

The Mother of All Languages

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Do all languages in the world originate from a single "mother tongue (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proto-Human_language)"?

By studying phonemes - the consonants, vowels and tonal elements of languages, biologist Quentin D. Atkinson has claimed to discover that human languages originated in Africa:

Dr. Atkinson, an expert at applying mathematical methods to linguistics, has found a simple but striking pattern in some 500 languages spoken throughout the world: A language area uses fewer phonemes the farther that early humans had to travel from Africa to reach it.

Some of the click-using languages of Africa have more than 100 phonemes, whereas Hawaiian, toward the far end of the human migration route out of Africa, has only 13. English has about 45 phonemes.

This pattern of decreasing diversity with distance, similar to the well-established decrease in genetic diversity with distance from Africa, implies that the origin of modern human language is in the region of southwestern Africa, Dr. Atkinson says in an article published on Thursday in the journal Science.

Link (<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/15/science/15language.html?ref=science>)

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