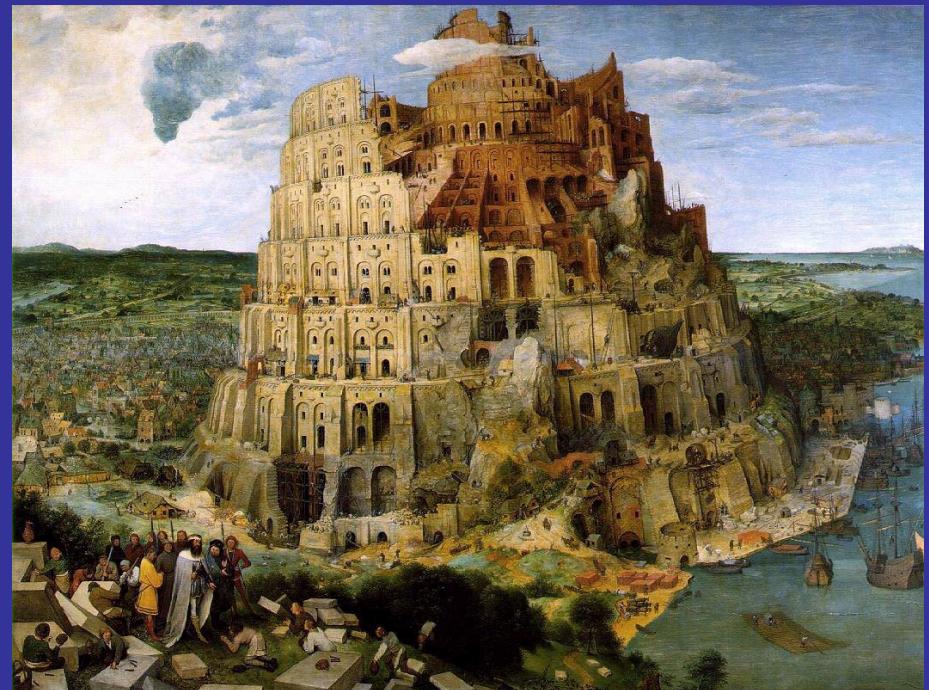


Today

- Historical linguistics
- Language change
- Language families



Language change

- Languages are constantly changing
- Language change is normal
- Language change ≠ decay, corruption

Why do languages change?

Possible reasons:

- Isolated groups develop separately
- Children can introduce innovations
- Optional rules may become obligatory

...

Historical Linguistics

- Concerned with
 - How languages change over time
 - How languages are related to one another

Historical Linguistics

- **Diachronic** change: language change over time
- **Synchronic** change: language change at a particular point in time

Historical Linguistics

- Sir William Jones (1788): noted that Sanskrit shared many similarities with Greek, Latin
- He suggested they had a common *ancestor*

Comparative Method

- Deducing genetic relations between languages by comparing cognates
 - **Cognates:** words from different languages that are similar in form and meaning, suggesting a common origin
- Used to reconstruct the **proto-language** (ancestor language)

‘month’

Related

<i>month</i>	English
<i>maand</i>	Dutch
<i>Monat</i>	German
<i>månad</i>	Swedish
<i>mis</i>	Welsh
<i>mí</i>	Gaelic
<i>mois</i>	French
<i>mes</i>	Spanish
<i>mês</i>	Portuguese
<i>mese</i>	Italian
<i>myesyats</i>	Russian
<i>minas</i>	Greek
<i>mahina</i>	Hindi

Not related

<i>shahr</i>	Arabic (Afro-Asiatic)
<i>kuukausi</i>	Finnish (Uralic)
<i>hilabethe</i>	Basque (Independent)
<i>ay</i>	Turkish (Altaic)
<i>bulan</i>	Malay (Malayo-Polynesian)
<i>inyanga</i>	Zulu (Niger-Congo)
<i>yue</i>	Mandarin (Sino-Tibetan)
<i>timgalu</i>	Kannada (Dravidian)
<i>thang</i>	Vietnamese (Austro-Asiatic)
<i>iyanvda</i>	Cherokee (Iroquoian)
<i>xoydesh</i>	Yiddish (Indo-European)

‘night’

night English

nuit French

Nacht German

nicht Scots

natt Swedish

nat Danish

noch' Russian

nox Latin

nakti- Sanskrit

natë Albanian

noche Spanish

noite Portuguese

notte Italian

nit Catalan

nótt Icelandic

naktis Lithuanian

Proto-Indo-European (PIE)

- The proposed parent language of all Indo-European languages
- No direct evidence for it (unwritten)
- Reconstructed from later Indo-European languages by back-tracking known sound changes
 - PIE *wódr 'water', *trÈi- 'three'.

False cognates

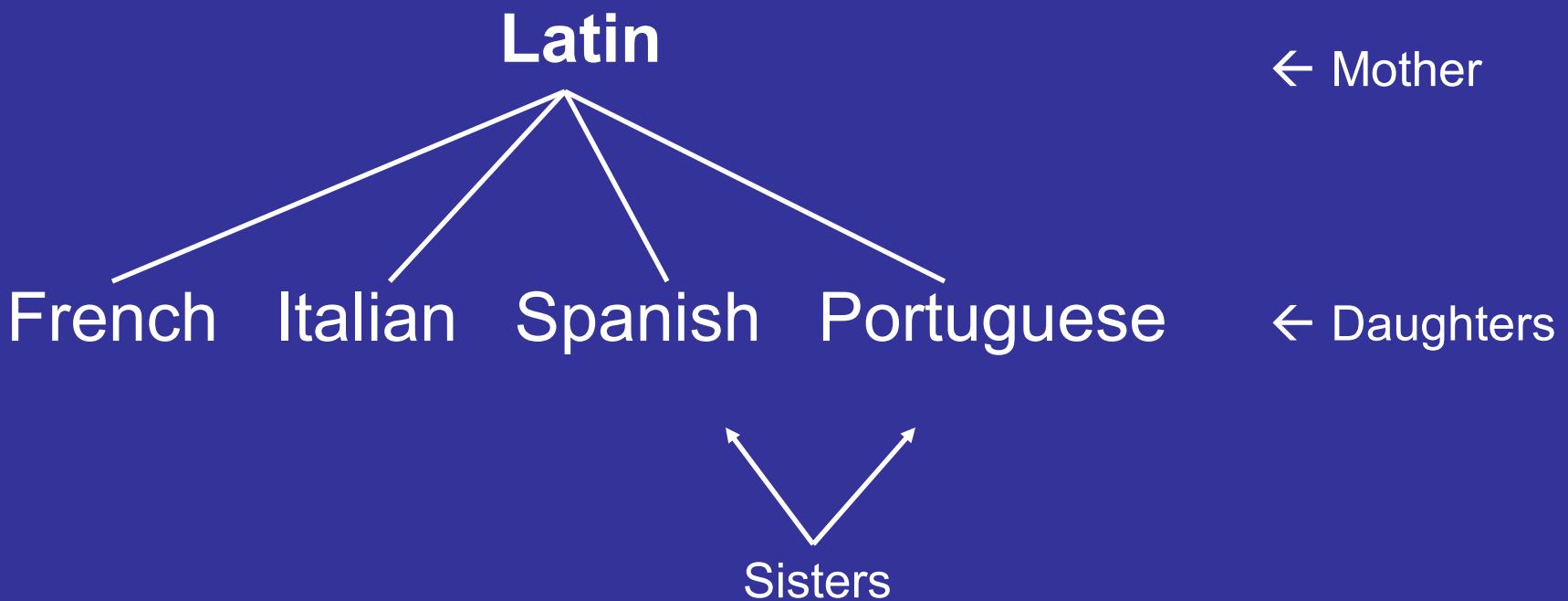
- Words that are thought to have a common origin, but which are unrelated.
e.g., Latin *habere*, German *haben* ‘to have’
 - German *haben* < PIE **kap*, ‘to grasp’
 - Latin *habere* < PIE **ghabh*, ‘to give, receive’

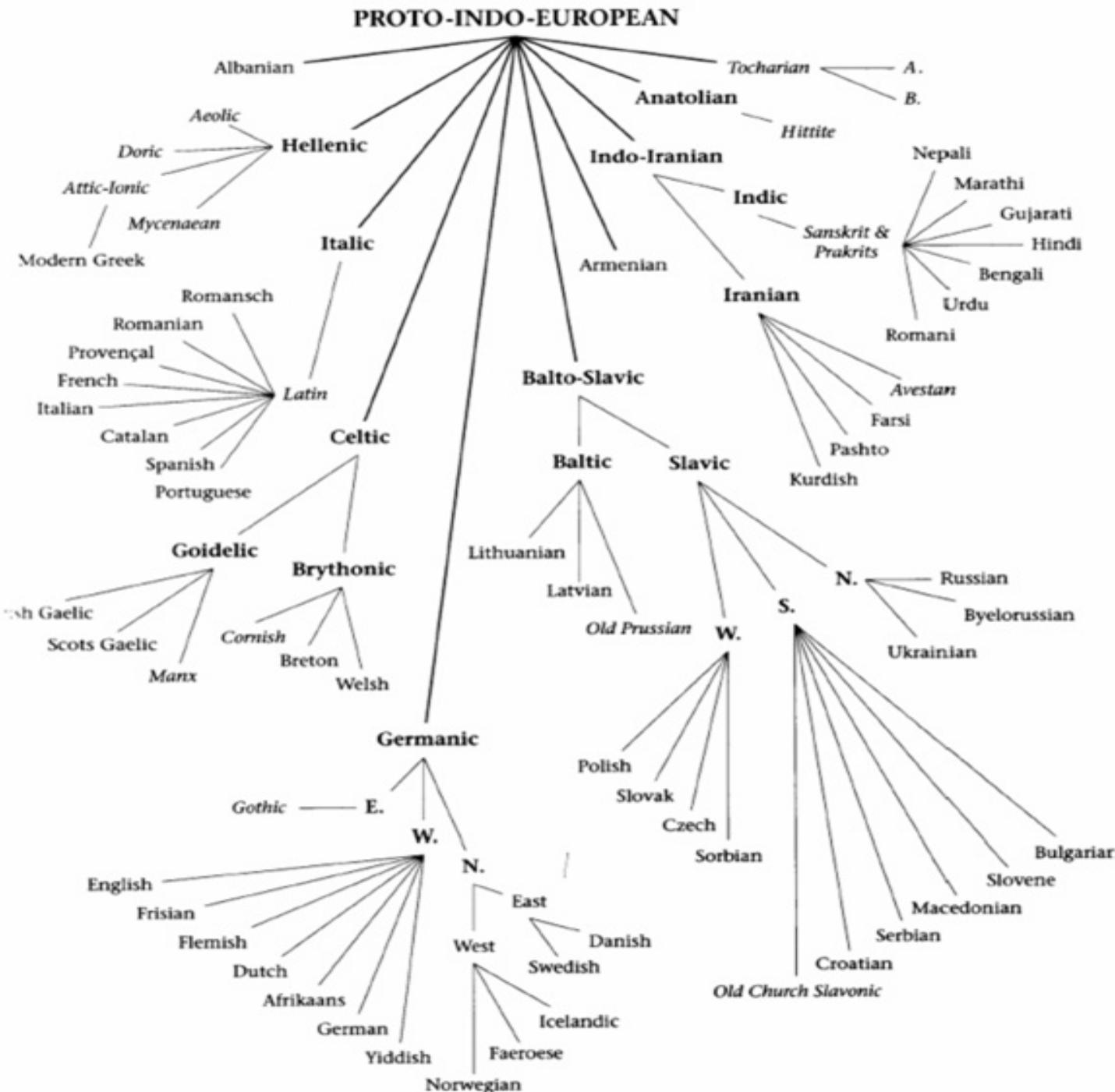
False friends

- Words that look and/or sound similar, but differ in meaning, e.g.,
 - English *preservative* is cognate with Russian *презерватив* ‘condom’
 - Spanish *embarazar* ‘to impregnate’
- Can be related, i.e. cognates

Family Tree Model

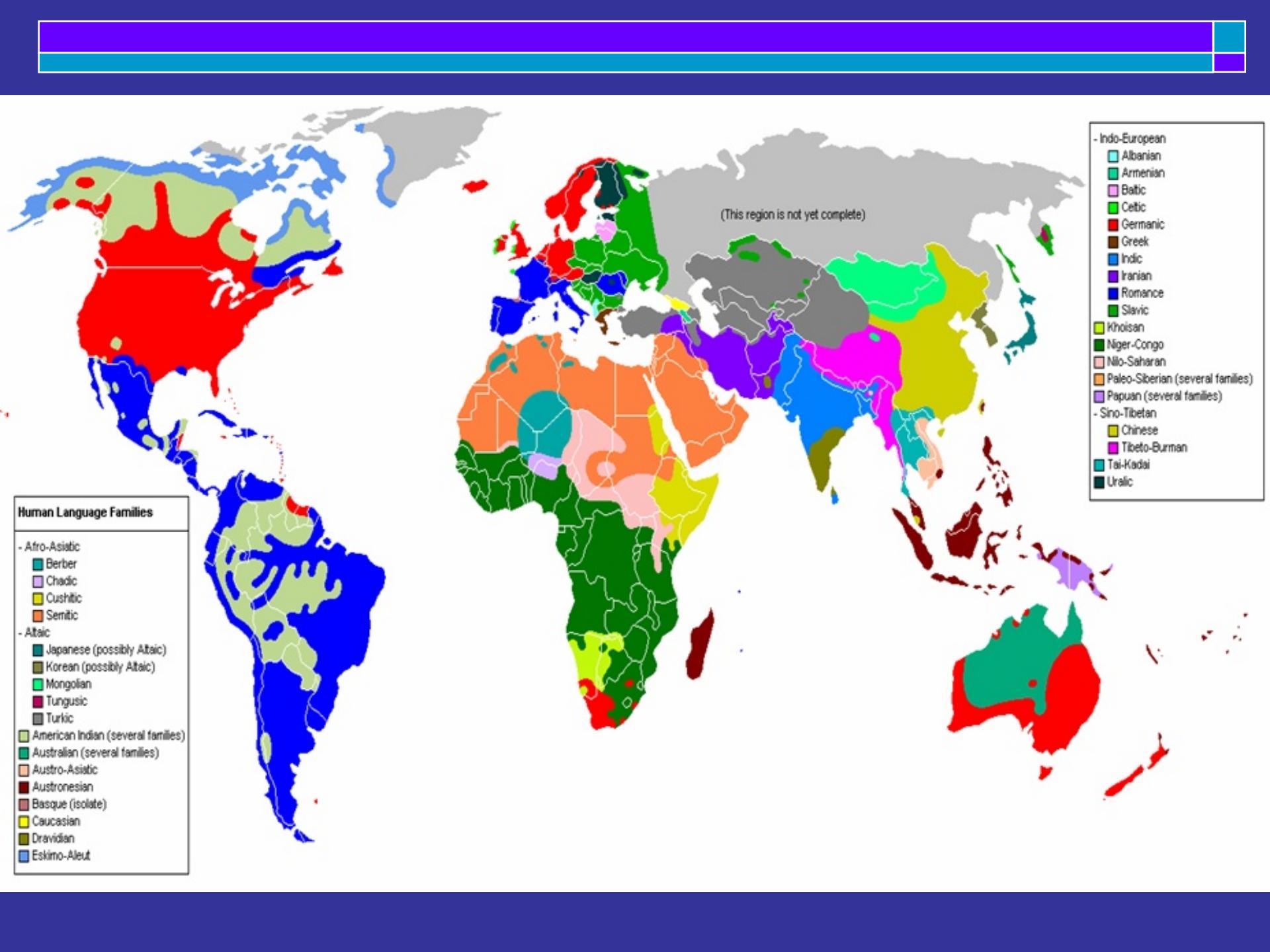
- Indicates genetically related languages that share common ancestor
- The higher up in the tree, the older it is
 - Mother/parent
 - Daughters
 - Sisters





Extinct langs

Sub-families



Some major Language Families

- Indo-European
- Uralic (Finnish, Hungarian, Estonian)
- Afro-Asiatic (Arabic, Hebrew)
- Niger-Congo (Swahili, Zulu)
- Sino-Tibetan (Chinese, Tibetan, Burmese)
- Altaic (Mongolic, Turkic, Japanese, Korean)
- Austronesian (Indonesian, Hawaiian)

Language Isolates

- No known relatives
 - Basque (Spain, France)
 - Zuñi (New Mexico)
 - Ainu (Hokkaido, Kuril, Honshū, Sakhalin)
 - Burushaski (Pakistan, Kashmir)
- Isolates for known history (e.g., Basque)
- Isolates because known relatives die (e.g., Pirahā)
- Isolates become families (e.g., Japanese)

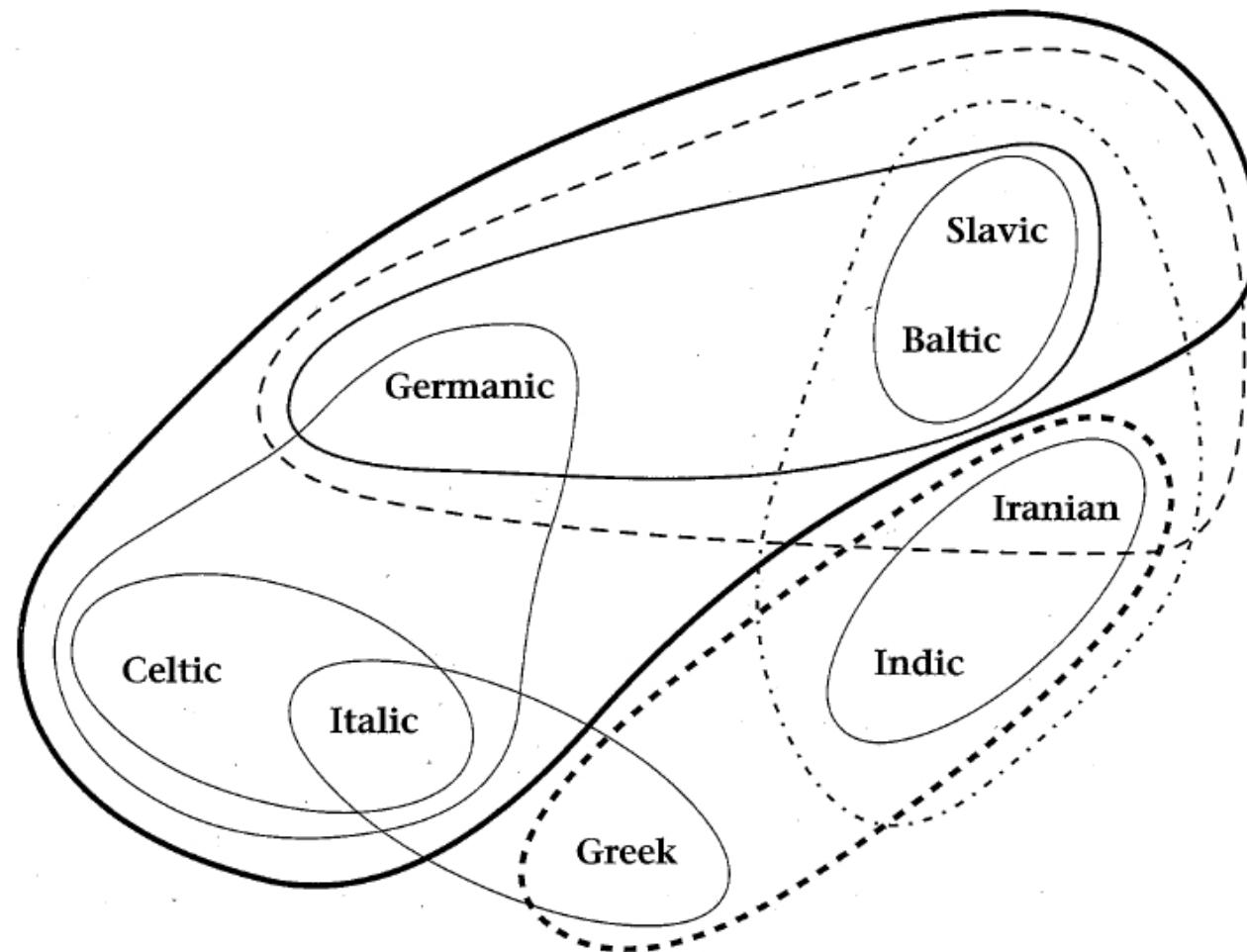
Family Tree Model: problems

- Implies each language is separate, independent from its neighbors
 - But distinctions btw. languages are fuzzy
- Suggests new languages appear/branch off suddenly
 - But languages diverge gradually

Wave Model

- Language changes spread like ripples in a pond
- Different points of origin
- ‘Overlap’ of different waves of change explains synchronic variation

Wave Model



Extinct and Endangered languages

- Today, approx. 6900 languages
- 90% spoken by < 100,000 speakers
- 5% spoken by < 50 speakers

Estimates of projected extinction

- 516 of the world's languages are 'nearly extinct'
- 50-90% loss in coming century

North America:

- At first contact with Europeans, ~ 400 languages
- Currently, 208 languages

Why languages die

- Genocide
- Socioeconomic factors
- Prevalence of dominant language
- Language suppression in education

Should we care?

- Negative consequences are both scientific and cultural
- Cultural: impact on communities and descendants
- Scientific: data from more languages = better understanding of linguistic diversity, which in turn = better understanding of Language