

The global distribution of languages results from a combination of two geographic processes—interaction and isolation. People in two locations speak the same language because of migration from one of the locations to another. If the two groups have few *connections* with each other after the migration, the language spoken by each will begin to differ. After a long period without contact, the two groups will speak languages that are so different they are classified as separate languages.

The interplay between interaction and isolation helps to explain *regions* of individual languages and entire language families. The difference is that individual languages emerged in the recent past as a result of historically documented events, whereas language families emerged several thousand years before recorded history.

## KEY ISSUE 1

# Where Are English-Language Speakers Distributed?

- Origin and Diffusion of English
- Dialects of English

The location of English-language speakers serves as a case study for understanding the process by which any language is distributed around the world. A language originates at a particular place and diffuses to other locations through the migration of its speakers. ■



**FIGURE 5-1** Teaching English. English is widely taught around the world, including this school in Thailand.

## Origin and Diffusion of English

English is the first language of 328 million people and is spoken fluently by another one-half to one billion people (Figure 5-1). English is an official language in 57 countries, more than any other language, and is the predominant language in two more (Australia and the United States). Two billion people—one-third of the world—live in a country where English is an official language, even if they cannot speak it (Figure 5-2).

### English Colonies

The contemporary distribution of English speakers around the world exists because the people of England migrated with their language when they established colonies during the past four centuries. Compare Figure 5-2 with Figure 8-8, which shows the location of former British colonies. English is an official language in most of the former British colonies.

English first diffused west from England to North America in the seventeenth century. The first English colonies were built in North America, beginning with Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607, and Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1620. After England defeated France in a battle to dominate the North American colonies during the eighteenth century, the position of English as the principal language of North America was assured, even after the United States and Canada became independent countries.

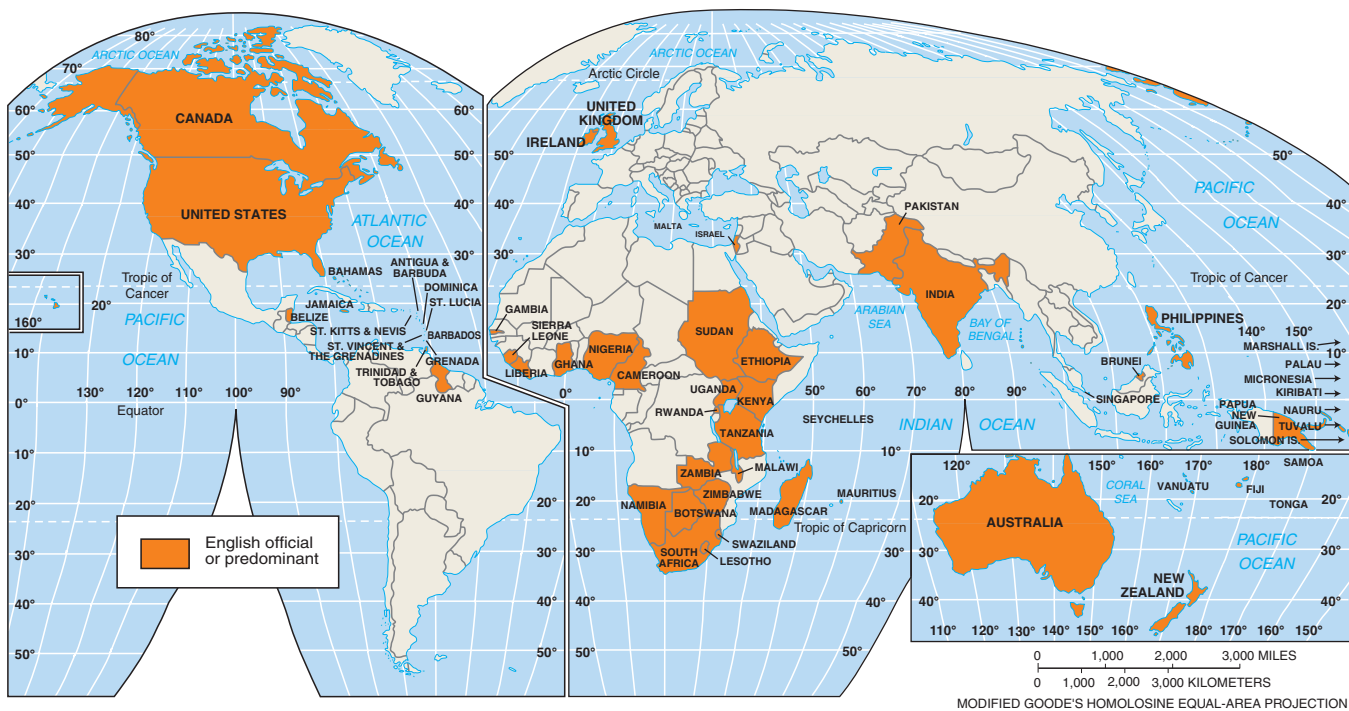
Similarly, the British took control of Ireland in the seventeenth century, South Asia in the mid-eighteenth century, the South Pacific in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and southern Africa in the late nineteenth century. In each case, English became an official language, even if only the colonial rulers and a handful of elite local residents could speak it.

More recently, the United States has been responsible for diffusing English to several places, most notably the Philippines, which Spain ceded to the United States in 1899, a year after losing the Spanish-American War. After gaining full independence in 1946, the Philippines retained English as one of its official languages along with Filipino.

### Origin of English in England

The global distribution of English may be a function primarily of migration from England since the seventeenth century, but that does not explain how English came to be the principal language of the British Isles in the first place, or why English is classified as a Germanic language.

The British Isles had been inhabited for thousands of years, but we know nothing of their early languages until tribes called the Celts arrived around



**FIGURE 5-2** English-speaking countries. English is an official language in 57 countries. English is also the predominant language in the United States and Australia, although neither country has declared it to be the official language.

2000 B.C., speaking languages we call Celtic. Then, around A.D. 450, tribes from mainland Europe invaded, pushing the Celts into the remote northern and western parts of Britain, including Cornwall and the highlands of Scotland and Wales.

**GERMAN INVASION.** The invading tribes were the Angles, Jutes, and Saxons. All three were Germanic tribes—the Jutes from northern Denmark, the Angles from southern Denmark, and the Saxons from northwestern Germany (Figure 5-3). The three tribes who brought the beginnings of English to the British Isles shared a language similar to that of other peoples in the region from which they came. Today, English people and others who trace their cultural heritage back to England are often called Anglo-Saxons, after the two larger tribes. Modern English has evolved primarily from the language spoken by the Angles, Jutes, and Saxons. The name *England* comes from *Angles' land*. In Old English, *Angles* was spelled *Engles*, and the Angles' language was known as *englisc*. The Angles came from a corner, or *angle*, of Germany known as Schleswig-Holstein.

At some time in history, all Germanic people spoke a common language, but that time predates written records. The common origin of English with other Germanic languages can be reconstructed by analyzing language differences that emerged after Germanic groups migrated to separate territories and lived in isolation from each other, allowing their languages to continue evolving independently.

Other peoples subsequently invaded England and added their languages to the basic English. Vikings from present-day Norway landed on the northeast coast of England in the ninth

century. Although defeated in their effort to conquer the islands, many Vikings remained in the country to enrich the language with new words.

**NORMAN INVASION.** English is a good bit different from German today primarily because England was conquered by the Normans in 1066. The Normans, who came from present-day Normandy in France, spoke French, which they established as England's official language for the next 300 years. The leaders of England, including the royal family, nobles, judges, and clergy, therefore spoke French. However, the majority of the people, who had little education, did not know French, so they continued to speak English to each other.

England lost control of Normandy in 1204, during the reign of King John, and entered a long period of conflict with France. As a result, fewer people in England wished to speak French, and English again became the country's unchallenged dominant language. Recognizing that nearly everyone in England was speaking English, Parliament enacted the Statute of Pleading in 1362 to change the official language of court business from French to English. However, Parliament continued to conduct business in French until 1489.

During the 300-year period that French was the official language of England, the Germanic language used by the common people and the French used by the leaders mingled to form a new language. Modern English owes its simpler, straightforward words, such as *sky*, *horse*, *man*, and *woman*, to its Germanic roots, and fancy, more elegant words, such as *celestial*, *equestrian*, *masculine*, and *feminine*, to its French invaders.



**FIGURE 5-3** Invasions of England. The first speakers of the language that became known as English were tribes that lived in present-day Germany and Denmark. They invaded England in the fifth century. The Jutes settled primarily in southeastern England, the Saxons in the south and west, and the Angles in the north, eventually giving the country its name—Angles’ Land, or England. From this original spatial separation, the first major regional differences in English dialect developed, as shown in Figure 5-5. Invasions by Vikings in the ninth century and Normans in the eleventh century brought new words to the language spoken in the British Isles. The Normans were the last successful invaders of England.

(Source: From Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language*, 3rd ed., 1978, p. 47. Reprinted by permission of Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.)

## Dialects of English

A **dialect** is a regional variation of a language distinguished by distinctive vocabulary, spelling, and pronunciation. Generally, speakers of one dialect can understand speakers of another dialect. Geographers are especially interested in differences in dialects, because they reflect distinctive features of the environments in which groups live.

The distribution of dialects is documented through the study of particular words. Every word that is not used nationally has some geographic extent within the country and therefore has boundaries. Such a word-usage boundary, known as an **isogloss**, can be constructed for each word. Isoglosses are determined by collecting data directly from people, particularly natives of rural areas. People are shown pictures to identify or are given sentences to complete with a particular word. Although

every word has a unique isogloss, boundary lines of different words coalesce in some locations to form regions.

When speakers of a language migrate to other locations, various dialects of that language may develop. This was the case with the migration of English speakers to North America several hundred years ago. Because of its large number of speakers and widespread distribution, English has an especially large number of dialects. North Americans are well aware that they speak English differently from the British, not to mention people living in India, Pakistan, Australia, and other English-speaking countries. Further, English varies by regions within individual countries. In both the United States and England, northerners sound different from southerners.

In a language with multiple dialects, one dialect may be recognized as the **standard language**, which is a dialect that is well established and widely recognized as the most acceptable for government, business, education, and mass communication. One particular dialect of English, the one associated with upper-class Britons living in the London area, is recognized in much of the English-speaking world as the standard form of British speech. This speech, known as **British Received Pronunciation (BRP)**, is well known because it is commonly used by politicians, broadcasters, and actors. Why don’t Americans or, for that matter, other British people speak that way?

## Dialects in England

“If you use proper English, you’re regarded as a freak; why can’t the English learn to speak?” asked Professor Henry Higgins in the Broadway musical *My Fair Lady* (Figure 5-4). He was referring to the Cockney-speaking Eliza Doolittle, who pronounced *rain* like “rine” and dropped the

*/h/* sound from the beginning of words like *happy*. Eliza Doolittle’s speech illustrates that English, like other languages, has a wide variety of dialects that use different pronunciations, spellings, and meanings for particular words.

As already discussed, English originated with three invading groups from Northern Europe who settled in different parts of Britain—the Angles in the north, the Jutes in the southeast, and the Saxons in the south and west. The language each spoke was the basis of distinct regional dialects of Old English—Kentish in the southeast, West Saxon in the southwest, Mercian in the center of the island, and Northumbrian in the north (Figure 5-5, left).

French replaced English as the language of the government and aristocracy following the Norman invasion of 1066. After several hundred years of living in isolation in rural settlements under the control of a French-speaking government, five major regional dialects had emerged—Northern, East

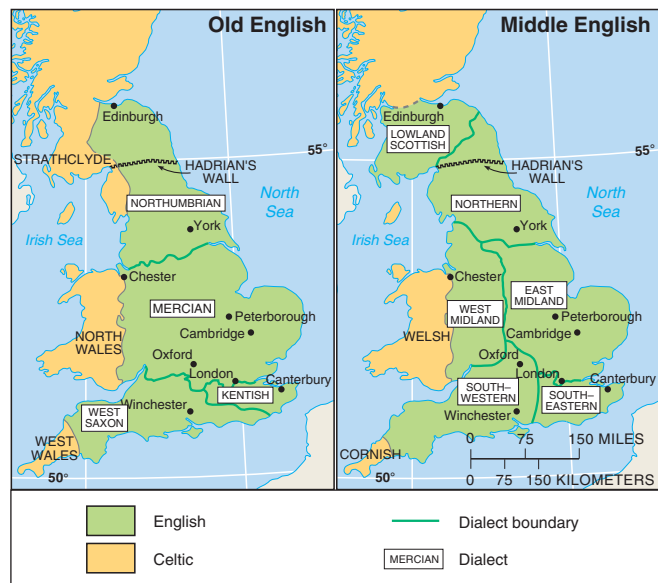


**FIGURE 5-4** *My Fair Lady*. In the 1950s Broadway musical *My Fair Lady* by Alan J. Lerner and Frederick Loewe, based on George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, language expert Professor Henry Higgins (played by Rex Harrison) transforms Eliza Doolittle, a Cockney from the poor East End of London (played by Julie Andrews), into an upper-class woman by teaching her to speak with the accent used by upper-class Britons.

Midland, West Midland, Southwestern, and Southeastern or Kentish (Figure 5-5, right).

From a collection of local dialects, one often emerges as the standard language for writing and speech. In the case of England, it was the dialect used by upper-class residents in the capital city of London and the two important university cities of Cambridge and Oxford. The diffusion of the upper-class London and university dialects was encouraged by the introduction of the printing press to England in 1476. Grammar books and dictionaries printed in the eighteenth century established rules for spelling and grammar that were based on the London dialect. These frequently arbitrary rules were then taught in schools throughout the country.

Despite the current dominance of BRP, strong regional differences persist in English dialects spoken in the United Kingdom,



**FIGURE 5-5** (Left) Old English dialects, before the Norman invasion of 1066. (Right) Middle English dialects (1150–1500). The two maps show that important dialects of Middle English corresponded closely to those of Old English. The Old English Northumbrian dialect, spoken by the Angles, split into Scottish and Northern dialects. The Old English Mercian dialect, spoken by the Saxons, divided into East Midland and West Midland, and the West Saxon dialect became known as the Southwestern dialect. The Old English Kentish dialect, spoken by the Jutes, extended considerably in area and became known as the Southeastern dialect.

(Source: From Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language*, 3rd ed., 1978, p. 53. Reprinted by permission of Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.)

especially in rural areas. They can be grouped into three main ones—Northern, Midland, and Southern. For example,

- Southerners pronounce words like *grass* and *path* with an /ah/ sound; Northerners and people in the Midlands use a short /a/, as do most people in the United States.
- Northerners and people in the Midlands pronounce *butter* and *Sunday* with the /oo/ sound of words like *boot*.

The main dialects can be subdivided. For example, distinctive southwestern and southeastern accents occur within the Southern dialect.

- Southwesterners pronounce *thatch* and *thing* with the /th/ sound of *then*, rather than *thin*. *Fresh* and *eggs* have an /ai/ sound.
- Southeasterners pronounce the /a/ in *apple* and *cat* like the short /e/ in *bet*.

Local dialects can be further distinguished. Some words have distinctive pronunciations and meanings in each county of the United Kingdom.

## Differences Between British and American English

The English language was brought to the North American continent by colonists from England who settled along the Atlantic

Coast beginning in the seventeenth century. The early colonists naturally spoke the language used in England at the time and established seventeenth-century English as the dominant form of European speech in colonial America.

Later immigrants from other countries found English already implanted here. Although they made significant contributions to American English, they became acculturated into a society that already spoke English. Therefore, the earliest colonists were most responsible for the dominant language patterns that exist today in the English-speaking part of the Western Hemisphere.

Why is the English language in the United States so different from that in England? As is so often the case with languages, the answer is isolation. Separated by the Atlantic Ocean, English in the United States and England evolved independently during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with little influence on one another. Few residents of one country could visit the other, and the means to transmit the human voice over long distances would not become available until the twentieth century.

U.S. English differs from that of England in three significant ways:

- **Vocabulary.** The vocabulary is different largely because settlers in America encountered many new objects and experiences (Figure 5-6). The new continent contained physical features, such as large forests and mountains, that had to be given new names.

New animals were encountered, including the *moose*, *raccoon*, and *chipmunk*, all of which were given names borrowed from Native Americans. Indigenous American “Indians” also enriched American English with names for objects such as *canoe*, *moccasin*, and *squash*.



**FIGURE 5-6** Differences between British and American. In Britain, a circus is a place where several roads come together. The station sign is over an entrance to what Americans call the “subway,” and Britons the “underground” or the “tube.”

As new inventions appeared, they acquired different names on either side of the Atlantic. For example, the elevator is called a *lift* in England, and the flashlight is known as a *torch*. The British call the hood of a car the *bonnet* and the trunk the *boot*.

- **Spelling.** American spelling diverged from the British standard because of a strong national feeling in the United States for an independent identity. Noah Webster, the creator of the first comprehensive American dictionary and grammar books, was not just a documenter of usage, he had an agenda.

Webster was determined to develop a uniquely American dialect of English. He either ignored or was unaware of recently created rules of grammar and spelling developed in England. Webster argued that spelling and grammar reforms would help establish a national language, reduce cultural dependence on England, and inspire national pride. The spelling differences between British and American English, such as the elimination of the “u” from the British spelling of words like *honour* and *colour* and the substitution of “s” for “c” in “*defence*,” are due primarily to the diffusion of Webster’s ideas inside the United States.

- From the time of their arrival in North America, colonists began to pronounce words differently from the British. Such divergence is normal, for interaction between the two groups was largely confined to exchange of letters and other printed matter rather than direct speech.

Such words as *fast*, *path*, and *half* are pronounced in England like the /ah/ in *father* rather than the /a/ in *man*. The British also eliminate the *r* sound from pronunciation except before vowels. Thus *lord* in British pronunciation sounds like *laud*.

Americans pronounce unaccented syllables with more clarity. The words *secretary* and *necessary* have four syllables in American English but only three in British (*secret’ry* and *necess’ry*).

Surprisingly, pronunciation has changed more in England than in the United States. The letters *a* and *r* are pronounced in the United States closer to the way they were pronounced in Britain in the seventeenth century when the first colonists arrived. A single dialect of Southern English did not emerge as the British national standard until the late eighteenth century, after the American colonies had declared independence and were politically as well as physically isolated from England. Thus people in the United States do not speak “proper” English because when the colonists left England, “proper” English was not what it is today. Furthermore, few colonists were drawn from the English upper classes.

## Dialects in the United States

Major differences in U.S. dialects originated because of differences in dialects among the original settlers (Figure 5-7). The English dialect spoken by the first colonists, who arrived in the seventeenth century, determined the future speech patterns for their communities because later immigrants adopted the language used in their new homes when they arrived. The language may have been modified somewhat by the new arrivals, but the distinctive elements brought over by the original settlers continued to dominate.

**SETTLEMENT IN THE EAST.** The original American settlements stretched along the Atlantic Coast in 13 separate colonies. The settlements can be grouped into three areas:

- **New England.** These colonies were established and inhabited almost entirely by settlers from England. Two-thirds of the New England colonists were Puritans from

East Anglia in southeastern England, and only a few came from the north of England.

- **Southeastern.** About half came from southeast England, although they represented a diversity of social-class backgrounds, including deported prisoners, indentured servants, and political and religious refugees.
- **Middle Atlantic.** These immigrants were more diverse. The early settlers of Pennsylvania were predominantly Quakers from the north of England. Scots and Irish also went to Pennsylvania, as well as to New Jersey and Delaware. The Middle Atlantic colonies also attracted many German, Dutch, and Swedish immigrants who learned their English from the English-speaking settlers in the area.

The English dialects now spoken in the U.S. Southeast and New England are easily recognizable. Current distinctions result from the establishment of independent and isolated colonies in the seventeenth century. The dialect spoken in the Middle Atlantic colonies differs significantly from those spoken farther north and south, because most of the settlers came from the north rather than the south of England or from other countries.

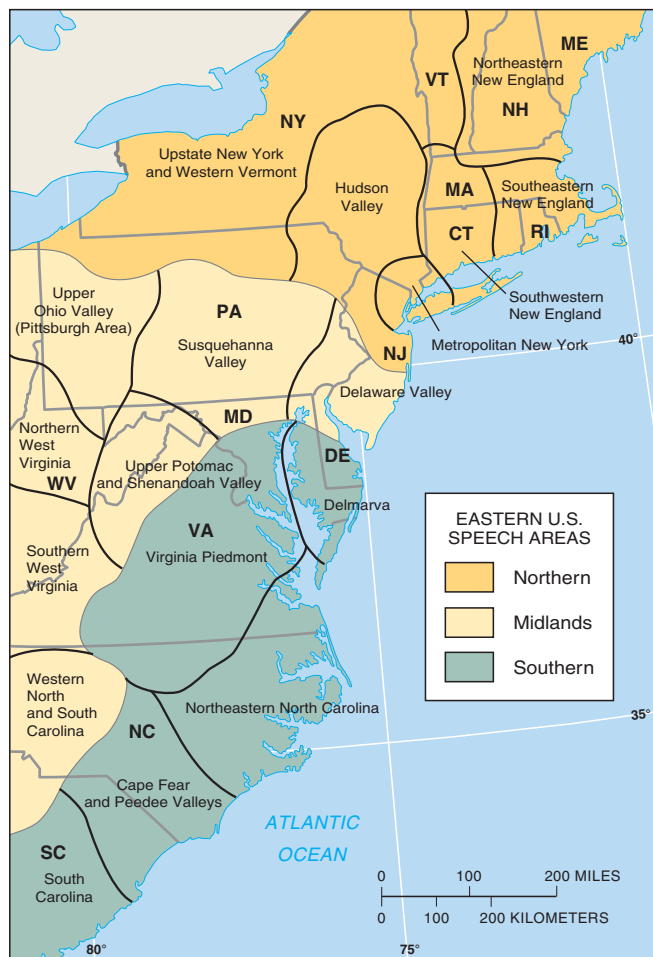
### CURRENT DIALECT DIFFERENCES IN THE EAST.

Major dialect differences continue to exist within the United States, primarily on the East Coast, although some distinctions can be found elsewhere in the country. Two important isoglosses separate the eastern United States into three major dialect regions, known as Northern, Midlands, and Southern (Figure 5-7). Some words are commonly used within one of the three major dialect areas but rarely in the other two. In most instances, these words relate to rural life, food, and objects from daily activities. Language differences tend to be greater in rural areas than in cities, because farmers are relatively isolated from interaction with people from other dialect regions.

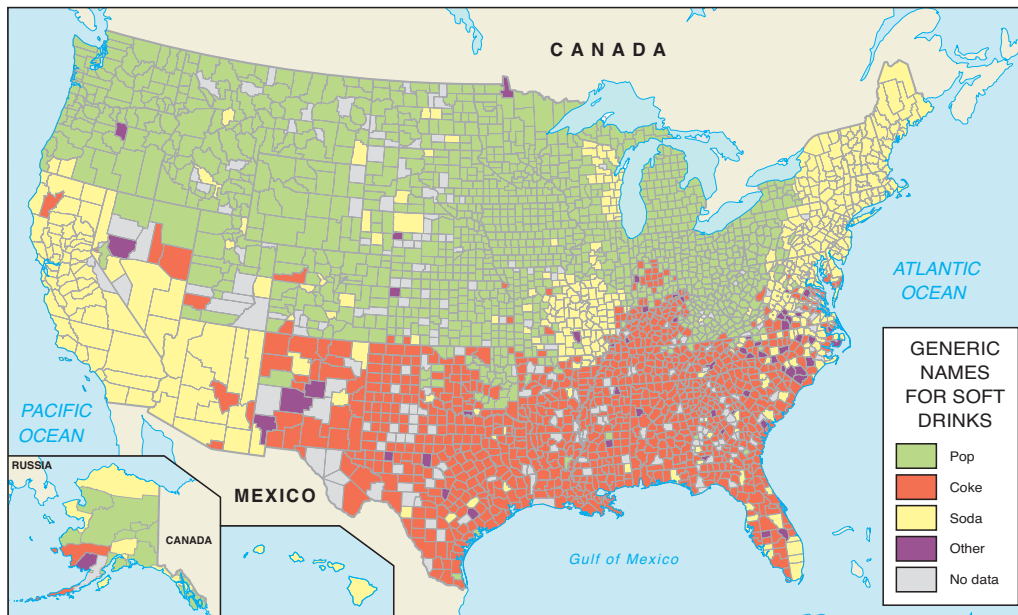
Many words that were once regionally distinctive are now national in distribution. Mass media, especially television and radio, influence the adoption of the same words throughout the country. Nonetheless, regional dialect differences persist in the United States (Figure 5-8). For example, the word for soft drink varies. Most people in the Northeast and Southwest, as well as the St. Louis area, use *soda* to describe a soft drink. Most people in the Midwest, Great Plains, and Northwest prefer *pop*. Southerners refer to all soft drinks as *coke*.

**PRONUNCIATION DIFFERENCES.** Regional pronunciation differences are more familiar to us than word differences, although it is harder to draw precise isoglosses for them.

- The Southern dialect includes making such words as *half* and *mine* into two syllables (“ha-af” and “mi-yen”), pronouncing *poor* as “po-ur,” and pronouncing *Tuesday* and *due* with a /y/ sound (“Tyuesday” and “dyue”).
- The New England dialect is well known for dropping the /r/ sound, so that *heart* and *lark* are pronounced “hot” and “lock.” Also, *ear* and *care* are pronounced with /ah/ substituted for the /r/ endings. This characteristic dropping of the /r/ sound is shared with speakers from the south of England



**FIGURE 5-7** Dialects in eastern United States. The most comprehensive classification of dialects in the United States was made by Hans Kurath in 1949. He found the greatest diversity of dialects in the eastern part of the country, especially in vocabulary used on farms. Kurath divided the eastern United States into three major dialect regions—Northern, Midlands, and Southern—each of which contained a number of important subareas. Compare to the map of source areas of U.S. house types (Figure 4-12). As Americans migrated west they took with them distinctive house types as well as distinctive dialects



**FIGURE 5-8** Soft-drink dialects. Soft drinks are called “soda” in the Northeast and Southwest, “pop” in the Midwest and Northwest, and “Coke” in the South. Map reflects voting at [www.popssoda.com](http://www.popssoda.com).

and reflects the place of origin of most New England colonists.

It also reflects the relatively high degree of contact between the two groups. Residents of Boston, New England’s main port city, maintained especially close ties to the important ports of southern England, such as London, Plymouth, and Bristol. Compared to other colonists, New Englanders received more exposure to changes in pronunciation that occurred in Britain during the eighteenth century.

The New England and southern accents sound unusual to the majority of Americans because the standard pronunciation throughout the American West comes from the Middle Atlantic states rather than the New England and Southern regions. This pattern occurred because most western settlers came from the Middle Atlantic states.

The diffusion of particular English dialects into the middle and western parts of the United States is a result of the westward movement of colonists from the three dialect regions of the East. The area of the Midwest south of the Ohio River was settled first by colonists from Virginia and the other southern areas. The Middle Atlantic colonies sent most of the early settlers north of the Ohio River, although some New Englanders moved to the Great Lakes area. The pattern by which dialects diffused westward resembles the diffusion of East Coast house types discussed in Chapter 4 (compare Figure 5-7 with Figure 4-12).

As more of the West was opened to settlement during the nineteenth century, people migrated from all parts of the East Coast. The California gold rush attracted people from throughout the East, many of whom subsequently moved to other parts of the West. The mobility of Americans has been a major reason for the relatively uniform language that exists throughout much of the West.

## KEY ISSUE 2

# Why Is English Related to Other Languages?

- Indo-European Branches
- Origin and Diffusion of Indo-European

English is part of the Indo-European language family. A **language family** is a collection of languages related through a common ancestral language that existed long before recorded history. Indo-European is the world’s most extensively spoken language family by a wide margin. ■

## Indo-European Branches

Within a language family, a **language branch** is a collection of languages related through a common ancestral language that existed several thousand years ago. Differences are not as extensive or as old as with language families, and archaeological evidence can confirm that the branches derived from the same family.

Indo-European is divided into eight branches (Figure 5-9). Four of the branches—Indo-Iranian, Romance, Germanic, and Balto-Slavic—are spoken by large numbers of people. Indo-Iranian languages are clustered in South Asia, Romance languages in southwestern Europe and Latin America, Germanic languages in northwestern Europe and North America, and Balto-Slavic languages in Eastern Europe. The four less extensively used Indo-European language branches are Albanian, Armenian, Greek, and Celtic.