ADVENTURES IN LANGUAGE

Science Behind Language Learning

How the languages you know influence the languages you're learning

Foreign Service Institute Language Difficulty Categories

Category I		
*24-30 weeks (600-750 class hours)**		
✅ Danish	✅ Dutch	✅ French
✅ Italian	✅ Norwegian	✅ Portuguese
✅ Romanian	✅ Spanish	✅ Swedish

Category II		
36 weeks (900 class hours)		
✅ German	✅ Haitian Creole	✅ Indonesian
✅ Malay	✅ Swahili	

Category IV		
88 weeks (2200 class hours)		
✅ Arabic	✅ Chinese – Cantonese	✅ Chinese – Mandarin
✅ Japanese	✅ Korean	

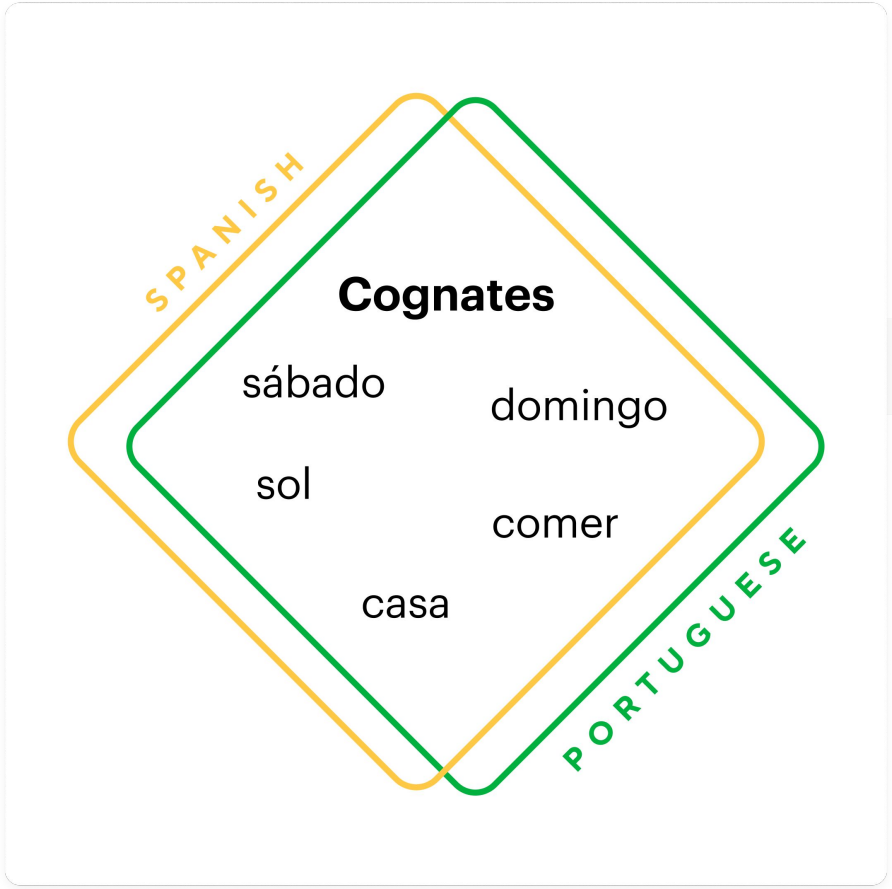
Category III			
44 weeks (1100 class hours)			
Albanian	Amharic	✅ Armenian	✅ Azerbajiani
✅ Bengali	Bulgarian	Burmese	✅ Czech
✅ Dari	Estonian	✅ Farsi	✅ Finnish
Georgian	✅ Greek	✅ Hebrew	✅ Hindi
✅ Hungarian	✅ Icelandic	✅ Kazakh	Khmer
Kurdish	Kyrgyz	Lao	Latvian
Lithuanian	Macedonian	Mongolian	Nepali
✅ Polish	✅ Russian	✅ Serbo-Croatian	Sinhala
✅ Slovak	Slovenian	Somali	✅ Tagalog
Tajiki	✅ Tamil	✅ Telugu	✅ Thai
Tibetan	✅ Turkish	Turkmen	✅ Ukrainian
✅ Urdu	✅ Uzbek	✅ Vietnamese	

✅ = COURSES AVAILABLE ON MANGO

L2 = second language; learned after an **L1** (first language)

L2 learners ***already have some language knowledge and experience***

Similar Languages: Spanish vs. Portuguese



Spanish: Todos los insectos tienen seis patas.

Portuguese: Todos os insetos têm seis patas.

All insects have six legs.

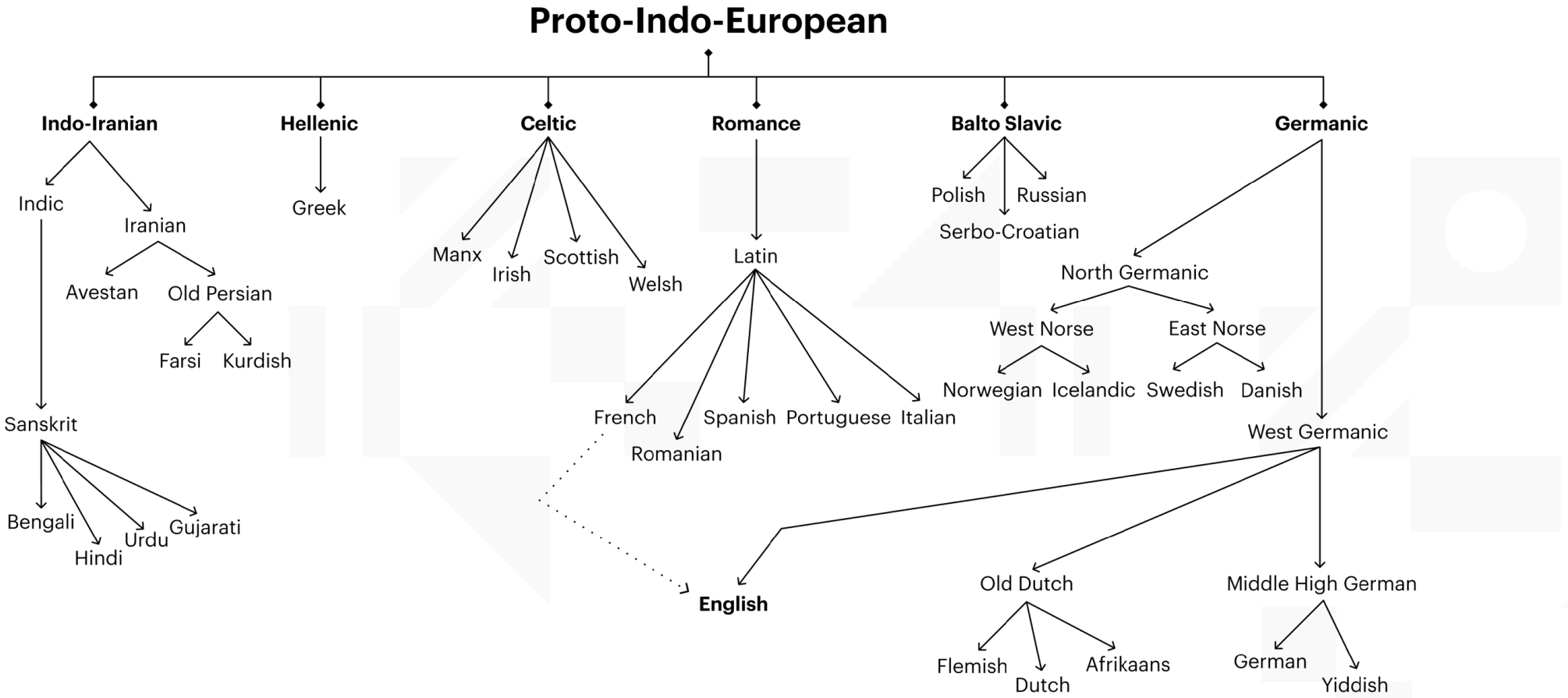
Cognates = words with similar sounds and meanings in two languages

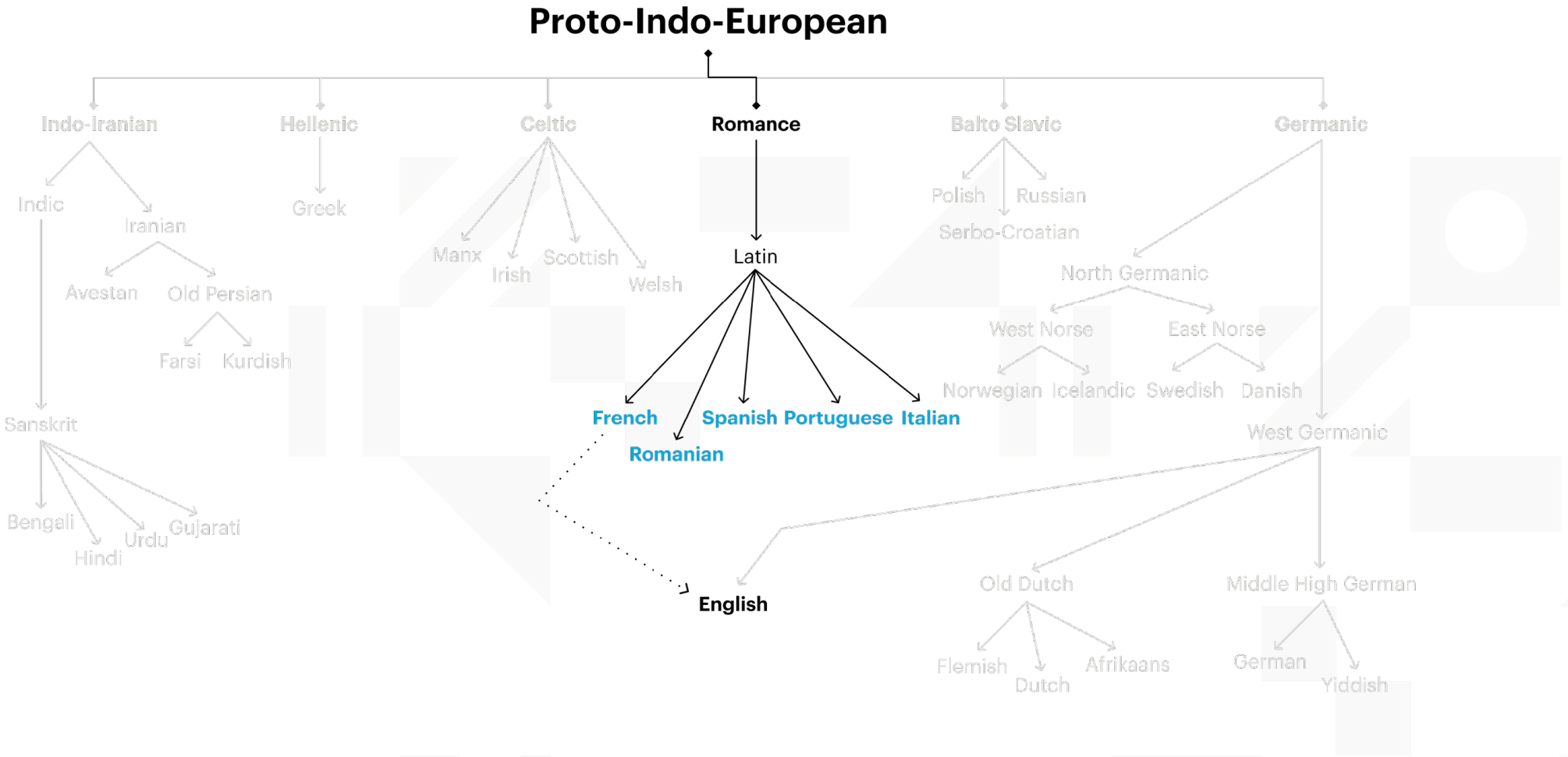
Similar Languages: Spanish vs. Portuguese

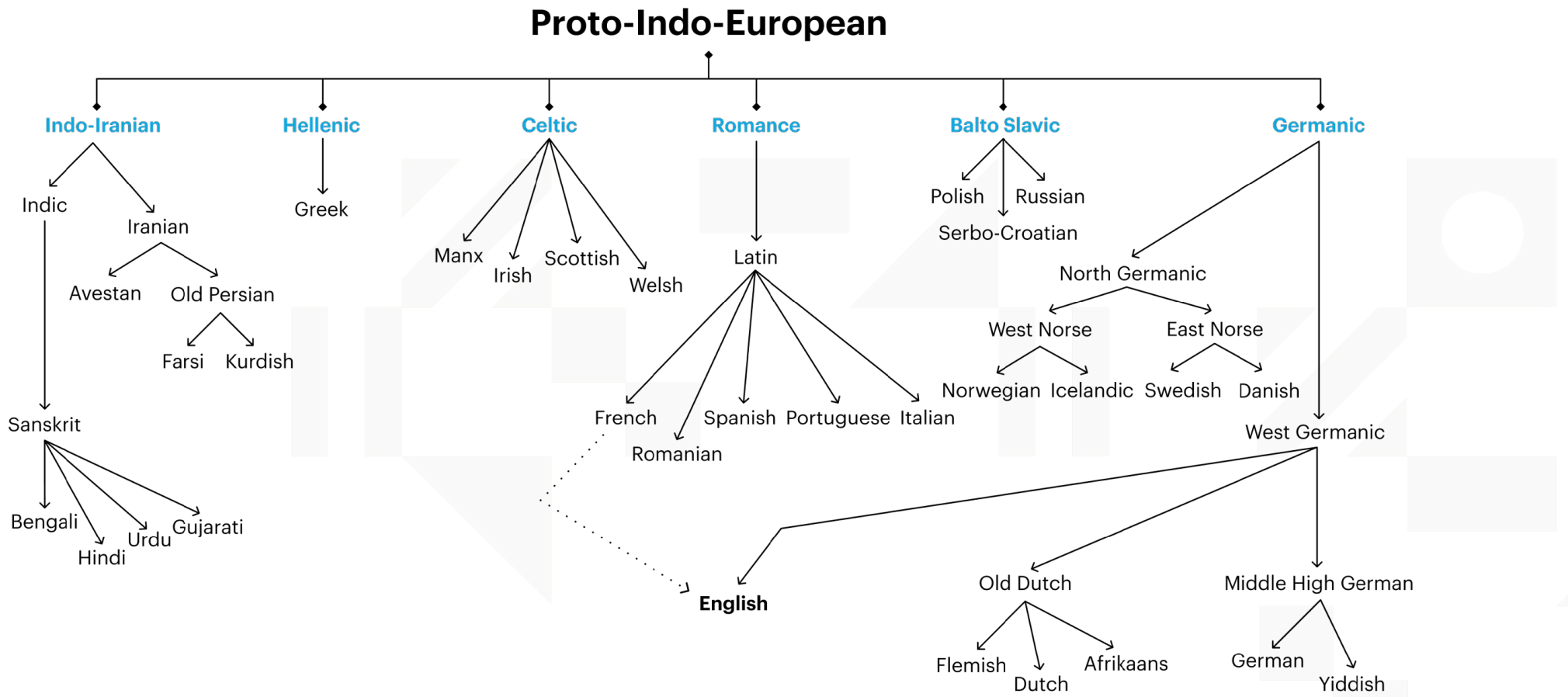
Spanish speakers can understand

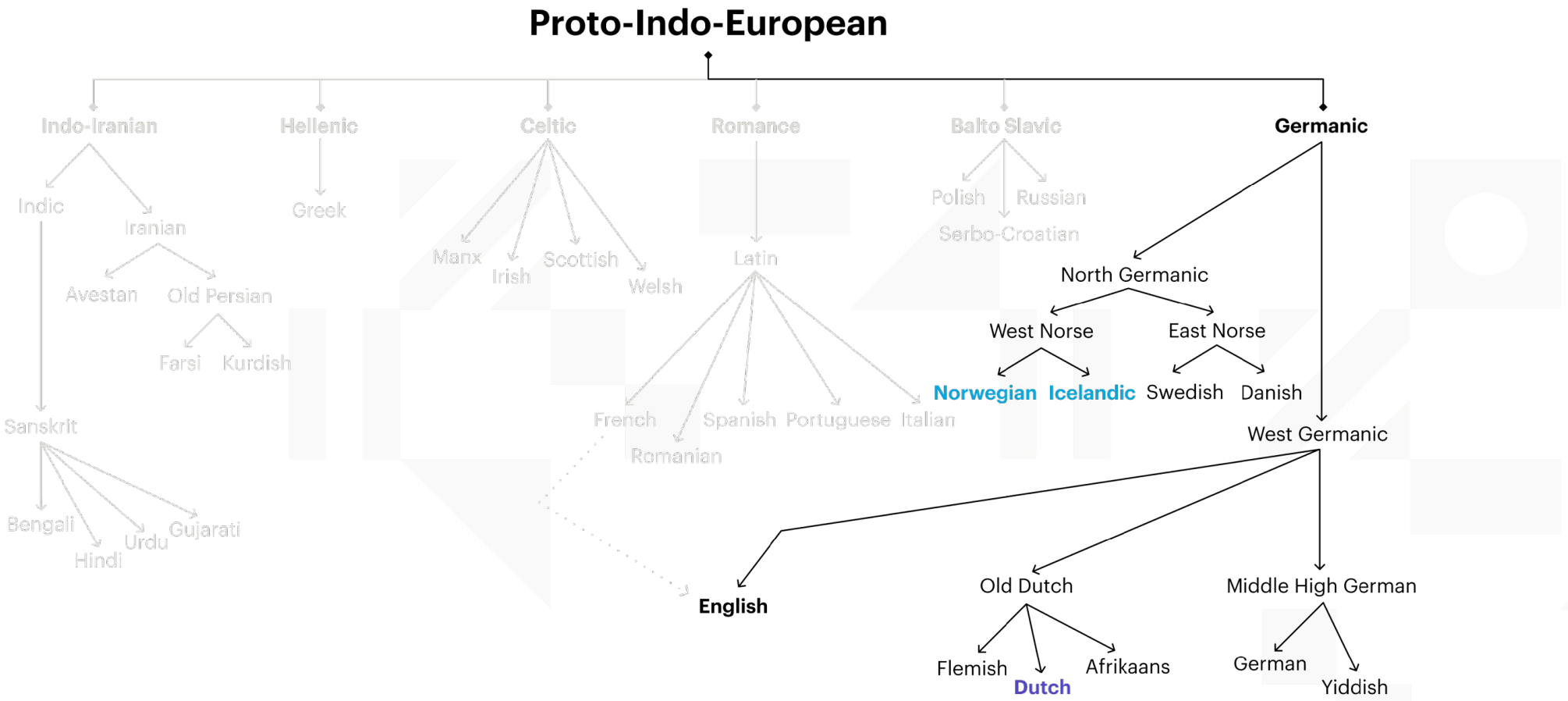
- ~50% of spoken Portuguese (Jensen, 1989)
- > 90% of written Portuguese (Henriques, 2000)

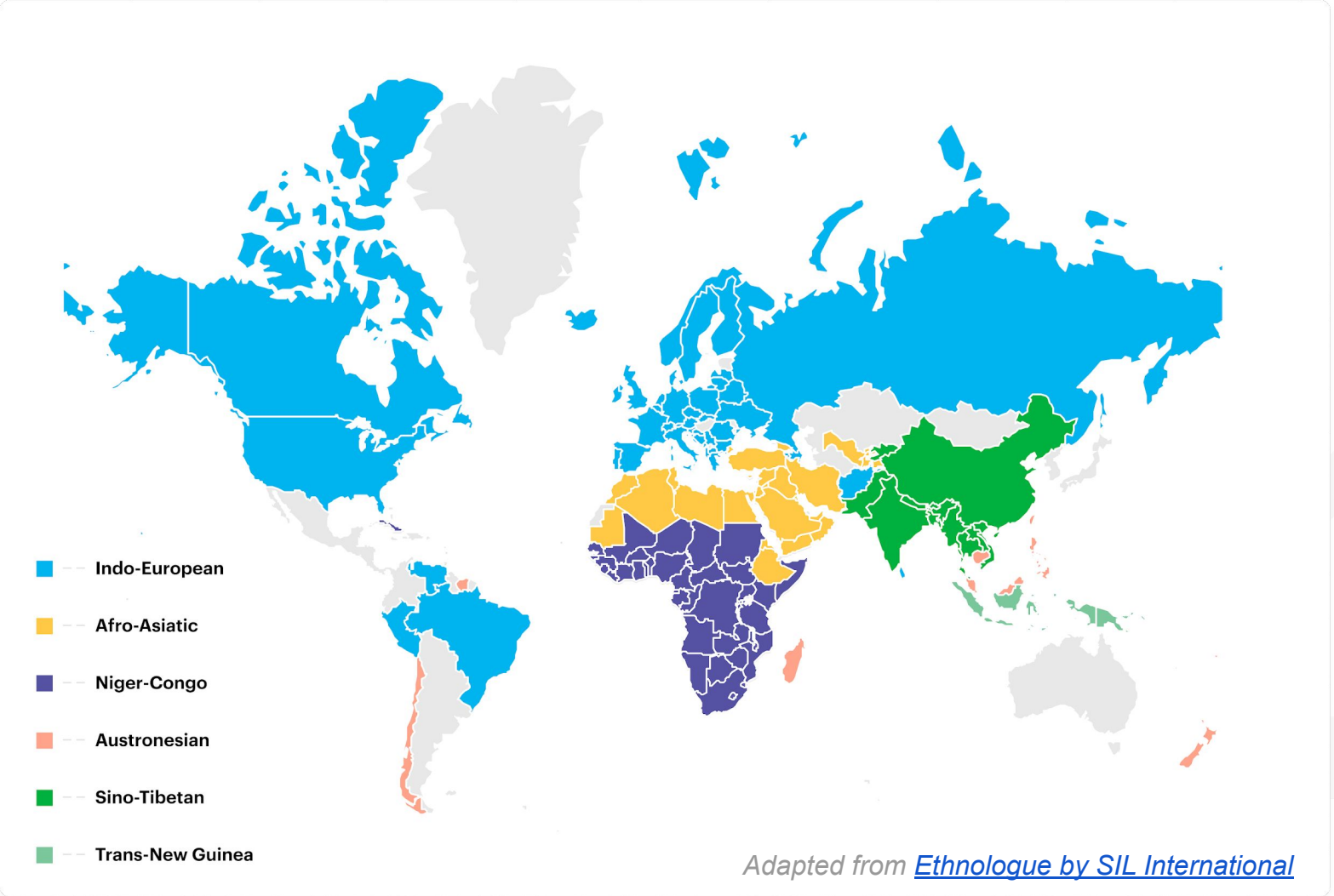
Spanish learners can communicate in Portuguese early on but miss some key differences


Proto-Indo-European
Indo-Iranian
Hellenic
Celtic
Romance
Balto Slavic
Germanic
Indic
Iranian
Greek
Manx
Irish
Scottish
Welsh
Latin
Polish
Russian
Serbo-Croatian
North Germanic
Avestan
Old Persian
Farsi
Kurdish
West Norse
East Norse
Norwegian
Icelandic
Swedish
Danish
French
Spanish
Portuguese
Italian
Romanian
Sanskrit
West Germanic
Bengali
Urdu
Gujarati
Hindi
English
Old Dutch
Middle High German
Flemish
Dutch
Afrikaans
German
Yiddish


Proto-Indo-European
Indo-Iranian
Hellenic
Celtic
Romance
Balto Slavic
Germanic
Indic
Iranian
Greek
Manx
Irish
Scottish
Welsh
Latin
Polish
Russian
Serbo-Croatian
North Germanic
West Norse
East Norse
Avestan
Old Persian
Farsi
Kurdish
Norwegian
Icelandic
Swedish
Danish
French
Spanish
Portuguese
Italian
Romanian
Sanskrit
West Germanic
Bengali
Urdu
Gujarati
Hindi
English
Old Dutch
Middle High German
Flemish
Dutch
Afrikaans
German
Yiddish


Proto-Indo-European
Indo-Iranian
Hellenic
Celtic
Romance
Balto Slavic
Germanic
Indic
Iranian
Greek
Manx
Irish
Scottish
Welsh
Latin
Polish
Russian
Serbo-Croatian
North Germanic
West Norse
East Norse
Norwegian
Icelandic
Swedish
Danish
Avestan
Old Persian
Farsi
Kurdish
Sanskrit
French
Spanish
Portuguese
Italian
Romanian
West Germanic
Bengali
Urdu
Gujarati
Hindi
English
Old Dutch
Middle High German
Flemish
Dutch
Afrikaans
German
Yiddish


Proto-Indo-European
Indo-Iranian
Hellenic
Celtic
Romance
Balto Slavic
Germanic
Indic
Iranian
Greek
Manx
Irish
Scottish
Welsh
Latin
Polish
Russian
Serbo-Croatian
Avestan
Old Persian
Farsi
Kurdish
Sanskrit
Bengali
Urdu
Hindi
Gujarati
French
Spanish
Portuguese
Italian
Romanian
North Germanic
West Norse
East Norse
Norwegian
Icelandic
Swedish
Danish
West Germanic
English
Old Dutch
Middle High German
Flemish
Dutch
Afrikaans
German
Yiddish



Adapted from [Ethnologue by SIL International]

Cross-Linguistic Influences

How the languages you know influence each other

Cross-Linguistic Influences

How the languages you know influence each other

Positive Transfer
Learning is **facilitated** by **similarities** between the L1 and L2

Cross-Linguistic Influences

How the languages you know influence each other

Positive Transfer
Learning is **facilitated** by **similarities** between the L1 and L2

Negative Transfer
Learners make **mistakes** because of **differences** between the L1 and L2

He ate five mangos.

Il a mangé cinq mangues.

I miss you.

Je manque toi.*

Je te manque.

Tu me manques.

[You to me are missing.]

NORWAY
SWEDEN
FINLAND

NORWAY
SWEDEN
FINLAND

NORWAY
SWEDEN
FINLAND
ESTONIA
HUNGARY

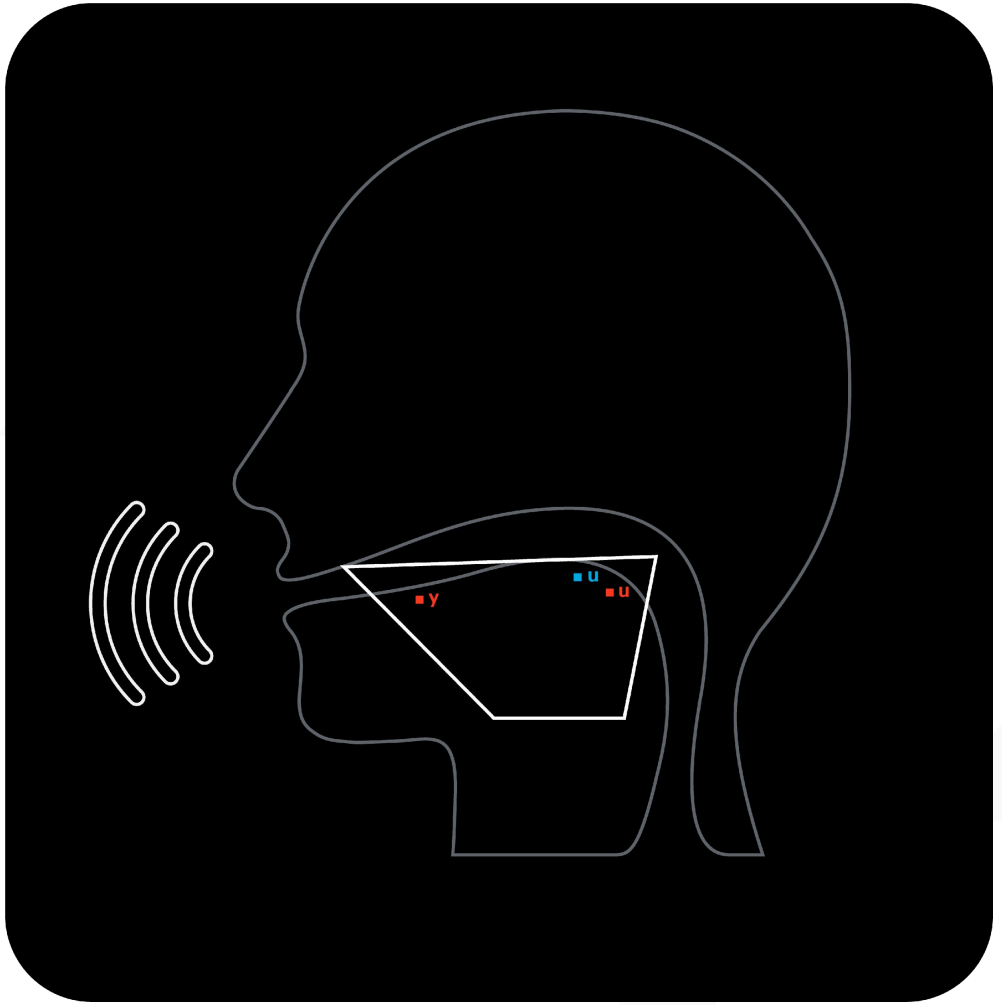
English /u/

you

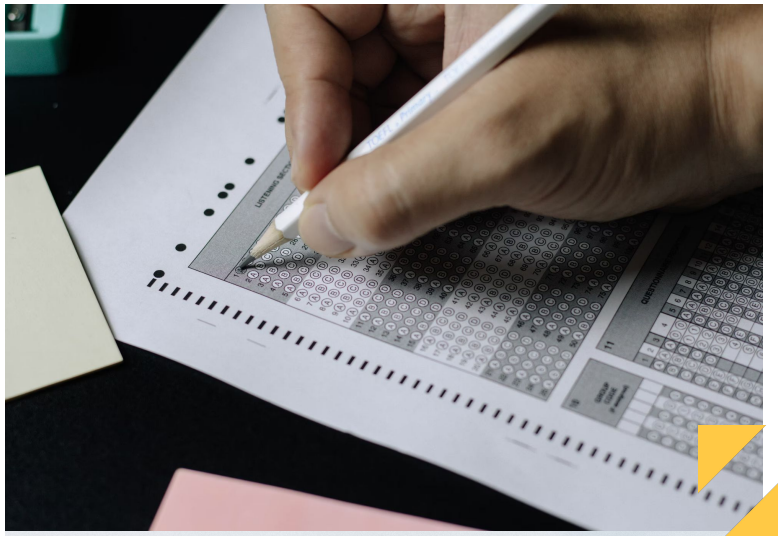
French /y/ /u/

tu *tout*

you *everything*



English	to know	
Spanish	saber	conocer
French	savoir	connaître
Italian	sapere	conoscere
German	wissen	kennen



Novelty Effect

Language features that are different in the L1 and L2 can be ***easy*** to learn if they are frequent and/or salient

Novelty Effect

Language features that are different in the L1 and L2 can be ***easy*** to learn if they are frequent and/or salient

Example:
Arabic speakers learning the English progressive tense (Kleinmann, 1977)

Avoidance

Learners don’t make mistakes, but it’s because they avoid using a difficult feature, **not** because they’ve mastered it

Avoidance

Learners don’t make mistakes, but it’s because they avoid using a difficult feature, **not** because they’ve mastered it

Example:
Hebrew speakers tend to avoid phrasal verbs in English (Dagut & Laufer, 1985):

- Come in Enter
- Shut off Stop

Psychotypology

How learners ***perceive*** the distance between their L1 and L2

When learners think their L1 and L2 are very similar, they may not notice differences

Example:

- Italian learners may confuse German gender rules

Psychotypology

How learners ***perceive*** the distance between their L1 and L2

When learners think their L1 and L2 are very similar, they may not notice differences

Psychotypology

How learners ***perceive*** the distance between their L1 and L2

When learners think their L1 and L2 are very similar, they may not notice differences

Example:

- Italian learners may confuse German gender rules

Learning a 3rd Language

How does knowing multiple languages influence learning an L3?

Learning a 3rd Language

How does knowing multiple languages influence learning an L3?

- ✔ Opportunities for positive transfer from both L1 and L2
- ✔ Language learning skills and strategies

Learning a 3rd Language

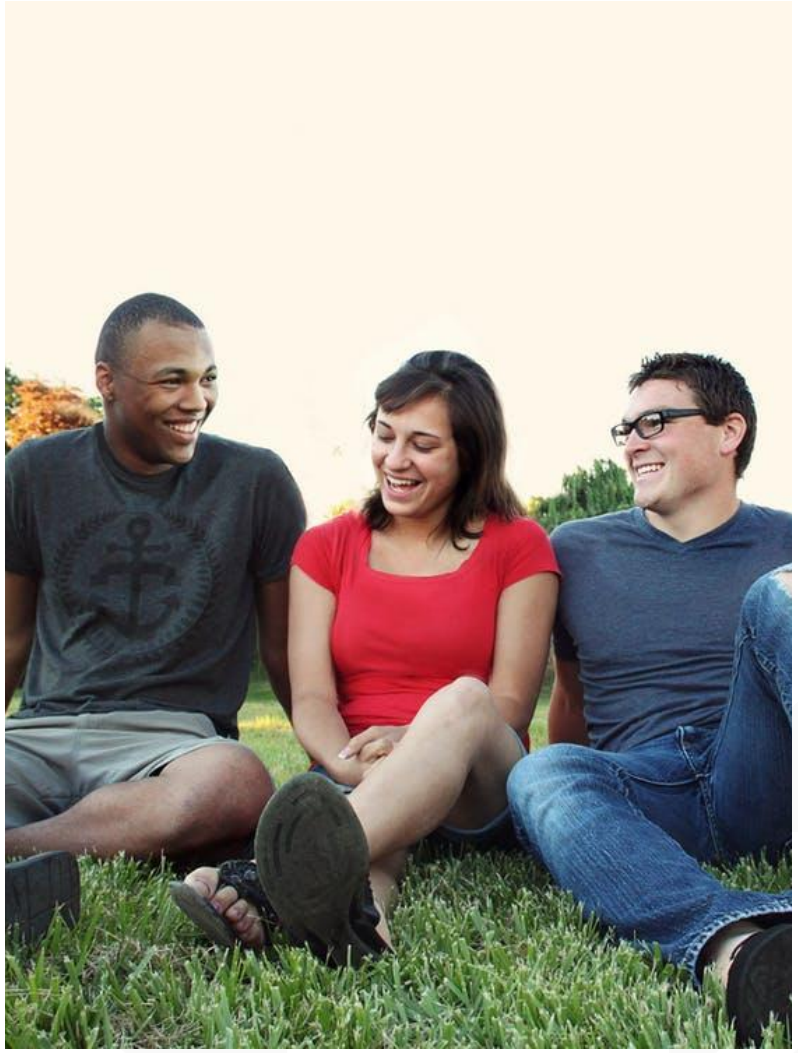
How does knowing multiple languages influence learning an L3?

Typological Primacy
Learners draw on whichever language most similar to the L3

L1 vs. L2
More influence from the L2 because L2 and L3 both feel like “talking foreign” (Selinker et al., 1995)

Let's Recap!

1. The languages you know influence the languages you're learning
2. Transfer from your L1 can be *positive* or *negative*
3. Your perception of how similar your languages are can play a role
4. Knowing multiple languages facilitates learning additional languages



MANGO

mangolanguages.com