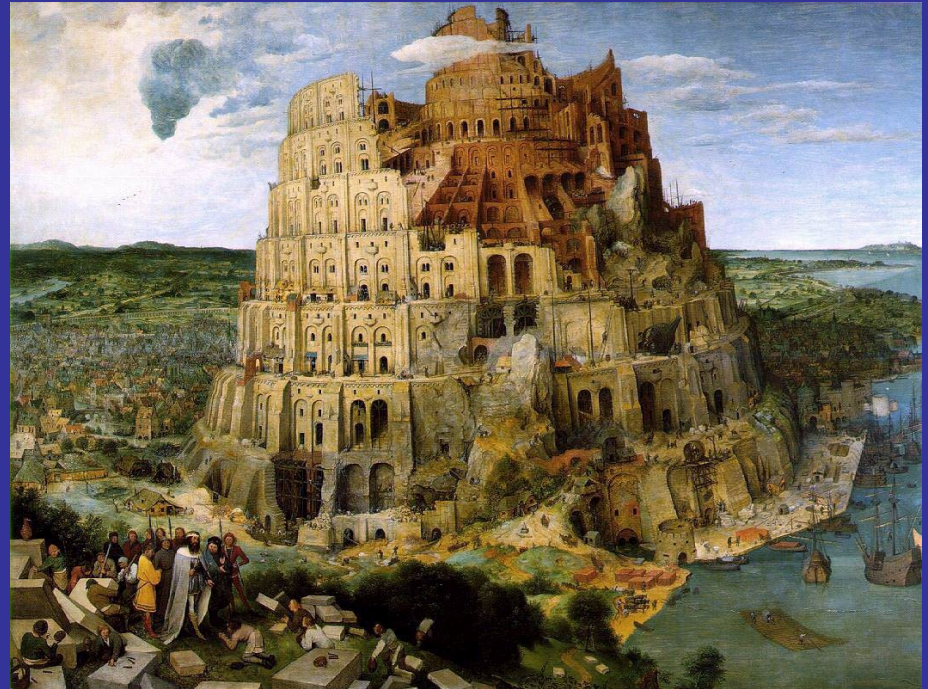


Today

- Historical linguistics
- Language change
- Language families





Language change

- ❑ Languages are constantly changing
- ❑ Language change is normal
- ❑ Language change \neq 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 **wódr̥* 'water', **trÉi-* '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’



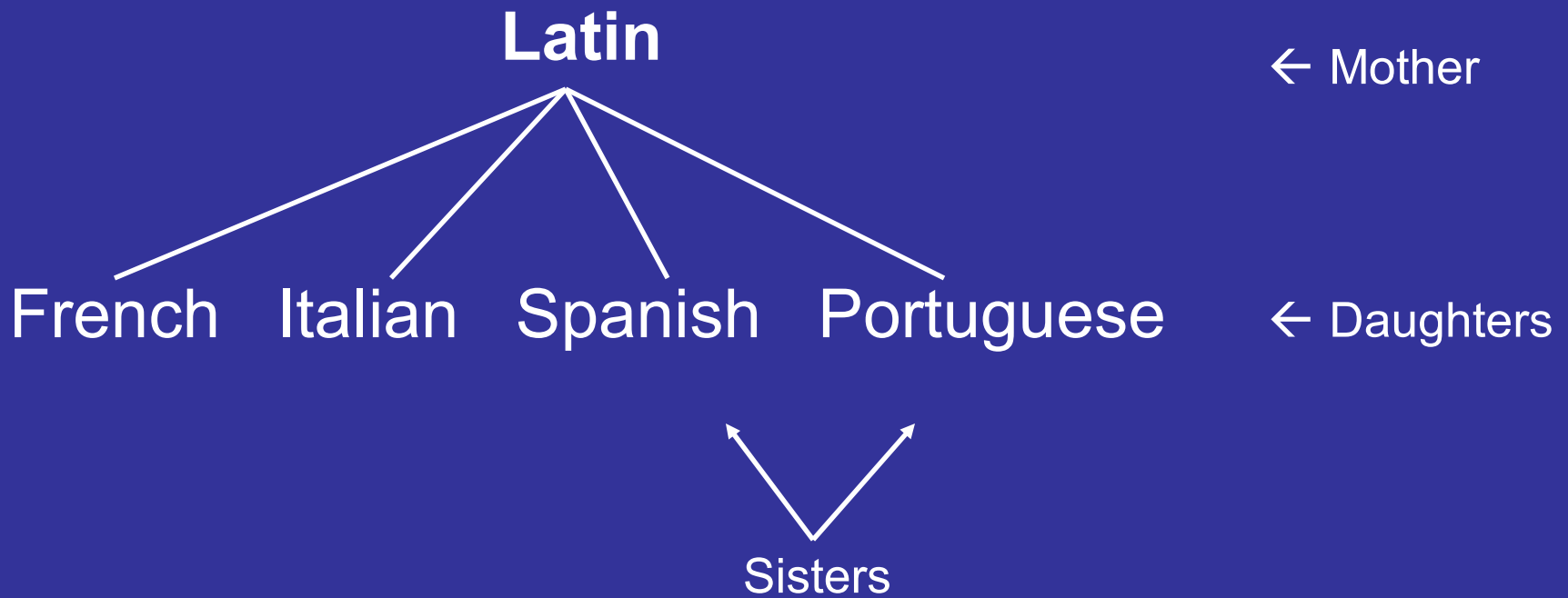
False friends

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

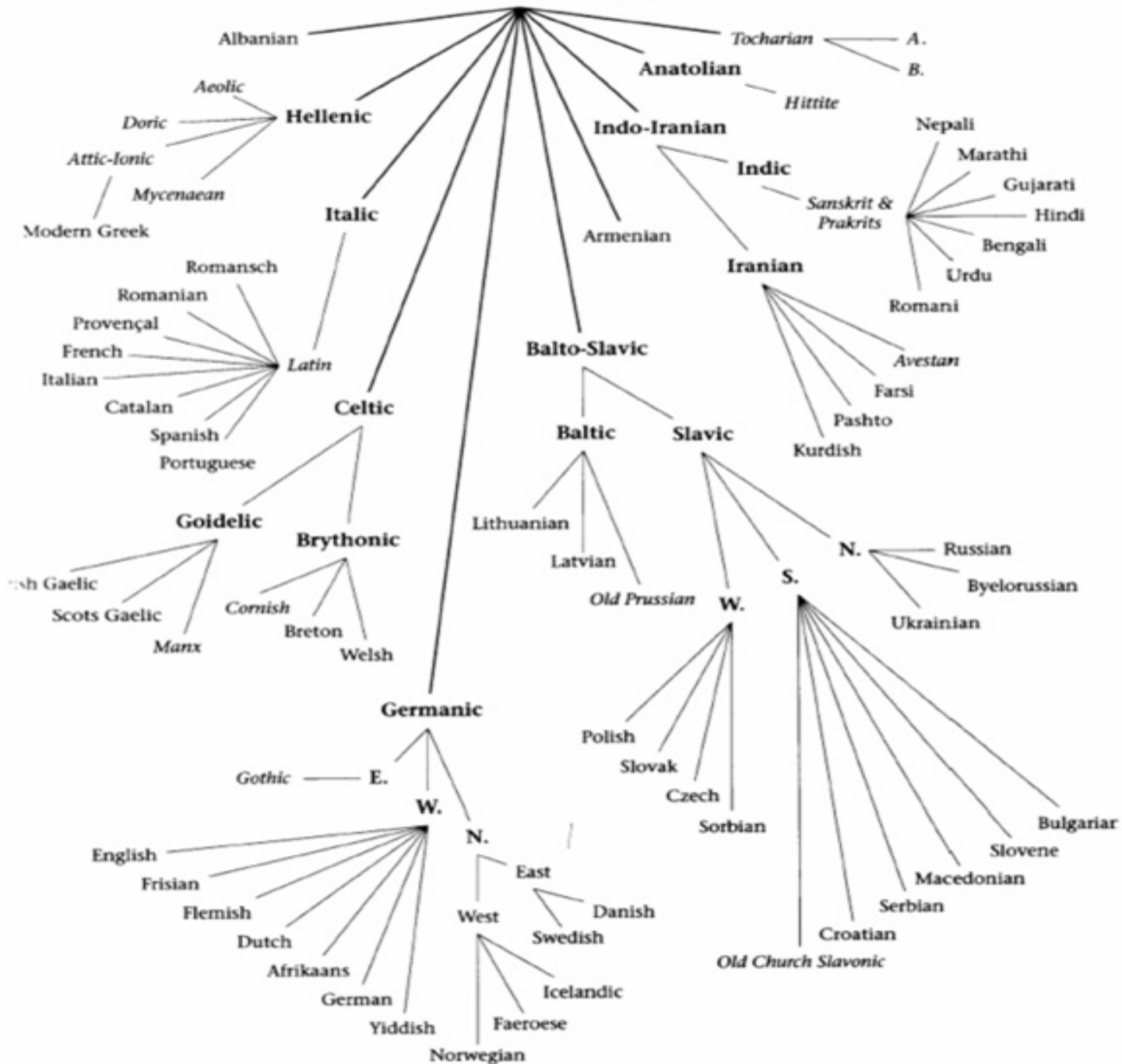


Family Tree Model

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

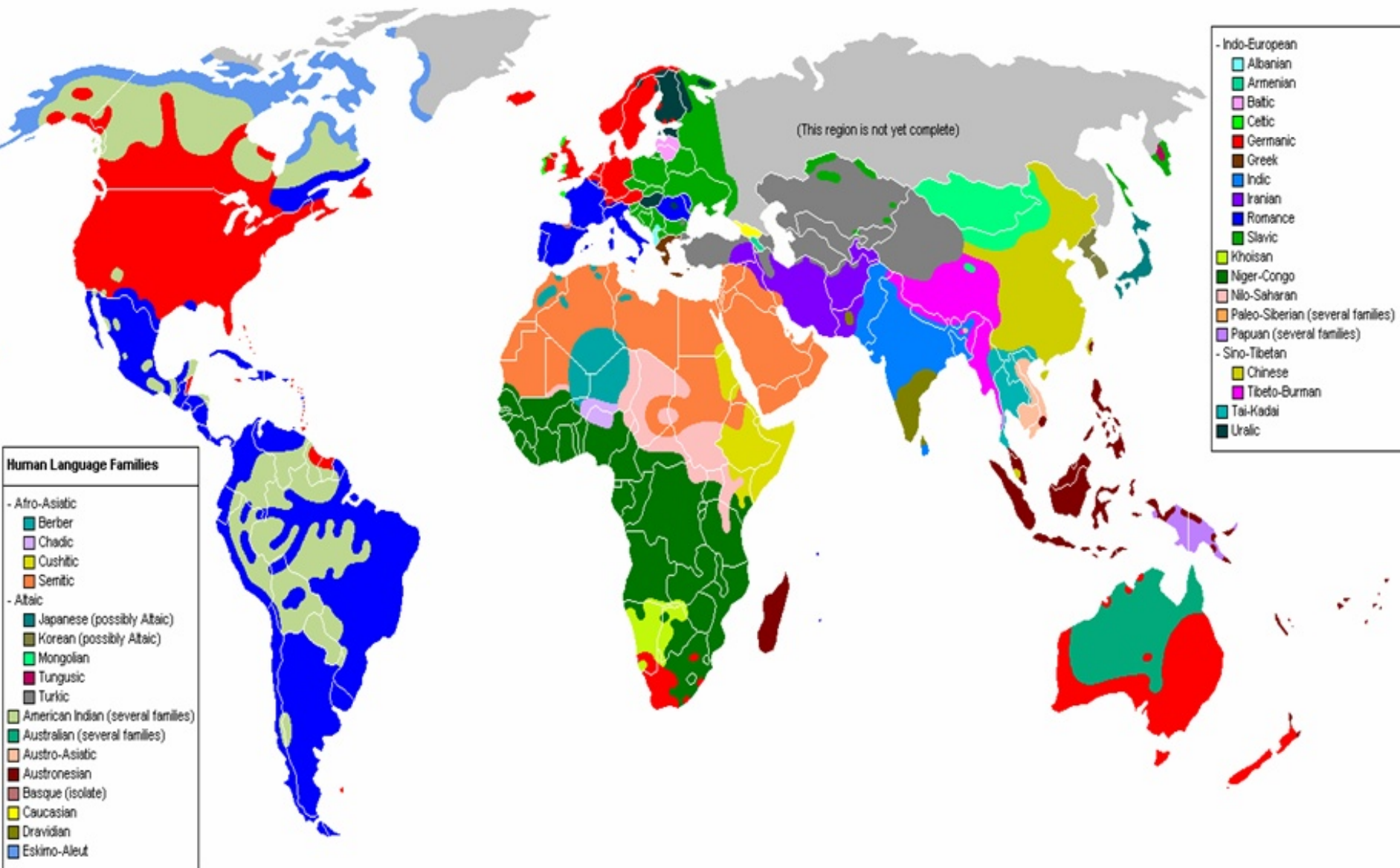


PROTO-INDO-EUROPEAN



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., Pirahã)
- Isolates become families (e.g., Japanese)



Family Tree Model: problems

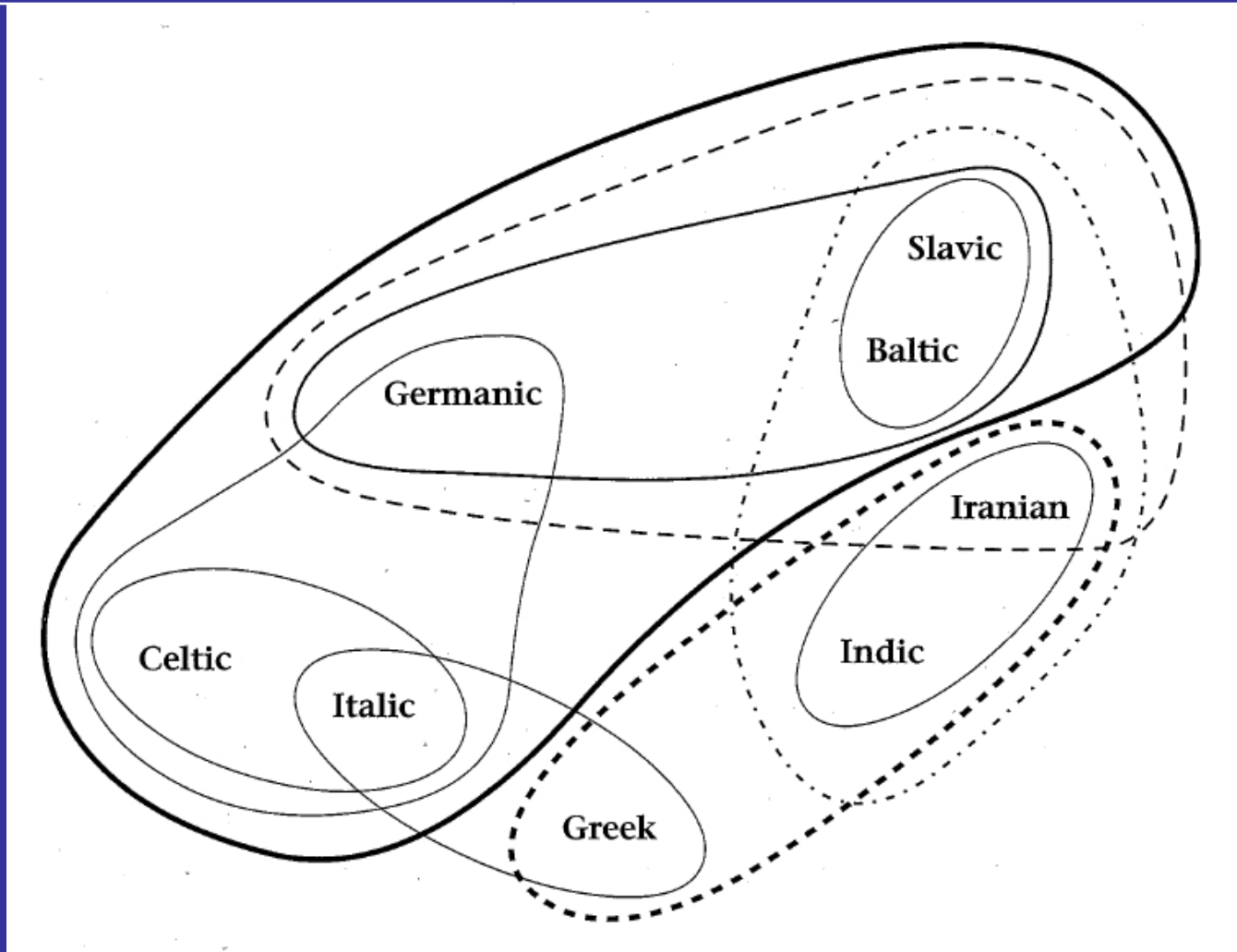
- Implies each language is separate, independent from its neighbors
 - But distinctions btw. languages are fuzzy
- Suggests new languages appear/branch off suddenly
 - But languages diverge gradually



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