

Cultural Patterns and Processes

AP Human Geography ■ Unit 3

AP Human Geography



What we will cover

- 1 Culture & landscape
- 2 Cultural patterns
- 3 Types of diffusion
- 4 Causes of diffusion
- 5 Religion & language
- 6 Effects of diffusion



Culture and cultural landscape

- **Material culture** = objects;
nonmaterial culture = ideas, beliefs.
- The **cultural landscape** is the visible human imprint on the land.
- **Sequent occupance** : successive cultures layered on one place.



The visible human imprint on land

The units culture is analysed in

cultural trait

a single element – using chopsticks, a greeting, a hairstyle

cultural complex

a group of linked traits that go together

hearth

the place a trait or religion **began**, from which it diffused

cultural relativism

judging a culture by **its own** standards rather than yours – the opposite of **ethnocentrism**

Trait, complex, hearth: name which one you are talking about and the answer stops being a list of examples and becomes analysis.

Cultural patterns

- **Universalizing religions** seek converts; **ethnic religions** tie to one people.
- **Centripetal** forces unify; **centrifugal** forces divide.
- Shared language, religion, ethnicity form cultural regions.



Ethnic enclaves mark cultural regions

Acculturation keeps your own culture

Acculturation



adopt some traits
of another culture,
keep your own

Assimilation



fully blend into
the other culture,
lose your own

Syncretism



two cultures fuse
into something
new

AP HuG · U3 · Three outcomes when two cultures meet

Acculturation keeps your own culture, assimilation replaces it, and syncretism blends both into something new



Types of diffusion

- **Relocation diffusion** : spreads as people move.
- **Expansion diffusion** : spreads outward, stays at source.
- Expansion = contagious, hierarchical, or stimulus.

Expansion diffusion comes in three forms

contagious

spreads outward from person to nearby person – a viral video, an accent, a disease

hierarchical

jumps from big, important places to other big places first – a fashion moving city to city, skipping the countryside between

stimulus

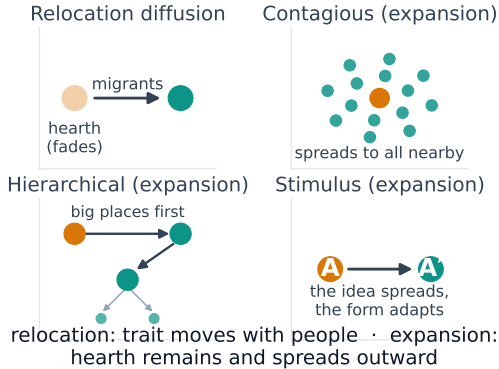
the underlying *idea* spreads even though the trait itself changes – a global fast-food brand rewriting its menu for a local market

and relocation

the separate case: the trait **moves with the people**, leaving the hearth behind

Expansion keeps the trait at the hearth and adds new places; relocation **carries** it away. That is the first split to make in any diffusion question.

Relocation diffusion moves with migrants; expansion



Relocation diffusion moves with migrants; expansion diffusion spreads outward while staying at the source

Causes of diffusion

- Historical: **colonialism** , trade routes, migration.
- Contemporary: **globalization** and communication technology.
- **Time-space convergence** makes places feel closer.



Trade and media shrink cultural distance

What made diffusion fast

historic

trade routes, migration, **colonialism** and **imperialism** carried language, religion and crops across continents

contemporary

globalisation, the internet and cheap transport – **time-space compression** means a trend can now cross the world in days

the tension

the same forces that spread culture also **threaten local traditions**

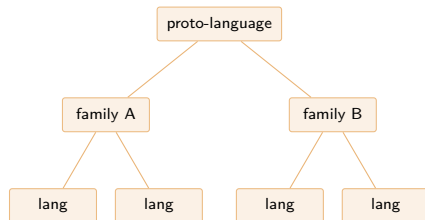
the debate

a global culture against local identity – and whether the two must be exclusive

Every diffusion answer should end here: what spread, how fast, and what it displaced on arrival.

Religion and language

- A **language family** shares a common ancestor.
- A **lingua franca** is a shared language across groups.
- A **pidgin** becomes a **creole** when learned as a first language.



a family shares a common ancestor

How religions and languages spread and split

universalising religions

Christianity, Islam, Buddhism – seek converts everywhere, so they spread by **expansion and relocation**

ethnic religions

Hinduism, Judaism – tied to a people and a place, so they spread mainly by **relocation**

language families

Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan and the rest – languages spread with migration and trade

splitting and dying

a language splits into **dialects**, or dies out as its speakers switch to a dominant one

Whether a religion *seeks* converts predicts its map. That single question separates the two global patterns.

Worked example – name that diffusion

Classify each: (a) Italians carry pizza to New York; (b) a dance trend spreads friend-to-friend; (c) a chain opens in Tokyo, Paris, then small towns; (d) Europeans see Chinese porcelain and invent their own.

- (a) **relocation** – the people moved.
- (b) **contagious** – near-neighbour contact.
- (c) **hierarchical** – biggest places first.
- (d) **stimulus** – the **idea** spread, not the thing.

Ask **one** question first: did the source **keep** the trait? If yes it is expansion (then pick the sub-type); if the trait **travelled with people**, it is relocation.

Effects of diffusion

- **Cultural convergence** vs **divergence** .
- **Acculturation** keeps some identity; **assimilation** loses it.
- **Syncretism** blends cultures into something new.

Convergence, divergence, and the tension between them

cultural convergence

cultures become more alike as they share traits – global brands, English online, the same films everywhere

cultural divergence

cultures grow apart, often as a deliberate **resistance** to convergence – language revival, local-food movements

the gain

new food, music, technology and ideas enrich a place

the loss

local languages and traditions erode, sometimes irreversibly

This is the **central tension** of a globalising world, and the essay wants both halves: what a place gained, and what it gave up to get it.

Key points

Relocation = people move;
expansion = idea spreads

Contagious/hierarchical/stimulus
are expansion types

Universalizing religions convert; **ethnic** pass by birth

Diffusion causes **convergence**,
syncretism, assimilation

Worked example – the command word is the question

“Explain how food preferences can be a culture trait.” (real AP question)

“Many dishes use ingredients or ways of cooking unique to one culture group – a national dish, say – so choosing and eating that food expresses belonging to the group, which is what makes it a culture trait.”

Explain needs a **link**, not a definition: connect the food preference **to** the idea of a shared culture. Listing foods earns **zero**.

Exam tips

- Distinguish **relocation diffusion** (people move) from **expansion diffusion** (the idea spreads and stays at its source).
- Name the expansion sub-type precisely: **contagious**, **hierarchical**, or **stimulus**.
- Separate **universalizing religions** (seek converts) from **ethnic religions** (spread mainly by birth).
- Use the **cultural landscape** – architecture, **toponyms**, **sequent occupance** – as evidence of past groups.
- For effects, keep **acculturation**, **assimilation**, and **syncretism** distinct; they are not the same.



Unit 3 – key takeaways

1

Diffusion

relocation vs expansion; name the sub-type

2

Religion

universalizing seeks converts;
ethnic by birth

3

Landscape

architecture, toponyms, sequent
occupance as evidence

4

Contact

acculturation, assimilation,
syncretism – not synonyms

Check yourself

- 1 Contagious or hierarchical: a trend spreading from big cities down?
- 2 What is relocation diffusion?
- 3 Give one element of a cultural landscape.
- 4 Which diffusion carries the idea, not the people?

Answers 1. hierarchical 2. people migrate and carry the culture with them 3. buildings, signs, land use, religious sites 4. expansion diffusion