THE LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD BY KENNETH KATZNER, KIRK MILLER

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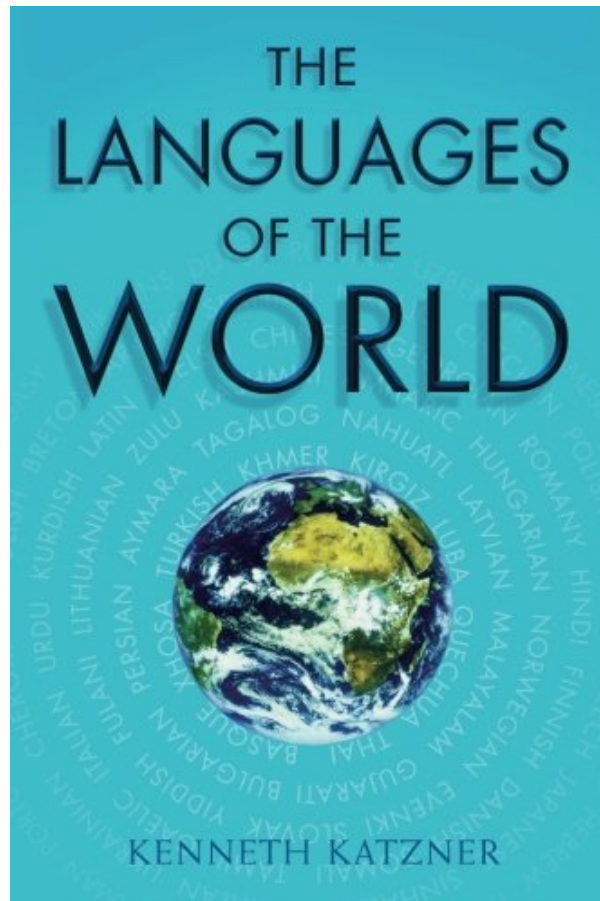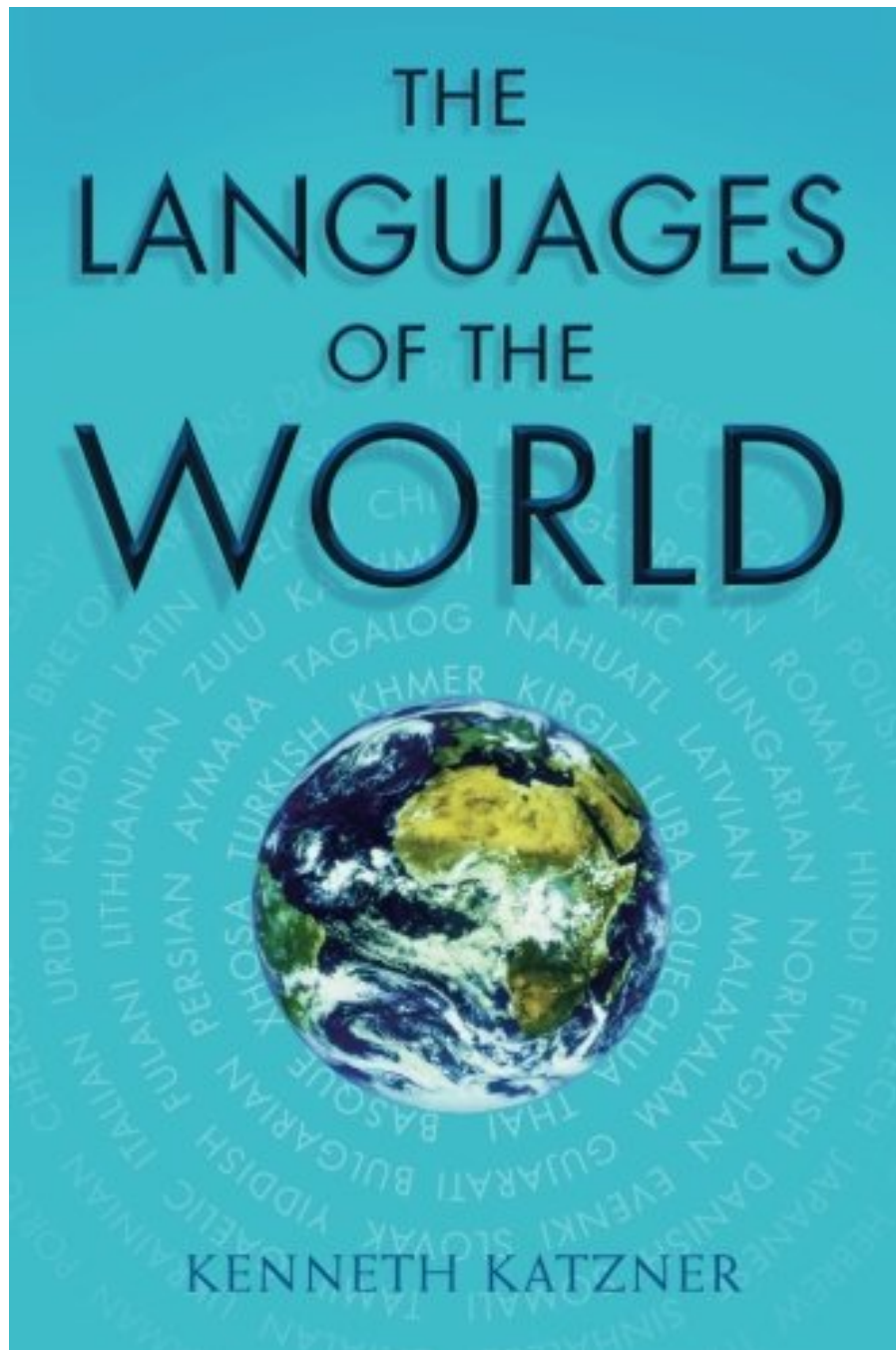**THE LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD BY KENNETH KATZNER, KIRK MILLER**

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Review
'A reference tool for all linguists as well as a collector's item for those in allied fields, enabling even an amateur to identify foreign scripts with ease and satisfaction ... to be recommended.' - Modern Language Review

'A wholly fascinating mini-kaleidoscope indicating the largely diverse variety of the world's main languages and their scripts and of their cultures.' - The Good Book Guide

About the Author
Prior to his recent retirement, Kenneth Katzner worked for the US government and also served as an editor on a number of international encyclopedias and English dictionaries. He is also author of a large English-Russian/Russian-English Dictionary.

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This third edition of Kenneth Katzner's best-selling guide to languages is essential reading for language enthusiasts everywhere. Written with the non-specialist in mind, its user-friendly style and layout, delightful original passages, and exotic scripts, will continue to fascinate the reader. This new edition has been thoroughly revised to include more languages, more countries, and up-to-date data on populations.
Features include:
*information on nearly 600 languages
*individual descriptions of 200 languages, with sample passages and English translations
*concise notes on where each language is spoken, its history, alphabet and pronunciation
*coverage of every country in the world, its main language and speaker numbers
*an introduction to language families

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Most helpful customer reviews

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful.
Very good for basic knowledge despite a few errors.
By Eric Andrew
I own both the second and third editions of this book, and I can attest that the improvements in the third edition make this volume far more valuable than before. Katzner now provides far more general information about language families that should satisfy the curiosity of someone not in this field. Also, the individual

language entries were updated. I especially value the language map.

My two main gripes with the book are: 1) there isn't enough information about individual languages, especially those with non-Roman character sets; and 2) there are some errors that need to be corrected. One of the most glaring errors that I noticed within 3 minutes of opening the new edition is Katzner's remark that the ß (eszet) character was totally eliminated from the German language in the 1998 spelling reform. This is undeniably false.

Could have been so much better
By Solivagant
The book is in 3 main parts.
Part 1 consists of a 32 page review of the Language Families of the world and packs quite a lot into this space.
Part III is again a c30 page review of the languages in use in "all" the countries of the world with indications of numbers of speakers and geographical location - again it is quite a good summary.
Part II on the other hand is the heart of the book and reviews around 200 languages giving each 1 or 2 pages (occasionally up to 4 eg for English and Chinese) - around 300 of the c 380 pages. Each language is represented by a passage of literature printed in the alphabet currently used for the language followed by an English translation. This is then followed by a review of the language setting out, inter alia,
a. Where spoken/numbers of people
b. Development history
c. Peculiarities of the alphabet, grammar and pronunciation
d. Comparisons with "near neighbours"
e. Words taken into English
f. Great writers and literature in the language

My main gripes concern
a. the balance of space given to the literature and that given to the review
b. The usefulness of the literature sample especially where it is written in an alphabet unintelligable to "western" readers
c. the comprehensiveness and consistency of the reviews themselves.

My conclusions are that far too much space is given to the literature sample and that the review is often incredibly thin with no consistency regarding coverage of aspects a-f. Also since the book makes no attmept to explore and explain alphabets all the examples of different alphabets are little better than useless!

Thus Afrikaans is given 1.3 pages of which 1 consists of a 4 stanza poem and its translation. This leaves just 13 lines for the language review, most of which is taken up with the "where spoken" information - which is largely a repeat of what is under S Africa and Namibia in section III together with a 4 line "history" and a mention of 1 "divergence" from Dutch. Two thirds of the page is left empty! This is just not good enough even for a non specialist book as this is. What are we supposed to gain from the poem and its translation? I can draw little from the translation other than some idea that a few words bear some similarity to English. Whether Afrikaans is a good means of expressing poetic ideas is not indicated and may or may not be derived from the translation. Nothing is said of "loan words" in English, nothing about the process of Afrikaans becoming a separate language or the nature of the divergence of grammar, pronunciation or vocabulary from Dutch (apart from 1 word).

A look at the "Bushman" language has half a page taken up with a story about a leopard. It utilises an

"alphabet" with number of strange "characters" whose function is not clear and it gives no indication of the capabilities of the language. Whilst only 5 lines are given to a review of the language itself, again much of which repeats section III. The conventions/alphabet used are not described at all, there is no assessment of grammar, word order, cases, tenses, size of vocabulary etc etc

And so it goes on - 1 whole page of Kashmiri script, half a page of translation (much of which consists of proper nouns -Gods etc!) and 10 lines again mainly on who/where spoken. Of the language itself one learns little or nothing

So much more could have been done even within the size of the book as printed

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.
Old books about old things
By Marco Buendia
This book was, at one time, a reasonably good snapshot of the status of the major languages of the world. It is composed of:

1) a brief description of language families, e.g. Indo-European, Afro-Asiatic (that includes Semitic, in case you didn't know), Uralic, Altaic, Malayo-Polynesian etc. There are sections on artificial languages (e.g. Esperanto) and Pidgins and Creoles.

2) the bulk of the book are page long entries giving a brief example of the language, in standard script, an English translation, and a few paragraphs on the history and then-current statistics on the language. There is a country-by-country survey of the (major) languages spoken locally, whatever the local dominant apes and arbiters of culture may think about it, and a brief bibliography.

The big drawback of the book: language examples are given in the standard local script. With Urdu, Russian, Hebrew and the even more exotic lingos showing up in orthographical garb you may not be able to decipher one element of, this is a major problem. Linguistically unsophisticated people may not realize that it's a problem with languages that use some form of the Roman alphabet as well, e.g. Polish and French. So the utility of the heart of the book is lessened. Every example should be accompanied by a phonetic transcription, though I know that the average American will consider the International Phonetic Alphabet just as outlandish as Cyrillic.

If not for this drawback, I would consider the book an excellent gift for the child who has that lust for codes and such that some children have, at least for those who don't have the Internet in the house to distract them with Hollywood movies, shoot-em-up's and porn.

Just chucked in the dumpster by the Zero Public Library. "Too old", though language doesn't change that fast. I still understand Cervantes and Shakespeare.

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