

# The Origin of Language

# Divine origin

- ▶ Judeo-Christian beliefs

And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

Genesis 2:19, *The Bible*, King James Version

- ▶ Egyptians: god Thoth
- ▶ Babylonians: god Nabu
- ▶ Hindus: creator Brahma's wife Sarasvati
- ▶ Plato: a "legislator"

# Human Invention or the Cries of Nature?

## ► Cries of Nature?

- The earliest form of language was imitative, or echoic, was proposed up to the twentieth century
- Language at first consisted of emotional ejaculations of pain, fear, surprise, pleasure, anger, and so on

## ► Human Invention?

- Language arose out of the rhythmical grunts of men and women working together
- Language originated from song as an expressive rather than a communicative need

# Genetic specification for language

- ▶ Is language culture? Or is language biology?
- ▶ Research by linguists, evolutionary biologists, and neurologists (through fossil record, comparative generic analysis) support that . . .
  - Language most likely evolved with the human species, possibly in stages, possibly in one giant leap
  - From the outset the human animal was genetically equipped to learn language
- ▶ Result of natural selection
- ▶ Homo Sapiens
  - FOXP2 gene
  - Lower larynx

- ▶ Human language is genetically coded: human beings are genetically predisposed to acquire and use language.
- ▶ Arguments for humans' genetic predisposition for language
  - No other species had evolved to speak language.
  - There are no human groups who cannot speak language.
  - All humans learn to speak.
    - Babies babble spontaneously in all cultures.
    - Speed of acquisition: Children learn language fast (compared to with adults).
    - Poverty of stimulus: Children learn language even with poor input.
    - Critical age hypothesis: Genie, a feral child (found at age 13 in 1970)
  - Human brains have evolved in a direction uniquely suitable to processing language.
  - Damage to specific areas of brain can have particular effects on language ability.
    - *Broca's Area—syntax (grammar)*
    - *Wernike's Area—semantics (meaning and comprehension)*

- Broca's aphasia

Yes... ah... Monday... er... Dad and Peter H... (his own name), and Dad....  
er... hospital... and ah... Wednesday... Wednesday, nine o'clock... and  
oh... Thursday... ten o'clock, ah doctors... two... an' doctors... and er...  
teeth... Yah

- Wernike's aphasia

O sure. Go ahead, any old think you want. If I could I would. Oh. I'm  
taking the word the wrong way to say, all of the barbers here whenever  
they stop you it's going around and around, if you know what I mean,  
that is tying and tying for repucer, repucertation, well, we were trying the  
best that we could.

# Monogenetic theory of language origin

- ▶ All languages originated from a single source? Or languages arose in several places, or at several times, in the course of history.
- ▶ The genetic instruction or predisposition for language must have been created by a mutation: such a mutation occurred once in the stem population of Homo Sapiens 150,000 years ago and was then passed on to all descendants, rather than emerging at various later times in separate offshoot populations.
- ▶ Mark Pagel. “How language transformed humanity” (2011)  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/mark\\_pagel\\_how\\_language\\_transformed\\_humanity](http://www.ted.com/talks/mark_pagel_how_language_transformed_humanity)

- ▶ “Language is the voice of our genes.”
- ▶ Language and social learning
- ▶ Puzzle: why so many languages? e.g. Papua New Guinea
- ▶ Humans use language to cooperate, exchange and spread the ideas
- ▶ Humans use language to protect identities, knowledge; Different languages slow the flow of knowledge and ideas
- ▶ “Nature knows no other circumstances in which functionally equivalent traits coexist. One of them always drives the other extinct.”
- ▶ “In a globalized, modern world, can we afford to have different languages”?
- ▶ Standardization? One world with one language?



# How a single languages evolves into many

Genesis 11:4-9

## The Tower of Babel



Hye-Won Choi

► A united humanity of the generations following the Great Flood, speaking a single language and migrating from the east, came to the land of Shinar.

4 And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

5 But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.

6 And the Lord said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.

7 Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."

8 So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city.

9 Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

# How did language evolve and why?

- ▶ Who were the first human beings who speak language?
  - Homo sapiens
- ▶ When did they first started using language?
  - 200,000-150,000 years ago
- ▶ Where did they live?
  - In East Africa
- ▶ Then what?
  - East Africa → Asia → Europe  
→ Australia → 6,000 languages  
→ Americas
- ▶ Alex Gendler. TED-Ed. “How languages change and evolve”  
<http://ed.ted.com/lessons/how-languages-evolve-alex-gendler>

# World Languages

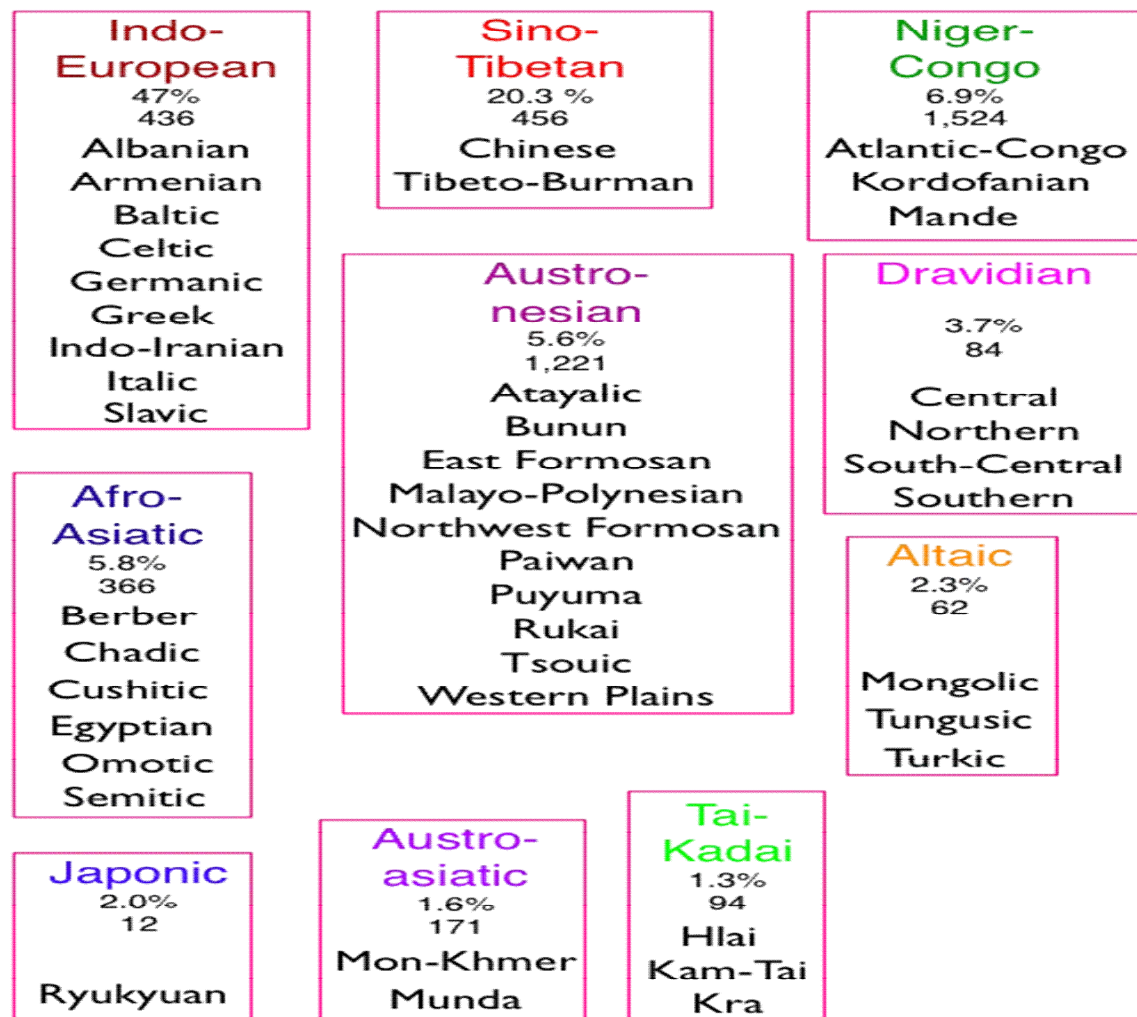
Language Families (Ethnologue, 2014)

Top Language Families: Map



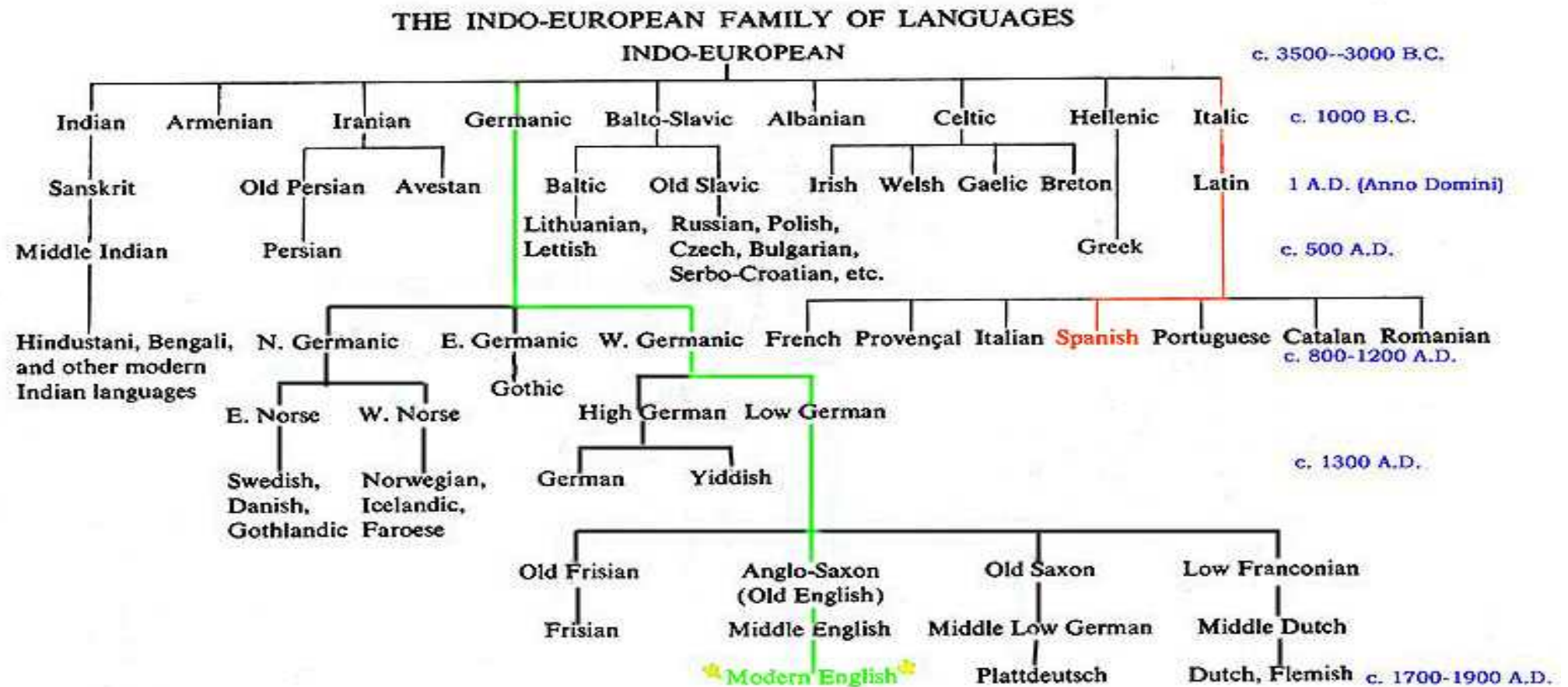
## Top Language Families: subgroups

by: [Triangulations@wordpress.com](mailto:Triangulations@wordpress.com)



# Indo-European Language Family

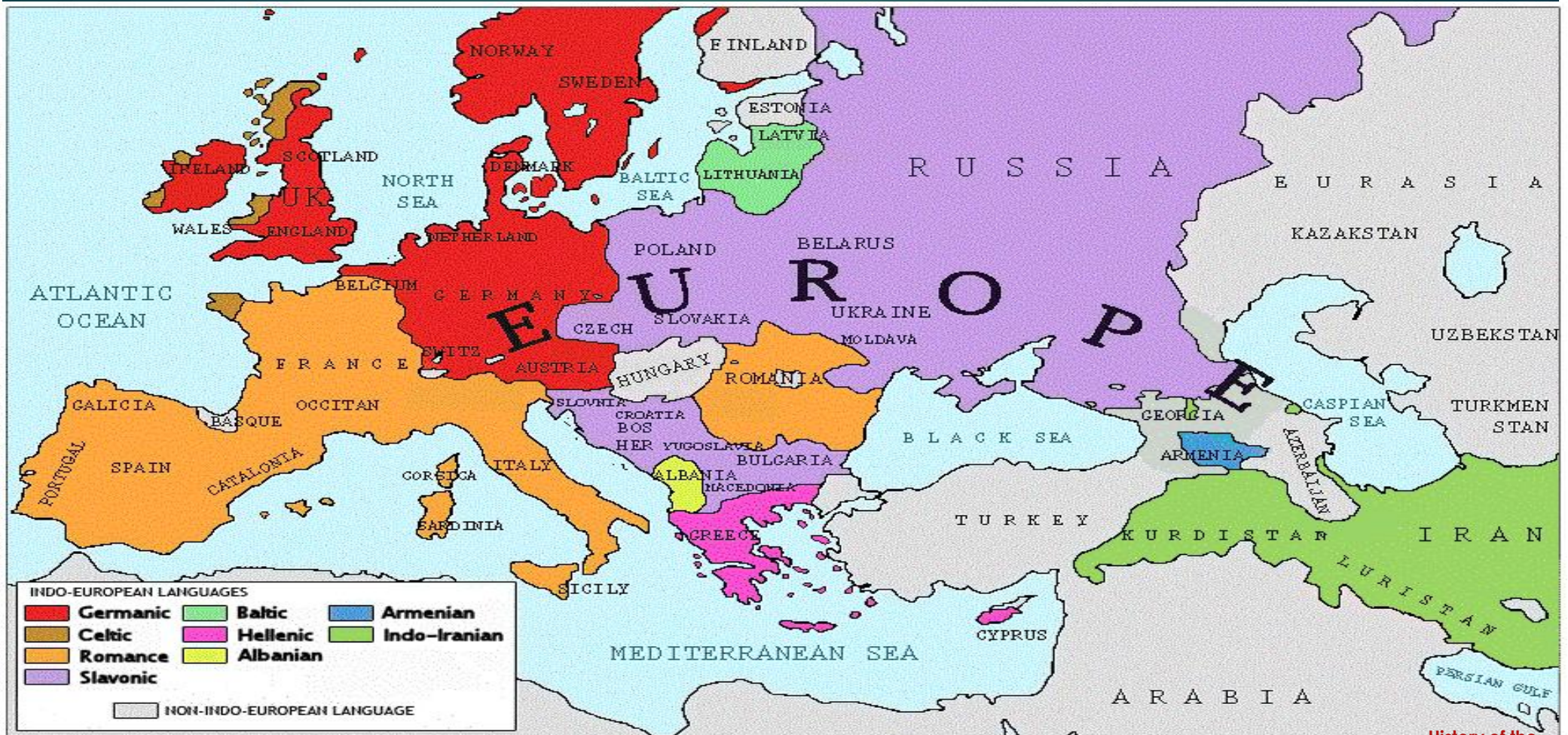
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# Indo-European Languages

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Hye-Won Choi

History of the English

# Languages of the Class

- ▶ Korean (Korea): Koreanic <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/kor>
- ▶ Mandarin Chinese (China): Sino-Tibetan <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/cmn>
- ▶ Cantonese/Yue Chinese (Hong Kong): Sino-Tibetan <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/yue>
- ▶ Japanese (Japan): Japonic <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/jpn>
- ▶ Mongolian (Mongolia): Mongolic <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/mon>
- ▶ Turkish (Turkey): Turkic <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/tur>
- ▶ Thai (Thailand): Tai-Kadai <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/tha>
- ▶ Lao (Laos): Tai-Kadai <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/lao>
- ▶ Tagalog (Philippines): Austronesian <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/tgl>
- ▶ Arabic (Saudi Arabia): Afro-Asiatic <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/arb>
- ▶ Lingala (Congo): Niger-Congo <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/lin>
- ▶ Ewe (Ghana): Niger-Congo <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/ewe>
- ▶ Akan/Twi (Ghana): Niger-Congo <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/aka>