

# The linguistic area and its related issues

- The effort in this section is to see how languages are related to various other views/notions in the real world.
- How languages affect some of these views in the real world.
- And how some views/notions from the real world seem to have deep impact on our languages.
- The course on SALA should not ignore these inter-related facts.
- Because they ultimately have direct impacts on the methods analyzing languages,
- Also they seem to be behind the curtain as the structural nuances with regard to forming the world-view of the Natives.

# Why should we study the structure of language ?

- It provides the single most common variable by which cultural groups are identified
- It facilitates us with the means by which learned customs and skills pass from one generation to the next
- It also motivates the cultural diffusion of innovations
- Because languages differ spatially, they reinforce the sense of region, place, and differences in perception of things
- Study of language with these ingredients is called *geolinguistics* or linguistic geography by researchers outside linguistics
- Such studies have facilitated the linguists to understand the ways in which the human mind responds to processes of cognition through language.

# Terms used in the study of language

- *Language* — tongues or forms of speech that cannot be mutually understood
- *Dialects* — variant forms of a language that have not lost mutual comprehension
  - A dialect is distinct enough in vocabulary and pronunciation to mark and differentiate its speakers and their geographical belongings
  - Some 7,000 languages and at least six times more to the number of dialects are spoken around the world today
  - In India alone there are about 1635 mother tongues as per the Census data of 1991
  - Out of these 1635 MTs, only 22 languages are recognized in the so called 8<sup>th</sup> Scheduled languages in the constitution of India.

# India: the museum of languages

With this number, India is called the 'museum of languages' where so many languages and dialects are spoken.

By all means, this diversity of languages in India is baffling.

In a popular parlance it is often described as 'linguistic pluralism'.

But this may not be a correct description. The prevailing situation in the country is not pluralistic but that of a continuum.

One dialect merges into the other almost imperceptibly(focal area); one language replaces the other gradually(relic area).

Moreover, along the line of contact between two languages, there is a zone of transition in which people are bilingual(transitional area).

The diversity of languages and dialects is a reality in India and it is not the numerical strength of the speakers of a language which is important.

The important fact is that there are people who claim a certain language as their mother tongue.

Another related development which contributed to linguistic diversity was the development of script.

Different Indian languages were written in different scripts.

This made learning of different languages a difficult exercise.

However, with the growth of scripts, written languages have been successful in maintaining their record with the consequence that different literary traditions have evolved in course of time in India.

It may be assumed that in the beginning of human civilization, various speech communities were confined to their own enclaves.

Within their enclaves, these groups have been communicating through a common language for centuries.

Therefore, the language became the basis of their identity.

This traditional association with a language gave them a sense of belonging and thus inculcated in them a feeling of unity with the larger speech community.

Sometimes, the boundary between two languages or dialects, was knife-edged, as they were separated by a hill-line or a river.

In the past, crossing a hill or a river wasn't that easy and thus these divisions separated the languages from one another.

Thus, with the passage of time, each speech community got differentiated from other communities in the neighborhood.

Such processes must have led to splitting of the spoken language into diverse dialects.

The dialect formation is, however, within the same speech area.

With the expansion of the speech territory more dialect groups emerged and the distance between them kept increasing.

Sometimes the outlying dialects are so isolated from the parent language that they acquire linguistic nuances of their own which are sufficient enough to be recognized as an independent form of speech.

A study of historical linguistics reveals that India has gone through all these phases of language development.

# Terms used in the study of language

- ***Pidgin* language** — results when different linguistic groups come into contact and thus is **not the MT of any individual**
  - Serves the purposes of commerce, trade or empire building
  - Becomes the hub of structural differences due to the flux of languages,
  - yet the efforts are incessantly made to make the communication possible following some technique
  - Has a small vocabulary derived from the various contact groups
  - Prepares a unique platform for re-structuration of the language that will sever as a means to link the people



**Creole language:** Creoles may arise in one of two basic situations.

One is where speakers of pidgins are put in a situation in which they cannot use their respective languages.

This has happened in the course of the slave trade where speakers were deliberately kept in separate groups to avoid them plotting any rebel.

They were then forced to maintain the pidgin which they had developed and then pass it on to future generations as their mother tongue.

This facilitates the transition from a pidgin to a Creole.

# Terms used in the study of language

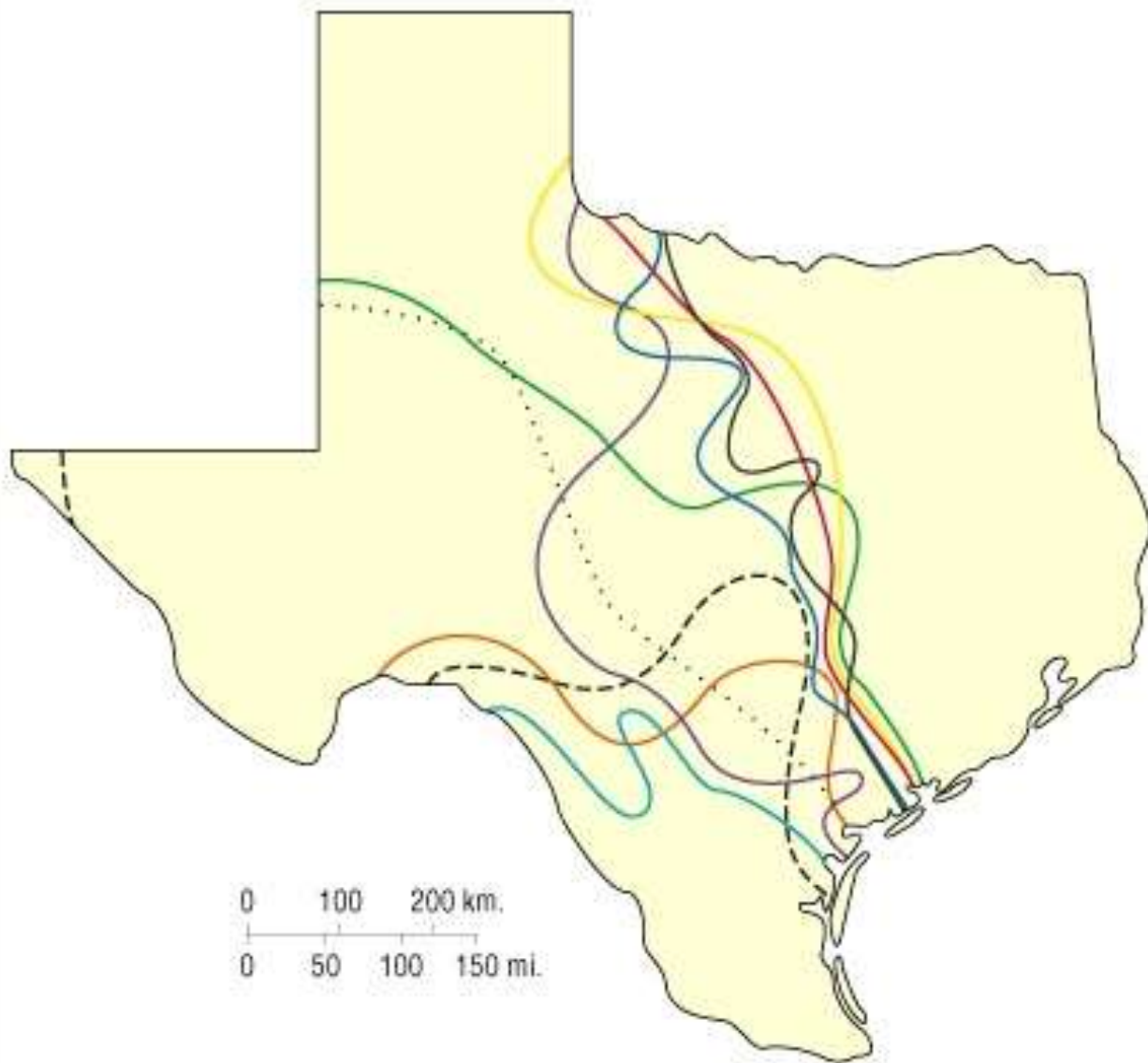
A second situation is where a pidgin is regarded by a social group as a higher language variety and deliberately cultivated.

The outcome of this kind of situation is that the children of such speakers which use pidgin for prestige reasons may start using the pidgin as **their first language**, thus rendering it a status of a creole.

- *Lingua franca* — a language that spreads over a wide area where it is not the **mother tongue of many speakers**
  - A language of communication and commerce
  - Hindi has this status in many parts of India
  - English has the status in many parts of the world
  - Swahili has this status in many parts of East Africa

## Characteristics of language can define linguistic area

- *isoglosses* — borders of individual word and its usage or pronunciation
  - No two words, phrases, or pronunciations have exactly the same spatial distribution
  - Spatially isoglosses crisscross one another
  - Typically cluster together in “bundles”
  - Bundles serve as the most satisfactory dividing lines among dialects and languages
  - The more the ‘bundles of isoglosses’, the less is the similarities amongst the languages

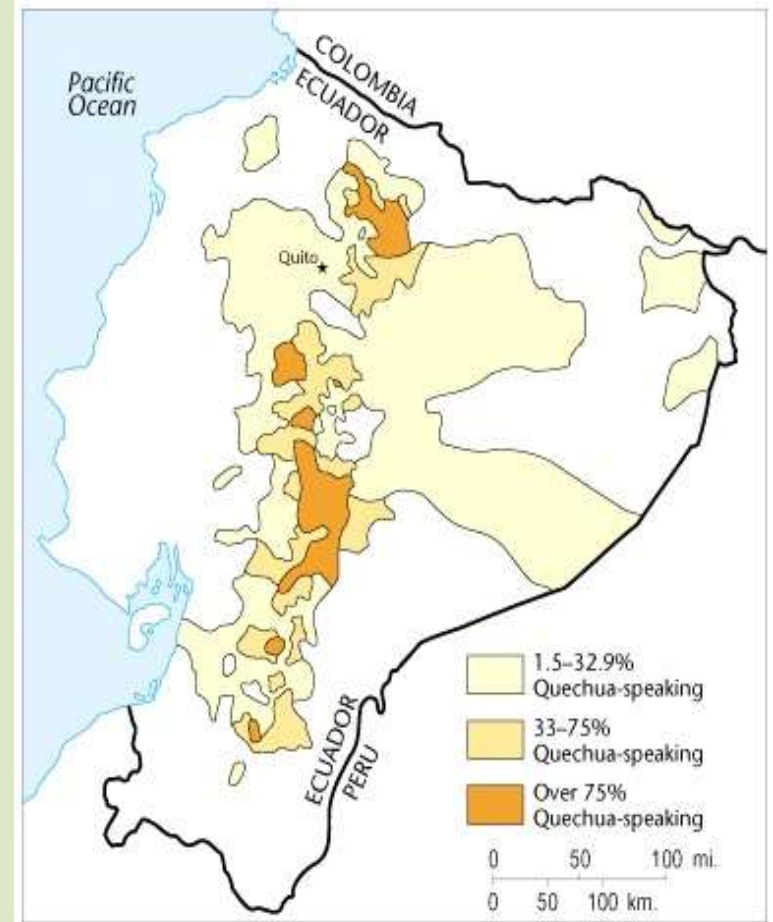


### Eastern and Northern Borders of

- Remuda (group of saddle horses)
- Resaca (channel)
- Vaquero (cowboy)
- Arroyo (dry creek)
- Pilon (something extra)
- Mesa (flat-topped hill)
- Frijoles (pinto beans)
- Toro (bull)
- Acequia (irrigation ditch)
- Morral (feed bag)

# Characteristics of language can define linguistic regions

- Linguists encounter a peripheral pattern rather than a distinct dividing line for linguistic area
  - Dominance of language diminishes away from the center of the region
  - Facing problems in outlying zone of bilingualism
  - Linguistic “islands” often further complicate the drawing of language boundaries



## Characteristics of language can define linguistic regions

- The term- 'dialects' often overlap considerably, making it difficult to draw isoglosses
  - Dialectologists often disagree about how many dialects are present in area X or Y
  - Disagreement also occurs on/for where lines should be drawn, and what should be the basis of such boundaries of drawing lines
- Thus, boundaries are necessarily simplified and that paves the generalizations of the structure of languages
- This process, in general, helps us to classify languages that belong to some common family and thus families of languages are decided

## Box 6.1

### *Language Families*

The process of change in a language often leads to divergent development. Imagine a language which is spoken only by the population of two small adjacent villages. In each village, the language will slowly change, but the changes will not be identical in both villages.... If communications between the two villages are bad, and members of one village seldom meet anybody from the other, then the rate of divergence may well be high. When a language is diverged into two forms like this, we say that it has two *dialects*.... Suppose now that the inhabitants of one of the villages pack up their belongings and migrate *en masse*. They go off to a distant country and under conditions quite different from their own home.... After a few hundred years the two dialects may have got so different that they are no longer mutually intelligible. We should now say that they were two different languages.... When two languages have evolved in this way from some single earlier language, we say that they are related (it is how the families of languages are formed).

—Charles Barber, *The Story of Language*, 1964: 70-71

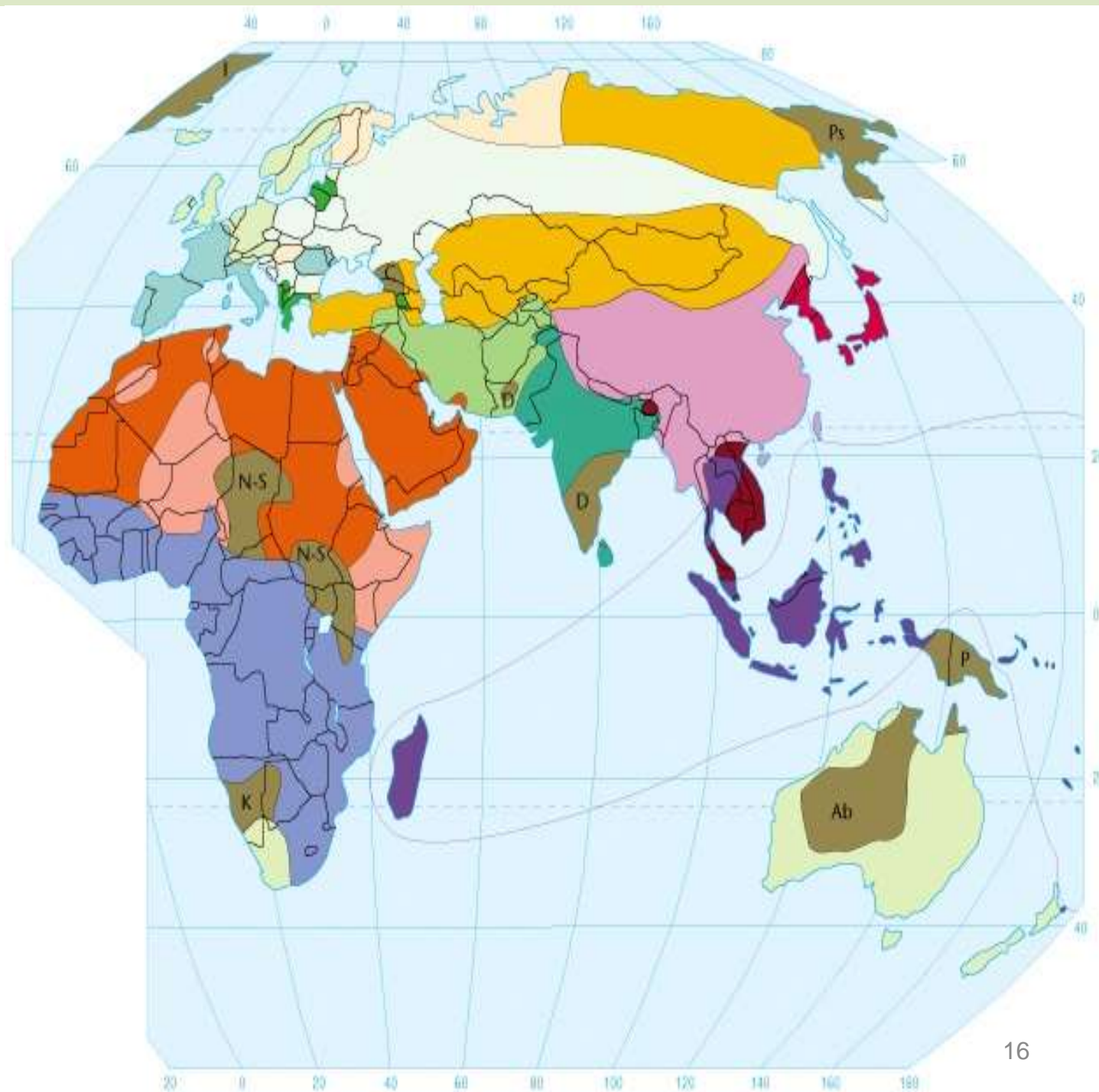
## Indo-European Family

- Slavic
- Germanic
- Romance
- Iranic
- Indic
- Other Indo-European

## Afro-Asiatic Family

- Semitic
- Hamitic
- Altaic family
- Niger-Congo family
- Austronesian family
- Uralic family
- Sino-Tibetan family
- Austro-Asiatic family
- Japanese and Korean
- Other families

- I = Inuktitut
- A = Amerindian
- C = Caucasian
- N-S = Nilo-Saharan
- K = Khoisan
- Ps = Paleosiberian
- D = Dravidian
- P = Papuan
- Ab = Aborigine





Dragonfly = भगडोलो; what is the name of this object in your mother tongue?

