The Story of Human Language
Part III

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The Story of Human Language

Scope:

There are 6,000 languages in the world, in so much variety that many languages would leave English speakers wondering just how a human being could possibly learn and use them. How did these languages come to be? Why isn't there just a single language?

This course answers these questions. Like animals and plants, the world's languages are the result of a long "natural history," which began with a single first language spoken in Africa. As human populations migrated to new places on the planet, each group's version of the language changed in different ways, until there were several languages where there was once one. Eventually, there were thousands.

Languages change in ways that make old sounds into new sounds and words into grammar, and they shift in different directions, so that eventually there are languages as different as German and Japanese. At all times, any language is gradually on its way to changing into a new one; the language that is not gradually turning upside-down is one on the verge of extinction.

This kind of change is so relentless that it even creates "languages within languages." In separate populations who speak the same language, changes differ. The result is variations upon the language—that is, dialects. Often one dialect is chosen as the standard one, and when it is used in writing, it changes more slowly than the ones that are mostly just spoken because the permanency of writing has an official look that makes change seem suspicious. But the dialects that are mostly just spoken keep on changing at a more normal pace.

Then, the languages of the world tend to mix together on various levels. All languages borrow words from one another; there is no "pure" vocabulary. But some borrow so much vocabulary that there is little original material left, such as in English. And meanwhile, languages spoken alongside one another also trade grammar, coming to look alike the way married couples sometimes do. Some languages are even direct crosses between one language and another, two languages having "reproduced" along the lines of mitosis.

Ordinarily, language change is an exuberant process that makes languages develop far more machinery than they need—the gender markers in such languages as French and German are hardly necessary to communication, for example. But this overgrowth is checked when history gets in the way. For example, when people learn a language quickly without being explicitly taught, they develop a pidgin version of it; then, if they need to use this pidgin on an everyday basis, it becomes a real language, called a *creole*. Creoles are language starting again in a fashion—immediately they divide into dialects, mix with other languages, and start building up the decorations that older languages have.

Just as there is an extinction crisis among many of the world's animals and plants, it is estimated that 5,500 of the world's languages will no longer be spoken in 2100. Globalization and urbanization tend to bring people toward one of a few dozen politically dominant languages, and once a generation is not raised in a language, it no longer survives except in writing—if linguists have gotten to it yet. As a language dies, it passes through a "pidgin" stage on its way to expiration. This course, then, is both a celebration and a memorial of a fascinating variety of languages that is unlikely to exist for much longer.

Lecture Twenty-Five
A New Perspective on the Story of English

Scope: The preceding lectures allow us to see the history of English in a new light. English is, basically, one of today's branches of Proto-Indo-European. The Germanic family that English belongs to was distinguished by odd consonant changes, changes in stress that encouraged endings to wear off, and possibly, an ancient encounter with a Semitic language, leaving words that do not trace to Indo-European at all. Then the branch of Germanic that the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes brought to England came to be learned as much by Viking invaders as by natives, which streamlined English into the one Germanic language without such distinctions as *here* and *hither* and the one Indo-European language of Europe with no gender markers.

Outline

I. Introduction.

A. Generally, the story of English is told as beginning with the arrival of the Angles, Jutes, and Saxons from continental Europe, followed by their language incorporating vocabulary from the original Celtic inhabitants, then the Scandinavian Vikings, then the Normans, and then Latin, Greek, and other languages.

B. But what we have seen so far in these lectures allows us to see how English began and why it is the way it is today from new perspectives.

II. Proto-Indo-European.

A. English, like all languages, is the product of change from a former language: that is, English is one step along a path of continuous development. The furthest back we can trace English, then, is Proto-Indo-European.

B. At this stage, "English" is barely perceptible. Here is a piece of a folk tale constructed in the Proto-Indo-European of about 2500 B.C. (hypothetically, of course):

Tod kekluwōs, owis agrom ebhuget.
that hearing sheep field fled

"On hearing that, the sheep ran off into the plain."

The word **tod* eventually did become *that*, and believe it or not, **kekluwōs* was a form of the verb that did eventually become *hear*. But *field* traces back to a Proto-Indo-European root meaning "to fill," and *flee* to one meaning "flow"—these words are products of the semantic change we saw in Lecture Five.

III. The Germanic subfamily.

A. The next step to English is Germanic, one of the many branches that Proto-Indo-European developed as its speakers moved into Europe and eastward into Asia. Germanic is thought to have emerged in southern Scandinavia or in Denmark and around the Elbe River in about 1000 B.C. The Germanic proto-language was English's next closest ancestor after Proto-Indo-European.

B. *Erosion of endings*. In this language, stress in words tended to drift to the first syllable. This left the final sounds in words highly unstressed, vulnerable to wearing away. Because of this, Proto-Germanic did not have as many endings on nouns and verbs as many other Indo-European languages had. Recall Lithuanian's seven cases: Proto-Germanic had just four. This set the scene for how few case marking suffixes English has.

C. *Semitic vocabulary?*

1. Proto-Germanic was also odd in that one in three Germanic words do not trace to Proto-Indo-European (*sheep* is one of them). This suggests that a group of speakers of some other language learned a branch of Proto-Indo-European and lent it many of their original words.

2. Recall Grimm's Law from Lecture Eight, where Proto-Indo-European *p* changed to *f*, *d* to *t*, and so on, only in Germanic. This is a very odd kind of change, which suggests that it was the result of speakers of a language with a very different sound system than Proto-Indo-European's.

3. But what would the language have been? Linguist Theo Vennemann thinks it was a Semitic language, given that Semitic-speaking sailors traveled the European coast far back in antiquity. The word *maiden*, cognate to German *Mädchen*, traces back to a Proto-Germanic word **maghatis*. The reconstructed Proto-Semitic word for girl is **maḥat*. In Germanic, a verb often marks past tense with a change of vowel instead of adding *-ed*, such as s*ink*, s*ank*. Recall how Semitic words work from Lecture Ten, ***kitāb***, "book"; ***kātib***, "writer."

IV. Germanic in England.

A. Proto-Germanic split into three branches, and some of the peoples who spoke the western one settled in England. (Their relatives today in the Netherlands speak Frisian and Dutch.) The language they developed, Anglo-Saxon or Old English, was one much like German.

B. But it did not stay this way. Part of the reason was the massive influx of borrowed words that we saw in Lecture Twenty. But English also changed its grammar considerably. Today, English is not only the one Germanic language that has lost all gender marking but also the only

Indo-European language of all Europe without it. English is the only Germanic language without the inherent reflexives from the last lecture: in German, one remembers oneself, one hurries oneself, but in English, one simply remembers and hurries. In Lecture Seven, I noted that English no longer makes any distinction between *here* and *hither*, *where* and *whither*, and so on. However, all of the other Germanic languages do. There are many other cases like this in English.

C. English is, in this sense, somewhat simpler than German, Dutch, Swedish, and its other sister languages. English was learned as a second language more than as a first, then passed down in this fashion. Specifically, it was likely in the northern half of England after the Viking invasions at the end of the 8th century that English was streamlined in this way.

V. What is English? English, then, is a descendant of Proto-Indo-European that, along the way toward its emergence, lost most of its case endings and a third of its vocabulary. It replaced that vocabulary with words from a language possibly related to Arabic and Hebrew, then supplemented this with words from, most copiously, Old Norse, Norman French, Dutch, Latin, and Greek. Meanwhile, it was learned so much as a second language by Vikings that its grammar was restrained somewhat from the overgrowth typical of languages that develop uninterrupted. A lot can happen to a language in 4,500 years!

Essential Reading:

Comrie, Bernard, Stephen Matthews, and Maria Polinsky, eds. *The Atlas of Languages*. New York: Facts on File, 2003.

Supplementary Reading:

Baugh, A. C., and T. Cable. *A History of the English Language*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978.

Questions to Consider:

1. As an imaginative exercise, take the English version of the folk tale passage from Section II.B. of this outline and, based on the language change processes we have seen throughout the series so far, project English forward 2,000 years. How might sounds change? Could we develop new prefixes or suffixes? Evidential markers? The sky's the limit.

2. Icelanders can read the version of their language from a thousand years ago with relative ease, but we can only do so after courses of training because English has changed so much. Do you think that this deprives English speakers of an immediately accessible historical literature and encourages cultural fragmentation, or do you embrace the bastard history of the language as a testament to the forces of hybridity over time?

Lecture Twenty-Six
Does Culture Drive Language Change?

Scope: Amateur linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf presented a hypothesis in the 1930s that features of our grammars channel how we think. This may encourage a sense that language structure and, by extension, change is driven significantly by culture rather than being an independently driven process. However, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis was based on faulty evidence and is even counterintuitive. In experiments, it has been shown to be true only in small degrees, such as color perception. Language and culture are surely related, but not as intimately as some researchers would assume.

Outline

I. Introduction.

A. Before proceeding, it is important that we address a hypothesis commonly taught and written about, which has deep implications for how we conceive of language change and how languages differ from one another.

B. Starting in the 1930s, amateur linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf, building on insights originated by his mentor, linguist Edward Sapir, presented a hypothesis that our ways of processing the world are channeled by the structure of our language. This has been called the *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis*.

C. Despite how widely this theory has been broadcast, the actual verdict on it has not been at all promising. Given the theory's implication that language and how it develops is determined in some significant way by culture, rather than by the faceless but fascinating processes of structural change, it is important that we get a closer look at this theory and its history.

II. Whorf's hypothesis.

A. A signature quotation from Whorf is this one:

> We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way—an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one, BUT ITS TERMS ARE ABSOLUTELY OBLIGATORY; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data which the agreement decrees." (Whorf, Benjamin Lee. *Language,*

Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf, edited by J. B. Carroll. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956, pp. 213–214.)

B. Whorf and Hopi.

1. Whorf noted that the language of the Hopi Indians has a word, *masa'ytaka*, for all flying things except birds, while English requires separate words for all such things (*pilot*, *airplane*, *dragonfly*). Hopi has a word for water as it occurs in nature (*pāhe*) and a word for water as drunk and cooked with (*kēyi*); English has just *water* for both. He proposed that differences like this signal different ways of viewing the world.

2. Whorf depicted Hopi as having no words or grammar placing actions in time similar to English's past and future markers. He claimed that this corresponded to the Hopi's having a cyclical, holistic sense of time in contrast to European language speakers' more linear one:

> Our objectified view of time is, however, favorable to historicity and to everything connected with the keeping of records, while the Hopi view is unfavorable thereto. The latter is too subtle, complex, and ever-developing, supplying no ready-made answer to the question of when "one" event ends and "another" begins. (Whorf, Benjamin Lee. *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, edited by J. B. Carroll. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956, p. 153.)

3. Part of Whorf's intention was to demonstrate that indigenous peoples are not "primitives." This was not as widely taught and known in his day as it is now, and thus, his portrait of Hopi language and thought is couched to show its superiority to ours:

> Does the Hopi language show here a higher plane of thinking, a more rational analysis of situations, than our vaunted English? Of course it does. In this field and in various others, English compared to Hopi is like a bludgeon compared to a rapier. (Whorf, Benjamin Lee. *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, edited by J. B. Carroll. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956, p. 85.)

Whorf added an important caveat, that the issue was less what we can think than what we think of most readily:

> The important distinction between HABITUAL and POTENTIAL behavior enters here. The potential range of perception and thought is probably pretty much the same for all men. However, we would be immobilized if we tried to notice, report, and think of all possible discriminations in experience at each moment of our lives. Most of the time we rely on the discriminations to which our

language is geared, on what Sapir termed "grooves of habitual expression." (Whorf, Benjamin Lee. *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, edited by J. B. Carroll. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956, p. 117.)

III. Problems with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

A. For one, Whorf's analysis of Hopi grammar was erroneous. Linguists have since shown that Hopi indeed has markers situating actions in time and that Hopi culture keeps careful time-based records with various calendars and sundials.

B. There are also intuitive problems with the hypothesis. We have seen that many languages mark the difference between how one has an eye versus how one has a chair. This would seem to index a focus in a culture on materialism. But this distinction is very rare in languages spoken by First World, capitalist nations and most common in languages spoken by indigenous peoples.

C. The idea that language channels thought is also less intuitive when applied to languages we are familiar with rather than exotic ones.

1. Western European languages tend to have two verbs for our *know*: one for being familiar with a person (that is, Spanish *conocer*, French *connaître*) and one for factual knowledge (that is, Spanish *saber*, French *savoir*). Yet do we sense that Europeans are more sensitive to the difference between knowing a person and knowing a fact than we are?

2. In English, *scissors*, *pants*, and *glasses* are marked with the plural. In Dutch, they are singular (*schaar*, *broek*, *bril*). But do we think of scissors as "two things"? Is a pair of pants "two things" to us?

D. Finally, to imply that language channels thought leads to uncomfortable implications given the difference between a language such as Tsez or European languages and ones like Riau Indonesian, where it often seems as if one barely needs to say much at all! Do Riau Indonesian speakers think less richly than shepherds in the Caucusus Mountains and functionaries in Brussels?

IV. Verdict from the experiments.

A. *Navajo and objects*. Navajo has different verbs for handling objects depending on their shape: *šaníléh* for long, flexible objects, *šaníʒíh* for long, rigid ones, and so on. In an experiment, Navajo children tended to distinguish objects by shape and form rather than size and color, as English-speaking children did. However, in a later experiment, white middle-class children tended to distinguish by shape and form more than black children from Harlem, with social class being the overall predictor. Culture rather than language was the factor.

B. *Navajo and motion*. In another study, a researcher claimed that Navajo grammar marks subtler shades of motion than English and linked this to their traditional nomadism. But how exotic is it that Navajo has separate verbs for "move on all fours," "move at a run," "move by flying," "move by floating on water," and "move by rolling" when English has *crawl*, *run*, *fly*, *float*, and *roll*? Nothing in the experiment differed from verbs of motion in many other grammars spoken by sedentary people.

C. Only a few experiments have shown language channeling thought. For example, the Berinmo, hunter-gatherers of Papua New Guinea, have one term for what we distinguish as green and blue. In experiments, they distinguish green and blue more slowly than English speakers. However, they have two words for different shades of what English simply uses the one word *yellow* for. Given chips in a wide range of colors, they separate these two faster than English speakers.

D. But this and other experiments show only minor differences in sensitivity to color, material, and spatial orientation. There is no evidence of larger spiritual or cultural differences determined by grammar.

Essential Reading:

Pinker, Steven. *The Language Instinct*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994 (chapter 3).

Whorf, Benjamin Lee. *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, edited by J. B. Carroll. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956.

Supplementary Reading:

Lucy, John A. *Language Diversity and Thought: A Reformulation of the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Questions to Consider:

1. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis exerts an endless fascination on a great many—a professor can feel the hush in a classroom when lecturing on the subject. Why do you think the hypothesis is so stimulating to so many? Or, more specifically, why is it that so many spontaneously hope that the hypothesis is true?
2. French has gender marking: masculine, *le bateau*, "the boat"; feminine, *la table*, "the table." Recent experiments have shown that French speakers, asked to characterize how a table might talk, tend to suppose that it would be in a high, feminine voice and that their sense of inanimate objects' "voices" tends to correlate with gender. In your opinion, does this finding suggest that French creates a different way of viewing the world than English does, or does the finding strike you as largely incidental to "thought" per se?

Lecture Twenty-Seven
Language Starts Over—Pidgins

Scope: Many situations in the world create stripped-down versions of a language that are suitable for passing, utilitarian use. These are called *pidgins,* and they have a minimum of the frills that typify older languages. For example, in the 1700s and 1800s, Norwegian and Russian traders used a makeshift language, *Russenorsk*, with about 300 words borrowed partly from Russian and partly from Norwegian. Native Americans in North America once used an English pidgin of this kind. Although some older languages have less elaborate grammars than others, all have nuanced vocabulary and grammars complex enough to render sophisticated thought. Pidgins do not.

Outline

I. Introduction.

A. Generally, languages both simplify and elaborate as they age, maintaining a high level of complexity at all times. When a language is learned as a second language more than as a first, its level of complexity drops, but it retains a considerable degree of unnecessary equipment.

B. However, there are many contexts in the world where only partial command of a language is necessary. A great deal of communication can take place with just a few hundred words and an elementary grammar. This kind of speaking is called using a *pidgin* version of a language.

C. The word comes from Chinese *pei tsin*, "pay money," which is what traders in Canton called the pidgin English they used there from the 1600s to the 1900s.

II. Typical example: Russenorsk.

A. Starting in the late 1700s, Russian traders would spend summers in Norway trading timber for fish. The traders used a makeshift combination of Russian and Norwegian.

B. One sentence was *Sobaku po moja skib*, which meant, "There is a dog on my ship."

Russenorsk:

Sobaku	po	moja	skib.
dog	on	my	ship

"There's a dog on my ship."

Sobaku is Russian for "dog"; *skib* is from Norwegian for "ship." *Moja* is Russian, and *po* is Norwegian, but *po* in Russian has a similar meaning. Speakers of the pidgin called it *moja po tvoja*, "me in yours."

C. As a pidgin, Russenorsk had no articles, no tense marking, no gender, no case markers, no verb conjugations. The vocabulary had only about 300 words. As a result, a single preposition, *po*, did the work of an army:

po moja stova	"at my house"
po Arkangel	"to Archangel"
po vater	"into the water"
po lan	"on land"

D. Pidgins are not real languages, nor are they quite the same as anyone's flailing attempt to render a language they barely know. Russenorsk was not completely word soup: there were loose rules. For example, there were many Norwegian or Russian prepositions that could have been used as an all-purpose one besides *po*: the use of *po* was a convention.

III. American Indian Pidgin English.

A. Russenorsk split two languages fifty-fifty, but this is not the usual case. When Native Americans first encountered English, they usually retained their native languages and used English only when necessary, such as for trade. This is how pidgins typically arise, and as a result, an English pidgin was spoken by Indians across the continent.

B. It had some conventions, such as *heap* for "very" and *squaw* for "woman," which came from the Narragansett language of Rhode Island. Here is a sample:

American Indian Pidgin English:

You silly. You weak. You baby-hands. No catch horse. No kill buffalo. No good but for sit still—read book.

Look squaw in face—see him smile—which is all one he say yes!

C. Notice that the squaw is referred to as *he*: this is because there is no gender marking in most pidgins.

IV. Other pidgin features.

A. *Sounds*.

1. Pidgin sound systems are highly simplified. Even though there are only five vowel symbols in English, there are actually about eleven vowel sounds: *a* can stand for the *a* in *father* as well as the one in *cat*, for example. But a pidgin usually has only the "basic five" vowels, *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u*.

2. Pidgins also drop the sounds in older languages that are harder to learn. Zulu of southern Africa, for example, is one of the Bantu languages that has some click sounds. There is a pidgin Zulu, called *Fanakalo*, that was developed by Africans from other regions brought in to work the mines in South Africa. Fanakalo speakers usually just replace the clicks with a *k*, as we would. Zulu has tones; Fanakalo does not.

B. *Vocabulary*. Pidgins stretch their small vocabularies with circumlocutions. In Chinese Pidgin English, *goose* was *big fela kwak kwak maki go in wata*.

C. *Reliance on context*. Pidgins do not have developed ways to distinguish among *When he came* versus *Although he came* versus *If he comes*, and so on. For example, there was a pidgin Eskimo. One sentence was *kim-mik ka'i-li pi-cu'k-tu*, which was, literally, "dog come want." This could mean any number of things depending on the situation in which it was said and the question it answered:

Eskimo Pidgin English:

	kim-mik ka'i-li pi-cu'k-tu dog come want
Why are you whistling?	"Because I want the dog to come." "Because I want the dogs to come." "Because I want my dogs to come." "Because I want your dogs to come."
Why do you want Jim?	"Because I want him to bring me a dog."
Why are you locking the door?	"Because dogs keep trying to get into the house."
Why did Jim go to Fort MacPherson?	"Because he wants to get dogs there."

D. In the Pacific Northwest, there was once a pidgin based on the Native American language Chinook called *Chinook Jargon*. Although the Indians in this region were known for being rather taciturn while speaking, when speaking Chinook Jargon, they were very animated in terms of expression and gesture, to compensate for the small resources in the pidgin.

V. Simple grammars in older languages versus pidgins.

A. A question that may arise here is why a language such as Chinese, which also leaves much to context, is not a pidgin. The answer is that even languages without endings and that leave much to context remain complex in other ways.

B. For example, recall that Chinese has tones, while pidgins do not. Chinese has the classifiers used with numbers, but Chinese Pidgin English used only one of these and then only sometimes. Chinese, like all languages, also has a large and subtle vocabulary. But no pidgin can distinguish such concepts as *nibble*, *bite*, *munch*, *gnash*, and *graze*.

VI. Pidgins, again, are not real languages. They are adults' partial versions of real languages. However, pidgins are important in providing the basis for new real languages, creoles. That is the subject of the next lecture.

Essential Reading:

Sebba, Mark. *Contact Languages: Pidgins and Creoles*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

Questions to Consider:

1. Have you ever spoken a foreign language at the pidgin level? Is there someone who you regularly speak to in, for example, Spanish, at a level just enough to "get by"? What parts of the language have you not mastered, and what kinds of concepts would you have trouble expressing?

2. American Indians really did often speak a pidgin English, although it was hopelessly implausible that Tonto never got beyond this level despite spending a lifetime by the Lone Ranger's side. However, in other cases, should the depiction of Indians speaking pidgin be avoided in order to discourage degraded conceptions of Native Americans' intelligence, or should the pidgin be shown out of a concern for historical accuracy?

Lecture Twenty-Eight
Language Starts Over—Creoles I

Scope: Only some new languages are truly new, having emerged when pidgin speakers came to use the pidgin as an everyday language. In these situations, people combine vocabulary from the language they are learning with grammar from this and their native languages, the result being a new hybrid rather than a dialect of the language that provides the words. These are creole languages and have emerged mostly amidst the slave trade and related activities. Jamaican patois, Haitian, and Cape Verdean are creoles, as is the Tok Pisin used in Papua New Guinea as a lingua franca among the hundreds of languages spoken there.

Outline

I. Introduction.

A. As we have seen, there are no new languages in the strict sense. All of today's languages are continuations of earlier ones: English is one of today's versions of Proto-Indo-European.

B. But there have been situations since the first language arose when people speaking pidgins, which are not real languages, have found themselves in situations where they needed to use the pidgin as their main language. In such situations, people build the pidgin into a new real language. This is called a *creole*, and creoles are the world's only truly new languages.

II. From pidgin to creole: The South Seas.

A. In the late 1700s, when the English colonized Australia, they traded with Aboriginals there in a pidgin English. They continued using this pidgin as they extended their business to Oceania, using Melanesians in whaling and collecting sandalwood and sea cucumbers.

B. This South Seas pidgin was typical of what we saw in the previous lecture: small vocabulary, elementary grammar. Here is an early sample:

South Seas Pidgin, 1835:

No! We all 'e same a' you! Suppose one got money, all got money. You—suppose one got money—lock him up in chest. No good! Kanaka all 'e same 'a one.

C. The English then established plantations in Queensland and elsewhere and brought men from Papua New Guinea and several islands in Oceania to work them on long-term contracts. Because the workers

spoke several different languages, the South Seas Pidgin served as a lingua franca, now used daily for years. In addition, the men often continued using the pidgin when they went home, because so many languages are spoken in Papua New Guinea and on many Oceanic islands. Gradually, the pidgin was expanded into a real language.

D. One branch of this language is Tok Pisin, spoken today in Papua New Guinea alongside the hundreds of indigenous languages there.

1. In South Seas Pidgin, tense was largely left to context, as in this sentence:

South Seas Pidgin:

You plenty lie. You 'fraid me se-teal. Me no se-teal, me come worship. What for you look me se-teal?

2. But Tok Pisin, as a creole and therefore a full language, has the same kind of equipment for setting sentences in time as older languages, as we see here:

Tok Pisin:

She goes to market.	*Em i go long maket.*
She goes to market (regularly).	*Em i **save** go long maket.*
She is going to market.	*Em i go long maket **i stap**.*
She has gone to market.	*Em i go long maket **pinis**.*
She went to market.	*Em i **bin** go long maket.*
She will go to market.	*Em **bai** go long maket.*

3. Tok Pisin also has a nuanced vocabulary. *Hevi* began meaning "heavy," but it has evolved semantically into also meaning "difficulty" and is used in idioms to mean sadness, as in *Bel bilong mi i hevi*, "I am sad."

4. This, then, is a real language. Tok Pisin is used in the Papua New Guinea government and in newspapers. One can speak it badly or even decently but not well.

III. Creole: A generic term.

A. Creoles are spoken throughout the world, wherever history has forced people to expand a pidgin into a full language. For example, in Louisiana, African slaves developed a creole based on French, just as South Seas natives developed one based on English. Louisiana blacks call this language *Creole*, but this is actually just one of dozens of creole languages. Creolization is a general process in language change.

B. *Caribbean creoles*. For example, Louisiana Creole was but one of many creoles developed by African slaves brought to work plantations in the New World. Jamaican patois was one; Haitian Creole is another; Papiamentu of Curaçao is a creole based on Spanish. Most of the world's creoles were born in plantation or similar conditions.

C. *Creoles elsewhere*. Creoles are also spoken on the West African coast, such as the ones created as the Portuguese explored and colonized there, starting in the 1400s. Cape Verdean is one of these. The Portuguese also left behind several creoles in India and Southeast Asia. Mauritian Creole is a French creole spoken on an island near Madagascar.

D. *Folk terminology and "pidgin."* Some creoles are called "pidgin" by their speakers. Jamaican patois was transported to the West African coast in the 1800s and gave birth to several new creoles in Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Cameroon. These are often called "pidgin," though they are actually real languages: creoles. An English creole was also born in Hawaii but is still called "pidgin" there.

IV. Creole versus dialect.

A. Because most of a creole's words are from the dominant language its creators learned, creoles can seem as if they are versions of that language (as their speakers often even suppose). But creoles actually use the words in grammars that are quite different.

B. For example, in English, one says *Where have you been?* In a nonstandard dialect of English, Black English, one says *Where you been at?*, but this is recognizable as a kind of English. However, in the creole English of Guyana, one says *Wisaid yu bin de?*, and in the creole English of Suriname called Sranan, one says *Pe i ben de?*

V. Where do creoles get their grammar?

A. Much of a creole grammar is based on the native languages of its creators. For example, in Sranan, *That hunter bought a house for his friend* is *A hondiman dati ben bai wan oso gi en mati*.

Sranan:

A hondiman dati ben bai wan oso gi en mati.
the hunter-man that PAST buy a house give his mate

"That hunter bought a house for his friend."

Sranan runs the verbs together in this way because the West African language many of its creators spoke, Fongbe, does the same thing:

Fongbe:

Koku so ason o na e.
Koku take crab the give her

"Koku gave her the crab."

B. Other parts of creole grammars appear exotic today but are actually just features of the regional dialects spoken by the whites with whom slaves had contact. For example, *Gullah* is a creole spoken on islands off of

South Carolina. Gullah for *I come here every evening* is *Uh **blant** come yuh ebry eebnin*. This *blant* appears strange to us, but it comes from regional British dialects, such as the one of Cornwall we saw in Lecture Fourteen, which used *belong* in the same way: *Billee d' b'long gwine long weth 'e's sister*, "Billy goes with his sister."

C. In other ways, creoles revert to what many linguists think are innate grammar "defaults" that many or even most languages have drifted away from but lie at the base of our capacity for language. For example, no matter what the word order is in a creole creator's native language or the one that the creator is learning, a creole's word order is almost always subject-verb-object. Many linguists consider this order the basic one for language, even though all possible orders exist throughout the world.

Essential Reading:

McWhorter, John H. *The Power of Babel*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001 (chapter 4).

Sebba, Mark. *Contact Languages: Pidgins and Creoles*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

Supplementary Reading:

Roberts, Peter. *West Indians and Their Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Questions to Consider:

1. "Oh, creole—like in Louisiana. And the spicy food and voodoo…Spanish mixed in, right?" This is how laymen typically conceive of what *creole* means. Based on this lecture, how would you explain what a *creole language* actually is?
2. Creole-speaking nationalists often argue that the creole should be used in official contexts as a badge of local identity. More Eurocentrically oriented countrymen often object that the "high" language—English, French, or whatever—should be used officially because it is a conduit to the wider world and success within it. Where would you come down in such a debate?

Lecture Twenty-Nine
Language Starts Over—Creoles II

Scope: Creoles, as new languages, do not have the volume of frills that older ones do, but they have complexities that qualify them as "real languages." For example, Saramaccan Creole, spoken in Suriname by descendants of runaway slaves, has multiple words for "to be" depending on shade of being and a special way of marking that an act of throwing or pushing or falling ended instead of going on indefinitely. Like real languages, creoles change over time, have dialects, and mix with other languages. Creoles are based on the innate language ability of humans: children exposed to a pidgin will expand it into a creole spontaneously, as happened in Hawaii at the turn of the 1900s.

Outline

I. Creoles are real languages.

A. Creoles can seem to be lesser versions of the languages they take their words from, a major reason being that a creole has few or none of the gender markers and conjugational endings that European languages have. But creoles actually have complexities of their own.

B. *Saramaccan* was developed by African slaves who escaped plantations in Suriname and founded their own communities in the interior. Their descendants still live there today and speak a creole with words mostly from English, Portuguese, and Dutch and a grammar that splits the difference between English and Fongbe, spoken in West Africa.

C. Here is a sentence in the language:

Nɔ́ɔ hɛ̃ wɛ wã dáka téé́é dí mujɛ̃ɛ−mií fɛ̃ɛ̃, de bi tá kái ɛ̃ Jejéta.
then it-is one day long-ago the woman-child of-her they PAST "-ing" call her Jejeta

"Then one day long ago they were calling her daughter Jejeta."

D. *Vocabulary*. There are words from five different languages in that one sentence. *De* is from *they*, *wã* is from *one*. But *dáka* is from Dutch's *dag*. *Mujɛ́ɛ* is from Portuguese *mulher*. *W*ɛ is from Fongbe, and *téé́é* is from Kikongo, a Bantu language.

E. *Sounds*.

1. The sound marked as *e* is pronounced "ay" and the one marked ɛ as "eh"; similarly, *o* is pronounced "oh" while ɔ is pronounced "aw." Saramaccan does not have a basic pidgin-style sound system.

2. The accent marks indicate tone, which Saramaccan has. Sometimes, tone is the only way to distinguish otherwise identical words, as in Chinese. *Kái* is *call*, but *kaí* is *fall*.

F. *Grammar*.

1. Saramaccan has two verbs "to be" that work in a subtle way. *Da* is used to show that two things are the same thing: *Mi da Gádu*, "I am God." *Dɛ́* is used to show where something is located—a different way of being, if you think about it—*Mi dɛ́ a wósu*, "I am at home." But then, this same *dɛ́* is used to show that one thing is a type of something else: *Mi dɛ́ wã mbéti*, "I am an animal." This is as if being a kind of something were to be "in" it.
2. I and my graduate students found that Saramaccan marks the end of a path an object follows after falling, being pushed, or jumping. The word *túwɛ́* comes from *throw away*, but it is used in ways that seem redundant at first, such as in this sentence:

   Mi tɔ́tɔ dí dágu túwɛ a wáta.
   I push the dog throw away in the water

   "I pushed the dog into the water."

   We get a clue as to what its function is with another sentence:

   Vínde dí biífi túwɛ.
   throw the letter throw

   "Throw the letter in" (the trashcan).

   The *túwɛ* is not being used in a literal sense but as a marker that something "made it" where it was aimed or headed. This is like the difference between *I threw it in the water* and *I threw it into the water*—the first sentence technically could mean that I was in the water while I threw it. But Saramaccan marks this distinction more clearly and regularly than English does.

G. *Change over time*. Like all languages, once creoles emerge, they start undergoing the same processes we have seen in this series.

1. *Transformation*. In early Saramaccan, *kái*, "call," was *káli*. The *l* dropped out over time.
2. *Dialects*. There are northern and southern dialects of Saramaccan. In the north, *not* is *á*. In the south, it is *ã*.
3. *Mixture*. The slaves who created Saramaccan were exposed mostly to English and Portuguese, but the Dutch took over the country soon afterward in 1667, and Suriname was a Dutch colony for the next three centuries. Today, Saramaccan has a layer of Dutch words threaded throughout the language. The numbers 3, 5, 9, 11, and 12 are from Dutch, for example.

II. A new language in one generation.

A. Creoles show that humans are genetically programmed to use real language. Most creoles were gradually expanded from pidgins by adults over time. But in some situations, children exposed to a pidgin turn it into a creole.

B. American businesses established plantations in Hawaii in the late 1800s, staffing them with Portuguese foremen and workers from China, Japan, Korea, and the Philippines. The first generation of workers spoke a pidgin English with little grammar, as in:

Gud, dis wan. Kaukau enikain dis wan. Pilipin ailaen no gud. No mo mani.

"It's better here than in the Philippines—here you can get all kinds of food—but over there, there isn't any money [to buy food with]."

People often used word order according to their native language. Because Japanese puts verbs last, Japanese pidgin speakers often put the verb last in the pidgin. Languages of the Philippines put their verb first; thus, for example, a speaker of Ilocano would often put the verb first in the pidgin:

Japanese speaker:

Mi kape bai. "He bought my coffee."

Ilocano speaker:

Meri dis wan. "He got married."

C. But the children born to these workers in Hawaii streamlined and expanded the pidgin into a creole English (now still called "pidgin"), with the same rules used by all speakers whatever the language they were using at home. For example, the creole has full machinery for placing actions in time:

dei bai	they buy
dei bin bai	they bought
dei stay bai	they are buying
dei go bai	they will buy
dei bin stay bai	they were buying
dei go stei bai	they will be buying

D. This creole is now the casual language of Hawaii, spoken by people of various ancestries.

Essential Reading:

McWhorter, John H. *The Power of Babel*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001 (chapter 4).

Supplementary Reading:

Bickerton, Derek. *Language and Species*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990. (Includes a summary of the author's work on Hawaiian "pidgin" and its emergence [the source of the discussion here], as well as its implications for how language emerged.)

Simonson, Douglas (Peppo). *Pidgin to Da Max*. Honolulu: The Bess Press, 1981.

Questions to Consider:

1. Even creole speakers are often given to supposing that their languages are not "real" ones, partly because they are usually only rarely written and, in some ways, seem to be "baby talk" versions of the language most of their words come from. How might you explain to a creole speaker why his or her creole is, in fact, just as much "a language" as English?
2. Many argue that language is simply an outgrowth of humans' mental abilities and resist Chomsky's idea that we are specifically programmed to speak. Yet children do spontaneously expand a pidgin into a full language. Is this phenomenon compatible with resistance to the innateness hypothesis, or can we see the Hawaiian scenario as "Score one for Chomsky"?

Lecture Thirty

Language Starts Over—Signs of the New

Scope: Many linguists have argued that because creoles are real languages, they are not even identifiable as different from older languages unless we know their history. But in fact, creoles are the only languages that lack, or have very little of, the grammatical traits that emerge only over time. No creole marks shades of possession regularly, has gender markers distinguishing tables from chairs on the basis of sex, or has more than a little of the irregularities that bedevil us in learning older languages. In all of this, creole grammars are the closest to what the grammar of the first language was probably like.

Outline

I. Introduction.

A. A question looming at this point is: if creoles are real languages, then how are they different from simple language mixture? The answer is that because creoles are new languages, they have not had time to amass the "mess" that we have seen in old languages.

B. It has often been said that creoles are different from old languages only in terms of their history. But this is an oversimplification—creoles are more interesting than that.

II. How can we tell it's a creole?

A. Most languages either have gender and conjugation markers, such as European languages, or tones, such as Chinese. As we have seen, these features develop over long periods of time by grammaticalization (gender, conjugation) or sound change (tones).

B. Because they start as pidgins and grow from there, creoles are too young to have drifted into conjugation markers, Chinese-style tone, and so on. Thus, many creoles have none of these features, and none has more than a small amount.

C. But this alone cannot tell us whether a language is a creole. We can point to a small number of old languages that, by chance, have neither gender or conjugation markers nor tone, in Polynesia, Southeast Asia, and West Africa.

D. But we can still tell a creole from these languages. In old languages, there are always prefixes and suffixes whose meaning is not always predictable. For example, *under-* in *underlie*, *undershoot*, and *underestimate* has the same meaning. But what does *under-* mean in *understand*? This kind of irregularity results from semantic change over long periods of time.

E. Because they are old, even languages without gender and conjugation markers or tone have their "understands." Chrau, of Vietnam, is one of these. Try to figure out what the prefix *pa-* means from the meanings of the words it is used in.

Chrau (Vietnam):

găn "go across"	*pagăn* "crosswise"
le "dodge"	*pale* "roll over"
lôm "lure"	*palôm* "mislead"
lăm "set, point"	*palăm* "roll"
jŏq "long"	*pajŏq* "how long?"

F. The only languages where there are very few or no "understands" are creoles. For example, *-pasin* (from "fashion," as in "way") has the same meaning with all of the roots it combines with:

Tok Pisin:

gut "good"	*gutpasin* "virtue"
isi "slow"	*isipasin* "slowness"
prout "proud"	*proutpasin* "pride"
pait "fight"	*paitpasin* "warfare"

III. Creoles: the world's sleekest languages.

A. The absence of "understands," then, is one of many ways in which creoles are less needlessly complex than old languages. We have seen that creoles are by no means "ground zero" in terms of complexity, but they are closer to this than an old language can be.

B. *Irregularity*. For example, creoles have very few or none of the irregular verbs that bedevil us in learning European languages. In English, we say *went* rather than *goed*, *was* rather than *be'd*, *sent* rather than *sended*. In Sranan, *went* is *ben go*, *was* is *ben de*, *sent* is *ben seni*, and so on.

IV. Hints of the first language.

A. Because creoles are the result of language starting anew, they shed light on what the world's first language was probably like.

B. Because gender and conjugation take time to appear, we can assume that the first language was one like creoles, or Chinese, in lacking these.

C. In the same way, because languages take time to wend into marking shades of possession, exactly how one learned of something, shades of subjecthood, and so on, we can assume that the first language did not have alienable possessive marking, evidential markers, ergativity, and similar traits.

D. Languages distinguish nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs with prefixes and suffixes: *happy*, *happiness*, *happily*. Because affixes start as separate words and arise through grammaticalization over time, we can assume that in the first language, one word could often stand as a noun, verb, adjective, or adverb, as in languages today with few affixes, such as Chinese. Sranan creole is a language like this, where the word *hebi* can have many meanings:

Sranan Creole (Suriname):

A saka hebi! A hebi e-hebi mi!
the bag heavy the weight is-weigh me

"The bag is heavy! Its weight is weighing me down!"

E. Thus, while we most likely cannot know what the first language's words were, creoles give us the closest approximation of what its grammar would have been like.

Essential Reading:

McWhorter, John H. *The Power of Babel*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001 (chapter 5).

Questions to Consider:

1. Have you ever made up your own language? If you have—or if you were to—what aspects of grammar did/would you see as necessary after you worked out some basic words? You probably did not assign each word a gender, as in French or Spanish, but what kinds of features would you see as necessary?
2. If creoles are identifiable as a type of language at first, then over time, as they develop the weight of bells and whistles typical of older languages, they will not be identifiable as such. Is there a line to be drawn as to when a creole can be designated an "older" language? Or should creoles always be classed apart because of the type of social history they were born in?

Lecture Thirty-One
Language Starts Over—The Creole Continuum

Scope: "Creoleness" is a continuum concept. Some creoles are closer to the language that provided their words than others: Saramaccan is barely recognizable as a kind of English, but French creoles, such as the one of Mauritius, are more like French in their grammars. There are even semi-creoles that are poised between dialect and creole. Many creoles exist as continua of varieties, shading from the European language itself to one quite far from it, with no break in between. In bird's-eye view, this sheds light on what a "language" can be, such as Spanish, which shades across dialects into Portuguese while also existing in several creole varieties as well as the Spanish-Quechua hybrid Media Lengua, while Portuguese exists as several creoles plus semi-creole varieties in Brazil.

Outline

I. Just as one dialect shades into another one, leaving the concept of "language" an artificial and arbitrary one, "creoleness" is a continuum concept. Once we know this, we are in a position to put the finishing touches on our conception of how speech varieties are distributed across the globe.

II. Depth of creoleness.

A. Some creoles are further from the language that provided their words than others. For example, although all of this Sranan sentence's words are from English, it is obviously quite a different language in all ways:

A hondiman dati ben bai wan oso gi en mati.
the hunter-man that PAST buy a house give his mate

"That hunter bought a house for his friend."

The sounds pattern in sequences of consonant-vowel-consonant-vowel, as in Japanese. Thus, *that* is *dati*, *mate* becomes *mati*. This is based on how sounds work in the African language Fongbe, as is the way the verbs are strung together and the placement of *dati* after *hondiman* instead of before.

B. But other creoles are closer to the language they are based on. In Mauritian Creole, *they were going* is the exotic-looking:

Mauritian Creole:

zot ti pe ale
they PAST "-ing" go

"They were going."

Regional French:

eux-autres étaient après aller

But actually, this is largely a phonetic rendition of the sentence in the regional French the slaves were exposed to, *eux-autres étaient après aller*, "they were after going." Pronounced casually and rapidly, this sentence is quite like the Mauritian one. Mauritian is somewhat less creolized than Sranan.

III. Semi-creoles.

A. Some creoles are poised directly between a European language and true creoleness, neither exactly dialects of the European language nor languages like Tok Pisin. These have been called semi-creoles.

B. On the island of Réunion off the east African coast, in the 1700s, Malagasy people were brought as slaves to work small coffee plantations. They lived side by side with their white owners and spoke with whites as much as among themselves. In this kind of situation, what emerges is less a creole than a kind of abbreviated French—a more extreme version of what happened to English after the Viking invasions.

Réunionnais semi-creole French:

Alor mon papa la tuzur di amwen, en zur kan li lete zenzan…
then my father PAST always say to-me one day when he was bachelor

"Well, my father always said to me, one day when he was a bachelor…"

C. Réunionnais has no gender markers regularly, and no plural suffix and usually uses particles before the verb for tense, like typical creoles. But it is recognizable as "French" nevertheless in a way that Sranan and Tok Pisin are not recognizable as English.

IV. Creole continua.

A. Many creoles actually consist of a series of dialects, with one furthest from the European language and others shading ever closer, such that the "creole" is actually a series of shells expanding outward from a nucleus, as in the classic model of atoms.

B. For example, it can appear that there are so many ways to say *I gave him* in Guyanese creole that there appears to be no structure in the language. But actually, the versions can be aligned to show an increasing likeness to English:

Guyanese Creole: *I gave him*

mi bin gii am
mi bin gii ii
mi bin gi i
mi di gii ii
mi di gi hii
a di gii ii
a did gi ii
a did giv ii
a did giv hii
a giv ii
a giv im
a giv him
a geev ii
a geev him
I gave him

The most "creole" sentence has *mi* for *I* and uses the *bin* particle for past instead of the *-ed* suffix. As we get closer to Standard English, *did* is used instead of *bin*, which reflects a common way of expressing the past in regional British dialects of the past, and *a* for *I* differs from the standard only in pronunciation. Finally, we get to a sentence that is the standard one in a different accent.

C. This kind of continuum is especially common in English creoles of the Caribbean, such as Jamaican patois, and is also true of Louisiana Creole and Cape Verdean. This often encourages speakers to view the creole as just a version of the European language (and, sadly, a "bad" one).

V. All the world is a continuum.

A. As standard languages shade into dialects, dialects shade into creoles, while languages often shade into one another via chains of dialects. The sense a language map gives us of "languages" checkering the globe often corresponding to country boundaries, then, is highly misrepresentative (although inevitable).

B. For example, "Spanish" is a bundle of dialects in Spain. Spanish shades into Portuguese through the Galician dialect(s). In the New World, there are hundreds of Latin American dialects of Spanish. In Ecuador, Spanish intertwined with Quechua and resulted in Media Lengua. There are two creole Spanishes in the New World, Papiamentu and

Palenquero of Colombia, where Spanish began again mixed with African languages. In the Philippines, there is a dialect cluster of Spanish creoles. In the United States, a new dialect of Spanish is emerging that borrows heavily from English: Spanglish. Meanwhile, there are Portuguese dialects in Brazil, Africa, and Southeast Asia; the one in Brazil has semi-creole varieties as a legacy of its slave plantation beginnings. There are various Portuguese creoles in Africa, India, and Southeast Asia.

C. The same kind of reality is true for a great many "languages" in the world. All people speak complex varieties of language, differing in clinal degree from one another and often not assignable as any one "thing."

Essential Reading:

McWhorter, John H. *The Power of Babel*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001 (chapter 4).

Sebba, Mark. *Contact Languages: Pidgins and Creoles*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

Supplementary Reading:

Roberts, Peter. *West Indians and Their Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Questions to Consider:

1. Because the progression from older language to creole is clinal, some argue that there should be no term *creole* at all; that is, in all cases, we are dealing with human language—period. How do you feel about drawing distinctions along what is actually a continuum? Is there any use in this, or is this an artificial distinction, along the lines of treating tomatoes as vegetables rather than the fruits that they actually are?
2. Many creolists' main mission has been to show that the apparent chaos of a continuum like the one in Guyana has structure—that creoles are indeed "language." If you were a specialist in creoles, would this be your main focus, or would you feel it urgent to share other information about creoles—and what?

Lecture Thirty-Two
What Is Black English?

Scope: This series allows us to gain a better understanding of Black English than was possible during, for example, the Ebonics controversy of 1996. Black English is a nonstandard dialect of English, with its own rules and complexities. It contains many features found in nonstandard English dialects of the United Kingdom, which slaves in America were exposed to in contact with settlers and indentured servants who spoke these varieties. Some have argued that Black English is an African language with English words, but this would make it a creole, and we can see that it does not have the traits of those languages. Rather, to the extent that it simplifies English a bit more than other dialects, Black English is lightly influenced by being created by adult learners—just as standard English itself was after the Viking invasions.

Outline

I. Before we proceed to the final four lectures, we are now in a position to understand the nonstandard English dialect most immediate—and controversial—for Americans. Because of the widely covered Oakland School Board controversy in 1996, it is now best known as Ebonics. Linguists have called it Black English or, more technically, African-American Vernacular English (AAVE).

II. Features.

A. It is often thought that Black English refers only to slang, such as the colorful language well known from rap music. But this is only the surface. Black English is a distinct dialect of English on all levels.

B. *Sounds*. For example, what is sometimes referred to as a "black sound" is due to a different sound system from the standard dialect's. This is often thought of as "leaving off sounds" because of how we spell English words but is often just a matter of using a different sound.

1. For example, Black English has *wif* instead of *with*, but if you think about it, *th* is two letters but one sound. Norman French has *carbon* while standard has *charbon*, but there is no *h* "left out" in Norman.

2. In other cases, Black English's vowel is more complex than Standard English's. *Bill* in Black English is more like "beal."

C. *Grammar*. Black English has systematic grammatical differences from Standard English.

1. *To be*. In places, Black English is simpler: *She my sister* is good Black English.

2. *Habitual* "*be*." Elsewhere, Black English comes out ahead. To say *She be walkin' to the store* does not mean that she is doing it right now but that she does it on a regular basis. Standard English usually leaves this difference to context: to indicate regularity, Standard English uses the bare present—*She walks to the store*.

III. Is Black English an African language?

A. Some have argued that Black English is less English than an African, or African-derived, language with English words. However, these claims do not stand up to scrutiny.

B. Black English as African language.

1. For example, especially in the context of the Oakland controversy, some proposed that Black English is based on African grammar, just as such creoles as Sranan and Haitian are. This claim is partly based on traits of Black English, such as the ability to use the same verb form with any pronoun: *he walk* instead of *he walks*. Many West African languages pattern like Chinese and have no endings.
2. But Black English does not match up with any African grammar the way creoles do. For example, no African-American would say *The hunter that been buy one house give his friend*.
3. Black English also retains too much of English's "mess" to qualify as a creole, such as irregular verbs (*stood*, *went*) and plurals (*men*, *feet*).

C. Black English as a creole continuum.

1. Others have argued that Black English began as a creole, namely Gullah, and that a continuum formed between Gullah and Standard English. Black English would now be in the middle of that continuum, while Gullah itself remains only in the Sea Islands and somewhat inland.
2. But there are many problems with this idea. There is no historical evidence of Gullah spoken anywhere far beyond where it is today. There were blacks who migrated to other countries in the 1800s when they supposedly would have been speaking Gullah, but the descendants of these blacks do not speak anything like Gullah even when English itself is not spoken in the country (such as the Dominican Republic).

IV. Black English as British dialect?

A. In fact, many of the features we associate with black American speech are found in regional Englishes in the United Kingdom.

B. Habitual *be* is used by Irish English speakers, and black slaves learned it from indentured servants who spoke this dialect. *Even when I be round there with friends, I be scared* is good Hiberno-English.

C. Black English uses *it* where the standard uses *there* in such sentences as *It's somebody at the door*. We see parallels to this in good old Cornwall: *'Tes some wan t'the dooar*.

V. What is Black English, then?

A. Yet the fact remains that there is an obvious difference between Black English and the English of the rural Brit. For example, there is no British dialect where *She my sister* is typical. There are also other features where Black English simplifies the standard, such as in not switching the order of subject and auxiliary in questions: *Why you didn't call me?* instead of *Why didn't you call me?*

B. Although Black English hardly "undoes" English enough to qualify as a creole or even semi-creole, there are enough traits like the above to show that the people who created Black English streamlined it slightly. We would expect this of African slaves learning the language quickly outside of a school setting. We would also expect in this situation that Africans would have left a slight impact from their accent—the hardest thing to shed when speaking a second language—on their rendition of English. Hence, certain aspects of the black "sound," as distinct from the British accent.

C. Thus, Black English can be described as a semi-semi-semi-creole of regional English dialects of the United Kingdom, standing in a relationship to Standard English rather like English does to Old English.

Essential Reading:

McWhorter, John H. *Word on the Street: Debunking the Myth of a "Pure" Standard English*. New York: Perseus, 1998 (chapters 6–7). (A more detailed, but accessible, exposition of the topics in this lecture.)

Supplementary Reading:

Rickford, John Russell, and Russell John Rickford. *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English*. New York: Wiley and Sons, 2000.

Questions to Consider:

1. In 1996, the Oakland School Board proposed that black American students be taught in Black English as a bridge to acquiring Standard English, arguing that Black English is an African language with English words, different enough from the standard to pose a barrier to black children's learning to read. After this lecture and the course so far, what are your views on this? Even if you suppose that the school board harbored some exaggerated notions, do you think that there was some truth in their perspective? Why or why not?

2. The temptation is great to hear young blacks' speech as "bad grammar." Yet this lecture and many previous ones suggest a certain challenge: listen to the rawest speech of this kind that you can find—rap lyrics or youngsters chatting in public. Can you wrap your head around the fact that they are not using "bad grammar" in any logical sense? Cockney English is one thing, but to Americans, this is largely rather "cute"—try to really bring it home!

Lecture Thirty-Three
Language Death—The Problem

Scope: Just as extinction is part of the natural history of life forms, it is also common in the life cycles of languages. Throughout human history, languages have died because of invasions and migrations, and more so as agriculture made these phenomena more common. But today, there is an extinction crisis among languages, just as among life forms: a language dies every two weeks, and 90 percent of the current 6,000 will likely be extinct by 2100. Once a generation stops passing a language to its children, a language is on its way to no longer being spoken. As it dies, a language begins reverting to pidgin form, losing its endings, the richness of its vocabulary, and the nuances that distinguish a full language.

Outline

I. This series has been about a process of growth, mixture, rebirth, and extravagance. But another part of the natural history of language is decline and extinction, just as with flora and fauna.

II. How languages die.

- **A.** When one generation of speakers does not speak the indigenous language(s) to the next one on a regular basis, then the new generation acquires only an incomplete version of the language, often almost a pidginized form.
- **B.** This generation cannot pass the language on to the next one at all and, thus, the language is no longer spoken. This means that even in a situation where great numbers of old people speak a language, if most middle-aged people do not, then the language is severely endangered.
- **C.** Unlike animals and plants, which leave fossils, when a language dies without being recorded, it is truly dead, with no hope of recovery. And even when we have records of the language (epics, inventory lists, sayings, songs), this is but an approximation of what the language in its totality was.

III. A natural process—to an extent.

- **A.** Languages have died throughout time, when their speakers are exterminated or, more frequently, subordinated by a more powerful group and switch to the new group's language. We have seen Hittite and Tocharian as dead Indo-European languages. There are dozens of such languages known in the Eurasian region alone.
- **B.** The process accelerated with the development of agriculture and the Neolithic revolution. Before this, humans existed in hunter-gatherer

groups, possibly speaking tens of thousands of languages. But agriculture creates food surpluses that increase population and encourage migrations and subjugation of other groups. As a result, migrators' languages tend to extinguish the ones they encounter.

C. But the process is occurring today at a vastly accelerated rate. Ninety-six percent of the world's people speak one of the 20 most spoken languages (Chinese, English, Spanish, Hindi, Arabic, Bengali, Russian, Portuguese, Japanese, German, French, Punjabi, Javanese, Bihari, Italian, Korean, Telugu, Tamil, Marathi, and Vietnamese). According to one estimate, 90 percent of the world's 6,000 languages will be extinct by 2100.

D. For example, there were about 300 languages spoken in the continental United States four centuries ago. Today, a third of them are spoken by no one, and of the remaining two-thirds, only a handful are being passed on to new generations, while all the rest are spoken only by very old people and will be dead within a decade.

IV. What happens to a language when it is dying?

A. When a language stops being used regularly, it starts to be spoken in a way that shaves off much of the fascinating machinery that defines human language. That is, it starts to revert to a pidgin-like stage, making do with less.

B. *Vocabulary*. By the 1980s, the Cayuga language of New York State had a word for *leg*, *foot*, and *eye* but not for *thigh*, *ankle*, or *cheek*. The original word for *enter* was no longer used, with *go* as a substitute. This is reminiscent of the small vocabulary in such pidgins as Russenorsk.

C. *Affixes*. In Spanish, it is easier for an English speaker to say *voy a hablar*, "I'm going to talk," instead of *hablaré*, using the future ending. In the same way, in dying languages, speakers start avoiding prefixes and suffixes of this kind, preferring to use separate words that are easier to remember. In Pipil of Central America, there was a future ending *-s*, but today's speakers prefer to use their *go* verb.

D. *Articulateness*. In many Native American languages, rendering what we think of as sentences as single words is common, and deciding when to do it is part of truly speaking the language with nuance. In Cayuga, to say *She has a big house* one says "It big-houses her," *Konǫhsowá:neh*. But the speakers of the dying version today tend to just say the Cayuga version of *Her house is big*. That is, they speak Cayuga with the soul of English.

E. The generation after the one that speaks the language on this level usually knows a few words or phrases in the language but cannot carry on a conversation at all. At this point, the language is no longer spoken.

Essential Reading:

Crystal, David. *Language Death*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Supplementary Reading:

Nettle, Daniel, and Suzanne Romaine. *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages*. New York: Oxford, 2000.

Questions to Consider:

1. Are you an immigrant to this country whose children speak your native language—but not quite in the same way that you do? Likely they sprinkle English words into their version of the language more than you did when you were young. But what about their grammar? Does their version of the language show any of the signs of language death above?
2. Some people think it would be a good thing if the world spoke only one language (to aid communication); others hope to save all 6,000 (for the sake of diversity). Many would fall somewhere in between. Where would you fall, and what kinds of languages would you prefer to see saved?

Lecture Thirty-Four
Language Death—Prognosis

Scope: There are many movements to revive dying languages, such as Welsh, Irish Gaelic, and Maori, but success is elusive. As speakers of indigenous languages come together in cities, it is unlikely that they will pass these on to their children. People often see their unwritten native language as less "legitimate" than written ones used on television, in radio, and in films. In addition, indigenous languages tend to be complex and quite unlike the usually European ones that dominate the world. Most likely, in the future, many languages will die, while others will live as "taught" languages, encountered in school and on the page rather than learned at home.

Outline

I. Language revival movements.

A. There is increasing awareness that there is an extinction crisis among the world's languages, just as there is among living creatures. There are thriving efforts to pass along to new generations Irish Gaelic, Welsh, and Breton (all Celtic languages), as well as Maori and Hawaiian (the Polynesian language originally spoken in the islands).

B. Some people involved in these efforts are more optimistic than others. As to the question of whether we can maintain 6,000 languages as spoken ones, the truth, as it so often does, lies in the middle. There is little prospect that English will become the world's only language (remember how common diglossia and bilingualism are worldwide). But there is equally little possibility of maintaining all the world's languages for longer than another century.

II. Obstacles to keeping 6,000 languages alive: It has been said that once there is a revival movement, the language is already dead. This may be too pessimistic, but it is grounded in sad truths.

A. *Status*. Often, people who speak a "top 20" language alongside an indigenous one do not think of their native language as "real," because it is not written or used in wider communications. Thus, linguists and anthropologists are often more interested in preserving a community's language than its members are.

B. *Urbanization*. The general trend for indigenous people to relocate to cities (or be forced there) helps exterminate indigenous languages. If parents speaking different languages have children in the city, the parents are unlikely to pass both, or even one, of the languages on to their children, and even if they try, the city's lingua franca will likely be their children's main language. And whatever they learn of their

parents' language, these children certainly will not pass this on to their own children.

C. *Tainted goods*. By the time a language is dying, often most of the people speaking it are no longer using the full vocabulary or grammar. Unless the language has been exceptionally well documented already, much of what the actual language consisted of may already be lost to history.

D. *Difficulty*.

1. Another obstacle to reviving languages is that languages under threat are usually spoken by small numbers of people and were rarely learned by outsiders. As we have learned in this series, these languages tend to be extremely complex. Rare is the threatened language whose grammar requires only the effort that Spanish or Dutch would to master.

2. Threatened languages also tend to be from groups other than the Romance and Germanic ones that we are most familiar with, such that in the threatened language, the very basics of putting words to thoughts are vastly different from ours. The problem is that speakers of the dying language have become most comfortable in Romance and Germanic languages. In Mohawk, for example, *Suddenly, she heard someone give a yell from across the street* is *Tha'kié:ro'k iá:ken' ísi' na'oháhati iakothón:te' ónhka'k khe tontahohén:rehte'*. Literally, this is "Suddenly, by what you could hear, there, it's beyond the street, the ear went to who just then made-shouted back towards her."

III. The success story: Hebrew. Revivalists often look to the successful revivification of Hebrew from a liturgical written language to a spoken one as a sign that such movements have promise. But Israel was a unique circumstance: it was a new land entirely; its immigrants spoke several languages and needed a lingua franca; the language had been richly preserved in writing; and the use of Hebrew was associated with a powerful religious impulse. These things are not true of any other situation where there are revival movements.

IV. Predictions.

A. *Taught language versus spoken language*. As times goes on, many languages will survive more as second languages than as first ones. It is more common than educated Westerners generally know for people to speak a language or two decently if not perfectly, having learned a new language for trade or work after childhood. My sense from the Irish, Welsh, Breton, Maori, and Hawaiian movements is that the languages are unlikely to be passed on to children again in enough households to be significant, but that the languages nevertheless can live as "taught"

languages, rather as many Americans have a decent if not native-level proficiency in Spanish.

B. *Documented languages*. A great many languages, however, will only survive on paper. The chances of reviving most of the Native American or Australian Aboriginal languages would seem nonexistent, which makes it imperative that they at least be described and recorded for posterity.

V. In this series, you have seen that linguistics is not about blackboard grammar or translation or learning to speak a lot of languages. If the topics I have taken you through have been interesting and your life circumstances allow it, you might consider helping to preserve a dying language in some way. You could contact the linguistics department nearest to you for advice.

Essential Reading:

McWhorter, John H. *The Power of Babel*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001 (chapter 7).

Supplementary Reading:

Abley, Mark. *Spoken Here: Travels among Threatened Languages*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.

Questions to Consider:

1. One linguist has argued his reluctance to disagree with a father who speaks a dying language in supporting his son in moving to the big city to seek his fortune, even though this will mean that the son will not pass the language on to his children. Languages are marvelous, but then exotification is perhaps a luxury of the fortunate. Then again, idealism is fundamental to change. Discuss.

2. I once had the experience of teaching some Native Americans who no longer spoke the language of their ancestors the basics of that language. It was hard—the language's sounds were unnatural to an English speaker, the word order placed the verb at the end, and the grammar as a whole was strikingly different from English's. Learning a language such as Spanish is hard enough, but it was clear to me—and to them—that in the end, the best we could do was give them a few words, such as numbers and family members, and some set expressions, including *Hello*. In your opinion, was this worth the effort, and why or why not?

Lecture Thirty-Five
Artificial Languages

Scope: There have been many attempts to create languages for use by the whole world. Some have been too needlessly complex, such as the briefly successful Volapük; others have been rather delightfully silly, such as Solresol, based on musical pitches. But Esperanto, a kind of streamlined Romance language, has had some success since its creation in 1887. Sign languages for the deaf are also artificial languages, but genuine ones, with grammar, nuance, and dialects, even created anew by deaf children if they are exposed to random collections of creative gesticulations.

Outline

I. Creoles are new languages that were created largely unconsciously, but many languages have been created deliberately. These languages, whether they succeed or pass away after a brief existence, are one more part of the natural history of language.

II. Artificial spoken languages.

A. *Volapük*.

1. The first influential artificial language was called Volapük, invented in 1879 by a Bavarian priest. It was based on Romance and Germanic, with 40 percent of the vocabulary English.

2. It had a brief vogue, but it was based on a mistaken sense that the difficulties of old languages were necessary rather than accidents. Volapük was difficult to learn, with a complex series of endings and umlauted vowels. *Vola* was "world" and *pük* was "speak."

Volapük:

The Lord's Prayer

O Fat obas, kel binol in süls, paisaludomöz nem ola...

"Oh our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name…"

B. *Esperanto*.

1. In 1887, Ludovic Zamenhof, who had been struck by the animosity between cultures speaking Russian, Yiddish, German, and Polish as he was growing up in Bialystok, invented Esperanto, with a mostly Romance and Germanic vocabulary.

2. Esperanto has had some success. There are at least a million speakers, a literature, and translations, including the Bible, the Koran, and *Hamlet*.

3. Part of this success is the result of Esperanto's user-friendly structure. It is strictly regular and has only 16 formal rules.
4. Nouns end in *o*, adjectives in *a*, adverbs in *e*, and verb infinitives in *i*. Thus, *varma* is "warm," *varmo* is "warmth," and *varmi* is "to warm up." Present tense is indicated with the ending -*as*, past with -*is*, future with -*os*, conditional with –*us*, and imperative with -*u*. Suffixes create new words: *koko* is "rooster" and *kokino* is "hen"; *arbo* is "tree" and *arbaro* is "forest."
5. Esperanto does have a bias toward European languages, such as assuming that a language must have a marker for direct objects or the conditional. Here is a sample, which you might probably be able to make sense of even without familiarity with the language:

   Esperanto:

   Simpla, fleksebla, praktika solvo de la problemo de universala interkompreno, Esperanto meritas vian seriozan konsideron.

   "A simple, flexible, practical solution to the problem of universal understanding, Esperanto deserves your serious consideration."

C. *Solresol*.
1. No discussion of artificial languages would be complete without a quick look at Solresol, invented in France in the early 1800s. It was based on musical pitches, which could be sung or whistled or played, as well as spoken. Related sequences of pitches were assigned to related words.
2. DORE was "I"; DOMI was "you"; DOREDO was "time"; DOREMI, "day"; DOREFA, "week"; DORESOL, "month"; DORELA, "year"; DORESI, "century"; MISOL was "good"; SOLMI was "bad."

III. Sign language.

A. The signing of deaf people is not simply a series of gestures. Sign languages are actual languages, with a grammar of their own, that must be carefully learned. There are dozens of sign languages. America's is called American Sign Language, or ASL, but Britain has a different one, as do other countries.

B. Most of the signs do not mean what an outsider might suppose, just as the correspondence between a barking mammal and the sequence of sounds d-o-g is arbitrary. For example, to convey the sign for "home" you must hold the tips of the fingers and thumb of one hand together, place them against one side of the mouth, and move them back toward the ear. That is obviously not the sign we would spontaneously come up with for the word, nor would we spontaneously know, upon seeing the sign, what it in fact means. ASL has about 4,000 signs.

C. The world's sign languages parallel spoken ones in their "natural history." Many of today's sign languages trace, at least partly, to one created in France in 1775 at a school for the deaf. This, then, was a kind of Proto-World for sign language. Sign languages have dialects, as well.

D. In being new languages, sign languages can be seen as creoles. Just as children exposed to a pidgin will expand it into a full language, in Nicaragua in the 1980s, deaf children at a school where each child was using gestures in an individual way created a systematic new sign language in one generation.

E. Like creoles, sign languages have simpler grammatical structure than most older languages. This is due not only to the youth of the languages but also to the fact that facial expression can perform some of the work that spoken languages need words for. Nevertheless, sign languages have their more complex aspects, such as having classifiers according to shape that Chinese and other languages have.

F. As creoles develop dialect continua toward a dominant language, some varieties of ASL are more affected by English than others. There are also various systems for writing ASL, although it remains primarily a spoken language.

Essential Reading:

Crystal, David. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. ("Artificial Languages"; section six, "The Medium of Language: Signing and Seeing").

Flodin, Mickey. *Signing Illustrated: The Complete Learning Guide*. New York: Perigee, 1994.

Supplementary Reading:

Richardson, David. *Esperanto: Learning and Using the International Language*. El Cerrito, CA: Esperanto League for North America, Inc., 1988.

Questions to Consider:

1. Part of the reason that Esperanto appears unlikely to become the world's universal language is that we effectively already have one: English. Is this a suitable state of affairs, or would we be better off with a more neutral universal language rather than an imperial—and complex—one?
2. Some people in the deaf community have argued against giving deaf children cochlear implants, arguing that this will discourage them from joining the deaf culture, including fluent signing. In our moment, this position is based partly on flaws in cochlear implant technology. But assuming that the technology improves, what is your opinion on the

complex issue of encouraging the use of sign language—now the vehicle of theatrical pieces and poetry—as the badge of a cultural identity?

Lecture Thirty-Six
Finale—Master Class

Scope: By themselves, word histories are a kind of butterfly collection. But now, we can examine an English sentence etymologically and perceive how the word histories represent the processes of language change and mixture worldwide. In *While the snow fell, she arrived to ask about their fee*, there is a riot of hidden history: grammaticalizations, vast layers of borrowings, single meaningless sounds that used to be whole words we will never know, rules that began as accidental byproducts of other ones now extinct, words that began as multi-word idioms in other languages, and even fascinating mysteries.

Outline

I. Introduction.

A. Many of you may have expected that the subject of this series would occasion more reference to words' histories. I have resisted dwelling on these too much, out of a sense that only after we have a full conception of how inherent change is to language can these etymologies be understood as more than isolated "just so" stories.

B. But now that we are at the end of our journey, it will be useful to take a simple sentence of English and examine the extent to which it is but one snapshot along an endless process of mutation. The histories of the words are now useful to us in illuminating how this has happened in various ways.

C. Our sentence is:

While the snow fell, she arrived to ask about their fee.

II. Word by word.

A. *While* is an example of grammaticalization. In Proto-Indo-European, it was a verb *k*^{w}*eiə-*, "to rest." In Old English, this verb became a noun, *hwīl*, meaning a peaceful stretch of time (we still say *spend a while* in this meaning). But after this, it became a grammatical word, showing that one thing happened within the same span of time as another. This grammatical meaning came from the part of *hwīl* referring to time, rather than rest. Today's *while*, then, has completely lost the connotation of rest that *k*^{w}*eiə-* had.

B. *The* is another grammaticalization, coming from the Old English word for *that*. To say *the cat* is to point out a certain cat, as opposed to *a cat*, which refers to any cat. But to say *that cat* is to be even more forcefully specific. The meaning of *that* weakened to *the* over time. This means,

however, that Old English—and Proto-Indo-European—were languages like Chinese and legions of others that have no articles. *The* is a frill that English has drifted into, seeming as peculiar and superfluous to many foreigners as alienable possessive marking is to us.

C. *Snow* is an ordinary English word that has had its meaning for eons. However, the first *s* is a mystery. Other Indo-European languages have it in their *snow* word, too, but Latin's word *nix* lacked the *s*; thus, we have *neige* in French and *nieve* in Spanish. We might think that the *s* just dropped off in Latin. But in other cases, Latin has an *s* where one of its sisters doesn't. Latin has such words as *specit* for "sees," but in Sanskrit, this is *páçyati*. Indo-Europeanists call this *s* that floats in and out of the family *s-mobile* and think it was the remnant of a prefix. We will never know what the prefix was or its meaning, but we utter its remains whenever we say that it's snowing.

D. *Fell* is evidence of a suffix that is completely gone.

1. If we made up a language on the spot, we would be unlikely to decide that the way to mark the past would be to change a verb's vowel. This happens in a language only by accident over time, because the vowel in some past suffix on the end of the word changes how people pronounce the vowel within the word. For example, before English had emerged, the plural of *foot* used to be *fōti*. But speakers would anticipate pronouncing the "ee" sound by pronouncing the "oh" sound close in the mouth to where "ee" is pronounced. This made the word "FAY-tee." Because final vowels are so fragile, the *-i* dropped off and left just "fayt." Then, the Great Vowel Shift changed this to *feet*. We assume that there was originally some sound like this after *fell*, but now, it is lost to the ages.

2. But then recall from Lecture Twenty-Five that such verbs as *fall* may also change their vowels to mark the past because of ancient mixture with a Semitic language. It could be that when we say that the temperature fell, this is a legacy from people whose descendants now live in Tel Aviv, Cairo, and Addis Ababa.

E. *She* is a strange case as well. The Old English word was *hēo*, which was not pronounced the way it was spelled ("hey-oh") but as "hey-uh." But it is not a usual process in sound change for *h* to become a *sh* sound. One possible explanation refers to the fact that Old English still had three genders, so that there were three forms of the definite article, masculine *sē*, feminine *sēo*, and neuter *þæt*. Maybe people began associating *hēo* with this feminine *the*: after all, in Old English, to see several girls and say of one of them, *That one is wearing green*, one would say *sēo* is wearing green. Maybe there was a short step from this to changing *hēo* to *sēo*. One reason speakers may have made this

change is that the word for *he*, pronounced "hay" then, was becoming hard to distinguish from "hay-uh."

F. *Arrive* is a borrowed word from French; we would be surprised if every word in this sentence traced back to Old English.

1. The native word is *come*, and as often, the French word is more formal than the original English one, as with *pig* versus *pork*.

2. *Arrive* actually started as an idiomatic expression in Vulgar Latin. *Ad rīpam* meant "to the shore" in Latin, and *adrīpāre* was, therefore, a created verb, as if we were to say "I got-to-the-shored." *Adrīpāre* became *arrīpāre* as the *d* became more like the *r* it came before (remember assimilation from Lecture Three?), and in Old French, the word was *ariver*. We borrowed it from French and have no idea that we are mouthing a Vulgar Latin neologism when we say *arrive*!

3. And as for the past ending *-ed*, some linguists think that it began as the word for *did* in early Germanic ("I arrive-did"). This means that *arrived* contains the remnants of three words from two different languages.

G. *To* goes back to Old English *tō*, and the reason we pronounce it with an "oo" is the same reason that a word pronounced "fode" is now pronounced *food*: the Great Vowel Shift.

H. *Ask* traces back to an Old English word *āscian*, but despite how we feel about the pronunciation "aks" today, in Old English *ācsian* was as common as *āscian*, casually written in formal documents. As so often, our contemporary senses of what is "wrong" are arbitrary—even literate English speakers once saw nothing amiss in the alternation between these words.

I. *About* came from a case of the rebracketing that we saw create the word *alone* in Lecture Four (the *arrive* case is another one). *At* plus *by* plus *out*, pronounced together rapidly over time, became the single word *about*, just as *God be with you* became *Goodbye*.

J. *Their* is not an original English word but one of the many words that the Vikings gave us. Why we switched to *their* (!) word instead of our own *hiera* is unknown.

K. *Fee* has a nice story. It, too, is not originally English—quite.

1. We took it from Norman French's word *fie*, which started as *fief*, and French had, in turn, borrowed this word from the language of Germanic-speaking invaders (the Normans were, in fact, originally *Norsemen*, Vikings who had stayed on the continent). Thus, English borrowed a word through French from one of its own sister languages.

2. The Proto-Germanic word had been **fehu*. But this, in turn, was an example of the strange consonant changes of Grimm's Law that, for example, changed Indo-European *p*'s, such as the *p* Latin has

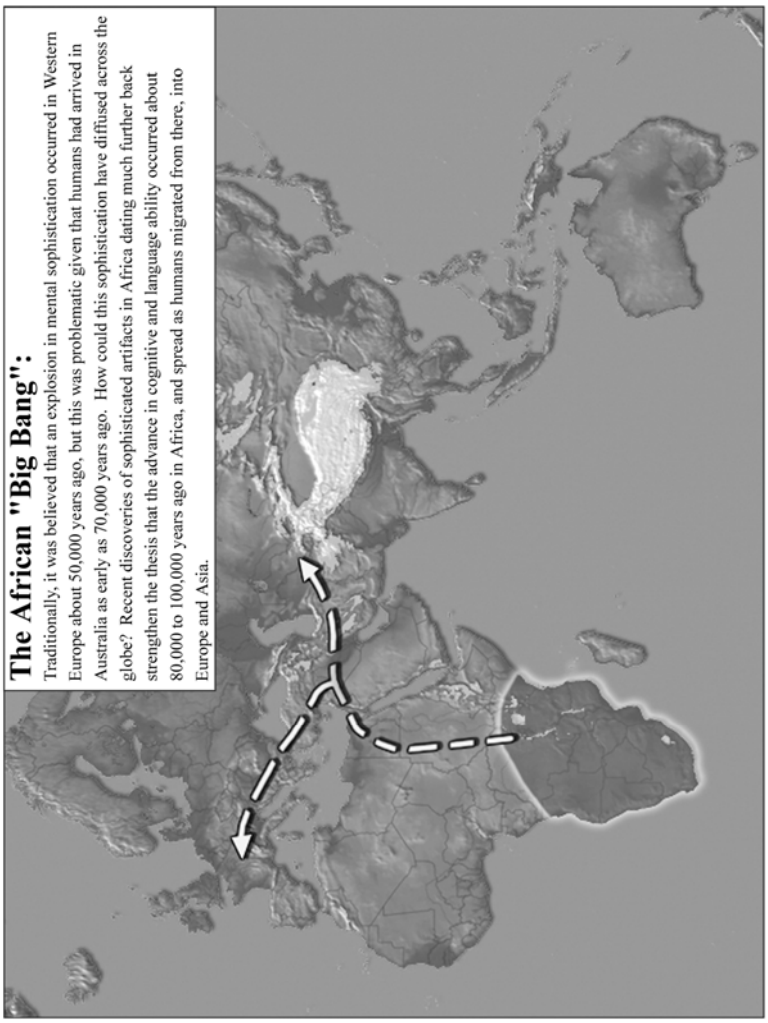
in *pater*, into the *f* of *father*. The Proto-Indo-European word was **peku*, and it meant *wealth* or *property*. That root came through more intact in Latin, in words we later borrowed, such as *pecuniary*. Thus, *fee* and *pecuniary* (and *peculiar*) trace to the same root!

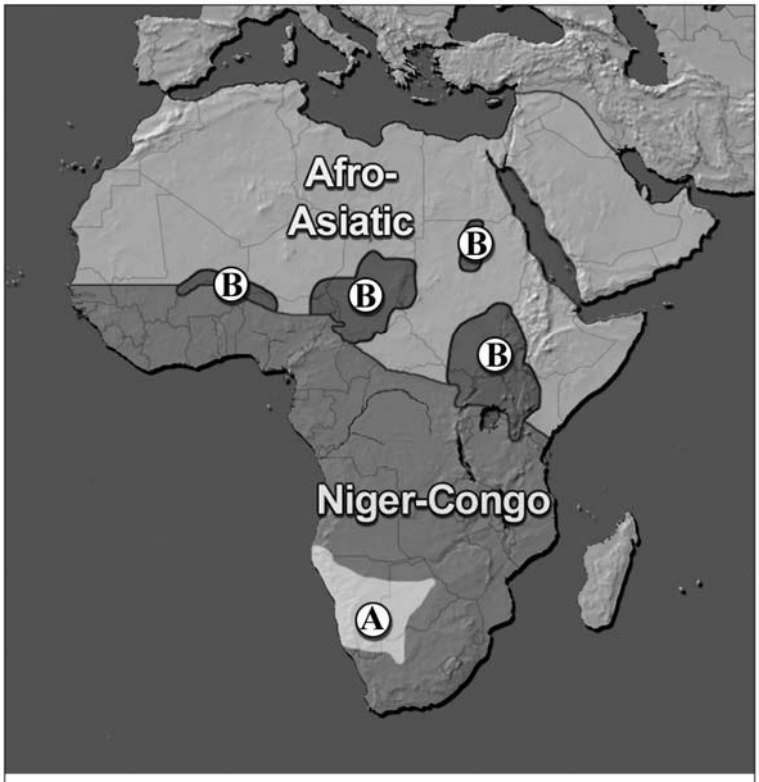
III. We see that any sentence of English is, viewed up close, a petri dish of disparate elements stewing together, testaments to a long history of one of the first language's 6,000 living branches and its endless mutations and mixings with other branches. Of course, we can see similar stories in any sentence from any of the 6,000 languages in the world. I hope to have demonstrated what a wonder the world's languages are when viewed as dynamic and symbiotic systems in a constant flux that is here predictable, but there surprising. Under this perspective, language, rather than being a basket of words knit together by a collection of "rules" that we learn in school and usually fall short of, is one of the many wonders of being members of our species.

Questions to Consider:

1. How will you feel the next time you get that e-mail that has been making the rounds for years asking why English is so illogical? One of the aims of this course has been to elucidate the degree to which any modern language is the product of a great deal of contingent and endless mutation of an original template. Have I succeeded?
2. Overall, how has your perspective on language changed after the lectures in this course? Are you equipped to provide insights on language issues of the day at parties? Have you been reinforced in views you held before or coaxed into new ones?

Language Maps





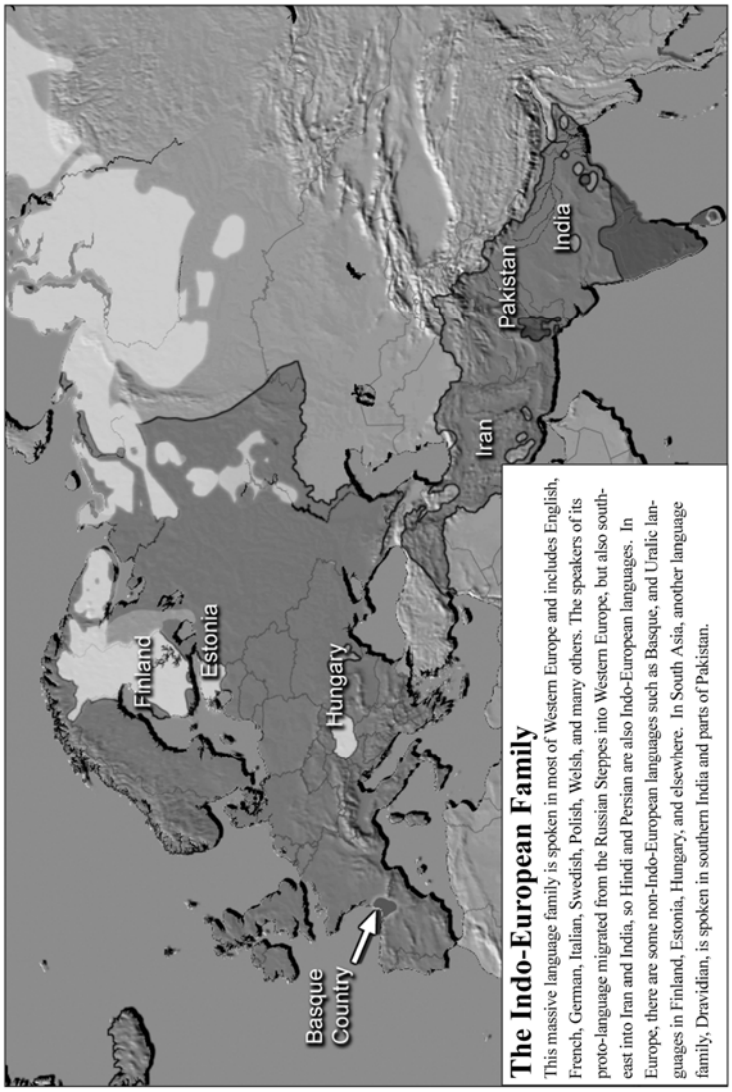
The language families of Africa

Niger-Congo: The language family most predominant in sub-saharan Africa, it includes the Bantu subfamily, which includes such languages as Zulu and Swahili.

Afro-Asiatic: The language family most common in the northern half of Africa, and extending into Arabia and the Middle East, it includes the North African Berber subfamily and the Cushitic (e.g., Somali), Chadic (e.g., Hausa), and Semitic subfamilies. Semitic languages include Arabic and Hebrew.

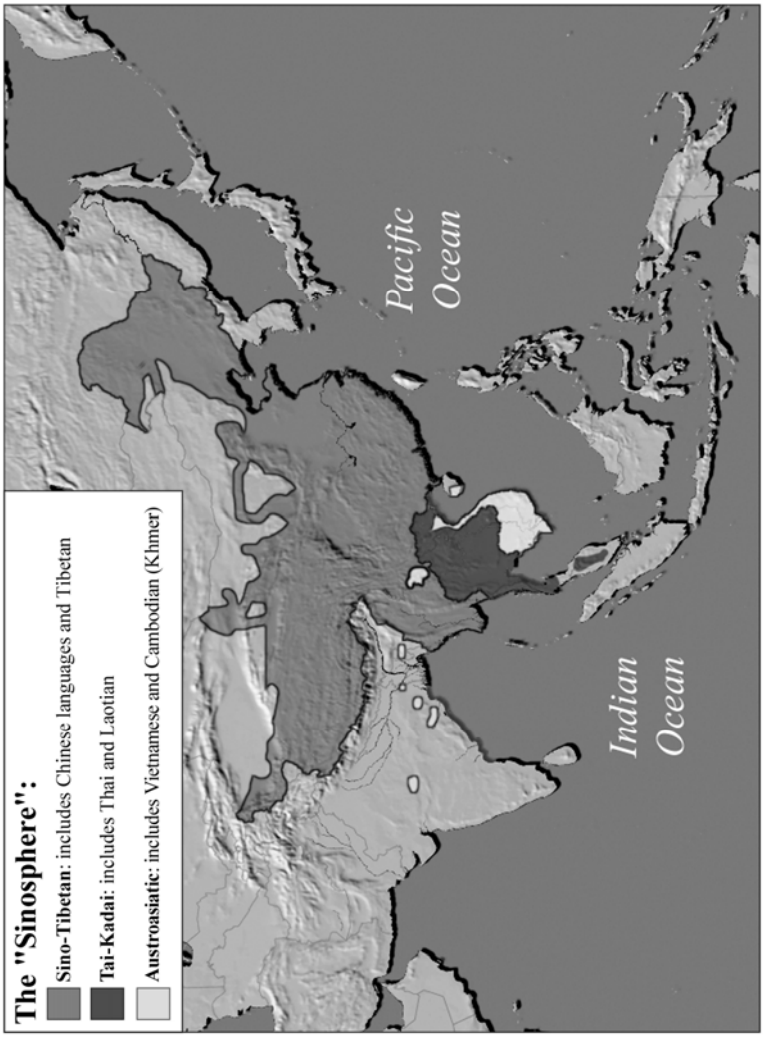
Khoi-San or "click" languages (A): These are concentrated in Namibia, and parts of South Africa and Botswana, and may be related to the first spoken languages.

Nilo-Saharan (B): Spoken in parts of Chad, Sudan, Ethiopia, Mali, Uganda, and Kenya.



The Indo-European Family

This massive language family is spoken in most of Western Europe and includes English, French, German, Italian, Swedish, Polish, Welsh, and many others. The speakers of its proto-language migrated from the Russian Steppes into Western Europe, but also southeast into Iran and India, so Hindi and Persian are also Indo-European languages. In Europe, there are some non-Indo-European languages such as Basque, and Uralic languages in Finland, Estonia, Hungary, and elsewhere. In South Asia, another language family, Dravidian, is spoken in southern India and parts of Pakistan.



Timeline

150,000–80,000 B.C.	Estimated time during which human language arose
4000 B.C.	Probable origin of Proto-Indo-European
3500 B.C.	First attested writing
3000 B.C.	Probable origin of Semitic
2000 B.C.	Bantu speakers begin migrations south and eastward
A.D.	
450–480	First attestation of English
787	First Scandinavian invasions of England
mid-1300s	Beginning of the standardization of English
1400	Beginning of the Great Vowel Shift in English
1564	Birth of William Shakespeare
c. 1680	The origin of Saramaccan creole
1786	Sir William Jones gives first account of Proto-Indo-European
1887	Ludwig Zamenhof creates Esperanto
c. 1900	The birth of Hawaiian Creole English
1916	Discovery of Hittite

Glossary

Algonquian: Family of Native American languages spoken in Canada and the northern and northeastern United States, including Cree, Ojibwa, Shawnee, Blackfoot, Fox, and Kickapoo. Much work has been done on the reconstruction of Proto-Algonquian.

alienable possessive marking: Distinguishing things possessed as objects (alienably) from those possessed as parts of one's body or as personal intimates (inalienably), e.g., *my chair* versus *my mother*. Many languages have different possessive pronouns for these two situations or distinguish between them in various other ways.

Amerind: One of the three families into which Joseph Greenberg divided the notoriously variegated hundreds of Native American languages. Amerind is by far the biggest of the families, comprising most of the languages native to the Western Hemisphere.

Areal: Of or pertaining to an area or region.

assimilation: The tendency for a sound to become similar to one adjacent to it: Early Latin *inpossibilis* became *impossibilis* because *m* is more like *p* than *n*, in requiring the lips to come together.

Austroasiatic: The Southeast Asian language family that includes Vietnamese and Khmer (Cambodian).

Austronesian: The massive Southeast Asian and Oceanic language family that includes Tagalog (Filipino), Indonesian, Javanese, Malagasy, and Polynesian languages, such as Hawaiian and Samoan.

Baltic: The small subfamily of Indo-European today including only Lithuanian and Latvian, the closest languages in the family to the Proto-Indo-European ancestor.

Bantu: The 500 languages spoken in sub-Saharan Africa, of which Swahili and Zulu are the best known; a subfamily of the Niger-Congo family.

Broca's area: The area of the brain, above the Sylvian sulcus on the left side, that is thought to control the processing of grammar.

Celtic: The subfamily of Indo-European including Irish Gaelic, Welsh, and Breton, all now under threat; the family once extended across Europe.

Chinook Jargon: The pidgin based on Chinook and Nootka with heavy admixture from French and English, used between whites and Native Americans in the Pacific Northwest, most extensively in the 19th century.

classifiers: Equivalents to *head* in such English expressions as *three head of cattle*, used more regularly in many languages, usually after numerals, and

varying according to shape or type of noun (long, flat, round, and so on). Many languages, such as Chinese ones, have dozens of such classifiers.

code-switching: When speakers regularly alternate between two languages while speaking, including in the middle of sentences.

comparative reconstruction: The development of hypothetical words in a lost proto-language of a family of modern languages through comparing the words in all the languages and deducing what single word all could have developed from. This is also done to reconstruct prefixes, suffixes, and sentence structure.

creole: The result of the expansion of a reduced version of a language, such as a pidgin, into a full language, which usually combines words from a dominant language with a grammar mixing this language and the ones the creole's creators spoke natively.

creole continuum: The unbroken range of varieties of a creole extending from one sharply different from the language that provided its words ("deep" creole) to varieties that differ from the dominant language largely in only accent.

critical-age hypothesis: The observation that the ability to acquire language flawlessly decreases sharply after one's early teens, first explicated by Eric Lenneberg in 1967 but since then referred to extensively by the Chomskyan school as evidence that the ability to learn language is innately specified.

diglossia: The sociological division of labor in many societies between two languages, or two varieties of a language, with a "high" one used in formal contexts and a "low" one used in casual ones. The classic cases are High German and Swiss German, practically a different language, in Switzerland, and Modern Standard Arabic, based on the language of the Koran, and the colloquial Arabics of each Arabic-speaking region, such as Moroccan and Egyptian, which are essentially different languages from Modern Standard and as different from one another as the Romance languages

double negative: The connotation of the negative in a sentence via two negator words: *I ain't seen nothing*.

Dravidian: A family of languages spoken mostly in southern India, including Tamil and Kannada, separate from the Indo-Aryan languages spoken elsewhere in the country.

equilibrium (vs. punctuation): A state when many languages share space in constant contact with one another, with no language threatening any other one to any significant extent over a long period of time. Linguist R. M. W. Dixon proposes this as human language's original state, contrasting with *punctuation* in which speakers of one language migrate and conquer other peoples, spreading their language across large areas.

ergativity: The condition in which a language marks subjects with different prefixes, suffixes, or separate particle words depending on whether the subject

acts upon something (*He kicked the ball*) or just "is" (*He slept*). In ergative languages, if the subject does not act upon something it takes the same marker as the object, while subjects that act upon something take a different marker. Ergativity is rather as if in English we said *Him saw* instead of *He saw* in a sentence without an object, but then said *He saw her* when there was an object.

Esperanto: A language created in the late 19th century by Ludwig Zamenhof, who hoped it would help foster world peace; comprised largely of words and grammar based on Romance languages, but made maximally simple. Esperanto has been the most successful of many artificial languages.

Eurasiatic: A "superfamily" proposed by Joseph Greenberg comprising Indo-European, Uralic (e.g., Finnish and Hungarian), Altaic (e.g., Turkish, Mongolian), Dravidian, Kartvelian (of the Caucasus mountains), Afro-Asiatic (e.g., Arabic, Hausa), Korean, Japanese, Chukchi-Kamchatkan (of eastern Russia), and Eskimo-Aleut. The Eurasiatic hypothesis differs from the Nostratic hypothesis in that the latter is based on comparisons of the families' proto-languages while the former is based on more general cross-family comparisons.

evidential markers: Markers that indicate how one learned a fact being stated (i.e., seen, heard, suspected, and so on); all languages have ways of expressing such things, but in some languages, one *must* express them with each sentence.

FOXP2 gene: The gene that is connected to humans' ability to speak, also found in slightly different form in chimpanzees and found to be damaged in a family in which a speech defect (specific language impairment) was common.

gender marking: The distribution of nouns into two or more classes, masculine and feminine usually included; the term usually refers to this as applied to inanimate objects, as well as animate ones, such as German's *der Löffel*, *die Gabel*, and *das Messer* for the spoon, the fork, and the knife.

Germanic: A subfamily of Indo-European including German, Dutch, Yiddish, Swedish, Icelandic, and English, distinguished by how very close Icelandic is to Proto-Germanic and how strikingly far English is from it.

grammatical words (vs. concrete words): Words that have no concrete essence but perform grammatical functions in a sentence, such as *would* or *then* or, well, *or*. These are as crucial as concrete words in making human language what it is.

grammaticalization: The development of a word from a concrete one into a grammatical one over time, such as French's *pas* from meaning "step" to "not." Grammaticalization is how most grammatical words, as well as prefixes and suffixes, come into being.

Great Vowel Shift: The transformation of many English vowels into other ones in the 1400s, before which many English spelling conventions had already gelled. This is why *made* is spelled as if it were pronounced "MAH-deh," which at a period before the Great Vowel Shift, it was.

Grimm's law: A curious transformation in the consonants of Proto-Germanic, in which Proto-Indo-European *p* became *f* (hence, Latin *pater*, English *father*), *t* became *th* (Latinate *tenuous*, original English *thin*), and so on.

Indo-Aryan: The subfamily of Indo-European including Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, and other languages descended from Sanskrit.

Indo-European: The language family now occupying most of Europe, Iran, and India, likely originating in the south of present-day Russia; its proto-language has been reconstructed, called Proto-Indo-European.

Indo-Pacific: The family of languages including the several hundred spoken on New Guinea and some others spoken on nearby islands; the group is often termed Papuan. Relationships among the languages have only begun to be worked out.

inherent reflexive marking: The extension of reflexive marking (*I hurt myself*) to verbs indicating emotion, movement, and other processes done to or occurring within one's self: German *ich erinnere mich*, "I remember myself," for "I remember"; similarly, French *je me souviens*. Especially common in Europe.

intertwined language: Languages developed by people with a bicultural identity that neatly combine the grammatical structure of one language with words from another one, in various fashions; e.g., Media Lengua and Mednyj Aleut.

Italic: The subfamily of Indo-European that included Latin and is now represented by the Romance languages; Latin's relatives, such as Oscan and Umbrian, are long extinct.

Khoi-San: The family of languages spoken in regions of southern Africa best known for their click sounds; perhaps the world's most ancient language family.

laryngeals: The breathy sounds reconstructed by Ferdinand de Saussure as having existed in Proto-Indo-European, to explain why many of its reconstructed roots were "open-ended" ones with a long vowel and no final consonant. De Saussure was proven correct when such sounds occurred in the places he predicted in Hittite, an extinct Indo-European language discovered in documents in the early 20th century.

Media Lengua: An intertwined language spoken in Ecuador, with Quechua endings and word order and Spanish words.

Mednyj Aleut ("middle" Aleut): An intertwined language, now basically extinct, spoken by children of Russian traders and Aleut women on one of the Aleutian islands starting in the 19th century.

Miao-Yao: A family of languages spoken by isolated groups in South Asia, including Hmong. Presumably, the family was much more widespread before Chinese peoples migrated southward.

Moldovan: A variety of Romanian spoken in Moldova, a country adjacent to Romania formerly incorporated into the Soviet Union. Only this history leads Moldovan to be considered a separate language from Romanian in any sense.

Normans: The French people who took over England in the 11th century, speaking the Norman dialect of French, which profoundly influenced the English vocabulary. Norman was derived from Norsemen, that is, Vikings.

Nostratic: A "superfamily" proposed by Russian linguists Aron Dolgopolsky and Vladislav Illich-Svitych comprising Indo-European, Uralic (e.g., Finnish, Hungarian), Altaic (e.g., Turkish, Mongolian), Dravidian, Kartvelian (of the Caucasus mountains), and Afro-Asiatic (e.g., Arabic, Hausa). See also Eurasiatic.

particle: A short word that is not an ending or a prefix that has a grammatical function.

perfect construction: A construction separate from the ordinary past one, connoting that a past event still has repercussions in the present. *I have decided not to take the job* implies that the impact of the decision is still ripe; *I decided not to take the job* sounds more like recounting a long-past occurrence. This is especially common in Europe.

pidgin: A makeshift, reduced version of a language used by people with little need or inclination to master the language itself, usually for purposes of trade. If used as an everyday language, a pidgin can become a real language, a creole.

poverty of the stimulus: The Chomskyan argument that actual speech is full of mistakes and hesitations and rarely offers demonstrations of various rules of a language that children nevertheless master early; Chomsky and others argue that this supports the idea of language as an innate faculty.

prescriptivism (vs. descriptivism): The school of thought that prescribes how language ought to be (e.g., *Billy and I went to the store* is "better" than *Billy and me went to the store* because *I* is a subject), as opposed to the descriptivist approach, which simply describes how language is naturally (the latter fundamental to academic linguistics).

Provençal: The Romance variety of southern France closely related to French. Formerly the vehicle of the music of the troubadours, now represented by modern relatives, such as Occitan, threatened by French.

rebracketing: The redrawing of boundaries between words or parts of words as a result of plausible mishearings, such as *nickname* developing when speakers heard the original word *ekename* used after an indefinite article: *an ekename* became *a nickname*.

Riau Indonesian: A colloquial dialect of Indonesia spoken on the island of Sumatra with unusually little overt grammatical apparatus, leaving more to context than most known languages.

Russenorsk: A pidgin spoken especially in the 1800s between Russians and Norwegians trading during summers, neatly splitting the difference between Russian and Norwegian.

Sapir-Whorf hypothesis: An idea developed especially by Benjamin Lee Whorf speculating that differences between languages' grammars and vocabularies may channel how their speakers think, creating distinct views of the world.

Saramaccan: A creole language spoken in the Suriname rain forest by descendants of slaves who escaped into the interior and founded their own communities; the creole mixes words from English, Portuguese, Dutch, and the African languages Fongbe and Kikongo and has a grammar highly similar to Fongbe's.

Schwäbisch: A dialect of German spoken in the south of Germany, one of the many that is different enough from High German as to essentially be a different language.

semantic broadening: The development over time of a word's meaning into one more general: *bird* once referred to small birds but now refers to all birds.

semantic drift: The tendency for words' meanings to morph gradually over time to the point that the distance between the original meaning and the current one can be quite striking: *silly* used to mean *blessed*.

semantic narrowing: The development over time of a word's meaning into one more specific: *hound* once referred to all dogs but now refers to only a subset of them.

semi-creole: Languages not quite as different from a standard one as a creole is but more different than the typical dialect of that standard language. The French of Réunion Island, further from French than, for example, Canadian French but hardly as different from it as Haitian Creole, is a typical semi-creole.

Semitic: A language family spoken in the Middle East and Ethiopia including Arabic, Hebrew, and Amharic; most famous for its three-consonant word skeletons (K-T-B means "write" in Arabic; thus, *kataba*, "he wrote"; *maktab*, "office"; and so on).

Sinosphere: Linguist James Matisoff's term for the language area in Eastern and Southeastern Asia, where several separate language families have come to share several structural traits, such as tone, over the millennia because of constant contact.

Sino-Tibetan: A language family including Chinese, Tibetan, Burmese, and many other languages spoken in Southern and Southeast Asia; tone is common in the family.

sound shift: The tendency for sounds to change their articulation gradually and become new ones; the Great Vowel Shift in English is one example, as is the increasingly common pronunciation of *aw* as *ah* in America (*rah fish* instead of *raw fish*).

specific language impairment: The condition discovered in an English family in the 1980s, in which sufferers spoke rather slowly and hesitantly and often made errors usually made by foreigners. Those afflicted were found to have a faulty FOXP2 gene.

Sprachbund: An area where separate languages have come to share many grammatical features as the result of heavy bi- and multilingualism over time. A classic case is found in the Balkans, where Albanian, Romanian, Serbo-Croatian, Macedonian, Bulgarian, and Greek have become a Sprachbund. Of late, the term *language area* is becoming increasingly prevalent.

standard dialect: The dialect out of language's many that happens to become the one used in writing and formal situations, typically developing a larger vocabulary and norms for written, as opposed to spoken, expression.

SVO: The word order subject-verb-object, such as in English; SOV order is actually more common worldwide.

Tai-Kadai: A language family of Southeast Asia including Thai, Laotian, and lesser known languages, such as Shan.

Tocharian: An extinct Indo-European language once spoken by white peoples who migrated eastward to China, known from Buddhist manuscripts discovered in Central Asia.

Tok Pisin: An English pidgin spoken in Papua New Guinea, now spoken as a native language by many and, thus, a creole; one of the few such languages used commonly in writing and in the government.

Tsez: A language spoken in the Caucasus Mountains in Asia, typical of languages in this area in having an extremely complex system of sounds and grammar.

Volapük: An artificial language created by Johann Schleyer in the 19th century based on a European pattern; initially popular but less user-friendly than Esperanto, which quickly replaced it as the most popular artificial language.

Wernicke's area: The area of the brain, below the Sylvian sulcus, that is thought to control the processing of meaning.

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Ramat, Anna Giacalone, and Paolo Ramat, eds. *The Indo-European Languages*. London: Routledge, 1998. This book includes survey chapters for each family, written by experts; it assumes some familiarity with linguistic terminology but will be of use to interested laymen who desire more detail than Dalby, Crystal (1987) or Comrie, Matthews, and Polinsky on this list give in their surveys.

Richardson, David. *Esperanto: Learning and Using the International Language*. El Cerrito, CA: Esperanto League for North America, 1988. This is the best source for learning, or learning about, this fascinating and beautiful experiment.

Rickford, John Russell, and Russell John Rickford. *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English*. New York: Wiley and Sons, 2000. Most literature on Black English is written from a political and cultural point of view, specifically from the left. This book is no exception, but for those interested in exploring these aspects of the dialect, which will be natural given its charged nature in our times, this book is the most up-to-date and solid and includes some coverage of grammar and history, as well.

Roberts, Peter. *West Indians and Their Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. A readable survey of Caribbean creoles, which a great deal of the creolist literature focuses on, despite my aim to give a more global picture in this lecture series. This book also covers the sociological issues that, despite their interest, are not especially germane to the thrust of our story here.

Ruhlen, Merritt. *The Origin of Language: Tracing the Evolution of the Mother Tongue*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1994. Merritt Ruhlen and the Proto-World camp's articulate call to arms for the general public. One cannot come away from this book without suspecting that these people are at least on to something.

———. "Taxonomic Controversies in the Twentieth Century," in *New Essays on the Origin of Language*, edited by Jürgen Trabant and Sean Ward, pp. 97–214. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2001. For those who would like to dig in somewhat more specifically to the Proto-World perspective without being inundated with long lists of words and comparisons only a historical linguist could love, this is the handiest presentation I am aware of.

Sampson, Geoffrey. *Educating Eve: The "Language Instinct" Debate*. London: Cassell, 1997. A gifted rhetorician tears away at the Chomskyan perspective, unique among those making such attempts in having thoroughly engaged the often forbidding literature in question. A valuable counterpoint to Pinker's *The Language Instinct*.

Sebba, Mark. *Contact Languages: Pidgins and Creoles*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997. Of the various textbooks on pidgins and creoles, this is the clearest, most up-to-date, and most worldwide in its orientation. Run, don't walk—this one made me decide not to write one of my own.

Simonson, Douglas (Peppo). *Pidgin to da Max*. Honolulu: The Bess Press, 1981. A jocular illustrated glossary of the creole English of Hawaii, focusing on "colorful" vocabulary but giving a good sense of a creole as a living variety.

Stavans, Ilan. *Spanglish: The Making of a New American Language*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003. "Spanglish" has inspired a fair degree of semi-informed musings, but here is finally a more considered and informed piece, also situating the variety sociopolitically.

Thomason, Sarah Grey. *Language Contact: An Introduction*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2001. A recent textbook on language mixture—a topic unknown to the textbook until recently—by a linguist with a gift for clarity, as well as relentless good sense. One of my favorite thinkers who has endlessly inspired me—highly recommended.

Versteegh, Kees. *The Arabic Language*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. This book includes anything anyone, other than a specialist, would want to know about the awesome cathedral that is Arabic, in accessible language. Details can be bypassed, but this will serve as one's dependable Bible (or Koran) on the subject.

Wallman, Joel. *Aping Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. This selection usefully compiles, between two covers, the issues regarding how closely apes approximate human speech. Not too closely, Wallman argues, but the book offers all one needs to know about the field of inquiry as a whole.

Watkins, Calvert, ed. *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985. This will serve those who want a brass-tacks look at how Indo-Europeanists go about their business. It is a book version of an appendix included in the *American Heritage Dictionary*, aimed at a general readership.

Wells, Spencer. *The Journey of Man: A Genetic Odyssey*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002. An alternative rendition of a story updating Cavalli-Sforza, told more comprehensively by the Oppenheimer book on this list; somewhat lesser on renegade insight and narrative suspense but more compact for those with less time.

Whorf, Benjamin Lee. *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, edited by J. B. Carroll. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956.

The take-home version of Whorf's ideas on how language channels thought. Now available only at university libraries, but a useful way to get the insights at their source without trawling the obscure and scattered venues in which the work originally appeared.

Wright, Robert. "Quest for the Mother Tongue." *Atlantic Monthly* 267 (1991): 39–68. A general-public account of the Proto-World thesis and its notably acrid reception by most other linguists; this is a nice introduction to whet the appetite for Ruhlen's book.

Internet Resources:

http://www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/IPA/index.html. On the Web site of the International Phonetic Association, you will find charts of the International Phonetic Alphabet, many of whose symbols were used throughout this booklet.

http://www.languagehat.com. A feast for language lovers, consisting of essays, comments, and links to dozens of language-related Web sites, including linguablogs, language resources, and more.

http://www.languagelog.org. A composite of language-related essays; some funny, some serious, all thought-provoking.

