LANGTIME CHAT: EPISODE 31

EVOLVING A LANGUAGE FAMILY

LANGUAGE FAMILY

a group of languages that can be historically traced back to the same mother language

LANGUAGE FAMILY

Creating a conlang family requires crafting multiple languages from the same proto-forms.

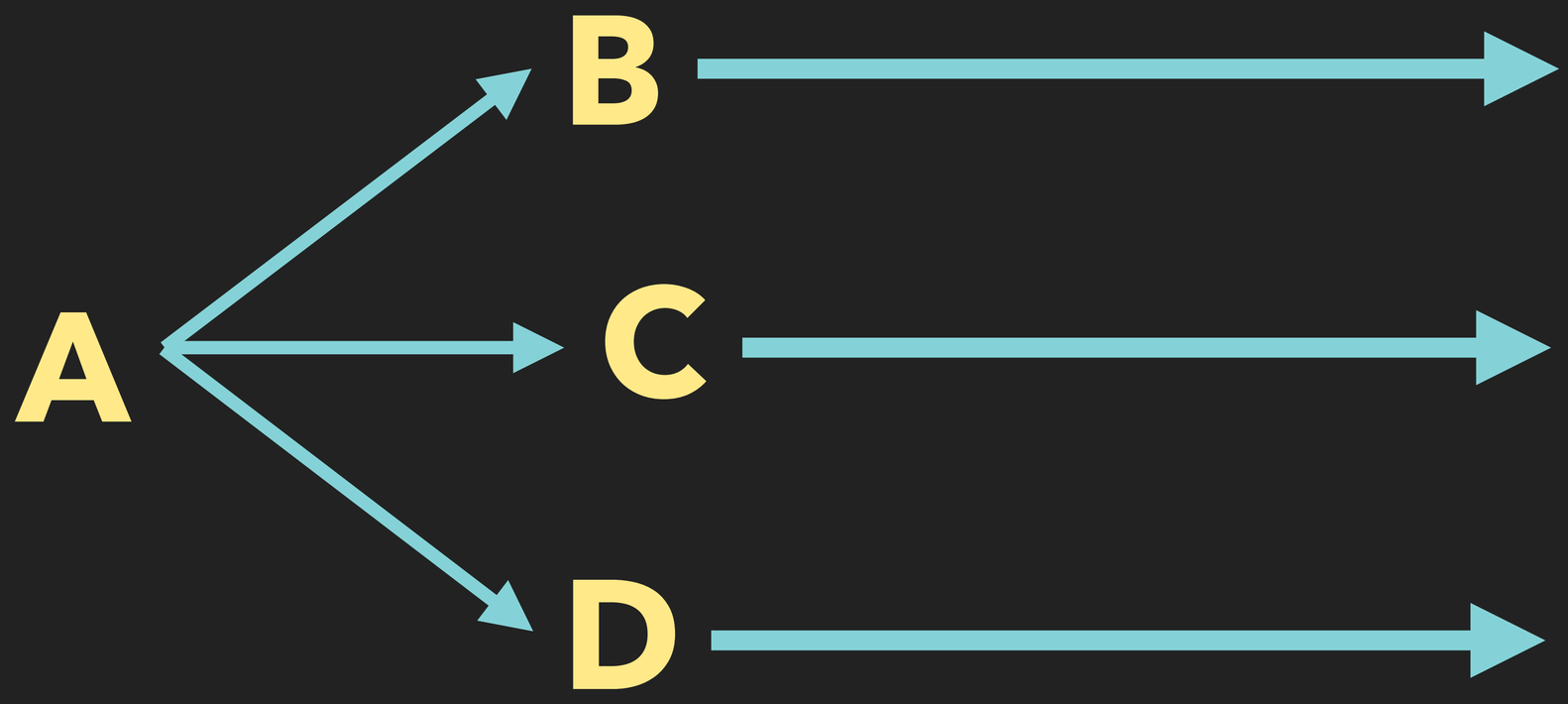
Make a timeline.

Make a timeline.

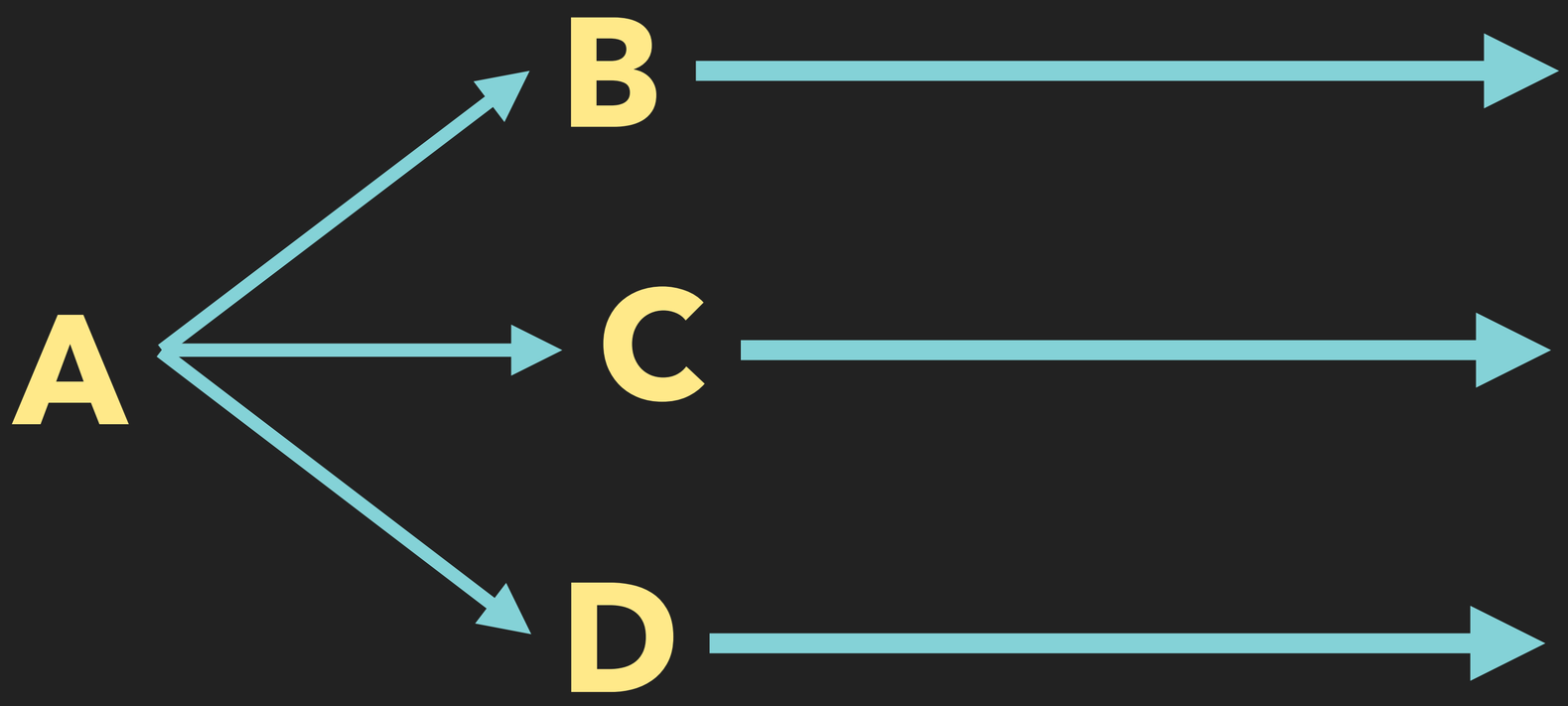
number of daughter languages

TIMELINE

Situation 1



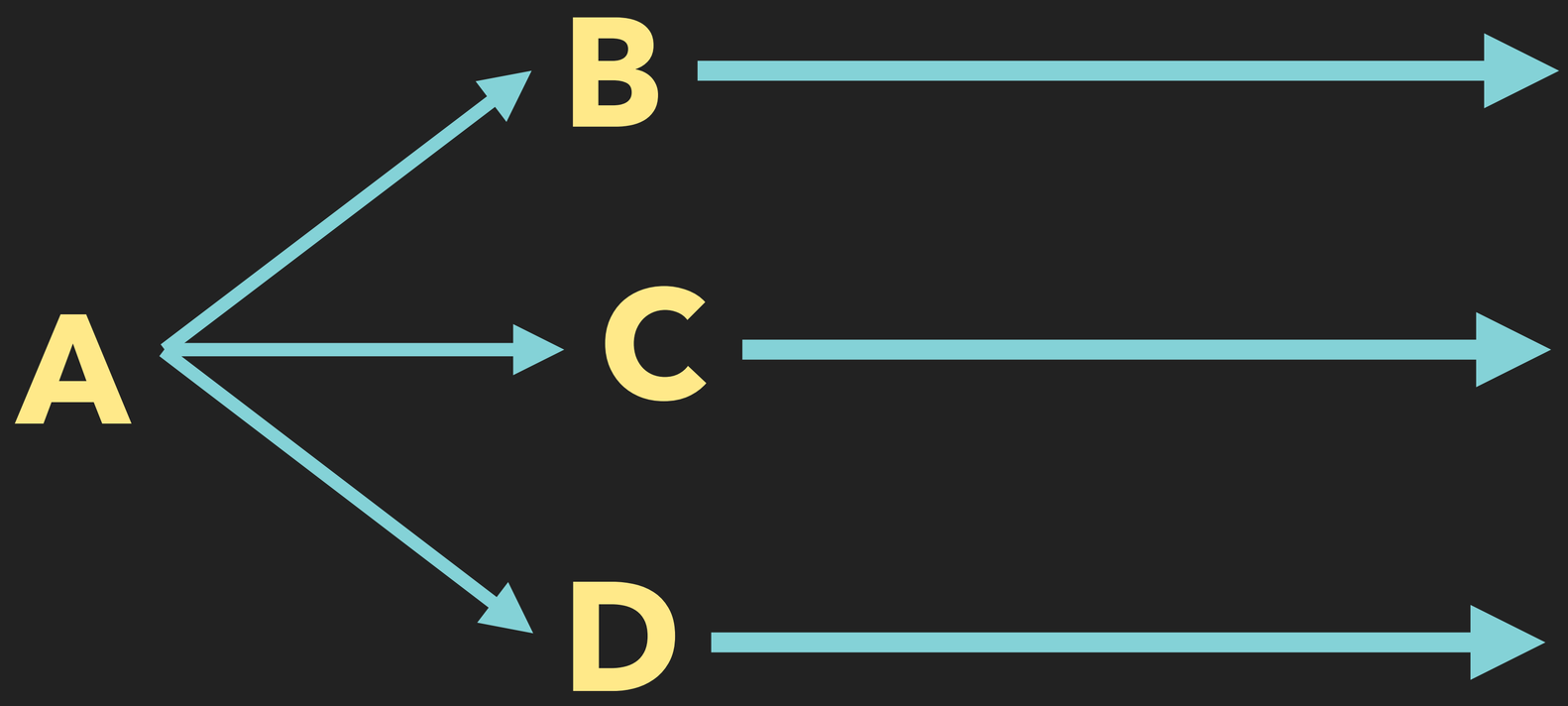
TIMELINE



Situation 1

This situation is like our Proto-Sketch challenge in Episode 25.

TIMELINE

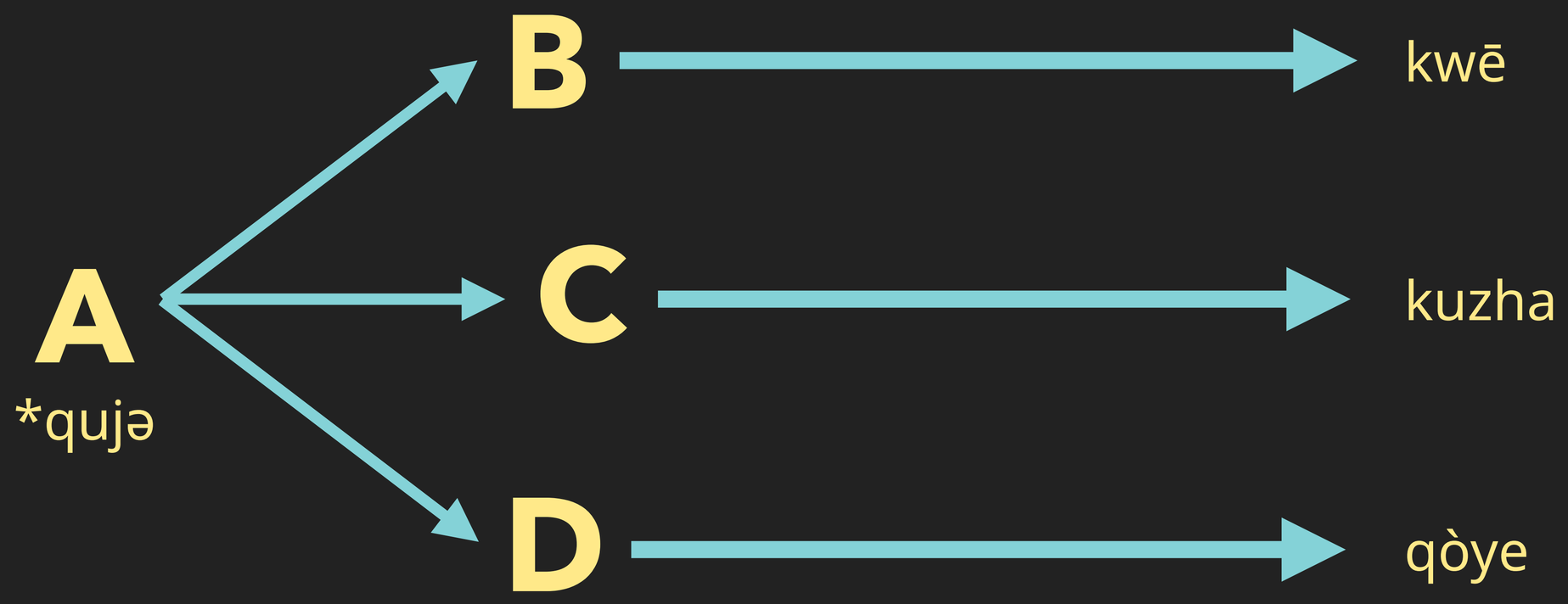


Situation 1

Daughter languages split off from the proto-form with all language developments independent from the others.

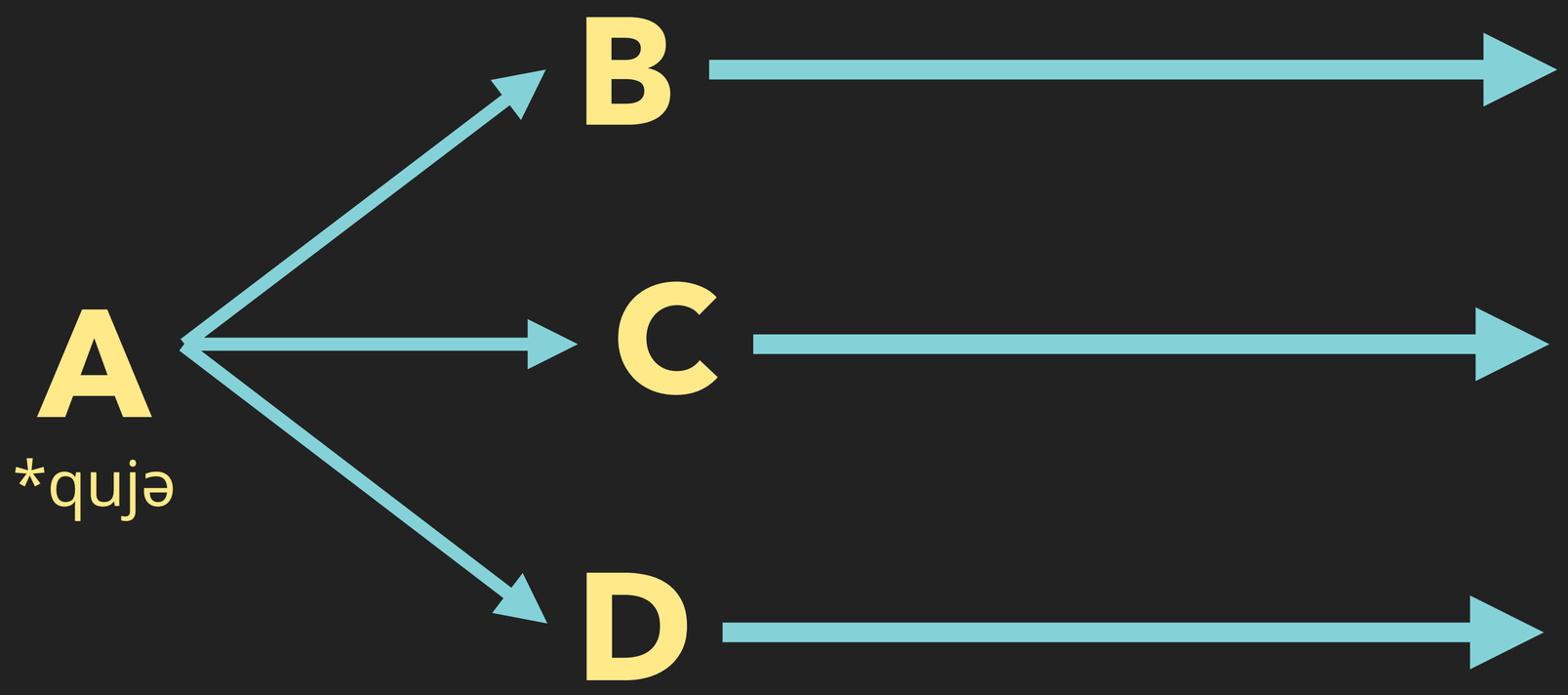
TIMELINE

Situation 1



TIMELINE

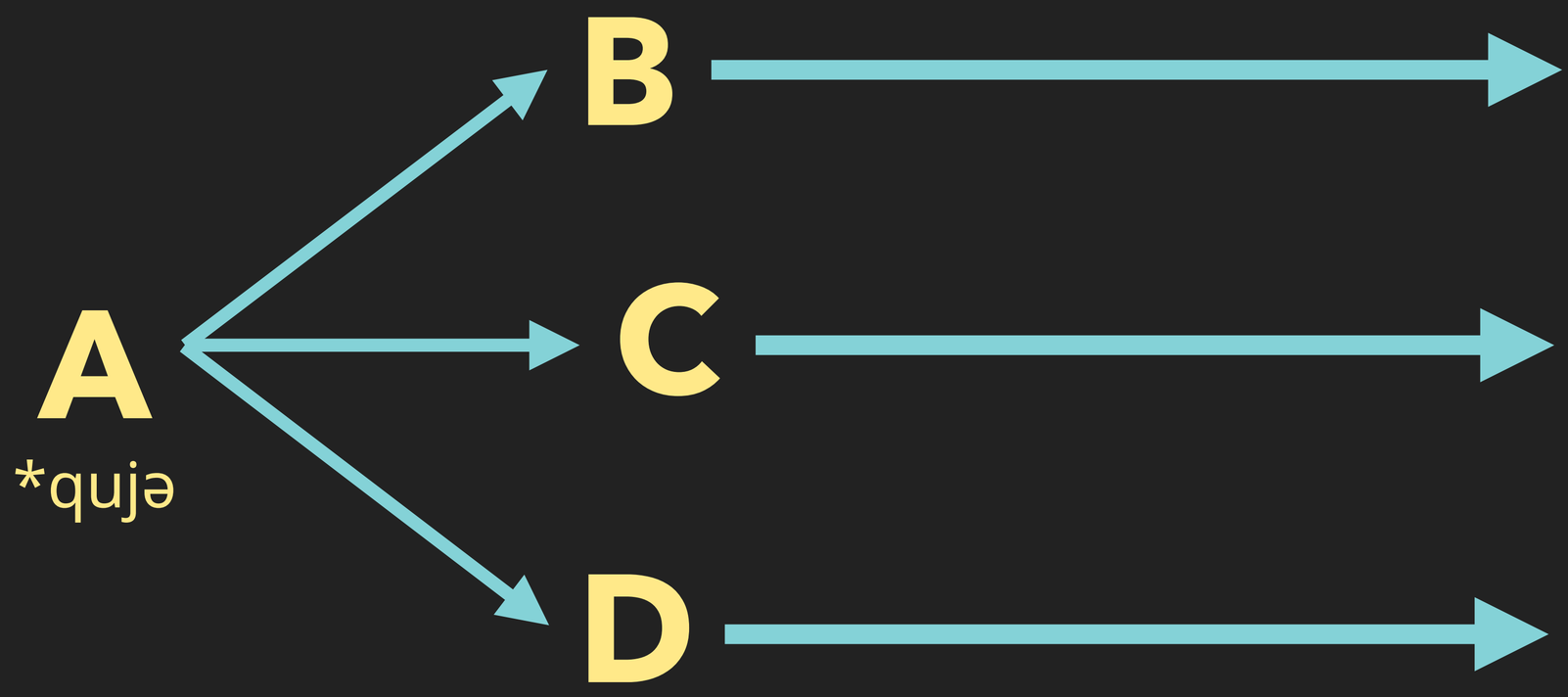
Situation 1



For most conlangers developing a family, though, they don’t often have other conlangers providing those alternate forms.

TIMELINE

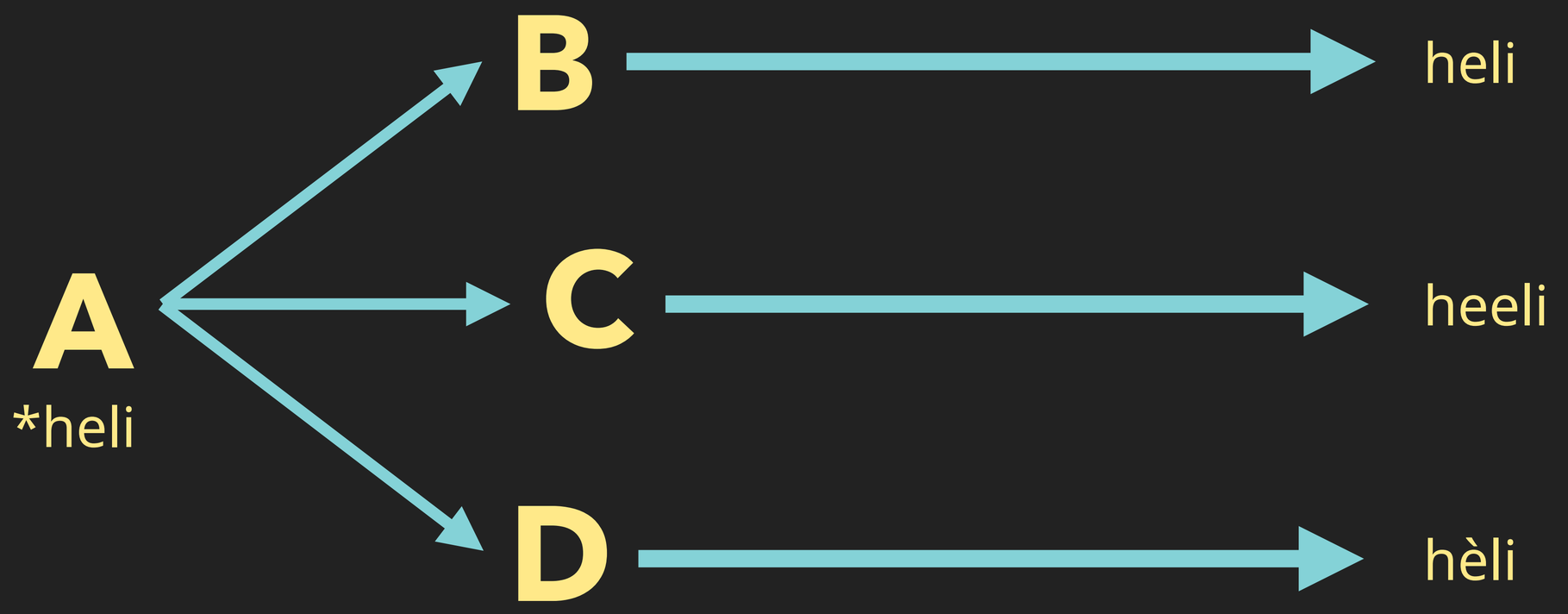
Situation 1



So it can be an added challenge to not get in your own head about making the daughters “distinct enough.”

TIMELINE

Situation 1



For example, consider “daisy,” whose form remained relatively stable across all daughter languages from the challenge.

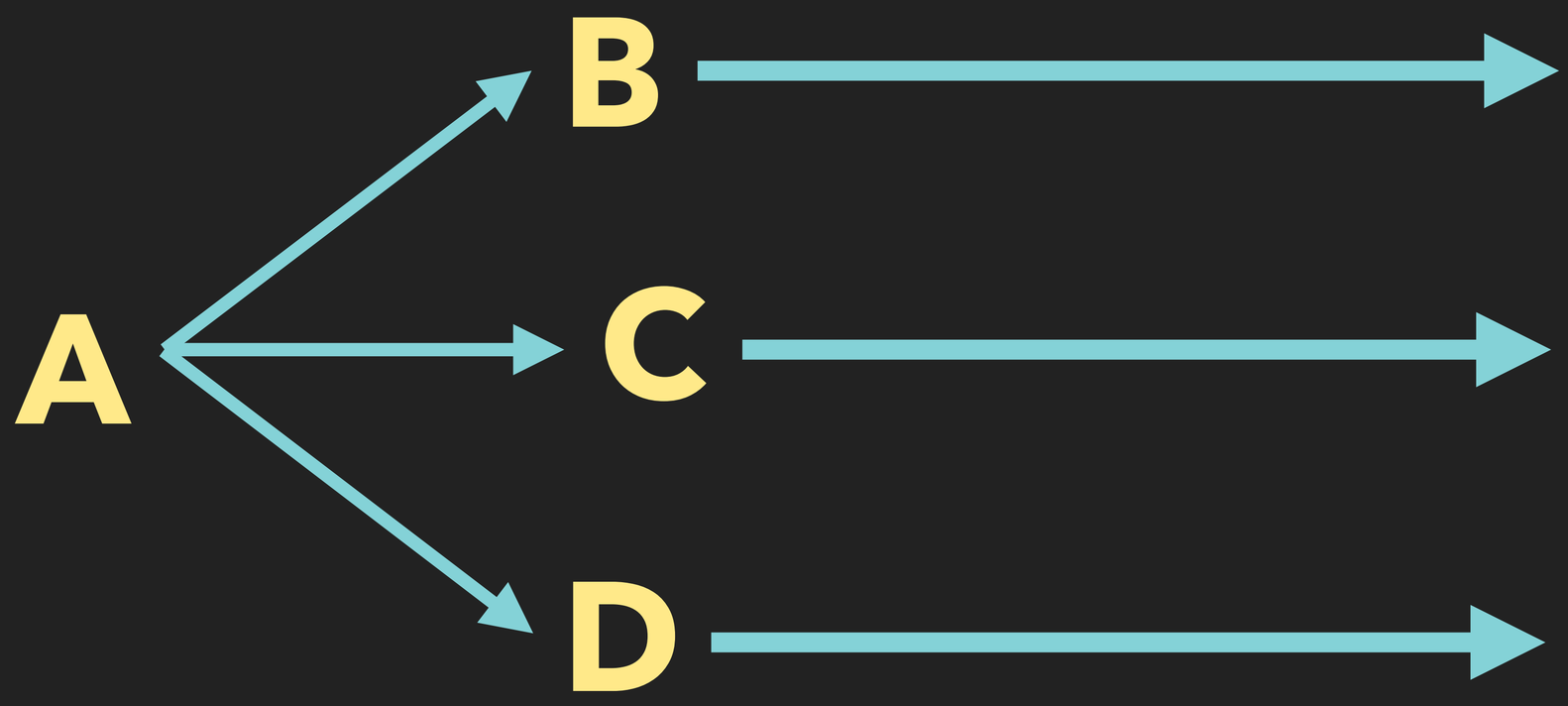
Make a timeline.

number of daughter languages

language features/shifts that are shared among daughters

TIMELINE

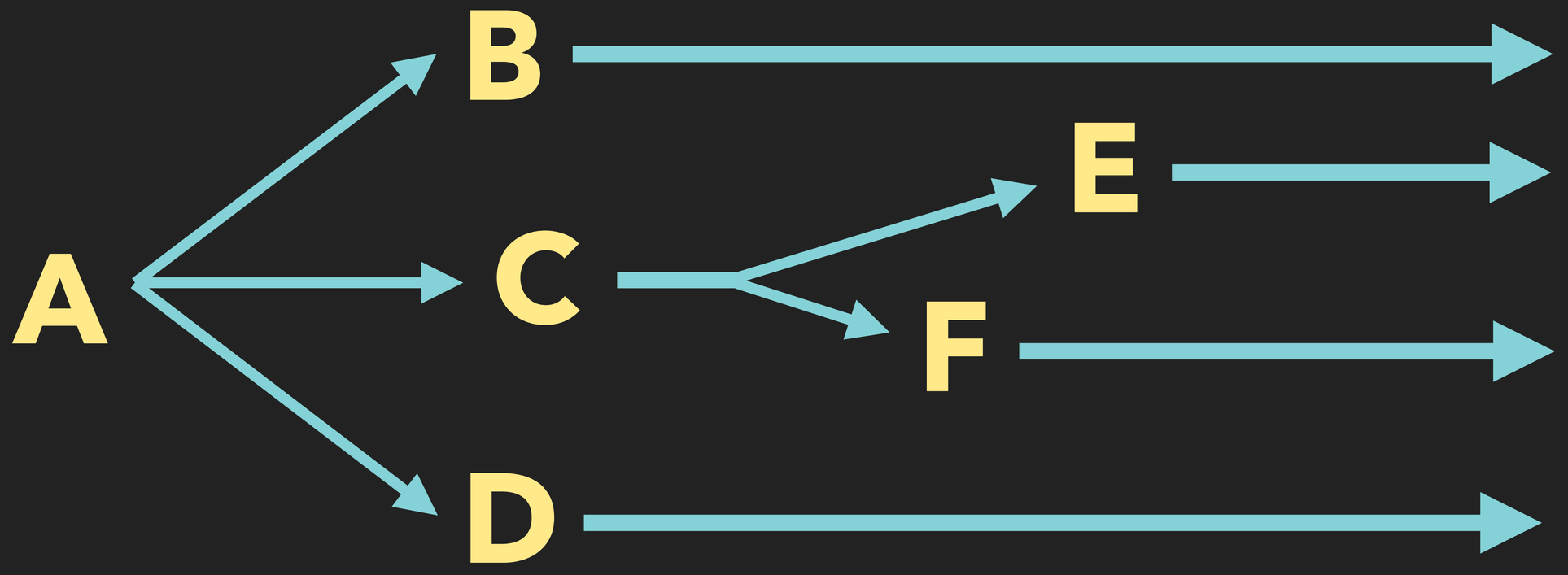
Situation 2



TIMELINE

Situation 2

This situation adds a wrinkle: E & F will share features that B & D don't.



Make a timeline.

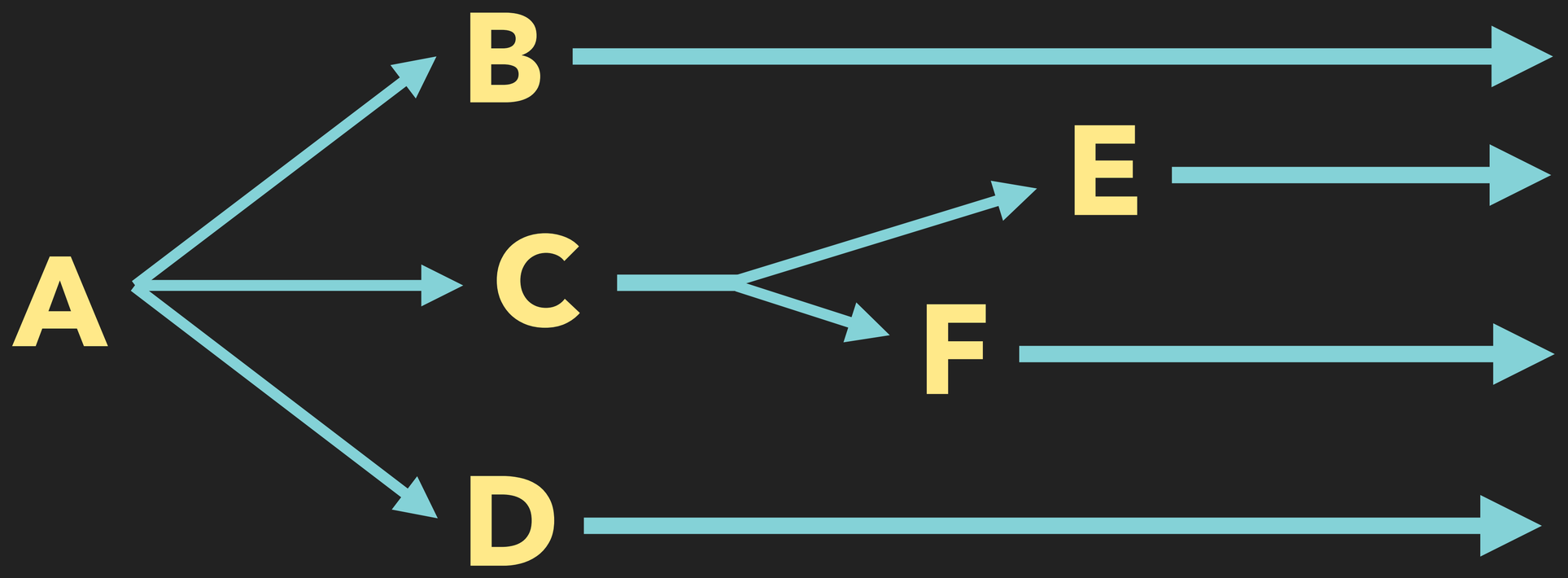
number of daughter languages

language features/shifts that are shared among daughters

language contact/isolation

TIMELINE

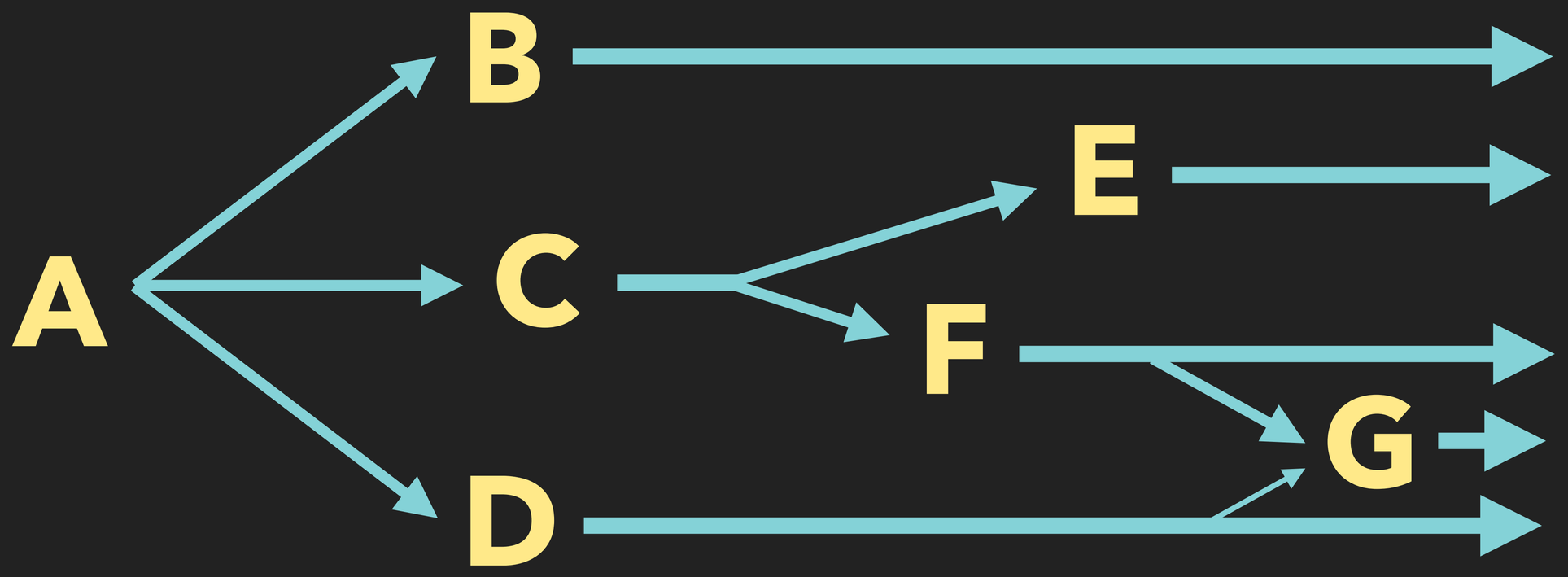
Situation 3



TIMELINE

Situation 3

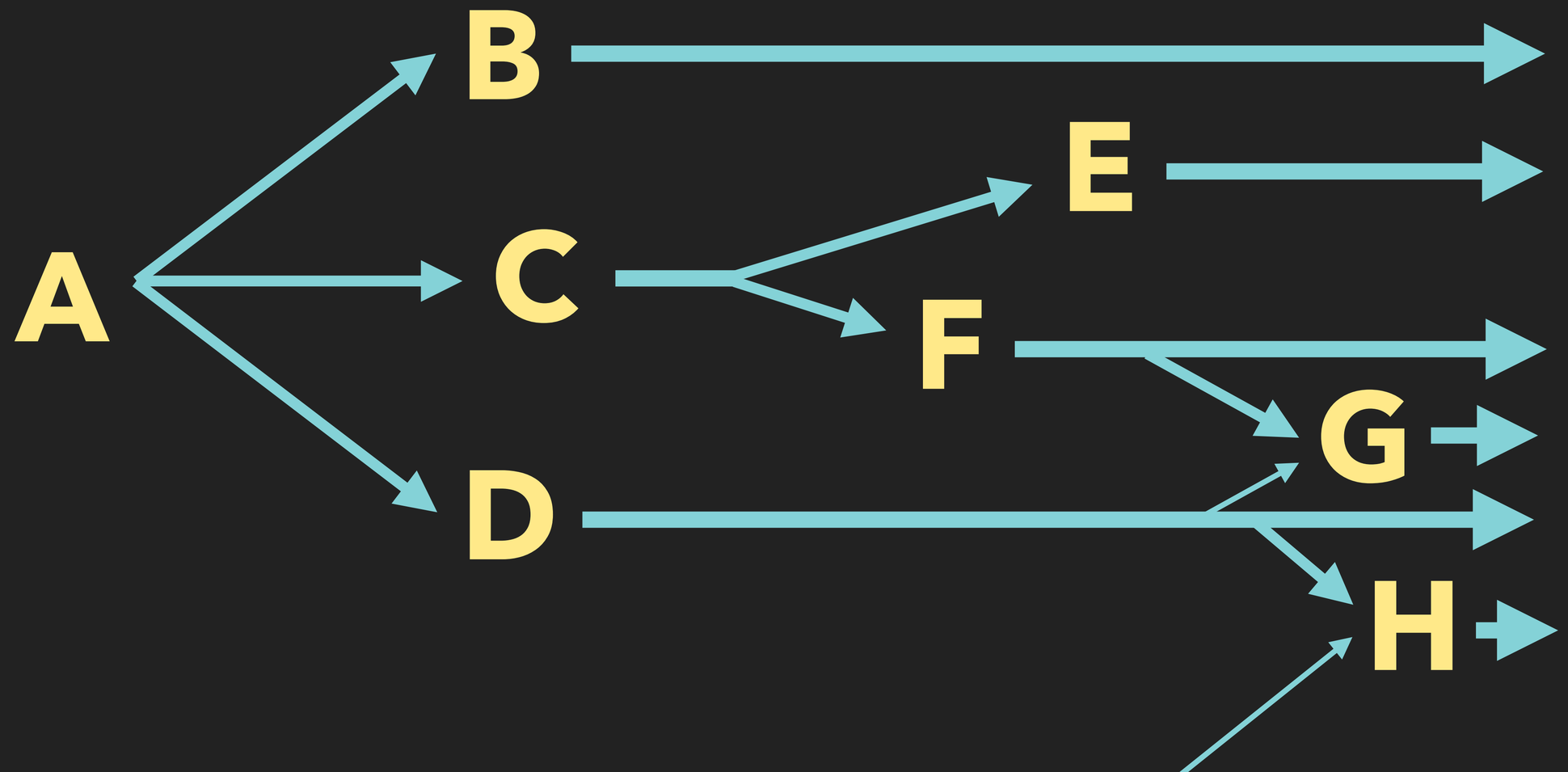
This situation typically affects the lexicon most.



TIMELINE

Situation 3b

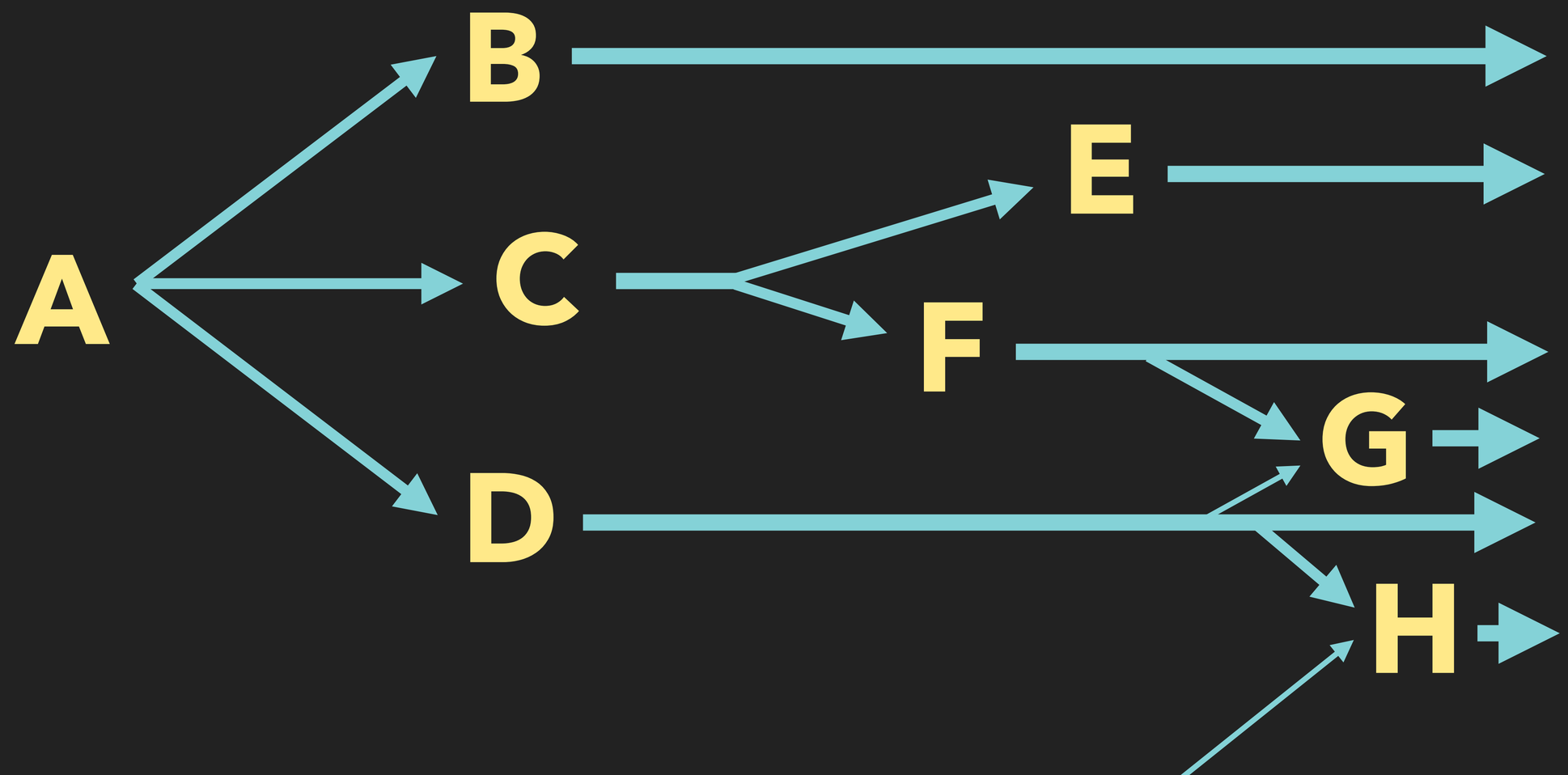
Daughter languages may have outside influences, too.



TIMELINE

Documentation

Thorough documentation for each stage you envision is key.



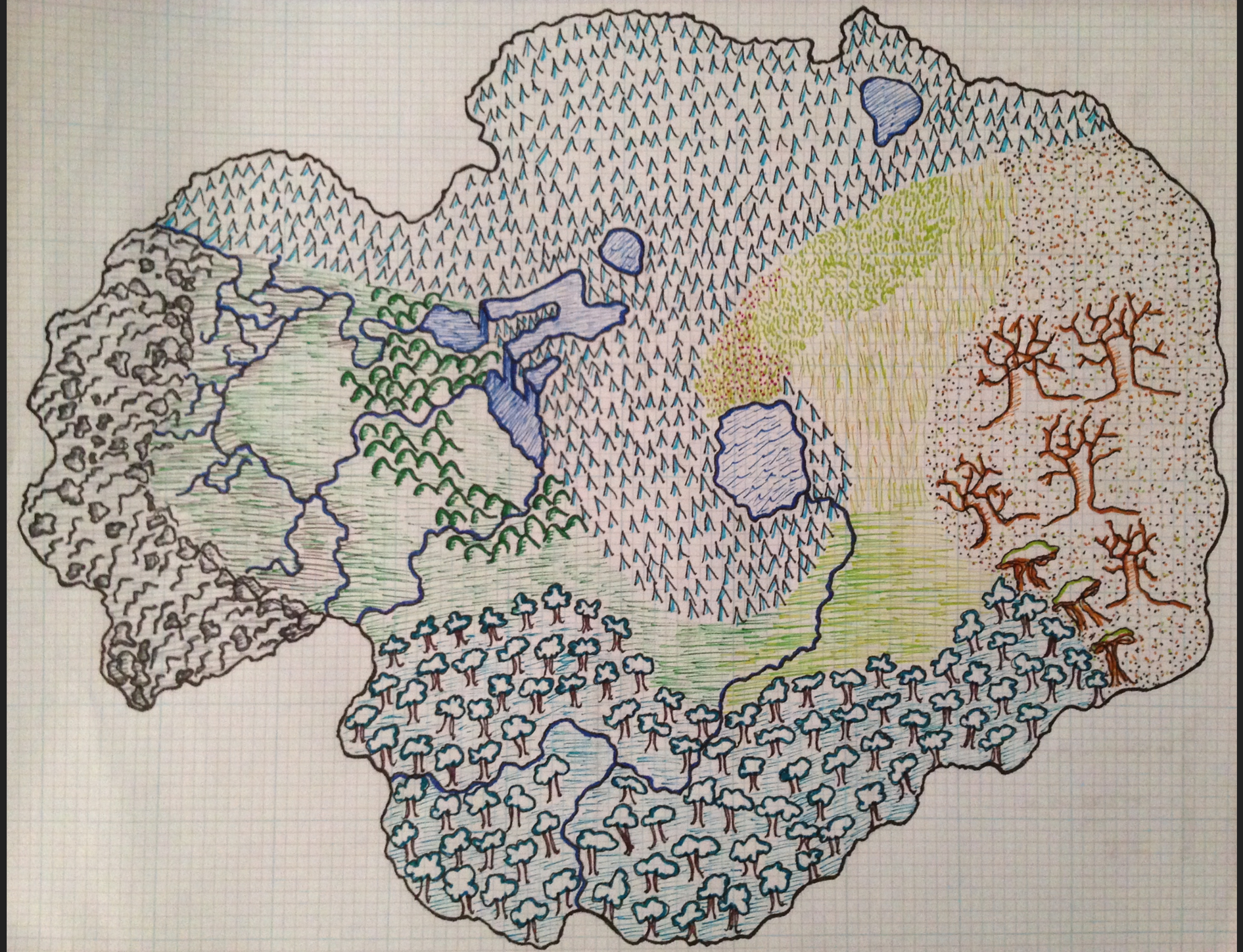
Keep records for each stage.

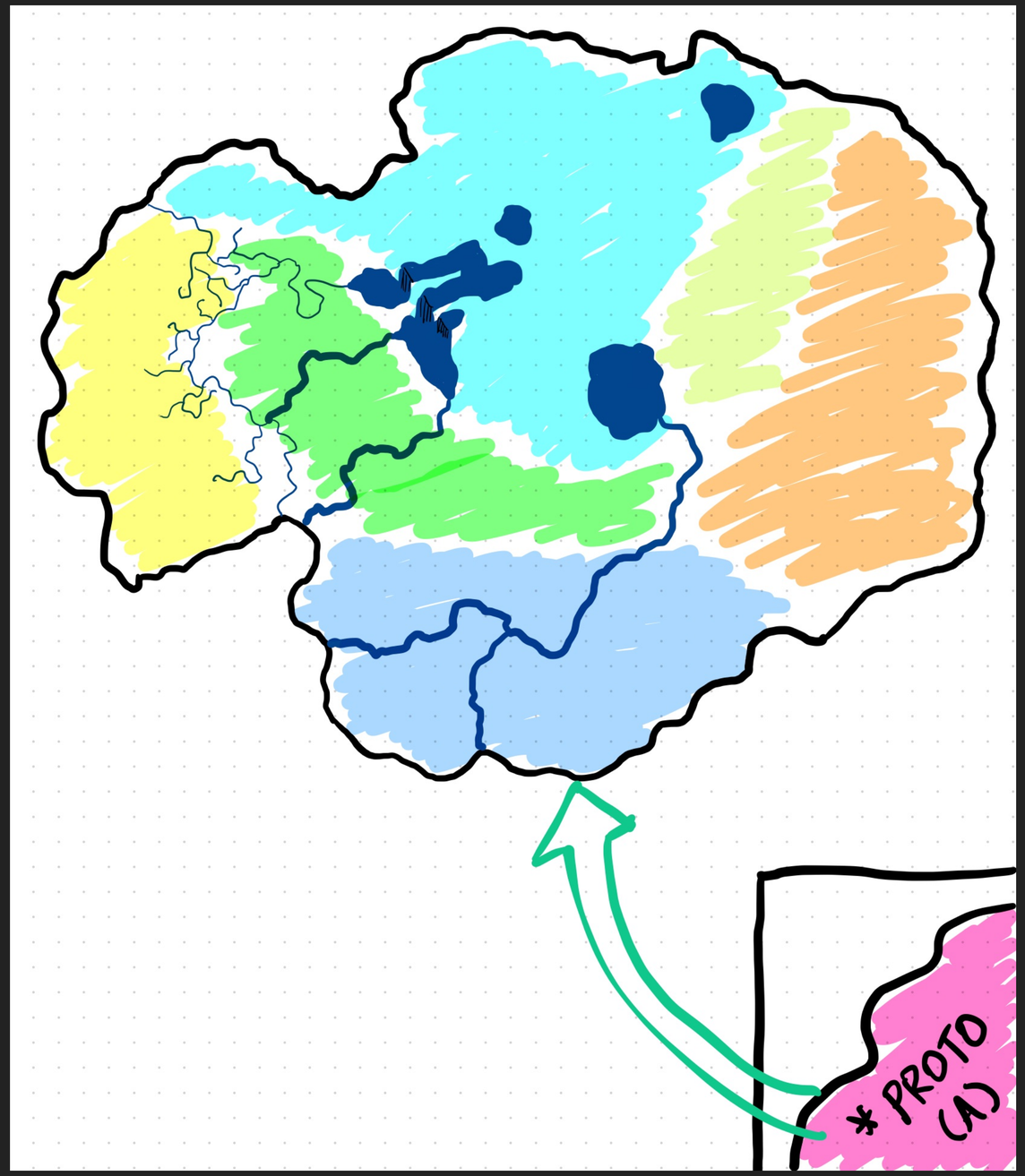
sound changes

grammar developments

lexicon growth and shifts

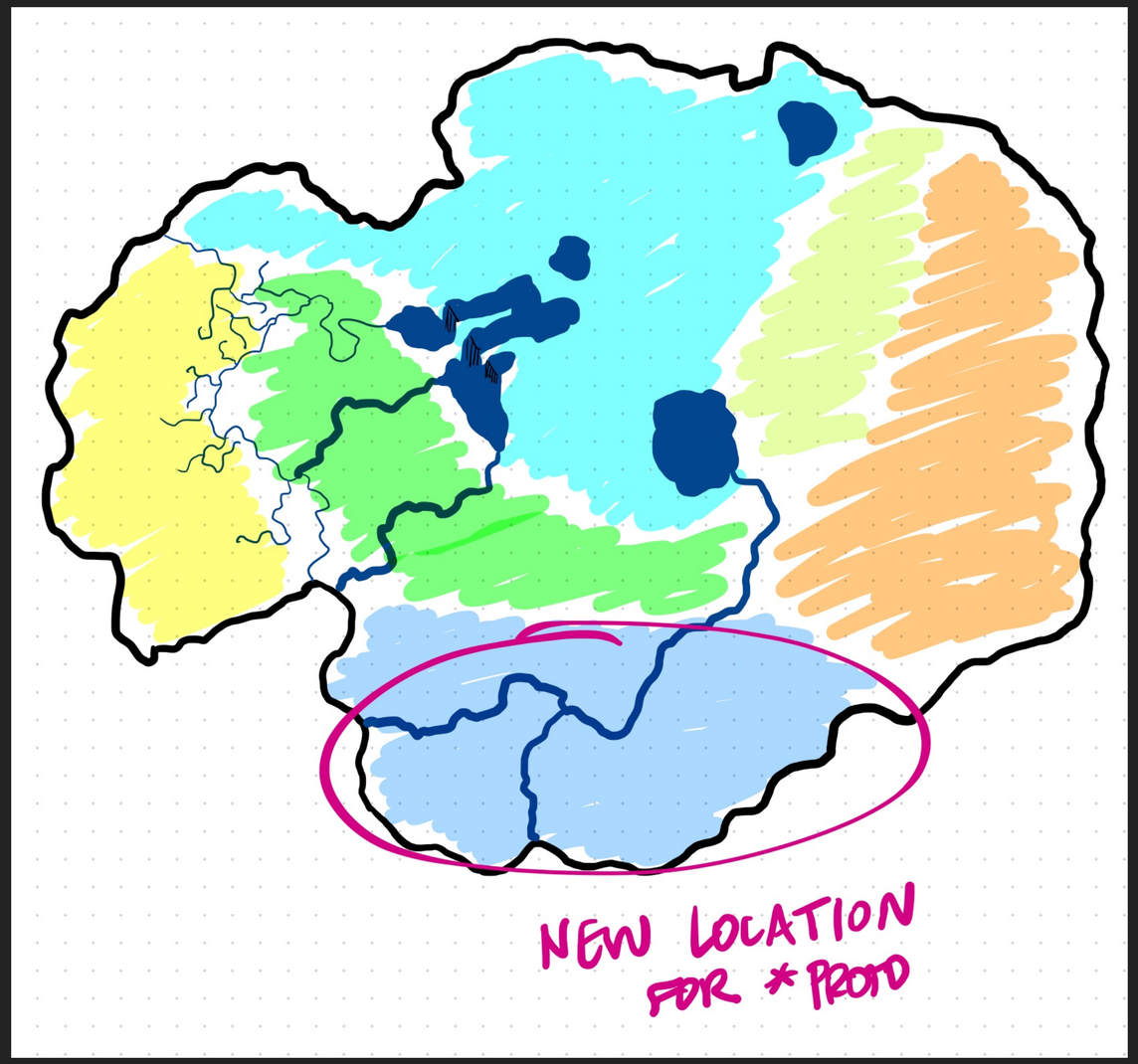
A QUICK EXAMPLE





***Proto-stage**

- word order
- tense and SVA
- noun cases
- basic derivations (e.g. augmentative, diminutive, agentive noun)



*Proto-stage

- lexical growth to describe new surroundings, including new compounds

*Proto (A)

Kuil tiu sna huk muz fi dau brai iakh.

“A rabbit chased a firefly near that tree.”

*Proto (A)

Kuil tiu sna huk muz fi dau brai iakh.

“A rabbit chased a firefly near that tree.”

*kuil “rabbit”

*tiu sna “spark bug” (*new compound*)

*muz “to chase”

*brai “tree”

*Proto (A)

Kuil tiu sna huk muz fi dau brai iakh.

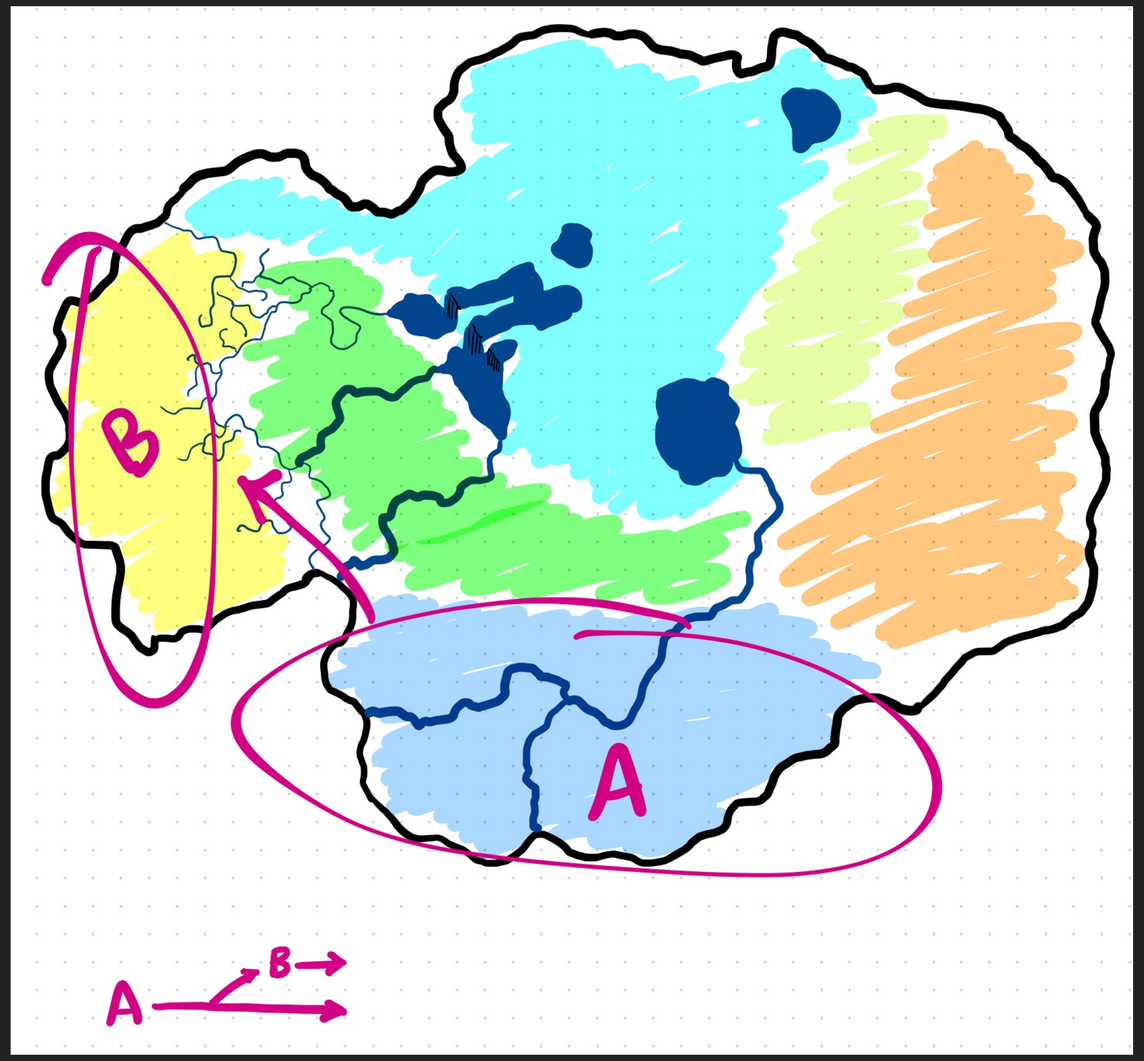
“A rabbit chased a firefly near that tree.”

*huk “to take” >> object marker

*fi “to finish” >> perfective

*dau “ground, place” >> proximal demonstrative

*iakh “to stand” >> postposition “near, close to, next to”



Stage 1 shifts

STAGE 1: A

*kuil tiu sna huk muz fi dau brai iakh

1. Diphthongs beginning with a high vowel shifted to glide onsets (*ia > ya, ui > wi, etc.).
2. Inflections merged to become suffixes, and compounds are reanalyzed as one word.

Kwil tyusnahuk muzfi dau brai yakh.

STAGE 1: B

*kuil tiu sna huk muz fi dau brai iakh

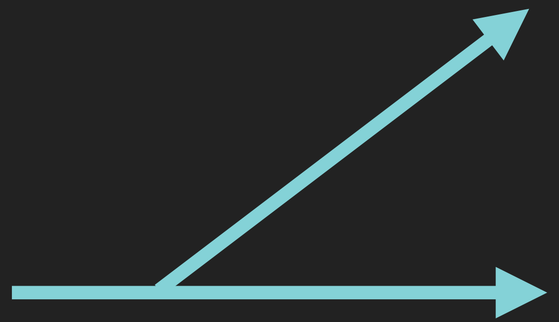
1. Diphthongs separate with slight glottal stop inserted between vowels.
2. In closed syllables, high vowels lower (*i > e, *u > o).

Ku‘el ti‘u sna hok moz fi da‘u bra‘i i‘akh.

STAGE 1

B

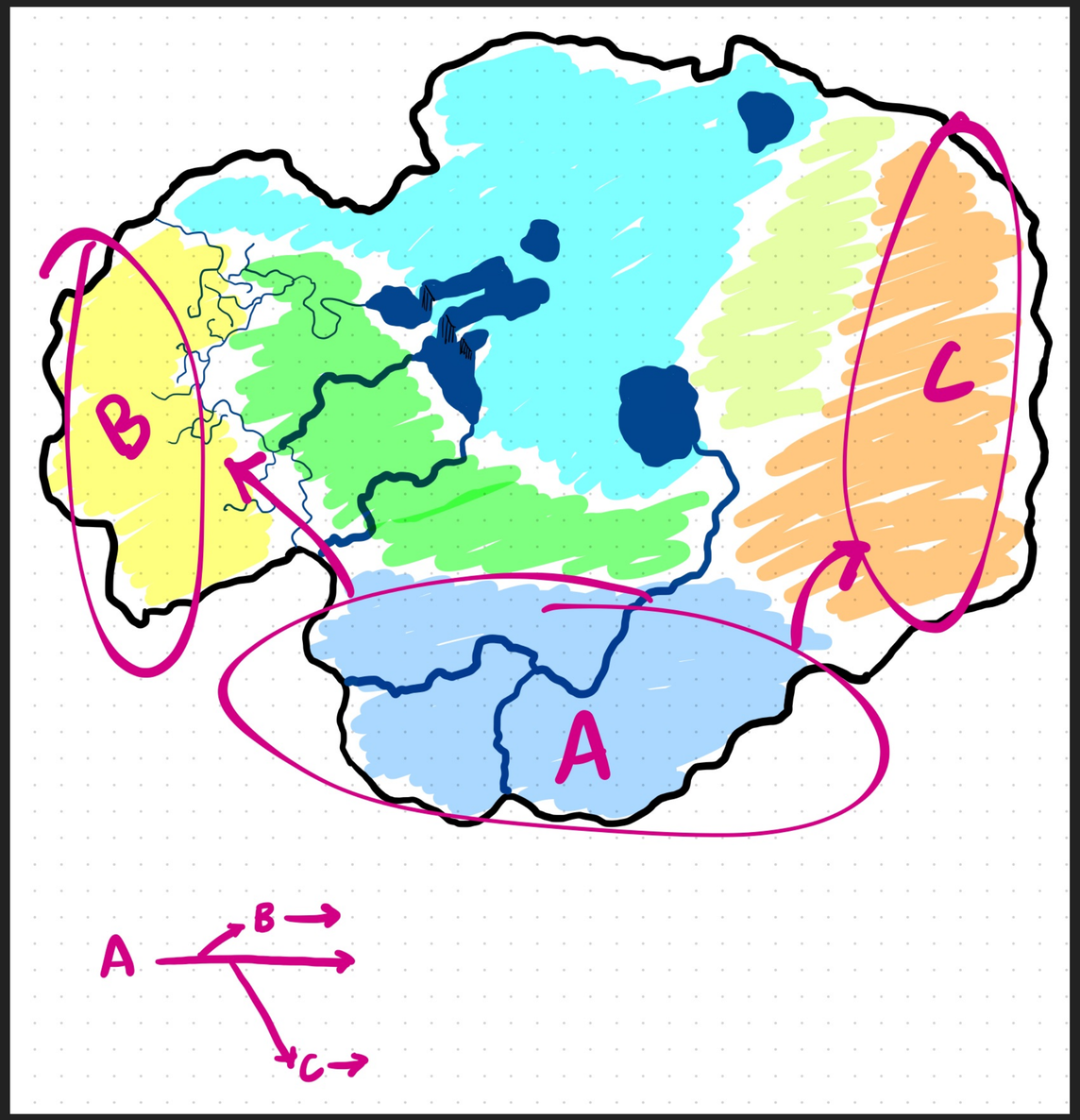
Ku’el ti’u sna hok moz fi da’u bra’i i’akh.



A

Kwil tyusnahuk muzfi dau brai yakh.

*kuil tiu sna
huk muz fi
dau brai iakh



Stage 2 shifts

STAGE 2: A

*kwil tyusnahuk muzfi dau brai yakh.

1. Where a palatal glide follows an alveolar consonant, the consonant palatizes.
2. Diphthongs *ai and *au merge to ***e*** and ***o***, respectively.
3. When two non-nasal consonants appear side-by-side, the second consonant takes the voicing of the one before it.

Kwil chusnahuk muzvi do bre yakh.

STAGE 2: C

*kwil tyusnahuk muzfi dau brai yakh.

1. When two consonants appear side-by-side, the first consonant takes the voicing of the one following it.

2. Initial syllables receive stress. Unstressed syllables lose their coda consonants. If the coda consonant is voiced, the vowel is compensatorily lengthened.

Gwil dyuznahu musfi do bre yakh.

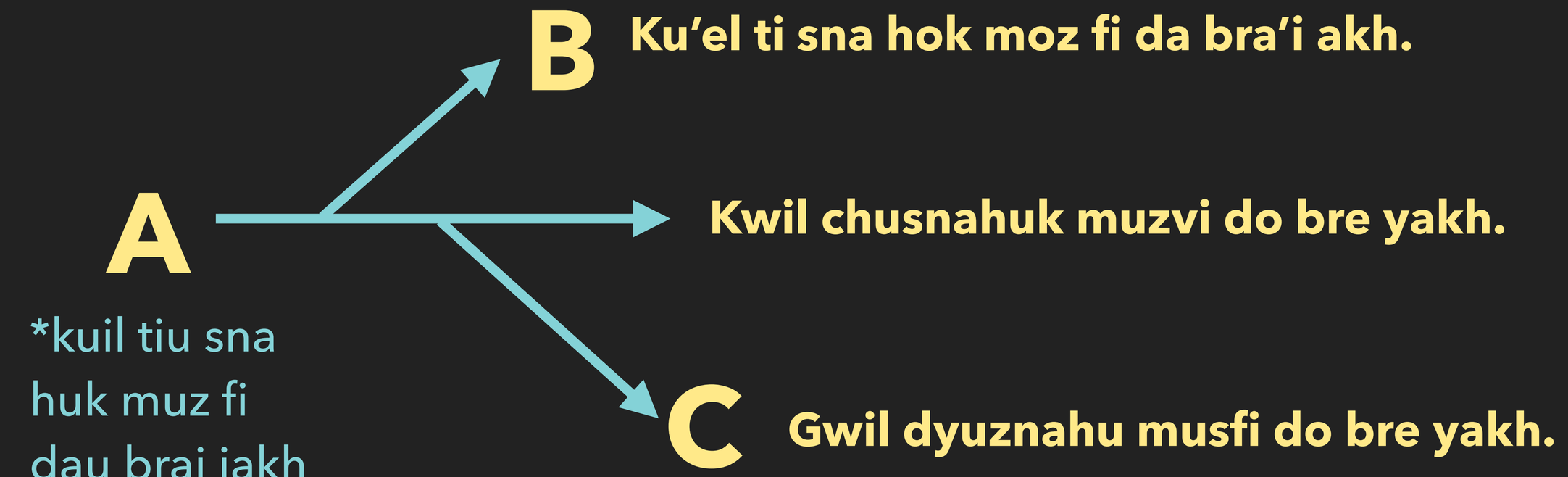
STAGE 2: B

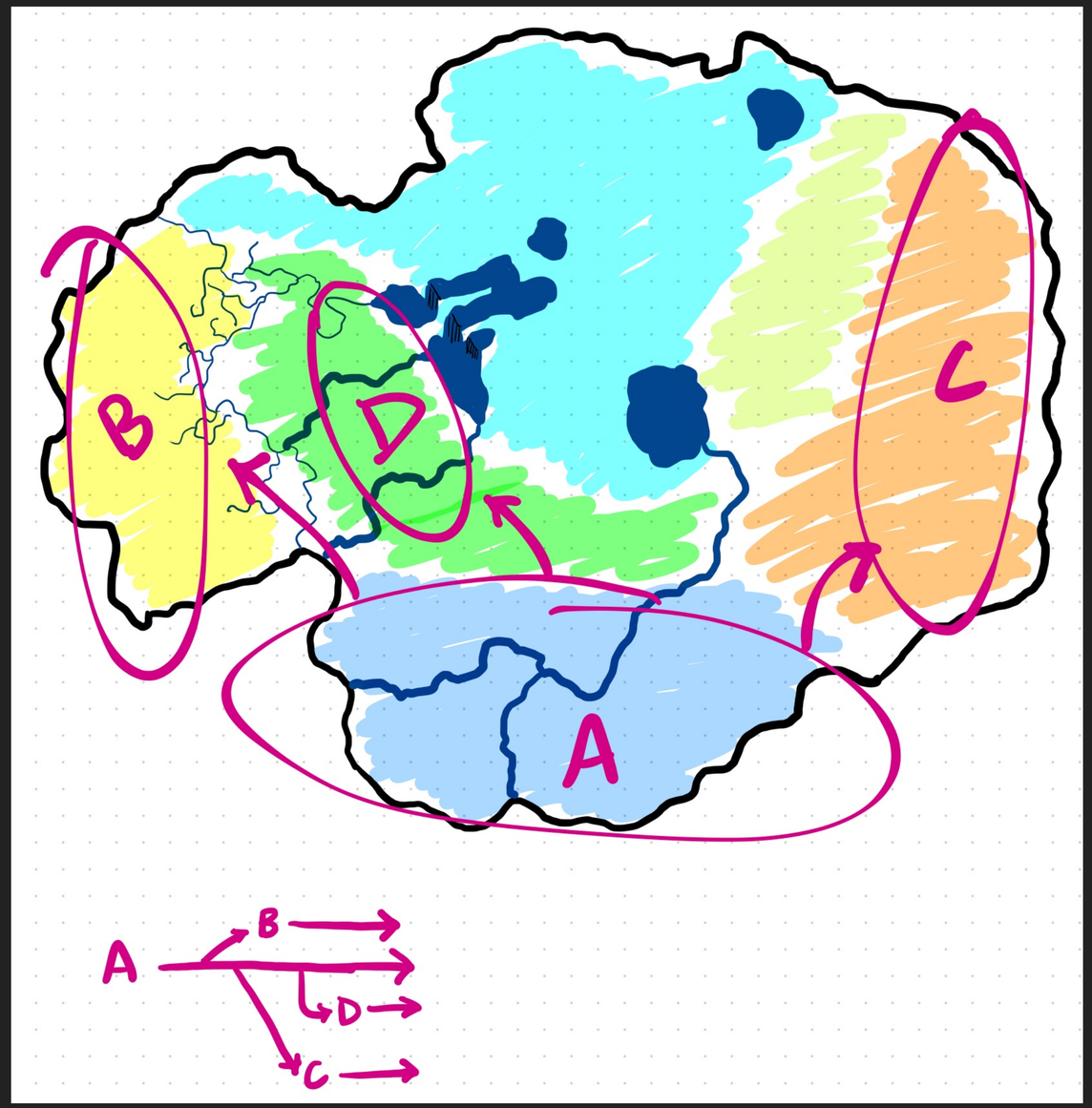
*ku’el ti’u sna hok mos fi da’u bra’i i’akh.

1. Unstressed words lose their unstressed syllable, where stress falls on penultimate syllable or a final heavy syllable. Compounded forms have heaviest stress on head word.

Ku’el ti sna hok moz fi da bra’i akh.

STAGE 2


B
Ku’el ti sna hok moz fi da bra’i akh.
A
Kwil chusnahuk muzvi do bre yakh.
*kuil tiu sna
huk muz fi
dau brai iakh
C
Gwil dyuznahu musfi do bre yakh.



Stage 3 shifts

STAGE 3: A

*kwil chusnahuk muzvi do bre yakh.

1. When two fricatives appear side-by-side, the second one becomes a stop.
2. The *w shifts to ***v***.

Kvil chusnahuk muzbi do bre yakh.

STAGE 3: D

*kwil chusnahuk muzvi do bre yakh.

1. Coda frequickatives are lost.
2. Demonstratives are reanalyzed as a prefix to the noun.

Kwil chusnahuk muzvi dobre ya.

STAGE 3: C

*gwil dyuznahu musfi do bre yakh.

1. Word-internal coda consonants are lost. If the coda was voiced, the vowel was lengthened.
2. Unstressed case endings are lost, and word order shifts to SVO.

Gwil mufi dyuuna do bre yakh.

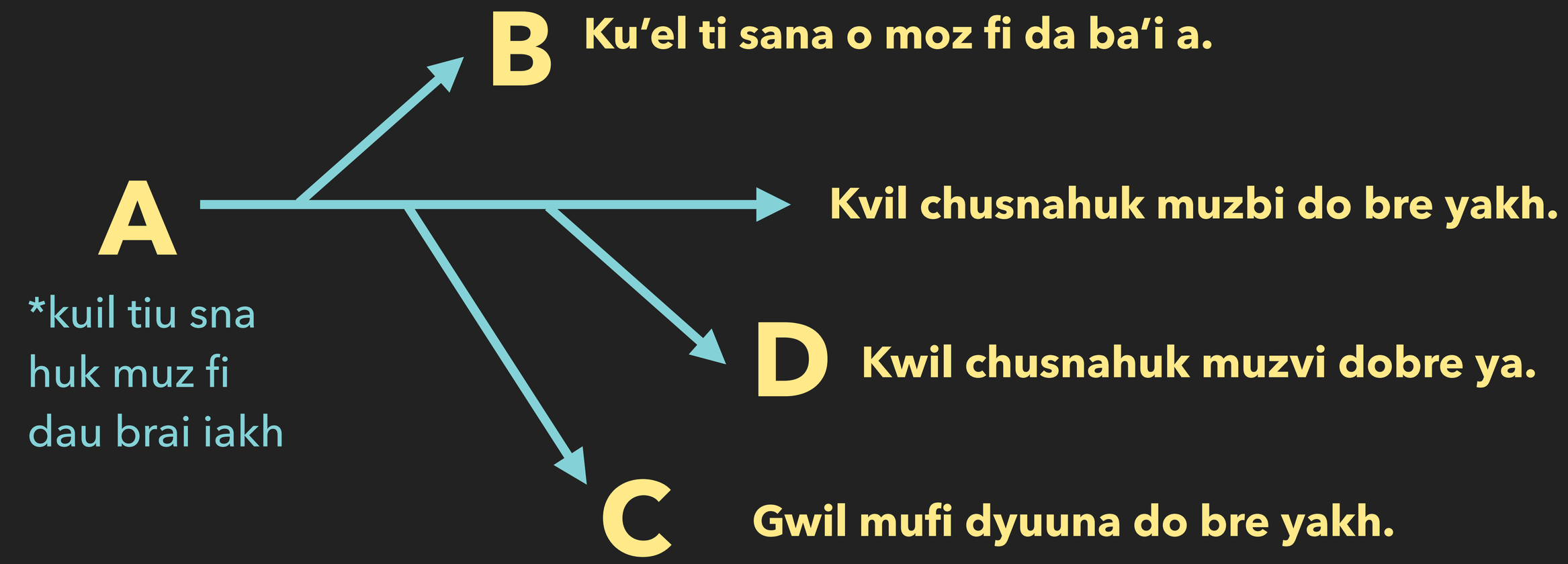
STAGE 3: B

*Ku’el ti sna hok moz fi da bra’i akh.

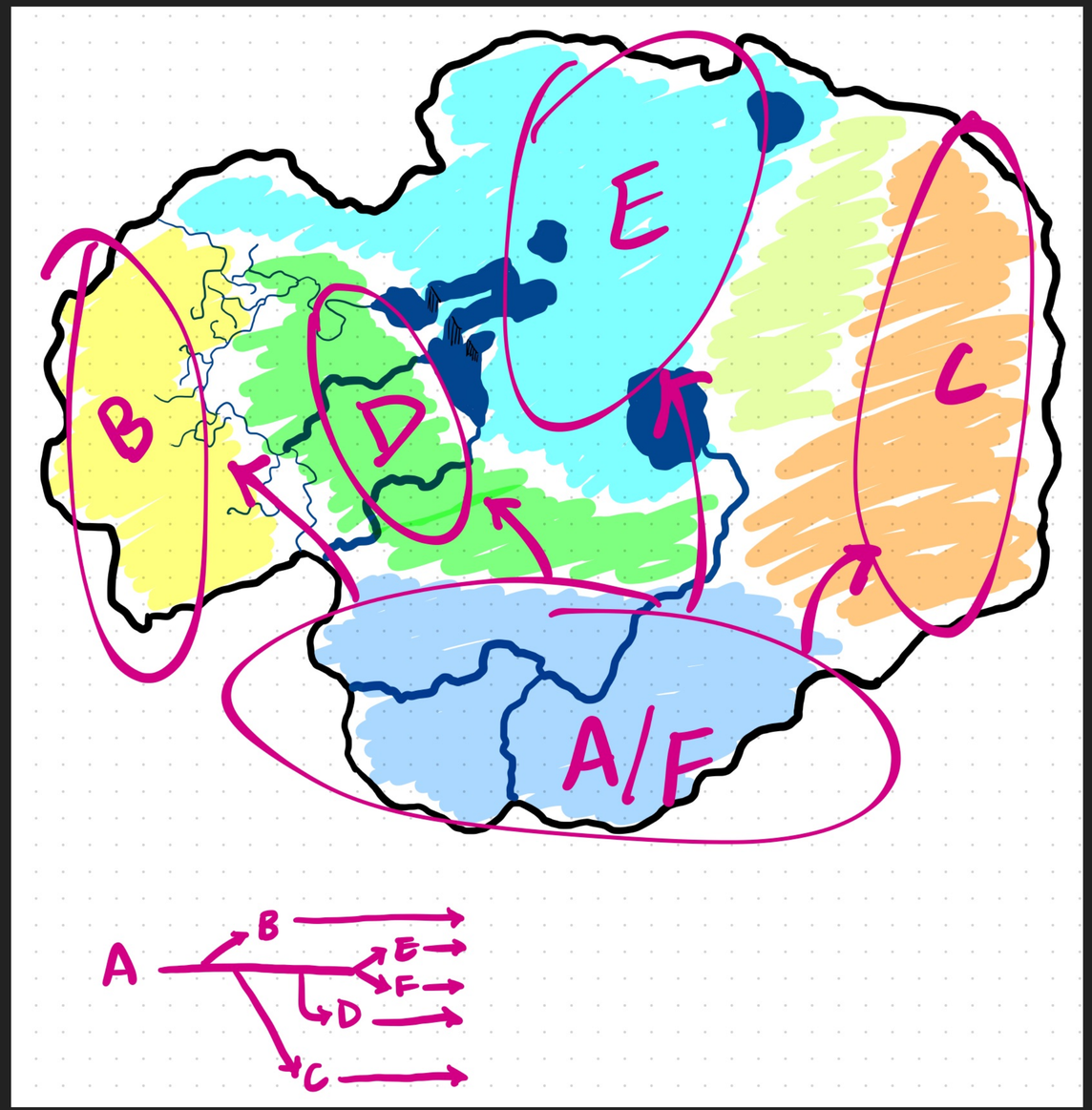
1. Voiceless codas are lost.
2. Glottal fricative is lost.
3. Consonant clusters are broken: liquids disappear after stops, but [a] is inserted in other cases.

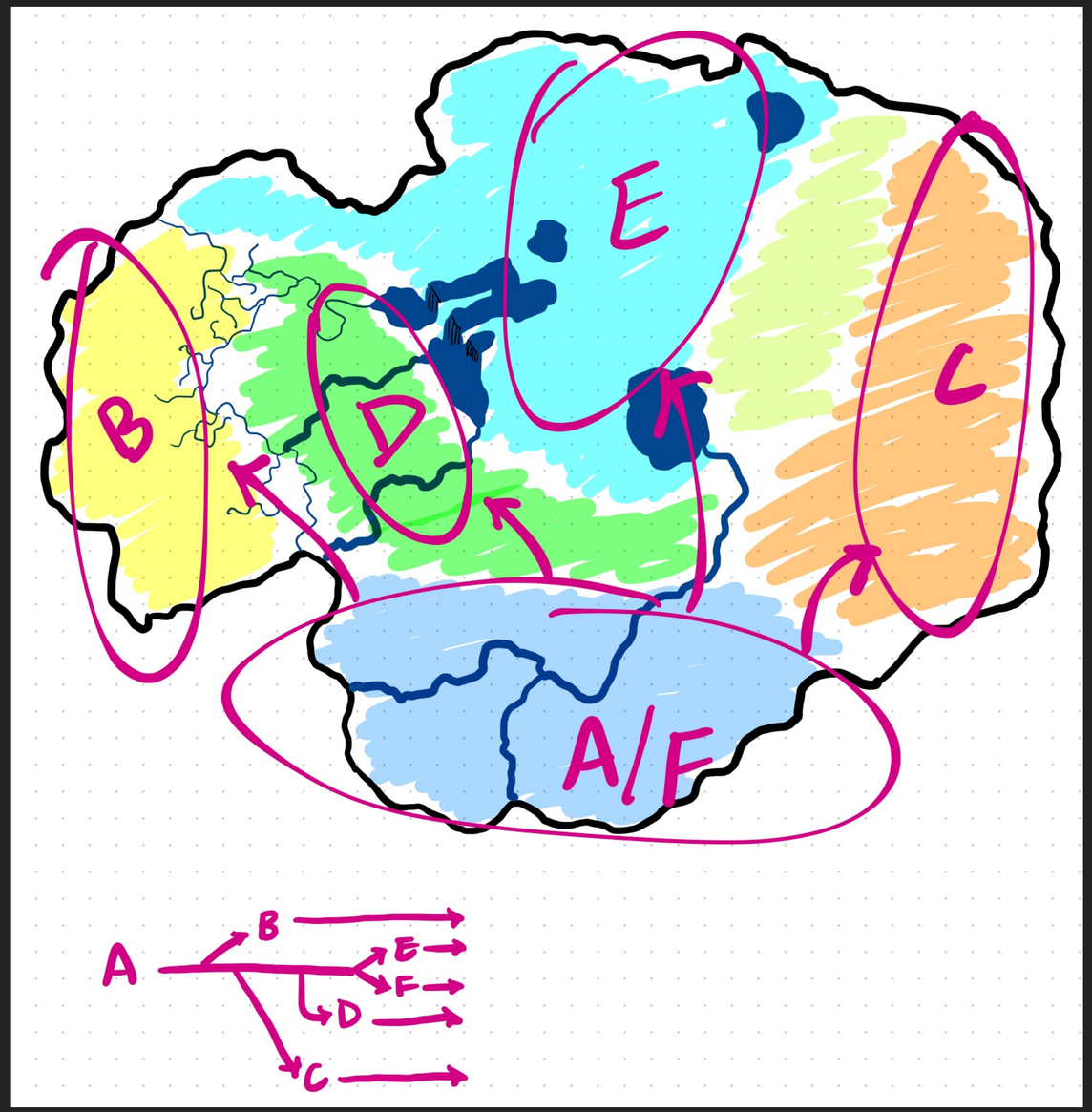
Ku’el ti sana o moz fi da ba’i a.

STAGE 3


A
*kuil tiu sna huk muz fi dau brai iakh
B
Ku’el ti sana o moz fi da ba’i a.
Kvil chusnahuk muzbi do bre yakh.
D
Kwil chusnahuk muzvi dobre ya.
C
Gwil mufi dyuuna do bre yakh.

Stage 4 shifts





Stage 4 shifts

Language “A” is no longer represented because that speaking community broke off into E and F.

STAGE 4: E

*kvil chusnahuk muzbi do bre yakh.

1. Stop-fricative consonant clusters reduce, with the initial stop being deleted.
2. Consonants assimilate in voicing to a following consonant.
3. Word-final voiceless stops become fricatives.

Vil chuznahukh muzbi do bre yakh.

STAGE 4: F

*kvil chusnahuk muzbi do bre yakh.

F, Stage 4:

1. Coda voiceless consonants are deleted in unstressed syllables.

Kvil chusnahu muzbi do bre ya.

STAGE 4: D

*kwil chusnahuk muzvi dobre ya.

1. Common postpositions are reanalyzed as case.
2. Stop-stop and fricative-fricative pairs geminate, where the second consonant assimilates to the first.
3. Word-final voiceless codas disappear.
4. Stress is typically assigned to penultimate syllable.

Kwil chusnahu muzzi dobreya.

STAGE 4: C

*gwil mufi dyuuna do bre yakh.

1. The segments *ty and *dy become ***ch*** and ***j***, respectively.
2. Word-final weak fricatives fortify, becoming stops.

Gwil mufi juuna do bre yak.

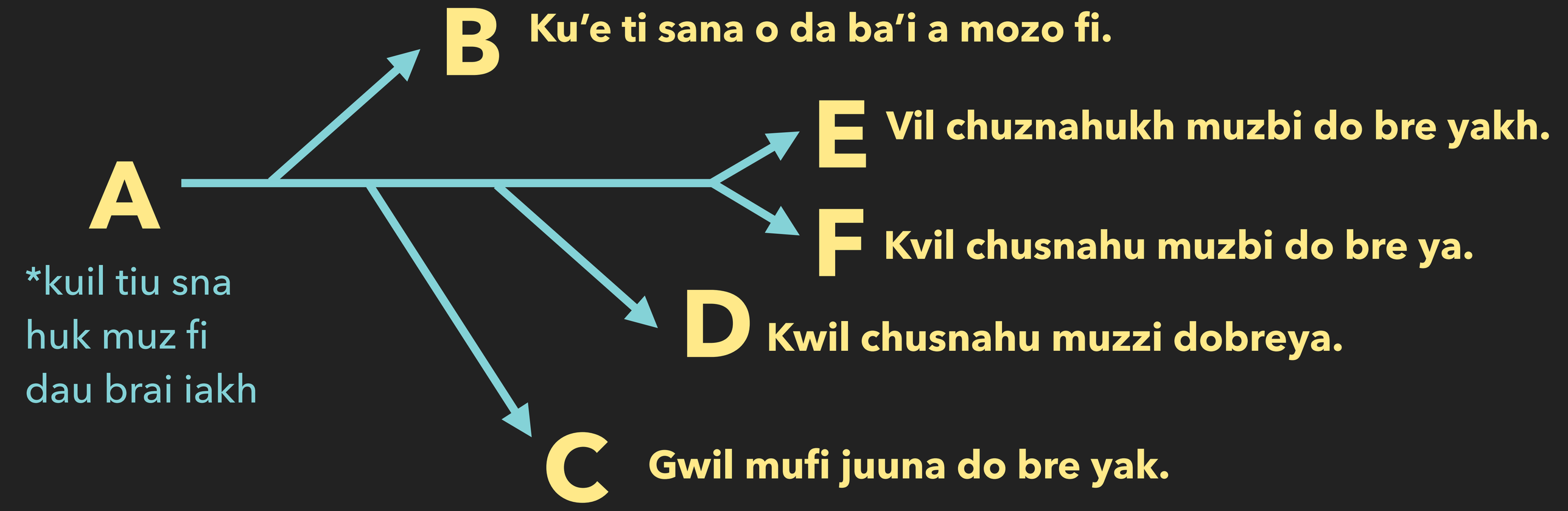
STAGE 4: B

*Ku’el ti sana o moz fi da ba’i a.

1. Word-final liquids are lost.
2. A copy vowel is inserted after a word-final consonant.
3. Speakers show a preference for verb-final structures.

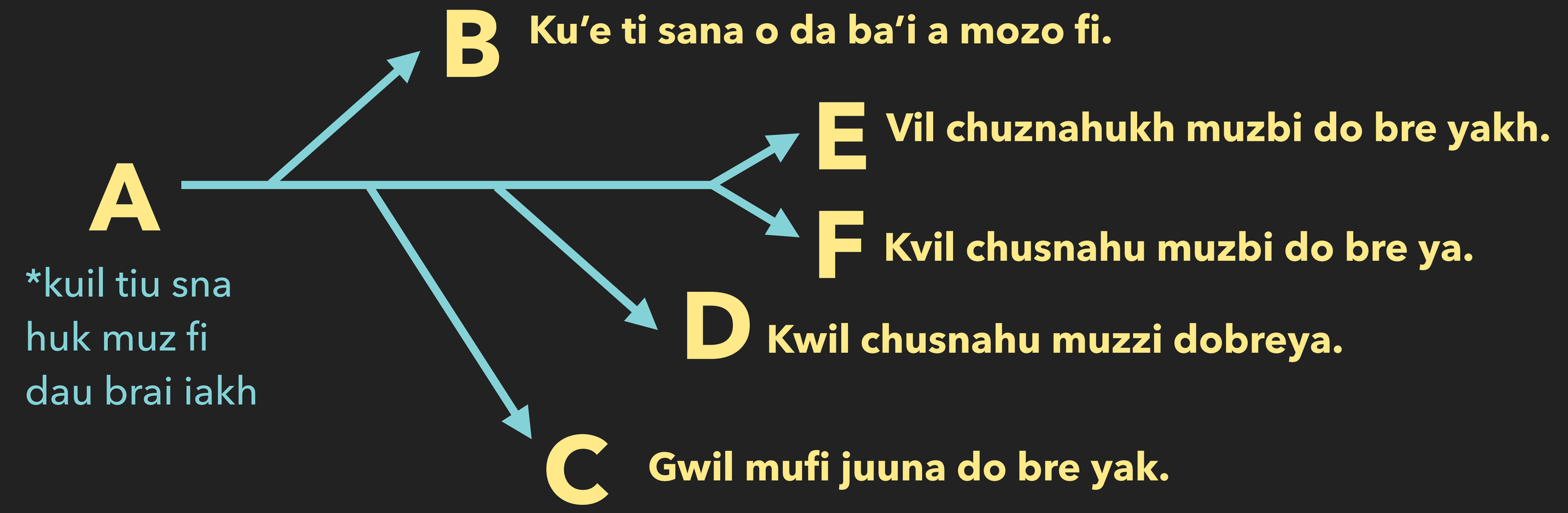
Ku’e ti sana o da ba’i a mozo fi.

STAGE 4


B
Ku’e ti sana o da ba’i a mozo fi.
E
Vil chuznahukh muzbi do bre yakh.
A
F
Kvil chusnahu muzbi do bre ya.
*kuil tiu sna
huk muz fi
dau brai iakh
D
Kwil chusnahu muzzi dobreya.
C
Gwil mufi juuna do bre yak.

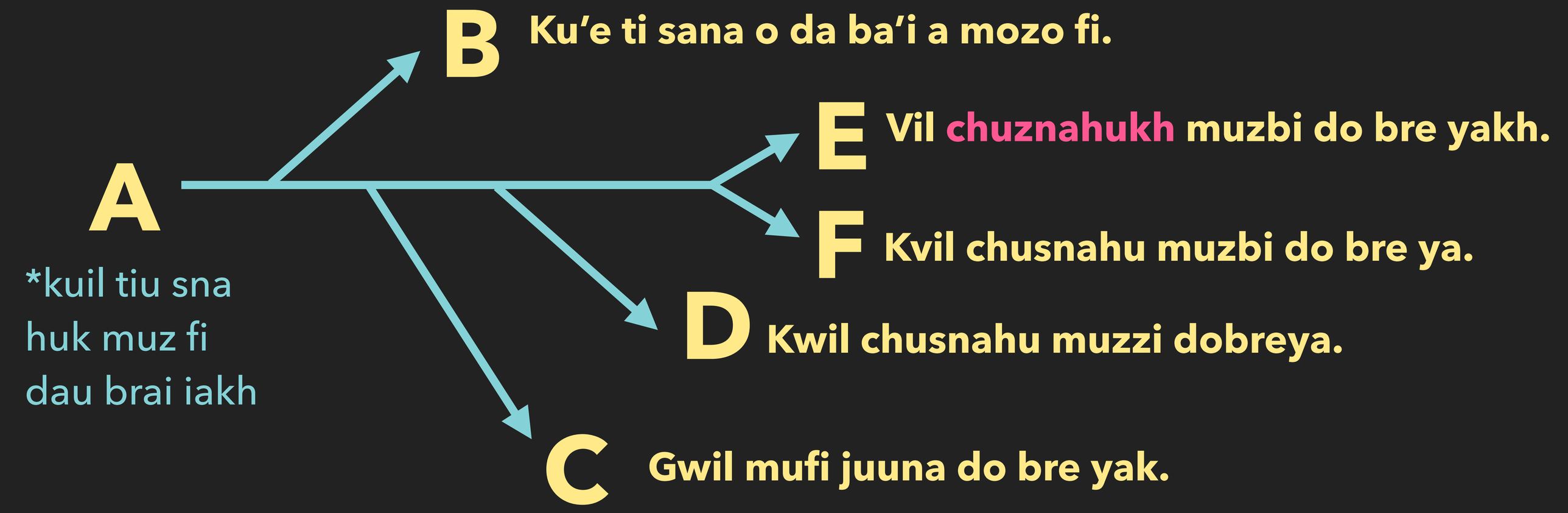
STAGE 4

This hasn't even touched on the lexical shifts that would happen as these speaking communities moved to new locations!



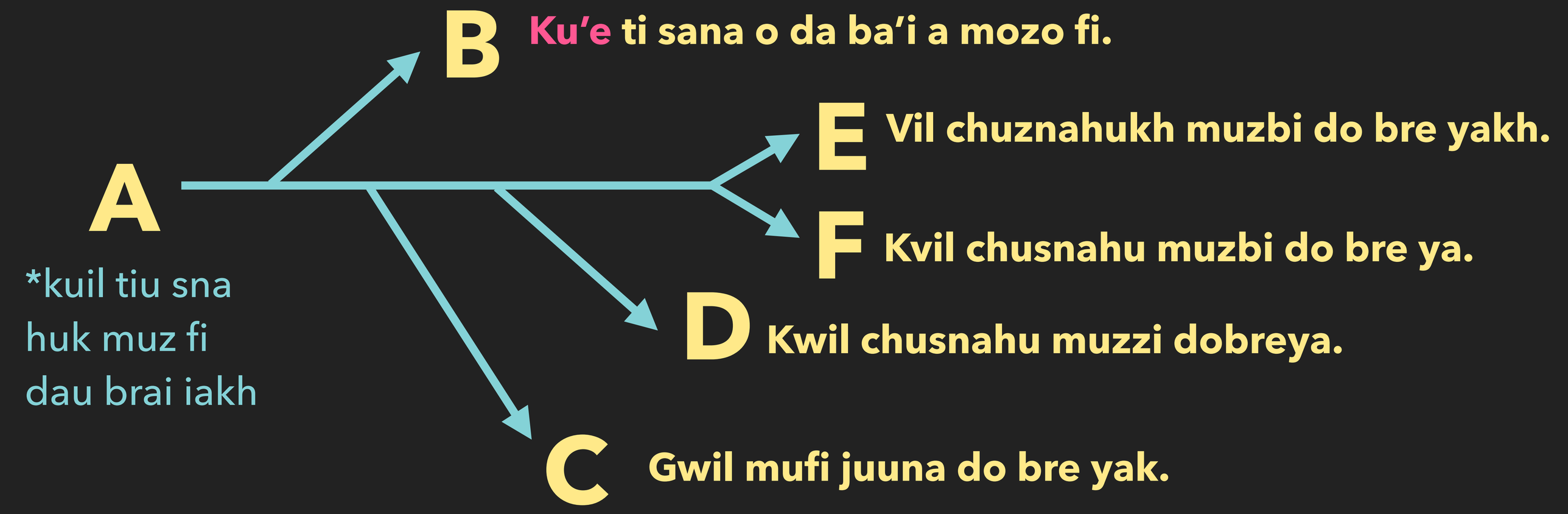
STAGE 4

E is spoken in mountain regions, where there are no fireflies. That word shifted to a poetic way of referring to stars.



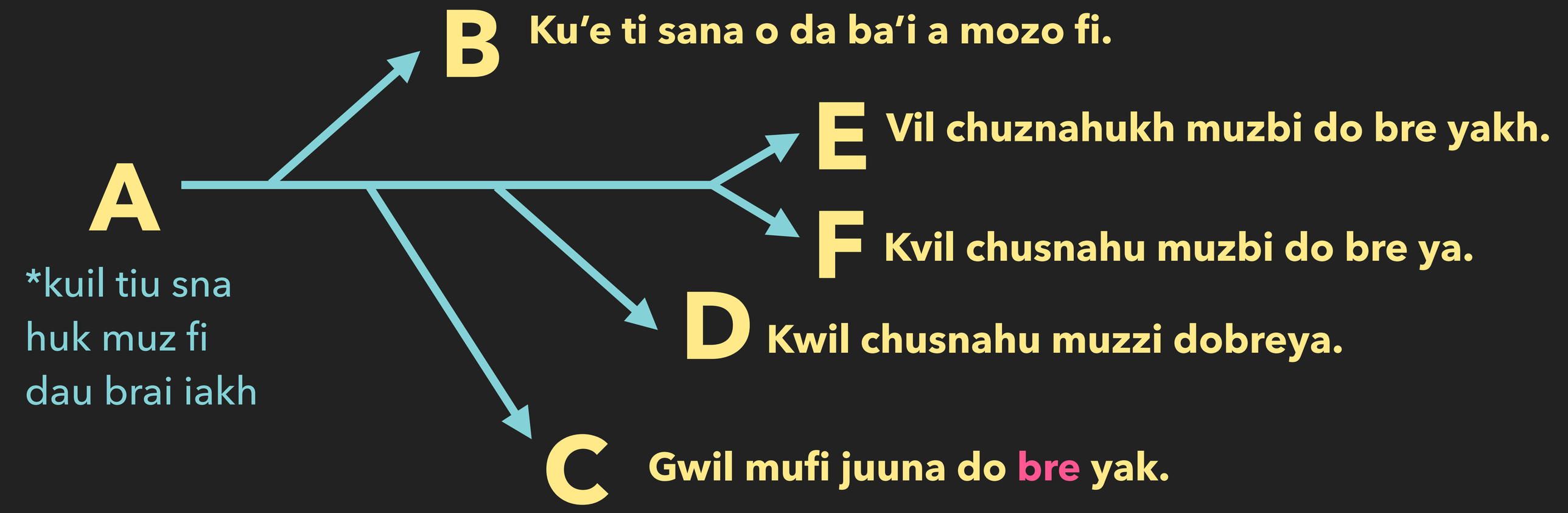
STAGE 4

The word for “rabbit” in the proto-language broadened in language B to refer to any small animal.



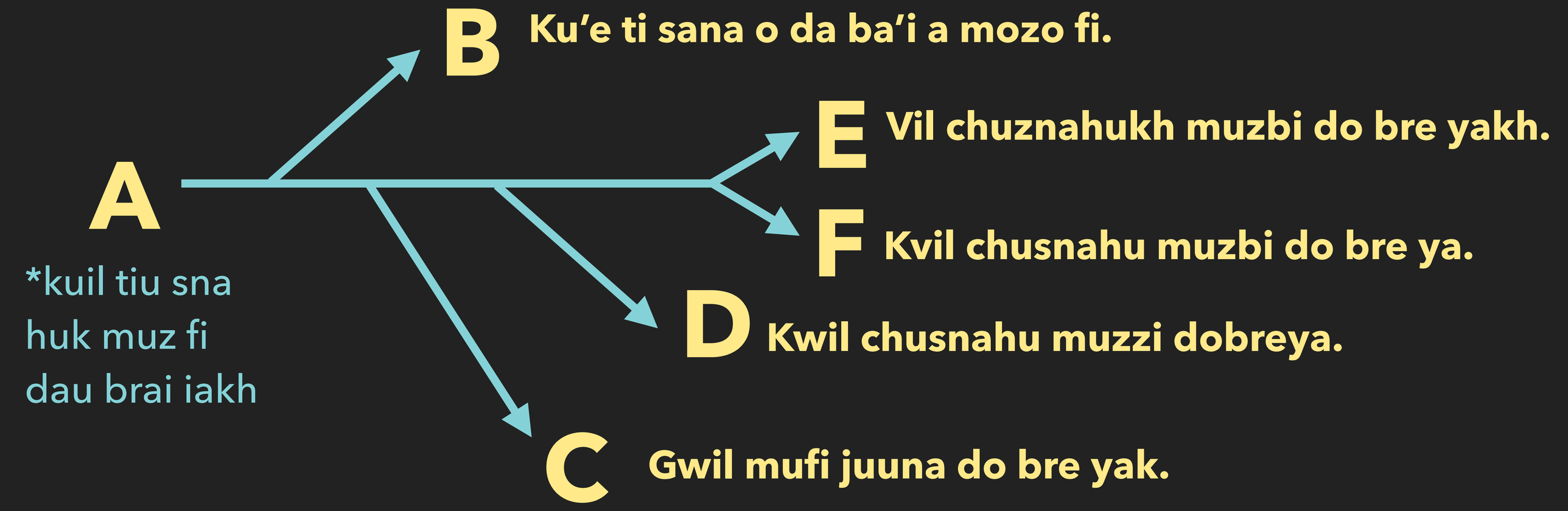
STAGE 4

In language C, the word for “tree” shifted to mean “bush.”



STAGE 4

Also, these were relatively few changes at each stage, yet you can already see how the branches are forming and how different each daughter could be.



So you can see the changes for each branch, I've organized the information by branch...

Language B

Stage 1,B

1. Diphthongs separate with slight glottal stop inserted between vowels.
2. In closed syllables, high vowels lower (*i > e, *u > o).

Stage 2, B

3. Unstressed words lose their unstressed syllable, where stress falls on penultimate syllable or a final heavy syllable. Compounded forms have heaviest stress on head word.

Stage 3, B

4. Voiceless codas are lost.
5. Glottal fricative is lost.
6. Consonant clusters are broken: liquids disappear after stops, but [a] is inserted in other cases.

Stage 4, B

7. Word-final liquids are lost.
8. A copy vowel is inserted after a word-final consonant.
9. Speakers show a preference for verb-final structures.

Language C

Stage 1, C-F

1. Diphthongs beginning with a high vowel shifted to glide onsets (*ia > ya, ui > wi, etc.).
2. Inflections merged to become suffixes, and compounds are reanalyzed as one word.

Stage 2, C

3. When two consonants appear side-by-side, the first consonant takes the voicing of the one following it.
4. Initial syllables receive stress. Unstressed syllables lose their coda consonants. If the coda consonant is voiced, the vowel is compensatorily lengthened.

Stage 3, C

5. Word-internal coda consonants are lost. If the coda was voiced, the vowel was lengthened.
6. Unstressed case endings are lost, and word order shifts to SVO.

Stage 4, C

7. The segments *ty and *dy become ***ch*** and ***j***, respectively.
8. Word-final weak fricatives fortify, becoming stops.

Language D

Stage 1, C-F

1. Diphthongs beginning with a high vowel shifted to glide onsets (*ia > ya, ui > wi, etc.).
2. Inflections merged to become suffixes, and compounds are reanalyzed as one word.

Stage 2, D-F

3. Where a palatal glide follows an alveolar consonant, the consonant palatizes.
4. Diphthongs *ai and *au merge to ***e*** and ***o***, respectively.
5. When two non-nasal consonants appear side-by-side, the second consonant takes the voicing of the one before it.

Stage 3, D

6. Coda frequickatives are lost.
7. Demonstratives are reanalyzed as a prefix to the noun.

Stage 4, D

8. Common postpositions are reanalyzed as case.
9. Stop-stop and fricative-fricative pairs geminate, where the second consonant assimilates to the first.
10. Word-final voiceless codas disappear.
11. Stress is typically assigned to penultimate syllable.

Language E

Stage 1, C-F

1. Diphthongs beginning with a high vowel shifted to glide onsets (*ia > ya, ui > wi, etc.).
2. Inflections merged to become suffixes, and compounds are reanalyzed as one word.

Stage 2, D-F

3. Where a palatal glide follows an alveolar consonant, the consonant palatizes.
4. Diphthongs *ai and *au merge to ***e*** and ***o***, respectively.
5. When two non-nasal consonants appear side-by-side, the second consonant takes the voicing of the one before it.

Stage 3, E-F

6. When two fricatives appear side-by-side, the second one becomes a stop.
7. The *w shifts to ***v***.

Stage 4, F

8. Stop-fricative consonant clusters reduce, with the initial stop being deleted.
9. Consonants assimilate in voicing to a following consonant.
10. Word-final voiceless stops become fricatives.

Language F

Stage 1, C-F

1. Diphthongs beginning with a high vowel shifted to glide onsets (*ia > ya, ui > wi, etc.).
2. Inflections merged to become suffixes, and compounds are reanalyzed as one word.

Stage 2, D-F

3. Where a palatal glide follows an alveolar consonant, the consonant palatizes.
4. Diphthongs *ai and *au merge to ***e*** and ***o***, respectively.
5. When two non-nasal consonants appear side-by-side, the second consonant takes the voicing of the one before it.

Stage 3, E-F

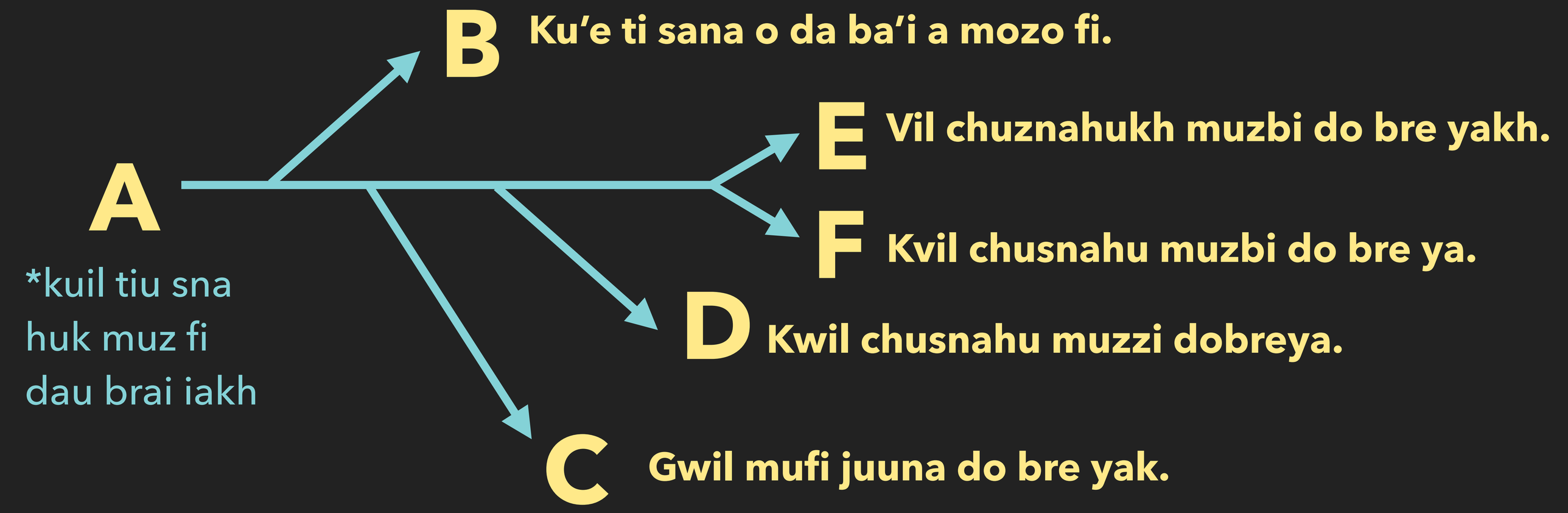
6. When two fricatives appear side-by-side, the second one becomes a stop.
7. The *w shifts to ***v***.

Stage 4, F

8. Coda voiceless consonants are deleted in unstressed syllables.

STAGE 4

Oh, and you may have noticed I recycled quite a few sound changes—the same changes yield new results when ordered differently!



The key is keeping track of what you've decided for each stage so daughter languages can develop organically.