Class 7a:
Language

- Origin and diffusion of English
- Language families
- Politics of language
What is a language?

• Organized system of speech
• Mutual comprehension of sounds
• Allows transmission of culture
• Cause and symbol of cultural differentiation
• Vocabulary, pronunciation, syntax, word meaning
World languages

• Estimated 6000-7000 languages
• But only 2000-3000 written
• Half the world speaks only 8
• Only 300 are safe from extinction
Geography of language

• Language depends on migration
• Diffusion of language
  – Spread by speakers
  – Picked up by others
• Language splitting
• Pidgins and creoles
Geography of English

- History of invasions
- Original inhabitants: Celts
- 450 AD: Angles, Jutes, Saxons
- 1066 AD: Normans
- Germanic, French, and Latinate bases
Geography of English

• Diffused via colonization
• Now official language of 60 countries
• 1.5 billion speakers
• *Lingua franca*
• Several distinct dialects
Dialects

- Variation of a language
- Different vocabulary, spelling, and pronunciation
- Vary by place, ethnicity, class
- Usually still understandable
American vs. British Dialects

• New words, new inventions
  – Moose, raccoon, canoe
  – Elevator/lift, flashlight/torch

• Deliberate new spellings
  – Color/colour, defense/defence

• Changes in pronunciation (“a,” “r”)
American Dialects

- Based on who migrated where and contact with England
  - New England
  - Mid-Atlantic
  - South
- Midwestern English standard dialect
Language classification

- Language families
  - Languages with a common, prehistoric origin
- 20 major families
  - Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan, Afro-Asiatic
  - Indo-European languages cover half the world
Language classification

• Branches or subfamilies
  – Common ancestor within thousands of years
  – Germanic, Armenian, Celtic
• Not mutually intelligible
• But similar sounds, grammar, words
Language classification

• Groups within branches
  – West Germanic, Indic, East Slavic and Baltic

• More recent common origin

• Few grammar, vocab differences
Politics of language

- Language as key to culture
- Official languages
- Bilingualism or multilingualism
  - Belgium vs. Switzerland
Belgium

- Walloons (French) 45%
  - Historically upper/ruling class
- Flemish (Dutch) 55%
- Two regions governed separately
- Brussels (capital) bilingual
Switzerland

- Four official languages
- German (65%), French (18%), Italian (12%), Romansh (1%)
- Strong local government (cantons)