

franca role in their linguistically diverse countries. The immense linguistic complexity of Africa has made regional lingua francas there necessary and inevitable—Swahili in East Africa, for example, and Hausa in parts of West Africa.

Language and Culture

Language embodies the culture complex of a people, reflecting both environment and technology. Arabic has 80 words related to camels, an animal on which a regional culture relied for food, transport, and labor, and Japanese contains more than 20 words for various types of rice. Russian is rich in terms for ice and snow, indicative of the prevailing climate of its linguistic cradle; and the 15,000 tributaries and subtributaries of the Amazon River have obliged the Brazilians to enrich Portuguese with words that go beyond “river.” Among them are *paraná* (a stream that leaves and reenters the same river), *igarapé* (an offshoot that runs until it dries up), and *furo* (a waterway that connects two rivers).

Most—perhaps all—cultures display subtle or pronounced differences in ways males and females use language. Most have to do with vocabulary and with grammatical forms peculiar to individual cultures. For example, among the Caribs of the Caribbean, the Zulu of Africa, and elsewhere, men have words that women through custom or taboo are not permitted to use, and the women have words and phrases which the men never use “or they would be laughed to scorn,” an informant reports. Evidence from English and many other unrelated tongues indicates that as a rule female speakers use forms considered to be “better” or “more correct” than males of the same social class. The greater and more inflexible the difference in the social roles of men and women in a particular culture, the greater and more rigid are the observed linguistic differences between the sexes.

A common language fosters unity among people. It promotes a feeling for a region; if it is spoken throughout a country, it fosters nationalism. For this reason, languages often gain political significance and serve as a focus of opposition to what is perceived as foreign domination. Although nearly all people in Wales speak English, many also want to preserve Welsh because they consider it an important aspect of their culture. They think that if the language is forgotten, their entire culture may also be threatened. French Canadians received government recognition of their language and established it as the official language of Quebec Province; Canada itself is officially bilingual. In India, with 18 constitutional languages and 1652 other tongues, serious riots have occurred by people expressing opposition to the imposition of Hindi as the single official national language.

Bilingualism or multilingualism complicates national linguistic structure. Areas are considered bilingual if more than one language is spoken by a significant proportion of the population. In some countries—Belgium, for example, or Switzerland—there is more than one official language. In many others, such as the United States, only one language

may have implicit or official government sanction, although several others are spoken (see “An Official U.S. Language?”). Speakers of one of these may be concentrated in restricted areas (e.g., most speakers of French in Canada live in Quebec Province). Less often, they may be distributed fairly evenly throughout the country. In some countries, the language in which instruction, commercial transactions, and government business take place is not a domestic language at all. In linguistically complex sub-Saharan Africa, nearly all countries have selected a European tongue—usually that of their former colonial governors—as an official language (Figure 7.23).

Toponyms—place-names—are language on the land, the record of past and present cultures whose namings endure as reminders of their passing and their existence. **Toponymy**, the study of place-names, therefore is a revealing tool of historical cultural geography, because place-names become a part of the cultural landscape that remains long after the name givers have passed from the scene.

In England, for example, place-names ending in *chester* (as in Winchester and Manchester) evolved from the Latin *castra*, meaning “camp.” Common Anglo-Saxon suffixes for tribal and family settlements were *ing* (people or family) and *ham* (hamlet or, perhaps, meadow) as in Birmingham or Gillingham. Norse and Danish settlers contributed place-names ending in *thwaite* (meadow) and others denoting such landscape features as *fell* (an uncultivated hill) and *beck* (a small brook). The Arabs, sweeping out from Arabia across



Figure 7.23 Europe in Africa through official languages. Both the linguistic complexity of sub-Saharan Africa and the colonial histories of its present political units are implicit in the designation of a European language as the sole or joint “official” language of the different countries.