

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, racoon, 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)