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.

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.