

Experimental diachronics: Investigating language change and evolution in the lab

James Brand

j.brand@lancaster.ac.uk

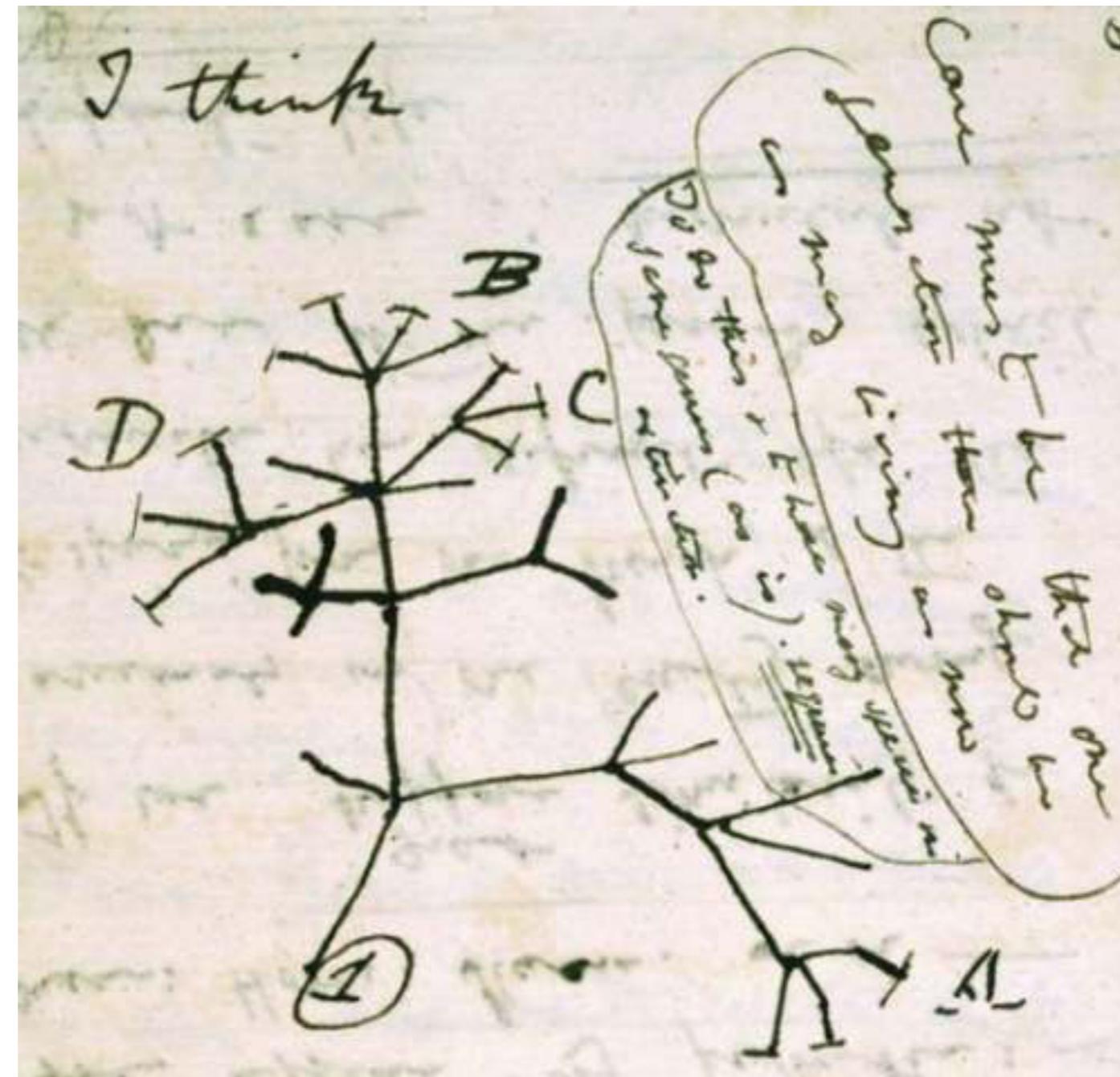


Outline

What you will learn today:

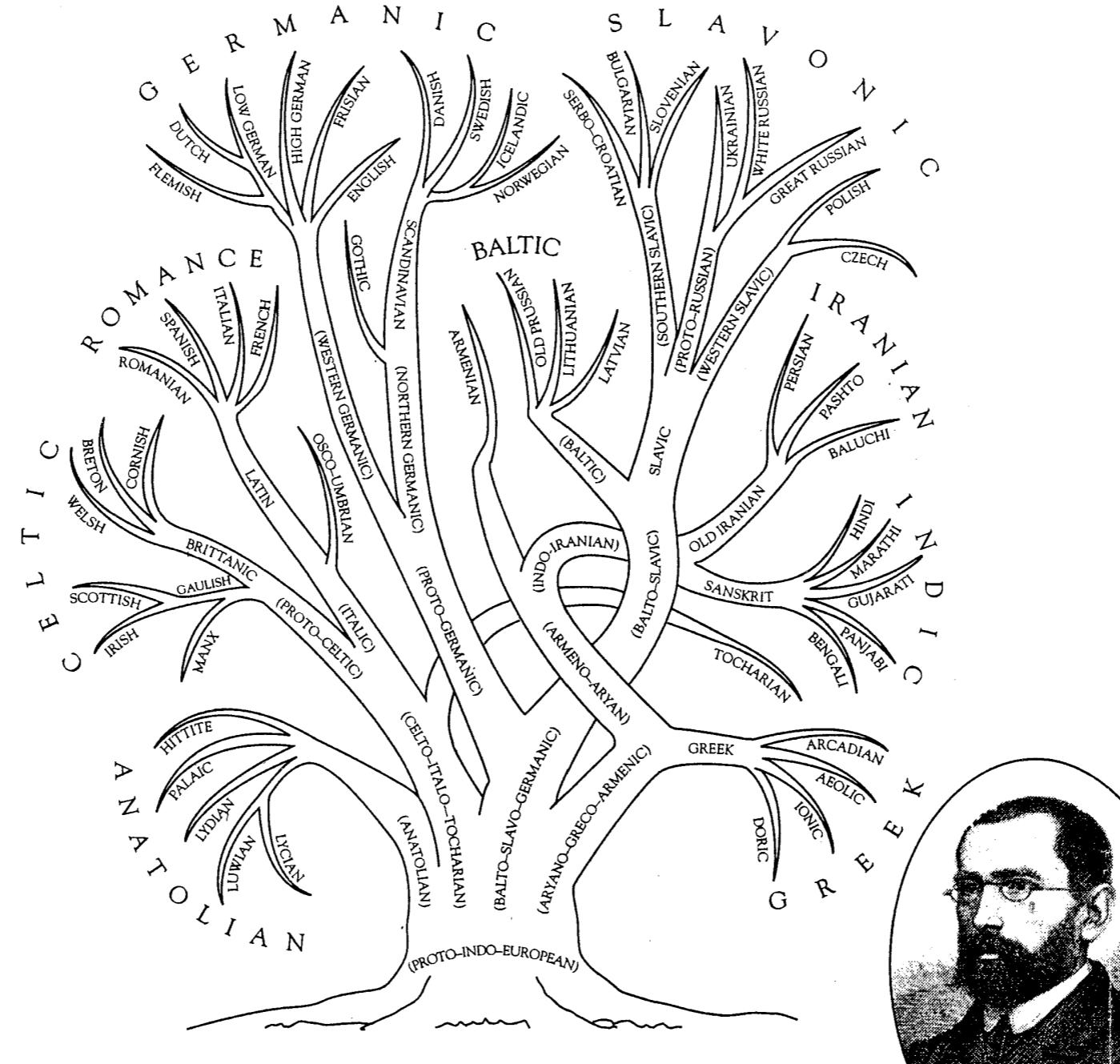
- What language evolution is
- Why we study it
- How to study it
- What studying it has shown us
- Why multi-disciplinary research is important

What is language evolution?



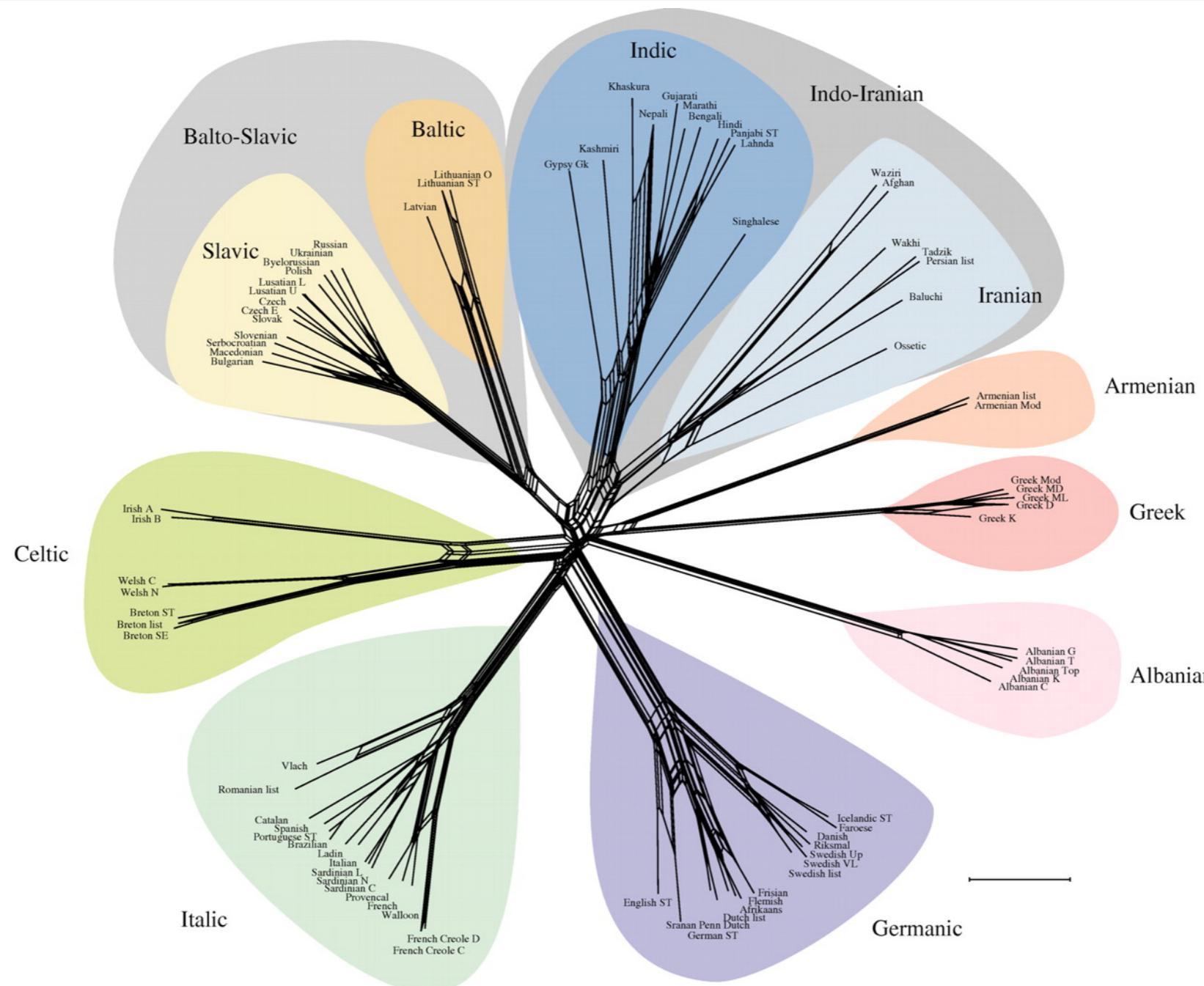
Darwin (1837)

What is language evolution?



Schleicher (1863)

What is language evolution?



Gray et al., 2010



Why study language evolution?



<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/01/science/01chimp.html>

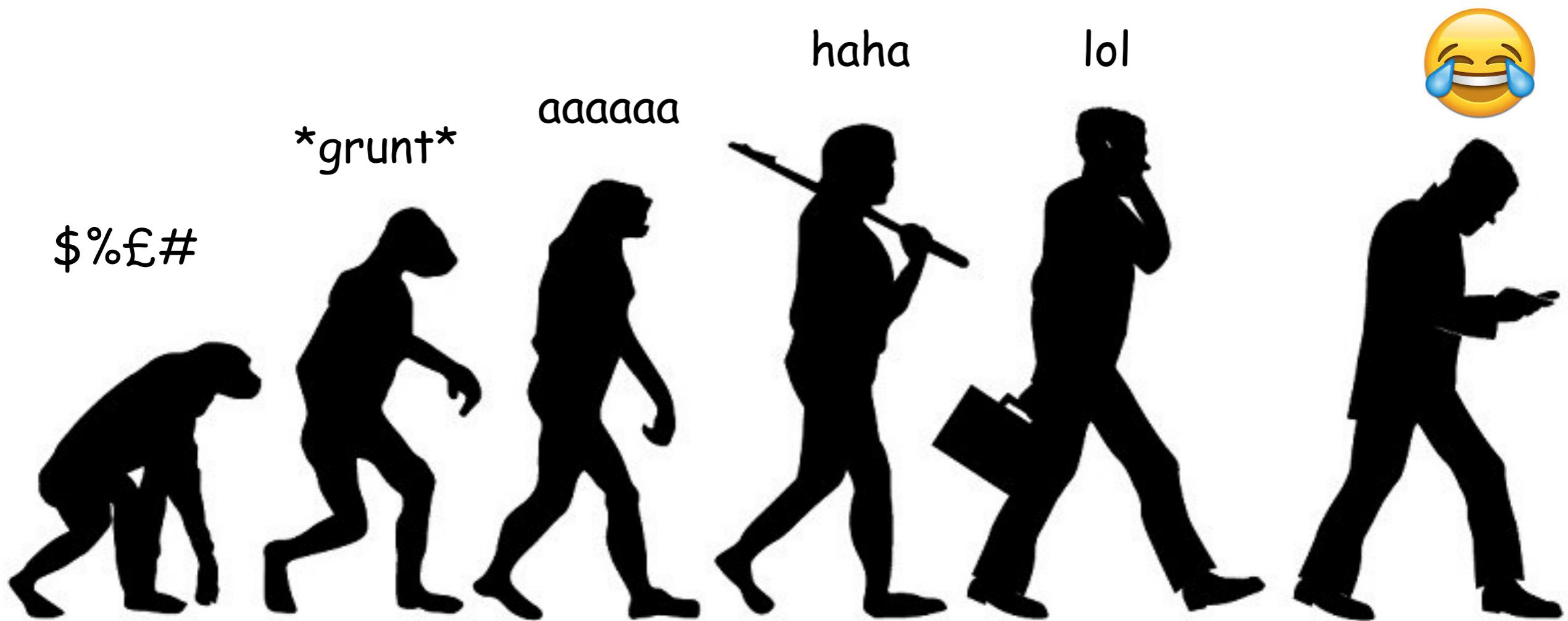
Why study language evolution?



Rise of the Planet of the Apes (2011)



Why study language evolution?



Why study language evolution?

1

Language Evolution: The Hardest Problem in Science?

Morten H. Christiansen and Simon Kirby

In 1859, when Charles Darwin published his book *The Origin of Species*, there was already a great interest in the origin and evolution of language. A plethora of ideas and conjectures flourished, but with few hard constraints to limit the realm of possibility, the theorizing became plagued by outlandish speculations. By 1866 this situation had deteriorated to such a degree that the primary authority for the study of language at the time—the influential Société de Linguistique de Paris—felt compelled to impose a ban on all discussions of the origin and evolution of language.

Christiansen & Kirby (2003)

How to study language evolution



Gorilla

*Homo erectus*
(*Sinanthropus*)*Homo sapiens*

https://startlediguana.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/boule_skulls.gif

How to study language evolution



Basalla (1988)

How to study language evolution

BEHAVIORAL AND BRAIN SCIENCES (2008) 31, 489–558

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Language as shaped by the brain

Morten H. Christiansen

Department of Psychology, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853, and Santa Fe Institute, Santa Fe, NM 87501

christiansen@cornell.edu

<http://www.psych.cornell.edu/people/Faculty/mhc27.html>

Nick Chater

Division of Psychology and Language Sciences, University College London, London, WC1E 6BT, United Kingdom

n.chater@ucl.ac.uk

http://www.psychol.ucl.ac.uk/people/profiles/chater_nick.htm

Christiansen & Chater (2008)

How to study language evolution

How to study language evolution

1 8 5 0 3 7 6 2 4 9

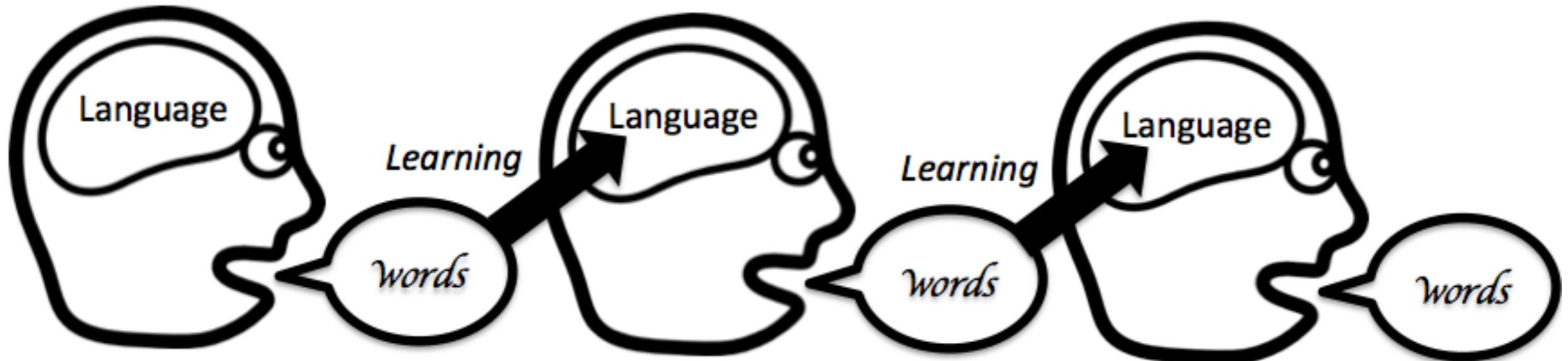
How to study language evolution

How to study language evolution

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

How to study language evolution

How to study language evolution



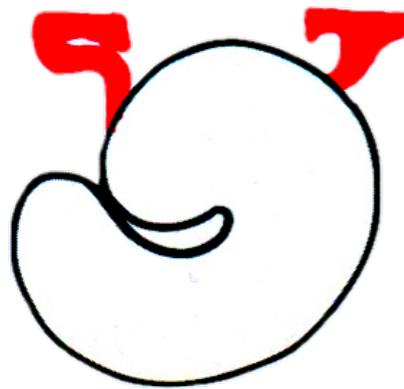
<http://www.replicatedtypo.com/iterated-learning-using-youtube-videos/6093.html>

How to study language evolution

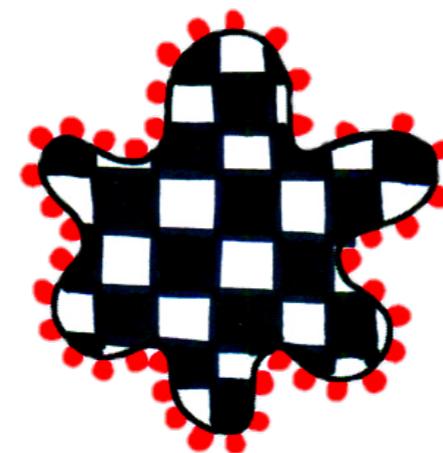


Arrival (2016)

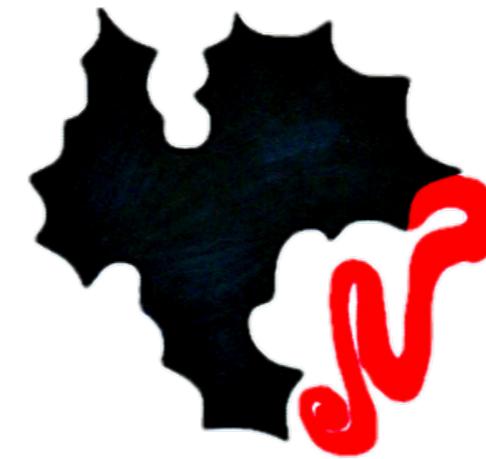
How to study language evolution



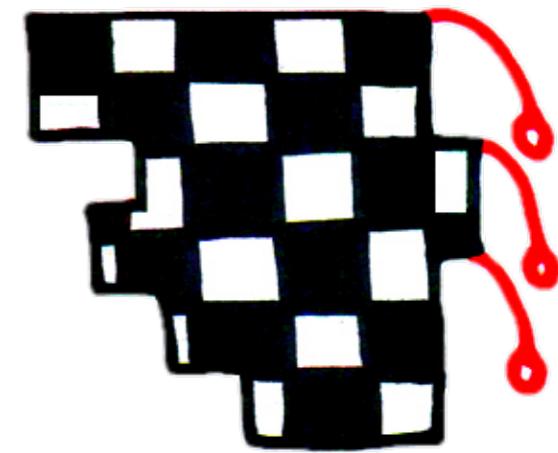
gahemi



hekipo



kilonu



lenoga

Brand & Monaghan (in prep)

How to study language evolution

Generation 1

	pihino		kapa		newhomo
	nemone		gakho		kamone
	piga		wuwele		gaku
	kawake		nepi		hokako

Kirby, Tamariz, Cornish & Smith (2015)

How to study language evolution

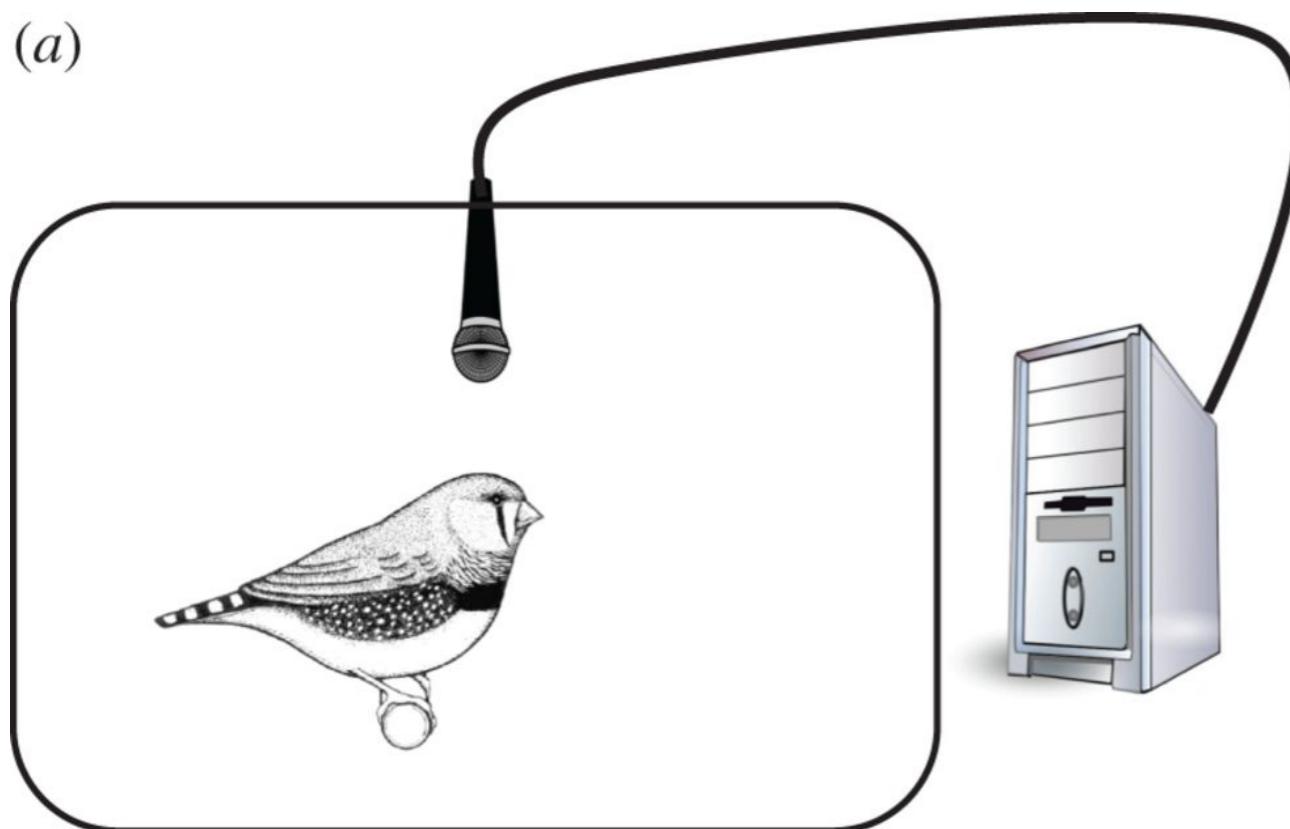
Generation 10

	ege-wawu		mega		gamene-wawu
	ege-wawa		mega-wawa		gamene-wawa
	ege-wuwu		mega-wuwu		gamene-wuwu
	ege		wulagi		gamane

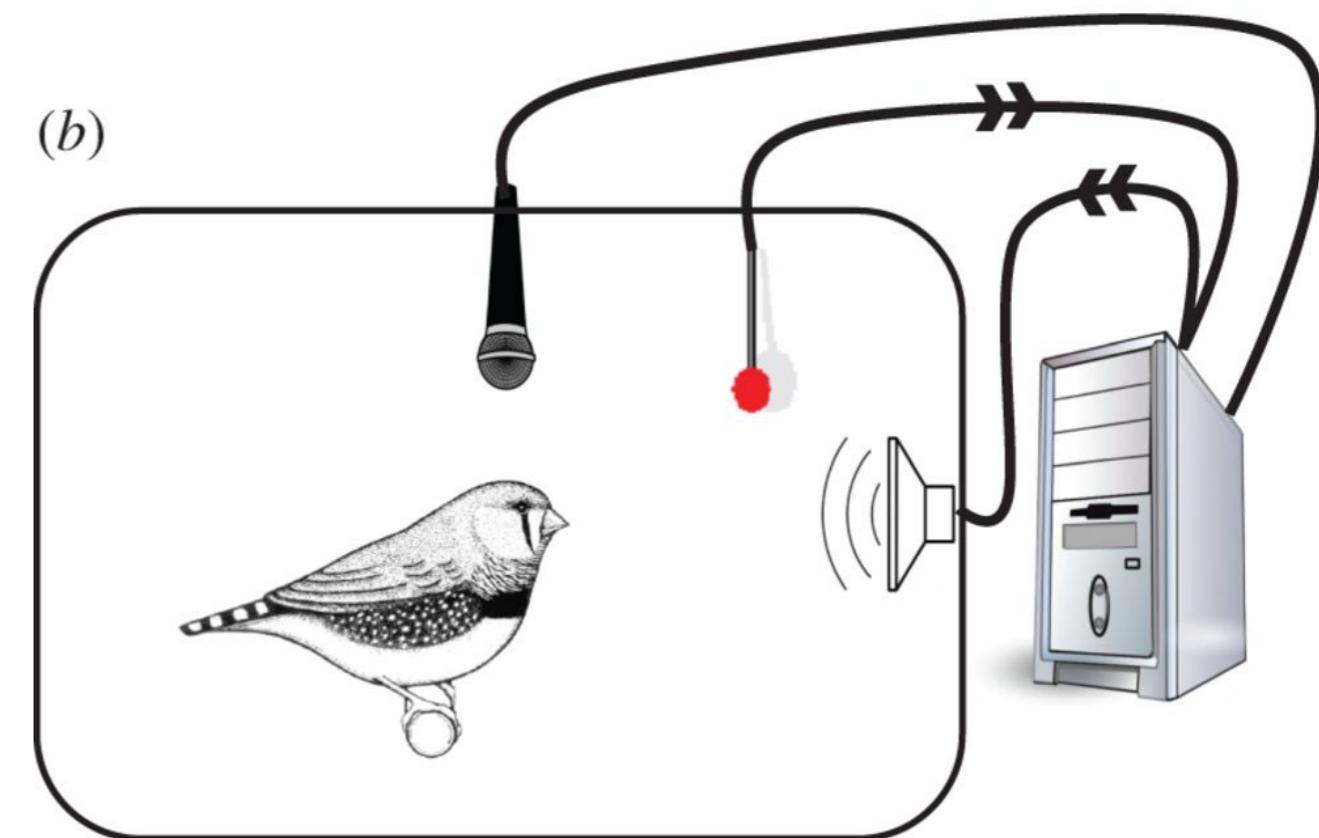
Kirby, Tamariz, Cornish & Smith (2015)

How to study language evolution

(a)

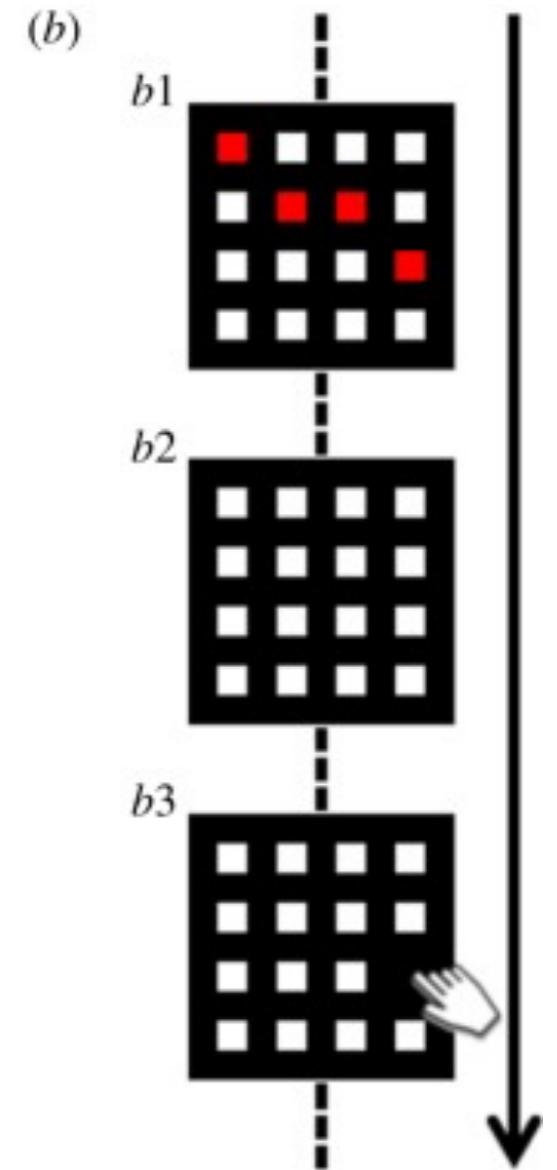
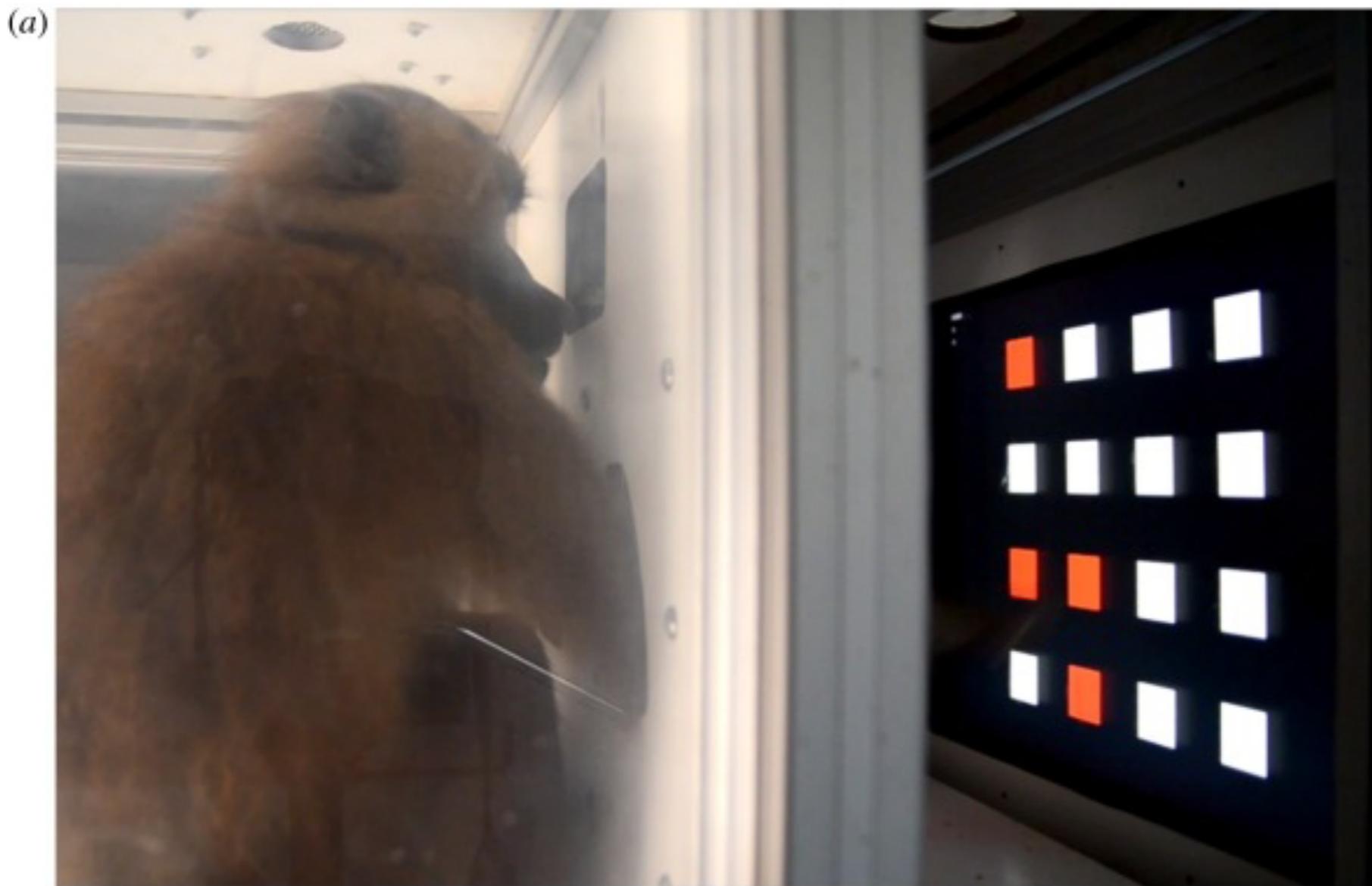


(b)



Fehér et al (2017)

How to study language evolution



Claidière et al (2014)

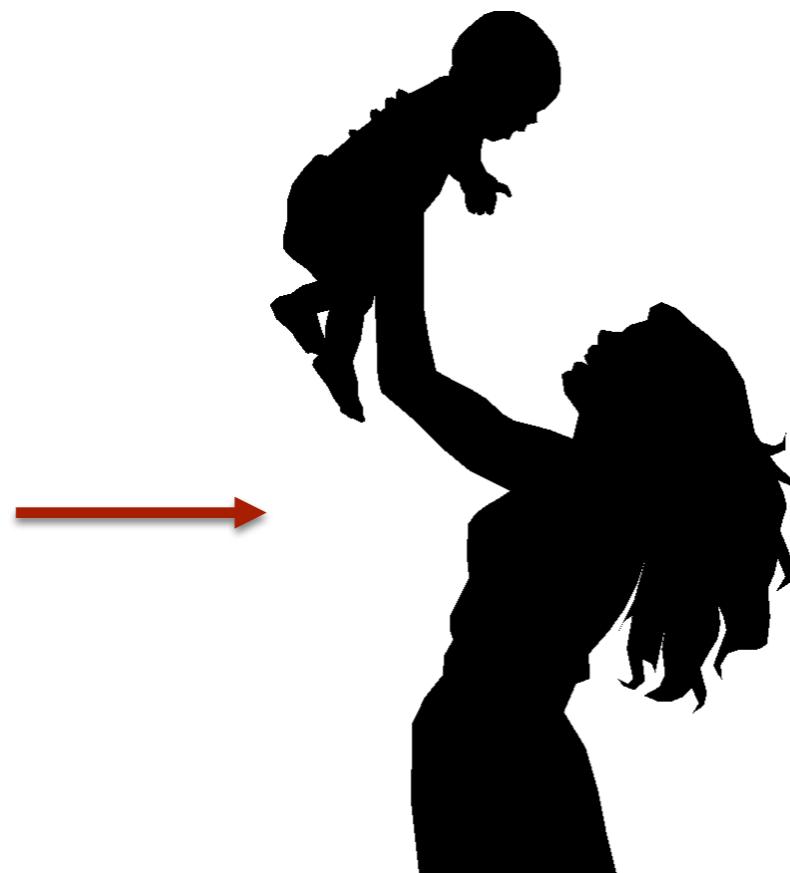
Understanding why words change

Second, a theory of language change must explain why languages do NOT change in many ways, sometimes over many generations of speakers (see Milroy 1992b:10–13). Many theories of language change focus their attention on mechanisms to bring about change. But if those mechanisms were the only mechanisms around, then languages would be changing constantly in all of their respects. Yet they are not. A theory of language change must provide for mechanisms that act as forces for stability as well as for change, and ideally get the proper balance in order to account for rates of change. Another way of putting this desideratum is to say that a theory of language change must provide mechanisms of **NORMAL (identical) REPLICATION** as well as altered replication (and also mechanisms for nondifferential replication as well as differential replication).

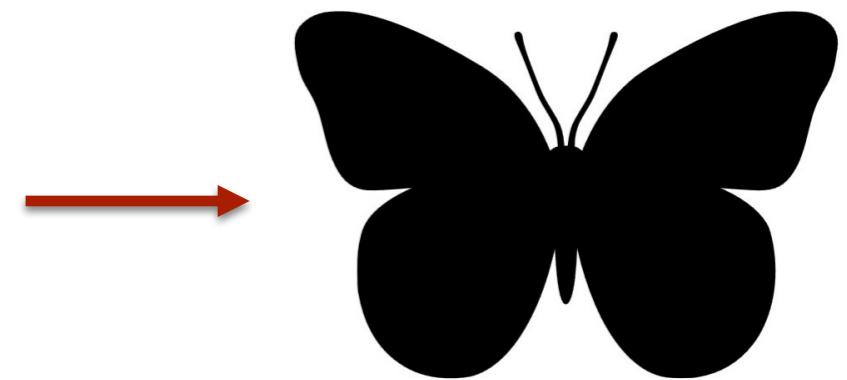
Croft (2000, p.4)

Understanding why words change

mum
μαμά
mama
maman
mamá



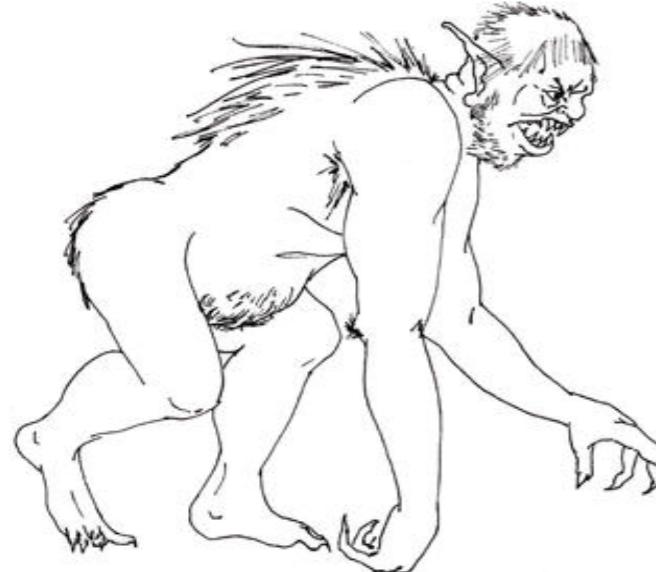
butterfly
Πεταλούδα
schmetterling
papillon
mariposa



Understanding why words change

Ic ne secge
(Beowulf, 900)

ic ne secze



Ic ne sege noht
(Ormulum, 1100)

ic ne sege noht



I seye not
(Chaucer, 1400)

ſeſe not



I doe not say
(Shakespeare, 1600)

I doe not say



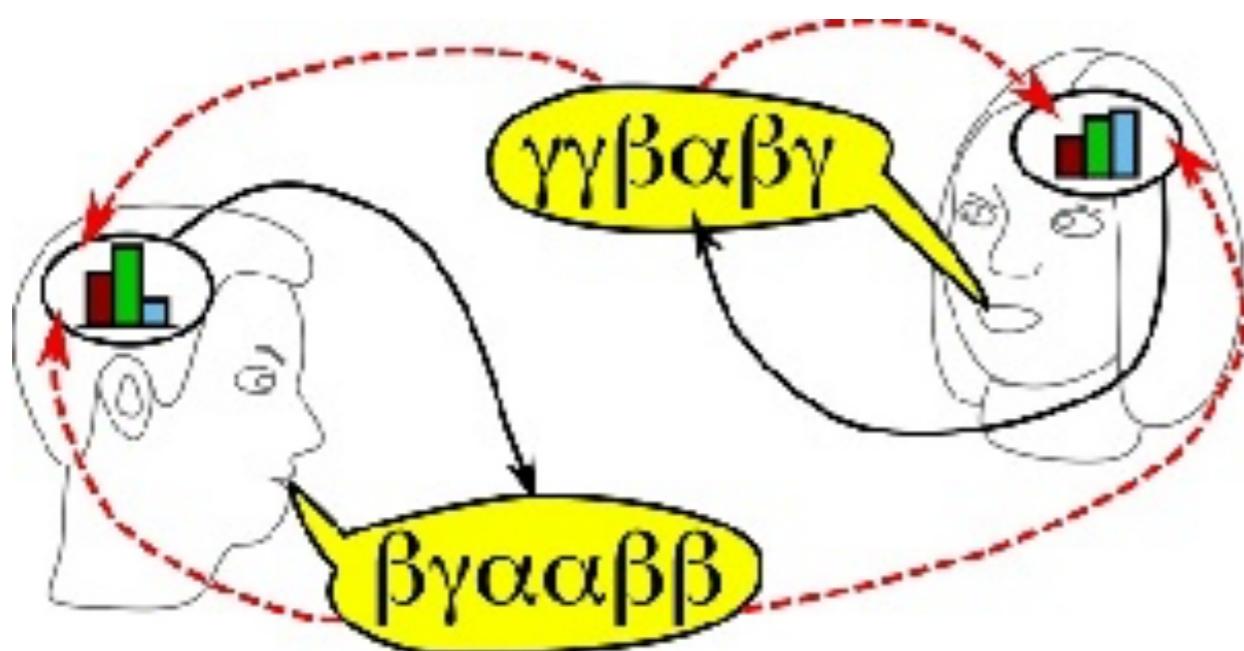
I don't say
(Woolf, 1900)

I don't say

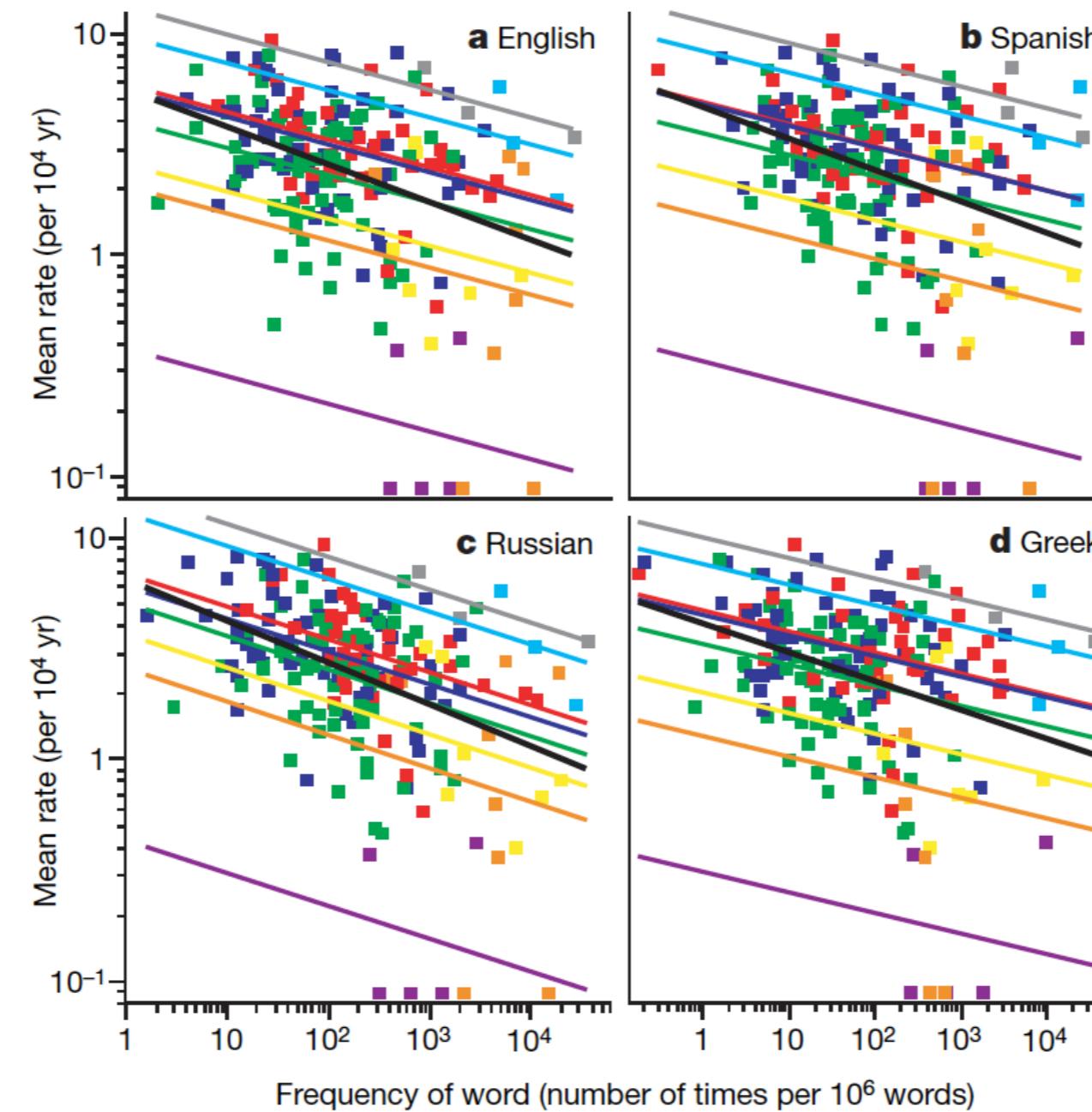


Dukelow (2017), Newberry (2017)

Understanding why words change

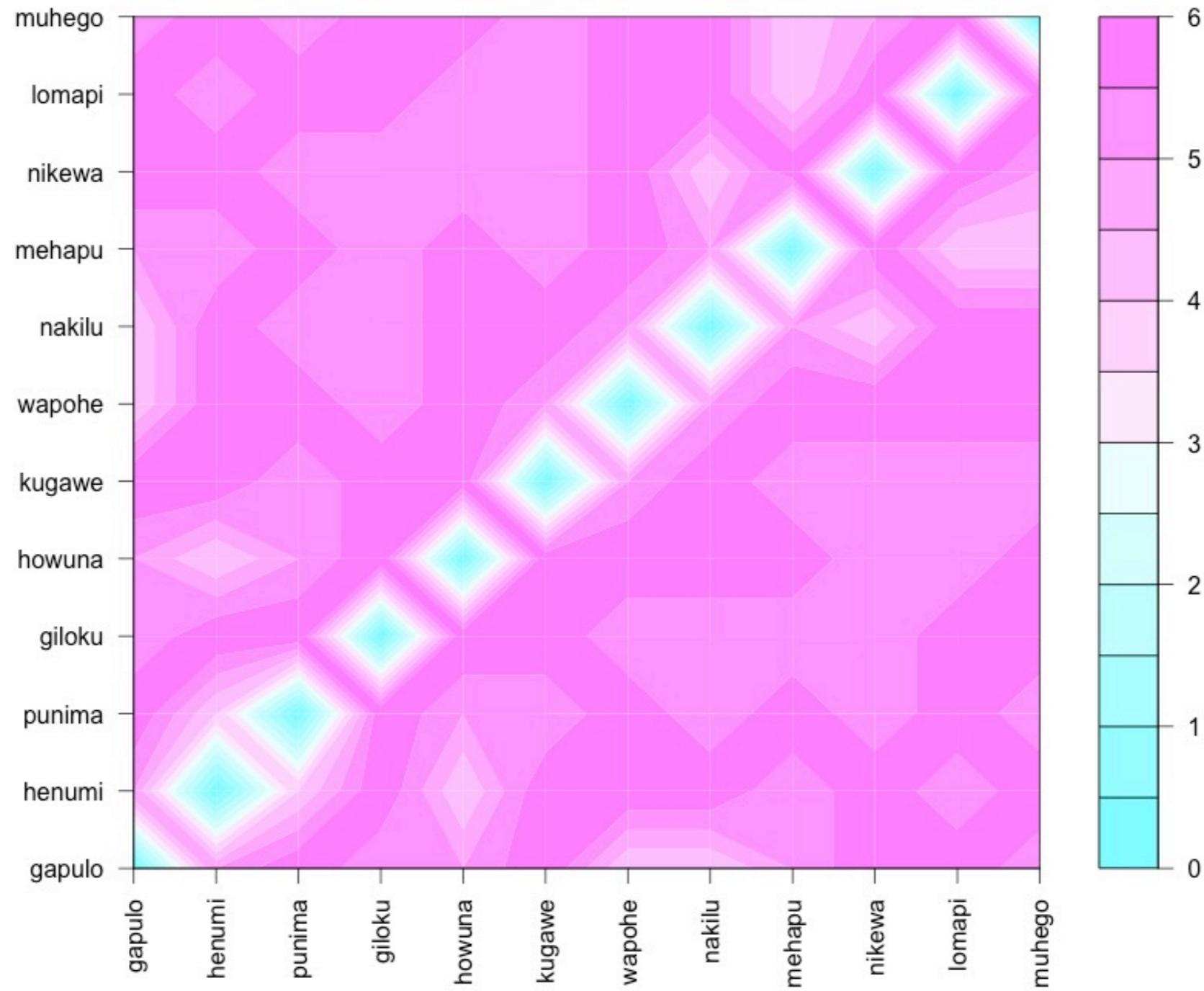


Understanding why words change

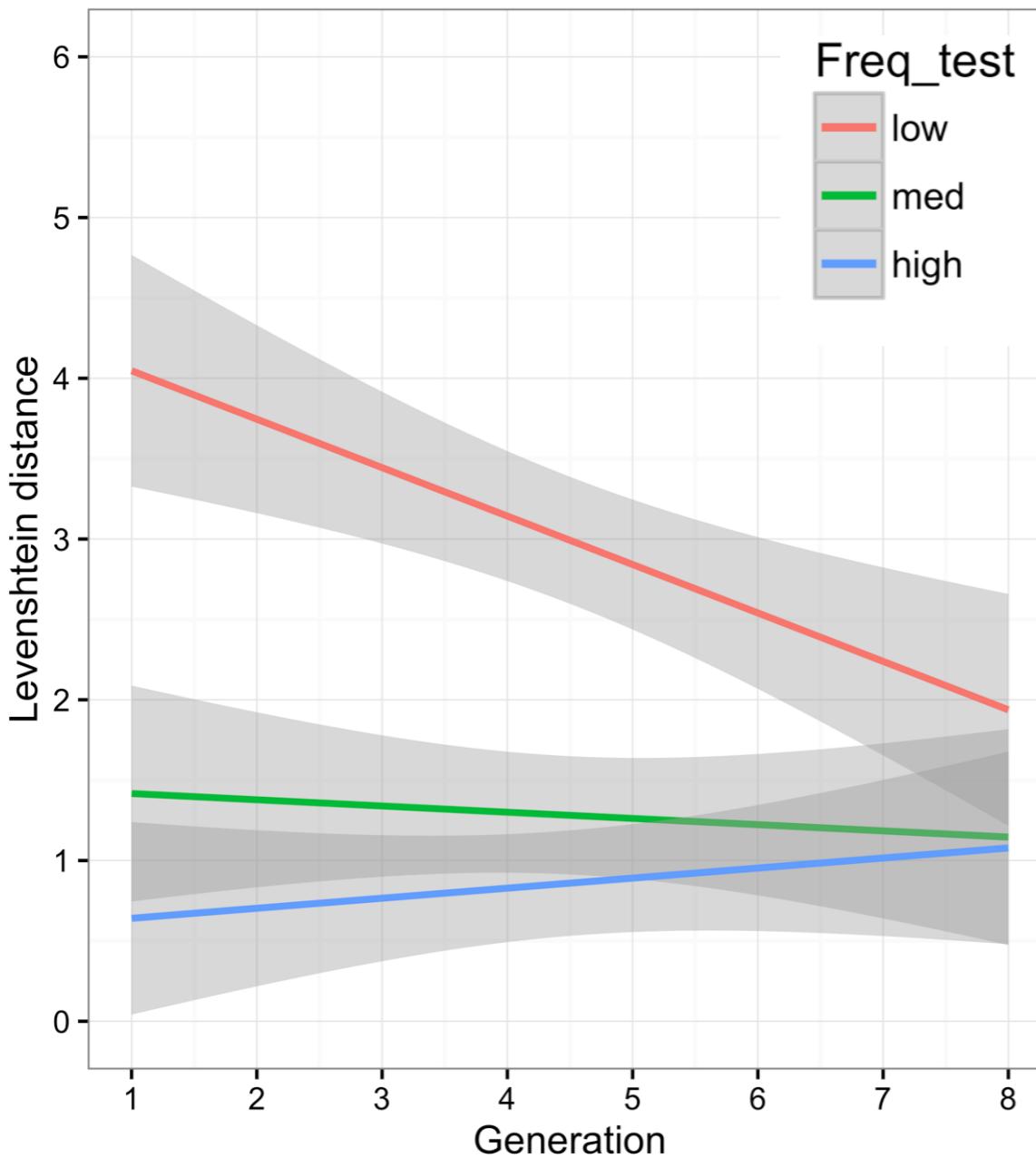


Pagel, Atkinson & Meade (2007)

Understanding why words change



Understanding why words change



Frequency	Generation 1	Generation 7
low	giloku	mihewu
low	howuna	mihuge
low	kugawe	nap <i>iwa</i>
low	lomapi	nok <i>iwa</i>
-----	-----	-----
med	nakilu	lilipe
med	wapohe	lamupo
med	muhego	hewino
med	punima	wopehu
-----	-----	-----
high	henumi	punima
high	gakulo	logopi
high	nipewa	henumi
high	mehapu	gakulo

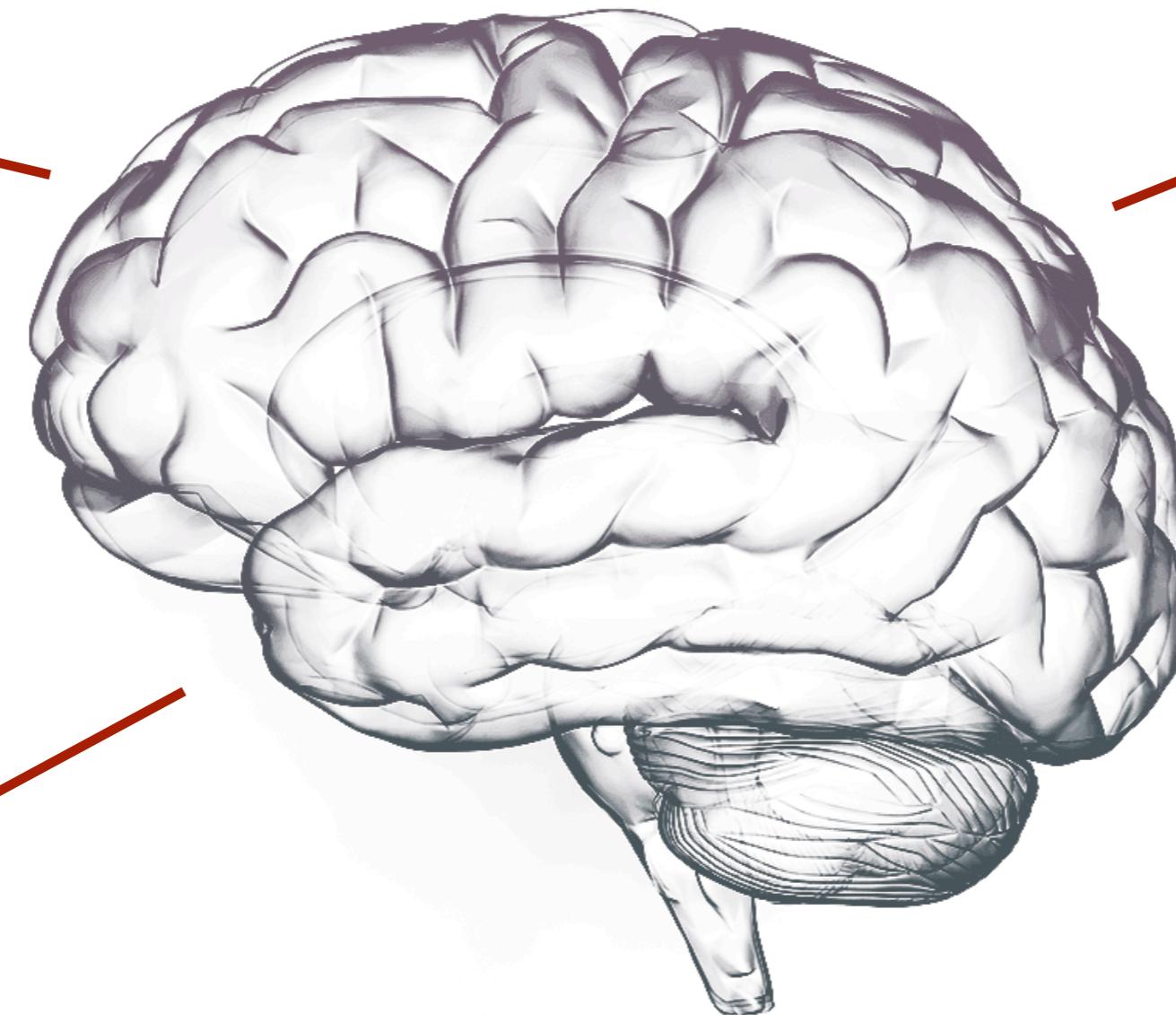
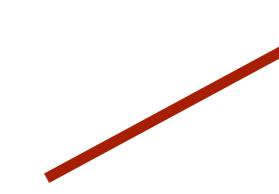
Brand & Monaghan (in prep)

Understanding why words change

Word
length



Age of
acquisition



Semantics



Grammatical
categories

Conclusions

What you have learnt today:

- What language evolution is
- Why we study it
- How to study it
- What studying it has shown us
- Why multi-disciplinary research is important

Questions / ?



j.brand@lancaster.ac.uk

Further reading

- Croft, W. (2000). *Explaining language change: An evolutionary approach*. Pearson Education.
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