

CHAPTER 3

SPEECH-COMMUNITIES

3. 1. A speech-community is a group of people who interact by means of speech (§ 2. 5). All the so-called higher activities of man — our specifically human activities — spring from the close adjustment among individuals which we call society, and this adjustment, in turn, is based upon language; the speech-community, therefore, is the most important kind of social group. Other phases of social cohesion, such as economic, political, or cultural groupings, bear some relation to the grouping by speech-communities, but do not usually coincide with it; cultural features, especially, are almost always more widespread than any one language. Before the coming of the white man, an independent Indian tribe which spoke a language of its own, formed both a speech-community and a political and economic unit; as to religion and general culture, however, it resembled neighboring tribes. Under more complex conditions there is less correlation between language and the other groupings. The speech-community which consists of all English-speaking people is divided into two political communities: the United States and the British Empire, and each of these is in turn subdivided; economically, the United States and Canada are more closely united than politically; culturally, we are part of a great area which radiates from western Europe. On the other hand, even the narrowest of these groups, the political United States, includes persons who do not speak English: American Indians, Spanish-speakers in the Southwest, and linguistically unassimilated immigrants. Colonial occupation, as in the Philippines or India, puts a speech-community into political and economic dependence upon a foreign speech-community. In some countries the population is divided into several speech-communities that exist together without local division: a town in Poland consists of Polish-speaking and German-speaking people; by religion, the former are Catholics, the latter Jews, and, until quite recently, very few persons in either group troubled themselves to understand the other group's language.

I have said nothing about biological grouping, because this does not, like the other groupings, depend upon language for its existence. Most matings, of course, take place between persons of like speech, so that a speech-community is always something of an inbred group; the exceptions, however, are very many, both in the mating of persons of different speech, one of whom usually acquires the other's language, and, what is more important, in the assimilation into a speech-community of whole groups of foreigners, such as immigrants, conquered people, or captives. These deviations are so many that, if we had records, we should doubtless find very few persons whose ancestors of a few generations ago all spoke the same language. What concerns us most, however, is the fact that the features of a language are not inherited in the biologic sense. A child cries out at birth and would doubtless in any case after a time take to gurgling and babbling, but the particular language he learns is entirely a matter of environment. An infant that gets into a group as a foundling or by adoption, learns the language of the group exactly as does a child of native parentage; as he learns to speak, his language shows no trace of whatever language his parents may have spoken. Whatever hereditary differences there may be in the structure of the larynx, mouth, lips, and so on, of normal human beings, it is certain that these differences are not such as to affect the actions which make up language. The child learns to speak like the persons round him. The first language a human being learns to speak is his *native language*; he is a *native speaker* of this language.

3. 2. Speech-communities differ greatly in size. More than one American Indian tribe of only a few hundred persons spoke a language of its own. On the other hand, even before the coming of modern communication and travel, some speech-communities were very large: in the first centuries of the Christian Era, Latin and Greek were each spoken by millions of people over large areas round the Mediterranean. Under modern conditions, some speech-communities have grown to enormous size. Jespersen estimates the number of speakers of the principal European languages, in millions, for the years 1600 and 1912 as follows:

	ENGLISH	GERMAN	RUSSIAN	FRENCH	SPANISH	ITALIAN
1600	6	10	3	14	8½	9½
1912	150	90	106	47	52	37

Figures such as these have only a very indefinite value, because one cannot always tell which local groups form a single speech-community. Tesnière, estimating the numbers round the year 1920, names Chinese as the largest speech-community, with 400 million speakers, but the term *Chinese* denotes a family of mutually unintelligible languages. Doubtless one of these, North Chinese, has today more native speakers than any other language, but I know no estimate of their number. Another language of this group, Cantonese, probably ranks among the largest speech-communities. In any case, English (to continue with Tesnière's figures) ranks second, with 170 million native speakers. Russian comes third; Tesnière divides the figures between Great Russian (80 millions), Little Russian (Ukrainian, 34 millions), and White Russian ( $6\frac{1}{2}$  millions), but these are mutually intelligible varieties, about as different as British and American English. Similarly, Tesnière splits the fourth-greatest language, German, into German (80 millions) and Judeo-German ( $7\frac{1}{2}$  millions), although the rest of his figures do not consider dialectal differences; Jespersen's figure of 90 millions is probably nearer right. Tesnière's remaining figures omit Javanese, which has at least 20 millions of native speakers. With these modifications his figures are: Spanish 65, Japanese 55, Bengali <sup>1</sup> 50, French 45, Italian 41, Turco-Tartar 39, Western Hindi <sup>1</sup> 38, Arabic 37, Bihari <sup>1</sup> 36, Portuguese 36, Eastern Hindi <sup>1</sup> 25, Telugu <sup>2</sup> 24, Polish 23, Javanese 20, Marathi <sup>1</sup> 19, Tamil <sup>2</sup> 19, Korean 17, Panjabi <sup>1</sup> 16, Annamite 14, Roumanian 14, Rajasthani <sup>1</sup> 13, Dutch 13, Bohemian-Slovak 12, Canarese <sup>2</sup> 10, Oriya <sup>1</sup> 10, Hungarian 10.

Another element of uncertainty in figures like these arises from the differences within speech-communities. Dutch and German actually form only one speech-community, in the sense that there is no break between local speech-forms, but the extreme types are mutually unintelligible, and the political groups (on the one side Flemish Belgium and the Netherlands, and on the other side, Germany, Austria, and German Switzerland) have adopted two mutually unintelligible speech-forms, Standard Dutch-Flemish and Standard German, as their official languages. On the other hand, Turco-Tartar and some of the languages of India in our list prob-

<sup>1</sup> Indo-European languages spoken in India; we should perhaps add Gujerati, with some 10 million speakers.

<sup>2</sup> Dravidian languages spoken in India.

ably include equally great differences, although the extremes may be connected by local gradations. A final and insurmountable difficulty lies in people's acquisition of foreign languages. If we could determine a degree of proficiency which makes a student a member of a foreign speech-community, English, studied all over the world, would receive a much larger figure. Tesnière estimates that Malay is native to some three million people, but is spoken as a foreign language, especially in commerce, by some thirty millions.

3.3. The difficulty or impossibility of determining in each case exactly what people belong to the same speech-community, is not accidental, but arises from the very nature of speech-communities. If we observed closely enough, we should find that no two persons — or rather, perhaps, no one person at different times — spoke exactly alike. To be sure, within a relatively homogeneous set of speakers — say, the native speakers of English in the Middle Western part of the United States — the habits of speech are far more uniform than the needs of communication would demand. We see the proof of this when an outsider — say, a Southerner or an Englishman or a foreigner who has mastered English — comes into our midst: his speech may be so much like ours as to cause not the slightest difficulty in communication, and yet strikingly noticeable on account of inessential differences, such as "accent" and "idiom." Nevertheless there are great differences even among the native members of such a relatively uniform group as Middle Western American, and, as we have just seen, even greater differences within a speech-community (e.g. English) as a whole. These differences play a very important part in the history of languages; the linguist is forced to consider them very carefully, even though in some of his work he is forced provisionally to ignore them. When he does this, he is merely employing the method of abstraction, a method essential to scientific investigation, but the results so obtained have to be corrected before they can be used in most kinds of further work.

The difference between speakers is partly a matter of bodily make-up and perhaps of purely personal habit; we recognize our friends by their voices from the next room and over the telephone. Some people are more talented for speech than others: they remember more words and turns of phrase, apply them better to the situation, and combine them in more pleasing style; the extreme

case is the literary genius. Sometimes convention assigns certain speech-forms to certain speakers, as when the soldier, the well-trained servant, and the child in certain schools, learn to say *sir* or *ma'm* to certain persons, who do not reciprocate. Some exclamations, such as *Goodness gracious!* or *Dear me!* are largely reserved for the use of women. In some communities very different speech-forms are conventional for the sexes. The classical instance is that of the Carib Indians; a recently authenticated one is the language of the Yana Indians in northern California. Examples of Yana words are:

	MEN'S LANGUAGE	WOMEN'S LANGUAGE
'fire'	' <i>aina</i>	' <i>auh</i>
'my fire'	' <i>ainija</i>	' <i>au'nich'</i>
'deer'	<i>bana</i>	<i>ba'</i>
'grizzly-bear'	<i>t'en'na</i>	<i>t'et'</i>

The differences between the two sets of Yana forms can be stated by means of a fairly complex set of rules.

3. 4. The most important differences of speech within a community are due to differences in *density of communication*. The infant learns to speak like the people round him, but we must not picture this learning as coming to any particular end: there is no hour or day when we can say that a person has finished learning to speak, but, rather, to the end of his life, the speaker keeps on doing the very things which make up infantile language-learning. Our description of the latter (§ 2. 5) might be taken, in many respects, as a slow-motion picture of the ordinary processes of speech. Every speaker's language, except for personal factors which we must here ignore, is a composite result of what he has heard other people say.

Imagine a huge chart with a dot for every speaker in the community, and imagine that every time any speaker uttered a sentence, an arrow were drawn into the chart pointing from his dot to the dot representing each one of his hearers. At the end of a given period of time, say seventy years, this chart would show us the density of communication within the community. Some speakers would turn out to have been in close communication: there would be many arrows from one to the other, and there would be many series of arrows connecting them by way of one, two, or three intermediate speakers. At the other extreme there would be

widely separated speakers who had never heard each other speak and were connected only by long chains of arrows through many intermediate speakers. If we wanted to explain the likeness and unlikeness between various speakers in the community, or, what comes to the same thing, to predict the degree of likeness for any two given speakers, our first step would be to count and evaluate the arrows and series of arrows connecting their dots. We shall see in a moment that this would be only the first step; the reader of this book, for instance, is more likely to repeat a speech-form which he has heard, say, from a lecturer of great fame, than one which he has heard from a street-sweeper.

The chart we have imagined is impossible of construction. An insurmountable difficulty, and the most important one, would be the factor of time: starting with persons now alive, we should be compelled to put in a dot for every speaker whose voice had ever reached anyone now living, and then a dot for every speaker whom these speakers had ever heard, and so on, back beyond the days of King Alfred the Great, and beyond earliest history, back indefinitely into the primeval dawn of mankind: our speech depends entirely upon the speech of the past.

Since we cannot construct our chart, we depend instead upon the study of indirect results and are forced to resort to hypothesis. We believe that the differences in density of communication within a speech-community are not only personal and individual, but that the community is divided into various systems of sub-groups such that the persons within a sub-group speak much more to each other than to persons outside their sub-group. Viewing the system of arrows as a network, we may say that these sub-groups are separated by *lines of weakness* in this net of oral communication. The lines of weakness and, accordingly, the differences of speech within a speech-community are *local* — due to mere geographic separation — and *non-local*, or as we usually say, *social*. In countries over which a speech-community has recently spread and settled, the local differences are relatively small, as, say, in the United States (especially the western part) or Russia; in countries that have been long settled by the same speech-community the local differences are much greater, as, say, in England, where English has been spoken for some 1500 years, or in France where Latin (now called French) has been spoken for two-thousand years.

3. 5. We shall examine first the simpler case, as it appears in the United States. The most striking line of cleavage in our speech is one of social class. Children who are born into homes of privilege, in the way of wealth, tradition, or education, become native speakers of what is popularly known as "good" English; the linguist prefers to give it the non-committal name of *standard* English. Less fortunate children become native speakers of "bad" or "vulgar" or, as the linguist prefers to call it, *non-standard* English. For instance, *I have none, I haven't any, I haven't got any* are standard ("good") English, but *I ain't got none* is non-standard ("bad") English.

These two main types of American English are by no means treated alike. The standard forms are used in school, in church, and in all discourse that officially concerns the whole community, as in law-courts and legislative assemblies. All our writing (except by way of jest) is based on the standard forms, and these forms are registered in grammars and dictionaries and presented in text-books to foreigners who want to learn our language. Both groups of speakers, standard and non-standard, agree in calling the standard forms "good" or "correct" and non-standard forms "bad," "incorrect," "vulgar," or even, "not English." The speaker of standard English does not trouble himself to learn the non-standard forms, but very many speakers of non-standard English try to use the standard forms. A native of the less favored group who acquires prestige, say, in the way of wealth or political eminence, is almost sure to learn, as well as may be, the standard forms of speech; in fact, noticeable lapses in this respect — even a single *I seen it* or *I done it* — may endanger his newly acquired position.

Within the standard language there are minor differences. In this case again, the divergent forms are estimated as higher and lower. A Chicagoan, for instance, who uses the *ah*-vowel of *father* instead of the more common *a*-vowel of *man* in words like *laugh*, *half*, *bath*, *dance*, *can't*, is said to be speaking a "higher-class" kind of English. In cases like these, however, people's attitudes differ: many Chicagoans find these *ah*-forms silly and affected. Speakers of standard English often dispute as to which of two forms is "better": *it's I* or *it's me*, *forehead* or "*forrid*." Since the disputants do not trouble themselves to agree on a definition of "better," these disputes never reach any conclusion. This is a matter which will occupy us again.

Within the standard language, further, there are differences that obviously depend upon density of communication: different economic classes, — say, the very rich and the so-called "middle class" in its various gradations, — differ in speech. Then there are differences of education, in the way both of family tradition and of schooling. These differences are crossed by less important divisions of technical occupation: different kinds of craftsmen, merchants, engineers, lawyers, physicians, scientists, artists, and so on, differ somewhat in speech. Sports and hobbies have at least their own vocabulary. The factor of age-groups will concern us later; it is a tremendous force, but works almost unseen, and scarcely appears on the level that now concerns us, except perhaps in young people's fondness for slang.

The most stable and striking differences, even in the United States and even in our standard language, are geographic. In the United States we have three great geographic types of standard English: New England, Central-Western and Southern. Within these types there are smaller local differences: speakers of standard English from older-settled parts of the country can often tell a fellow-speaker's home within fairly narrow limits. In matters of pronunciation, especially, the range of standard English in America is wide: greatly different pronunciations, such as those, say, of North Carolina and Chicago, are accepted equally as standard. Only from the stage do we demand a uniform pronunciation, and here our actors use a British type rather than an American. In England there are similar regional types, but they are not granted equal value. The highest social recognition is given to the "public school" English of the south. The innumerable gradations from this toward the decidedly provincial types of standard, enjoy less prestige as they depart from the most favored type. The social recognition of a speaker of standard English from Scotland or Yorkshire or Lancashire, depends in part upon how closely his pronunciation approaches the upper-class southern type. In England, but scarcely in the United States, provincial colorings of standard English are tied up with differences of social level.

3. 6. Non-standard speech shows greater variety than standard. The higher the social position of the non-standard speaker, the more nearly does he approach the standard language. At the top are the transitional speakers who use an almost standard form of speech, with only a sprinkling of non-standard forms, and perhaps

a pronunciation with too provincial a twang. At the bottom are the unmistakably rustic or proletarian speakers who make no pretense at using standard forms.

Apart from this continuous gradation, various groups of non-standard speakers have their own speech-forms. Occupational groups, such as fishermen, dairy workers, bakers, brewers, and so on, have, at any rate, their own technical language. Especially, minor groups who are in any way cut off from the great mass, use clearly-marked varieties of speech. Thus, sea-faring men used to speak their own type of non-standard English. Tramps and some kinds of law-breakers have many speech-forms of their own; so do circus people and other wandering entertainers. Among non-standard speakers of German, Christians and Jews, and in some places Catholics and Protestants, differ in many of their linguistic forms. If the special group is at odds with the rest of the community, it may use its peculiarities of speech as a *secret* dialect, as do the English-speaking Gipsies. Criminals in various countries have developed such secret dialects.

The greatest diversity in non-standard speech, however, is geographic. The geographic differences, which we hear even in the standard English of the United States, are more audible when we listen to non-standard speakers. In remote districts within the older-settled parts of the country these local characteristics are very pronounced, to the point where we may describe them as *local dialects*.

In older-settled speech-communities, the type exemplified by France, or by the British part of the English-speaking group, local dialects play a much greater part. In such communities the non-standard language can be divided, roughly, to be sure, and without a sharp demarcation, into *sub-standard* speech, intelligible at least, though not uniform, throughout the country, and *local dialect*, which differs from place to place to such an extent that speakers living some distance apart may fail to understand each other. Sub-standard speech, in such countries, belongs to the "lower middle class," — to the more ambitious small tradesfolk, mechanics, or city workmen, — and the local dialects are spoken by the peasants and the poorest people of the towns.

The local dialects are of paramount importance to the linguist, not merely because their great variety gives him work to do, but because the origin and history of the standard and sub-standard

types of speech can be understood only in the light of the local dialects. Especially during the last decades, linguists have come to see that *dialect geography* furnishes the key to many problems.

In a country like France, Italy, or Germany — better studied in this respect than England — every village or, at most, every group of two or three villages, has its own local dialect. The differences between neighboring local dialects are usually small, but recognizable. The villagers are ready to tell in what way their neighbors' speech differs from theirs, and often tease their neighbors about these peculiarities. The difference from place to place is small, but, as one travels in any one direction, the differences accumulate, until speakers, say from opposite ends of the country, cannot understand each other, although there is no sharp line of linguistic demarcation between the places where they live. Any such geographic area of gradual transitions is called a *dialect area*.

Within a dialect area, we can draw lines between places which differ as to any feature of language. Such lines are called *isoglosses*. If a village has some unique peculiarity of speech, the isogloss based on this peculiarity will be simply a line round this village. On the other hand, if some peculiarity extends over a large part of the dialect area, the isogloss of this feature will appear as a long line, dividing the dialect area into two sections. In Germany, for instance, the northern dialects pronounce the word *bite* with a *t*-sound, as we do in English, but the southern dialects pronounce it with an *s*-sound (as in standard German *beissen*); the isogloss which separates these two forms is a long and very irregular line, running east and west across the whole German speech area. In the north and northeast of England one can mark off an area where the past tense of *bring* has the form *brang*. *Dialect atlases*, collections of maps of a speech area with isoglosses drawn in, are an important tool for the linguist.

The speakers' attitude toward local dialects differs somewhat in different countries. In England the local dialects have little prestige; the upper-class speaker does not bother with them and the native speaker of a local dialect who rises socially will try to cast it off, even if only in exchange for some form of sub-standard speech. The Germans, on the other hand, have developed, within the last century, a kind of romantic fondness for local dialects. While the middle-class speaker, who is not quite sure of his social position, will shy away from them, some upper-class Germans make

it a point to speak the local dialect of their home. In German Switzerland this goes farthest: even the upper-class Swiss, who is familiar with standard German, uses local dialect as the normal medium of communication in his family and with his neighbors.

3. 7. The main types of speech in a complex speech-community can be roughly classed as follows:

(1) *literary standard*, used in the most formal discourse and in writing (example: *I have none*);

(2) *colloquial standard*, the speech of the privileged class (example: *I haven't any* or *I haven't got any* — in England only if spoken with the southern "public school" sounds and intonation);

(3) *provincial standard*, in the United States probably not to be differentiated from (2), spoken by the "middle" class, very close to (2), but differing slightly from province to province (example: *I haven't any* or *I haven't got any*, spoken, in England, with sounds or intonations that deviate from the "public school" standard);

(4) *sub-standard*, clearly different from (1), (2), and (3), spoken in European countries by the "lower middle" class, in the United States by almost all but the speakers of type (2-3), and differing topographically, without intense local difference (example: *I ain't got none*);

(5) *local dialect*, spoken by the least privileged class; only slightly developed in the United States; in Switzerland used also, as a domestic language, by the other classes; differs almost from village to village; the varieties so great as often to be incomprehensible to each other and to speakers of (2-3-4) (Example: *a hae nane*).

3. 8. Our survey of differences within a speech-community has shown us that the members of a speech-community may speak so much alike that anyone can understand anyone else, or may differ so much that persons who live some distance apart may fail to understand each other. The former case is illustrated by an Indian tribe of a few hundred persons, the latter by a farming speech community like English, where an American and a dialect-speaking Yorkshireman, for instance, do not understand each other's speech. Actually, however, we can draw no line between the two cases, because there are all kinds of gradations between understanding and failing to understand. Whether the American and the Yorkshireman understand each other, may depend on the intelligence of the two individuals concerned, upon their general experience with foreign dialects or languages, upon

their disposition at the moment, upon the extent to which the situation clarifies the value of the speech-utterance, and so on. Again, there are endless gradations between local and standard speech; either or both persons may make concessions which aid understanding, and these concessions will usually run in the direction of the standard language.

All this prevents our drawing a plain line round the borders of many a speech community. The clear cases are those where two mutually unintelligible languages abut on each other, as do, say, English and Spanish in our Southwest. Here each person's native language — if, for simplicity sake, we ignore the languages of Indians and recent immigrants — is either English or Spanish, and we can draw an imaginary line, a *language boundary*, which will separate the English-speakers from the Spanish-speakers. This language boundary will of course not appear as a simple and fixed line between two topographically solid communities. There will be English-speaking settlements thrown out, in the shape of *speech-islands*, into totally Spanish surroundings, and, vice versa, Spanish speech-islands surrounded by English-speaking communities. Families and individuals of either group will be found living among the other and will have to be enclosed in a separate little circle of our language boundary. Our language boundary, then, consists not only of a great irregular line, but also of many little closed curves around speech-islands, some of which contain only a single family or a single person. In spite of its geometrical complexity and of its instability from day to day, this language boundary at any rate represents a plain distinction. It is true that linguistic scholars have found enough resemblance between English and Spanish to prove beyond a doubt that these languages are related, but the resemblance and relationship are too distant to affect the question with which we are here concerned.

The same might be said, for instance, of German and Danish: across the Jutland peninsula, just north of the city of Flensburg, we could draw a boundary between the two languages, and this boundary would show, on a smaller scale, the same features as the English-Spanish boundary in our Southwest. In this case, however, the resemblance between the two languages is sufficiently close to warn us of further possibilities. The two languages are mutually unintelligible, but resemble each other so closely that it takes no linguistic research to see the relationship. If one

can compare such things at all, the difference is no greater than the difference between, say, a German local dialect spoken in Sleswick and one spoken in Switzerland. German and Danish, where they abut on each other, show a difference no greater than the differences which may exist within a single locally differentiated speech-community — only that in the latter case the intermediate gradations intervene, while between German and Danish we find no intermediate dialects.

The purely relative nature of this distinction appears more plainly in other cases. We speak of French and Italian, of Swedish and Norwegian, of Polish and Bohemian as separate languages, because these communities are politically separate and use different standard languages, but the differences of local speech-forms at the border are in all these cases relatively slight and no greater than the differences which we find within each of these speech-communities. The question comes down to this: what degree of difference between adjoining speech-forms justifies the name of a language border? Evidently, we cannot weigh differences as accurately as all this. In some cases, certainly, our habits of nomenclature will not apply to linguistic conditions. The local dialects justify no line between what we call German and what we call Dutch-Flemish: the Dutch-German speech area is linguistically a unit, and the cleavage is primarily political; it is linguistic only in the sense that the political units use different standard languages. In sum, the term *speech-community* has only a relative value. The possibility of communication between groups, or even between individuals, ranges all the way from zero up to the most delicate adjustment. It is evident that the intermediate degrees contribute very much to human welfare and progress.

3. 9. The possibilities of communication are enhanced and the boundaries of the speech-community are further obscured by another very important factor, namely, people's use of foreign languages. This is by no means a modern accomplishment; among peoples of simpler civilization, such as some tribes of American Indians, well-bred persons often speak more than one of the languages of neighboring tribes. The factor of foreign-language speaking does not lend itself to measurement, since proficiency ranges all the way down to a smattering so slight as to be of almost no actual use. To the extent that the learner can communicate, he may be ranked as a *foreign speaker* of a language. We have

already seen that the usefulness of some languages, such as English or Malay, is partly due to the adherence of foreign speakers. Often enough, as among the educated classes in India, English serves as the means of communication between foreign speakers who do not understand each other's native languages.

Some people entirely give up the use of their native language in favor of a foreign one. This happens frequently among immigrants in the United States. If the immigrant does not stay in a settlement of others from his own country, and especially if he marries outside his original nationality, he may have no occasion at all to use his native language. Especially, it would seem, in the case of less educated persons, this may result, after a time, in wholesale forgetting: people of this kind understand their native language when they chance to hear it spoken, but can no longer speak it freely or even intelligibly. They have made a *shift of language*; their only medium of communication is now English, and it is for them not a native but an *adopted* language. Sometimes these persons have nevertheless acquired English very imperfectly and therefore are in the position of speaking no language well.

Another, more common case of shift of language occurs in the children of immigrants. Very often the parents speak their native language at home, and make it the native language of their children, but the children, as soon as they begin to play out of doors or to attend school, refuse to speak the home language, and in time succeed in forgetting all but a smattering of it, and speak only English. For them, English has become what we may call their *adult* language. In general, they speak it perfectly — that is, in a manner indistinguishable from that of the surrounding native speakers — but in some cases they carry over foreign peculiarities from their native language. This latter they speak very imperfectly or not at all, but their passive understanding, when they hear it, is somewhat better. A study of similar cases in Wales, where the children of Welsh-speaking parents shift to English, seems to show that this process retards the child's development.

3. 10. In the extreme case of foreign-language learning the speaker becomes so proficient as to be indistinguishable from the native speakers round him. This happens occasionally in adult shifts of language and frequently in the childhood shift just described. In the cases where this perfect foreign-language learn-

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; is not accompanied by loss of the native language, it results in *lingualism*, native-like control of two languages. After early childhood few people have enough muscular and nervous freedom enough opportunity and leisure to reach perfection in a foreign language; yet bilingualism of this kind is commoner than one might suppose, both in cases like those of our immigrants and as a result of travel, foreign study, or similar association. Of course, one cannot define a degree of perfection at which a good foreign speaker becomes a bilingual: the distinction is relative.

More commonly the bilingual acquires his second language in early childhood. This happens frequently in communities near a language border, or where a family lives as a speech-island, or where the parents are of different speech. Many well-to-do European families make their children bilingual by employing foreign nurses or governesses. The educated Swiss-German is bilingual in the sense that he speaks both the local dialect and the highly polished standard German. In the United States, better-educated immigrants often succeed in making their children bilingual; this development contrasts with the shifting of language among less privileged groups. In all these cases, apparently, the two languages play somewhat different parts in the life of the bilingual. Ordinarily one language is the *home language*, while the other serves a secondary range, but other dispositions also occur. The apparent tendency with which one meets bilinguals among artists and men of science may indicate a favorable effect of bilingualism on the mental development of the child; on the other hand, it may mean simply that bilingualism results from generally favorable child-surroundings.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD

4.1. Among the languages that are spoken today, only few are even tolerably well known to science. Of many we have inadequate information, of others none at all. The older stages of some present-day languages, and some languages no longer spoken are known to us from written records; these records, however, acquaint us with only an infinitesimal part of the speech-forms of the past. Some extinct languages are known from the scantiest of records, such as a few proper names, many more only by the name of the people who spoke them, and doubtless a vastly greater number has disappeared without a trace. More than one language now spoken, especially in Africa and in South America, will pass out of existence without being recorded.

The inadequacy of our knowledge makes it impossible to determine the relationships that may exist between many languages. In general, students who deal with slightly-known languages, have a weakness for setting up relationships on insufficient evidence. By relationship of languages we mean, of course, resemblances that can be explained only on the assumption that the languages are divergent forms of a single older language. Such resemblances show themselves in phonetic correspondences like those cited in Chapter 1, correspondences which can be determined only on the basis of extensive and accurate data. The less known the languages and the less expert the student, the greater is the danger of his making false assumptions of kinship. Even the most positive announcements often turn out, upon examination, to be based upon insufficient evidence.

4.2. *English* is spoken by more native speakers than any other language except, presumably, North Chinese; if we count the important factor of foreign speakers, English is the most widespread of languages. The number of native speakers of English was estimated for 1920 at about 170 millions (§ 3.2). Almost all of these speakers use standard or sub-standard English; local dialects are of small extent and for the most part mutually intelligible.