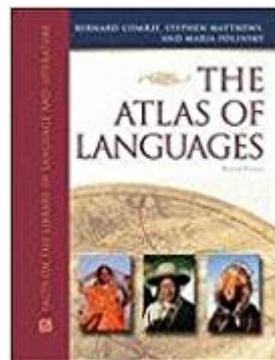




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The Atlas Of Languages: The Origin And Development Of Languages Throughout The World (Facts On File Library Of Language And Literature)OUT OF PRINT****



Synopsis

The origins of language have long been the subject of myth and conjecture. Today, scientists and scholars are rendering these origins less obscure with clues from linguistic and archaeological evidence. Written by a panel of eminent linguists, this book guides the general reader through the mysterious and exciting world of languages and linguistics. In a detailed account of the language families of each region of the world, this comprehensive work identifies and explains interesting and sometimes unique features of vocabulary and grammar. The evolution of more than 200 languages and their deep-seated similarities as well as surprising differences are revealed in clear, precise language. The writing systems of the world are also examined in some detail and the issue of disappearing languages is addressed.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Bernard Comrie has a Ph.D. in linguistics from Cambridge University in England. He is currently professor of linguistics at the University of Southern California. Among his many publications are *Language Universals* and *Linguistic Typology: Syntax and Morphology* and *The Russian Language in the Twentieth Century*. Stephen Matthews earned his Ph.D. in linguistics from the University of Southern California. Since 1990 he has lectured in linguistics at the University of Hong Kong. Maria Polinsky earned a Ph.D. at the Institute for Linguistics, Russian Academy of Sciences. She is a professor of linguistics at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

The more I use this book the more disappointed by its presentation I become. I come to it, not as a language expert, but as someone who expects the information to be reasonably detailed, accurate and well presented/laid out. The authors are clearly knowledgeable on their subject and there is a lot of good information in there but accuracy and detail have been sacrificed for a presentation which is muddled and "space hungry" ega. All the maps adopt a strange "jig-saw cut out" pseudo 3 dimensional convention by which coasts on one side are shown as "cliffs" in a different colour. Since the maps rely on colour as a means of differentiating language locations this just muddles the picture. In any case why do it - it adds absolutely nothing and can only remove accuracy!b. Yet there is often little or no real attempt at accuracy when it comes to showing language locations with languages often magically following international boundaries. eg on page 41 Belgium is shown as being completely Flemish speaking!!c.Space is wasted on totally extraneous information - eg half of page 53 is taken up with a picture of some fir trees and an icy river with the statement that this is "a view of the Siberian Yenisei river where the isolated language Ket is spoken". Yet we are told NOTHING more about "Ket" other than its family and that it is "isolated". It isn't even mentioned on the page with the map of Eurasia which supposedly covers the Yenisei area - on which this river is not even shown!! So much for this being an "Atlas"!d. There are plain "errors" - eg the map of "Minority Languages" on page 213 has a pointer referring to Gascon which is aimed at the Basque areae. Yet, on the other hand, "conventions" which may be commonplace among language experts are adopted without explanation (there is a thin 1 page glossary of language terms) eg the use of something akin to "?" after a Chinese word (but not on words of other languages in the chart which mean the same - so does it show "tone"?) on page 28 which appears again on page 38 in front of an "Afro-Asiatic word "?amen = remain". so what does it mean there?f. The use of colour is totally over the top! Charts are often shown in poor colour combinations for reading - eg black print on blue background (pages 136/7). All the maps in the section on S and S.E Asia adopt a yellow background for seas/oceans -possibly because this is the "signal" colour for this chapter (ie it is adopted at every opportunity for backgrounds, print fonts and charts). Luckily this is the only geographical area so treated and we do not have to put up with Purple seas for the Pacific or Green seas for Europe!! So why do it for that 1 chapter??Regarding "completeness" the authors "excuse" themselves in the introduction "since it is not feasible to give the locations ..of all 6000 or so languages the maps show only major languages or those mentioned in the text" My wife and I have just returned from a holiday in Guyana where we stayed with some Amerindians and I immediately looked up their language "Makushi". Not a mention. Was I just unlucky? But I look at all

that "waste space" I guess for the price and given the competition this book is Ok but there is still an opportunity for a good, adult Atlas of Language!

My initial response to this book was awe and pleasure. It's the kind of book I might put on my coffee table (if I had a coffee table). The use of photos of people and places from around the world helps intensify the feeling of diversity that is the hallmark of the world's 6,000+ languages. I found the charts, drawings, and maps very helpful, though I do share with an earlier reviewer a little dismay about the accuracy of the maps. As that reviewer wrote, this is, after all, an atlas, which is a book of maps; if the maps are askew, then the value of the book is seriously weakened. I seriously hope the authors and the publisher will take this criticism to heart. In addition to the errors pointed out by the other reviewer (regarding Gascon/Basque on page 213; the languages of Belgium on page 41--French & Flemish, not just Flemish) there is no line indicating where Azeri is spoken (p 50); furthermore, I believe that the major language of Iran is Farsi, an Indo-European language, not Azeri, and not any Altaic language. Finally, the authors do need to include a chart of symbols used in the text. For example, one reviewer complained of the use of something that looks like a question mark "?" next to words such as "mi?" on page 28. Actually, it's not a question mark; it's a symbol that indicates a "glottal stop". (For a discussion, readers may consult a linguistics textbook or use a search engine like Google to look up the term.) In any case, if the authors use it, they should explain it. All of this said, I still feel pleased about the overall quality of the book. The discussion of the relatedness of languages is very important because this is a hotly contested issue in the study of languages. There are many people who are opposed to their language (or language family) being related to any other. Some of their reasons are because of the difficulty of providing proof of such things as Proto-World or Nostratic. Some of their reasons are because they've invested lots of time in their own specialty and really cannot accept alternative explanations. Some are because of professional jockeying for position and jealousy and all the other "sins" of scholarly omission and commission which academics are liable to. For example, Prof. Comrie was quoted on one website as refuting the notion of the Altaic language family, but that was in an article written 20 years ago. In this book, written and compiled under his direction, there is a sizeable discussion of this (putative) language family (e.g. pages 46-47). The most controversial part of the discussion is the relationship of languages like Korean and Japanese to the rest of the world. Are they related to each other, are they the offspring of a long distant Proto-Altaic, are they sui generis, perhaps like Basque? As a student of these two languages, I see the relatedness, and Prof. Roy Andrew Miller has made what to me stands as a significant contribution to the idea that they are part of this larger Altaic group.

However, his is apparently a minority opinion. Seeing Prof. Comrie and his team include the possibility of the relationship tips my opinion in favor of this book as an important contribution to the field. In short, it's a beautiful book which I am glad I bought and which makes an important contribution to our understanding of the great and fascinating diversity of languages around the world. However, authors and publisher take note: fix those maps!

I liked it very much.

It was large with rich, colorful illustrations and maps. More of a coffee table book than anything else... a collector's book, if you will.

Fantastic....really great when trying to study the history of any language...I will cherish this book for life! Using to pair up with study of English language.

The point of an atlas is the maps, and in this case the maps are horrible. Jagged lines indicate the edge of continents, thick dotted lines (bright red) indicate language boundaries, and the languages themselves are in a headache-inducing color palate -- aquamarine next to pink next to purple. There is no way that any competent graphic artist would turn out such a project, unless he/she had a grudge against the company and wanted to get revenge by producing the worst maps possible. But didn't any editor notice? If I had seen the maps before I bought this book, I wouldn't have.

Very interesting. Easy to read. Lots of pictures and examples to explain things. If you're interested in language structure or how language came about this is for you.

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