

Linguistic issues about the origins of modern humans

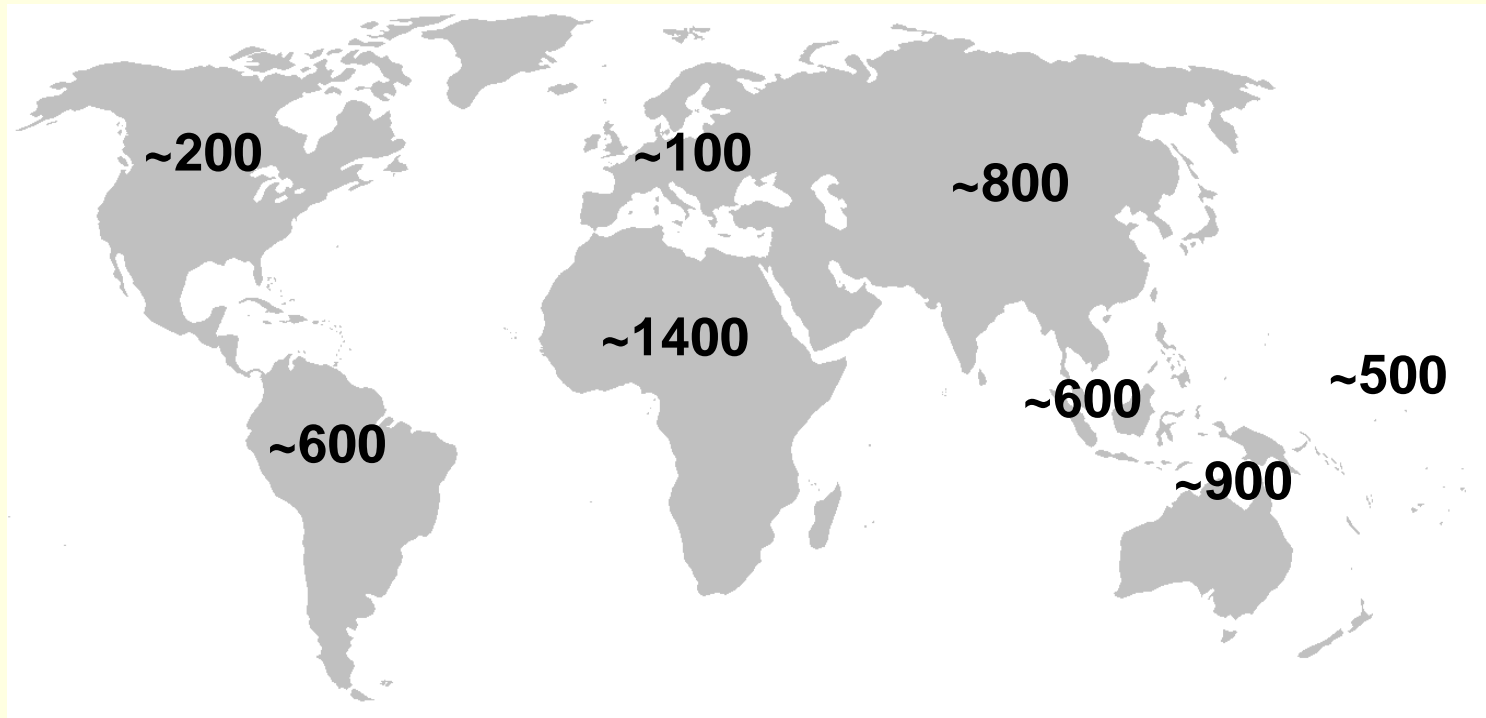
Bernard Victorri

Lattice-CNRS, ENS Paris

Bernard.Victorri@ens.fr

Language diversity

More than 5000 languages spoken today...



What can today's languages tell us about early human migrations?

First step:

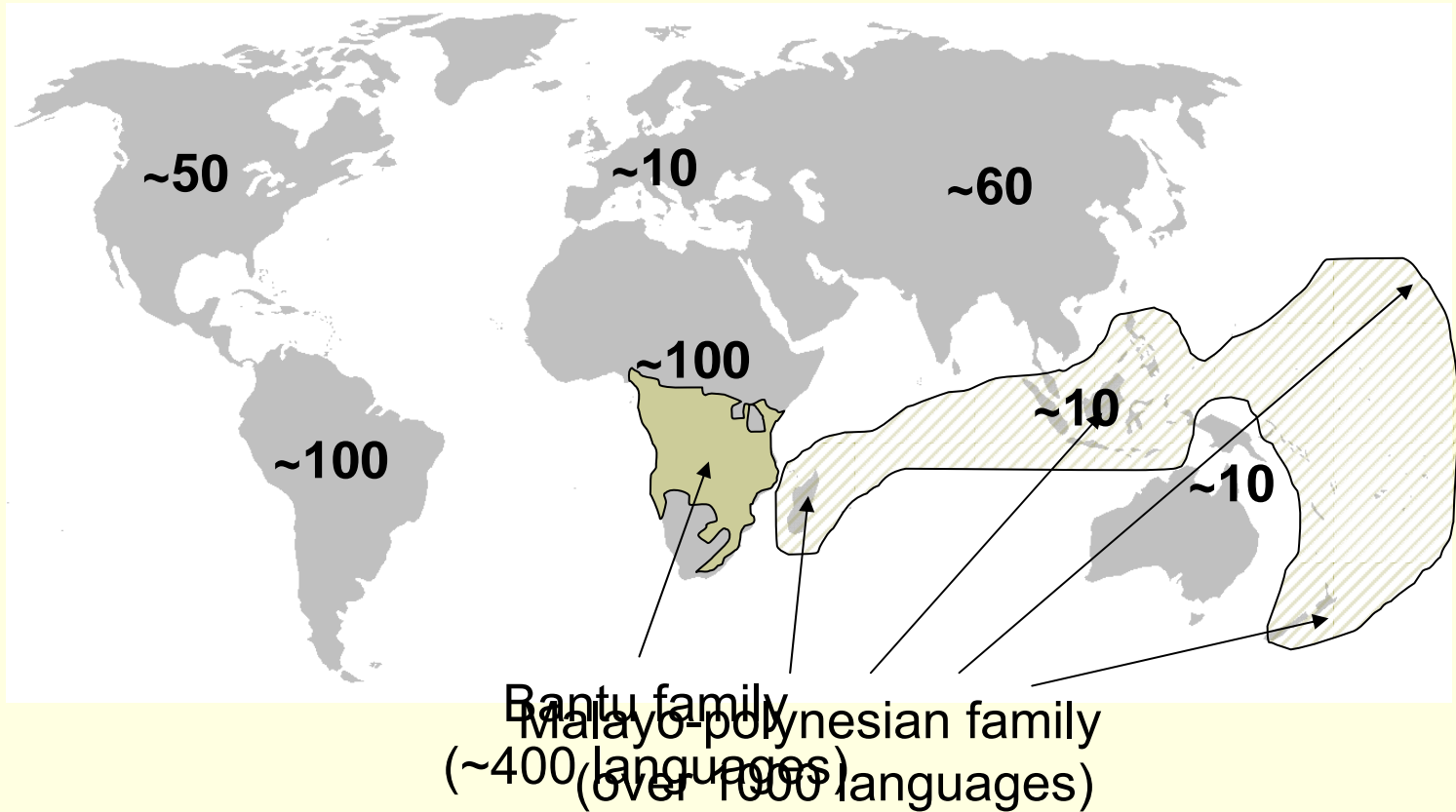
Obvious language families

Thousands of easily identifiable “cognates”

French	Italian	Spanish	Portuguese	Latin
<i>main</i>	<i>mano</i>	<i>mano</i>	<i>mão</i>	<i>manus</i>
<i>famille</i>	<i>famiglia</i>	<i>familia</i>	<i>familia</i>	<i>familia</i>
<i>nuit</i>	<i>notte</i>	<i>noche</i>	<i>noite</i>	<i>nox, noctis</i>
<i>dire</i>	<i>dire</i>	<i>decir</i>	<i>dizer</i>	<i>dicere</i>

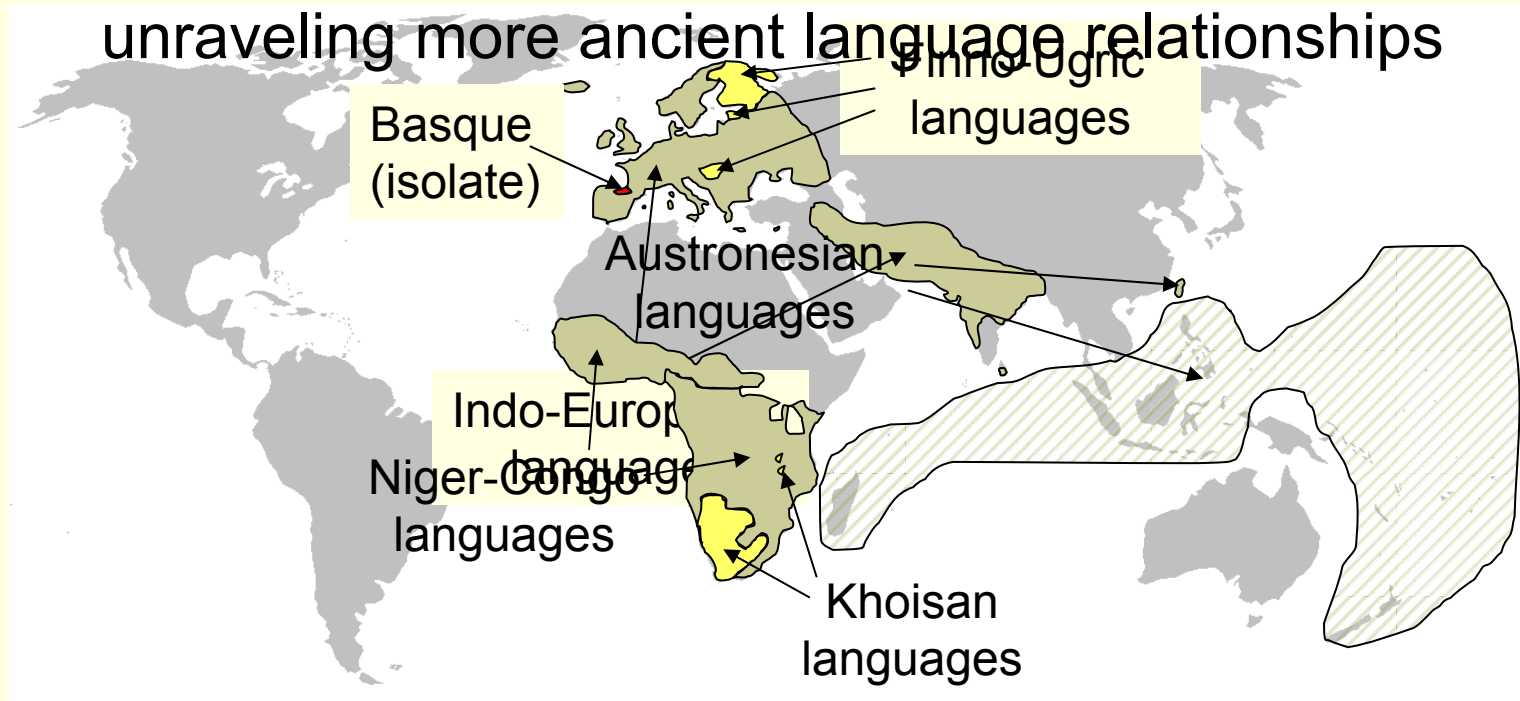
First step:

300-400 language families

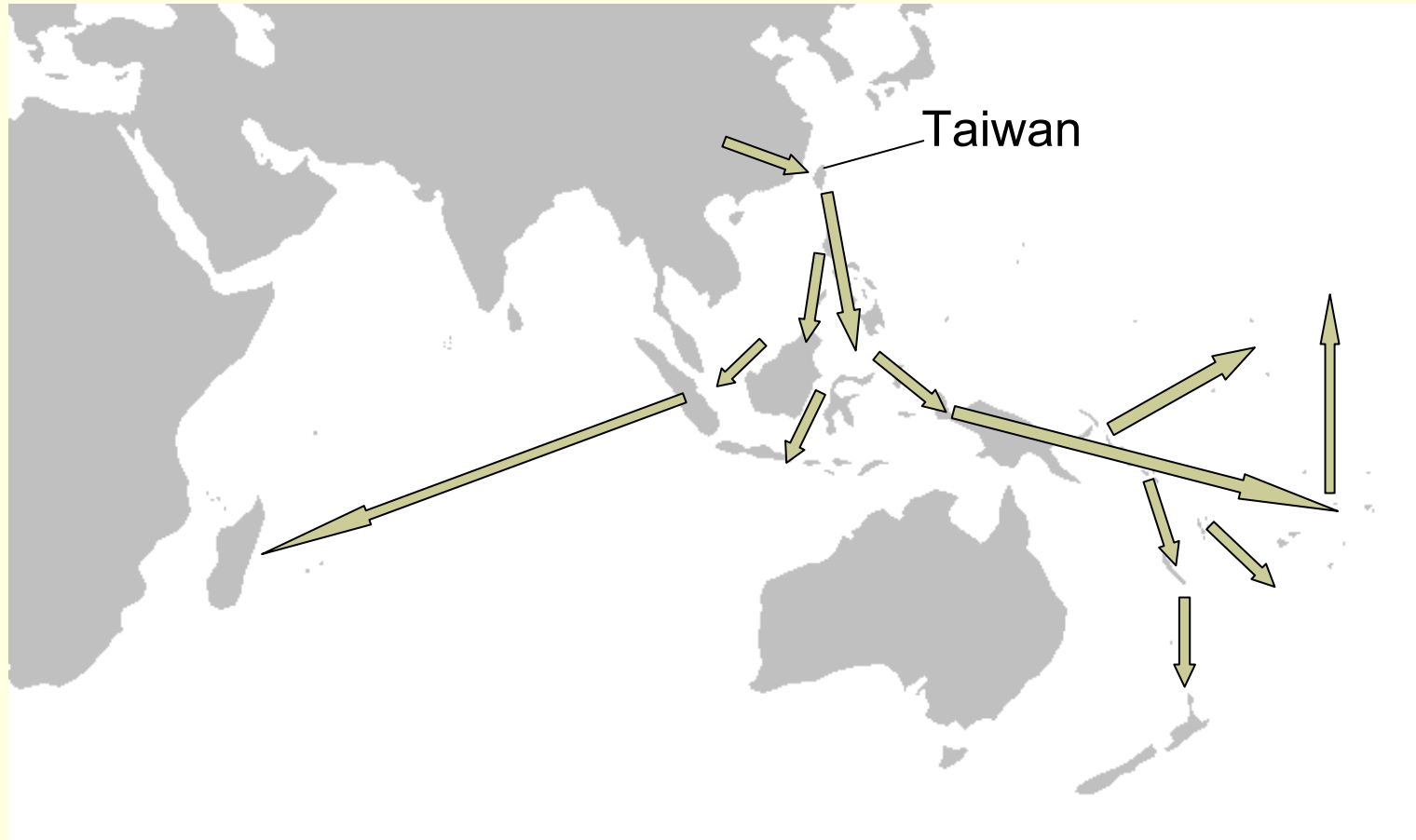


Second step:

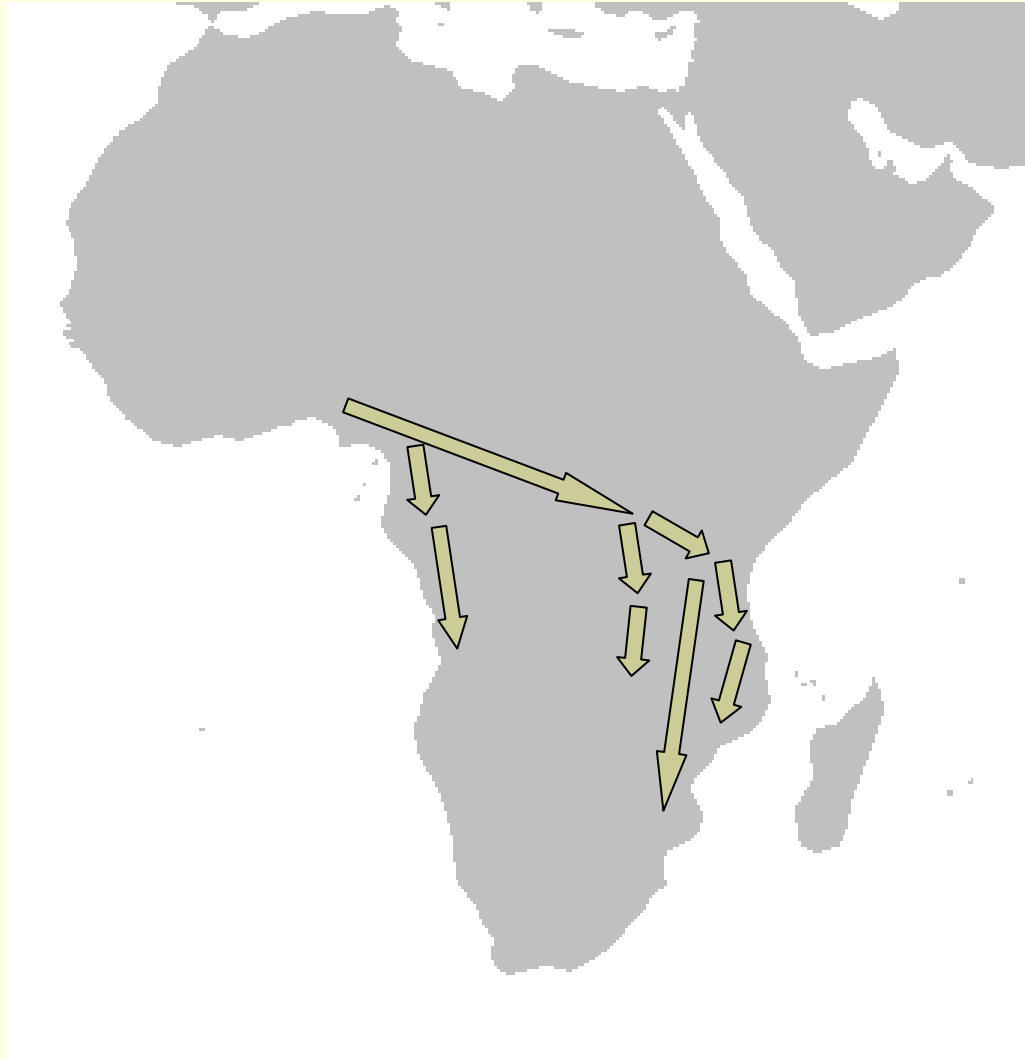
Grouping language families



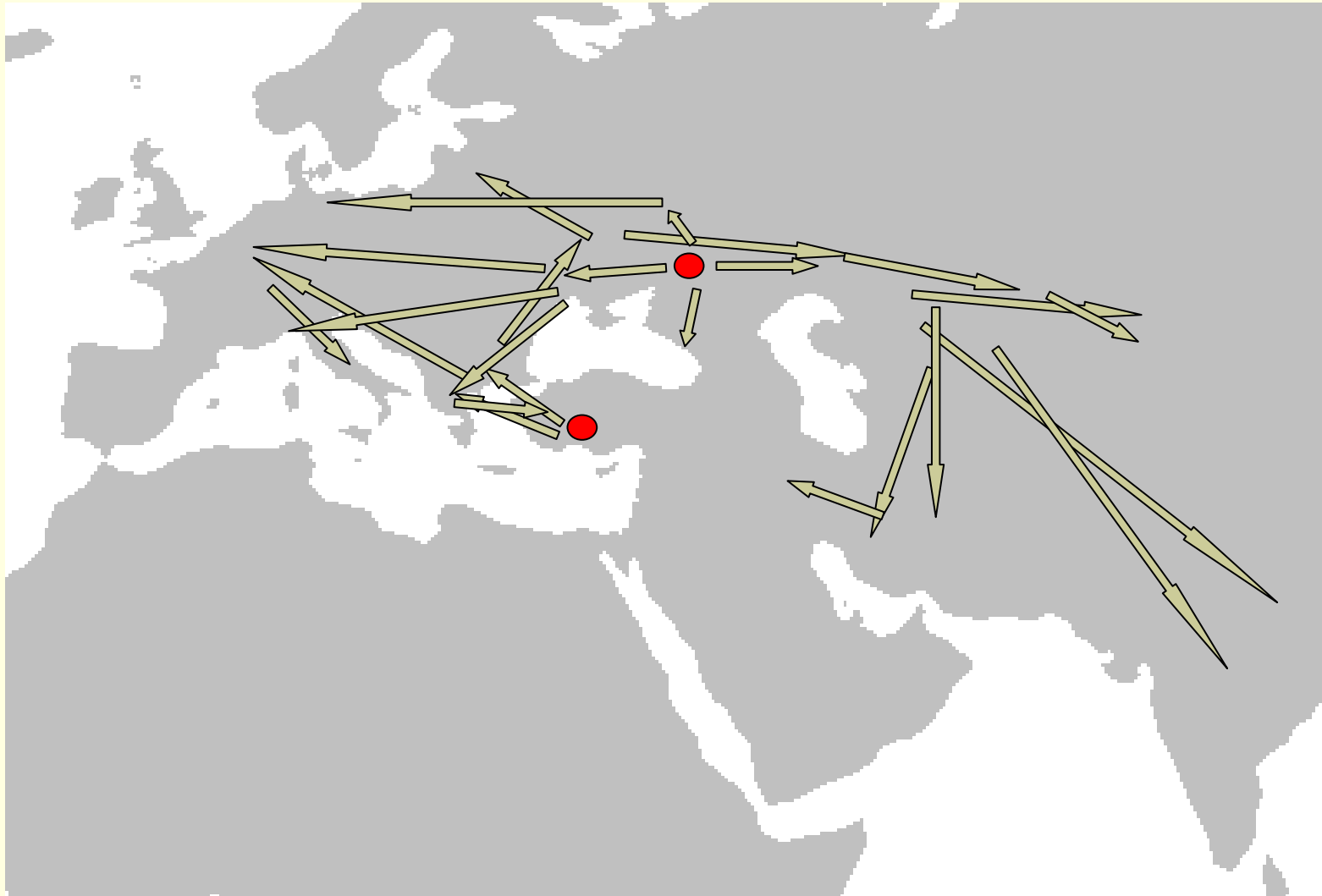
Austronesian migrations



Bantu migrations



Indo-European migrations



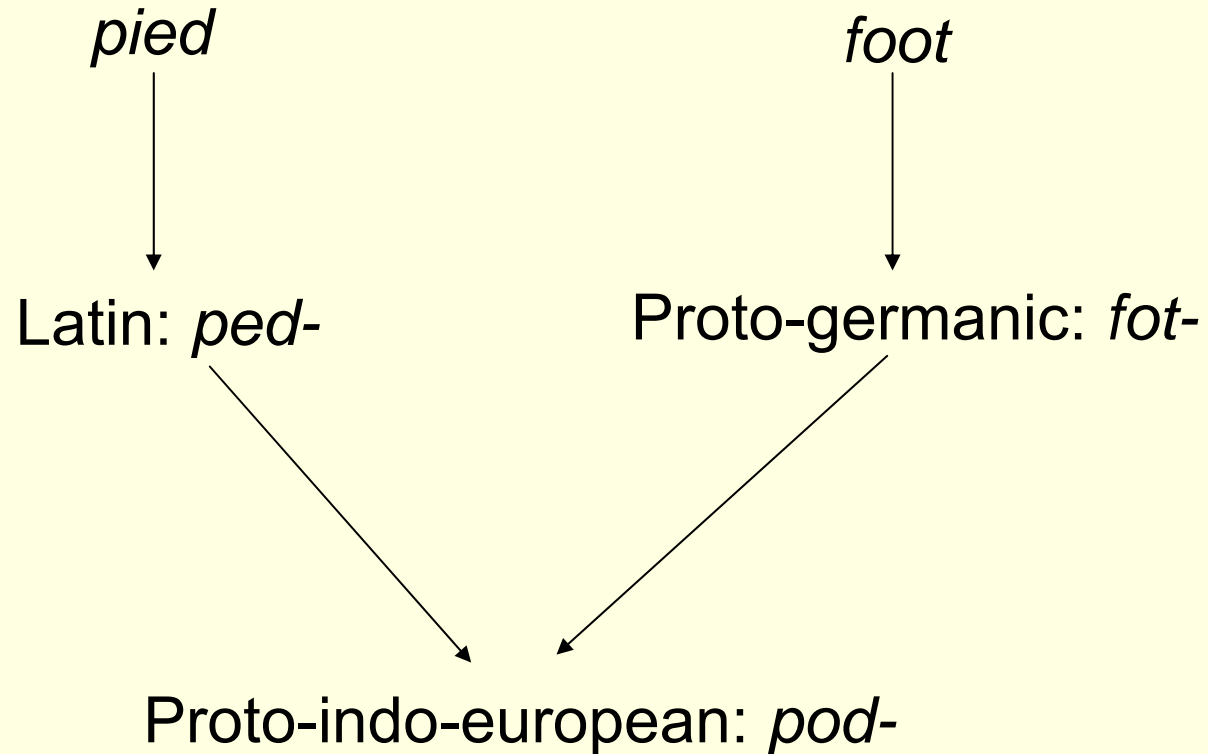
Comparative methods

Looking for cognates

French	English
<i>stop</i>	<i>stop</i>
<i>famille</i>	<i>family</i>
<i>main</i>	<i>hand</i>
<i>pied</i>	<i>foot</i>

Comparative methods

Reconstructing the root in the proto-language



Comparative methods

Discovering sound laws from regular correspondence

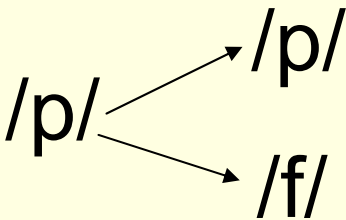
Example : Latin /p/ ↔ Germanic /f/

Latin	Old English
<i>pater</i>	<i>faeder</i>
<i>primus</i>	<i>fyrst</i>
<i>piscis</i>	<i>fisks</i>
<i>ped-</i>	<i>fot</i>

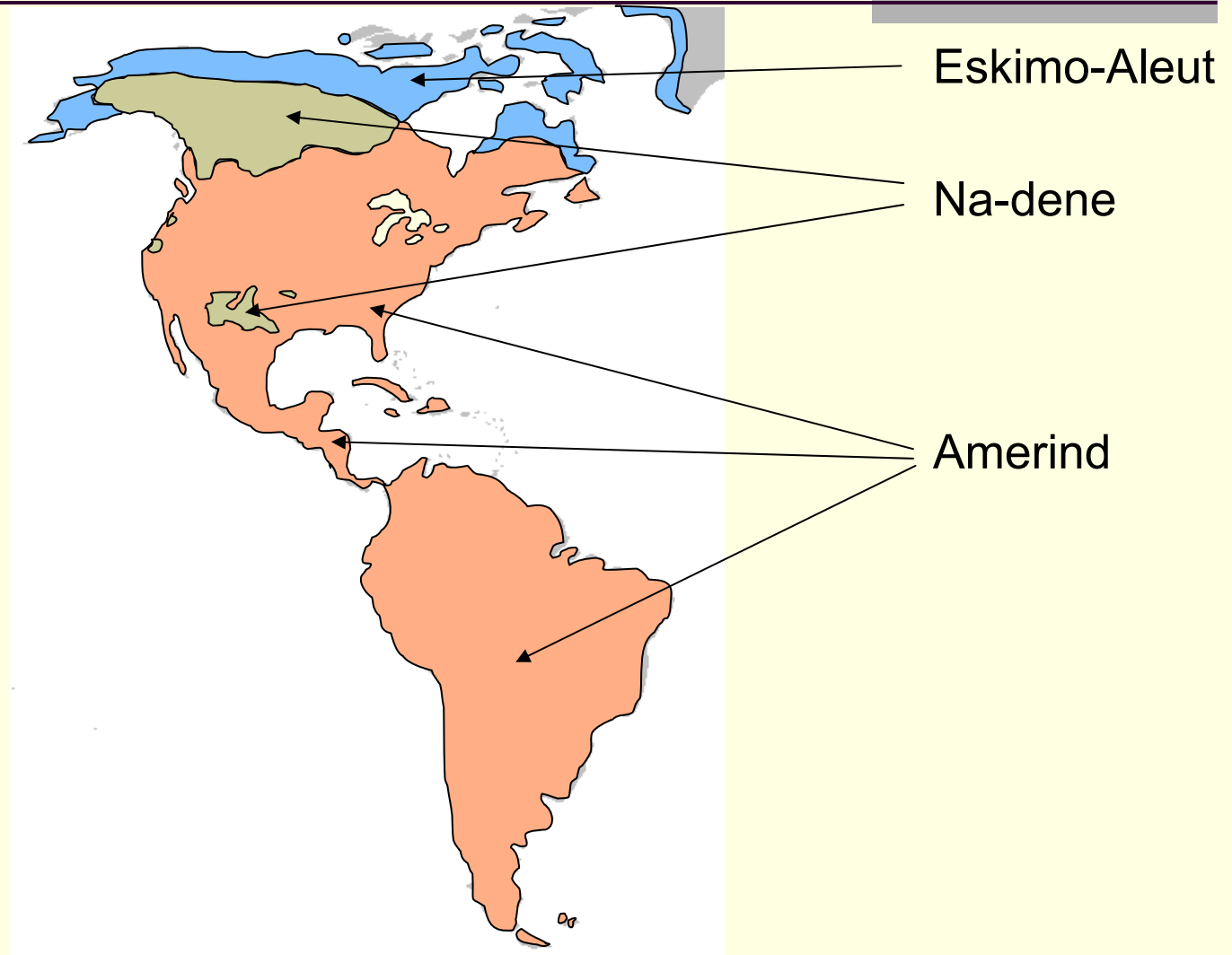
Comparative methods

Formulating the laws of phonetic changes

Latin	Greek	Persian	Sanskrit	Old English
<i>pater</i>	<i>pater</i>	<i>pedar</i>	<i>pitar</i>	<i>faeder</i>
<i>ped-</i>	<i>podī</i>	<i>pa</i>	<i>pada</i>	<i>fot</i>

Proto-Indo-european /p/  Latin, Greek, Persian, etc.
Germanic

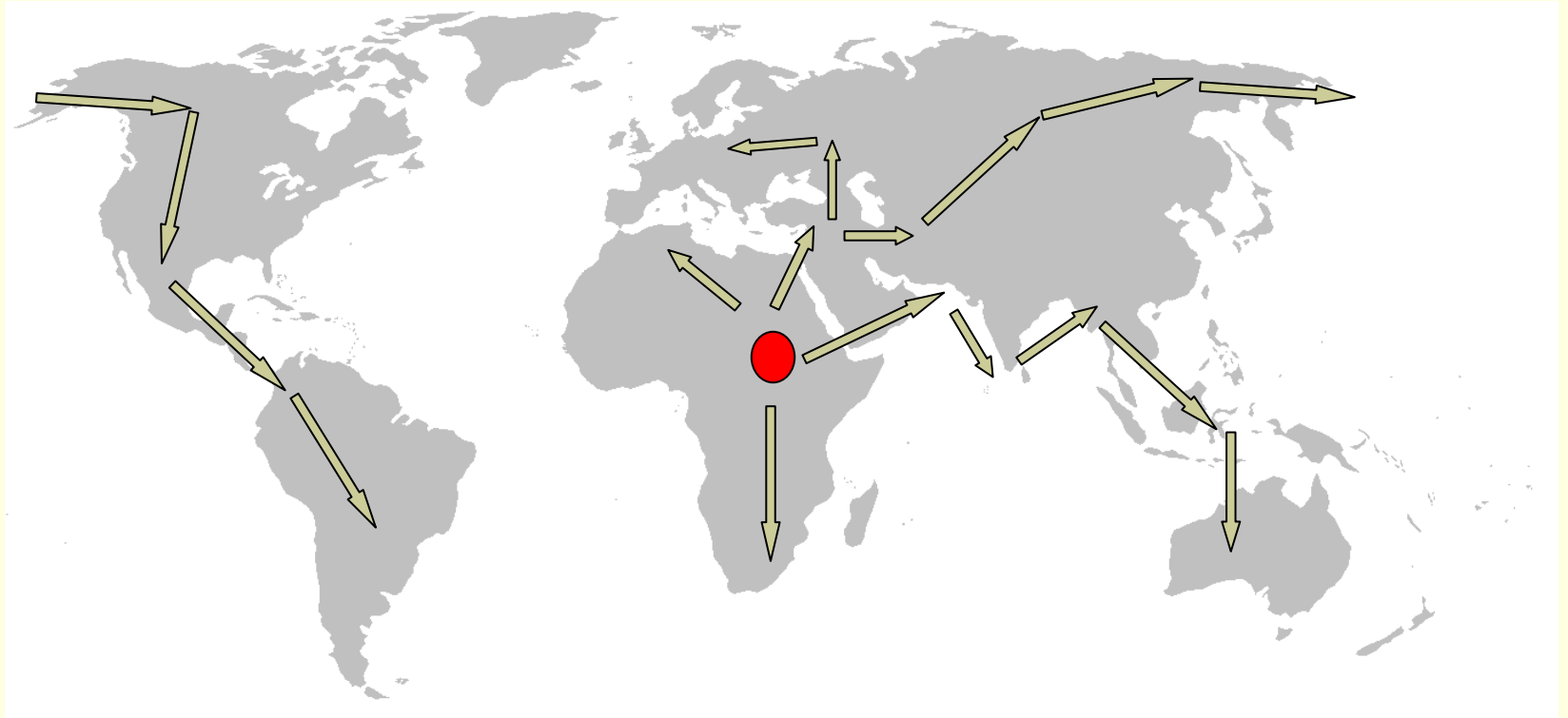
Greenberg's Amerind hypothesis



Ruhlen's Proto-World ("mother tongue")

	AQ'WA	water	Proto-World
AQ'WA	water		
	KUAN	dog	
<i>aqua</i>	water		Latin
	KUNA	woman	
<i>k"á</i>	drink		!Kung (Khoisan)
	MANA	to stay	
<i>yoka</i>	river		Proto-Uralic
	MANO	man	
<i>Ku</i>	fluid, spill		Proto-Sino-Tibetan
	MENA	to think	
<i>yaku</i>	lake		Quechua
	PAL	two	
<i>oqwa</i>	rain		Lezgi (Northeast Caucasian)
	TIK	one	

Human dispersal from Africa



Human language specific features

- syntactic structures
- aspectuo-temporal markers
- modal markers
- polysemy
- ...