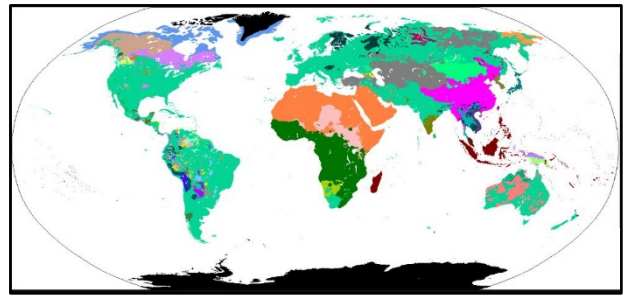


OSAGE LANGUAGE ORIGINS - Fact Sheet

Just as our experiences as humans change greatly over time, the languages we speak are also constantly changing and evolving.

The scientific study of our language - its form and meaning - is called **linguistics**. The study of how language changes over time is called **historical linguistics**.



Another way to study history is through **archaeology** - the study of human's past, often through excavation of sites and analysis of artifacts and physical remains - also called "material" culture.

Linguists and archaeologists are working together to reconstruct the pre-history of the Osage.

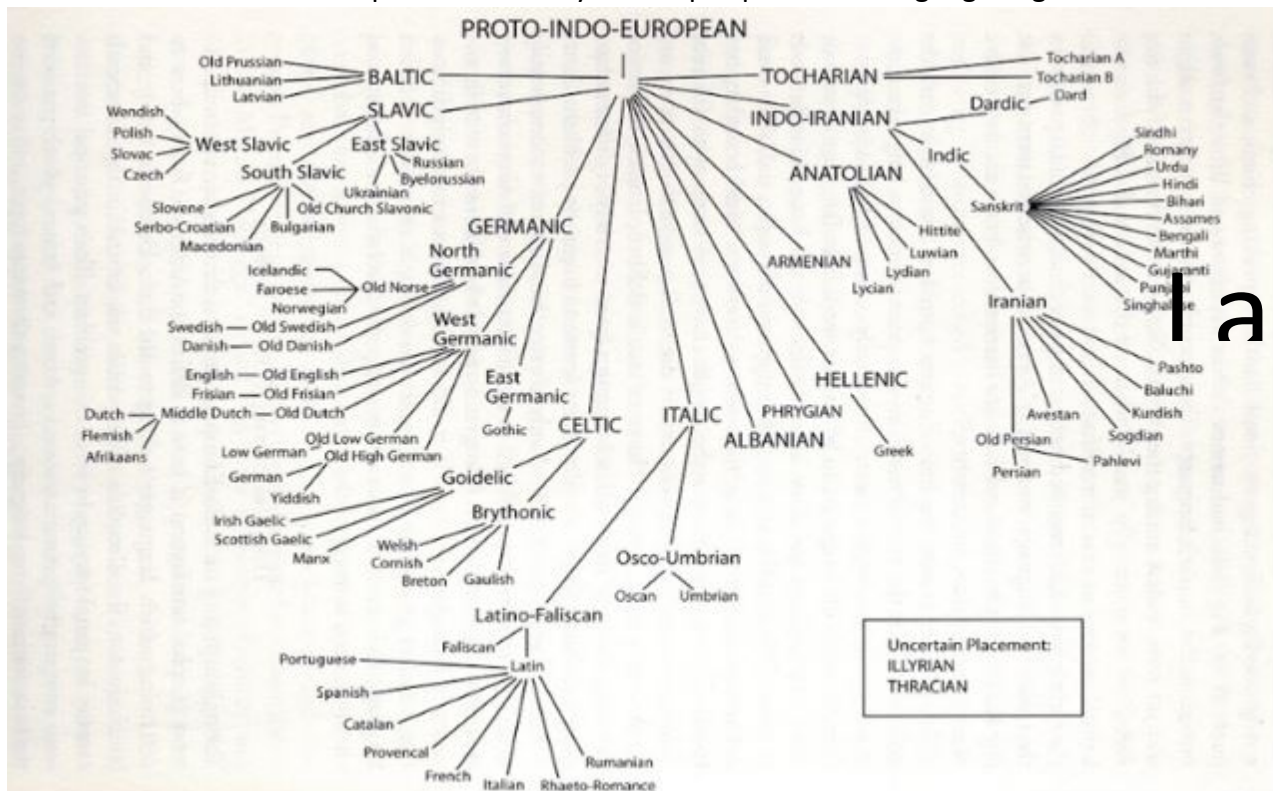
They study how the Osage language developed, and how it fits in with others - its **language family**.

A **language family** is a group of languages related through **descent** (being handed down) from a common ancestral language or parental language, called the **proto-language** of that family. (**Proto** means the original or first of something, i.e. proto-language).

The division of a proto-language into daughter languages typically occurs through **geographical separation** (when people separate and some move to a new region or place).

For example: BELOW is the **family tree of the English Language**.

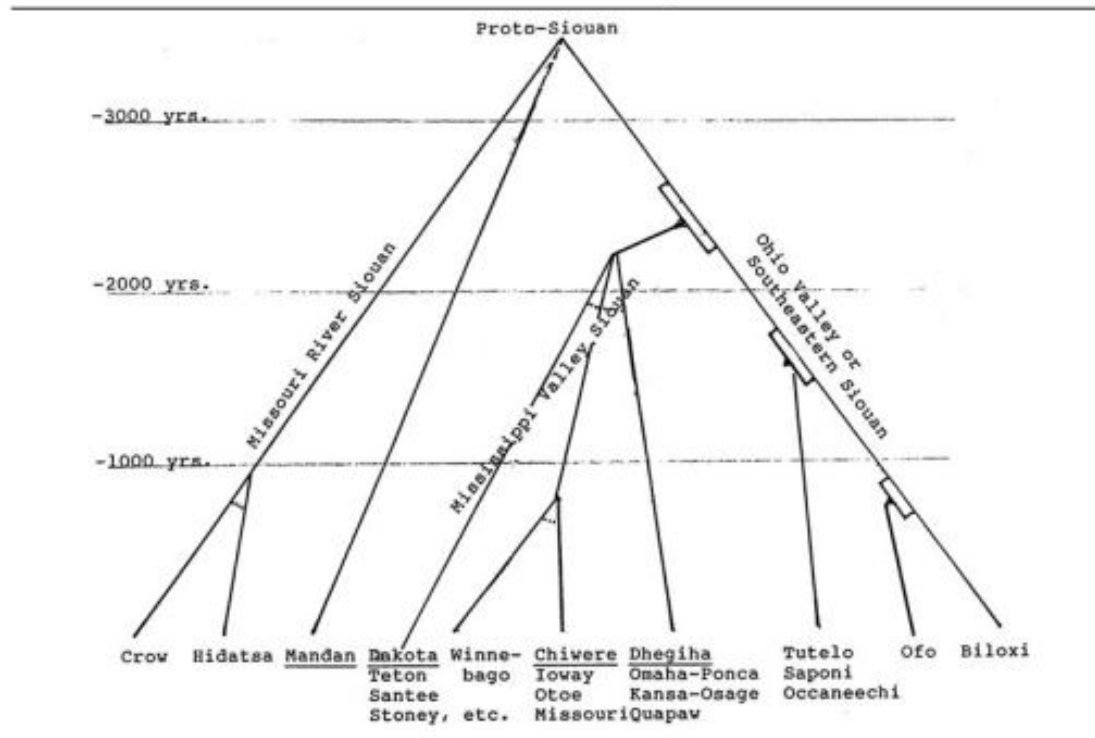
- Where is English? (it is small - search closely until you see it)
- What is the original (very top) parent or proto-language of English?
- Notice how the subdivisions tend to be grouped **geographically**: related languages are often near each other on a map. What country in Europe speaks the language English comes from?



BELOW is the **family tree of the Osage language**.

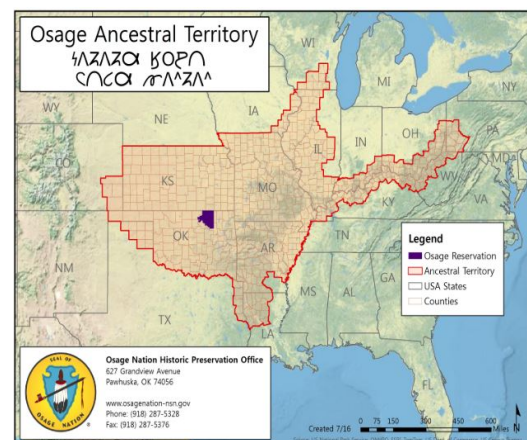
- What is its original parent or proto-language?
- Where is the Osage language?
- Notice how the subdivisions are grouped geographically, and sometimes follow major river valleys: Missouri River, Mississippi River, and Ohio River.
- On this Siouan family tree, Osage is closely linked to the **Kansa (Kaw)** language. This shows they are closely-related and are **mutually intelligible** - meaning speakers can understand each other pretty well.

TABLE 41-3 The siouan family tree



Geographical history: Here is what we have learned about the geography of the **five groups in the Dhegiha** language branch of the Mississippi Valley Siouan division:

- All five of these tribes were **together in the Ohio River Valley**. Around A.D. 200-400, they all began migrating down the valley to the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers.
- In A.D. 900, four tribes (less the **Quapaw**) created large settlements around what is now the St. Louis area.
- Around A.D.1000, the **Omaha and Ponca** tribes separated and moved on.
- Around A.D. 1200, the **Kansa (Kaw)** separated and traveled up the Missouri. Today, the Kaw and Osage languages are very closely related - .
- The **Osage** were the last remaining Dhegiha Siouan tribe in the St. Louis area. Around 1350, they moved westward into central and western Missouri. **See related lesson: Ancestral Lands.**



Sources: Hunter, Andrea A., “Ancestral Osage Geography,” Osage Nation Historic Preservation Office webpage - <https://www.osagenation-nsn.gov/who-we-are/historic-preservation/osage-cultural-history>; Rankin, Robert L., “Siouan Tribal Contacts and Dispersions Evidenced in the Terminology for Maize and Other Cultigens,” pp. 563-575 in *The History of Maize*, ed. Staller, John E. et al (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc., 2009). Compiled 2018.