

SISSA, July 7th 2016

# *Language, languages, genes and human diversity*

Giuseppe Longobardi



UNIVERSITY *of York*

with the *Langelin* project team



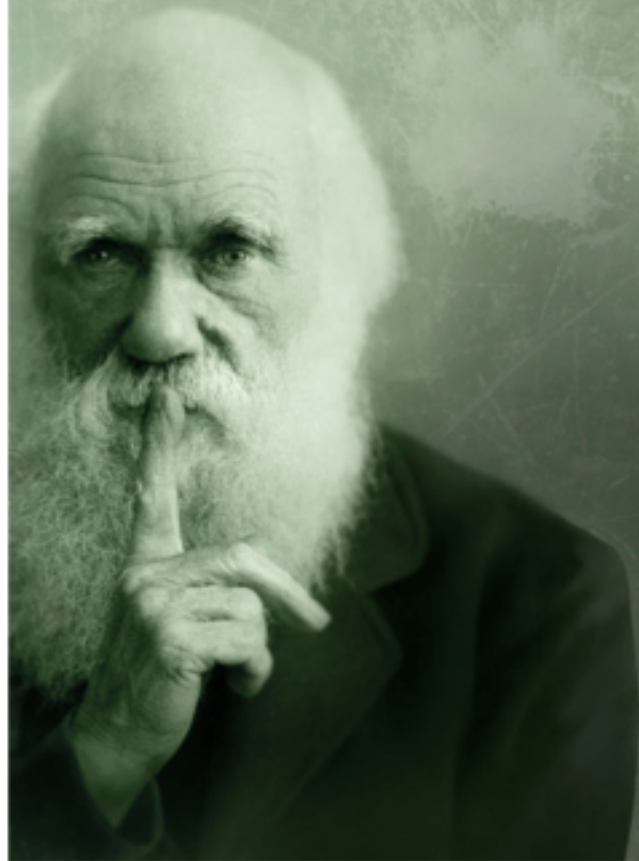
**LANGELIN - LANGUAGES GENES  
LINEAGES**

**ERC ADVANCED GRANT N. 295733  
MEETING DARWIN'S LAST CHALLENGE**



Funded by the European Union

## Darwin's last challenge (*The origin of the species*, ch. 14)



*If we possessed a perfect pedigree of mankind,  
a genealogical arrangement of the races of man,  
we would afford*

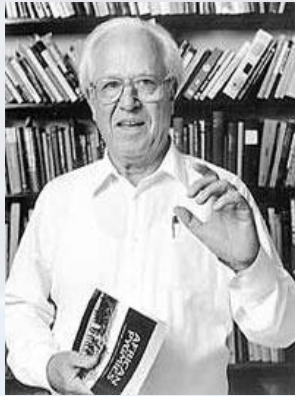
**the best classification of the various languages  
now spoken throughout the world;**

*and if all extinct languages,  
and all intermediate and slowly changing dialects,  
were to be included,*

*such an arrangement would be  
**the only possible one***

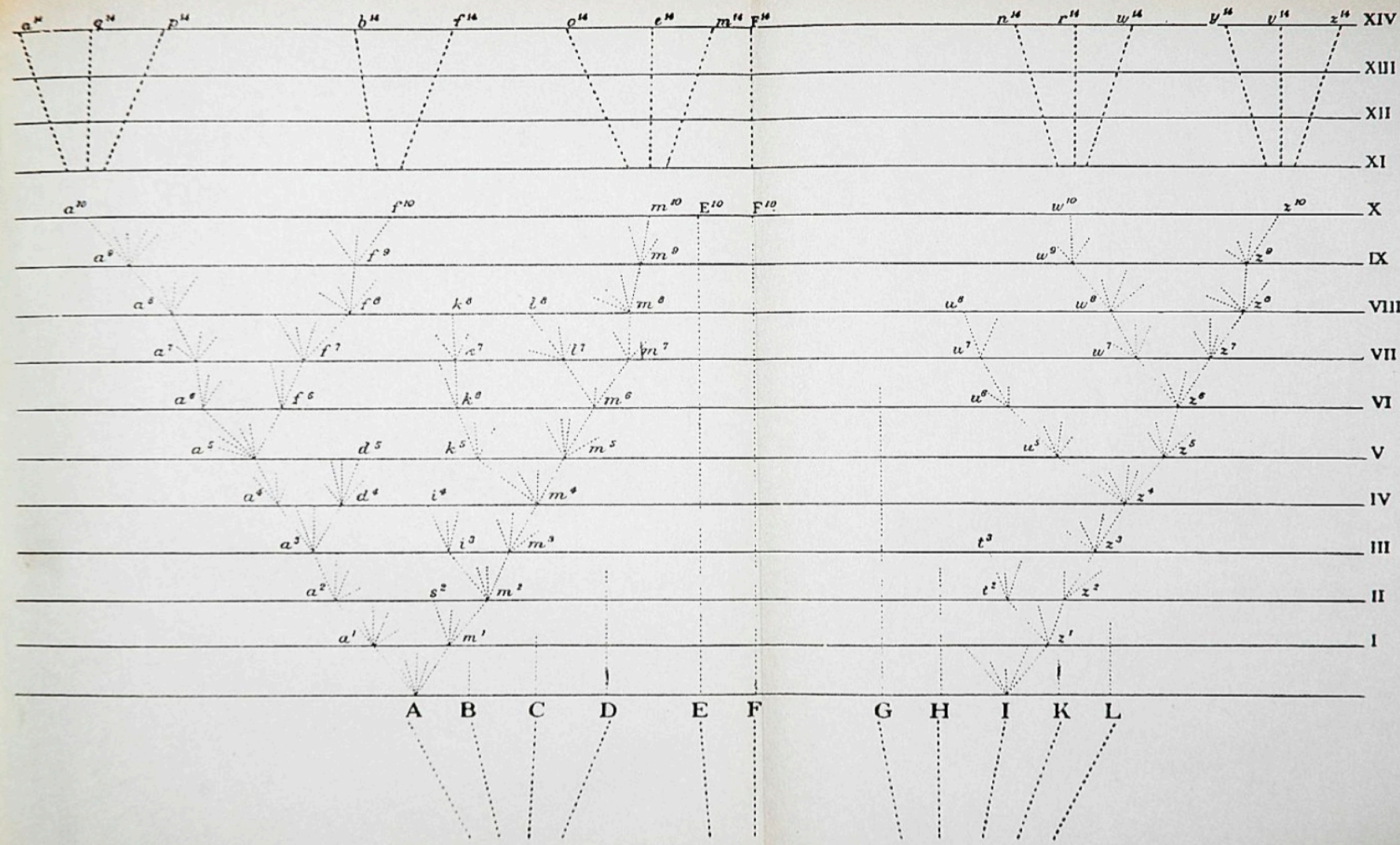


Since Darwin (1859), research in human biology has tried to address empirically the parallels between genetic and linguistic diversification: Cavalli Sforza et al. (1988), Sokal (1988)



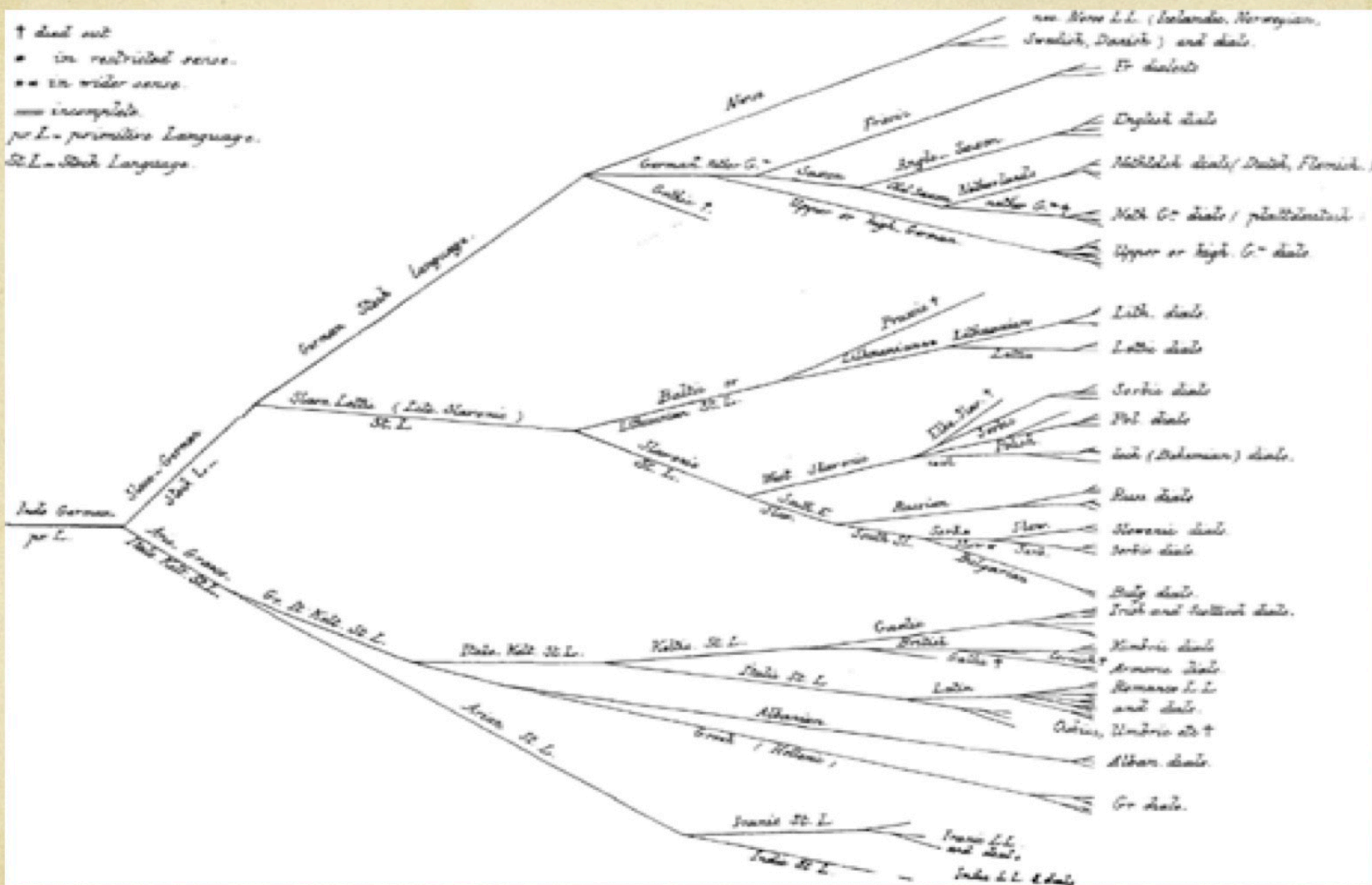
A positive answer would allow researchers to support (pre-)historical hypotheses using evidence coming from **two different domains**







† died out  
 \* in restricted sense.  
 \*\* in wider sense.  
 — incomplete.  
 p.L. = primitive Language.  
 S.L. = Sph. Language.



# Lexical cognates

Distances for cognate words (lexical etymologies)  
are:

time shallow

and

hardly quantifiable

because of

Vagueness and instability of meaning

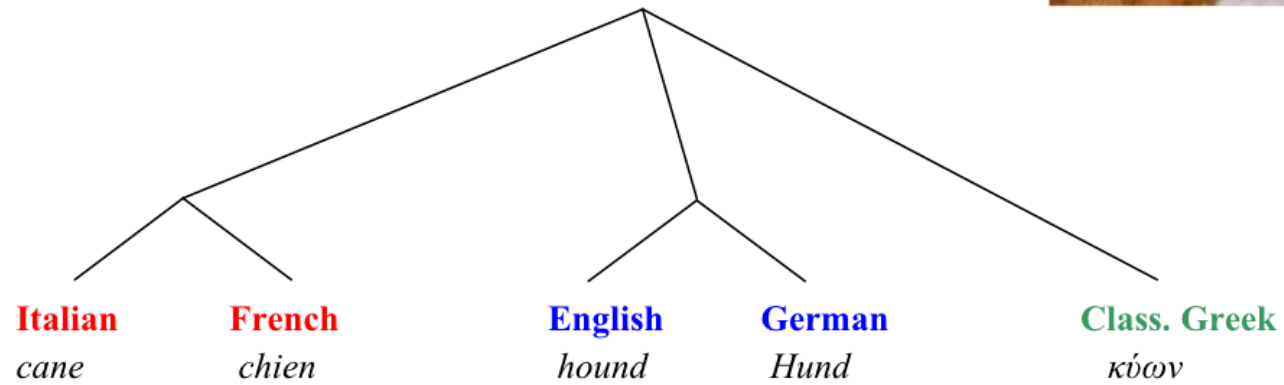
Complexity of word structure also in form



# **Vagueness** of lexical *comparanda*

- ⇒ partial identity of *form*: *prendo* vs. *get*
- ⇒ (or *haemorrhoid* and *serpent*!)
- ⇒ partial identity of *meaning*: *Hund* vs. *hound/dog*
- ⇒ identity of *form*, not of *meaning*: *klein* vs. *clean*
- ⇒ similarity of *meaning shifts*, no (real) correspondence of form:  
*fegato* vs. *συκώτι*
- ⇒ difficulty of measuring relative distances: *(je) fonds*, *(ich)*  
*giesse*, *juhomi*

Meaning 'DOG':



Abkhaz = *ala*

Ainu = *seta*

Algonquian = *athemwa*

Amharic = *wäshsha*

Apache = *góshé*

Arabic = *kalb*

Aragonian = *gos*

Assamese = *kukur*


Asturian = *perru*

Atayal = *huzil*

Aymara = *anu*




Atkinson (2011)





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# Phonemic Diversity Supports a Serial Founder Effect Model of Language Expansion from Africa

**Quentin D. Atkinson<sup>1,2,\*</sup>**

+ Author Affiliations

\*E-mail: q.atkinson@auckland.ac.nz

*Science* 15 Apr 2011:  
Vol. 332, Issue 6027, pp. 346-349  
DOI: 10.1126/science.1199295



Atkinson (2011) shows that «the number of phonemes used in a global sample of 504 languages [...] fits a serial founder–effect model of expansion from an inferred origin in Africa»

Data refer to the size of vowel inventories, consonant inventories, and tone inventories taken from WALS (Dryer and Haspelmath 2013)



# Languages are represented through three **equally weighted** multi-state characters

## Consonant Inventory

- 1 = Small (6-14)
- 2 = Moderately Small (15-18)
- 3 = Average (19-25)
- 4 = Moderately Large (26-33)
- 5 = Large (33+)

## Tone Inventory

- 1 = No Tones
- 2 = Simple Tone system
- 3 = Complex Tone system

## Vowel Inventory

- 1 = Small (2-4)
- 2 = Average (5-6)
- 3 = Large (7-14)

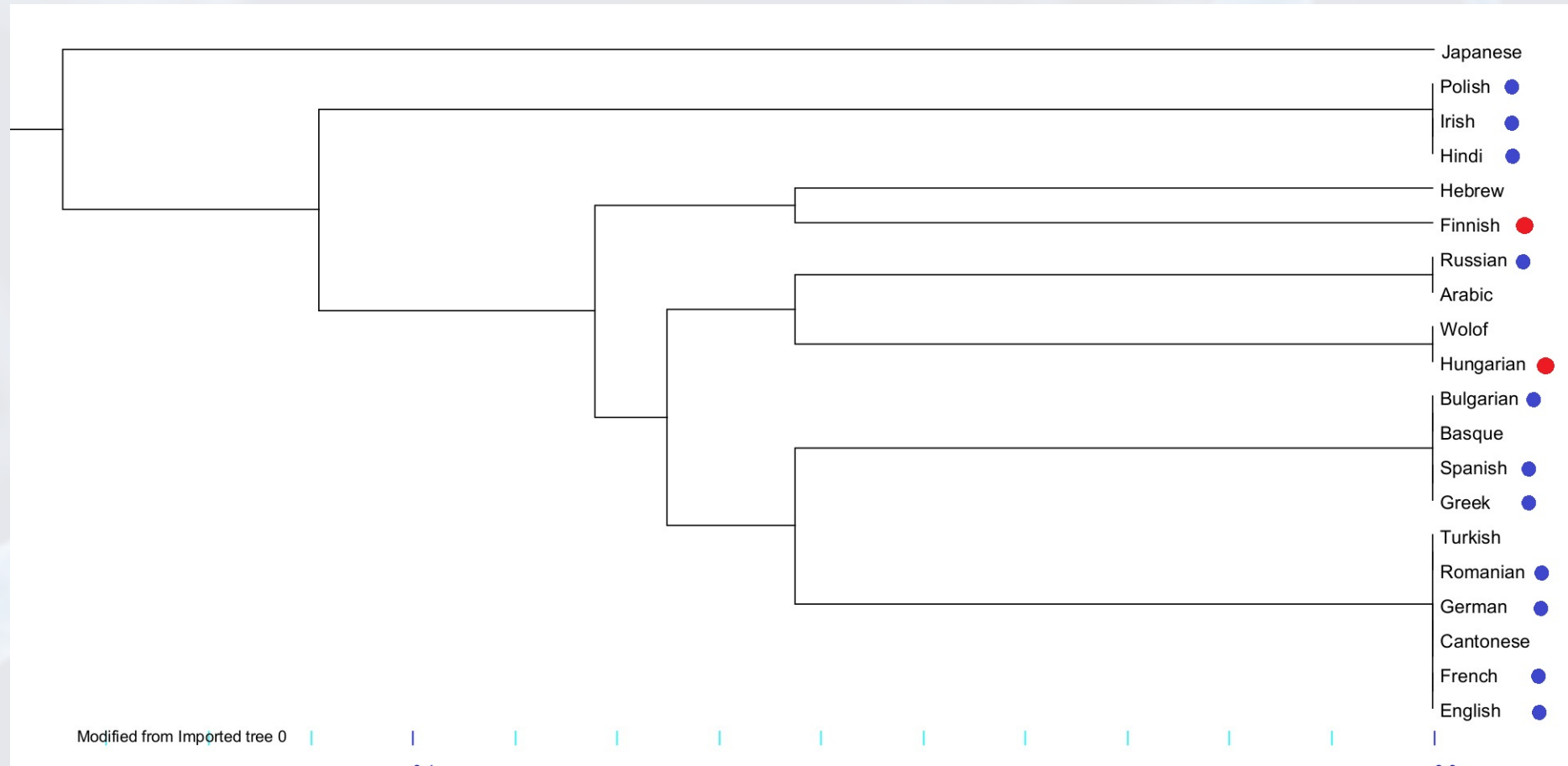


Which kind of information do phonemic inventories provide about language history?

**Empirical Test:** Eurasia (different language families)



We can compute phylogenetic trees to check if phonemic inventories contain a historical signal

Distance-based trees  
KITSCH (Phylip package)  
Felsenstein (2004)



Tree calculated from the data in WALS  
employed by Atkinson (2011)

# Creanza et al. (2015)



**A comparison of worldwide phonemic and genetic variation in human populations**

Nicole Creanza<sup>a</sup>, Merritt Ruhlen<sup>b</sup>, Trevor J. Pemberton<sup>c</sup>, Noah A. Rosenberg<sup>a</sup>, Marcus W. Feldman<sup>a,1</sup>, and Sohini Ramachandran<sup>d,e,1</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Biology and <sup>b</sup>Department of Anthropology, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305; <sup>c</sup>Department of Biochemistry and Medical Genetics, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R3E 0J9; and <sup>d</sup>Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and <sup>e</sup>Center for Computational Molecular Biology, Brown University, Providence, RI 02912

This contribution is part of the special series of Inaugural Articles by members of the National Academy of Sciences elected in 2013.

Contributed by Marcus W. Feldman, December 17, 2014 (sent for review July 16, 2014; reviewed by Quentin D. Atkinson and Keith Hunley)

**Worldwide patterns of genetic variation are driven by human demographic history. Here, we test whether this demographic history has left similar signatures on phonemes—sound units that distinguish meaning between words in languages—to those it has left on genes. We analyze, jointly and in parallel, phoneme inventories from 2,082 worldwide languages and microsatellite polymorphisms from 246 worldwide populations. On a global scale, both**

compares the signatures of human demographic history in microsatellite polymorphisms from 246 worldwide populations (20) and complete sets of phonemes (phoneme inventories) for 2,082 languages; these are the largest available datasets of both genotyped populations and phonemes, the smallest units of sound that can distinguish meaning between words. Languages do not hold information about deep ancestry as genes do, and phoneme evolution is complex; phonemes can be transmitted



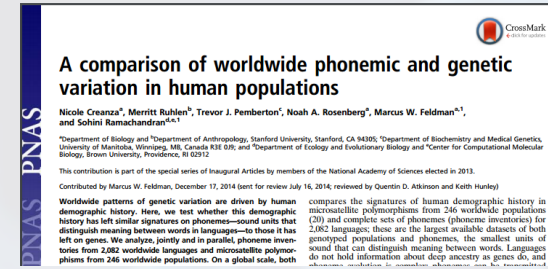
Genes are represented through microsatellite polymorphisms

Languages are represented through binary characters, which code for the absence/presence of phonemes:

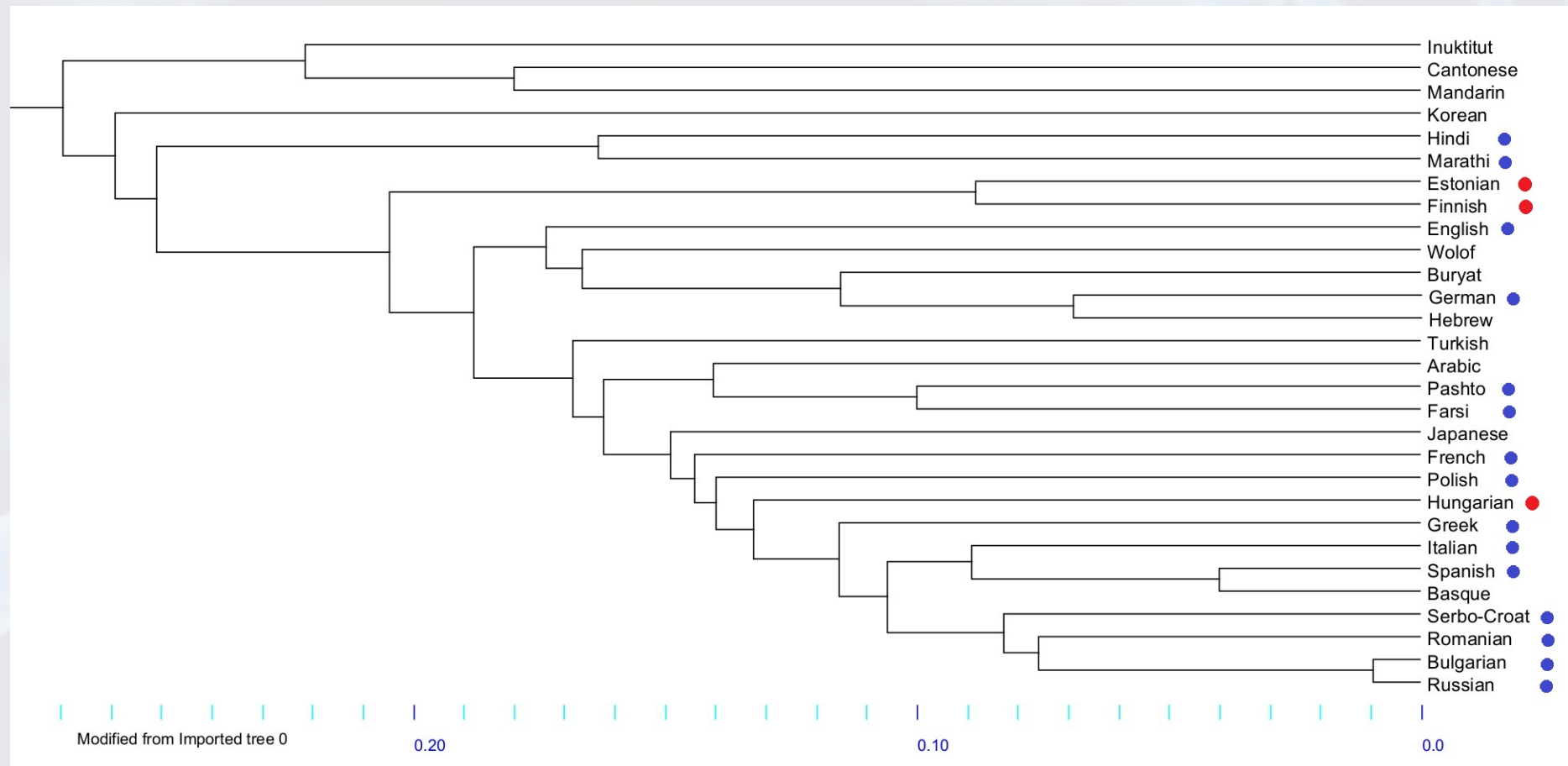
	English	French	Japanese
/x/	1	0	0
/h/	1	0	1
/p/	0	1	1

The major conclusions of the paper are:

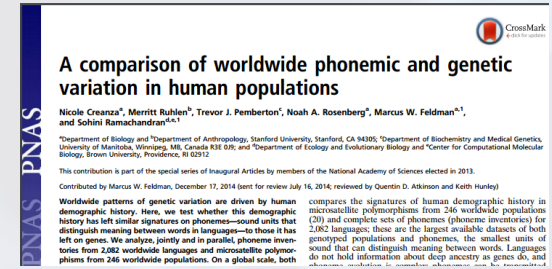
- 1) No serial founder-effect out of Africa
- 2) Correlation between genes and languages is strong worldwide, but it is entirely predictable from geography (Partial Mantel Test:  $R = 0.05$ ,  $p = 0.16-0.17$ )
- 3) Geographical isolation leads to an increase in phonemic inventory sizes (vs. genetic drift)
- 4) The correlation between geography and phonemic distances ignores family boundaries (and saturates after 10,000 km)



Distance-based trees  
KITSCH (Phylip package)  
Felsenstein (2004)



Tree calculated from a sample of the  
Ruhlen phonemic database



“This suggests that phoneme inventories are affected by recent population processes and thus carry little information about the distant past”

(Creanza et al. 2015:1269)



## Language as an epiphenomenal (somewhat misleading) notion:

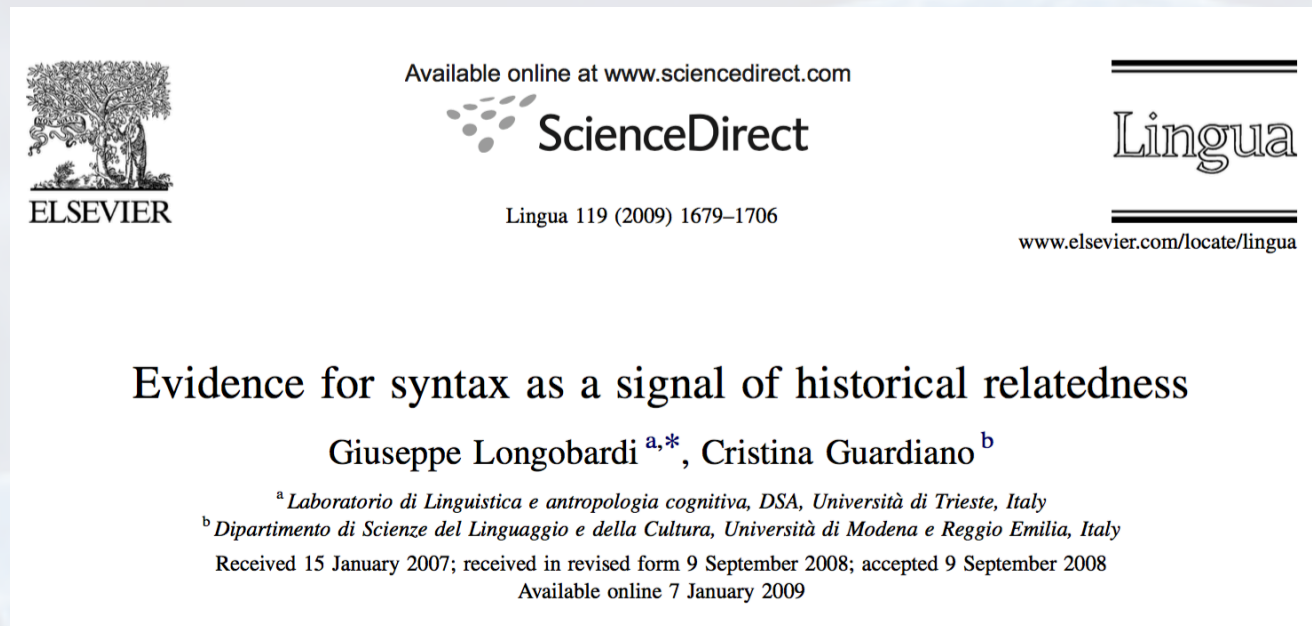
*Speech (vocalization)*

*Symbolic function (vocabulary)*

*Grammar (syntax...)*

Cognitive sciences, primatology: *they may have **co-evolved** and may historically **co-vary**, but this an empirical hypothesis*

Is there any other linguistic domain that can be used to study historical relationships at a global scale?



Guardiano and Longobardi (2005) and Longobardi and Guardiano (2009) propose to look at generative **Syntax (PCM)**

# Parametric Comparison Method

Longobardi (2003),  
Guardiano and  
Longobardi (2005),  
Longobardi and  
Guardiano (2009),  
Longobardi, Guardiano,  
et al. (2013)

## Parameter values

may appropriately act as  
**comparanda** for historical  
reconstruction

It becomes possible:

- ◆ to **precisely calculate** the syntactic distance between any two languages
- ◆ to **assess the probabilistic value** of such distances

# The syntax of the Nominal Domain (DP): 75 binary parameters (Guardiano and Longobardi 2016)

***Crosslinguistic morphosyntactic difference > parameter***

**if and only if it entails**

- (A) the presence of **obligatory formal expression** for a semantic or morphological distinction (*grammaticalisation*, i.e. the obligatory presence of a feature in the computation to obtain the relevant interpretation and its coupling with an uninterpretable counterpart)
- (B) the **variable form of a category** depending on the syntactic context (selection and feature agreement)
- (C) the **position of a category** (movement,  $\pm$ overt attraction triggered by grammaticalised features)
- (D) The **availability** in the lexicon of certain functional categories (e.g. functional genitive projections)



# Crossparametric Implications

**Languages are encoded as lists of binary parameters (+,-)**

Grammaticalized Person (FGP) and Strong Person (NSD)

	English	French	Chinese
FGP: gramm. person	+	+	-
NSD: strong person	-	+	?

# Crossparametric Implications

**Languages are encoded as lists of binary parameters (+,-)**

Grammaticalized Person (FGP) and Strong Person (NSD)

	<i>Conditions</i>	English	French	Chinese
<b>FGP</b> : gramm. person		+	+	-
NSD: strong person	<b>(+FGP)</b>	-	+	<b>0</b>

# TableA

It	-+---00+++++---0---+0--0000+++0+0+---+000-+--0--0++---00+---
Sp	++---00+++++---0---+0+++-----+000-+--0--0++---00+++
Fr	++---00+-+---+0--0---+00-+-0+0+++0+0+---+000-+--0--0++---00+---
Ptg	++---00+++++---0---+0+-0000+++0+0+---+000-+--0--0++---00??-?
Rm	++---00+++++---+0---+00+-+-----+000-+--0--0---+0--00--0-
Grk	++---00+++++---0---+0-+-+-----+0+---0--0-++0--0--0+
E	++---00+++++---0---+00-0000+--0+0-----+---0---+0--0-0-0-
D	++---00+++++---0---+00-0000++-++0-----0+--0---+---+00+0-
Da	++---00+++++---+---+00-0000+++++0-----0+--0---+0--0-0-0-
Ice	++---00+++++---+---+00-0000+++++0-----0+--0---+0--0+0-0-
Nor	++---00+++++---+---+00-0000+++++0-----0+--0---+0--0-0-0-
Blg	++---00+++++---+0---+00-0000+++0+0-----0---0--0++---0+--?-
SC	++---00+-+---00-0000-+-0000++0+++0+0-----0+--0---+---+00+0-
Slo	++---00+-+---00-0000-+-0000++0+++0+0-----0---0---+---+00+0-
Po	++---00+-+---00-0000-+-0000++0+++0+0-----+0---0---+---+00+0-
Rus	++---00+-+---00-0000-+-0000++0+++0+0-----+0---0---+---+00+0-
Ir	++---00+++++---0---+00+-0+---+0+-----+0000-0--0---+0--00+0-
Wel	++---00+++++---0---+00+-0+---+0+-----+0000-0--0---+0--00+0-
Ma	++---00+-+---00-0000-++0-00++0+++0-+-+-----00--0---+00--0+0-0-
Hi	++---00+-+---00-0000-++0-00++0+++0-+-+-----00--0---+00--0+0-0-
Pas	++---00+-+---00-0000---0000++0+--0-+-+-----0+--0---+00--0+0-0-
Man	-0---++0000000000000000+0-0+++0-+000-----00-00---+00+00-0-0-
Can	-0---++0000000000000000+0-0+++0-+000-----00-00---+00+00-0-0-
Ar	++---00+++++---0+++0-0+-+---+0+0+++000000+0--0+-0+++0--00--0-
Heb	++---00+++++---0---+0-+-0+++++0+0-++000000+0+-0+-0+++0--00--0-
Hu	++---00---+---+---0---+0---+00+-+0+0-----0+-+00000-0--0+0000
Est	++---00---+---00+0000---0000++0+++0+0-----00--0+000-0---+0-0-
Fin	++---00---+---00+0000---0000++0+++0+0-----0+-+00000-0--0+0000
Tur	++---00---+---00-0000---+0-00++0+--0-----00++0000000--0+0000
Bur	++---00---+---00-0000---+0-00++0+--0-----00+-0---+00--0+-+0+
cB	++---00-+00-0+0-00000-00+-0000+0+0---+---000000+--0--0+-00--000-0-
wB	++---00++00-0+0+00000-00+-0-0+0+0---+---000000+--0--0+-00--000-0-
Wo	++---00++00+-0+-0+00+0-+-0000-0+0+000--00000-0--0---+0+0+0?-0+

# Distances

How to choose a distance measure?

Since we have a lot of '0' values, we cannot rely on a simple Hamming distance.

We can use a **Jaccard-Tanimoto distance** between “comparable” values:

$$\delta(A,B) = d(A,B) / [d(A,B) + i(A,B)]$$

= differences / identities + differences

E.g.: Italian-English: (35 id., 6 diff.)  $\delta = 6 / 41 = 0.146$



# Macro- and micro-classification

## ***Indo-European:***

Longobardi, G., Guardiano, C., Silvestri, G., Boattini, A., & Ceolin, A. (2013). Toward a syntactic phylogeny of modern Indo-European languages. *Journal of Historical Linguistics*, 3(1), 122-152.

## ***Greek and Romance micro-variation***

Guardiano, C., D. Michelioudakis, A. Ceolin, M. Irimia, G. Longobardi, N. Radkevic, G. Silvestri, A. Sitaridou (2015) South by SouthEast. A syntactic approach to Greek and Romance micro- variation. *L'Italia Dialettale*.

The classifications so obtained largely match the results of well-established and sophisticated methods

- extremely high correlation with distributions of etymological distances

Going beyond well-established families and beyond the historical depth of PIE, no other linguistic tools, e.g. etymology, can be used as benchmarks/standards of comparison.

- Do cross-family syntactic distances correlate with genetic distances? Is the correlation comparable to that of within-family distances?

# Genes and Languages in Europe (15 populations)

## Research Article

### Across language families: Genome diversity mirrors linguistic variation within Europe



Giuseppe Longobardi<sup>1,2</sup>, Silvia Ghirotto<sup>3</sup>,  
Cristina Guardiano<sup>4</sup>, Francesca Tassi<sup>3</sup>,  
Andrea Benazzo<sup>3</sup>, Andrea Ceolin<sup>1</sup>  
and Guido Barbujani<sup>3,\*</sup>

Article first published online: 8 JUN 2015

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## Issue

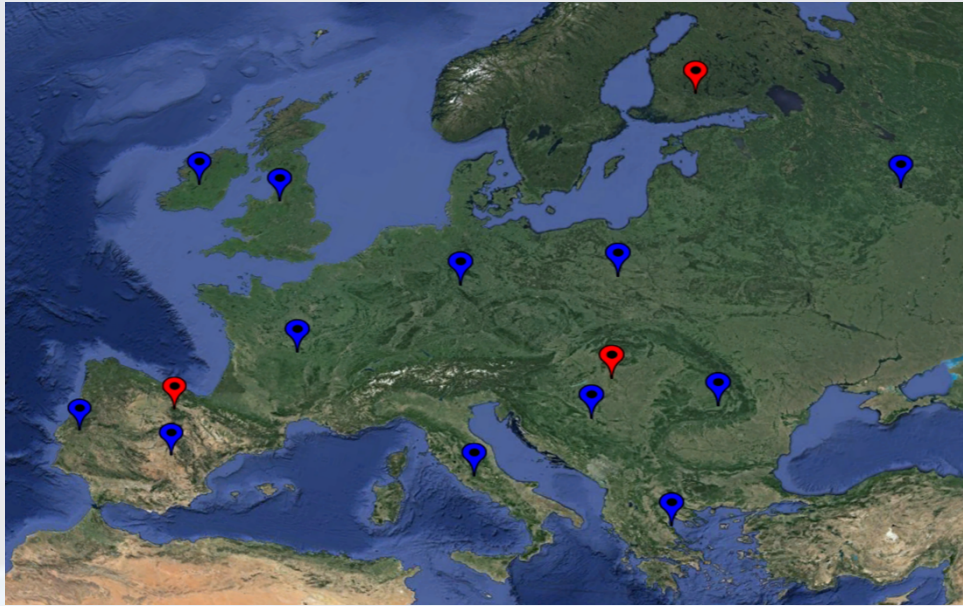


American Journal of Physical  
Anthropology

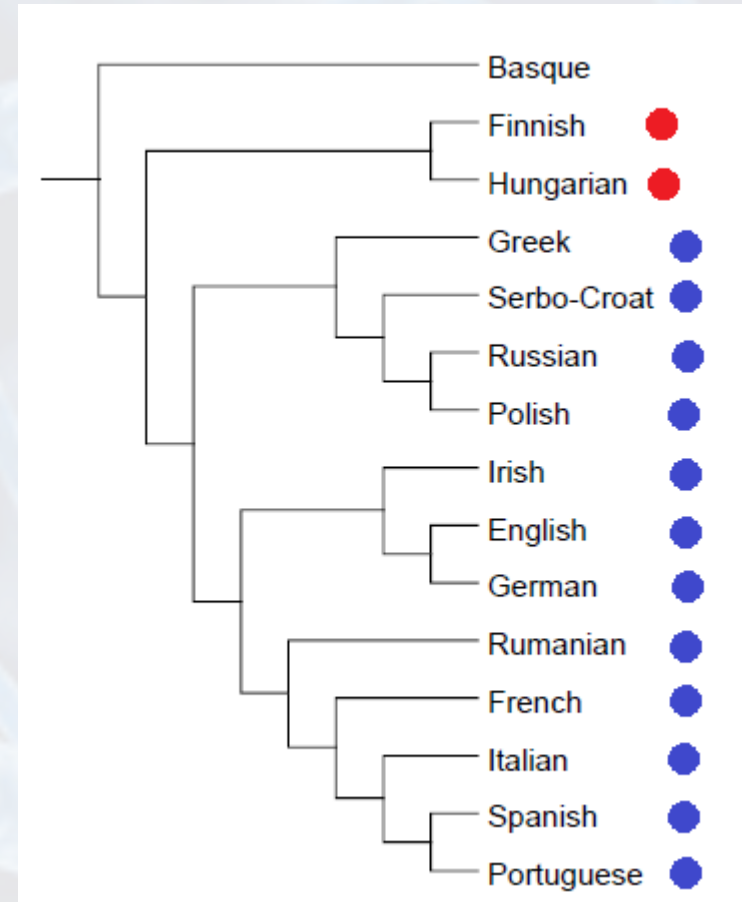
Volume 157, Issue 4, pages  
630–640, August 2015

12 IE populations and 3 non-IE populations (Basque, Hungarians, and Finns) are analyzed from the viewpoint of their syntactic, lexical genetic and geographic distances.

# Genes and Languages in Europe (15 populations)



Syntactic differences are distributed following historical patterns (contrary to the phonological data in Atkinson 2011 and Creanza 2015)



Tree from Longobardi et al. 2015



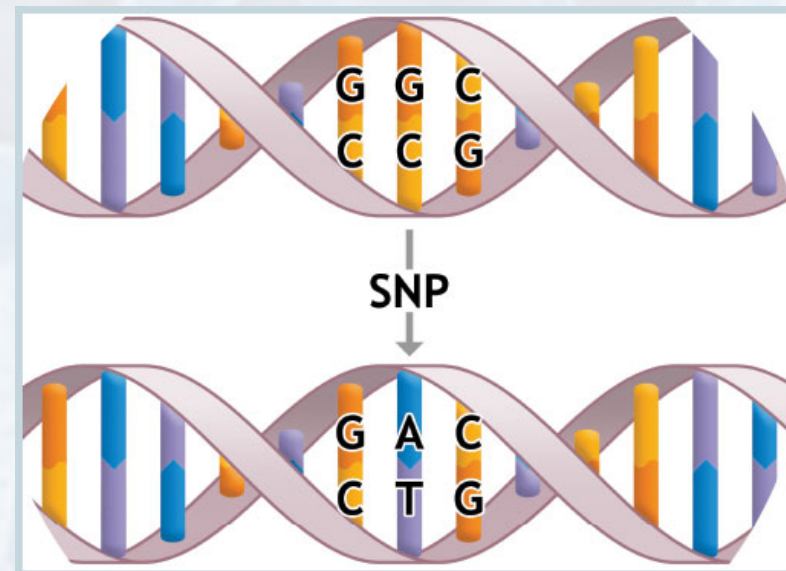
# Genetic Data

## ARTICLE

### The Population Reference Sample, POPRES: A Resource for Population, Disease, and Pharmacological Genetics Research

Matthew R. Nelson,<sup>1,\*</sup> Katarzyna Bryc,<sup>2</sup> Karen S. King,<sup>1</sup> Amit Indap,<sup>2</sup> Adam R. Boyko,<sup>2</sup>  
John Novembre,<sup>3,4</sup> Linda P. Briley,<sup>1</sup> Yuka Maruyama,<sup>1</sup> Dawn M. Waterworth,<sup>5</sup> Gérard Waeber,<sup>6</sup>  
Peter Vollenweider,<sup>6</sup> Jorge R. Oksenberg,<sup>7</sup> Stephen L. Hauser,<sup>7</sup> Heide A. Stirnadel,<sup>8</sup> Jaspal S. Kooner,<sup>9</sup>  
John C. Chambers,<sup>10</sup> Brendan Jones,<sup>1</sup> Vincent Mooser,<sup>5</sup> Carlos D. Bustamante,<sup>2</sup> Allen D. Roses,<sup>1</sup>  
Daniel K. Burns,<sup>1</sup> Margaret G. Ehm,<sup>1</sup> and Eric H. Lai<sup>1</sup>

5,886 subjects genotyped at 500,568 loci using the Affymetrix 500K single nucleotide polymorphism

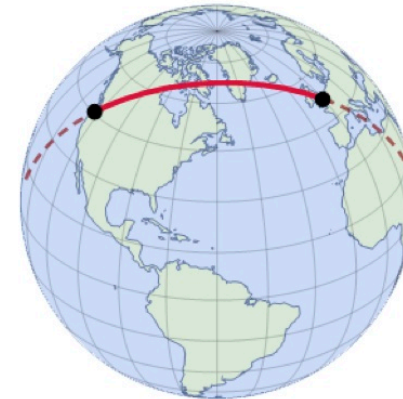




## Geographic distances

Great Circle Distances (the shortest distance between two points on the surface of a sphere)

	Basque	England	Finland	France	Germany	Greece	Hungary	Ireland	Italy	Poland	Portugal	Romania	Russia	Ser_Cro	Spain
Basque	0														
England	1187.32	0													
Finland	3598.33	3116.53	0												
France	703.27	930.48	2900.12	0											
Germany	1720.55	1441.89	1879.06	1021.06	0										
Greece	2842.08	3148.58	2070.09	2370.7	1808.53	0									
Hungary	2504.1	2515.3	1472.55	1894.75	1086.01	833.19	0								
Ireland	1301.76	652.09	3760.08	1386.19	2081.45	3726.67	3140.04	0							
Italy	1692.39	2083.82	2359.24	1234.44	1019.94	1155.1	948.34	2614.46	0						
Poland	2659.05	2423.91	1035.1	1986.03	1007.66	1309.18	514.5	3072.68	1325.44	0					
Portugal	693.88	1665.57	4292.19	1395.39	2414.33	3420.15	3164.26	1498.94	2299.75	3346.22	0				
Romania	3099.24	3151.21	1442.74	2518.15	1715.71	652.92	637.63	3777.63	1450.7	892.46	3738.87	0			
Russia	4669.32	4440.39	1463.4	4020.28	3053.41	2236.19	2181.1	5092.48	3103.42	2046.74	5340.66	1678.13	0		
Ser_Cro	2594.25	2759.21	1739.13	2048.29	1372.57	466.32	370.15	3361.71	924.19	868.04	3220.66	531.06	2204.72	0	
Spain	298.17	1473.97	3830.7	965.2	1962.6	2924.66	2666.35	1517.52	1798.83	2864.87	501.42	3237.63	4845.04	2719.27	0



## 12 IE populations + Basque, Hungarians, and Finns

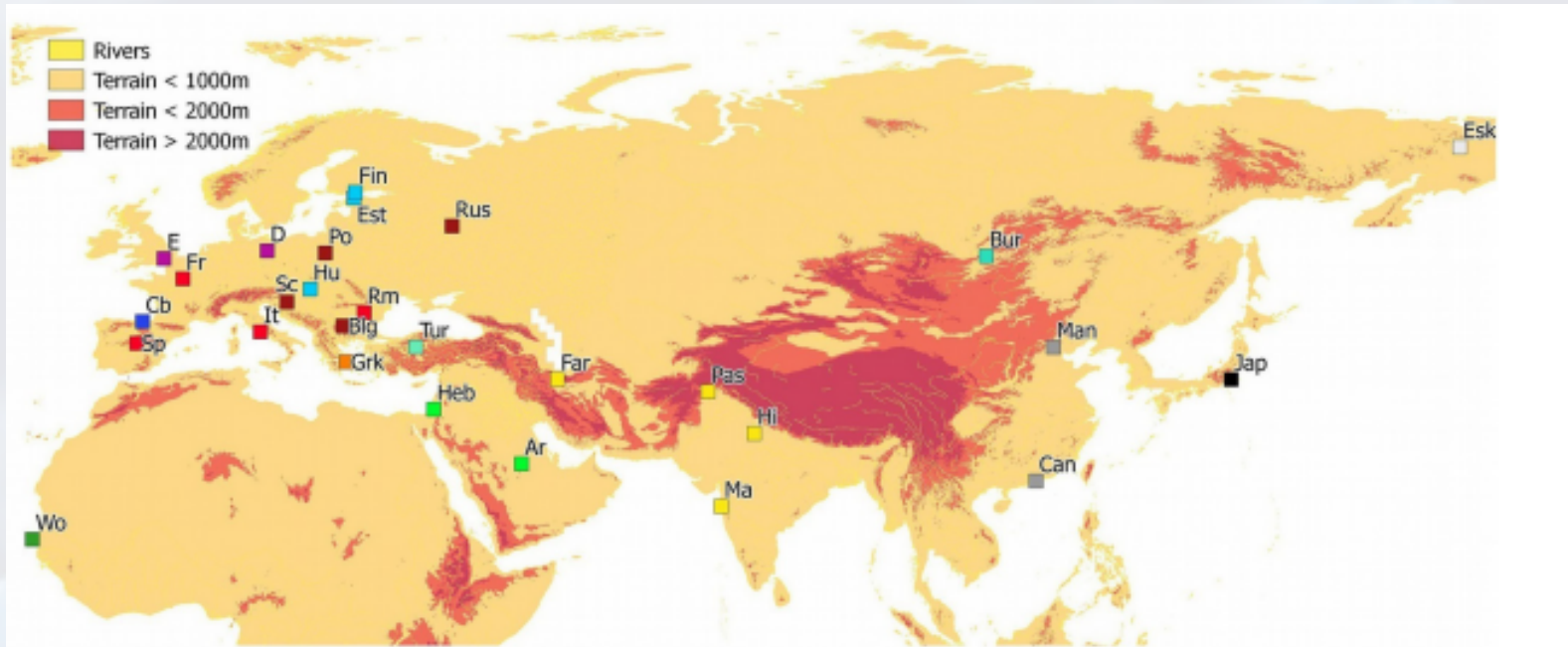
Distance matrices	<i>r</i>	<i>P</i>
$d_{\text{GEN}}$ $d_{\text{GEO}}$ Genetic - Geographic	0.299	0.030
$d_{\text{SYN}}$ $d_{\text{GEO}}$ Syntactic - Geographic	0.240	0.039
$d_{\text{SYN}}$ $d_{\text{GEN}}$ Syntactic - Genetic	0.599	0.001
$d_{\text{SYN}}$ $d_{\text{GEN}}$ ( $d_{\text{GEO}}$ ) Syntactic - Genetic (Geography held constant)	0.570	0.002

## An exception: Hungarian

“Careful analyses of 10th century ancient DNA in Hungary showed a predominance of European mitochondrial haplotypes in burials attributed to the lower classes, and a high incidence of Asian haplotypes in high-status individuals of that period (Tömöry et al. 2007), which points to the Asian immigrants as representing a social élite [...]

[...] when a Finno-Ugric language was introduced in Hungary, the genetic buildup of the population changed only in part, thus retaining similarities with its geographic neighbors, an example of the process called **élite dominance** by Renfrew (1992).”

## Next step: Eurasia (28 languages)



**Indo-European (15)**

**Finno-Ugric (3)**

**Altaic (2)**

**Semitic (2)**

**Sinitic (2)**

**Niger-Congo (1)**

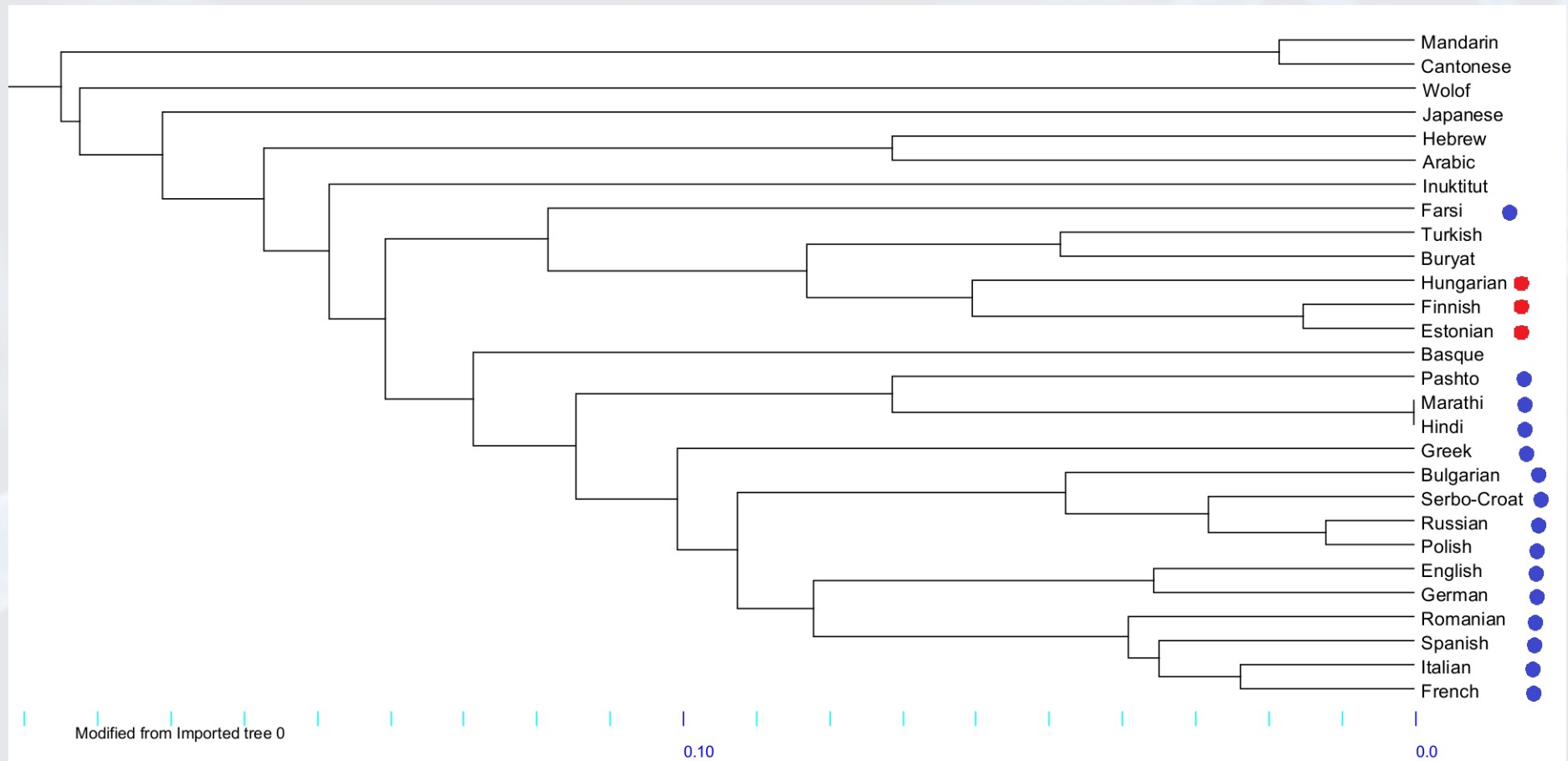
**Basque (1)**

**Japanese (1)**

**Inuit (1)**



Distance-based trees  
KITSCH (Phylip package)  
Felsenstein (2004)



## Correlations in Eurasia: 28 populations

Distance matrices	<i>r</i>	<i>P</i>
$d_{\text{GEN}}$ $d_{\text{GEO}}$ Genetic - Geographic	0.8319	0.0001
$d_{\text{SYN}}$ $d_{\text{GEO}}$ Syntactic - Geographic	0.4669	0.0001
$d_{\text{SYN}}$ $d_{\text{GEN}}$ Syntactic - Genetic	0.5286	0.0001
$d_{\text{SYN}}$ $d_{\text{GEN}}$ ( $d_{\text{GEO}}$ ) Syntactic - Genetic (Geography held constant)	0.2857	0.0036

## Syntactic and phonetic evidence in correlation with genes

	This study	Creanza et al. (PNAS 2015)	
	<i>Syntactic</i>	<i>Phonetic</i> (Ruhlen)	<i>Phonetic</i> (PHOIBLE)
$d_{\text{Gen}} - d_{\text{Lin}}$	<b>0.529</b> p=0.0001	<b>0.157</b> p=0.002	<b>0.240</b> p=0.0002
$d_{\text{Gen}} - d_{\text{Lin(Geo)}}$	<b>0.2857</b> p=0.0036	<b>0.05</b> p=0.16	<b>0.05</b> p=0.17

## Syntactic and phonetic evidence in correlation with genes (Eurasia)

### This study

#### *Syntactic*

$d_{\text{Gen}} - d_{\text{Lin}}$  **0.529**  
p=0.0001

$d_{\text{Gen}} - d_{\text{Lin(Geo)}}$  **0.2857**  
p=0.0036

### Creanza et al. (PNAS 2015)

#### *Phonetic* (Ruhlen)

**0.4232**  
p=0.005

**0.0359**  
p=0.3344

## Modeling geography

Great Circle Distances (GCD) are the standard measures in correlation studies

Can we test models closer to reality? We have four different models:

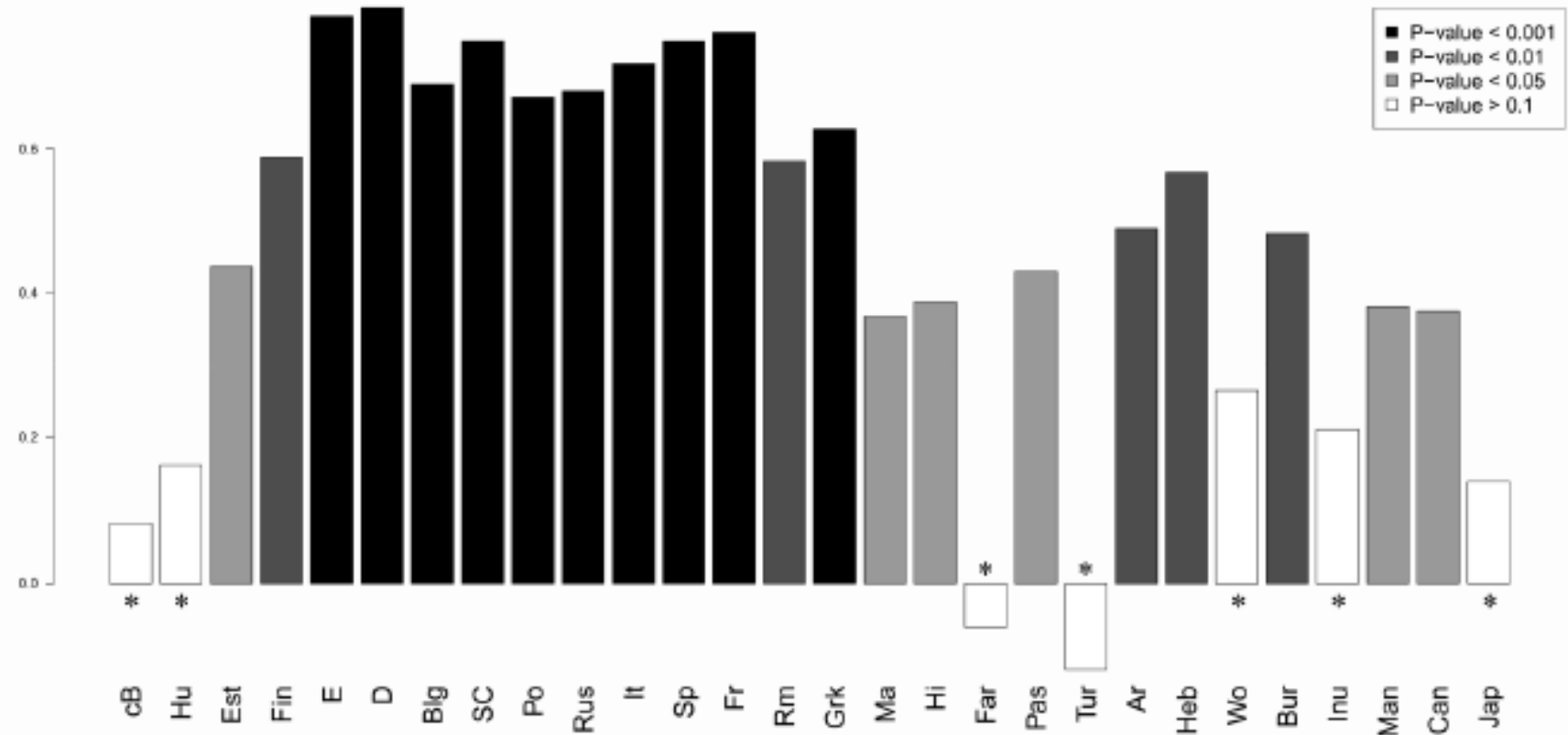
- 1- GCD with WayPoints
- 2- Road Maps
- 3- Least Cost Path
- 4- Resistance



## Correlations in Eurasia: 28 populations

Distance matrices	<i>r</i>	<i>P</i>
$d_{\text{SYN}}$ $d_{\text{GEN}}$ ( $d_{\text{GEO}}$ ) (GCD WayPoints)	0.2770	0.0063
$d_{\text{SYN}}$ $d_{\text{GEN}}$ ( $d_{\text{GEO}}$ ) (RoadMaps)	0.2641	0.0082
$d_{\text{SYN}}$ $d_{\text{GEN}}$ ( $d_{\text{GEO}}$ ) (Least Cost Path)	0.3049	0.0030
$d_{\text{SYN}}$ $d_{\text{GEN}}$ ( $d_{\text{GEO}}$ ) (Resistance)	0.3508	0.0011

# Partial correlations



## Exceptions

Wolof: it is more salient as an outlier genetically rather than linguistically. This can derive from grammatical variation being more constrained (by UG?)

Inuktitut: likely to be an insufficient sampling approximation: the language is spoken in Eastern Canada, while the nearest genetic proxy available was in North-Eastern Asia

# Exceptions

Hungarian is still an exception, as it was in Longobardi et al. (2015)

Turkish, Farsi, Basque, Japanese can all be explained in terms of **élite dominance** (like Hungarian) and related demographic processes

# Conclusions

- An abstract deductive model of language structure/transmission/acquisition (based on a theory of UG) is surprisingly well reflected in the history of languages. It is only marginally affected by horizontal transmission and it can allow the investigation of macro-families
- Languages (modeled as cognitive objects at that abstract level) and genes seem to follow the same axes of variation **independently** of geography (vs. Creanza et al. 2015)
- A single process (**élite dominance**, Renfrew 1992) can explain a few cases of mismatch between linguistic and genetic variation
- Tools provided in the cognitive sciences might provide new insights for the historical study of human migrations across the world





THANKS!

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