ISSUES IN GLOBAL EDUCATION

LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY

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Many social studies teachers believe that language is the province of foreign language teachers and teachers of English, and many language teachers believe that society is a topic best left to social studies teachers. But social studies as a subject is incomplete without a knowledge of the role of language as a factor in human social, political and economic behavior, and language study is incomplete without an understanding of the social setting of language.

When we talk of democracy in Nigeria, or self-determination in East Timor; when we explain what must be done to restore peace in Sudan or deal with conflict in the Balkans or create democratic institutions in Afghanistan, language is an important dimension. It is even a dimension in Arabic-speaking Iraq, where Kurds (who speak Kurdish) constitute an important minority. And it is certainly a dimension in the overall effort to curb terrorism.

Foreign language teachers, for their part, teach standard forms of language that may be far removed from the experience of many native speakers. They give little attention to non-standard forms. They may be right to do so, since their goal is to equip their students to succeed in an elite environment; but emphasis on standard forms may make it more difficult for their students to perceive the sheer diversity of linguistic expression and its functions in the target society. In fact their students may not fully understand what a language is, and how it functions in society generally. Languages are not contained in textbooks, but in the minds and on the lips of living people, and they change constantly in response to the pressures and demands of their social context.

This contribution to Issues in Global Education is intended to help social studies teachers assess the role of language in society and to assist language teachers in analyzing how society shapes language.

The Study of Language

What is a language, and how do languages come about? One of the major problems posed by language is its multi-level nature. Language can be analyzed in the form of individual competence, in actual dialogue (or "discourse") among groups of individuals, as a formal system of signs, as a cultural system, and in numerous other ways. Which of these perspectives one takes depends on the kinds of questions one wants to ask, and also narrows down the kinds of answers one is likely to get. General linguistics has tended to focus on language as a formal system and, under the influence of Noam Chomsky, to interpret language in terms of a highly abstracted individual competence. Such an approach leads us to see language as beginning in the individual, in the physical development of the brain and in its ability to process language, which is in turn linked with neural systems that support speech and hearing. These matters are the terrain of the *psycholinguist*, who is interested in the relationship between *psychology and language*. But this approach is only one way of addressing language – and the kinds of questions that interest social studies teachers are not, by and large, questions that the formal approach is capable of addressing in a comprehensive way, nor do the internal workings of the human brain tell us what we need to know about language in a broader social context.

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But individuals interact with other individuals and create systems for communicating. They engage in specific speech acts and particular kinds of verbal exchanges. Language allows them to express their own personality and absorb information about the personalities and needs of others. Speakers do not rely solely on the rules of language as a formal system, but draw equally on their knowledge of the social context, of the individual whom they are addressing, and of the topic. Even if we accept that human beings are, in some sense, "wired" for language, as linguists like Chomsky and Steven Pinker have argued, they just as clearly possess an uncanny ability to perceive and react to environmental cues in their actual use of language. Were it not for these social and ecological dimensions, language could hardly play a useful role in communication. Thus several branches of language science have developed which look at language as social interaction and as a device for the exercise of power. As a fundamental aspect of human behavior, language has an impact on virtually every kind of human interaction, including political and economic interaction.

The linguistics of communication between individuals is often referred to as *pragmatics.* Researchers study how people interact with one another, who controls conversations, how turn-taking works, who interrupts whom. Analysis of the content and consequences of such exchanges is called *discourse analysis.* Such studies demonstrate that there are many regularities in language use that cannot be captured at the level of the formal system but nevertheless constitute part of the "communicative competence" of a fluent speaker. These regularities can be viewed either as skills that speakers acquire and use to function effectively in particular groups, networks or settings, or as markers that enable others to identify them. As the level of analysis moves from specific exchanges to these wider social patterns, we enter the domain of *sociolinguistics.* David Crystal has defined language as "the systematic, conventional use of sounds, signs, or written symbols in a human society for communication and self-expression." In stressing the fact that language is socially determined and its use is governed by social convention, he moves it within the realm of social studies, as an important element in human social behavior and as a social institution.

A person's repertoire of use within a single language or dialect may be determined by numerous markers, among them geographical location (in the western United States, the word "orange" has one syllable, while in the East it has two; a furze bush in the north of England is often a gorse bush in the south; most New Yorkers' speech is rhotic – they pronounce their r's – but most Londoners are non-rhotic, and so on), or it may express such characteristics as ethnicity, gender, age, profession, class or social standing. As our major form of communicative behavior, language is bound up with self-identification and also with other people's perceptions of who we are. As critics of conventional testing techniques have pointed out, or as observers of interactions between government employees and their clients have shown, the way people use language can determine – often quite wrongly – our judgments about their skills, their intelligence, and their work habits.

What Is English?

Is it the English of London or of New York, of San Antonio or Newark, Sydney or Dublin, Nairobi or New Delhi? And the English of whom in those places? Everyone? Only certain people? Is it the language of Merriam-Webster, or of the BBC, or the Queen, or Tom Brokaw, or Madonna, or Snoop Doggy-Dog, or the University of Oxford? Is it an element in foreign policy, or a device for the exercise of cultural imperialism? Is it a means of bridging the smaller languages to promote communication and bring economic advancement? Is it a device for excluding those who have not had the good fortune to learn it? Is it inherently superior to other languages or a language that just got lucky? Is there such a thing as "correct" English, and is such "proper English" superior to other forms?

Evidently the answers that one finds in grammatical studies, or in standard dictionaries, cannot reflect the full diversity of language in its social setting. While the abstract study of language is crucially important, there is a very real danger that we will conclude that Spanish is something in a textbook, that French is to be found inside a dictionary, that Chinese is hidden in a box of CDs. The study of language as a social phenomenon, as something constantly changing, constantly being renegotiated, gets relatively little attention. But language is in fact an institution that has a massive bearing on our lives, in all kinds of ways.

The linguistic behavior of people in small groups is mirrored in the larger interaction of language communities. Language is used as a device to include (when the speaker of a minority language learns the government's official language in school, this is part of a process to incorporate that individual into the imagined community of the nation) or to exclude (when language minorities are obliged to communicate in a language that is not their native language, they are put at a disadvantage or shut out altogether). Examining this process of inclusion and exclusion (and the two sometimes happen simultaneously) is one way of observing the exercise of political or economic power in a community.

How often, for example, do we examine an election in a bilingual or multilingual country by asking who uses what languages or language varieties with which voters? In countries like Taiwan or the Philippines, for example, this may be a crucially important variable. And how often do we examine the economy of language diversity by attempting to model the costs and benefits of knowing more than one language or combinations of languages in a given country? Economists increasingly recognize that knowledge of languages may be an important consideration in the labor market and in workforce mobility, but such considerations make their way relatively rarely into social studies textbooks.

Thus the study of language leads us to examine politics and economics through a different lens. It may also lead us to look at history differently. What, for example, is the relationship among the invention of printing, the growth of literacy and the emergence of national languages in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and how do these various phenomena relate to the emergence of Protestantism in this period? The growth of viable local markets for printed materials (the cost of written texts fell as printing emerged, and the cost of distribution fell as literacy rose) made it possible to produce materials in the dominant local languages. These languages in turn allowed the development of local print economies, and also local economies of belief, weakening centralized control and giving new emphasis to texts accessible by ordinary people. We are witnessing a similar phenomenon today with the Internet, where the percentage use by native English-speakers (though not necessarily the absolute use) is declining, and speakers of smaller languages are taking a larger share (native English-speaking users, for example, declined from 51% in 2001 to 40.2% in March 2003). Our examples could go on, but the central point is clear: human institutions are bound up with questions of language capability, language choice, and language use.

Any "language," as the term is most commonly used, consists of a wide and overlapping set of "sub-languages." Some are geographically or ethnically defined and known as dialects; some are defined by social setting, and known as registers; some are linked to profession, or class, or gender, or educational level, or various combinations of these; some are determined by medium, such as print, writing, and speech. *Sociolinguistics* studies all of these variations, along with their role in self-identification and in other people's assessment of identity. Although such sub-languages share parts of an underlying formal system, to use this system (for example) to "speak English" in ways that are most appropriate and productive, people have to acquire a mastery of complex social conventions as well.

Languages in the World

But we have not answered one of our initial questions: What is a language and how does it get to be one? The answer to this question turns out to be more difficult than we might suppose. In parts of rural West Africa, a given village may use a brand of language that is slightly different from, but fully comprehensible with, that of the next village over. This second village may speak a slightly different form of the language from a third, and so on. The result is a dialect continuum that may stretch for hundreds, or even thousands, of miles. The language spoken at one end of this continuum may be quite different from that spoken at the other end, but there may be no easy way of splitting the continuum up into a finite number of "languages." In Europe, there is a dialect continuum (fainter now than it once was, but still there) that arches from Portugal all the way to northern France in one direction and southern Italy in another. Another dialect continuum extends from Austria and northern Italy to the Netherlands. Overlaid on these dialect continua are modern, standardized languages like French, Italian, and German, the products and markers of nation-states.

Just as in the mid-nineteenth century railroads had to come up with a system of standard time even though at a given minute the sun was in different places in the

sky over Boston and over Pittsburgh, so nation states have adopted a standard form of one language, or in some cases more than one language, in which to conduct their official business. This standard form of language in a given country did not come about by magic, but resulted from the favoring of certain forms, or even certain languages, over other dialects and languages, and the reinforcement of this selection through such institutions as schools and newspapers: standard language is an expression and a consequence of institutional power. So standard languages, which confer power and prestige on their speakers, emerge from the abundant underbrush of dialects. Indeed, it has been said that a language is a dialect with an army.

But, to return to our earlier question, counting the number of languages in the world is no easy business. It is made more difficult by the fact that most languages are quite small – the vast majority are spoken by no more than a few thousand speakers, and sometimes by hundreds – and not written down. Most estimates set the figure at around 6000 languages, but this is a very rough number, dependent on wildly varying definitions and on imprecise knowledge of highly multilingual parts of the world, such as Papua New Guinea and areas of Africa. Languages are dying out at an alarming rate, and there is currently much discussion about the desirability of preserving or reviving dying languages. Is the loss of a linguistic system similar to the loss of a species? Should linguists be as exercised about the loss of linguistically unique ways of describing the world as biologists regret the passing of species?

If the small languages are very small, the big languages are very big. Some 70% of the world's population speaks one of eleven languages. Mandarin Chinese, Hindi-Urdu (spoken in India and Pakistan), Spanish, and English have the largest number of speakers, but estimates of the precise number of native speakers vary considerably, and estimates on second-language speakers are wildly different.

LEADING LANGUAGES

Estimates of Native Speakers

Language	Speakers
Chinese	1,113 million
English	372 million
Hindi-Urdu	316 million
Spanish	304 million
Arabic	201 million
Portuguese	165 million
Russian	155 million
Bengali	125 million

Graddol, 1997, p. 8

Counting the number of speakers of a given language is even harder than defining the language in the first place. Most people in the world are bilingual: they use more than one language in their day-to-day lives. They may have one or more languages in their families (and social mobility and urbanization are creating more and more bilingual homes); they may use another to do their shopping, and a third at work. Estimates of the number of non-native English speakers may be based on such data as school enrollment in foreign language classes, self-reporting in censuses, and the like. But just as it is hard to tell the difference between a dialect and a language (When does a dialect become a language?), so it is hard to tell the difference between a speaker and a non-speaker of a language. How much English qualifies a taxi-driver or a shopkeeper to be counted as a speaker of English?

Sometimes even the concept of "speaker" requires definition. The languages of the deaf, for example depend on visual sign rather than audible speech, but in every other respect they resemble spoken languages. Only in recent years has sign language gained full recognition, not only as a linguistic system (in fact many linguistic systems: there are dozens, perhaps hundreds, of varieties of sign, some more standardized than others) but also as the marker of a distinct Deaf culture.

Mapping the varieties of language used across the world can involve many approaches. *Historical* or *diachronic* linguistics looks at the development of a language or languages over time. Two centuries ago, the practice of historical linguistics led to the conclusion

that all or most languages are related to one another through common ancestors, just as French or Italian are derived from Latin, the language of the Romans and their empire. The genetic classification of languages assumes common origins and produces families and family trees. We sometimes forget that this biological approach is no more than a convenient metaphor: although French is derived from Latin, the language of the Romans was not the only influence on French, nor does it fully account for the language of Paris today – and the same is even truer of, say, Romanian or Portuguese. Languages have many fathers and many mothers, and the classification of languages into families or groups may tell us something about their history but not much about their modern interactions. On one matter all linguists agree: languages change over time, and language change is an essential phenomenon common to all functioning languages.

Linguistic typology looks at structural similarities among languages regardless of historical connections, and *areal linguistics* looks at geographical regions sharing linguistic properties among languages that are not necessarily of the same language group. Theories that the human brain is hard-wired for language have encouraged some linguists to look for language universals on the assumption that all languages have common properties. But most sociolinguists are less interested in these abstract properties of language than in how languages interact and overlap in the political, economic and social spheres, regardless of their "kinship" or their common linguistic characteristics. For many sociolinguists, if enough people believe that they are speaking a given language, and if they are able to interact in that language, then the language exists. Critics might call such a definition dangerously relativistic, but it may be a better starting-point for the study of language in human society than a purely theoretical one that tells us that, in spite of the fact that the Dutch think they are speaking Dutch, they are in fact speaking a dialect of German, or in spite of the fact that the Brazilians think they speak Portuguese, they are in fact speaking an early dialectal offshoot of Spanish. As for the Americans, if they believe they are speaking English, the least the Brits can do is humor them.

A major way of asserting ethnic identity is by means of language and language choice. Ethnicity in turn is tied to language loyalty: staying with a language even when you might expect economic forces to turn you away from it. Language is a principal vehicle of culture – another highly slippery term. If culture is a collection of shared behaviors, which themselves constitute a form of meta-language, then language is fundamental to culture. A given "culture" may have its own language or languages, or it may share a language with others, in which event it may seek to make that language its own in various ways, even to the extent of defining it as a separate entity. We observe this phenomenon frequently when political realities change. Yugoslavia under Marshal Tito used Serbo-Croatian as its major language, even though the Serbs used one writing system for it and the Croatians another. Today, when Croatia and Serbia are eager to stress their separate identities, Serbian and Croatian are identified as separate languages. Does that mean that they have been artificially separated and are really one language? Not entirely. One could, if one wished, argue that Danish, Norwegian and Swedish are essentially varieties of a single language, but the three are generally regarded as separate, despite their high level of mutual intelligibility. The term "language," in short, is often a political term rather than a linguistic one.

Some scholars have described this worldwide mosaic of languages and speakers as a world language system, in which choices are made among languages and in which languages interact at various levels – local, regional, and international. In such a system there exist complex hierarchies of language use in which languages compete for attention. In certain respects language is like a software system: if you can persuade others to use it, you can create a network of users who develop a preference (and a capability) for interacting within the system rather than going outside. Languages compete to dominate their local markets: a common language promotes common trade, the exchange of cultural products, and an open market of ideas. Of course, an individual may belong to more than one such user network: the Japanese speaker of English has a local area network at her disposal and also a kind of world-wide web.

Speaking More Than One Language

We have already raised the question of whether the diversity of the languages of the world is an asset or a liability. It obviously slows communication globally, and, in a world that is rapidly converging through technological advances and complex international political arrangements, our desire or need to communicate seems to outstrip our linguistic capacity for doing so. But the diversity of languages is also an asset: it helps build cohesion in small communities and sustains unique cultures, thereby bestowing distinctive identities on individuals and reducing alienation and homogenization. The rich variety of linguistic idioms carries with it an equally rich variety of cultural forms and ways of thought, and maintains for humankind a diversity of devices for coping with the uncertain challenges of human existence. And who knows what cultural and intellectual tools we will need in tomorrow's world? In this sense, linguistic diversity resembles biodiversity.

There are many ways in which people communicate across language barriers. Often the speakers of one language communicate with their more powerful neighbors in the language of the neighbors, yielding to the linguistic power that their neighbors wield by virtue of their superior economic or military strength. Sometimes they adopt the language of a third power with greater prestige or authority. Thus, Azerbaijanis or Uzbeks continue to communicate with Russians in Russian – at least if the Russians have something they need – and Ghanaians and Nigerians use English, the government language of their countries, even though their native languages may be quite different. A *lingua franca* is a language used to permit routine communication between groups of people who speak different native languages – particularly communication having to do with trade and economic matters. Today, English performs the role of lingua franca for many people, much as Dutch or Portuguese did for merchants three or four hundred years ago, or Latin did among the learned in the Middle Ages. When we study Mediterranean trade in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, or Atlantic trade in the eighteenth, do we devote enough attention to the question of who used what languages, and how language use affected trade patterns?

Sometimes, an entirely new linguistic medium will develop for purposes of trade, incorporating elements of a powerful language with elements of a local one. Such a language, often with very restricted uses, and sometimes short-lived (as in the case of the simplified language used between Vietnamese and Americans in Vietnam) is known as a *pidgin*. Although a pidgin may have a very restricted grammar and vocabulary, pidgins sometimes expand the domains in which they function, so that they become full-fledged languages, with a broad vocabulary and complex grammar, and with native speakers and extensive speech communities. Such languages are known as *creoles*. English-, French-, and Spanish-based creoles continue to have wide currency in the Caribbean, their origins lying in the pidgins developed by the Caribbeans' African ancestors under the oppression of slavery and under the influence of their native African languages. Many linguists believe that Black English in the United States is a form of creole related to the creoles of the Caribbean.

Languages are also sometimes invented for international use. When Esperanto was created in the 1880s, it was intended as a means of communicating across language barriers not on the terms of the powerful languages, but on a neutral basis. Unlike creoles, which are derived from spoken language, planned languages like Esperanto begin as written languages rather than spoken ones and develop a speech community, if at all, only after their basic linguistic features have been quite extensively elaborated. Today, there are Esperanto speakers and users in most countries of the world, though in relatively small numbers.

Although we are born with a native language, we may choose additional languages. It has been said that languages exist because they support a collection of communal interactions that are regarded as important enough by their participants to be worth preserving. People remain loyal to their native languages or adopt other languages (by substitution or addition) on the basis of utility, power, or prestige – which are often, but not always, the same thing. In general, people remain loyal to a language when they have the strength and resources to do so (*differentiation*); they

give it up when the advantages that accrue from the adoption of another language exceed those they enjoy by remaining with the one they have (*convergence*). They may well opt for bilingualism, using one language for certain domains (family life, religion, community life), and another for other domains (employment, mass media, education). Such bilingualism may be hard to sustain, and what appears to be additive or stable bilingualism may well turn out to be transitional, as speakers shift from one language to another, and as the domains in which one language is used (the family, the school, the market, and so on) are appropriated by the other.

The maintenance of minority languages may require imaginative and persistent efforts by local leaders and central governments, including opportunities to use these languages at least in some areas of schooling. Such attitudes are rare among native speakers of dominant languages, who tend to lapse into monolingualism and fail to understand the complexity of language situations (Americans, unfortunately, are frequent offenders in this regard). Often language maintenance efforts are driven by, and drive, political and economic trends, such as local control, autonomy, or even political independence. In some countries, South Africa for instance, several languages are regarded as official languages, with equal status; but if their use is insufficiently supported by government resources, some languages inevitably emerge as stronger than others and the smaller ones decline.

LANGUAGES OF GOVERNMENT

Language	States
English	74 states
French	25 states
Spanish	18 states
Arabic	19 states

All other languages (including Russian and Chinese, both working languages of the UN General Assembly) are used as official languages in less than 10 states each.

Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p.300

More or less all of us use more than one language *form* in our day-to-day communication. We communicate differently in informal situations from the way in which we communicate in highly formal situations, such as school or work. We may employ different vocabulary, or form our sentences differently, or use a different accent. The way in which we speak in a given situation is known as a *register*: we use different registers for work and for going to football games, or for school and for shopping. Some people use not only different vocabulary but different grammar as well, speaking a dialect at home that is different from the one used elsewhere. While such dialects, Black English for example, are different from standard language, they have their own complex grammatical rules that all speakers follow: it is inaccurate to regard such dialect speech as poor or lazy or incomplete language.

The use of two different language varieties within a speech community for different purposes is known as *diglossia*. Some languages, such as Modern Greek, Arabic, or Bengali, have significantly different language varieties for use in formal or informal situations, so-called Low and High varieties, and thus diglossia is the norm. Occasionally the term *diglossia* is used not only for varieties of the same language but for quite different languages. Thus the use of Spanish as the language of the home and English as the language of the workplace, a common phenomenon in the United States, can also be described as a diglossic situation. So can the widespread use of the indigenous American language Guaraní in day-to-day living in Paraguay, and the use of Spanish in more formal situations. Speakers who are comfortable in more than one language may choose to switch from one language to another when topics change or when they are talking in one language about a domain in which they use a different language. Thus a conversation in Spanish about family may shift to English when the subject is work (this is known as *code-switching*), or may include English terms in a Spanish context (this is known as *code-mixing*).

We can distinguish between *individual* and *societal* multilingualism. In the former, an individual speaks more than one language, while in the latter a society or community recognizes more than one language but most people speak only one. Switzerland is an example of societal multilingualism: there are four official languages (German, French, Italian, Romansch). But patterns of individual multilingual-

ism in Switzerland are harder to define: while individual bilingualism between French and German is relatively common, a complicating element is the fact that the official German of Switzerland (Hochdeutsch) is not the variety of German that most German-speakers use in the home (Schweitzerdeutsch).

Many states are officially multilingual. India, for example, recognized in its original constitution two languages as its national languages (only one of which is native to India: the other is English) and an additional fourteen as regional languages (since increased to 18). There are perhaps a further 350 languages spoken in India, some 25 of them with more than a million speakers. Nigeria has English as the language of government but accords broad official recognition to Yoruba, Hausa and Ibo, and local recognition to a large number of other languages. Many Nigerians use a local language in the home (and perhaps in elementary school), Hausa in the market, Yoruba or Ibo at work, and (if they know enough of it) English for communication with government officials. One of India's regional languages may well be enough for individuals to live out their entire lives with very little knowledge of additional languages. It goes without saying that to name such languages "dialects" would be a mistake. The low-prestige term "dialect" sometimes gets used for non-European languages, rather than the high-prestige term "language," which some people mistakenly associate only with languages that are standardized, written, prominent on the world scene and/or European.

Languages Interacting

The world language situation is highly kinetic: as languages interact, their relative strength changes, they borrow from one another, they gain or lose prestige, and in many cases they lose their reason for being and wither and die. There is nothing particularly just or unjust about this process. Languages do not live because they have inherent *linguistic* strengths, nor do they die because they are inherently weak. It is not because of Shakespeare that English enjoys its current popularity, but primarily because of the economic strength of the United States. It may sometimes seem that languages die because they lack the vocabulary to deal with the modern world, but it is speakers and users who develop vocabulary, not inert linguistic systems: all free-standing languages that linguists have discovered in the world so far appear to have complex grammatical and syntactical substructures well capable of change and adaptation, but their speakers do not always succeed in maintaining a separate identity and purpose.

In such cases, choice tends to follow power: people shift to the dominant language in a bilingual situation because economic opportunities are better, schooling is provided in the dominant language, local religious leaders are replaced by leaders from outside the community, or the community grows weaker as people move away. Sometimes the process is slow: it may take a generation or two for the social fabric to disintegrate. Languages undergoing shift and decline often display simplification as their use is decreased. Ultimately they may die out completely. Does this occur because their speakers knowingly and voluntarily abandon them, or because of outside pressures? If we can speak of language "death," is there such a phenomenon as language "murder"? Many sociolinguists, pointing to the history of colonialism or even the history of schooling or industrialization, would argue that there is.

Languages gain in influence primarily through the relative economic strength of their speakers. Sometimes they are supported by governments, and sometimes governments pursue policies that have the effect of marginalizing minority languages within their borders. At the time of the French Revolution only a minority of the nation's population used the language of Paris and the court, but the systematic efforts of a highly centralized government administration, coupled with the introduction of universal elementary education in the 19th century, pushed other language varieties out – including languages such as Breton that belonged to entirely different language groups. This "internal colonialism" was also practiced in Britain, where the five Celtic languages spoken in outlying areas were either marginalized, as was the case with Welsh and with Irish and Scots Gaelic, or entirely extinguished, as happened with Manx and Cornish. In the Soviet Union, while the realities of huge distances

and well established ethnicities were recognized in the maintenance of some of the languages of some of the republics, the influence of Russian was expanded and enforced through government policies. Such intervention continues today, for example in China, where efforts to generalize the use of Mandarin are weakening the influence of the other varieties of Chinese and the other minority languages.

The processes of language change cause languages to borrow from one another. English has always been accommodating to loan words from other languages, and its rich vocabulary is derived from the assimilation of waves of borrowings from Norman French in the Middle Ages, from Latin in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, and from other sources besides. With its enormous strength today as the language of technology and business, and as a major source of cultural products, English delivers loan words to numerous languages, such as Japanese and Russian. Some language cultures show greater acceptance of loan words than others, and several governments and other institutions are working hard to resist such assimilation, often by the active creation of new words and terms more suited to the aesthetic of their languages (see our section on language planning). Is such linguistic purism doomed to failure or can it be made to work? The experience of some smaller languages (Icelandic, for example) would suggest that under certain circumstances it can be successful, but sometimes the language academies that many nations maintain (the Académie Française, for example) seem to be fighting a losing battle.

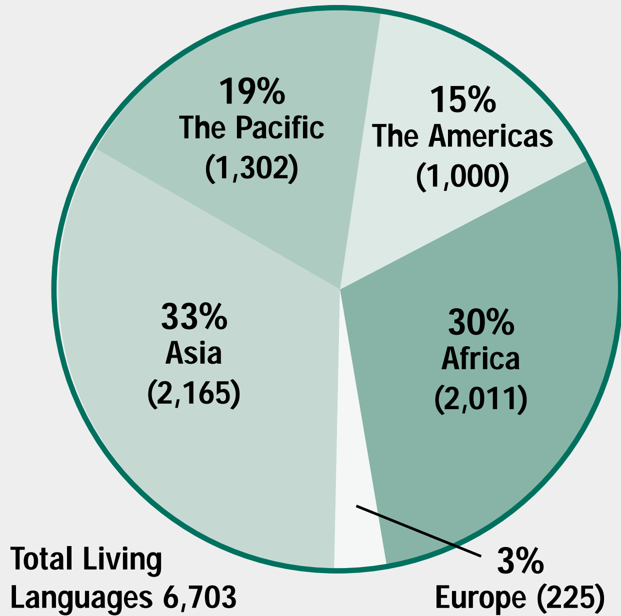
Language change works much like other social changes – in S-curves such as we see in epidemiology, with scattered cases early in the process, rapid increase, and slow dying-out of old forms. Some change goes downwards, as standard forms spread outwards, but other changes emerge from non-standard varieties of the language or from other languages entirely, as concepts or technologies are imported or new locutions arise in international popular culture.

In the international sphere, languages are constantly jockeying for position, as is evident today in the policy debates of the European Union. What seems to a speaker of a dominant language like common sense or the easiest solution ("Let's all use English") may seem to a speaker of a non-dominant language like aggressive cultural domination or an attempt to silence opposing views ("Let's stop using German"). Thus, Americans are often impatient with non-speakers of English, accusing them of willful refusal to speak English or of using their own languages in order to gain a negotiating advantage by speaking a language the Americans do not understand. The European Union maintains an official policy of equality among all the languages of government of the member-states, but in practice some languages dominate and others are marginalized. English continues to make gains in the EU against French and German, but resentment against English increases proportionately.

Spoken And Written Language

Most of our interactions take place through the medium of spoken language, and even the most reclusive of us use speech more than we use writing. Most languages in the world have no written form, and estimates of the percentage of the world's population that is literate varies enormously. Spoken language is associated with the family: it is in the home that, learning to talk, we discover the oral use of language. Although many people learn to read and write at home, written language is associated with schooling: it is more institution-based than spoken language and its use implies a need to communicate over distance and gather knowledge over time. Since it is intended to communicate with a wider circle of people, in which writers may not even know their readers, it tends to be more standardized than speech. Since it allows for revision and sustained thought (the acts of composition and of transmission are separated by time, as they are not in spoken language), it tends to be more abstract in content and more conservative in form.

Over the past four or five thousand years, many different ways of writing have been developed. Alphabets and syllabaries are adaptations of the sounds of spoken language to written form. They imply the pre-existence of at least a partially standardized spoken language and are well adapted to the movable type traditionally used in printing, and to typewriter and computer key-



Grimes, Barbara F., ed. Ethnologue, 13th Edition, Summer Institute of Linguistics, Inc. 1996 http://www.sil.org/ethnologue/distribution.html (11 August 1999).

boards. Pictographic and ideographic systems are representations of ideas and concepts rather than sounds, and they can often be used as common writing systems for several languages or language varieties. They imply the pre-existence of cultural systems that may cover more than one language variety; they are less well adapted to movable type.

It is evident, then, that the choice of a writing system affects the development of a community or society and the distribution of power within it. A great advantage enjoyed by English and the major European languages is their Roman alphabet: a person literate in one European language can automatically write many others. A person literate in the South Indian language Kannada, however, cannot automatically write the North Indian language Hindi, nor any other language for that matter. Changes in writing systems often produce or abet major shifts in political power. Thus the romanization of Turkish in 1929 helped the secular, western elite against the more traditional, religious forces. In recent years, several of the former Soviet republics have moved away from the Cyrillic alphabet in an attempt to reduce their cultural and economic ties with Russia and forge links with the West. In the short run, such efforts are little more than symbolic: often there are no resources to replace the old printing presses with computerized printing systems.

The Roman alphabet is somewhat too restricted to cover the spectrum of meaningful sounds (*phonemes*) used in the languages that employ it. So accents (*diacritics*) must be introduced, and single letters must sometimes cover multiple sounds. English, which lacks diacritics, has what many regard as a chaotic spelling system, but its spelling reflects the complexity of its historical roots, and, while it is problematic to learn, it readily accommodates differing pronunciations, thereby allowing for standardization of written English across many phonological varieties of the language.

We can see written language as another part of the linguistic repertoire of the individual: to be literate is in some sense to be bilingual. There are numerous communicative elements missing from written language, such as body-language (*kinesics*) and intonation, though they are replaced in some measure by punctuation and by more complex syntax and word-order, as well as by such extralinguistic factors as typography. Translation from spoken to written language is a tricky process, and many misunderstandings arise when courtroom testimony or legal depositions are rendered in writing, or when political speeches or press conferences are transcribed. Often the people concerned do not realize that the problem is linguistic. Written language frequently fails to recognize spoken irony: politicians quoted in the press are often reduced, after the fact and in the heat of controversy, to insist that they were joking or were quoted out of context.

Literacy, the ability to read and write, is, as we have noted, hard to define in practice, and various working definitions of literacy are used for political and administrative purposes. How much written language is enough to qualify as literacy? What reading level is required? Literacy plays a significant role in democratic systems, at least as conceived in the west, and is essential for the operations of a modern nation-state. It is hard to imagine a nation-state coming into being at all without the means to communicate over distance. Written language also facilitates transfer of power over time by keeping traditions and precedents intact, and it facilitates institution-building, including the creation of

a legal system. Written language makes the creation and maintenance of a collective history and belief-system easier (it is also the most important source of evidence for the historian), and allows the accumulation of a literature and the development of a canon. Literature plays a significant role in linguistic development and in the development of a sense of group identity. The printing press allows for the mass distribution of information and ideas and hence homogenization and standardization on a national basis.

The rendering of spoken communication in written form, through transcriptions, through fiction and drama, and in numerous other ways, has long blurred the distinction between written and spoken communication, and in our own day various forms of communication that straddle the division between the two have been developed through technology. The telephone allows oral communication over distance, and radio and television allow unidirectional communication in oral form (with the addition of body language in the case of television). Such phenomena as e-mail and instant messaging have encouraged the development of new, less formal modes of written communication. The more widespread use of speech recognition technology will begin to blur the distinction still further.

Since written language is a formally learned skill, the educational system is the primary gatekeeper (as we have noted, one acquires spoken language at home, written language at school). As the language of the larger society rather than a family language, written language is standardized. It is (normally) a language of the state and of the economy – hence a requirement of economic prosperity in many cases, and a class marker (because an indication of education). It may lead to social stratification, especially in societies where not everyone is literate, e.g. in societies in which skill-sets are easily transferred without recourse to written texts, particularly where such skill-sets are family-based. Recently, in an article on literacy in the United States, the *New York Times* quoted a mother newly arrived from Africa and eager for her daughter to have an education: “They say this is the land of opportunity,” she said, “But they forget to tell you that opportunity comes only with education. On the farm in Liberia, whether you have an education or not doesn’t matter. Here it is not good to be a dummy, especially in New York. If you can’t read, you’re going nowhere. I don’t want my children to be lost.”

Language, Community, Nation

Language is an important means of self-identification: our sense of identity is bound up with the language we speak. As we have noted, it is one of the principal markers of ethnic identity and it serves as an important means of creating a sense of ethnic community. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as the old multi-nation states of central Europe developed industrialized societies and as schooling made more and more people literate, the speakers of what had hitherto been regarded as local languages acquired economic and political power and began to use their languages as focal points for their own national identity. Such languages as Hungarian, Finnish, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Polish emerged in parallel with the national consciousness of these regions. The German Romantic writer Johann Gottfried Herder was not alone in asserting that language unity and nationhood were closely related, and the period saw the emergence of a one-nation/one-language principle in which language was regarded as the prime indicator of group identity. Nationalist movements in these countries discovered a new history for their languages – a history rooted in notions of incipient nationhood supported by long-lost epics and shadowy kings. The unity of the Finnish *Kalevala,* for example, was exaggerated to transform it from a collection of folk tales into the full-blown oral epic of an oppressed and proud nation finally emerging into recognition. Language is an indicator not only of a common present but also of a common past.

The colonial powers of the nineteenth century paid little attention to linguistic or ethnic identity in setting the boundaries of their colonies. Indeed sometimes they chose to divide communities in order to govern them more effectively. In our own time, the result has been the emergence of extremely multilingual countries. In some cases, their governments have sought to impose the language of the elite on the others, arguing for the importance of a single language of government. But such efforts often lead to resentment and conflict, in which the elite is accused of holding on to

power by imposing its language on others. Without a measure of linguistic unity, however, it is hard to create lasting institutions, or to bring about full political participation. Democracy does not require the choice of a single language, but it does require the making of manageable linguistic arrangements to maximize voter involvement.

While colonialism has left a legacy of highly multilingual states, relatively few countries anywhere in the world contain a single, entirely dominant ethnic group, and patterns of immigration are making such countries still rarer. If a single group seeks to impose its language on the others, ethnic conflict is likely to arise. Under the Soviet regime, the Estonian language was subordinated to Russian and was little used for official communication; with the coming of an independent Estonia, Estonian has been elevated to a position of political dominance, creating much resentment among the large Russian-speaking minority. Similar patterns are evident in the other Baltic states, and identifying Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian as languages of government has marginalized the formerly powerful Russian minorities. Perhaps such shifts are politically justifiable, or necessary for national unity, but they inevitably create conflict.

On the other hand, efforts to find indicators of a common identity in spheres other than that of language are not always successful. Furthermore, language difference complicates governance: multilingual parliaments or electoral systems are often hard to manage, and contain many flashpoints where conflicts can break out. Nor is command of a given language purely symbolic: if we cannot use our native language to participate in the life of our community or state, we are at a marked disadvantage in expressing our views and having them prevail.

Is linguistic unity necessary for the creation of a sense of nationhood? Most linguists would argue that it is not – but they would point out that the language that one speaks is an important identity marker, and that mutlilingual states require generally accepted and formalized arrangements for the handling of language and language differences.

Language Rights

Can a person be discriminated against on the basis of language? A moment's reflection would probably produce an answer in the affirmative. If a speaker of Spanish is arrested in the United States and can understand neither the charges nor the court proceedings, such a situation makes a mockery of the principle of equal protection. If an English-speaking American is arrested in, say, China, there would be no justice in locking him up after a trial he did not understand. While the concept may be difficult to define precisely, the notion of linguistic discrimination, and hence of language rights, does seem to have substance. In the United States, much of what passes for racial discrimination may in fact be linguistic discrimination: it is not the Spanish-speaker's race that matters in the court, but the Spanish-speaker's language.

The concept of language rights originated, at least in the west, in the 18th and 19th centuries in arrangements for the education of minorities (for example in the Austrian Empire, where local populations were sometimes accorded the right to conduct schools in their own languages), and (paradoxically) in the right to *access* to national languages (if French was to be the medium whereby the French constitution bestowed civil liberties on its citizens, it follows that French citizens had a right of access to the French language). Thus the Final Act of the Congress of Vienna (1815) recognized the existence of national minorities, and the Austrian Constitutional Law of 1867 accorded equal rights to provincial languages "with regard to education, administration and public life."

However, it was not until the middle of the twentieth century that the idea of language rights was given full recognition in international customary law, primarily in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948. According to that landmark document, "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status." Among those rights and freedoms are such provisions as a right to a fair trial, a right to freedom of opinion and expression, a right to education, and a "right freely to

participate in the cultural life of the community." Each of these rights, and many of the others mentioned in the Declaration, has an important linguistic dimension. The right to a fair trial implies the ability of the defendant to understand the charges, the ability to confer with counsel, to follow court proceedings, and to testify in his/her own defense. It would seem to imply a responsibility by the state to provide interpreters and translators as needed.

This linguistic right clearly relates to the individual, but some rights are less easily defined purely as individual rights. Education is a case in point: while education relates ultimately to the individual, it is delivered through educational communities called schools. Most linguists would agree that, after the family, schools are the most important locus for the acquisition of a language. Hence they are crucially important in ethnic politics – as any school board member in an urban district in the United States knows well. Does a right to education imply the right to have one's children educated in a given language? If there are no other children in the vicinity who use that language, presumably not. But how many families are required to reside in a given area before the state has a responsibility to address their needs in their language, if at all? And is there a difference between education in a language indigenous to the country in question and a language imported into the country by immigrants? Does the state have a responsibility to help new arrivals acquire the language of the state, or other languages? And does a right to participate in cultural life imply a responsibility of the state to support a given culture and keep it vigorous? Can access to instruction in foreign languages be construed as part of a right to communicate with the world at large?

We have already noted that the application of adequate language arrangements by the authorities in a given community or country often requires resources – resources that the majority may regard as better used elsewhere, or resources that in many countries simply do not exist. Thus the use of multiple languages in the courts or in the delivery of education requires proactive positive intervention by the state. But some language rights imply only freedom from negative attention. In some countries, people are prevented from, or even punished for, using their language in public, or in the workplace. Such was the situation years ago in many of the schools run by the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, where the use of Native American languages was strictly forbidden. In an article on the current state of Cherokee, the *New York Times* reported recently (September 21, 2003) the experience of the father of Chief Chad Smith of the Cherokee Nation: "If you spoke the language [at school], your mouth was washed out with soap . . . It was an effort to destroy the language and it was fairly successful." Today, only 8,000 Oklahoma Cherokees out of a total of 100,000 speak the language well, and most are over the age of 45. Similar, indeed still more severe, restrictions were imposed on the Kurds by the Turks, or on the Koreans by the Japanese during the Japanese occupation of Korea.

Many of the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 are spelled out in greater detail in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (which deals, among other things, with education) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (which includes a section on court proceedings), both of which came into force in 1976. They are taken up again in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, widely ratified by UN members, though so far not by the United States, and in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, approved by the General Assembly in 1992. None of these documents, however, directly addresses the question of collective rights as opposed to individual rights. Many legal experts deny the existence of collective rights and hence do not recognize the responsibility of the state to protect minorities as a group, but only the members of minorities in circumstances where their individual rights are threatened. The European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages does go part-way to recognizing the existence of collective linguistic and cultural rights, but the question of how these are reconciled with individual rights remains an open practical and legal issue. It is not difficult to imagine, nor indeed to find, examples of cases where a given state, wishing to afford a minority group special protection in a given geographic area, infringes on the rights of citizens in that area who are not members of the minority in question (we cited the case of Estonia and the Baltic States). Such claims have been a source of legal conflict in the officialization of French in the Canadian province of Quebec, a process that fundamentally changed the socio-economic status of the French-speaking majority and permanently altered the cultural environment.

In the United States, in the well-known Lau v. Nichols case of 1974, the Supreme Court found that school

administrators do not meet their obligation to provide equal educational opportunities merely by treating all students alike, but have an obligation to help students unable to understand English. Although there may be differences of opinion on what such help might minimally require, the principle that non-speakers of English are entitled to various kinds of assistance in access to public services, in participation in elections, and in various other ways, is well established in law.

But, as we have noted, what about situations in which a country simply does not have the resources to provide special services for linguistic minorities – nor indeed enough money to send everyone to school? What about situations in which a state recognizes the official status of several languages in its constitution but lacks the resources to provide services in that language? Language rights may be largely luxuries affordable only in highly-developed states with resources to support linguistic diversity. Perhaps the best that we can hope for for the moment in much of the world is the interdiction of persecution and discrimination against members of language minorities.

Changing Languages

We have already noted that all languages change over time, as the purposes change for which they are employed, as communities change, and as the influence of groups within the language community or languages beyond that community wax and wane. But if language change can be seen as in some sense a natural process, most changes come about as a result of quite specific human intervention. Thus the emergence of Estuary English observed by linguists in Britain in recent years (common patterns of speech emerging in cities characterized by significant in-migration and spreading to other regions of the country) is due in part to the mass media, particularly radio and television. The patterns of rising intonation first identified with the Valley Girls of California and later observed, particularly in female speech, in all parts of the United States, would not have gained national currency without television and film. In these cases, no one specifically set out to diphthongize standard English vowels or to reshape American intonation: these things just happened. But sometimes people do intervene to plan language change. Indeed they do it more frequently than we perhaps imagine.

The use of a given language as the medium of instruction in schools bestows on that language great influence and power. Potentially it may cause it to dominate for generations thereafter, as people use it to conduct business, to create literary works, to intermarry, and to raise children who speak it as their first language. People who study *language policy* see education as an important locus for the application of such policy. Thus, policies regarding the use of English in the public schools of 19th-century America helped establish English as the dominant language of the United States, and helped reduce the influence of other languages. Not only can schools favor a given language to the exclusion of others: they can also help propagate standard forms of a given language. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy refers to Tess's mastery of standard speech (as opposed to the Dorset speech of the illiterate) as a result of participation in elementary education. This standard language was also advanced by the adoption of similar forms by the bureaucracy of the state. While perhaps there was no specific *agent* of this process of standardization, the creation of standard English in Britain over several hundred years was not entirely unplanned, and specific policies were used to put it into effect. They were reinforced by the emergence of a standard written form, which was in turn perpetuated through the bureaucracy and the printing press.

We can describe these various practices and policies as forms of *language planning*, the deliberate shaping of a language or its spheres of usage to achieve particular ends. Language planning is generally seen as coming in two forms: *status planning* and *corpus planning* (scholars sometimes see planning for the acquisition of languages as a third, separate category). Status planning seeks to alter the standing of a language: choosing one language over another as the language of schooling is a case of status planning. So is a decision to stop teaching French as a foreign language in a given high school and its replacement by Spanish. So, for that matter, is a decision by a mixed-language couple to raise their children speaking language A rather than language B: while we think of language planning

as primarily a sphere of the state and of officialdom generally, it also has its micro manifestations at the level of the family or even the individual.

Corpus planning involves picking one form of a language over another, or changing a language in some way. Obviously this is very difficult to do with spoken language (though arguably a decision to attempt to standardize the speech of announcers in the early days of the BBC, or to insist that they not split infinitives, was a case of corpus planning as well as status planning), and easier with written language, which is used in more formal settings and more subject to control. Some years ago, for example, a decision was made to stop capitalizing nouns in Dutch (the Germans, of course, continue to capitalize their nouns). The change was achieved in part because of a willing population (an inability to keep one's nouns straight in written Dutch was likely to damage one's chances in a job application: simplifying the language was thus a form of democratization), but also because of the cooperation of the schools, government departments, publishers, and all of the other institutions of the state. The Dutch case affected only the writing system, but sometimes such changes can be introduced also into spoken language, by launching them first or primarily through written language and official speech.

Changes in corpus generally come about because of a decision to change status, and in many cases the two are intertwined. One of the great examples in language planning, often cited in the literature, is the case of Modern Hebrew, derived from the ancient form of the language, which in the mid-nineteenth century was largely confined to liturgical and scholarly use. At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries there was much discussion among the Jewish settlers in Palestine as to the language that they should adopt for their own use and for a future state. Should it be Yiddish, spoken by the Ashkenazim of Central and Eastern Europe though not by the Sephardim of the Mediterranean countries? Should it be German, of which Yiddish was widely regarded as a dialect? Should it be some totally different idiom, like Arabic or English? Under the influence of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda and others, the decision was made to use Hebrew – but a Hebrew modernized and secularized. Given that no one spoke it as a native language, it had to be introduced into the schools, and families had simultaneously to be convinced to use it in the home. Inevitably it was the young who mastered it first, and the often stumbling capability of teachers and parents was transformed by the children into the fluency of a full-blown language. New words, of course, were required in abundance, and a Hebrew Language Committee was established to introduce them. The Bible and other writings were ransacked for ancient words that might be resemanticized with modern meanings. Failing the Hebrew of the Bible, other ancient languages were examined, Arabic was explored, and in some cases other languages too.

Selecting A Language

The difficulties in selecting a language of government are well illustrated by the experience of the newly independent East Timor, which had fought a long battle for independence from Indonesia. The choice lay among adoption of the principal local vernacular, Tetum, unknown beyond the immediate environs of this tiny state and largely undeveloped (one of sixteen East Timorese indigenous languages, but widely used in East Timor as a lingua franca); Bahasa Indonesia, the language of East Timor's oppressor but largest trading partner (and of course hitherto the official language in government and education); or Portuguese, the language of an earlier colonial power but also a language on the world scene (the language of government of seven members of the United Nations). East Timor chose Portuguese as its official language of wider communication, Tetum for local official use, and all the other indigenous languages as "national languages." Whether this solution will last is unclear: some senior opinion-makers can speak Portuguese, but it is little known among young people, who are more likely to turn to English and the Australian sphere of influence. Indonesian may continue in use in the mainstream even if it is ideologically unacceptable as an official language. Can Portuguese be introduced in education and government when there are very few people able to teach and use it, and are the resources available to expand the corpus of Tetum? According to independence leader Jose Ramos Horta, Indonesian "is an alien language imposed in Timor with a genocide on its back, on its record. Those Timorese students who studied the Indonesian language, they should not fear because they also have Tetum. . . . They must speak Tetum if they don't want to speak Portuguese." - Voice of America broadcast, 7 July 2000: <http:// www.fas.org>

Thus the adoption of Hebrew involved a combination of status and corpus planning. A not wholly dissimilar process of combined corpus and status planning took place in Indonesia immediately before and following the departure of the Dutch after World War II. Instead of adopting Javanese, the largest language of the region, as the official language of Indonesia, the founders of the nation chose to adopt the trading language Malay, spoken widely as a second or auxiliary language but lacking the linguistic resources or the standard forms of Javanese, with its thousand-year literary tradition. Malay also lacked the strong ethnic identification of Javanese and hence was a more appropriate medium of communication for a multi-ethnic Indonesia, but the process of standardization and augmentation required to transform it into Bahasa Indonesia, the language of the modern Indonesia, required extensive planning and active intervention at all levels.

Most language planning these days is neither as grand nor as ambitious as these examples. But, as we have noted, most such changes require a high degree of willingness, often coupled with strong enforcement, to bring them about. The lessons learned from such examples as Hebrew and Indonesian have inspired many efforts at the revival of smaller languages, for example in Europe. But the paradox remains: a language cannot be applied to fields for which it has no terminology, but for the most part no terminology can be developed without economic or ideological incentive.

As a footnote we might point to an interesting example of language planning here in the United States. When Noah Webster compiled his dictionary (and dictionary-making is a powerful means of language planning), he quite explicitly adopted a new form of English slightly different from that of Britain, stressing that he did so in order to create an idiom recognizably American and identifiable with American aspirations to national identity. His purpose was not economic but ideological, and had little to do with making the language better, only making it different.

At the other extreme from such restrictive attempts at establishing a distinctive national identity are dreams of finding a planned solution to language differences across the world. Some see English emerging as such a solution – and status-planning organizations like the British Council and various branches of the United States government are working to bring this about, assisted by the vast cultural and economic resources of the English-speaking world. Others plan entire languages, like Esperanto, to serve as a bridge across the divide of language differences. Still others, conscious of language differences, focus on the process of transferring meaning from one language to another through translation and interpretation, while others stress the importance of language learning. These are all manifestations of what some scholars call *interlingualism*, the process of mediation between separate languages.

World English

More or less the only people who think that one can conduct all of one's affairs in this world through the medium of a single language are speakers of English: pretty much everyone else recognizes that different sets of tasks require different languages. Many people use three or four as a matter of course. English-speakers feel as they do because of the notable spread of the English language in modern times to almost all corners of the globe and almost all domains of human endeavor. While English is not the language most widely spoken as a first language (that distinction belongs to speakers of Chinese), it probably has somewhere between 300 and 400 million native speakers and an equal number of people who use it as a second language (the elites in many developing countries that were former British colonies; Filipinos, where English has broad official recognition; non-native speakers of English in countries like Australia and the United States; business people, scientists and engineers in many countries, etc.). In addition it is the world's most studied language: there are hundreds of millions of people across the world who are studying or have studied the language. We may argue about whether an Indian taxi-driver has a command of English, or whether Jamaican creole is really English at all, but the fact remains that by any measure English is the most internationalized in distribution of any language in the world.

There are many reasons for the spread of English, among them the legacy of colonialism and the history of European expansion that went along with it, but the principal reason, most people would agree, is the sustained economic power first of the British and then of the Americans. This economic power was translated

Three Levels of English-speakers

First-language speakers ....320-380 million
Language is a first, and often only, language.

Second-language speakers...An additional 150-300 million
English is a part of their repertory of languages.

Users of English as a foreign language ....Perhaps as many as 1 billion

More and more speakers of English are shifting from the third group to the second, particularly in such countries as Denmark, Costa Rica, the Netherlands, Surinam, and the Philippines, where English is firmly established. - Graddol, 1997, p.10, citing Kachru

also into educational power: American emphasis on the importance of higher education for national development over a century and a half has resulted in the creation of educational institutions and research enterprises in the English-speaking world of enormous influence and prestige. Today, English-speaking countries and English-speaking enterprises dominate in international finance, world trade, scientific research, cultural production (publishing, music, film etc.), telecommunications, the Internet, and numerous other spheres, and each expansion of use reinforces the language's utility in other spheres as well. Those who aspire to influence aspire also to a command of English: one cannot go far in a profession anywhere in the world without sooner or later encountering the desirability of knowing English.

Many American and British social scientists take this state of affairs so much for granted that they ignore language difference altogether. It is not unusual to encounter a social scientist who believes that an English-language questionnaire can be administered more or less anywhere in the world with similar results. World historians, particularly of the modern period, pay little attention to differences of language. Even specialists in mass communication will often ignore the variable of language as they look at the international reach of the media. This lack of attention to language difference, coupled with the demonstrable strength of English, has led to a neglect of language study in the United States and Britain and in the English-speaking world in general. It leaves Britain and the United States vulnerable to a certain insularity and to an inability to listen to dissenting voices or other points of view on world affairs when they are expressed in languages other than English.

We have already suggested that language is like a software system: once one has invested in it one cannot readily reject it in favor of some other product. This dependency on English works to the advantage of English-speakers. Their greater fluency in English allows them to dominate discussion in the language; it spares them the expense of editing their writing, as even accomplished non-native English-speakers must often do; it helps them to jobs; it adds to their mobility. Although those aspiring to influence in the world go along with such a situation, their resentment is often considerable. It is rare for a national leader these days to have no knowledge of English, rare for a scientist (however accomplished his or her work) to be wholly unable to speak the language; but all too often the merits of such individuals are measured in terms of their capacity to use English rather than their ideas.

The emergence of large numbers of non-native speakers of the language has recently resulted in a situation in which the number of non-native speakers exceeds the number of native speakers. A kind of Global English is appearing whose speakers draw on the standard forms of American and British English (and also, in parts of the world, of Australian English) to produce a language that may be less adventurous and idiomatic than native forms but has wide currency and intelligibility. At the other end of the spectrum, the local and regional use of English for local and regional purposes (for example in India) is causing divergence rather than convergence, leading to the appearance of markedly different regional forms of English (indeed, there are those who prefer to talk of Englishes rather than of English).

Throughout history languages have gained in influence in particular parts of the world only to recede when their speakers lose economic and political power and other languages arise to take their place. Such was the glory and the fate of Latin and, later, of French. In the eighteenth century, when English was only beginning to exchange the status of offshore idiom for the status of major language, the great courts of Europe spoke French. French continued to dominate in diplomacy right up to the Conference of Versailles in 1919, when English began to challenge its position. Other lan-

"The estimated gross language product (GLP – the money generated by language-related commerce) of English is $7,815 billion, compared to $2,455 billion for German and $1,789 billion for Spanish."

- *The* (London) *Observer* (18 March 2001)

guages have dominated, or continue to dominate, in particular regions of the world: German for many years in Central and Eastern Europe; Russian in Eastern Europe and Central Asia; Chinese in much of East Asia. Such regional influence can wane even faster than it comes into being – but on a smaller geographical scale languages can push out their rivals more or less permanently, indeed to the point of extinguishing the rivals completely. The past century has seen the conquest of distance and the exploration and colonization of the entire world. Is the future of English more like that of one of those regional languages, or will its widespread adoption drown out its rivals so that even the rivals adopt it as their medium and their struggle for power is conducted in and through their adopted idiom? The experts disagree. There are those who argue that the influence of English is a mile wide and an inch deep; those who believe that as fast as English converges into a global medium of the elite it diverges into what are essentially mutually incomprehensible languages; and those who consider that English, inegalitarian and homogenizing though it may be, will maintain its position of dominance. We should also remember that perhaps eighty percent of the world's inhabitants still have one thing in common: they do *not* speak English.

A Language For International Communication

Are there, or should there be, alternatives to English as a worldwide *lingua franca*? For much of history there was no dominant language in world affairs, and language differences were widely perceived as a hindrance to progress – in commerce, in diplomacy, in science, and in all of the other forms of international interaction. An inability to communicate linguistically was often cited as a cause of war (today we know that wars among speakers of the same language are as ferocious as those between speakers of different languages), and speaking the same language was seen as a guarantee of peace. But what language might that be? Every major language was identified with a particular country, a particular ideology, and its use would confer on that country or those countries a particular advantage. It was during the nineteenth century, when communications were expanding and were more and more accessible to a growing middle class, that various noteworthy attempts were made to construct a truly international language, identified with no particular power group or ideology or nation, and made easier to learn than the exception-ridden national languages. While people had been dabbling in the creation of languages for centuries (some of them, like Descartes, Leibnitz, and Newton, figures of major intellectual stature), the nineteenth century saw the appearance of several attempts to rework elements from existing languages to create a global idiom.

These *planned languages* took different forms. Some were little more than simplifications of existing languages, particularly Latin. Others sought greater internationality. While most addressed questions of vocabulary quite directly, they often left grammar and syntax to take care of themselves. The one relatively successful experiment along these lines was Esperanto, created by Lazar Ludwik Zamenhof, who was born in the predominantly Jewish city of Bialystok, in Russian Poland, in 1859 and who published his language in 1887. Esperanto was heavily influenced by the Romance languages, derived from Latin, but its revolutionary grammar grew out of the early stirrings of structuralism and was based on principles contained in no language known by Zamenhof. While this combination of originality and familiarity may have attracted some people to Zamenhof's language, what made Esperanto unique was Zamenhof's willingness to share it with its first speakers: he gave up all rights to the language and left its development in large measure to the public opinion of the Esperanto-speaking community.

Zamenhof was very much a person of his age: an aspiring Jewish intellectual, he was early attracted to Zionism, but he soon rejected Zionism in favor of a belief in the common fortunes of humankind and the need to create a spiritual as well as a linguistic bond among the world's peoples. For many years his emphasis on the need to find bridges between religions as well as between languages was derided as the passion of the fighter of last year's battles, but, a century later, his concerns seem prescient. His interest in opening up the world to the new beneficiaries of the universal elementary education introduced in many countries in the nineteenth century also attracted a following, while his openness to the newest linguistic thinking by people like Baudouin de Courtenay and Ferdinand de Saussure was noteworthy.

"Many believe the popularity of [Esperanto] in the developing world is being fueled by growing resentment of English as the language of global commerce and political rhetoric. 'Bush and Blair have become Esperanto's best friends,' jokes Probal Dasgupta, professor of linguistics at India's University of Hyderabad. 'Globalization has put wind in our sails, making it possible for people to have interest in Esperanto as not only a language, but a social idea.'" *Newsweek, international edition, August 11, 2003*

In fact, many of Zamenhof's followers were a lot less imbued with the ideological spirit than their founder. Interest in Esperanto spread beyond Eastern Europe, and the first international meeting of Esperantists took place in France in 1905. The French business community became interested in Esperanto, and, later, the world of diplomacy began to pay attention when Esperanto was proposed as a possible language for the League of Nations. Today, it continues to be used for such practical purposes as professional exchanges, and as a language of literary translation. Annual world congresses of Esperanto are held, with two or three thousand participants, and the language is used by numbers of radio stations, and of course on the Internet. The influence of the language is by no means confined to Europe: it is particularly strong, for example, in China, where the 2004 world congress will be held.

But the practical use of Esperanto has been matched historically by its use in all manner of idealistic pursuits. It was strong in the labor movement in the 1920s and 1930s, and for a while enjoyed considerable popularity in the newly-established Soviet Union – until Stalin rounded up its leaders and liquidated them in the purges of the 1930s. Given its Jewish origins and the large numbers of Jews among its followers, it was a prime target for Hitler, who denounced the language in *Mein Kampf.* In our own day, it has been proposed as the language of the United Nations, put forward as a neutral means of resolving the impasse over working languages in the European Union, and widely used by religious organizations and organizations promoting world peace. It has an extensive original and translated literature (its relative grammatical simplicity is matched by a nuanced expressivity) and even a thousand or so native speakers.

When Esperanto was first proposed, it was proposed as a solution to the problem of communication among nations. Today, it is increasingly advanced as an equitable, neutral means of international communication alternative to the inequitable solution of English, which favors native speakers of English (and accomplished non-native speakers as well). One thing seems certain: using Esperanto to advance one's knowledge of the world leads one to places and ideas different from those favored by the dominant culture of Global English. That in itself may be a good reason for learning it. It is also a good reason for using it to study the world in all its social, economic and political complexity. The great drawback of English in that regard is that even school exchanges through the medium of English expose English-speakers to a version of the world seen through the eyes of children from other countries, whose self-worth is judged in part through their command of the language of America and whose desire to please may hide rather than advance their search for truth. Indeed, all interaction through language (including that through Esperanto) is in some measure ideological.

Translation and Interpretation

Translation is the process of "carrying across" meaning from one language to another. While much interlingual communication takes place through the general acquisition of additional languages (the African farmer learns enough of the language of the market to sell his wares or buy the essentials he needs; the Dutch banker learns German), under certain circumstances a community chooses to delegate its interlingual communication to specialists in the languages in question, known as translators. These mediators between languages are an important element in the communication network.

Translation comes in two principal forms: written and oral (translation of sign languages converts visual to oral communication). Oral translation is generally known as interpretation. The translation of written texts is essentially a solitary occupation and is less time-dependent than interpretation. The translator has time to reflect on the text to be translated and to seek out the best equivalent, which will vary according to the nature of the text: a scientific article, for example, requires very different treatment from a literary work because its purpose and audience are different. As any language teacher knows well, there are few one-to-one correspondences between languages, and finding the right word or right expression is an inexact art.

Language Barriers in the Courts

Although any linguist or translation theorist will tell you that languages are not one-to-one mirrors of one another, the court systems of the United States do not recognize this fact. While under most circumstances a defendant is entitled to an interpreter if he or she does not, in the opinion of the judge, understand English, the court record will consist not of the words of the defendant but only of the translation of those words into English by a court interpreter. From a formal point of view, the language of the defendant disappears as soon as it is uttered. Among other things, this makes it hard, after the fact, to prove that something was mistranslated. While efforts are underway to raise the standards for court interpreters, the profession is often underpaid and court interpreters are often underqualified. Errors and misinterpretations are common.

Interpretation places quite different demands on the interpreter. At one time, most interpretation was *consecutive*: a speaker spoke and his or her words were then interpreted into the target language. This is still the method used in informal situations and in such settings as courtrooms or hospitals, but over the past fifty years *simultaneous* interpretation has become the norm in conferences and large meetings. Simultaneous interpretation, conducted by highly skilled interpreters who speak as they listen, requires complex and expensive technology, along with special physical arrangements for the interpreters. This technology was first applied at the Nuremberg Trials following World War II and was soon adopted by the United Nations. The UN's predecessor, the League of Nations, used time-consuming consecutive interpretation, which effectively limited the number of languages employed in debate to two – English and French. But the advent of headphones and interpreters' booths allowed for the expansion of working languages. Today, the UN General Assembly uses six – Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish – although the New York headquarters staff continues to use only English and French for its day-to-day business, where interpretation is often not available or affordable. We note that the chioce of the six working languages of the General Assembly largely reflects the post-war power structure: Chinese, English, French and Russian were the languages of the victors of World War II (Arabic was added during the oil crisis of 1972). Japanese and German, though they are the languages of major economic powers, are not among the working languages.

There are advantages to having one's language represented among those used for interpretation and translation, including the ability to debate in one's own language, to have texts readily available in that language, and to enjoy a certain prestige: the distribution of languages at the UN has as much to do with power as it does with comprehension.

The European Union, committed to providing language services in the languages of all its member-states, must contend with a growing number of languages as new members join the organization. Interpretation is not always possible between certain of the smaller languages because of the unavailability of competent interpreters: it is hard to find interpreters between, say, Finnish and Greek. In these cases a relay system must be used: a Finnish speech is interpreted into a bridge language, generally English, and then re-interpreted into Greek. Such a system results in significant loss of meaning and may sometimes be more symbolic than practical.

Translation and interpretation require special skill-sets that not even good linguists always possess. Good interpreters, particularly, are hard to find, and the work is taxing and exhausting. Today, translators in the large international organizations have various technological aids at their disposal, including electronic thesauri containing important words and phrases, electronic dictionaries, and advanced computers. Indeed, increasingly computers are taking over much of the drudgery of translation, but, even under the best of foreseeable circumstances, human intervention will still be needed to eliminate ambiguities, to remove infelicities of style, and to introduce idiomatic elements that make a text more accessible to native speakers. It is doubtful whether machines will ever take over the translation of literary texts from human translators. Word-for-word translation systems, readily available as computer software, are seldom useful for texts of any complexity. A Polish television producer recently described a letter he had received from an American librarian, translated into wholly incomprehensible Polish by such a system. He only recognized the librarian's name when he realized that the English equivalent of the Polish word *wypad*, meaning "a sudden rush from a besieged place upon the enemy," was "sally."

Language Learning

The commonest means of overcoming language barriers is simply to learn the language of the people one wishes to communicate with. If I suddenly need to communicate in Tagalog, I will look around for someone who knows Tagalog, but if I emigrate to the Philippines and find a job there, I may well end up acquiring the language: sustained contact with another language may make it worth my while to learn it and I may acquire it from my fellow-workers.

Most language learning is of this type. It does not take place in the classroom but on the street or at the workplace. Formal language instruction, while it has been carried on for centuries, is largely a product of western schooling, primarily in the past 150 years. Acquiring language is mostly a matter of motivation: where the desire is lacking, learning is slow. Perhaps the biggest difficulty facing the American language teacher is the creation of this desire among students who have become accustomed to living in an environment dominated by the English language and who feel little need to move beyond it.

The world's most-taught foreign language is English: in many countries it is a compulsory subject in the schools, and its importance is reinforced by its presence in the larger culture, in the form of popular music, films, and television programming. Little of this reinforcement exists for the student of a foreign language in the United States, and, where it does exist, it is made little use of. In fact, the United States is ill supplied with competent speakers of foreign languages, as most world crises seem to demonstrate. Currently, for example, the US is scrambling to find good speakers of Arabic, and, as recent problems at Guantanamo Bay and elsewhere have shown, the government cannot always find reliable help.

The low level of language proficiency among US elementary and secondary school students makes their language learning seem all the more pointless: they often do not learn enough to put the language to practical use. Nor is their acquisition of foreign language reinforced by other teachers, who seldom make use of foreign-language skills or even encourage students to read texts in other languages. It is here that the alliance between foreign language teachers and social studies teachers can be particularly valuable: the language teachers should draw on the work of social studies teachers, perhaps in active collaboration, to make their subject more applicable beyond the classroom, and the social studies teachers should recognize that the dimension of language is crucially important to an understanding of how communities function, how states make decisions and maintain their power, and how the world assesses and confronts the challenges of existence in the 21st century.

Resources On Languages

The Study of Language

Bourdieu, P. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Coulmas, F., ed. 1997. *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics.* Oxford: Blackwell.
Crystal D. 1997. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language.* 2nd ed. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.
Elgin, S.H. 2000. *The Language Imperative.* Cambridge, MA: Perseus.
Fairclough, N. 1989. *Language and Power.* London & New York: Longman.
Reagan, T.G., & T.A.Osborn. 2002. *The Foreign Language Educator in Society.* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
Romaine, S. 2000. *Language in Society: An Introduction to Sociolinguistics.* 2nd ed. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Crystal's encyclopedia will provide a general overview of most of the topics discussed here. The book is entertaining, thorough, and well-documented and is highly recommended. **Coulmas** has assembled in his handbook a collection of essays by well-known experts on sociolinguistics. **Romaine** covers somewhat similar ground, though in a less

compartmentalized way. See also the website <http://logos.uoregon.edu/explore/socioling/>. **Elgin**'s book is an uncomplicated general introduction to language, and **Reagan & Osborn** offer an excellent discussion of topics related to language and society in a form particularly suited to language teachers. Finally, **Bourdieu** and **Fairclough** discuss the subject of language and power. Of the two, Bourdieu is the more theoretical.

Languages in the World

de Swaan, A. 2001. *Words of the World: The Global Language System.* Cambridge: Polity Press.
Padden, C., & T. Humphries. 1988. *Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Tonkin, H., and T.Reagan, ed. 2003. *Language in the Twenty-first Century.* Amsterdam: Benjamins.

De Swaan approaches the languages of the world as a system, and also discusses the economic value of language acquisition. **Padden & Humphries** provide a readable and authoritative guide to deafness and language. **Tonkin & Reagan**'s book offers a number of approaches to the question of the future of language. For an overview of the world's languages, see the website <http://www.ethnologue.com/>, and <http://www.ilovelanguages.com/>.

Speaking More Than One Language

Dillard, J.L. 1972. *Black English: Its History and Usage in the United States.* New York: Random House. 1972
Edwards, John. 1994. *Multilingualism.* London & New York: Routledge.
McWhorter, J. 1998. *The Word on the Street: Fact and Fable about American English.* New York: Plenum.

Dillard provides a classic account of African-American English, and **McWhorter** discusses varieties of American English. **Edwards** gives a comprehensive overview of language in multilingual situations.

Languages Interacting

Aitchison, J. 1991. *Language Change: Progress or Decay?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Crystal, D. 2000. *Language Death.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Dalby, D. 2003. *Language in Danger: The Loss of Linguistic Diversity and the Threat to Our Future.* New York: Columbia University Press.
Nettle, D., & Romaine, S. 2000. *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages.* Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.
Phillipson, R. 2003. *English-only Europe? Challenging Language Policy.* London & New York: Routledge.
Skutnabb-Kangas, T. 2000. *Linguistic Genocide in Education - Or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights?* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Aitchison's book on language change is a good introduction to the subject from the point of view of linguistics. **Phillipson** explores the question of language policy in the European Union. **Crystal, Dalby,** and **Nettle & Romaine** are all recent contributions to the growing literature on the decline and death of languages, a subject also explored in **Skutnabb-Kangas**, whose wide-ranging study examines language policy in education and the threat to smaller languages. On languages at risk and on linguistic diversity, see http://www.terralingua.org/.

Spoken and Written Language

Coulmas, F. 1989. *The Writing Systems of the World.* Oxford: Blackwell.
Drucker, J. 1995. *The Alphabetic Labyrinth.* London: Thames & Hudson.
Celia Roberts and Brian Street, in Coulmas's handbook (see "The Study of Language," above) examine the

differences between written and spoken language, and this topic is also dealt with in some detail by Crystal in his encyclopedia (also under “The Study of Language”). **Coulmas** gives an overview of the various writing systems and **Drucker** focuses on alphabets. On writing systems see also <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~ozideas/writintro.htm> and <http://www.ancientscripts.com/>.

Language, Community, Nation

Edwards, J. 1985. *Language, Society and Identity.* Oxford: Blackwell.
Fishman, J.A. 1972. *Language and Nationalism.* Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Fishman’s account of the subject is the classic text. **Edwards**’s book remains well worth reading, though much of the same ground was later covered in his book on multilingualism (see “Speaking More Than One Language,” above).

Language Rights

Corson, D. 2001. *Language Diversity and Education.* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
Crawford, J. 2000. *At War with Diversity: US Language Policy in an Age of Anxiety.* Clevedon and Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.
Lippi-Green, Rosina. 1997. *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States.* London & New York: Routledge.
Skutnabb-Kangas, T. & R.Phillipson, ed. 1995. *Linguistic Human Rights. Overcoming Linguistic Discrimination.* Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Corson, Crawford and **Lippi-Green** all discuss language policy and language discrimination in the United States. **Skutnabb-Kangas** & **Phillipson** give a comprehensive overview of the international situation and particularly of international instruments intended to address issues of language rights and language discrimination. See also Skutnabb-Kangas under “Languages Interacting,” above. The European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages <http://www.eblul.org> offers useful information on the status of languages in Europe.

Changing Languages

Cooper, R.L. 1989. *Language Planning and Social Change.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Kaplan, R.B., & Baldauf, R.B., Jr. 1997. *Language Planning: From Practice to Theory.* Clevedon & Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters.
Lepore, J. 2002. *A is for American: Letters and Other Characters in the Newly United States.* New York: Knopf.

Lepore gives an entertaining account of some of the linguistic developments in the United States in the course of the 19th century. **Cooper** provides a good introduction to language planning, as does the rather more recent book by **Kaplan & Baldauf**. On language policy and planning see also Phillipson, under “Languages Interacting,” above, and the titles under “Language Rights.” See also “A Language for International Communication,” below.

World English

Crystal, D. 1997. *English as a Global Language.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Graddol, David. 1997. *The Future of English? A Guide to Forecasting the Popularity of the English Language in the 21st Century.* London: British Council.

Crystal offers a rather general and somewhat optimistic overview of the status of English. **Graddol**’s study is harder to find, awkward to read, but extremely valuable and full of facts.

A Language for International Communication

Eco, U. 1995. *The Search for a Perfect Language* . Oxford: Blackwell.
Janton, P. 1995. *Esperanto: Language, Literature and Community.* Ed. Humphrey Tonkin. Albany: State University of New York Press.
Richardson, D. 1988. *Esperanto: Learning and Using the International Language.* Eastsound, Wash.: Orcas.

Eco's book examines the history of the search for linguistic perfection, through philosophical languages and through constructed languages like Esperanto. **Janton** provides a scholarly introduction to Esperanto and **Richardson** a rather more popular one, with an Esperanto grammar. The web resources on Esperanto are extensive. See <http://www.uea.org/>, for general information, <http://www.lernu.net/>, to learn the language, and <http://www.esperantic.org/> for context and background.

Translation and Interpretation

Bassnett, S. 1991. *Translation Studies.* 2nd ed. London & New York: Routledge.

Bassnett's introduction is literary and theoretical. There are no easily accessible accounts of all aspects of translation and interpretation, though Phillipson's book on the European Union (above, "Languages Interacting") offers a good approach from the point of view of policy. See also Crystal's encyclopedia ("The Study of Language," above). <http://www.inttra.net/> is a website for professional interpreters and translators that readers may find interesting.

Language Learning

Kramsch, C. 1993. *Context and Culture in Language Teaching.* Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Reagan & Osborn ("The Study of Language," above) offer a good guide to the social context of language learning. **Kramsch** addresses the cultural context.

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