



Cell phone service provider advertisement in Mexico. *Feisbuquear* is a Spanglish verb meaning "to Facebook." (Courtesy of Patricia L. Price.)

The Geography of Language

LOCATING THE SPOKEN WORD

Why make up a word that doesn't exist in Spanish or English, but instead is located between the two languages?

Think about this question and photo as you read. We will revisit them in Seeing Geography on page 147.

Learning Objectives

- 4.1 Identify the geographical patterns of languages.
- 4.2 Understand how languages and dialects have come to exist, move, and change.
- 4.3 Evaluate the relationship between technology and language.
- 4.4 Explain the relationships between language and the physical environment.
- 4.5 Characterize the ways languages are visibly part of the cultural landscape.

(Courtesy of Patricia L. Price.)



Language is one of the primary features that distinguish humans from other animals. Many animals, including dolphins, whales, and birds, do indeed communicate with one another through patterned systems of sounds, movements, or scents and other chemicals. Some nonhuman primates have been taught to use sign language to communicate with humans. The complexity of human language, its ability to convey nuanced emotions and ideas, and its importance for our existence as social beings sets it apart from the communication systems used by other animals.

In many ways, language is the essence of human culture. It provides the single most common variable by which different cultural groups are identified and by which groups assert their unique identity. Language not only facilitates the cultural diffusion of innovations; it also helps to shape the way we think

about, perceive, and name our environment. **Language**, a mutually agreed-upon system of symbolic communication, is the main vehicle by which learned belief systems, customs, and skills pass from one generation to the next.

Region

4.1 Identify the geographical patterns of languages.

While there are relatively few linguistic families, the spatial variation of speech is remarkably complicated, in part because of the intricate regional patterns (**Figure 4.1**). Because language is such a central component of culture, understanding the

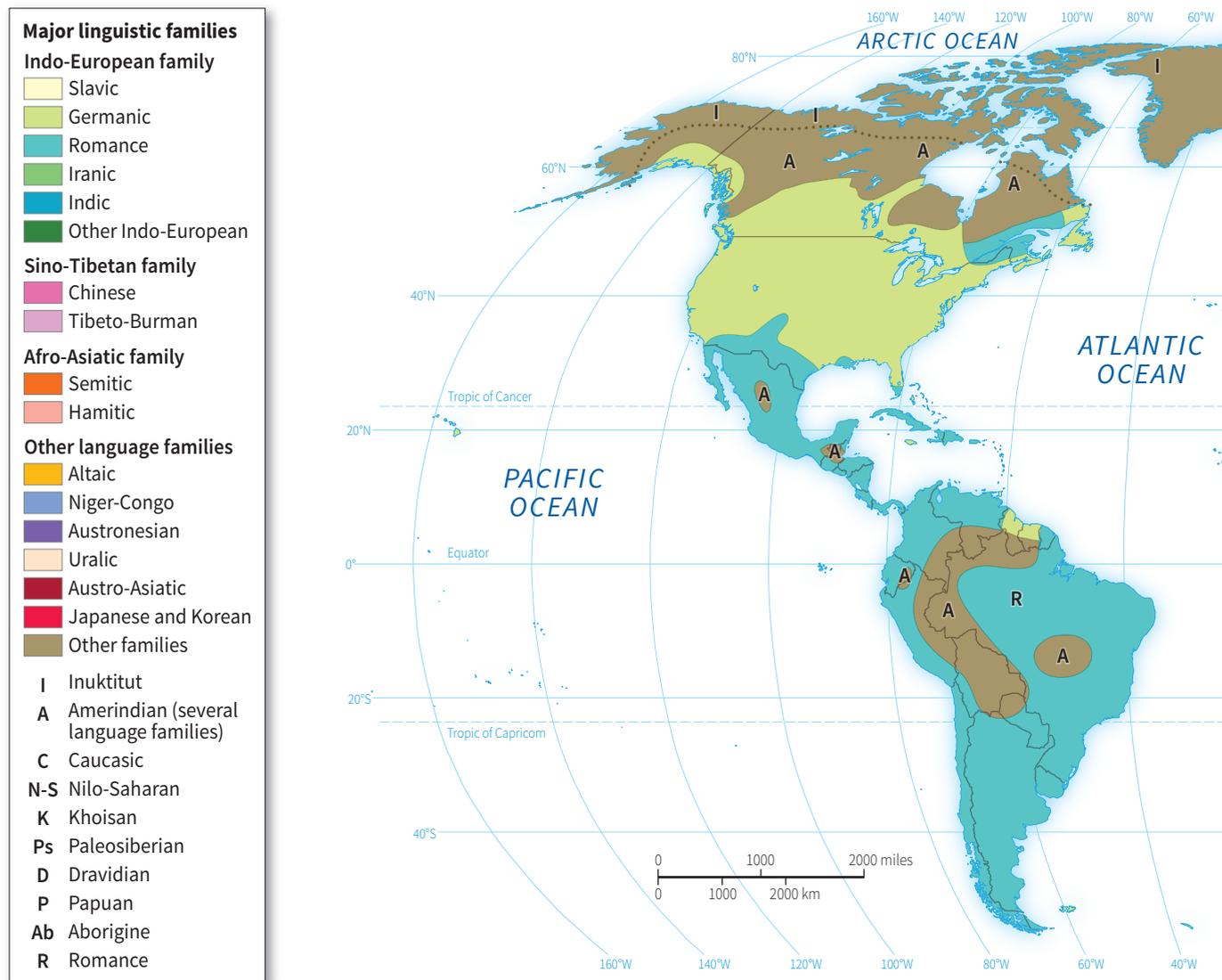


FIGURE 4.1 The major linguistic formal culture regions of the world. Although there are thousands of languages and dialects in the world, they can be grouped into a few linguistic families. The Indo-European language family represents about half of the world's population. It spread throughout the world, in part, through Europe's empire-building efforts.

spatiality of language, and how and why its patterns change over time, provides a valuable window into human geography. The logical place to begin is with the regional theme.

Language Classifications

Separate languages are those that cannot be mutually understood. In other words, a monolingual speaker of one language cannot comprehend the speaker of another (Figure 4.2, page 120). **Dialects**, by contrast, are variant forms of a language where mutual comprehension is possible. A speaker of English, for example, can generally understand that language's various dialects, regardless of whether the speaker comes from Australia, Scotland, or Mississippi. Nevertheless, a dialect is

distinctive enough to label its speaker as hailing from one place or another, or even from a particular city. About 7000 languages and many more dialects are spoken today.

When different linguistic groups come into contact, a **pidgin** language, characterized by a very small vocabulary derived from the languages of the groups in contact, often results. Pidgins primarily serve the purposes of trade and commerce: they facilitate exchange at a basic level but do not have complex vocabularies or grammatical structures. An example is Tok Pisin, which means, "talk business." Tok Pisin is a largely English-derived pidgin spoken in Papua New Guinea, where it has become the official national language in a country where many native Papuan tongues are spoken. Although New Guinea pidgin is not readily intelligible to a speaker of Standard English, certain common words such as *gut bai* ("good-bye"),

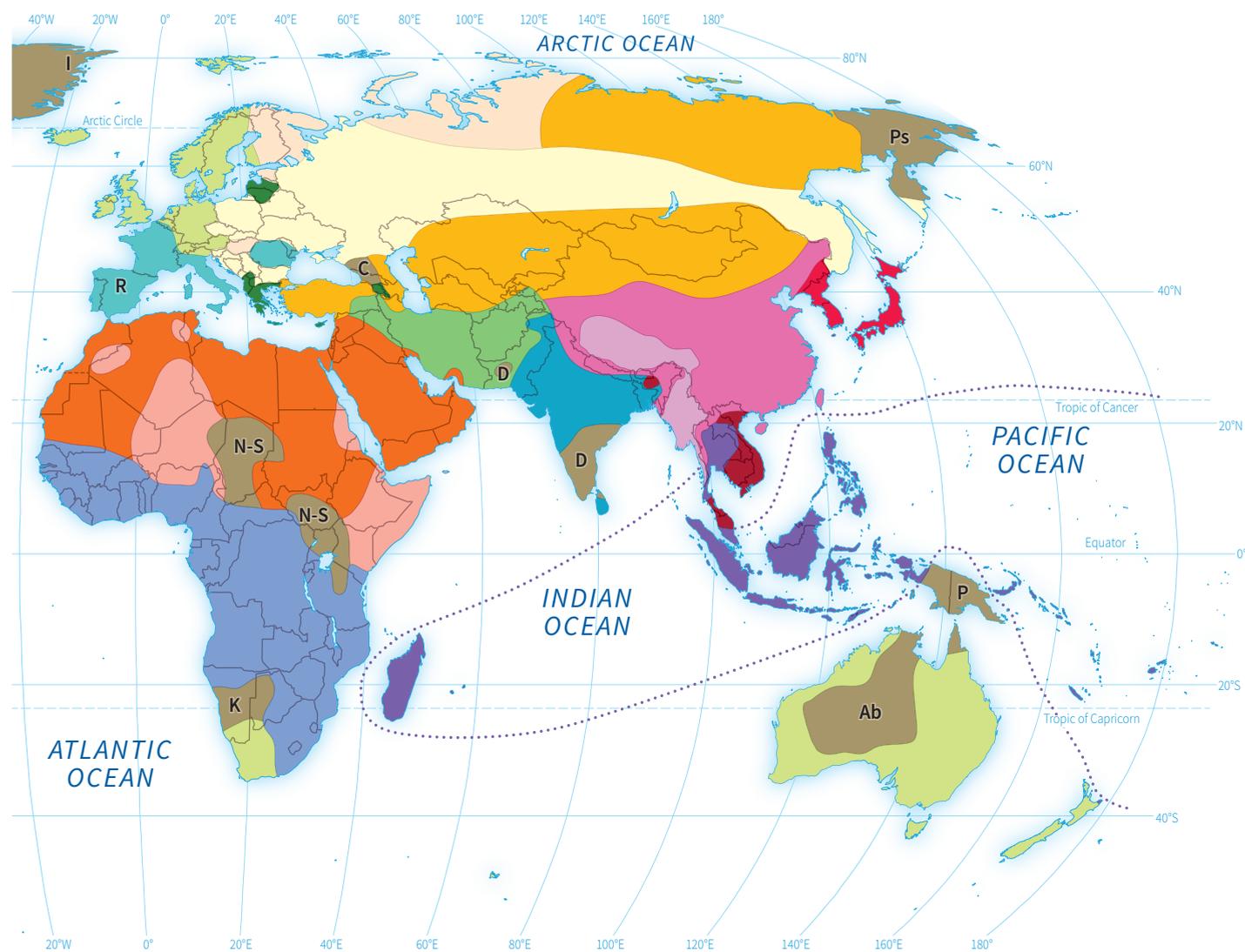


FIGURE 4.1 (continued)

HOW TO SOUND LIKE A DOG IN 14 LANGUAGES



FIGURE 4.2 How to sound like a dog in 14 languages. Although a dog obviously sounds the same in any part of the world, the speakers of various human languages render that sound very differently. (James Chapman)

tenkyu (“thank you”), and *haumas* (“how much”) reflect the influence of English. When pidgin languages acquire fuller vocabularies and become native languages of their speakers, they are called **creole** languages. Obviously, deciding precisely *when* a pidgin becomes a creole language has at least as much to do with a group’s political and social recognition as it does with what are, in practice, fuzzy boundaries between language forms (see also *Doing Geography: Active Learning*, on page 146).

Another response to the need for speakers of different languages to communicate with one another is the elevation of one existing language to the status of a **lingua franca**. A lingua franca is a language of communication and commerce spoken across a wide area where it is not a mother tongue. The Swahili language enjoys lingua franca status in much of East Africa, where inhabitants speak a number of other regional languages and dialects. English is fast becoming a global lingua franca. Finally, regions that have linguistically mixed populations may be characterized by **bilingualism**, which is the ability to speak

two languages with fluency. For example, along the U.S.–Mexico border, so many residents speak both English and Spanish (with varying degrees of fluency) that bilingualism in practice—even if not in policy—means there is no need for a lingua franca.

Language Families

One way in which geolinguists simplify the mapping of languages is by grouping them into **language families**: tongues that are related and share a common ancestry. Words are simply arbitrary sounds associated with certain meanings. Thus, when words in different languages are alike in both sound and meaning, they may well be related. Over time, languages interact with one another, borrowing words, imposing themselves through conquest, or organically diverging from a common ground. Languages and their interrelations can thus be graphically depicted as a tree with various branches (**Figure 4.3**).

Indo-European Language Family The largest and most widespread language family is the Indo-European, which is spoken on all the continents and is dominant in Europe, Russia, North and South America, Australia, and parts of southwestern Asia and India (see **Figure 4.4**, page 122). Romance, Slavic, Germanic, Indic, Celtic, and Iranian are all Indo-European subfamilies. These subfamilies, in turn, are divided into individual languages. For example, English is a Germanic Indo-European language. Six Indo-European tongues, including English, are among the 10 most spoken languages in the world as classified by the number of native speakers (**Table 4.1**, page 122).

Comparing the vocabularies of various Indo-European tongues reveals their kinship. For example, the English word *mother* reveals their kinship. For example, the English word *mother* is similar to the Polish *matka*, the Greek *meter*, the Spanish *madre*, the Farsi *madar* in Iran, and the Sinhalese *mava* in Sri Lanka. Such similarities demonstrate that these languages have a common ancestral tongue.

Sino-Tibetan Language Family Sino-Tibetan is another of the major language families of the world and is second only to Indo-European in numbers of native speakers. The Sino-Tibetan region extends throughout most of China and Southeast Asia (see **Figure 4.3**). The two language branches that make up this group, Sino- and Tibeto-Burman, are believed to have had a common origin some 6000 years ago in the Himalayan Plateau; speakers of the two language groups subsequently moved along the great Asian rivers that originate in this area. “Sino” refers to China and in this context indicates the various languages spoken by more than 1.4 billion people in China. Han Chinese (Mandarin) is spoken in a variety of dialects and serves as the official language of China. The nearly 400 languages and dialects that make up the Burmese and Tibetan branch of this language

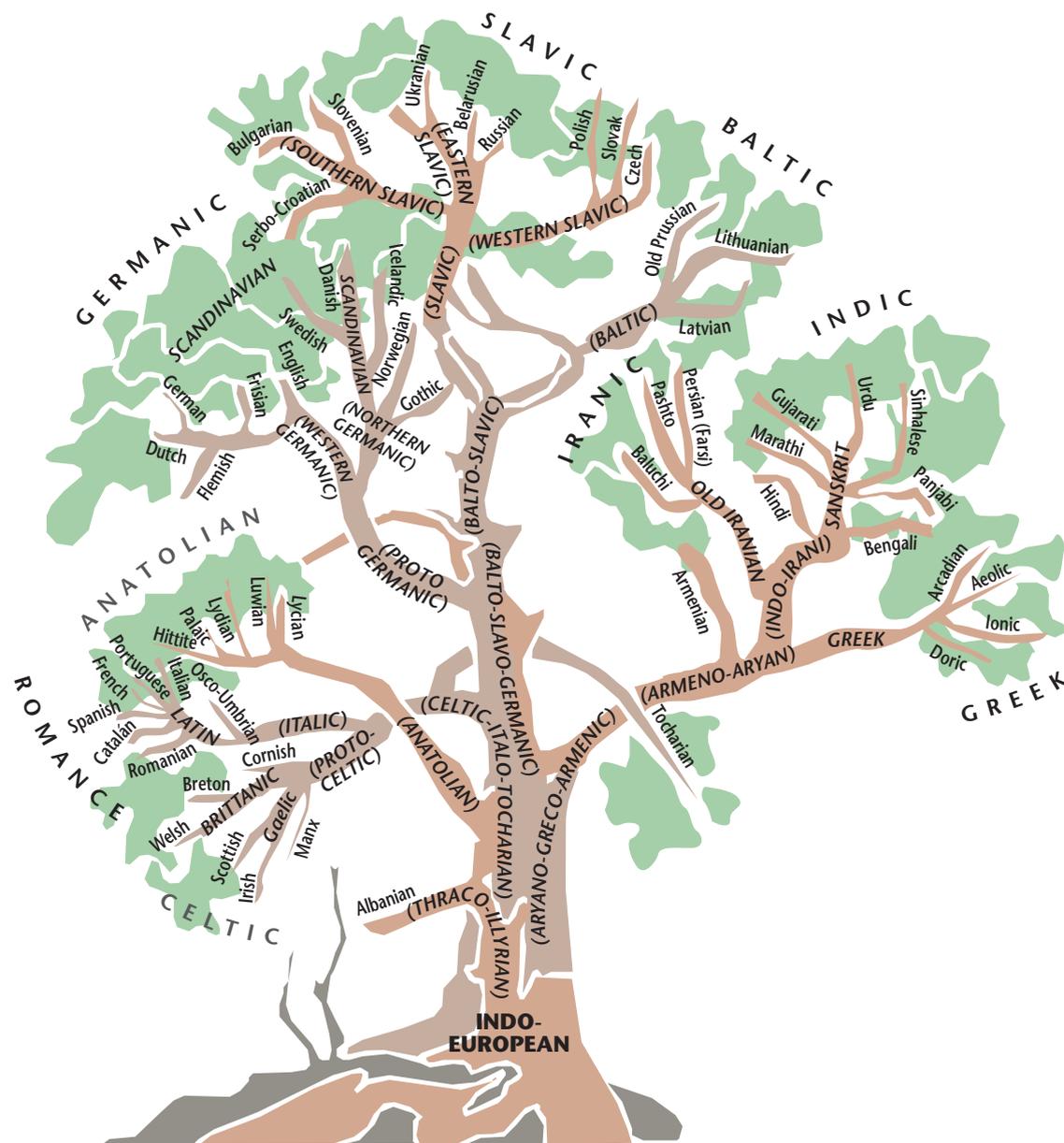


FIGURE 4.3 Linguistic family tree. Shown here is a detailed image of one branch of the linguistic family tree. (Source: Adapted from Ford.)

family border the Chinese language region on the south and west. Other East Asian languages, such as Vietnamese, have been heavily influenced by contact with the Chinese and their languages, although it is not clear that they are linguistically related to Chinese at all.

Afro-Asiatic Language Family The third major language family is the Afro-Asiatic. It consists of two major divisions: Semitic and Hamitic. The Semitic languages cover the area from the Arabian Peninsula and the Tigris-Euphrates river valley of Iraq westward through Syria and North Africa to the Atlantic Ocean. Despite the considerable size of this region, there are

fewer speakers of the Semitic languages than you might expect because most of the areas that Semites inhabit are sparsely populated deserts. Arabic is by far the most widespread Semitic language and has the greatest number of native speakers, about 295 million. Although many different dialects of Arabic are spoken, there is only one written form.

Hebrew, which is closely related to Arabic, is another Semitic tongue spoken by 9 million people worldwide (but of those, only 7 million speak it fluently). For many centuries, Hebrew was a “dead” language, used only in religious ceremonies by millions of Jews throughout the world. With the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, a common language was



FIGURE 4.4 Sign in Arab quarter of Nazareth. Many of Israel's cities are home to diverse populations. This sign at a child-care center reflects Israel's polyglot population, with its English, Arabic, and Hebrew wording. (Courtesy of Patricia L. Price.)

needed to unite the immigrant Jews, who spoke the languages of their many different countries of origin. Hebrew was revived as the official national language of what otherwise would have been a **polyglot**, or multi-language, state (Figure 4.4). Amharic, a third major Semitic tongue, is spoken today by 22 million people in the mountains of East Africa.

Smaller numbers of people who speak Hamitic languages share North and East Africa with the speakers of Semitic

languages. Like the Semitic languages, these tongues originated in Asia but today are spoken almost exclusively in Africa by the Berbers of Morocco and Algeria, the Tuaregs of the Sahara, and the Cushites of East Africa.

Other Major Language Families Most of the rest of the world's population speak languages belonging to one of six remaining major families. The Niger-Congo language family, which is spoken by about 400 million people, dominates Africa south of the Sahara Desert. The greater part of the Niger-Congo culture region belongs to the Bantu subgroup. Both Niger-Congo and its Bantu constituent are fragmented into a great many different languages and dialects, including Swahili. The Bantu and their many related languages spread from what is now southeastern Nigeria about 4000 years ago, first west and then south in response to climate change and new agricultural techniques.

Flanking the Slavic Indo-Europeans on the north and south in Asia are the speakers of the Altaic language family, including Turkic, Mongolic, and several other subgroups. The Altaic homeland lies largely in the inhospitable deserts, tundra, and coniferous forests of northern and central Asia. Also occupying tundra and grassland areas adjacent to the Slavs is the Uralic family. Finnish and Hungarian are the two most widely spoken Uralic tongues, and both enjoy the status of official languages in their respective countries.

As depicted in **Figure 4.5**, one of the most remarkable language families in terms of distribution is the Austronesian. Representatives of this group probably originated from

TABLE 4.1 The 10 Leading Languages in Numbers of Native Speakers*

Language	Family	Speakers (in millions)	Main Areas Where Spoken
Chinese	Sino-Tibetan	1284	China, Taiwan, Singapore
Spanish	Indo-European	437	Spain, Latin America, southwestern United States
English	Indo-European	372	British Isles, United States, Caribbean, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Philippines, former British colonies in tropical Asia and Africa
Arabic	Afro-Asiatic	295	Middle East, North Africa
Bengali	Indo-European	292	Bangladesh, eastern India
Hindi	Indo-European	260	Northern India, Pakistan
Portuguese	Indo-European	219	Portugal, Brazil, southern Africa
Russian	Indo-European	154	Russia, Kazakhstan, parts of Ukraine and other former Soviet republics
Japanese	Japanese and Korean	128	Japan
Lahnda	Indo-European	84.3	Pakistan

*"Native speakers" means mother tongue.

Source: Ethnologue, 2017, <http://www.ethnologue.com/statistics/size>.



FIGURE 4.5 Map of the Pacific language family tree. This map shows the settlement of the Pacific by Austronesian language family speakers. By studying the relationships between these languages, the settlement history of the region is revealed. (Source: Adapted from <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/01/090122141146.htm>.)

modern-day Taiwan. Today, speakers of the Austronesian languages live mainly on tropical islands stretching from Madagascar, off the east coast of Africa, through Indonesia and the Pacific islands, to Hawaii and Easter Island. This longitudinal span is more than half the distance around the world. The north–south, or latitudinal, range of this language area is bounded by Hawaii and Taiwan in the north and New Zealand in the south. The largest single language in this family is Javanese, with 75.5 million native speakers, but the most geographically widespread is Polynesian.

Japanese and Korean, with about 205 million speakers combined, probably form another Asian language family. The two perhaps have some link to the Altaic family, but even their kinship to each other remains controversial and unproven.

In Southeast Asia, the Vietnamese, Cambodians, Thais, and some tribal peoples of Malaysia and parts of India speak languages that constitute the Austro-Asiatic family. They occupy an area into which Sino-Tibetan, Indo-European, and Austronesian languages have all encroached.

Mobility

4.2 Understand how languages and dialects have come to exist, move, and change.

Different types of cultural diffusion have helped shape the linguistic map. Relocation diffusion has been extremely important because languages spread when groups, in whole or in

part, migrate from one area to another. Some individual tongues or entire language families are no longer spoken in the regions where they originated, and in certain other cases the linguistic hearth is peripheral to the present distribution (compare Figures 4.3 and 4.7). Today, languages continue to evolve and change based on the shifting locations of peoples and on their needs as well as on outside forces.

Indo-European Diffusion

How did Indo-European languages arise and spread to become the largest language family on Earth? One theory suggests that the earliest speakers of the Indo-European languages lived in southern and southeastern Turkey, a region known as Anatolia, about 9000 years ago. According to the **Anatolian hypothesis**, the initial diffusion of these Indo-European speakers was facilitated by the innovation of plant domestication. As sedentary farming was adopted throughout Europe, a gradual and peaceful expansion diffusion of Indo-European languages occurred. As these people dispersed and lost contact with one another, different Indo-European groups gradually developed variant forms of the language, causing fragmentation of the language family.

The Anatolian hypothesis has been criticized by scholars who note that specific words used for animals (particularly horses), but not agriculture, appear to link Indo-European languages to a common origin. The **Kurgan hypothesis**, which is more widely accepted than the Anatolian hypothesis, places the rise of Indo-European languages in the central Asian steppes

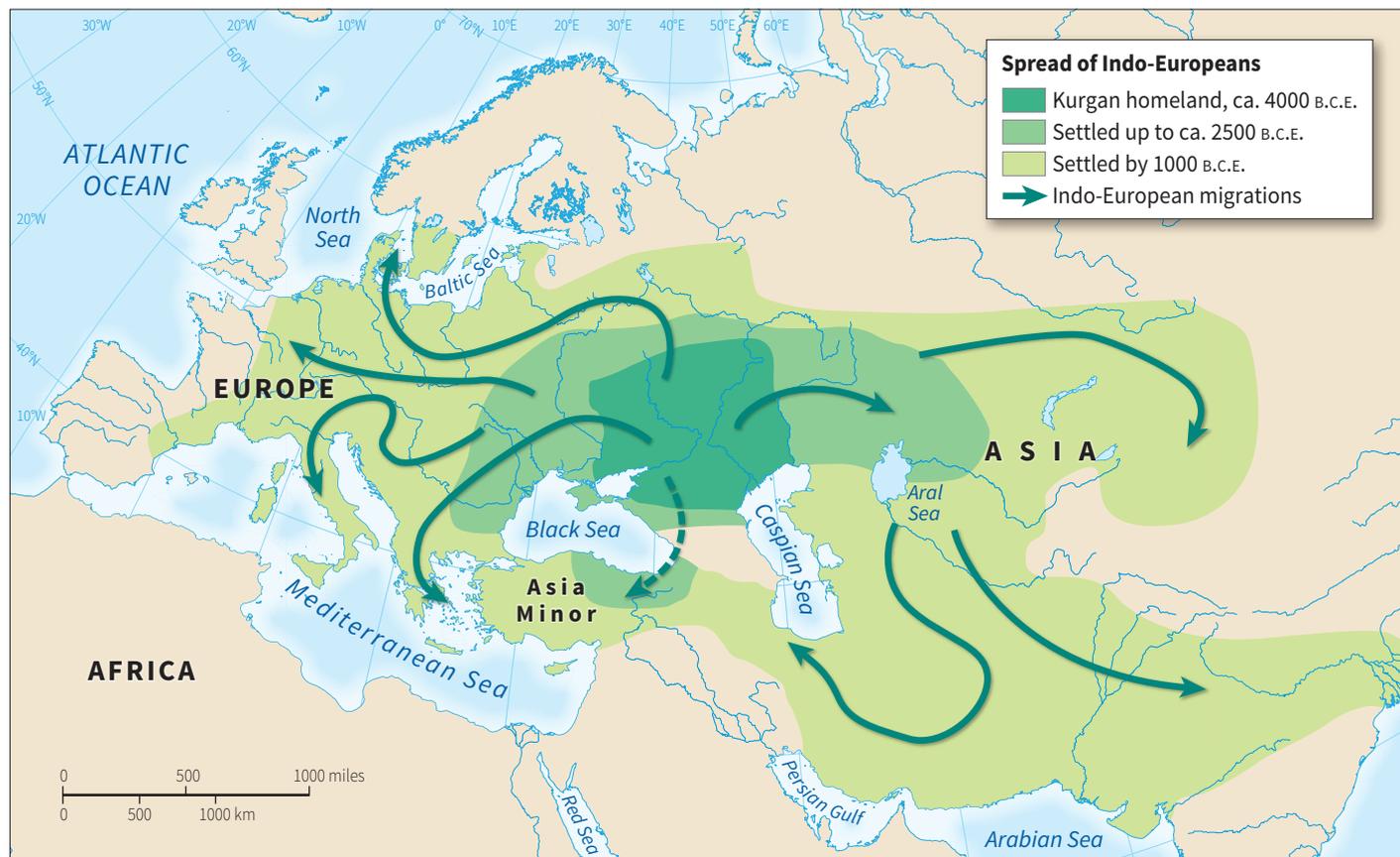


FIGURE 4.6 The spread of Indo-European language. This map depicts the so-called Kurgan hypothesis, named after the burial mounds (*kurgan*) characteristic of the warrior pastoralists who inhabited the area north of the Black and Caspian seas. Around 6000 B.C.E., they began to spread outward, conquering and imposing their language across Europe, central Asia, India, the Balkans, and Anatolia (modern-day Turkey).

only 6000 years ago (Figure 4.6). It asserts that the spread of Indo-European languages was both swifter and less peaceful than is maintained by those who subscribe to the Anatolian hypothesis. The domestication of horses by militaristic Kurgans allowed them to overtake the more peaceful agricultural societies and to rapidly spread their languages through imposition. No one theory has been definitively proven.

What is more certain is that in later millennia, the diffusion of certain Indo-European languages—in particular, Latin, English, and Russian—occurred in conjunction with the territorial spread of great political empires. In such cases of imperial conquest, relocation and expansion diffusion were not mutually exclusive. Relocation diffusion occurred as a small number of conquering elites came to rule an area. The language of the conqueror, implanted by relocation diffusion, often gained wider acceptance through expansion diffusion. Typically, the conqueror's language spread hierarchically—adopted first by the more important and influential persons and by city dwellers. The diffusion of Latin with Roman conquests, and Spanish with the conquest of Latin America, occurred in this manner.

Migration and the Survival of Language

As we have seen above, conquest can lead to the imposition of a new language and the abandonment or suppression of native tongues. However, these threatened languages may reappear and thrive in new places, as their speakers migrate for reasons of economic or cultural survival.

New York City is thought to be home to as many as 800 languages, making it the most linguistically dense place in the world. There are more speakers of Vlashki in Queens than in the Croatian mountain villages where the language originated, and roughly the same number of Garifuna speakers in the Bronx and Brooklyn as in Honduras and Belize. According to journalist Sam Roberts, these are but two of “a remarkable trove of endangered tongues that have taken root in New York.”

How did New York City become home to such linguistic riches? These languages relocated there through the migration of their native speakers. While populations in the language source region may fall victim to ethnic conflict, disease, starvation,

SUBJECT TO DEBATE Imposing English

English-only laws are nothing new in the United States. Its history as a nation of immigrants has led to a population that, at any one point in time, has spoken a variety of languages besides English. In its early days as a colony, one could hear German, Dutch, French, and a multitude of Native American languages spoken alongside English. This prompted both Benjamin Franklin and John Adams to propose enforcing English as the sole acceptable language, and Theodore Roosevelt once said, “The one absolutely certain way of bringing this nation to ruin or preventing all possibility of its continuing as a nation at all would be to permit it to become a tangle of squabbling nationalities. We have but one flag. We must also learn one language, and that language is English.”

Citing concerns that providing official documents and services in multiple languages would simply be too expensive, contemporary advocates of English-only legislation claim that mandating one language is one way to reduce the cost of government. Some proponents also believe that English-only laws encourage immigrants to assimilate by learning the official language of the United States. Opponents accuse the laws of being discriminatory and suggest that supporters of English-only legislation are threatened by cultural diversity. Linguistic unity, they say, does not lead to political or cultural unity. Furthermore, providing official documents and services only in English in effect denies these services and information to those who do not understand English. Debates such as these bring up questions of the legal, social, and political status of minority groups and their languages, debates that exist in many countries besides the United States.

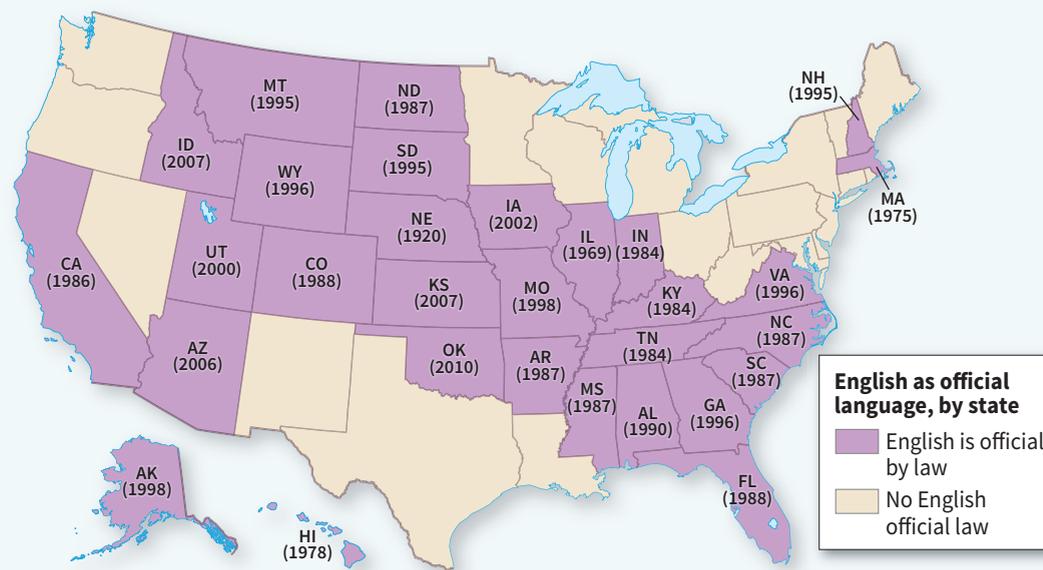
Today, most of those who wish to legislate English as the official language of the country target Spanish-speaking immigrants as the object of their concern. Anxieties about being culturally “overwhelmed” by Spanish speakers who refuse to learn English culminate in claims that Latino immigrants are dividing the nation in two: one English-speaking and culturally “American,” and the other Spanish-speaking and unwilling to assimilate into the mainstream.

Historically, most immigrants to the United States eventually abandon their native tongues. As late as 1910, one out of every four Americans could speak some language other than English with the skill of a native; today that number is significantly lower. This was a result of the mass immigrations from Germany, Poland, Italy, Russia, China, and many other foreign lands. Much of this linguistic diversity has given way to English, partly because these other languages lacked legal status, partly because of the monolingual educational system in the United States, and partly because of social pressures.

Continuing the Debate

As this discussion illustrates, many cultures do not want to assimilate into English-speaking society, choosing instead to actively assert pride in their language. Keeping this in mind, consider these questions:

- Do you think the wave of immigrants today, with their pride in language, is different from earlier waves? How so?
- Will monoglot English speakers become a dwindling minority as more and more people become bilingual through either choice or necessity?



States that have some form of official English-only laws. Dates show the years English-only laws were enacted. In the 1980s, the influx of immigrants to the United States from Asia and Latin America prompted many of these laws. Typically, English-only laws require that state documents be published in English only. Some states' laws, however, also prohibit the state from doing business in a language other than English or providing services such as multilingual emergency medical hotlines.

compulsory schooling, or merely assimilation into dominant language groups, thereby losing their ability to speak their native language, migrant speakers from these places may have a better chance at keeping the tongue alive and well in their new homes.

Many of these relocated languages find themselves under new pressure from the dominant English language in the United States (see Subject to Debate). For this reason, members of the nonprofit Endangered Language Alliance canvass city neighborhoods in search of immigrant speakers of vulnerable languages. The speakers are videotaped, and the Alliance encourages the teaching and use of these languages. The reality, however, is that many of these languages will vanish from New York City's linguistic landscape when the children of these immigrants cease to speak them regularly or when parents stop teaching them to their children.

Religion and Linguistic Mobility

Cultural interaction creates situations in which language is linked to a particular religious faith or denomination, a linkage that greatly heightens cultural identity. Perhaps Arabic provides the best example of this cultural link. It spread from a core area on the Arabian Peninsula with the expansion of Islam. Had it not been for the evangelical success of the Muslims, Arabic would not have diffused so widely. The other Semitic languages also correspond to particular religious groups. Most Hebrew-speaking people are of the Jewish faith, and the Amharic speakers in Ethiopia tend to be Coptic, or Eastern, Christians. Indeed, we can attribute the preservation and recent revival of Hebrew to its active promotion by Jewish nationalists who believe that teaching and promoting Hebrew to diasporic Jews facilitate unity.

Many languages persist because of their use in religious ceremonies and texts. Latin survived mainly as the ceremonial language of the Roman Catholic Church and Vatican City. In non-Arabic Muslim lands, such as Iran, where people consider themselves Persians and speak Farsi, Arabic is still used in religious ceremonies. Great religious books can also shape languages by providing them with a standard form. Martin Luther's translation of the Bible in 1522 led to the standardization of the German language, and the Qur'an is the model for written Arabic. Because they act as common points of frequent cultural reference and interaction, great religious books can also aid in the survival of languages that would otherwise become extinct. The early appearance of a hymnal and the Bible in the Welsh language aided the survival of that Celtic tongue, and Christian missionaries in diverse countries have translated the Bible into local languages, helping to preserve them. In Fiji, the appearance of the Bible in one of the 15 local dialects elevated that dialect to the dominant native language of the islands.

Language's Shifting Boundaries

Dialects, as well as the language families discussed previously, reveal a vivid geography. Their boundaries—what separates them from other dialects and languages—shift over time, both spatially and in terms of what elements they contain or discard.

Geolinguists map dialects by using **isoglosses**, which indicate the spatial borders of individual words or pronunciations. For example, the dialect boundaries between Latin American Spanish speakers using *tú* and those using *vos* are clearly defined in some areas, as shown in **Figure 4.7**. The choice of *tú* or *vos* for the second-person singular carries with it a cultural indication. *Vos* represents a usage closer to the original Spanish but is considered by many in the Spanish-speaking world to be rather archaic and, in fact, has died out in Spain itself. In other regions, particularly throughout the countries of the Southern Cone, *vos* has long been used by the media; often, it is considered to reflect the “standard” dialect and usage for the area in which it is used. Because certain words or dialects can fall out of fashion or simply become overwhelmed by an influx of new speakers, isogloss boundaries are rarely



FIGURE 4.7 Dialect boundaries in Latin America. Spanish speakers in the Americas use either *vos* or *tú* as the second-person singular verb form. They represent dialects of Spanish: both are correct, linguistically speaking, but the *vos* form is older. Some regions use *vos* and *tú* interchangeably. (Source: Adapted from Pountain, 2005.)

clear or stable over time. Indeed, in Central America, the media are increasingly using *vos*—long used in conversation in the region—thus elevating *vos* to a more official status covering a larger territory. Because of this, geolinguists often disagree about how many dialects are present in an area or exactly where isogloss borders should be drawn. The language map of any place is constantly shifting.

The dialects of American English provide another good example. At least three major dialects, corresponding to major culture regions, had developed in the eastern United States by the time of the American Revolution: the Northern, Midland, and Southern dialects (Figure 4.8). As the three subcultures expanded westward, their dialects spread and fragmented. Nevertheless, they retained much of their basic character, even beyond the Mississippi River. These culture regions have unusually stable boundaries. Even today, the “*r*-less” pronunciation of words such as *car* (“cah”) and *storm* (“stohm”), characteristic of the East Coast Midland regions, is readily discernible in the speech of its inhabitants.

Although we are sometimes led to believe that Americans are becoming more alike, as a national culture overwhelms

regional ones, the current status of American English dialects suggests otherwise. Linguistic divergence is still under way, and dialects continue to mutate on a regional level, just as they always have. Local variations in grammar and pronunciation proliferate, confounding the proponents of standardized speech and defying the homogenizing influence of the Internet, television, and other mass media.

Shifting language boundaries involve content as well as spatial reach, and this, too, changes over time. Today, for example, some of the unique vocabulary of American English dialects is becoming old-fashioned. For instance, the term *icebox*, which was literally a wooden box with a compartment for ice that was used to cool food, was used widely throughout the United States before people had refrigerators. Although the modern electric refrigerator is ubiquitous in the United States today, some people, particularly those of older generations and in the South, still use the term *icebox*. Most speakers of American English, by contrast, no longer pause to say the entire word *refrigerator*, shortening it instead to *fridge*.

As illustrated by the birth of the new word *fridge*, slang terms are quite common in most languages, and American English



FIGURE 4.8 Major dialects of North American English, with a few selected subdialects. These dialects had developed by the time of the American Revolution and have remained remarkably stable over time. Some cities, identified on this map, have their own particular dialects.

is no exception. **Slang** refers to words and phrases that are not part of a standard, recognized vocabulary for a given language but are nonetheless used and understood by some or most of its speakers. Often, subcultures—for example, youth, drug dealers, and clubbers—have their own slang that is used within that community but is not readily understood by nonmembers. Slang words tend to be used for a period of time and then discarded as newer terms replace them. For example, *fresh*, *the bomb*, and *phat* were used to refer to desirable, attractive, or fashionable things in the 1990s. Although many people today still recognize these words, a new generation of young people is much more likely to use a new set of words. Their children, in turn, will more than likely use yet another set of words. Slang illustrates another way in which American English changes over time.

Some African Americans speak a distinctive form of English. African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) shares characteristics with the older Southern dialect and also displays considerable African influence in pitch, rhythm, and tone. Some linguists understand AAVE as a creole language that grew out of a pidgin that developed on the early slave plantations and is today spoken by some African Americans. Indeed, AAVE shares many characteristics with other English creole languages worldwide. Today, it is considered a dialect, or variation, of Standard American English. It is also considered an **ethnolect**, a dialect spoken by an ethnic group, in this case, African Americans. The popularity of AAVE's distinctive vocabulary and syntax among some white Americans, however, calls

into question its ethnic exclusivity and serves to point out the instability of any language boundaries, including ethnic ones.

The grammar of AAVE is virtually uniform across the country, which has been attributed to the segregation of African American speakers or their relatively recent migration from the South (see Chapter 5, page 155). Some distinguishing characteristics of AAVE's speech patterns include the use of double negatives (“She don’t like nothing”), omission of forms of the verb *to be* (“He my friend”), and non-conjugation of verbs (“She give him her paper yesterday”). There is some controversy over the place of AAVE in the U.S. educational system. Does AAVE constitute a distinctive language, rather than simply a dialect of English? Should it be taught—with its attendant grammar, structure, and literature—to American schoolchildren? Are those who speak AAVE and Standard English technically bilingual? This has led some linguists to refer to AAVE as African American Language (AAL), indicating the status of a separate language.

In the United States today, many descendants of Spanish speakers have adapted their speech to include words and variants of words in both Spanish and English, in a dialect known as “Spanglish” (see Seeing Geography, page 147). Although acceptance of AAVE and Spanglish as legitimate language forms is hardly without conflict (see Subject to Debate, page 125), they illustrate the fluidity of languages and how they are constantly evolving and changing as the needs and experiences of their users change.

The Video Connection

Who Speaks Wukchumni?

 Watch at  SaplingPlus

The Wukchumni are a Native American people resident in central California. Today, fewer than 200 Wukchumni are alive. Marie Wilcox, born in 1932, is the only remaining native speaker of the Wukchumni language. Together with family members, Marie has composed a Wukchumni dictionary and recorded herself speaking the native language. The predicament of the Wukchumni people and their language is mirrored throughout the United States, where 130 Native American languages are on the “endangered” list.

Thinking Geographically

1. As you watch this video, notice the poverty and isolation of the rural area where Marie and her fellow

Wukchumni tribe members live. Do you think these factors have helped to preserve, or to endanger, the Wukchumni language?

2. Marie, her daughter Jennifer Malone, and her grandson Donovan Treglown have all contributed to the compilation and recording of the Wukchumni dictionary featured in this video. Their work has involved years of sacrifice. What factors have motivated them to pursue and complete this project?
3. As Marie relates in this video, the deaths of individual Wukchumni speakers have endangered the language to the point of extinction. Do you believe that, when Marie passes away, the Wukchumni language will die out entirely? Why or why not?

Globalization

4.3 Evaluate the relationship between technology and language.

More often than not, the diffusion of some languages has come at the expense of many others. Ten thousand years ago, the human race consisted of only 1 million people, speaking an estimated 15,000 languages. Today, a population 7000 times larger speaks only 47 percent as many tongues. Only 1 percent of all languages have as many as 500,000 speakers. It has been estimated that the world loses a language on average every two weeks. Some experts believe that all but 300 languages will be extinct or dying by the year 2100. Clearly, globalization has worked to favor some languages and eliminate others. There are, for instance, no children today who are learning any of California's nearly 100 native languages (see The Video Connection). Languages die out when their speakers do; often the entire cultural world associated with a language vanishes as well. Thus, globalization both presents the opportunity for more people to communicate directly with one another and, at the same time, threatens to extinguish the cultural diversity that goes hand in hand with linguistic diversity.

Technology, Language, and Empire

Technological innovations affecting language range from the basic practice of writing down spoken languages to the sophisticated information superhighway provided by the Internet. Technological innovations have in the past facilitated the spread and proliferation of multiple languages, but more recently they have encouraged the tendency of only a few languages—especially English, but also Chinese and Spanish—to dominate all others (Figure 4.9). Particular language groups achieve cultural dominance over neighboring groups in a variety of ways, often with profound results for the linguistic map of the world. Technological superiority is usually involved (see the cartoon at right). Earlier, we saw how plant and animal domestication—the technology of the “agricultural revolution”—aided the early diffusion of the Indo-European language family.

An even more basic technology was the invention of writing, which appears to have developed as early as 5300 years ago in several hearth areas, including in Egypt, among the Sumerians in what is today Iraq, and in China. Writing helped civilizations develop and spread, giving written languages a major advantage over those that remained spoken only. Written



FIGURE 4.9 Multilingual sign. This sign, located in a New York City polling station, displays the world's three dominant languages: English, Spanish, and Chinese. (Patti McConville/Alamy)



(Bizarro © 2010 Dan Piraro - Distributed by King Features Syndicate, Inc.)

languages can be published and distributed widely, and they carry with them the status of standard, official, and legal communication.

Written language facilitates record keeping, helping governments and bureaucracies to develop. Thus, the languages of conquerors tend to spread with imperial expansion. The imperial expansion of Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Portugal, Spain, and the United States across the globe altered the linguistic practices of millions of people. This empire building superimposed Indo-European tongues on the map of the tropics and subtropics. The areas most affected were Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Austronesian island world. A parallel case from the ancient world is China, also a formidable imperial power that spread its language to those it conquered. During the Tang dynasty (618–907 C.E.), Chinese control extended to Tibet, Mongolia, Manchuria (in contemporary northeastern China), and Korea. The 4000-year-old written Chinese language proved essential for the cohesion and maintenance of its far-flung empire. Although people throughout the empire spoke different dialects or even different languages, a common writing system lent a measure of mutual intelligibility at the level of the written word. Today, however, the Chinese are concerned about the “Romanization” of their language, as Chinese schools prioritize learning English and youth are not familiar with as many Chinese characters as their parents or grandparents.

Even though imperial nations have, for the most part, given up their colonial empires, the languages they transplanted overseas survive. As a result, English still has a foothold in much of Africa, South Asia, the Philippines, and the Pacific islands. French persists in former French and Belgian colonies, especially in northern, western, and central Africa; Madagascar; and Polynesia (Figure 4.10). In most of these areas, English and French are the languages of the educated elite, often holding official legal status. They are also used as a lingua franca of government, commerce, and higher education, helping hold together states with multiple native languages.

Transportation technology also profoundly affects the geography of languages. Ships, railroads, and highways all serve to spread the languages of the culture groups that build them, sometimes spelling doom for the speech of less technologically advanced peoples whose lands are suddenly opened to outside contacts. The Trans-Siberian Railroad, built about a century ago, spread the Russian language eastward to the Pacific Ocean. The Alaska Highway, which runs through Canada, carried English into Native American refuges. The construction of highways in Brazil’s remote Amazonian interior threatens the native languages of that region.



FIGURE 4.10 French, the colonial language of the empire, shares this sign on the isle of Bora Bora in French Polynesia with the native variant of the Polynesian tongue. Until recently, French rulers allowed no public display of the Polynesian language and tried to make the natives adopt French. (Courtesy of Terry G. Jordan-Bychkov.)

Another example is the predominance of English on the Internet, which can be understood as a contemporary information highway (Figure 4.11). It is unclear what will happen when other languages begin to challenge the dominance of English on the Internet, which is bound to happen sooner or later, although exactly when English will be surpassed by another language is anyone’s guess. For example, from 2000 to 2017 there was a truly impressive 2263 percent growth in the number of Chinese speakers on the Internet. If this trend continues, and when—not if—the 47 percent of Chinese speakers who do not now use the Internet begin to log on, we can expect Chinese to surpass English as the most popular language on the Internet. Speakers of other languages grew even more impressively over this time period. For instance, Arabic-speaking Internet users grew 6806 percent from 2000 to 2017, while speakers of Russian grew 3273 percent over the same period.

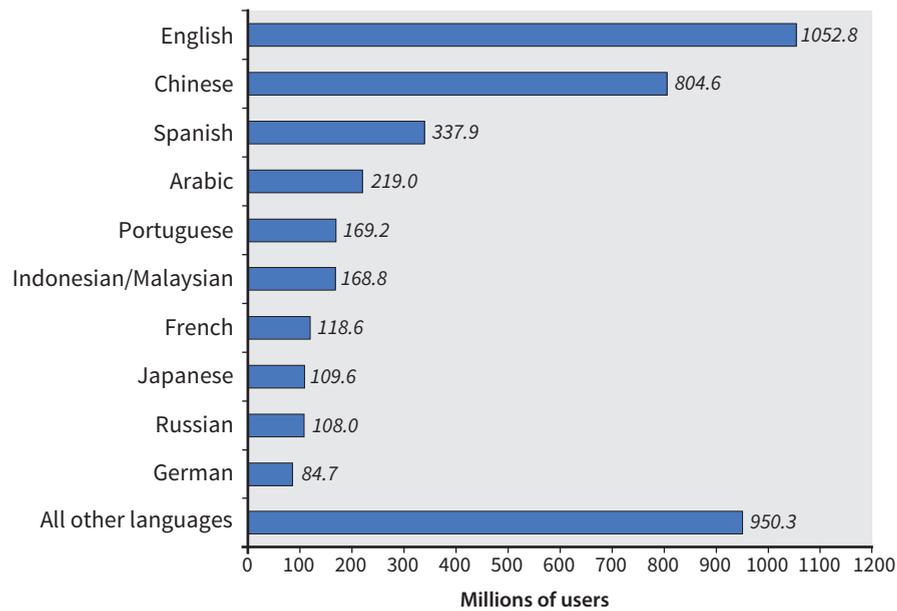


FIGURE 4.11 The 10 most prevalent languages on the Internet, measured as a percentage of total users. English is the second most widely spoken language on Earth, after Mandarin Chinese. And English is the most widely spoken second language in the world. Mandarin Chinese, however, is an increasingly popular second language learned by individuals of non-Chinese ancestry. (Source: Adapted from <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm>.)

Technology can also be used to preserve and revive endangered languages. Native American groups, for instance, are working with software developers to create language apps for the iPhone and iPad. They are also producing toys and video games that speak in native languages. Facebook, texting, video chats, and YouTube also help to connect speakers and promote the use of native speech, especially among younger people. Most speakers of Native American languages—around 90 percent—are middle-aged and older, so capturing the interest of younger speakers is vitally important to the survival of these languages. The U.S. government provides federal funds in the form of competitive grants to support language preservation efforts, and some tribes can utilize casino earnings for this purpose. Regardless of the funding source, most Native American groups are engaged in language preservation and instruction. Besides social media, apps, and video games, language immersion schools have been established (**Figure 4.12**), with mentor relationships forming between elders and youth.

Texting and Language Modification

Though English may dominate the Internet (see **Figure 4.11**), much of what comes across our computer and cell phone screens isn't a readily recognizable form of English.

As with the diffusion of spoken English to far-flung regions of the British Empire, the English language that is spread via electronic correspondence is subject to significant modification. E-mailing, instant messaging, and text messaging Standard English on cell phones requires a lot of typing, and text is notoriously deficient in conveying emotions when compared to the spoken word. For these reasons, abbreviations and symbols are used to shorten the number of keystrokes, to add emotional punctuation to correspondence, and to make electronic communication difficult to monitor by those who don't understand the language—particularly parents and teachers!

English is an alphabetic writing system, where letters represent discrete sounds that must be strung together to form a word's complete sound. A second major writing system is syllabic, where characters represent blocks of word sounds. This type of writing, prevalent throughout the Middle East and Southeast Asia, includes Arabic, Hebrew, Hindi, and Thai. The third form of writing is logographic, where characters represent entire words. Chinese is the only major language in this category.

English-speaking texters quickly learn to take shortcuts around the lengthiness inherent to alphabetic writing systems. The simplest and most commonly used shortcut involves



FIGURE 4.12 Learning Cherokee with technology. These two fifth-graders attend the Cherokee Nation Immersion School in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. They are working with their teacher to learn the Cherokee language with the assistance of an app. (Sue Ogrocki/AP Photo)



(Sidney Harris/ScienceCartoonsPlus.com)

using acronyms instead of whole words to convey common phrases. *POS* (parent over shoulder), *VBG* (very big grin), *LOL* (laughing out loud), and *GMTA* (great minds think alike) are some examples of this technique. Another shortcut involves using characters that sound like words. For example, the number “8” can substitute for the word or sound “ate,” so “h8” is “hate,” and “i8” is “I ate.” In the first example, a syllabic approach to writing is used because “8” condenses the syllable “ate” into one character. The second example substitutes a symbol for an entire word. Using “8” for the word “ate” is an example of this technique, called rebus writing, where a symbol is used for what it sounds like, as opposed to what it stands for. As your instructor for this class will likely confirm, such abbreviations and symbols have even worked their way into term papers at the college level, much to the consternation or delight of language scholars (see the cartoon above).

Texters sometimes use logographic writing, in which symbols such as ☺ and ♥, which are called pictograms, or word pictures, are used. Although the meaning of these symbols is understood by speakers of many languages because of their ubiquity, non-English languages also employ their own symbol combinations. In Korean, for instance, ^^ is used instead of :) to convey a smiling face and -_- is used instead of :(to depict a sad face. In Chinese, the number “5” is pronounced in a way that resembles crying, so “555” is the Chinese texter’s way of conveying sadness.

Texting shortcuts are making their way into spoken and written English. For instance, *LOL* is now commonly used in speech. As speakers of non-English languages become more heavily involved in texting-based activities, their spoken and written languages also doubtlessly will become modified.

Language Proliferation: One or Many?

Could all the world’s languages have derived from one single mother tongue? It may seem a large leap from the primordial tongue to a consideration of globalization and languages, but, in fact, the two are related. If we humans began with one language, why shouldn’t we return to that condition? If one language can become 15,000 languages and the 7000 or so that remain will dwindle to 300 languages within a century, then is it possible to eventually end up with just one again?

Are the forces of modernization working to produce, through cultural diffusion, a single world language? And if so, what will that language be—English? Worldwide, about 335 million people speak English as their mother tongue and perhaps another 350 million speak it well as a second, learned language. Adding other reasonably competent speakers who can “get by” in English, the world total reaches about 1.5 billion, more than for any other language. What’s more, the Internet is one of the most potent agents of diffusion, and its leading language is English.

English earlier diffused widely with the British Empire and U.S. imperialism, and today it has become the *de facto* language of globalization. Consider the case of India, where the English language imposed by British rulers was retained (after independence) as the country’s language of business, government, and education. It provided some linguistic unity for India, which had 800 indigenous languages and dialects. This is why today many of India’s 1.3 billion people speak English well enough to provide customer support services over the telephone for clients in the United States. Even so, many resent its use and wish India were rid of this linguistic colonial legacy once and for all (see Figure 4.22 on page 142). Although English is not likely to be driven out of India any time soon, it is true that the spoken English of India has drifted away from Standard British English. The same holds true for the English of Singapore, which is now a separate language called Singlish. Many other regional, English-based languages have developed—languages that could not be readily understood in London or Chicago.

But is the diffusion of English to the entire world population likely? Will globalization and cultural diffusion produce one world language? Probably not. More likely, the world will ultimately be divided largely among 5 to 10 major languages.

Language and Cultural Survival

Because language is the primary way of expressing culture, if a language dies out, there is a good chance that the culture of its speakers will, too. Languages, like animal species, can be

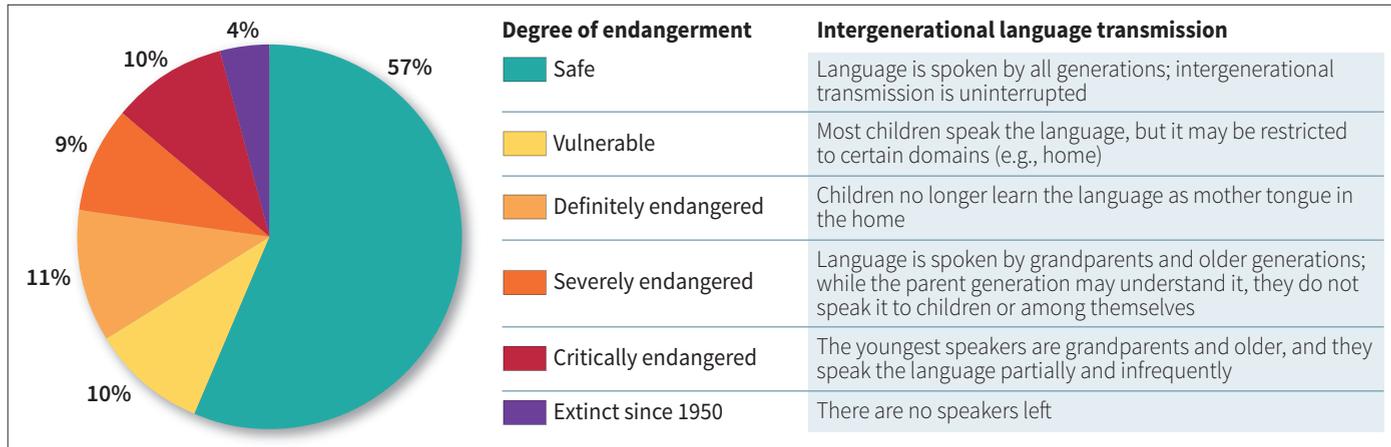


FIGURE 4.13 Degrees of language endangerment. Forty-three percent of the world’s languages are endangered to some degree. (Data from UNESCO Project: Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger, 2011.)

classified as endangered or extinct. Endangered languages are those that are not being taught to children by their parents and are not being used actively in everyday matters. Some linguists believe that more than half of the world’s roughly 7000 languages are endangered. According to Ethnologue, an online language resource, 377 languages have become extinct since 1950, and another 906 are on the “dying” list. Languages that have only a few elderly speakers still living fall into this category (**Figure 4.13**). **Language hotspots**—places with the most unique, misunderstood, or endangered tongues—are located around the globe (**Figure 4.14**). Three of the world’s most vulnerable regions are found in the United States. The

Americas and the Pacific regions together account for more than three-quarters of the world’s current nearly extinct languages, thanks to their many and varied indigenous language groups. UNESCO estimates that, in the United States alone, 48 native languages are “critically endangered,” as their youngest speakers are grandparents. When speakers die, it is most likely that their language will die out with them.

Languages can also be used to keep cultural traditions alive. Keith Basso, an anthropologist who has written an intriguing book titled *Wisdom Sits in Places*, discusses the landscape of distinctive place-names used by the Western Apache of New Mexico. The people Basso studied use place-names to



FIGURE 4.14 Global “language hotspots.” The Enduring Voices Project and National Geographic Society have teamed up to document endangered languages and thereby attempt to prevent language extinction. One-quarter of the world’s languages that are in trouble or dying may be found in the Americas. They represent a wealth of Native American languages slowly becoming suffocated by English, Spanish, and Portuguese. (Source: Adapted from <http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/enduring-voices/>.)

invoke stories that help the Western Apache remember their collective history. According to Nick Thompson, one of Basso's interviewees, "White men need paper maps. . . . We have maps in our minds." Thompson goes on to assert that calling up the names of places can guard against forgetting the correct way of living, or adopting the bad habits of white men, once Western Apaches move to other areas. "The names of all these places are good. They make you remember how to live right, so you want to replace yourself again." One of the places Basso heard about is called *Shades of Shit*. Here is what he was told:

It happened here at Shades of Shit.

They had much corn, those people who lived here, and their relatives had only a little. They refused to share it. Their relatives begged them but still they refused to share it.

Then their relatives got angry and forced them to stay at home. They wouldn't let them go anywhere, not even to defecate. So they had to do it at home. Their shades [shelters] filled up with it. There was more and more of it! It was very bad! Those people got sick and nearly died.

Then their relatives said, "You have brought this on yourselves. Now you live in shades of shit!" Finally, they agreed to share their corn.

It happened at Shades of Shit. (p. 24)

Today, merely standing at this place or speaking its graphic name reminds the Western Apache that stinginess is a vice that can threaten the survival of the entire community.

Nature-Culture

4.4 Explain the relationships between language and the physical environment.

Language interacts with the environment in three basic ways. First, the specific physical habitats in which languages evolve help to form their vocabularies. Second, physical habitats may shape the way a language sounds. Third, the environment can guide the migrations of linguistic groups or provide refuges for languages in retreat. From the viewpoint of possibilism—the notion that the physical environment shapes, but does not fully determine, cultural phenomena—the theme of nature-culture illustrates how the physical environment influences the vocabulary, tonal characteristics, and distribution of language.

Habitat and Vocabulary

Humankind's relationship to the land played a strong role in the emergence of linguistic differences, even at the level of vocabulary. For example, the Spanish language—which

originated in Castile, Spain, a dry and relatively barren land rimmed by hills and high mountains—is especially rich in words describing rough terrain, allowing speakers of this tongue to distinguish even subtle differences in the shape and configuration of mountains. Similarly, Scottish Gaelic possesses a rich vocabulary to describe mountainous types of topography; this terrain-focused vocabulary is a common attribute of all the Celtic languages spoken by hill peoples. English, by contrast, which developed in the temperate wet coastal plains of northern Europe, is relatively deficient in words describing mountainous terrain. However, English abounds with words describing flowing streams and wetlands: typical physical features found in northern Europe. This vocabulary transferred well to the temperate East Coast of the United States. In the rural American South alone, one finds *river, creek, branch, fork, prong, run, bayou, and slough*. This vocabulary indicates that the area is a well-watered land with a dense network of streams.

Clearly, then, language serves an adaptive strategy. Vocabularies are highly developed for those features of the environment that involve livelihood. Without such detailed vocabularies, it would be difficult to communicate sophisticated information relevant to the community's livelihood, which in most places is closely bound to the physical landscape.

Natural Environment and Language Sounds

Recent research suggests that the sounds that birds use to communicate vary with the natural characteristics of their habitat. The combinations of conditions such as temperature, vegetation, wind, and mountains create specific habitats that are more or less conducive to transmitting different sound frequencies. Bioacousticians—scientists who study sound and biology—find that birds living in rain forests use fewer consonants in their song. The theory is that this is because the dense rainforest vegetation reflects sounds from trees and leaves; furthermore, warm air can scramble consonant-heavy sounds. Birds in such areas use more vowels, resulting in a more sonorous song than birds dwelling in open plains, where consonant-heavy sounds transmit more faithfully.

Could the same be true for human languages? Ian Maddieson, a linguist at the University of New Mexico, believes so. He hypothesizes that the linguistic soundscapes of human languages have adapted to the ecological conditions of the places they are spoken. As depicted in [Figure 4.15](#), consonant-heavy languages, such as English, evolved in the cool open plains of northern Europe. Languages that are more focused on vowels, such as Hawaiian, were shaped by the dense vegetation of their natural habitat. In the geography of the spoken word, nature and culture appear to be intertwined in fascinating ways.

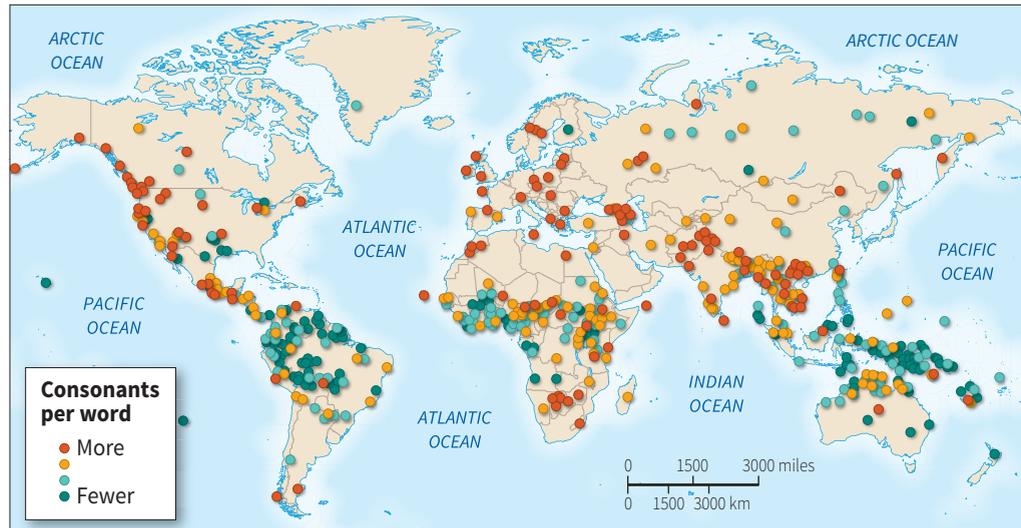


FIGURE 4.15 Did the language you speak evolve because of the environment? Places with more open spaces tend to have languages with lots of consonants. The sounds of such languages don't carry well in places that are windy or have dense forest cover. These places tend to have languages with more vowels. (Source: Based on an analysis by Ian Maddieson and Christophe Coupé.)

Habitat Helps Channel Language

Environmental barriers and natural routes have often guided linguistic groups onto certain paths. The wide distribution of the Austronesian language group, for instance, was profoundly affected by prevailing winds and water currents in the Pacific and Indian oceans (see Figure 4.6). The Himalayas and the barren Deccan Plateau deflected migrating Indo-Europeans entering the Indian subcontinent into the rich Ganga-Indus river plain. The northern and southern dialect boundaries in the United States are loosely limited by the Mississippi River.

Because such physical barriers as rivers and mountain ridges can discourage groups from migrating from one area to another, they often serve as linguistic borders as well. In parts of the Alps, speakers of German and Italian live on opposite sides of a major mountain ridge. Portions of the mountain rim along the northern edge of the Fertile Crescent in the Middle East form the border between Semitic and Indo-European tongues. Linguistic borders that follow such physical features generally tend to be stable, and they often endure for thousands of years. By contrast, language borders that cross plains and major routes of communication are often unstable, and shift over time.

Habitat Provides Refuge

The environment also influences language insofar as inhospitable areas provide protection and isolation. Such areas, referred to as **linguistic refuge areas**, provide minority linguistic groups protection from aggressive neighbors. Rugged hilly and

mountainous areas, excessively cold or dry climates, dense forests, remote islands, and extensive marshes and swamps can all offer refuge to minority language groups. For one thing, unpleasant environments rarely attract conquerors. Also, mountains tend to isolate the inhabitants of one valley from those in adjacent ones, discouraging contact that might lead to linguistic diffusion.

Examples of these linguistic refuge areas are numerous. The rugged Caucasus Mountains and nearby ranges in central Eurasia provide protection for a large variety of peoples and their languages (Figure 4.16). In the Rocky Mountains of northern New Mexico, an archaic form of Spanish survives, largely as a result of isolation that ended only in the early 1900s. Similarly, the Alps, the Himalayas, and the highlands of Mexico form fine-grained linguistic mosaics, thanks to the mountains that provide both isolation and protection for multitudinous languages. Bitterly cold tundra climates of the far north have sheltered Uralic and Inuktitut speakers, and a desert has shielded Khoisan speakers from Bantu invaders. In short, rugged, hostile, or isolated environments protect linguistic groups that might otherwise be overtaken by more dominant languages.

Still, environmental isolation is no longer the vital linguistic force it once was. Fewer and fewer places are so isolated that they remain relatively untouched by outside influences. Today, inhospitable lands may offer linguistic refuge, but it is no longer certain that they will in the future. Even an island situated in the middle of the vast Pacific Ocean does not offer reliable refuge in the age of the Internet, social media, and global tourism. Similarly, marshes and forests provide refuge only if they are not drained and cleared by those who wish to use the land more intensively. The nearly 10,000 Gullah-speaking descendants



FIGURE 4.16 The environment provides a linguistic refuge in the Caucasus Mountains. The rugged mountainous region between the Black and Caspian seas—including parts of Armenia, Russia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan—is peopled by a great variety of linguistic groups, representing three major language families. Mountain areas are often linguistic mosaics because the rough terrain provides refuge and isolation.

of African slaves have long nurtured their distinctive African-influenced culture and language, in part because they reside on the Sea Islands of South Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida. Today, the development of these islands for tourism and housing for wealthy nonlocals, as well as the out-migration of Gullah youth in search of better economic opportunities, threatens the survival of the Gullah culture and language. The reality of the world is no longer isolation, but contact.

Cultural Landscape

4.5 Characterize the ways languages are visibly part of the cultural landscape.

Road signs, billboards, graffiti, placards, and other publicly displayed writings not only reveal the locally dominant language but also can be a visual index to bilingualism,

linguistic oppression of minorities, and other facets of linguistic geography. Furthermore, differences in writing systems render some linguistic landscapes illegible to those not familiar with these forms of writing (Figure 4.17).

Linguistic Landscapes and Their Messages

Linguistic landscapes send messages, both friendly and hostile. Often these messages have a political content and deal with power, domination, subjugation, or freedom. In Turkey, for example, until recently Kurdish-speaking minorities were not allowed to broadcast music or television programs in Kurdish, to publish books in Kurdish, or even to give their children Kurdish names. People who spoke Kurdish were arrested and imprisoned. In 2002 Turkey reformed its legal restrictions to allow the Kurdish language to be used in daily life but not in public education. In 2012 Kurdish language instruction



FIGURE 4.17 Linguistic landscapes. This image, from Los Angeles's Koreatown, is difficult for non-Korean speakers to read. The Korean characters used are not the Latin alphabet with which most English speakers are familiar. (nik wheeler/Getty Images)

became an elective subject in Turkey's public schools. The Canadian province of Québec, similarly, has tried to eliminate English-language signs. French-speaking immigrants settled Québec, and its official language is French, in contrast to Canada's policy elsewhere of bilingualism in English and French. As **Figure 4.18** indicates, there is a practice in Ireland to supplement English-language place-name signs by adding the original Gaelic place-names. The suppression of minority languages and attempts to reinstate them in the landscape offer an indication of the social and political status of minority populations more generally.

Other types of writing, such as graffiti, can denote ownership of territory or send messages to others (**Figure 4.19**). Only those who understand the specific symbols used will be able to decipher the full meaning of



FIGURE 4.18 Road sign in Dublin, Ireland, shows the place-name in Irish Gaelic on top and English underneath. (Courtesy of Patricia L. Price.)



FIGURE 4.19 Graffiti in a parking lot. This wall in a parking lot in Cork, Ireland, is covered with graffiti. Gangs use stylized scripts often unintelligible to nonmembers to mark their territory. (Courtesy of Patricia L. Price.)

the message. Misreading such writing can have dangerous consequences for those who stray into unfriendly territory. In this way, graffiti can be understood as a dialect that is particular to a subculture and transmitted through symbols or a highly stylized script.

Toponyms

Language and culture also intersect in the names that people place on the land, whether they are given to settlements, terrain features, streams, or various other aspects of their surroundings (Figure 4.20). These place-names, or **toponyms**, often reflect the spatial patterns of language, dialect, and ethnicity. Toponyms become part of the cultural landscape when they appear on signs and placards. Many place-names consist of two parts—the

generic and the specific. For example, in the American place-names Huntsville, Harrisburg, Ohio River, Newfound Gap, and Cape Hatteras, the specific segments are *Hunts-*, *Harris-*, *Ohio*, *Newfound*, and *Hatteras*. The generic parts, called **generic toponyms**, which tell what *kind* of place is being described, are *-ville*, *-burg*, *River*, *Gap*, and *Cape*.

Generic toponyms are of greater potential value to the cultural geographer than specific names because they appear again and again throughout a culture region.

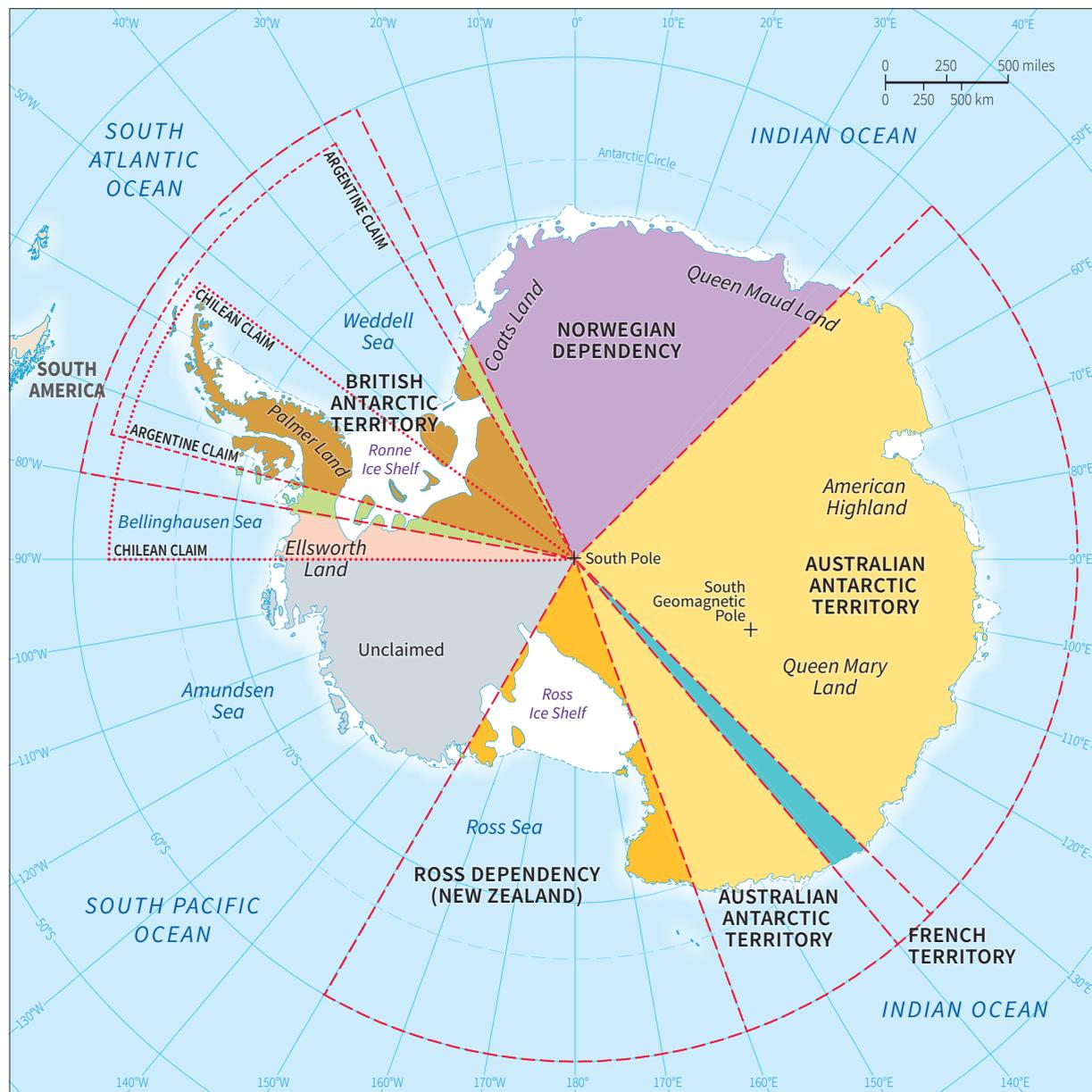


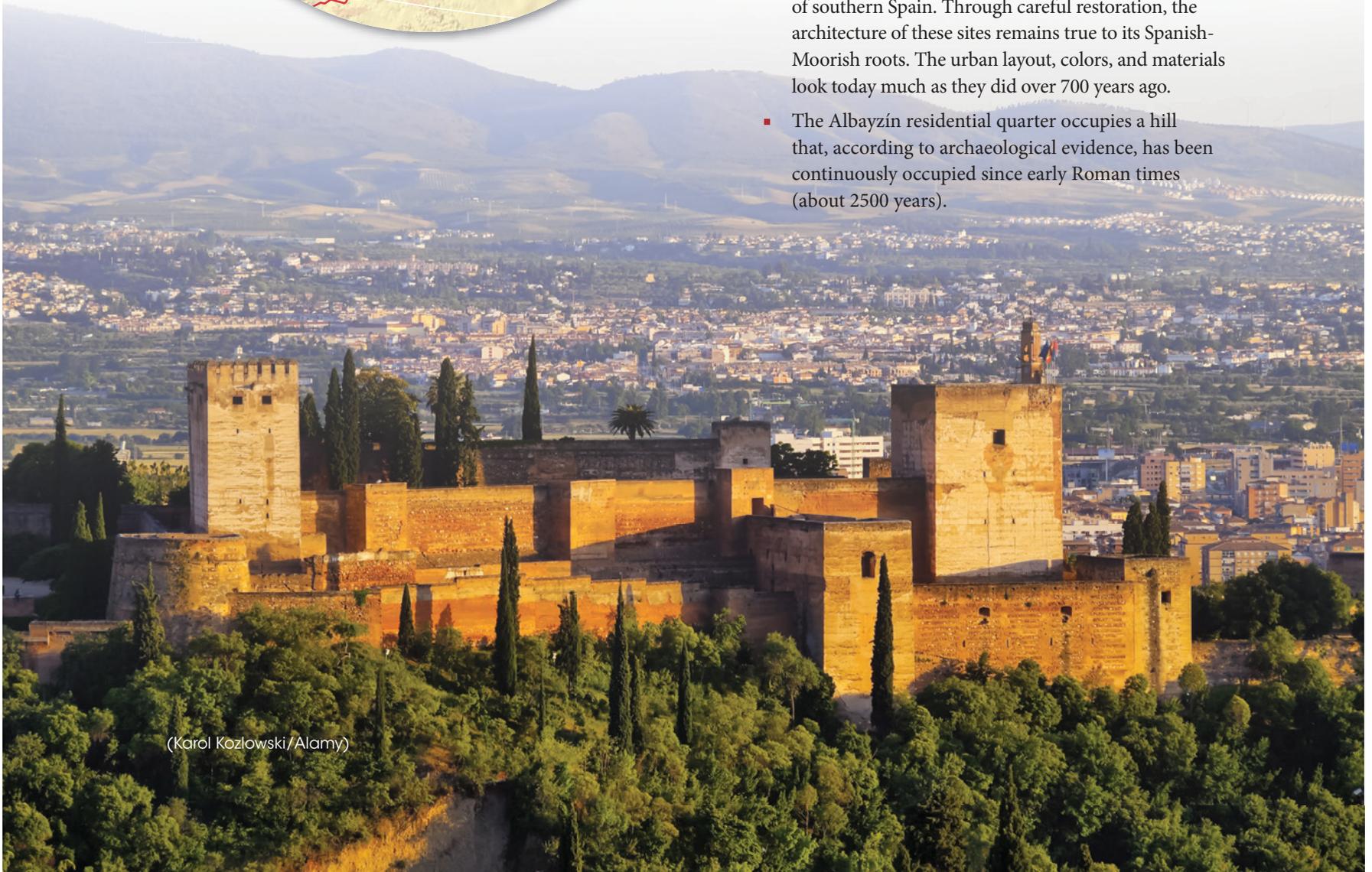
FIGURE 4.20 Naming place is closely related to claiming place. This map of Antarctica shows the pie slice-shaped land claims of various nations. Notice how place-names reflect the names of Antarctic explorers or European rulers. The gray portions are unclaimed. (Source: Adapted from Latrimer Clarke Corporation Pty. Ltd.)

World Heritage Site: Alhambra, Generalife, and Albayzín



The Alhambra fortress-palace complex, the gardens and rural estates of the Generalife, and the Albayzín residential quarter together form this World Heritage Site. All three are located in the city of Granada, in southern Spain. The Alhambra and the Albayzín are situated on hills above the modern lower city. Hills were important defense sites in medieval European cities (see Chapter 10). And the irrigated gardens of the Generalife were part of the rulers' rural estates.

- From the eleventh through fourteenth centuries, Muslim rulers, or *emirs*, oversaw the construction of the Alhambra fortress and residences, the gardens of the Generalife, and the Albayzín residential quarter. From the eighth through fifteenth centuries, Spain was ruled by the Moors, Muslims of North African descent.
- These sites are exceptional examples of Moorish imperial architecture. Though Spain became Christianized after the Moors were expelled in 1492, Spanish monarchs greatly admired and sought to safeguard the architectural achievements of the Moors in the Andalusian region of southern Spain. Through careful restoration, the architecture of these sites remains true to its Spanish-Moorish roots. The urban layout, colors, and materials look today much as they did over 700 years ago.
- The Albayzín residential quarter occupies a hill that, according to archaeological evidence, has been continuously occupied since early Roman times (about 2500 years).



(Karol Kozlowski/Alamy)

WALL WRITING IN THE ALHAMBRA: The original Alhambra fortress-palace was built by Samuel Ha-Nagid, an eleventh-century Jewish grand vizier (a prime minister of sorts) to the Zirid sultans of Granada. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Nazrid emirs constructed an entire complex of palaces and irrigated gardens at the site. The buildings are adorned with what appear at first glance to be elaborate, intricate designs. In reality, the walls, ceilings, and other architectural elements are covered with words. Over 10,000 Arabic inscriptions adorn the interior of the Alhambra complex. “There is probably no other place in the world where studying walls, columns and fountains is so similar to turning the pages of a book,” according to Spanish researcher Juan Castilla.

- Islamic architecture is typically adorned with decorative writing called calligraphy and other geometric patterns, rather than representations of living beings. According to some Muslims, figural representation was a form of idolatry (the worship of a physical object as a god), while others saw the body as an imperfect covering for the soul.
- Because calligraphy was commonly regarded as the preeminent expression of the visual arts, calligraphers typically had a higher status than other artists and were housed in the Ministry of Writing.
- Efforts to digitally archive and transcribe the wall writing reveal that fewer than 10 percent of the inscriptions are Qur’anic (religious) verses or poetry. The rest offer praise to the Nasrid emirs or consist of other popular sayings, with “There is no victor but Allah” being the most common inscription.

TOURISM: This site attracts a huge number of international tourists, most of whom arrive in the summer months.

- The number of tourists to the Alhambra is limited to a daily quota of 6600.
- Unfortunately, the decorative surfaces of the site’s buildings are not well protected, so they continue to be worn away by the touch of so many tourists.
- The picturesque city of Granada is situated on a series of hills against the backdrop of the Sierra Mountains. Tourists enjoy the mix of Mediterranean cultures, cuisines, and traditions there.



(characterdesign/Getty Images)

- This World Heritage Site was built by and for the Moorish rulers of southern Spain, and exemplifies the pinnacle of Andalusian architecture, a synthesis of classical Arabic and southern Spanish styles.
- The interior structures of the Alhambra palace are covered with more than 10,000 intricate inscriptions in Arabic calligraphy.
- The Alhambra and the Generalife were placed on the list of World Heritage Sites in 1984, and in 1994 the site was expanded to include the Albayzín quarter.

<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/314>



(Geoff A Howard/Alamy)

Australia abounds in Aborigine toponyms, even in areas from which the native peoples disappeared long ago. No toponyms are more permanently established than those identifying physical geographical features, such as rivers and mountains. Even the most absolute conquest, exterminating an aboriginal people, usually does not entirely destroy such names. The abundance of Native American toponyms in the United States provides an example. The names of more than half of the states are of Native American origin. India, however, has recently decided to revert to traditional toponyms, after many Indian place-names had been Anglicized under British colonial rule (Figure 4.22).

In Spain and Portugal, seven centuries of Moorish rule left behind a great many Arabic place-names. An example is the prefix *guada-* on river names (as in Guadalquivir and Guadalupejo). The prefix is a corruption of the Arabic *wadi*,

meaning “river” or “stream.” Thus, Guadalquivir, corrupted from Wadi-al-Kabir, means “the great river.” The frequent occurrence of Arabic names in any particular region or province of Spain reveals the remnants of Moorish cultural influence in that area. Many such names were brought to the Americas through Iberian conquest, so that Guadalajara, for example, appears on the map as an important Mexican city.

The Political Economy of Toponyms Without a doubt, you are familiar with places that bear the names of wealthy and influential individuals, politicians, or corporate sponsors. Sports stadiums, campus buildings, and museums are all specific spaces that can be named. The owners of these spaces typically use naming opportunities as a way to raise funds. For instance, universities provide naming rights for donors contributing anywhere from \$5 million to over \$300 million.



FIGURE 4.22 India's postcolonial toponym shift. More than 50 years after the English colonizers “quit” India, their colonial place-names are being swept from the map, too. (Source: Adapted from Sappenfield, 2006.)



FIGURE 4.23 Barclays Center Station. The New York City subway system is public. Yet this stop—just outside the Barclays Center arena—is named after the arena’s corporate sponsor, a bank. (Richard Levine/Alamy)

But what happens when a place that has been built using public monies—say, a train station that was constructed using tax revenues—is given a corporate name (**Figure 4.23**)? Geographers Reuben Rose-Redwood and Derek Alderman examine this practice, using the example of the building that was constructed to replace the World Trade Center’s Twin

Towers, which were destroyed in the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The building was initially dubbed “The Freedom Tower,” but once it acquired corporate tenants, the building began to be referred to by its legal address, One World Trade Center. According to Rose-Redwood and Alderman, this illustrates “how the naming of places has become . . . one of the next ‘frontiers’ in the neoliberalization of urban spaces.”

What happens when the corporate sponsor of a place has a less-than-acceptable reputation? Florida Atlantic University, for instance, sold the naming rights for its sports stadium to GEO Group for \$6 million in February 2013. GEO Group operates private prisons and has been implicated in the inhumane treatment of inmates at its facilities. Less than two months later, the agreement was cancelled. In this instance, the negative place image generated by a corporate sponsor wasn’t worth the price paid (**Figure 4.24**).

Is no place safe from corporate ownership? Apparently not. People are paid to allow companies to use their cars as mobile billboards. What about the items of clothing and accessories that prominently bear the names of their designers? Is what poet Adrienne Rich called “the geography closest-in”—our bodies—a place that is also open for corporate naming opportunities?



FIGURE 4.24 University of Louisville sports stadium. The home of the Cardinals was named after a pizza chain and supported by other corporate sponsors noted on the sign. Recently the university took Papa John’s name off the stadium in the wake of a racial slur scandal. (Andy Lyons/Getty Images)

Conclusion

Human interactions, with one another and with the world around us, are primarily language-based. We shape our surroundings using language, and in turn, our surroundings shape the way different languages sound, their vocabularies, and their spatial expression.

Like human cultures, languages are fluid and adaptive to the needs of their users. Languages are also susceptible to the power dynamics at work in human societies more generally. Conquest, dominance, and repression, but also creativity and resilience, are at work in the rise and fall of languages and in their ever-changing expressions. The trend toward the dominance of a few “big” languages may afford opportunities to communicate on a global scale, but it also may signal the demise of much of the cultural richness across the Earth.

Chapter Summary

4.1 Identify the geographical patterns of languages.

- Language families, dialects, vocabulary, pronunciation, and toponyms display distinct spatial variations that can be identified on maps of linguistic culture regions.
- Pidgins, creoles, lingua franca, and bilingualism are all linguistic strategies that allow speakers of different languages to interact with each other; there is both creativity and power involved.
- Languages are connected to other languages in a tree-like fashion, with major branches—such as Indo-European or Sino-Tibetan—leafing into specific, related tongues.

4.2 Understand how languages and dialects have come to exist, move, and change.

- The rise and spread of Indo-European, the largest language family on Earth, has been explained by the Anatolian hypothesis and the Kurgan hypothesis.
- Relocation and expansion diffusion, both hierarchical and contagious, are apparent in the movement of language from one place to another.
- Political conquest and the spread of religions have been important for the diffusion of languages.
- Language is fluid and ever-changing along with the needs of users.

4.3 Evaluate the relationship between technology and language.

- The number of languages spoken on Earth is decreasing, while a few—notably Chinese, English, and Spanish—are spoken by an increasing number of people worldwide. Technological forces, ranging from the invention of writing to transportation innovations, help to spread languages across the globe.
- The rise of the Internet and texting have dramatically reshaped spoken and written language.
- When endangered languages become extinct, so too do the cultures of their speakers. Efforts to preserve and teach dying languages draw on the same cultural innovations that in other ways act to threaten the most vulnerable of tongues.

4.4 Explain the relationships between language and the physical environment.

- The natural habitat helps to shape linguistic elements, such as vocabulary and dominant sounds.
- Physical features, such as mountains and rivers, can channel the spread of language or provide barriers to its diffusion.
- Inhospitable physical environments can provide refuge and protection for speakers of minority languages.

4.5 Identify the ways languages are visibly part of the cultural landscape.

- Dominance of one group over another is often expressed in exclusion, or even extermination, from the linguistic cultural landscape.
- Toponyms provide clues to the history of places, political struggles over land, and display particular regional patterns in the United States.
- Corporations purchase the right to name places, and in so doing bring the controversy between public and private space into sharp focus.

Key Terms

language A mutually agreed-upon system of symbolic communication that has a spoken and usually a written expression (page 118).

dialect A distinctive local or regional variant of a language that remains mutually intelligible to speakers of other dialects of that language; a subtype of a language (page 119).

pidgin A composite language consisting of a small vocabulary borrowed from the linguistic groups involved in commerce (page 119).

creole A language derived from a pidgin language that has acquired a fuller vocabulary and become the native language of its speakers (page 120).

lingua franca An existing, well-established language of communication and commerce used widely where it is not a mother tongue (page 120).

bilingualism The ability to speak two languages fluently (page 120).

language family A group of related languages derived from a common ancestor (page 120).

polyglot Involving many languages (page 122).

Anatolian hypothesis A theory of language diffusion holding that the movement of Indo-European languages from the area in contemporary Turkey then known as Anatolia followed the spread of plant domestication technologies (page 123).

Kurgan hypothesis A theory of language diffusion holding that the spread of Indo-European languages originated with animal domestication in the central Asian steppes and grew more aggressively and swiftly than proponents of the Anatolian hypothesis maintain (page 123).

isogloss The spatial border of usage of an individual word or pronunciation (page 126).

slang Words and phrases that are not part of a standard, recognized vocabulary for a given language but that are nonetheless used and understood by some of its speakers (page 128).

ethnolect A dialect spoken by a particular ethnic group (page 128).

language hotspots Those places on Earth that are home to the most unique, misunderstood, or endangered languages (page 133).

linguistic refuge area An area protected by isolation or inhospitable environmental conditions in which a language or dialect has survived (page 135).

toponym A place-name, usually consisting of two parts—the generic and the specific (page 138).

generic toponym The descriptive part of many place-names, often repeated throughout a culture area (page 138).



Practice at SaplingPlus

Read the interactive e-Text, review key concepts, and test your understanding.



Story Map. Explore the globalization of the English language.



Web Map. Examine maps illustrating issues of linguistic geography.

Doing Geography



ACTIVE LEARNING: Listening to the Dialects of English

As we have seen, linguistic influences, historical patterns, and migratory flows all can play a role in shaping spoken languages. In this activity, you will use your phone or computer to listen to recordings of people speaking various dialects of English. As you listen, you'll try to understand what you are hearing and decide which dialects are easy or difficult to make out, keeping in mind the differences between dialects, pidgins, creoles, and "standard" languages, and how these differences sound.

More guidance at  SaplingPlus



EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: Exploring the Political Economy of Purchased Place-Names

In this activity, you will work individually or in small groups to identify places that bear the names of corporate or individual sponsors. As you learned in the section titled "The Political Economy of Toponyms," elements of the built environment—buildings, parks, sports venues, as well as vehicles and the clothing we wear—can bear the name of a wealthy person or family, or a corporation. Purchasing the right to name a place often confers a type of power on the purchaser. This experiential learning activity will encourage you to make these connections in your local landscape.

Steps to Exploring the Political Economy of Purchased Place-Names

- Step 1:** Work with your instructor to decide whether you will conduct this activity alone or in small groups.
- Step 2:** Determine the place you will explore. For some of you, the immediate college or university campus has

ample places named by benefactors. For others, your city, town, or neighborhood will provide a better field research site.

- Step 3:** Set out to find places in the landscape that have been named by individuals or corporations. Photograph them with your cell phone and, if your instructor requests, note the location coordinates.
- Step 4:** Research the history of the named places that you find. Based on what you learn, answer the following questions.
- How much money did the naming rights cost?
 - Who received the funds and what were the funds used for?
 - Has there been any controversy over the naming, or has the naming of the place(s) you've identified changed over time from one sponsor to another?
- Step 5:** Report to your classmates and compare your findings.



The name of donors Joan and Sanford I. Weill is now part of the name of Cornell University's medical center. (Alessio Botticelli/Getty Images)

SEEING GEOGRAPHY

Feisbuquear: “To Facebook”

In 2002, Hispanics surpassed African Americans as the nation’s numerically most significant minority group. In some U.S. cities, Hispanics constitute more than half of the population, a fact that brings into question the designation “minority.” For example, the population of Miami, Florida, is two-thirds Hispanic, and more than three-fourths of the residents of El Paso and San Antonio, Texas, are Hispanic. In the United States today, Spanish-speaking peoples from Latin America provide the largest flow of immigrants into the United States. Even midsize and smaller towns in the midwestern and southern United States are becoming destinations for Spanish-speaking immigrants, sharply changing the ethnic composition of cities such as Shelbyville, Tennessee; Dubuque, Iowa; and Siler City, North Carolina.

By the same token, English has burrowed its way deeply inside the contemporary Mexican linguistic landscape. The ubiquity of U.S. consumer goods, English-language media, and American popular culture in Mexico is notable. Many Mexicans travel back and forth to the United States for work- and family-related reasons. And, given that the United States and Mexico share a nearly 2000-mile border, these flows of people and ideas have a long history. It is logical to assume that the Spanish spoken by Mexicans will be influenced by American English, and vice versa.

Indeed, Spanish and English have combined in a rich, complex fashion, producing a hybrid language called Spanglish. The phrase “*Vámonos al downtown a tomar una bironga after work hoy*” is an excellent example. It translates into Standard English as “Let’s go downtown and have a beer after work today.” *Vámonos* (“let’s go”), *tomar* (“to drink”), and *hoy* (“today”) are Spanish words that are combined in the same sentence with the English words *downtown* and *after work*. Linguists refer to this tendency to shift between languages in the same sentence, a very common practice among bilingual speakers, as code-switching. However, the noun *bironga*, which means “beer” in English, is a Spanglish invention: it exists in neither English nor Spanish. This is quite common in Spanglish, and neologisms such as *hanguear* (“to hang out”), *deioff* (“day off”), and *parquear* (“to park” a vehicle) abound.

In the image that opens this chapter, the word “feisbuquear” is wholly invented, using the sound of the noun “Facebook” and a Spanish verb ending. Spanglish reflects the growing Spanish-English bilingualism of many U.S. residents, as well as residents of Mexico. It underscores the flexibility of language, and the enduring creativity of human beings as we attempt to communicate with one another.

Cell phone service provider advertisement in Mexico. Feisbuquear is a Spanglish verb meaning “to Facebook.” (Courtesy of Patricia L. Price.)

