

# Cheyenne

## 1. Description

- 1.1 Name of society, language, and language family: The Cheyenne Indians from the language family Algic/Algonquian/Plains. Native language is Cheyenne (8). The Cheyenne's refer to themselves as '*Tsistsistas*' which has been translated to mean "people" (1, pg: 3).
- 1.2 ISO code: chy (8).
- 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): Northern Cheyenne Reservation, southeastern Montana; associated with Arapaho in western Oklahoma (8). *See also attached charts* (4).
- 1.4 Brief history: "The Cheyennes are one of the westernmost tribes of the great Algonquian family. They formerly lived far to the east of their present range, in fixed villages and cultivated the soil; but moving west and southwest, becoming separated from their kindred of the East, they at last thrust out into the plains beyond Missouri, and secured horses" (1 pg: 1). "The Cheyennes first came onto the plains in about 1780" (4, pg: 89).
- 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: "The first flint-and-steel is said to have been obtained from Mexicans" (1, pg: 55). Small pox epidemic impacted many of the tribes on the plains, including the Cheyenne (4, pg: 93).
- 1.6 Ecology:
- 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: 1,720 (1990 census), decreasing. Ethnic population: 2,320 (2000 census) (8). Old accounts of the Cheyenne estimate their largest population to be around 3,500 (1, pg: 21).

## 2. Economy

- 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): Used to plant corn before they became nomadic hunter-gatherers as evidence from a very old Cheyenne village (1, pg: 24). Once the Cheyenne became more nomadic, it seems that roots were one of their main carbohydrate staples; women would go dig these up during the day (1). Planted/cultivated corn, squash, and beans (1, pg: 247). One book mentions that corn agriculture died out around 1876 (1, pg: 252). "Although the nomadic Cheyenne traded with horticulturalists for corn and vegetable food when they could, there were wild plant resources on the plains which were of considerable interest. Prominent among these were three starchy roots: prairie turnips or breadroot, Jerusalem artichokes, and Indian potatoes" (4, pg: 57).
- 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: Buffalo once they had migrated to the plains (1, pg: 52). Also hunted other game animals and fished too (1, pg: 247). Hunted antelope (1, pg: 277).
- 2.3 Weapons: Back in the early days of the Cheyenne, weapons were very few. "They surrounded animals and killed them with arrows armed with points of stone, bone, or horn. Some of these points were short, and some long. After they had killed large animals, they skinned them with knives of flint or bone" (1, pg: 52). The Cheyenne eventually came into contact with traders from Mexico and also French traders in the north who introduced them to modern weapon technology like metal, guns and ammunition (1). Mentions the use of bow and arrow technology (1, pg: 178). Before trade, the Cheyenne depended on flint to make their tools—even though obsidian and chert were also common on the plains, they could only be quarried out easily in a few locations (4, pg: 65). Had clubs and axes (4, pg: 118).
- 2.4 Food storage: "To transport the meat to the camp, a hide was cut in several pieces, and in each piece was packed as much meat as a man or woman could carry. The hide was laced up, and the pack was put on the back, and held there by straps passing over the head and chest. In winter, however, they tied up their belongings in bundles, put them on a drier hide, and walked along, dragging the hide, which was thus like a loaded sled" (1, pg: 55).
- 2.5 Sexual division of production: On an average day, Cheyenne men will begin their mornings by heading out to hunt for game animals and bring back any protein that they can find. Cheyenne women have a wider variety of activities that they can choose from. Some women will dress animal skins used for lodge construction, some women and girls will head off to gather wood, some pound berries, others will go off to gather roots for food, and some are left in charge of caring for the children (1, pg: 66-67). Cheyenne women are extremely good at tanning animal hides—and they spend a lot of time training young girls how to do it (1, pg: 217). Women make all of the clothes; men make the weapons and tools (3, pgs 63-64).
- 2.6 Land tenure: It is believed that early in Cheyenne history, they were known to be agriculturalists, but as they began migrating westward, food was harder to come by, so travelling to get food became necessary. Eventually bringing food back to one central village evolved into splitting up into small groups and foraging alone until eventually the whole mass of Cheyenne became nomadic hunters and gatherers (1, pg: 13-15). Depending on the season of the year, the Cheyenne would break into specific bands and move to desired areas on the plains (4, pg: 69).
- 2.7 Ceramics: Had pottery at some point in their history and knew how to make it. Old pots and sherds of pottery are found in and around old, abandoned Cheyenne villages (1, pg: 25). Mention of pots and dishes made out of wood (1, pg: 170-171). Original

Cheyenne kettles were made out of animal hide...“At some time, and in some fashion, they learned to make a serviceable pottery, which began to pass out of use only about 1850, when trade with the whites brought them metal vessels” (1, pg: 235).

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: One book mentions that if a Cheyenne man has not killed some type of animal during his days' hunt, the women will ban together and make sure that he does not have access to the roots and/or berries that they have collected that specific day. Almost like if the men don't contribute their share, then the women won't contribute either (1, pg: 69). Sharing within the family is automatic and absolute with the Cheyenne, and family members do not hesitate to share not only food but jewelry, tools, and vehicles. Outside of the family, sharing is more stressed. A Cheyenne never wants to be considered “selfish” so when someone asks for something, if you don't have it, you must try your best to satisfy them while also protecting your own interests (4, pg: 179).

2.9 Food taboos: They Cheyenne wouldn't kill grizzly bears because they were afraid of them (1, pg: 290).

2.10 Canoes/watercraft: When the Cheyenne talk about their history and how they migrated west, they mention the use of canoes to cross rivers and streams (1, pg: 6-7).

### 3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

### 4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f): “When a young girl reached the age of puberty and had her first menstrual period, she, of course, told her mother, who in turn informed the father. Such an important family event was not kept secret. It was the custom among well-to-do people for the father of the girl publicly to announce from the lodge door what had happened and as an evidence of his satisfaction to give away a horse. The girl unbraided her hair and bathed, and afterward older women painted her whole body with red” (1, pg: 129).

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): Probably somewhere close to these numbers provided by this quote: “Women married earlier, at about 16-18 years, and men married at about 18-21. By the time they were 40, most people had grandchildren, and few people lived beyond 50” (4, pg: 257).

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: **See 4. 7 “Polygyny” for information regarding divorce** (1, pg: 153). “If a man found it impossible to live peaceably with his wife, he might divorce her in public fashion, notifying everyone that he abandoned all rights in her that he might possess” (1, pg: 153). “A woman divorces her husband simply by moving back into her parents' tipi” (3, pg: 27).

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: “The Cheyennes did not take many wives. The largest number ...heard of for one man was five. These were sisters who were married to Crooked Neck. When he was made a chief, he gave three of his wives away, but lived always with the other two. Younger sisters were the potential wives of an older sister's husband, but were not always married to him. Men seldom married a second wife who was not related to the first. When they did so, there was usually trouble, and the first wife was likely to leave her husband” (1, pg: 153). “Every sister-in-law is a potential second wife to a Cheyenne man, since the tribe practices preferential levirate and sororate marriage. Because the ties between the two families have already been cemented by marriage, the circumspect behavior of a boy courting his first wife-to-be need not apply in sister-in-law relations” (3, pg: 28).

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry: The Cheyenne are matrilineal, so a male will spend the rest of his married life working for his father-in-law and mother-in-law, but before marriage, the Cheyenne have, “bashful and long, drawn-out [courting] affairs. It usually takes four or five years for a young man to win his bride, and when he is ready to put the question it is directed to her family and not to the girl” (3, pg: 21).

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): “In old times, these old men declare, the rule forbidding marriage within the tribal group was absolute, and not to be violated” (1, pg: 91).

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

4.17 Preferential category for spouse: Exogamous, anyone who is not part of your clan/tribe is a viable partner as long as there is absolutely NO kin relationships between them (1, 3).

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms: Cheyenne women have a historical reputation for being very chaste (1, pg: 156). “The Cheyennes are sexually repressed, have very strict notions of proper conduct, and are most sensitive to what other members of the tribe think of them” (3, pg: 20).

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children: Because Cheyenne children were raised to call their mother’s sisters (“mother”) and father’s brothers (“Father”) if their parents died, they were just adopted by their aunt/uncle and it wasn’t too traumatic of an experience because they were already used to referring to them in the mother/father way (4, pg: 153).

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

4.22 Evidence for couvades

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect: “One of the first things to be done in considering a marriage was to find out whether any relationship—no matter how distant—existed between the young man and the girl. If there was found to be any kinship whatever, the marriage was forbidden. The rules with regard to intermarriage or even courting among relatives were seldom infringed” (1, pg: 93).

4.24 Joking relationships: The Cheyenne are very prude, so sexual joking is considered vulgar and inappropriate (1,3). Cheyenne men can have joking relationships with their sister-in-laws because they are considered potential second wives, but joking with your mother-in-law is forbidden, and in fact you are not even supposed to speak to her, look at her, or ever be alone with her (3, pg: 28).

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: “When a child reached the age of five or six years, a more formal name was given it. A boy might be named after his father’s brother, or after his grandfather. A good name was always chosen, though he might also have a nickname by which he was commonly called. A woman’s daughter might not be named after the relations of the mother, but after some relative of the father. In fact, children were almost always named after their father’s relatives” (1, pg: 107).

4.26 Incest avoidance rules: All members of a Cheyenne clan are considered relatives/ “descendants of a common ancestor” and so it is hugely frowned upon to marry anyone within your own clan—in fact it will be called into question by the elders in the tribe if any interest is expressed in marrying a clan member (1, pg: 92).

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony: When a man is ready to marry a woman, he will bring presents and horses to the bride’s family, and if they are accepted, the bride will be put into her best dress and will be led on horseback to her husband’s lodge (which is generally close to the bride’s parents’ lodge) then they are considered married. If the presents are not accepted, then the offer of marriage has been refused (3, pg: 23).

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name: **See 4.25 “Patterns of Descent” for information regarding how one acquires one’s name in the Cheyenne culture** (1, pg: 107).

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community: The Cheyenne had strict rules about marrying outside of the community, but men were always the ones leaving the group going out to seek their wives; women never left kin or their original home group (1, pg: 91).

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges: It seems that Cheyenne people can choose their own spouses, but when a family finds out who you intend to marry, a lot of research is done to make sure that the person you are intending to marry has not kin-ties with you; if they do, the marriage is most likely forbidden or strongly discouraged (1, pg: 93).

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: It doesn’t seem so, unless the girl is considered “kin” of the man who is interested in her, and then there is a huge problem with everyone in the group (1,3).

**Warfare/homicide:** When the Cheyenne tell stories about the past, they mention several wars between themselves different tribes that occurred as they were migrating westward; they blame the Souix Indians for pushing them south into Missouri (1, pg: 7-9). Cheyenne scouts and spies were called “wolfs” (2, pg: 17). It wasn’t often that Cheyenne women went out on a war path with the men, but it was allowed, and generally, women were just as successful at killing enemies as men were (2, pg: 44). Trade and Warfare were generally connected to one another when it came to conflict between different tribes (4, pg: 87) The Cheyenne spent a lot of time preparing to go into warfare—it was not a spur of the moment thing (4, pg: 104).

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: It seems as though in the Cheyenne groups, you are not really considered a man until you have had experience in warfare and the more warfare you encounter, the more social status you gain. I imagine that if a man dies in warfare, it is considered a great honor for him and the tribe (1, pg: 79). “The motives which led the Cheyennes to go to war were thus a desire for glory, a wish to add to their possessions, or eagerness for revenge, but the chief motive was the love of fighting, which was instilled into them from early youth” (2, pg: 7).

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): The Cheyenne seem to have some peaceful tribal encounter stories and also some really warlike tribal encounter stories. Sometimes interaction with a specific tribe will be peaceful and then for some reason, the next time the tribe encountered the same group, interactions were hostile—so I think relations were always sort of precarious between tribes (1).

4.18 Cannibalism: Mention the ceremonial eating of a Crow Indian’s heart after killing him in a battle (1, pg: 200).

## 5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): Yes, the Cheyenne move as the seasons change (3,4).

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): There is a mention of “chiefs” in my first source (1, pg: 64). In the first source, there was also mention of a village “crier” who would ride on horseback around the camp and shout out the news of the day to the members of the camp—almost like modern local news headlines (1, pg: 64). “Among the Cheyennes there was a governing body of chiefs, not all of equal authority, which decided a variety of questions coming before it, its decisions, if necessary, being enforced by power of the soldier bands” (1, pg: 336). In each of the bands of Cheyenne, there is exactly four chiefs of each band (1, pg: 337). There is a tribal-council of forty-four peace chiefs, a total of four from each band, and they have contact and communication with one another on a regular basis (3, pg: 37).

5.4 Post marital residence: “Decent was matrilineal. A woman born into the group remained all her life a member of that group, and her children were members of it. When a man married a girl he went to live with her group, though always known by his own group name” (1, pg: 91).

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): Women have a lot of control over their husbands in Cheyenne society both politically and within the family group (1, pg: 156).

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: It seems that the Cheyenne had really tight-knit communities and that they had really close friendships and relationships with one another. I haven’t run across any information about their ‘joking’ relationships, but unlike some of the tribes in South America, they don’t seem to have very much of the vulgar joking relationships (1).

5.8 Village and house organization: Images of the Cheyenne show them using teepees and organizing them in circular fashion (1, pg: 80). See attached image of page 90, “*THE CHEYENNE CAMP CIRCLE*” for a visual of the village organization (1, pg: 90).

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses):

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere: Sleep on mattresses made out of willow, tied together with sinew—these were flexible so they could be rolled up and carried to the next camp. When they were used in a lodge, they were covered with a few buffalo hides (1, pg: 241-242).

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: “Many old [Cheyenne] men have declared to me that that members of a clan consider all of the clan their relations... “descendants of a common ancestor”...and it is certain that usually marriages took place between men and women who belonged to different groups. In old times if a young man wished to marry some girl in his own clan the old people, when they learned of it, asked him what he meant and whether he wished to marry his relative” (1, pg: 92). “There are ten main Cheyenne bands, as follows: 1. Eaters, 2. Burnt Aorta, 3. Hair Rope Men, 4. Scabby, 5. Ridge Men, 6. Prognathous Jaws, 7. Poor, 8. Dog Men, 9. Suhtai, 10. Sioux-Eaters” (3, pgs: 31-32).

5.12 Trade: The Cheyenne have a long history of trading with those that they come into contact with such as the Mexicans near the southern border of the plains, the French, and even Indians from other tribes—it is how they gained a lot of their more ‘advanced’ means for everyday life, like horses, and guns, etc (1). **See also, 2.7 “Ceramics” for information about trade** (1, pg: 235). White settlers also introduced the Cheyenne to whiskey (1, pg: 46).

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies: Several mentions of a “soldier class” within the Cheyenne groups (1, pgs: 150-157). With the Cheyenne, the wealthier you were—meaning you had more horses than most others—the larger your lodge/tipi was in comparison to the rest of the group. If you had more status, your lodge was larger because you had more horses that could pull more lodge poles than other families’ horses could (1, pg: 226). *See attached list from (4, pg: 160)*. Elders are highly respected, and Cheyenne people anticipate getting old because as they get older, their status grows (4, pg: 180).

## 6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6 Time allocation to RCR: To the Cheyenne, smoking is a very religious experience, and they have a lot of strict social rules that go along with smoking tobacco—such as the way the pipe is passed throughout a lodge and they even, “think it unlucky to touch anything with the stem of the pipe while smoking. The pipe must be held straight up as it is passing from man to man, not passed across the body the stem or bowl first, but held upright, the bowl down” (1, pg: 75). The Cheyenne seem to spend a lot of time on Ritual/Ceremony/Religion—they have several different important ceremonies: “The Arrow Renewal,” “The Sun Dance,” “The Massaum (Contrary) or Animal Dance” (3, pgs: 6-17).

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): Mention of a “Medicine Lodge” (1, pg: 71). Mention of a “priest” a.k.a “medicine man” (1, pg: 117). Many people—women and men alike—have the power to heal in the Cheyenne culture (2, pg: 127). Used herbal remedies (2). A “Contrary” is a village position that seems to be chosen by a Cheyenne on a personal level—it doesn’t seem that the position is appointed—but the “Contrary” spends their life in seclusion in their own lodge, and they are someone who does the opposite of what they say, or says the opposite of what needs to be done; their whole life is a contradiction (2,3).

6.2 Stimulants: “In primitive times they had a native tobacco that they cultivated and used for smoking...At present, in the south, they mix dried leaves of the sumach with the tobacco they smoke. In old times they put a little buffalo grease with this. In the North they use “red-willow” (cornel) bark with tobacco” (1, pg: 75). Peyote (4, pg: 234).

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): **See 4.1 “Menarche” for puberty rituals** (1). Most of the time, when a Cheyenne died, they were dressed in their best, wrapped in animal hides, and were carried to a site away from camp to be buried; often they were buried with their possessions. Sometimes, family members would cut their hair in mourning (2, pgs: 160-161). It is also mentioned that if a man dies during warfare, his body uncovered on the ground where he died so the animals can scatter his remains throughout the land (2, pg: 163).

6.4 Other rituals: There are mentions of animal sacrifices, particularly with buffalo being performed at night (1, pg: 83). Drea26). ms and visions were an important aspect of Cheyenne culture—especially when it came to their impact on warfare (2, pg: 26). Scalp-dances (2, pg: 39).

6.5 Myths: Most of the stories told by the Cheyenne are family stories. Story-time is taken very seriously and when a sacred-story is being told, it is only done at night in one lodge with the door closed. No one can leave or enter the lodge while a story is being told, and any disruption is considered taboo because they think it will lead to something bad happening (1, pg: 77). **Creation Myth:** “According to one of these tales, the Cheyennes formerly lived under the ground. They were in a cave; it was dark, but a distant light was seen, and traveling toward it they found an opening and came out upon the earth. At first the light hurt their eyes, but it was not always light. There were night and day. They found themselves in a new country, rough and strange, where rocks and stone were strewn all over the ground” (1, pg: 5).

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Both men and women enjoy music and dancing in the evenings (1, pg: 69). “The drum was an important musical instrument, and was used in doctoring, dancing, gambling, and in religious ceremonies” (1, pg: 202). Flutes were used by the Cheyenne for courting mates (1, pg: 205). Young men played a lot of games and had a lot of athletic competitions; girls and boys would go sledding on animal hides during the cold season (1, pgs: 313-314).

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect: Missionaries must have had contact because they make mention of the ‘whiskey-problem’ of how many of the Indian furs were traded for whiskey from white settlers (1, pg: 46).

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: Most of the time, when a Cheyenne died, they were dressed in their best, wrapped in animal hides, and were carried to a site away from camp to be buried; often they were buried with their possessions. Sometimes, family members would cut their hair in mourning (2, pgs: 160-161). It is also mentioned that if a man dies during warfare, his body uncovered on the ground where he died so the animals can scatter his remains throughout the land (2, pg: 163).

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion: There is a mention of 'spirits' and also an excerpt about the Cheyenne praying before eating their meals (1, pg: 76). "Among the Cheyennes, just as among all people, civilized and savage, the belief prevailed that personal suffering was acceptable to the supernatural powers, and would be likely to secure their favor" (1, pg: 79-80).

## 7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: "Across the bare left arm the [Cheyenne] woman might paint a red stripe for every coup her husband had counted" (1, pg: 56). There is mention of men using body paint (1, pg: 66). Mention of young girls getting their entire body painted red the first time they go through menstruation (1, pg: 129).

7.2 Piercings: There is mention of wealthy families piercing their children's ears close after birth has occurred (1, pg: 107).

7.3 Haircut: Up until about 1850, Cheyenne men wore their hair hanging down their backs in a dozen or so little strings that were stuck together with pine gum. More modern Cheyenne hair is worn in side-braids doubled up twice (1, pg: 59). Women also braid their hair which they double up two or three times and tie up behind their heads with fringed deerskin rolls attached (1, pg: 59). Another more 'modern' way of wearing hair is mentioned in which one side of the hair is completely cut off and only one side is left to be braided. The ear that has no hair covering it is usually adorned with ear ornaments (1, pg: 61).

7.4 Scarification:

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): "He had turned up also glass beads, which he described as like the charms or bead which we know the Cheyennes used to manufacture" (1, pg: 24). "The old-time people wore rings in their noses. An old woman, now, or very recently, alive in the Cheyenne camp, can remember three old men who wore such nose ornaments. They took the shells of mussels and carved them into different shapes, and tying the shell to a deerskin string, passed the string through a hole in the septum of the nose. After the fashion of wearing shells passed out, they wore rings of metal in the nose, and after the nose ornament ceased to be fashionable, the practice arose of wearing earrings" (1, pg: 61).

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

7.7 Sex differences in adornment: Cheyenne men are the only ones mentioned of having worn the nose-rings in the past (1, pg: 61). Women adorn themselves with bracelets, beads, and finger rings (1, pg: 62). One source discusses young men devoting a lot of time to plucking the hairs from their eyebrows, cheeks and lips; also it mentions that the more 'modern' practice among young Cheyenne men is to shave the face instead of plucking (1, pg: 66). Both men and women wear moccasins (1, pg: 223).

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

## 8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

8.2 Sororate, levirate: "Practice preferential levirate and sororate marriage" (3, pg: 28).

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

## 9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

### Numbered references

1. Grinnell, Bird George. "The Cheyenne Indians: Their History and Ways of Life." Vol. 1. Cooper Square Publishers: New York. (1962). Print.
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5. Lewis, M. Paul (ed.), 2009. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, Sixteenth edition. Dallas, Tex.: SIL International. Online Version: <<http://www.ethnologue.com/>>.