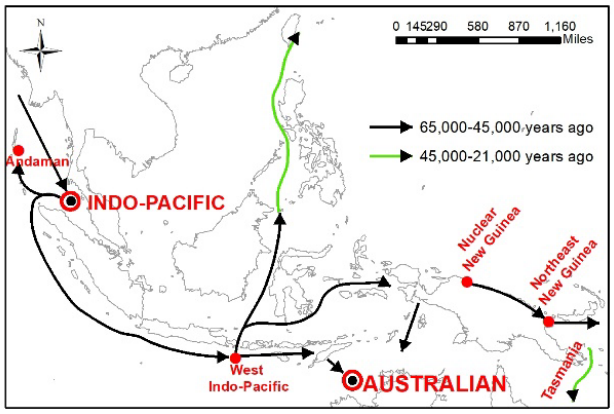
6.Indo-Pacific



Homeland. The homeland of Indo-Pacific is difficult to locate with precision. Because of the overlay by Austronesian languages as they expanded throughout the archipelago of Southeast Asia in the late Holocene, it has not yet been possible to identify traces of early Indo-Pacific languages in western Indonesia or the Philippines. It is assumed here that, since the settlers were moving eastward along the Indian Ocean littoral, they would have reached the west coast of Sunda (present-day Malaysia or Sumatra), established a homeland, and then dispatched settlers from that base throughout Sunda and Sahul.

Greenberg's 1971 classification of Indo-Pacific, drawing especially on the compilations of the German scholars Wurm and Schmitz, was based on the assumption that it was the language group of the original settlers of island Southeast Asia and Melanesia. As *Homo sapiens* first arrived, the region was in the form of the subcontinent of Sunda and the neighboring continent of Sahul. Greenberg's view of Indo Pacific included widely dispersed languages, including those of the Andaman Islands, the Solomon Islands, and Tasmania, along with New Guinea. These were allocated into the four regions of the hypothetical distribution of the phylum. The Australian phylum is widely believed to have diverged from Indo-Pacific in the late Pleistocene Epoch. Tasmanian languages are only faintly attested and are also argued to be subgroups of the Australian rather than the Indo-Pacific phylum.

Concise Spreadsheet: top four levels

Indo-Pacific		
	Andamanese	
		Great Andamanese
		South Andamanese
	West Indo-Pacific	
		North Halmaheran
		Timor
		West New Guinea
	Nuclear New Guinea	
		North New Guinea
		Southwest New Guinea
		South New Guinea
		Central New Guinea
		East New Guinea
	Northeast New Guinea Pacific	
		Northeast New Guinea
		Panaras
		Uasi
		New Britain
		Central Solomons
		Bougainville
		Santa Cruz
	Tasmanian	

Full Spreadsheet: see "6.Indo-Pacific," listing Indo-Pacific languages by groups and subgroups.

Pleistocene Changes.

65,000–45,000 years ago. Settlers moved throughout the regions of Sunda, Sahul, and the islands, by land and sea.

45,000–21,000 years ago. Recently discovered paintings – in caves in highland Sulawesi and Kalimantan – created 40,000 years ago suggest that Indo-Pacific speakers were ubiquitous in the region. At a certain point the Indo-Pacific languages would have diverged, with Australian languages becoming a separate phylum. Comparisons of Indo-Pacific and Australian languages have suggested 37,000 years ago as a time for that separation.

While the details of their watercraft and navigation systems are not known, the Indo-Pacific-speaking settlers spread to the Solomon Islands, and probably up the chain of islands to Taiwan, the Ryukyus, and to the Amur Valley in northeast Asia.

21,000–12,000 years ago. Genetic evidence suggests that people of ancestry similar to that of New Guinea were present in northeast Asia and among the early settlers of the Americas during the Terminal Pleistocene.

Holocene Changes.

12,000–6000 years ago. The largest group of closely related languages within Indo-Pacific is the Trans-New Guinea family (as labeled by Wurm), and the largely equivalent Nuclear New Guinea families (as labeled by Greenberg). In an overlay within the phylum, these languages likely expanded along with the rise of agriculture based on taro.

6000 years ago–1000 CE. A major overlay of Indo-Pacific languages came from the north. Austronesian-speakers arrived in the Philippines from Taiwan, built communities relying on paddy rice, and expanded throughout the western Indonesian archipelago; they expanded in smaller numbers to New Guinea, Micronesia, and Polynesia.

Commentary and Debates. Wurm's 1982 classification focuses on languages of Papua New Guinea, centering on Trans-New Guinea as the main language group of the region. In fact, Wurm's Trans-New Guinea phylum is quite similar to the Nuclear New Guinea portion of Greenberg's 1971 Indo-Pacific phylum, which includes other language families to the east, north, and west.

On another issue, Greenberg classified the Tasmanian languages as an Indo-Pacific group, thus implying a maritime voyage along the coast of Australia. Claire Bowern argues that Tasmanian languages are more likely a subgroup of the Australian phylum.

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