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| language | A set of sounds, combination of sounds, and symbols that are used for communication. |
| culture | The sum total of the knowledge, attitudes, and habitual behavior patterns shared and transmitted by members of a society. this is anthropologist Ralph Linton's definition; hundreds of others exist. |
| standard language | The variant of a language that a country's political and intellectual elite seek to promote as the norm for use in schools, government, the media, and other aspects of public life. |
| dialects | Local or regional characteristics of a language. While accent refers to the pronunciation differences of a standard language, a dialect, in addition to pronunciation variation, has distinctive grammar and vocabulary. |
| isogloss | A geographic boundary within which a particular linguistic feature occurs. |
| mutual intelligibility | The ability of two people to understand each other when speaking. |
| Dialect chains | A set of contiguous dialects in which the dialects nearest to each other at any place in the chain are most closely related. |
| language families | Group of languages with a shared but fairly distant origin. |
| subfamilies | Divisions within a language family where the commonalities are more definite and the origin is more recent. |
| sound shift | Slight change in a word across languages within a subfamily or through a language family from the present backward toward its origin. |
| Proto-Indo-European | Linguistic hypothesis proposing the existence of an ancestral Indo-European language that is the hearth of the ancient Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit languages which hearth would link modern languages from Scandinavia to North Africa and from North America through parts of Asia to Australia. |
| cognate | a word that has the same linguistic derivation as another word, (same root word) |
| Proto-Eurasiatic | Linguistic hypothesis proposing the existance of a language or group of languages that predated, and gave rise to, Proto-Indo-European and other language families with European origins |
| backward reconstruction | The tracking of sound shifts and hardening of consonants "backward" toward the original language. |
| extinct language | Language without any native speakers. |
| conquest theory | One major theory of how Proto-Indo-European diffused into Europe which holds that the early speakers of Proto-Indo-European spread westward on horseback, overpowering earlier inhabitants and beginning the diffusion and differentiation of Indo-European tongues. |
| deep reconstruction | Technique using the vocabulary of an extinct language to re-create the language that preceded it. |
| Nostratic | Language believed to be the ancestral language not only of Proto-Indo-European, but also of the Kartvelian languages of the southern Caucasus region, the Uralic-Altaic languages (including Hungarian, Finnish, Turkish, and Mongolian), the Dravadian languages of India, and the Afro-Asiatic language family. |
| Language Divergence | The opposite of language convergence; a process suggested by German linguist August Schleicher whereby new languages are formed when a language breaks into dialects due to a lack of spatial interaction among speakers of the language and continued isolation eventually causes the division of the language into discrete new languages. |
| language convergence | The collapsing of two languages into one resulting from consistent spatial interaction of peoples with different languages; the opposite of language divergence. |
| Renfrew Theory | Hypothesis developed by British scholar Colin Renfrew wherein he proposed that three areas in and near the first agricultural hearth, the Fertile Crescent, gave rise to three language families: Europe's Indo-European languages (from Anatolia (present-day Turkey)); North African and Arabian languages (from the western arc of the Fertile Crescent); and the languages in present-day Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India (from the eastern arc of the Fertile Crescent). |
| Dispersal Hypothesis | Hypothesis which holds that the Indo-European languages that arose from Proto-Indo-European were first carried eastward into Southwest Asia, next around the Caspian Sea, and then across the Russian-Ukrainian plains and onto the Balkans. |
| Romance Languages | Languages (French, Spanish, Italian, Romanian, and Portuguese) that lie in the areas that were once controlled by the Roman Empire but were not subsequently overwhelmed. |
| Germanic Languages | Languages (English, German, Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish) that reflect the expansion of peoples out of Northern Europe to the west and south. |
| Slavic Languages | Languages (Russian, Polish, Czech, Slovak, Ukrainian, Slovenian, Serbo-Croatian, and Bulgarian) that developed as Slavic people migrated from a base in present-day Ukraine close to 2000 years ago. |
| lingua franca | A term deriving from "Frankish language" and applying to a tongue spoken in ancient Mediterranean ports that consisted of a mixture of Italian, French, Greek, Spanish, and even some Arabic. Today it refers to a "common language" a language used among speakers of different languages for the purposes of trade and commerce. |
| pidgin languages | When parts of two or more languages are combined in a simplified structure and vocabulary. |
| Creole language | A language that began as a pidgin language but was later adopted as the mother tongue by a people in place of the mother tongue. |
| Monolingual States | Countries in which only one language is spoken. |
| Multilingual States | Countries in which more than one language is spoken. |
| official language | In multilingual countries the language selected, often by the educated and politically powerful elite, to promote internal cohesion; usually the language of the courts and government. |
| global language | The language used most commonly around the world; defined on the basis of either the number of speakers of the language, or prevalence of use in commerce and trade. |
| place | The fourth theme of geography as defined by the Geography Educational National Implementation Project; uniqueness of a location. |
| toponym | Place name. |