


In [Science](#), a new [paper](#) by [Quentin D. Atkinson](#) "Phonemic Diversity Supports a Serial Founder Effect Model of Language Expansion from Africa" is generating a lot of well-deserved interest (see [here](#), [here](#), or [here](#) for instance).

Abstract: Human genetic and phenotypic diversity declines with distance from Africa, as predicted by a serial founder effect in which successive population bottlenecks during range expansion progressively reduce diversity, underpinning support for an African origin of modern humans. 

Recent work suggests that a similar founder effect may operate on human culture and language. Here I show that the number of phonemes used in a global sample of 504 languages is also clinal and fits a serial founder - effect model of expansion from an inferred origin in Africa. This result, which is not explained by more recent demographic history, local language diversity, or statistical non-independence within language families, points to parallel mechanisms shaping genetic and linguistic diversity and supports an African origin of modern human languages.