

**Figure 4.15** Languages used to access Google, the Internet search engine, in January 2002. The prevalence of English as the lingua franca of the Internet is clear. (Source: Adapted from <http://www.netz-tipp.de/sprachen.html>.)

**REFLECTING ON GEOGRAPHY**

Can we view the Internet as a principal transportation route responsible for spreading English throughout the world today? If so, what does the spread of Internet access to areas formerly isolated by their physical landscape mean for the survival of linguistic minorities?

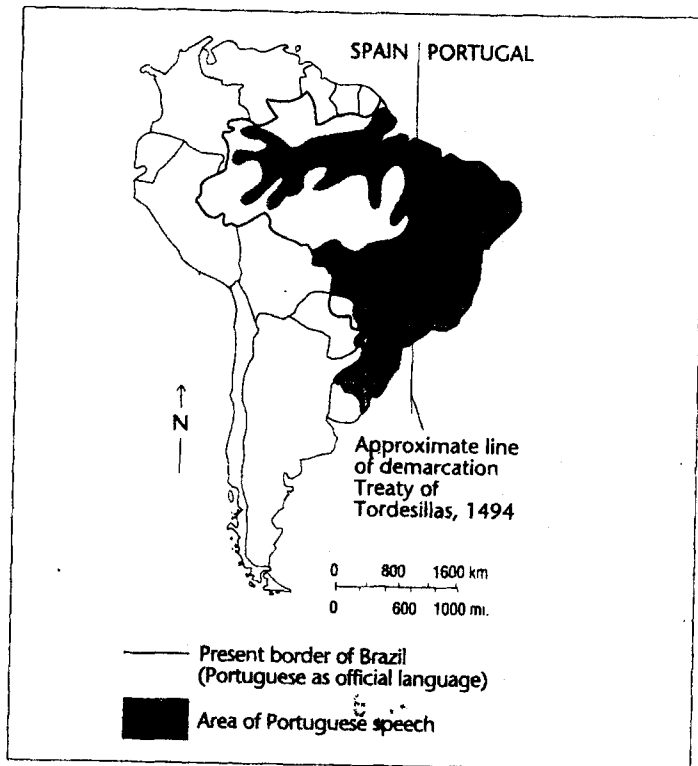
Even though imperial nations have, for the most part, given up their colonial empires, the languages they transplanted overseas survive (see *Practicing Geography*). As a result, English still has a foothold in much of Africa, South Asia, the Philippines, and the Pacific islands. French persists in former French and Belgian colonies, especially in northern, western, and central Africa; Madagascar; and Polynesia (Figure 4.17). In most of these areas, English and French function as the languages of the educated elite, often holding official legal status. They are also used as a lingua franca of government, commerce, and higher education, helping hold together states with multiple native languages.

**The Social Morale Model**

Once a language diffuses spatially as a result of technological advantage or imperial conquest, the replacement of the indigenous languages typically begins. Geographer Charles Withers proposed the *social morale model* to explain the process that, over time, places the conquered group in a lower social class and sees it lose pride in its language and

**Language and Empire**

Written language facilitates record keeping, allowing governments and bureaucracies to develop. Thus, the languages of conquerors tend to spread with imperial expansion. Highly organized, literate empires represent simply another technological advantage for the territorial growth of some groups, at the expense of others. The imperial expansion of Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Portugal, Spain, and the United States across the globe altered the linguistic practices of millions of people (Figure 4.16). This empire building superimposed Indo-European tongues on the map of the tropics and subtropics. The areas most affected were Asia, Africa, and the Austronesian island world. A parallel case from the ancient world is China, also a formidable imperial power that spread its language to those it conquered. During the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618–907), Chinese control extended to Tibet, Mongolia, Manchuria (in contemporary northeastern China), and Korea. The 4000-year-old written Chinese language proved essential for the cohesion and maintenance of its far-flung empire. Though people throughout the empire spoke different dialects or even different languages, a common writing system lent a measure of mutual intelligibility at the level of the written word.



**Figure 4.16** The mesh of language and empire in South America. The Treaty of Tordesillas, signed by Spain and Portugal in 1494, established the political basis for the present linguistic pattern in South America. Portugal was awarded the eastern part of the continent and Spain, the rest. (Courtesy of Terry G. Jordan-Bychkov.)