

130. Finger and Hand

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1. Defining the values

This map shows the distribution of the two primary ways in which languages lexically treat the human finger and the hand of which it is a constituent. 'Finger' refers to any one of the hand's five appendages. ('Fingers' is a collection of two or more of the latter.) 'Hand' is defined as that part of the upper limb from the fingertips to the wrist. Two values are represented:

@	1. Identity: a single word denotes both 'hand' and 'finger' and/or 'fingers'	72
@	2. Differentiation: one word denotes 'hand' and another, different word denotes 'finger' (or, very rarely, 'fingers')	521
	total	593

English is an example of a type 2 language, with *finger* and *hand*. Another example is West-Central Oromo (Cushitic; Ethiopia and Kenya), with *quba* 'finger' and *harka* 'hand.'

In San Andrés Tzotzil (Mayan; Chiapas, Mexico), *c'obil* denotes 'hand' and an overtly marked construction based on the latter term, *bic'tal c'obil*, refers to 'finger.' Tzotzil is considered a differentiating language since the base word, *c'obil*, and the overtly marked construction, *bic'tal c'obil* (literally, 'little hand'), are different terms (although obviously nomenclaturally related). Similar examples of type 2 languages are Yapese (Austronesian; Micronesia), with *paaq* 'hand' and *bugul ii paaq* 'finger' (literally, 'tip of hand'), and Choctaw (Muskogean; Mississippi), with *ibbak* 'hand' and *ibbak ushi* 'finger' (literally, 'son of hand') (see Brown and Witkowski 1981 for further discussion). Designation of

'finger' through use of an overt marking construction based on a word for 'hand' is common among the differentiating languages sampled for the map. (In no language among those sampled is there an overtly marked construction for 'hand' based on a word for 'finger'.)

Examples of type 1 (identity) come from Warlpiri (Pama–Nyungan; Northern Territory, Australia), Cahuilla (Uto–Aztecan; California), and Kxoe (Khoisan; Namibia), respectively showing the terms *rdaka*, *-ma-l*, and *cèú*, all of which denote both 'hand' and 'finger.' Paakantyi (Pama–Nyungan; New South Wales, Australia), Mesa Grande Diegueño (Yuman; California), and Pacoh (Mon–Khmer; Vietnam and Laos) provide other examples of identity, with the respective terms *mará*, *esally*, and *atí*, all of which designate both 'hand' and 'fingers' (as a collection). Yugumbir Bandjalang (Pama–Nyungan; New South Wales, Australia) shows three different terms, each of which in addition to 'hand' is used to refer to the finger as a singular object or to the fingers as a collection.

A few languages included on the map show identity but nonetheless have a term for 'hand' that does not also designate 'finger.' For example, Oneida (Iroquoian; New York State) uses *osnúhsa* for both 'finger' and 'hand,' and has an alternate term, *óhtsya*, for 'hand' (which also denotes palm, but not 'finger'). The convention followed here is that if a language shows 'finger/hand' polysemy, identity is judged present, even if there are terms in its lexicon denoting 'hand' that are not referentially extended to 'finger' as well.

2. Geographical distribution

The language sample of the map indicates that differentiating languages are about seven times more common than languages with identity. Differentiating languages occur in abundance all over the inhabited parts of the world. Identity languages occur relatively frequently in two major areas of the world: Australia

and North America (excluding central and southern Mexico). Identity languages occur next most frequently in South America, but they are not especially prevalent there. Outside these three areas, such languages occur only sporadically and at very low frequencies (in Africa, mainland Southeast Asia, New Guinea, and Polynesian islands of the Pacific).

3. Cultural distribution

Seventy-two languages of the sample of 593 show identity. Of these, 46 (64%) are spoken by traditional hunter-gatherers, 18 (25%) are spoken by groups having a mixed economy of cultivation and foraging, and eight (11%) are spoken by full-fledged agrarians. Close to 90 % of type 1 languages, then, are spoken by peoples who traditionally have not embraced or have only partially embraced an agricultural way of life. The languages associated with each of these three cultural categories are as follows:

Hunter-gatherers:

Alyawarra, Arrernte (Mparntwe), Atakapa, Atikamekw, Bandjalang, Bandjalang (Waalubal), Bandjalang (Yugumbir), Beothuk, Bunuba, Cahuilla, Comecrudo, Diegueño (Mesa Grande), Djabugay, Djingili, Hupa, Iñupiaq, Kalispel, Karankawa, Karok, Kurna, Kxoe, Maranungku, Miwok (Northern Sierra), Miwok (Plains), Murrinh-Patha, Ndjébbana, Nez Perce, Ngadjumaja, Ngiyambaa, Nunggubuyu, Ojibwe (Minnesota), Paakantyi, Pintupi, Pitjantjatjara, Quileute, Seri, Shasta, Tasmanian, Thompson, Wambaya, Warlpiri, Wintu, Xokleng, Yana, Yir Yiront, Yukulta

Farmer-foragers:

Amahuaca, Apache (Western), Carijona, Chayahuita, Cocopa, Eudeve, Javae, Jivaro, Mohawk, Yukpa, Munduruku, Natchez, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, Tunica, Urubú-Kaapor, Winnebago

Full-fledged farmers:

Hawaiian, Keresan (Santa Ana), Navajo, Ngizim, Pacoh, Tahitian, Tuamotuan, Yagaria. The geographical distribution of these three cultural categories is shown on Map 130A.

@	1.	Hunter-gathers	46
@	2.	Farmer-forages	18
@	3.	Full-fledged farms	8
		total	72

Values of Map 130A. Cultural Categories of Languages with Identity of 'Finger' and 'Hand'

[Map 130A about here]

The major concentration of languages showing identity in Australia and North America (excluding southern and central Mexico) reflects the fact that most of the hunter-gatherer languages sampled for the map are spoken in these two areas.

These data indicate that the way in which 'finger' and 'hand' are lexically distinguished is robustly associated with type of livelihood. Those languages spoken by groups who are not fully agrarian tend substantially more strongly to show identity than those of full agriculturalists. Conversely, languages of full-fledged farmers tend more strongly to show differentiation than those of hunter-gatherers and part-time farmers.

There are, of course, languages showing identity that nonetheless are spoken by full-fledged farmers (see above). In at least two such instances, evidence suggests that speakers of the language have relatively recently made the transition from hunting-gathering or from partial farming to full agriculture.

Speakers of Navajo (Athapaskan; Arizona) are intrusive into the United States Southwest from sub-Arctic North America, probably beginning about seven hundred years ago or so. In contemporary times, their Athapaskan-language-speaking relatives in the sub-Arctic region are traditional hunter-gatherers, such as the Navajo themselves almost certainly were when they began their southerly migration. Russell G. Schuh (personal communication) reports that while Ngizim (Chadic; Nigeria) is spoken by full-time farmers, hunting at one time was very important. In 1969, when he was doing linguistic fieldwork among the group, there was no game left other than small animals such as hares and grasscutters, but at the time they nonetheless talked considerably about hunting. In addition, the mainstay songs of the most famous Ngizim musicians are about hunters.

4. Explanatory framework

Farmers tend to lexically distinguish finger from hand more often than hunter-gatherers. This indicates that agriculturalists typically have more reasons for referring precisely to the finger than do foragers and, consequently, that the finger typically is more distinct for the former than for the latter. What, then, renders the finger more distinct among farmers compared to hunter-gatherers? Of several possible answers considered, the following is the one that, provisionally at least, seems most compelling.

Hunter-gatherer groups may typically differ from agrarians in the extent to which they make use of finger adornment. The major, globally spread, form of finger adornment is the use of rings. Plausibly, the manufacture and use of rings would enhance the salience of the finger as a distinct hand part and would serve to augment the number of contexts in which the finger is specifically referred to, thus promoting a term for finger different from that for hand.

Hunter-gatherers traditionally may tend not to make and use finger rings to the degree farmers do. If so, this could figure prominently in an explanation of why foragers tend not to lexically distinguish finger from hand while agrarians do.

To my knowledge, no one has published a comprehensive survey of the distribution of finger rings across the world's peoples and cultures. Consequently, we do not know through rigorous comparative investigation that foragers tend to show less interest in finger rings than farmers. However, since agriculturalists generally have material culture inventories that are significantly larger than those of hunter-gatherers, plausibly, rings should be more prevalent in their inventories than in those of foragers.

The only relatively thorough source treating anthropological and historical aspects of rings is Kunz (1917). While anecdotal in nature, the information included in this work seems suggestive of the general absence of finger rings among foraging peoples. For example, Kunz (1917: 31) notes that rings are not favored by the Eskimos, who neither make nor wear them. Indeed, he reports that Admiral Peary "found it impossible to dispose of a lot of rings he had taken with him on one of his Arctic trips in the belief that they would be attractive to the Eskimos, and good objects of barter." Kunz (1917: 17-18) also refers to archaeological excavations in various parts of the Americas (many in areas traditionally inhabited by hunter-gatherers and farmer-foragers) that have yielded no examples of prehistoric finger rings. He writes, "The attainable evidence in regard to the wearing of rings by aborigines of North and South America is, in the main, negative" (1917: 18).

I have undertaken an unsystematic electronic search of the Human Relations Area File database for mention of rings (for the finger) in a large number of published ethnographies. While references to finger rings are found in many monographs describing agricultural peoples, they are not common in those describing hunter-gatherer groups. When such references are

found for foragers, they almost always involve rings that have been acquired by groups (usually from Western sources) rather than those natively manufactured.

At present, then, the small amount of evidence assembled, mostly anecdotal in nature, supports the proposition that agricultural people typically make and use finger rings to a far greater extent than hunter-gatherers. This helps to explain why languages of farmers tend more strongly to lexically distinguish finger from hand than those of hunter-gatherers, which tend more strongly to use a single term to denote both 'finger' and 'hand.'

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