los Angeles permit this phenomena?
• The challenge and beauty of living in Los Angeles represented on a sign in Northridge.
• Bladerunner?
Which language is nearly extinct in South Louisiana?

- A. French Creole
- B. Cajun French
- C. Cajun Spanish
- D. Gullah/Geechy French
Dialects

• What is a dialect?
• What is an accent?
• In addition to region, what other factors contribute to dialect?
English Dialects in the United States

- Three major dialects are spoken by three major subcultural groups.
  - Northern
  - Midland
  - Southern

- Consider the various expressions for “highway”

- What other words or terms are used in one part of the country but not in others?
Major US Dialect Regions (fig)
Massive Dialect Map

• http://aschmann.net/AmEng/#SmallMapCanada
Linguistic Isoglosses (fig)
What is the underlying meaning of the words on this water tower, just south of Cincinnati in Northern Kentucky on I-75, a major North-South passageway?
• http://www.popvssoda.com/
• A website where you once could vote…
• An outstanding data collection device.
• Or based on tweets:
• http://blog.echen.me/2012/07/06/soda-vs-pop-with-twitter/
• Are there other terms that you can think of that you could set up a website about?.
Ebonics

- Partly a variant of the Southern Dialect
- Many Southerners now speaking Midland English.
- Center of a controversy in early 1990s when Oakland school board suggested Ebonics a “language”.
- Partly a pidginized English
- Why is this geographic?
Ebonics

- Multiple Varieties of Ebonics - not just slang
- Pulpit Ebonics: the linguistic style of the black churches
- Sports Ebonics: the linguistic style of black athletes
- Consider “the dozens” and Hip Hop
- Georgia’s Gullah Islanders
Cultural Ecology of Language

- The way we speak is also affected by the natural environment in which we live.
- Dialects and languages face many of the same barriers other cultural practices do.
Diffusion Barrier (fig)
Tangiers, Virginia

• [http://youtu.be/AIZgw09CG9E](http://youtu.be/AIZgw09CG9E)
Gullah Islands

- http://youtu.be/rCYBf-1yHml?t=27s
Appalachian Mountains

- [http://youtu.be/03iwAY4KIIIU?t=4s](http://youtu.be/03iwAY4KIIIU?t=4s)
Louisiana Swamp

- [Video](http://youtu.be/BRXcpBlteEM?t=28s)
American Plains

- [http://youtu.be/5tbsiqaqh_4](http://youtu.be/5tbsiqaqh_4)
L.A. Dialect?

• What sort of “accent” do Los Angelenos have?
• What would account for the dialect of Los Angeles?
Culturo-Linguistic Integration

• Language is an important indicator of the health, status and changing nature of wider cultural issues.

• Politics, economics, social and cultural movement are all reflected in the linguistic changes of a society.
How Does a Language Achieve Dominance or Die Out?

A. Technology (military)

B. Social Morale
   - Doesn’t always happen (Greek, Chinese)

C. The Economic Development Model
   - Migration out (clearance)
   - Migration in (changeover).

D. Language and Religion
   Do rainforest languages even have a term for “desert”?
Language and Power

-language is a powerful tool in the maintenance of political arrangements (on both sides of the coin)

Consider the evolution of the term "mugging" in the British press.
Linguistic Landscapes

Toponyms (place names)

- serve as reminders of migration patterns, ethnicity and religion.
- lots of places have Indian names
- what place names in California serve as indicators of past political arrangements?
- can you name any?
Toponyms as Clue to the Past (fig)

Each dot = one Arabic toponym
Linguistic Landscape of PA (fig)
Penn-German Forebay Barn
(fig)
What American term did British newspapers begin using in the late 1970s, that sparked British fears about crime?

- A. Rolling
- B. Mugging
- C. Pillaging
- D. Busking
“Center” and duplicate names (fig)
If you drove into a town called “Woodstock Center”, the first house you would see would most like be a(n):

• A. Saltbox
• B. Dog Trot
• C. Shotgun
• D. I-house
American landscape Project

• https://picasaweb.google.com/AmericanLandscapeProject