Dialect vs. Language

- What is the difference between a *dialect* and a *language*?
- From a linguistic point of view, these terms are problematic
- They might have a particular meaning from a socio-political point of view
- A 'language' tends to be associated with a standard language, which is almost always written, and is almost always associated with the speech of a wealthy, educated social class

Dialects

- From a linguistic point of view, there is no such thing
- Linguistic variants can be separated geographically by isoglosses
- However, each isogloss will have a different geographic distribution, yielding a huge number of 'dialects' (given thousands of variants)
- Similarly, variation along social dimensions is non-discrete

Language

- The concept of a 'language' is similarly problematic (e.g. the *Spanish language*)
- This problematic both temporally and geographically

Temporal delimitation

- Given that language change occurs item by item, in various orders, there is no non-arbitrary point where, for example, Latin gives way to Spanish

- Nevertheless, there are two reasons to distinguish languages temporally:
  - To label geographically distinct varieties
  - As a result of standardization

Geographic delimitation

- An artificial method of delimiting the geographic distribution of a language is through political boundaries - only relevant for languages with some official standardization
- However, political boundaries and linguistic boundaries rarely coincide
- Mutual intelligibility is problematic, as it is non-discrete, and often asymmetrical
- Orthography is not necessarily keyed to similar varieties

Languages and Dialects

- What is wrong with saying "Andalucian is a dialect of Spanish"? It is based on erroneous assumptions:
  - That a uniform standard language fragments into dialects
  - That the standard is somehow prior to the dialects (Castilian was based on a variety spoken around Burgos, transplanted to Toledo, then to Madrid, all for political reasons)
  - In addition, some varieties may share features with more than one standard language (e.g. some dialects that share features with Castilian and Catalan)

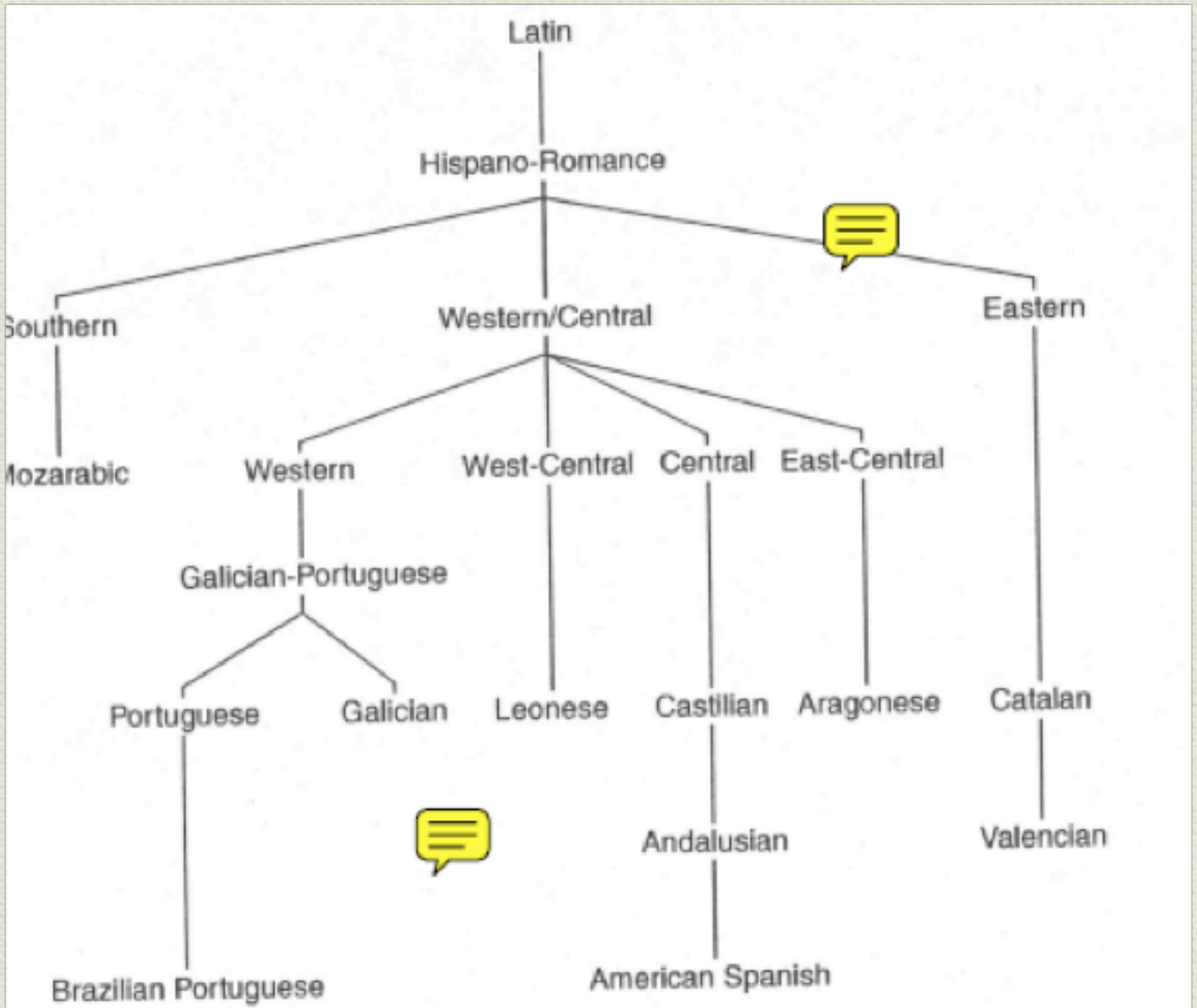
Varieties

- The set of linguistic features that defines a person's speech is a *variety*
- These differ from neighboring varieties in terms of all the parameters of variation (geographic, social, register, etc.)
- The bundling of isoglosses is not uniform, and not equally distributed.
- The space between social parameters is even more problematic

Tree Model

- Developed in historical linguistics to represent shared features between varieties
- Only used for differences along the geographic parameter
- The tree model has an false analogy in the classification of species
- Less successful varieties often survive as non-standard varieties

Hispano-Romance Tree



Tree model of Hispano-Romance varieties

Problems with trees

- Problematic because of shared features - assumes that once varieties 'split', there will be no more shared features (e.g. Aragonese versus Catalan/Castilian)
- Sometimes explained as borrowing (o>we, vs. -ete/-eta)

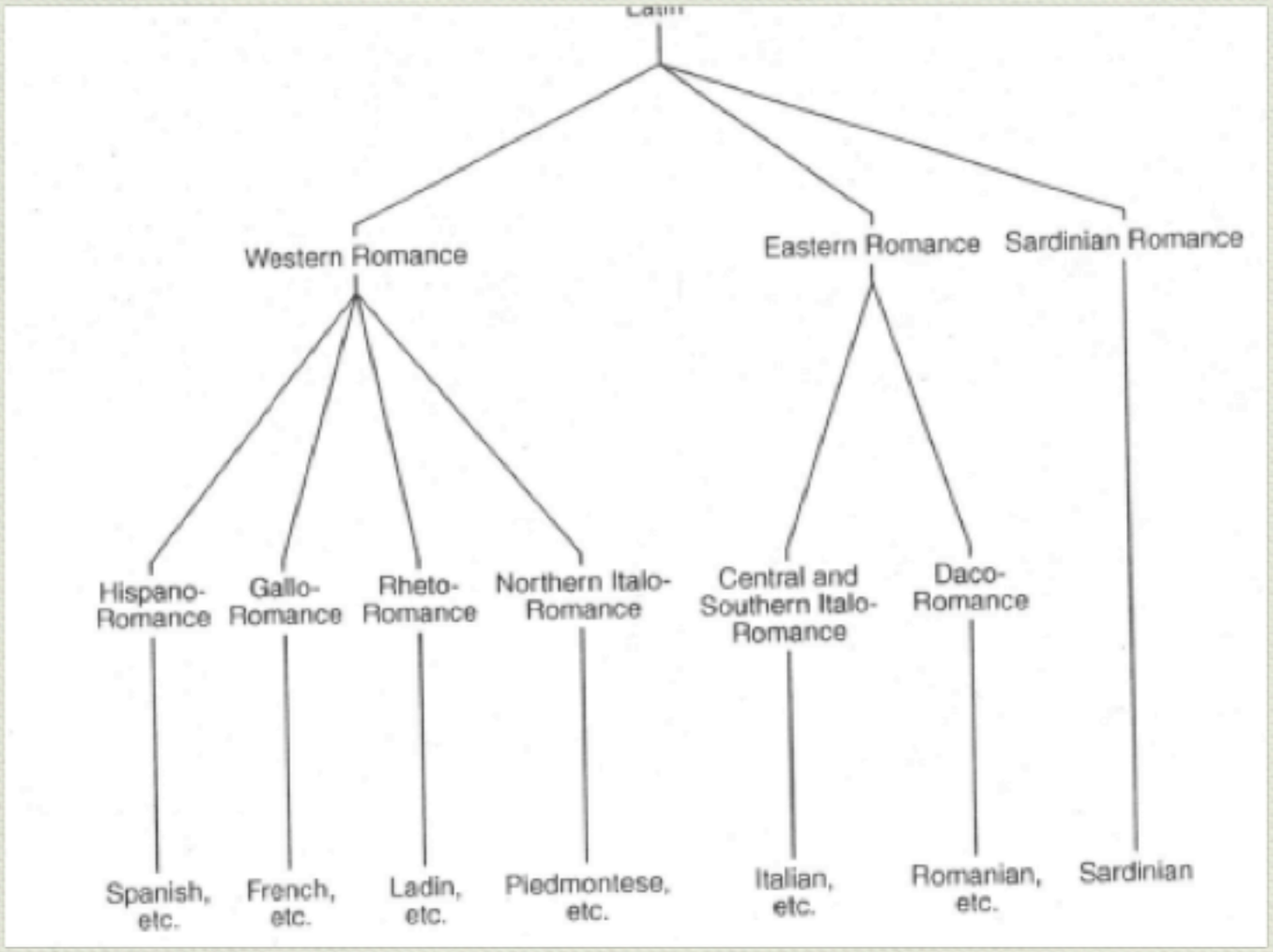
Variation in trunk

- The tree model ignores variation in the trunk

Western Romance	Eastern Romance
Spanish	Italian
French	Romanian
Portuguese	

- Based primarily on voicing of stops V__V ([lá:tus] [ládo])

Tree model of Romance



Classification Issues

- Pomeiian graffiti shows *g* where you would expect *c*
- Tuscan varieties should intervocalic voicing
- Central Pyrenean varieties often lack voicing
- Mozarabe lacked voicing
- Perhaps based on social variation

Wave Model

- Isoglosses spread out in a wave-like manner from a prestige source
- Yields the nuanced variation often found
- Nevertheless, difficult to represent social variation and non-categorical variation

Non-nuanced variation

- Can stop at an important political or linguistic boundary
- Competing prestige centers
- Population displacement