GEOG 247 Cultural Geography

The Geography of Language

Part 3

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Language Diffusion and Change

❖ **There are three critical influences to perpetuate and spread** (or restrict) **a language:**

1. **Writing** – leads to standardization and sharing through learning mediums.
2. **Technology** – leads to interaction and diffusion through publication and delivery systems to points away from the hearth.
3. **Political organization** – leads to access (or denial) and acceptance (nationalistic feeling) of the language's use (or prohibition) by those in power.

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Influence of Language on Culture's Geography

❖ Once a language has been established its use becomes part of that area's cultural identity.

✓ Linguistic landscapes are created.

✓ Written/spoken language conveys information about a place (creating perceptions); naming is part of this.

✓ Enforced use of a language by one group over others can be seen as a power play – a means of control.

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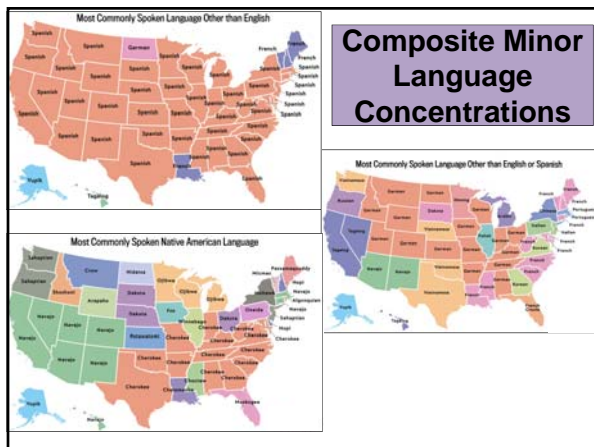
Who Speaks What Secondary Language Where?

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Languages Spoken at Home in the USA

TABLE 4.2	Number of Speakers 5 Years and Older	Number of Speakers 5 Years and Older	Number of Speakers 5 Years and Older
Language	1990	2000	2010
English only	198,600,798	215,423,557	228,699,523
Spanish, Spanish Creole	17,339,172	28,101,052	35,468,501
Chinese	1,249,213	2,022,143	2,600,150
Tagalog	843,251	1,224,241	1,513,734
French (including Patois, Cajun)	1,702,176	1,643,838	1,305,503
Vietnamese	507,069	1,009,627	1,251,468
German	1,547,099	1,383,442	1,109,216
Korean	626,478	894,063	1,039,021
Russian	241,798	706,242	881,723
Arabic	355,150	614,582	845,396

(Source: U.S. Census, 1990; 2000; 2010.)
Table 4.2
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U.S. Minor Language Concentrations

Most Commonly Spoken Language Other than English or Spanish

U.S. Minor Language Concentrations

Most Commonly Spoken Native American Language

Composite Minor Language Concentrations

Language and the Naming of the Landscape

❖ **Toponyms:** Place names (language on the land)
- Record of past and present cultures
- A means of personalizing earth features making them more meaningful and "giving life to them"
- Gives us hints about who inhabits/inhabited an area
   Similar to you being named after a grandparent or significant place in your parent's life!

❖ **Toponymy:** The study of place-names.
   – Revealing and useful tool for cultural and historical geographers

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Linguistic Landscapes

1. **Messages:** By the presence or absence of language communication on the land (spoken, written, signage, colors, graffiti, music) we get a "*feeling*" about an area. Can be **outright** or subliminal. Can convey inclusion or exclusion.
2. **Toponyms:** Names that may give us a "sense of place." People name areas to convey both information and give a sense of identity to places with which they are (or were) in contact. Descriptive add-ons to place names as are often repeated over an area or within a region.
3. **Remnant Toponyms:** Historic names that have out-lasted the people who created them but remain as an integral part of the new culture group's identification and important to the navigation of the landscape.

TOPONYMY

How are places named?

What do the names signify?

Sometimes mistakes are made.

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Toponyms

➢ **Place names often are indicative of a group's sense of importance, identity, or attitude.** The result of naming falls into one or more categories **(Table 4.4):**

- **Commemorative** (named after someone or thing)
- **Commendatory** (praises or emphasizes)
- **Descriptive** (characteristic or feature)
- **Incident-related** (relates to something that happened)
- **Manufactured** (made up)
- **Mistaken** (error)
- **Possessive** (named for ownership)
- **Shift** (named after some other place)

❖ Place names often directly **reflect spatial patterns** of language, dialect, and ethnicity (note the pattern or similarity).
✓ Become part of the **visible cultural landscape** when they appear on maps, signs, and placards.

Toponym Types

Type of Toponym	Origin	Examples
Commemorative	Honors a famous or important person	• Monrovia, Liberia (U.S. President James Monroe) • Seattle, Washington (Suquamish Indian Chief Si'ahl [Seattle]) • Illinois (the Illini Indians)
Commendatory	Praises some physical or environmental characteristic	• Pleasant Valley, Greenland • Sun City, Arizona • Paradise, Texas
Descriptive	Describes a physical feature or environmental characteristic	• Rocky Mountains • Great Falls, Montana • Land's End, England
Incident related	Recalls an historic event	• Battle Creek, Michigan • Fourth of July Mountain, Washington • Massacre Lake, Nevada
Manufactured	Made-up or coined	• Tesnus, Texas ("sunset" spelled backward) • Reklaw, Texas (for Ann Walker, with "Walker" spelled backward) • Truth or Consequences, New Mexico (after a 1950s radio show as part of a contest)
Mistaken	Traceable to an historic error in identification or translation	• The West Indies (neither part of the Indies nor west of them) • Texas (mistakenly translated from the word teychas, a Caddoan Indian word for "friend") • Lasker, North Carolina (mistranslation of Alaska, for which the town is named)
Possessive	Indicates an historic claim to ownership or control of a place	• Castro Valley, Pennsylvania • Johnson City, Tennessee • Hall's Store, Texas
Shift	Relocated from another place, often settlers' homeland	• New Leipzig, North Dakota (Germany) • Lancaster, Pennsylvania (England) • New Mexico

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Origin of some NYC Area Place Names

PLACE NAME	ORIGIN
Amsterdam Avenue	Amsterdam, a city in the Netherlands
Bergen Street	Hans Hansen Bergen, Dutch settler originally from Norway
Bowery	Bowerij, Dutch for "farm"
Brooklyn	Breukelen, a town in the Netherlands
Bronx	Jonas Bronck, Dutch settler originally from Sweden
Bushwick	Boswyck, Dutch for "woods district"
Canarsie	Canarsee Indians. The name means "long small grasses."
Coney Island	Conyne Eylandt, Dutch for "rabbit island"
Cortelyou Road	Jacques Cortelyou, a Walloon settler
Fresh Kills	Kil, Dutch for stream or river
Gramercy	Krom-moerasje, Dutch for crooked marsh
Gravesend	Gravesand, a town in the Netherlands
Greenwich Village	Greenwyck, Dutch for "pine area"
Gowanus Bay	Delaware Indian name meaning "the sleeper"
Harlem	Haarlem, a town in the Netherlands
Jamaica	Indian name meaning "beaver"
Long Island	Lange Eylandt, Dutch for "long island"
Manhattan	The Manhattan Indians. The name means "hilly island" or "place where wood is gathered for bows and arrows."
Maspeth	Delaware Indian name meaning "great brook"
Midwood	Midwout, Dutch for "middle woods"
Minetta Street	Indian name meaning "wooded swamp"
New Dorp	Nieuw Dorp, Dutch for "new village"
New Utrecht	Utrecht, a town in the Netherlands
Raritan Bay	The Raritan Indians. The name means "a point on a tidal river."
Rikers Island	Abraham Rycken, an early Dutch settler
Rockaway Peninsula	The Rockaway Indians. The name means "sandy place."
Stuyvesant Street	Peter Stuyvesant, Dutch Director General
Wallabout Bay	"Waalen Boogt," Dutch for "Walloon's Curve"
Yonkers	Adriaen Van der Donck, Dutch settler known as Jonker (the gentleman)

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Toponyms

➢ **Many place-names consist of two parts:**

- **generic** portion
- **specific** portion

Sometimes they are written as separate words; sometimes as a compound word.

Examples:

New York	South Carolina
Jacksonville	Lakeland
Fort Meyers	West Palm Beach
Harrisburg	Ohio River
Newfound Gap	Cape Hatteras
Donner Pass	Hoover Dam

▪ The **specific part** of the names listed would be: *York, Carolina, Jackson, Lake, Meyers, Palm, Harris, Ohio, Newfound, Hatteras, Donner, Hoover.*

▪ The **generic parts,** which tell what kind of place is being described are: *new, south, ville, land, fort, west, beach, burg, river, gap, cape, pass, dam.*

Location of "New England-type" Generic Place Names

Concentration is evident in area "A" and thins away from the core.

Terminology does not extend into Canada nor much past the southern border of the Northern dialect nor into rugged areas that Europeans avoided.

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Arabic Toponyms in Iberia

In the early 700s the Moors of North Africa invaded Spain taking their language and religion with them.

Over the course of 700 years they were pushed out of Spain and Portugal **but their presence remains** in names, designations and other cultural remnants.

Each dot = one Arabic toponym

Gibraltar: Tariq's rock
Guadalajara: stone river
La Sagra: the desert
Madrid: water source

Andalucia: Arabic name for the peninsula
Agarve (in Portugal): the west
Almeria: watchtower

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Place Names as an Indication of Power

Throughout history conquerors and colonial powers have **changed** the names of local places as an assertion of power or to emphasize control.

Signs at international border crossings as well of US state lines "welcome" you to the new land.

- Aboriginal land of NE Australia was named **Queensland** in honor of Queen Victoria.
- New Amsterdam renamed **New York** after Dutch surrender.
- Tribal "Matabeleland" became British "Southern Rhodesia" then **Zimbabwe** after independence.
- Saigon became **Ho Chi Minh City** at end of Vietnam War.

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India's Postcolonial Toponym Shift

The British named (translated) **places by mishearing native speakers.**

Upon independence India sought to revert to its original place names.

OLD: Uttaranchal State
NEW: Uttarakhand State

OLD: Calcutta
NEW: Kolkata

OLD: Bombay
NEW: Mumbai

OLD: Madras
NEW: Chennai

OLD: Bangalore
NEW: Bengaluru

OLD: Pondicherry
NEW: Puducherry

Figure 4.21
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Signage

When populations are diverse, signage tends to incorporate the main languages spoken. Below English, Arabic and Hebrew are used.

Ethnic neighborhoods tend to have signs exclusively in the language of the majority group. Some are more inclusive.

HOLA
HELLO
HOWDY

Brooklyn Culture Signage

Brooklynese: Vernacular speech; the vocabulary, pronunciation and speech pattern associated with Brooklyn, NY

Welcome to Brooklyn
Home To Everyone From Everywhere!

Welcome to Brooklyn
How Sweet It Is!

Leaving Brooklyn
Fuhgeddaboudit

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Multilingual Signage

BEWARE OF CAMELS NEAR THE ROAD

Welcome to Louisiana
Bienvenue en Louisiane

VOTE HERE
VOTE AQUI

McDonald's

EMIRATES INDIA
International Exchange

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New Language?

2B or not 2B?

Or re-inventing the past?

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نهاية الطريق
END OF ROAD

NEXT:
Race and Ethnicity

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