

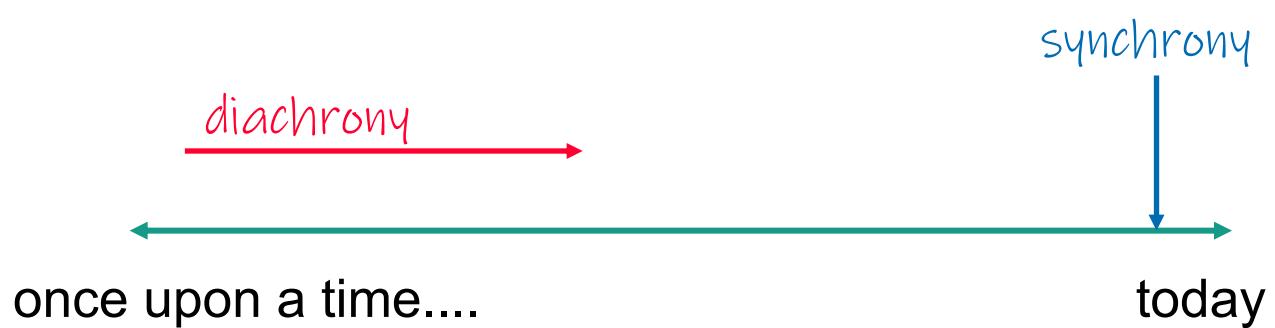
# **History of German:**

## Overarching developments & open questions

# Overview

- Synchrony and diachrony
- Periodization of German language history
- Typological status of German
- Examples of major changes

# Synchrony and diachrony



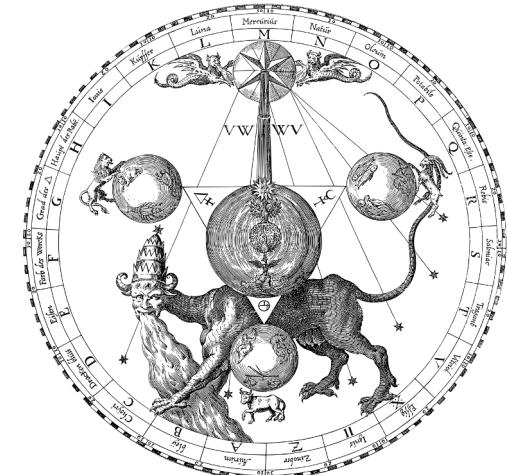
# Periodization

- 500/750–1050: Old High German (OHG)
- 1050–1350: Middle High German (NHG)
- 1350–1650: Early New High German (ENHG)
- 1650–today: New High German (NHG)

(some researchers propose a new period “present-day German” from 1950 onwards; others distinguish *älteres Neuhochdeutsch*, roughly ‘Early Modern German’, from more recent varieties)

# Criteria for periodization

- internal and external criteria
  - internal criteria e.g.
    - significant phonological processes of change (Grimm's law and other sound shifts)
  - external criteria e.g.
    - earliest written records (OHG)
    - emergence of new text types (MHG)
    - invention of the movable-type printing press; spread of Luther's Bible translation (ENHG)
    - gradual emergence of a standard variety (NHG)



# Pre-history of German

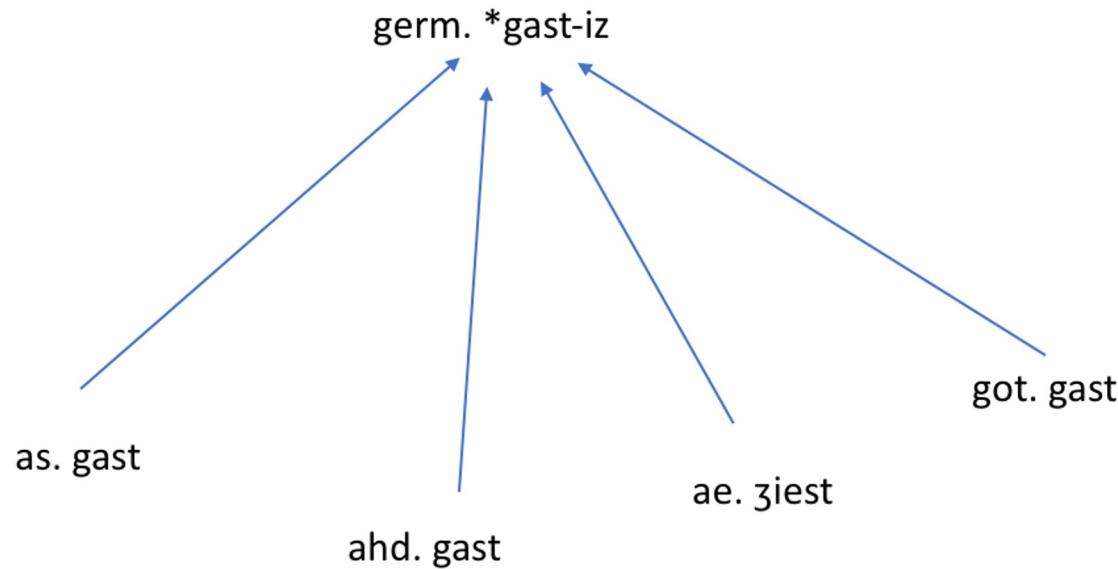
- German is part of the **West-Germanic** language family, which in turn belongs to the **Indo-European** languages
- Its predecessors are Proto-Indo-European (PIE) > Proto-Germanic (PGmc) > Proto-West-Germanic (PWGmc)
- these “Proto-languages” are **reconstructed** languages: we have a good idea of how they must have looked like thanks to the **comparative method**.

# The comparative method

DT.	ENGL.	NL.	FRANZ.	ITAL.	SPAN.	BASK.
eins	one	één	un	uno	uno	bat
zwei	two	twee	deux	due	dos	bi
drei	three	drie	trois	tre	tres	hiru
vier	four	vier	quartre	quattro	cuatro	lau
fünf	five	vijf	cinq	cinque	cinco	bost
sechs	six	zes	six	sei	seis	sei
sieben	seven	zeven	sept	sette	siete	zazpi
acht	eight	acht	huit	otto	ochos	zortzi
neun	nine	negen	neuf	nove	nueve	bederatzi
zehn	ten	tien	dix	dieci	diez	hamar

# The comparative method

Example: reconstruction of a (Proto-)Germanic “proto-word”



## Comparative method (see e.g. Campbell 2013)

- **step 1:** find possible **cognates**, i.e. forms that go back to a common origin
- **step 2:** show systematic **sound correspondences**
- **step 3:** reconstruct a **proto-sound** from the comparison, e.g. for German *Zahn* ‘tooth’: PGmc. \**tanþ-*, PIW. \**dont-*
- **step 4:** check **plausibility** of the reconstruction in the context of the reconstructed system

## Comparative method

- The comparative method mostly focuses on sound correspondences
- its underlying assumption is that “sound change suffers no exceptions”
- this assumption is not entirely unproblematic, but (roughly paraphrasing Bloomfield 1928): its enormous success speaks for the method, despite potential problems

# Typology

- Classification of languages regarding different (formal and functional) parameters

three definitions:

- typology as language comparison (e.g. Croft)
- typology as investigation of cross-linguistic patterns
- typology as a sub-discipline or a methodological approach

## A little bit of scientific history

- Typology as we know it goes back to Joseph Greenberg
- closely connected to American structuralism
- main question: “What is possible in human language?” (Croft 2003)

# Universals

- Basic idea: finding features that all natural languages have in common
- however: unclear whether there are features that really all languages have in common

# Morphological typology



Wilhelm v. Humboldt  
1767–1835



August Wilhelm v. Schlegel  
1767–1845



Friedrich v. Schlegel  
1772–1829

# Morphological language typology: Synthesis and analysis

- notions of “synthesis” and “analysis” refer to different ways of packaging information:
- synthesis: many information units in one utterance unit, i.e. many morphemes in one word
- analysis: one information unit corresponds to one utterance unit, e.g. 1 morpheme = one word
- synthesis and analysis form a continuum. Languages make use of both ways of encoding to a different extent.
- E.g. in German, both synthetic and analytic strategies to express information ‘past’: *Ich lachte* ‘I laughed’ vs. *Ich habe gelacht* ‘I have laughed’

# Morphological language typology: Language types

Widespread (but debated) distinction between

- isolating languages (1 word = 1 informational unit, e.g. Vietnamese)
- agglutinating languages (concatenation of morphemes, e.g. Turkish)
- Inflecting languages (morphemes can “coalesce” in various ways, e.g. portmanteau morphs and polyfunctional affixes, e.g. Icelandic)
- polysynthetic languages (many morphemes in one word, to the extent that entire sentences can consist of one word, e.g. Greenlandic)

## **Morphological language typology**

Most if not all languages show features of more than one of these types.

Language change is possible in both directions!

# Morphological language typology

- “Received wisdom”: Overarching tendency from synthatic to analytic encoding in German language history
- e.g. reduction of simple past forms in favor of perfect forms; analytic *Konjunktiv* (*ich könnte* ‘I could’ > *ich würde können* ‘I would be able to’)
- but there are also tendencies towards more synthetic encoding in some domains, e.g. cliticization

# Typological status of German

- Ronneberger-Sibold (1980): German employs a mixture of synthetic and analytic encoding strategies
- one information can be distributed on multiple words - but the full meaning only emerges from the combination of these different elements!
- e.g. *werden* + perfect participle encodes the meaning ‘passive’: *Sie wird gesehen* ‘She is (being) seen’

## **Examples of major changes**

- Phonology: Sound shifts – Grimm's law
- Morphology: Morphologization of umlaut phenomena
- Some examples of semantic change

# Phonology: Grimm's law

# Grimm's law

- in German: 1. Lautverschiebung
- most important criterion that distinguishes the Germanic languages from all other Indo-European languages
- timeframe: 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, completed by c. 500 BC → loan words entering Germanic after that are not subject to the shift any more
- change of articulation type – place of articulation stays the same.

# Grimm's law

- Result: Consonant system with more fricatives and less plosives.
- In the case of plosives, aspiration has disappeared as a distinctive feature.
- Between the three shifts that constitute Grimm's law, researchers usually assume pull and push chains

# Grimm's law

- three shifts:
  - tenues shift (voiceless plosives)
  - shift of voiced plosives
  - shift of aspirated plosives

# Consonants

Place of articulation



	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	p b			t d		t d̪	c ʃ	k g	q G		?
Nasal	m	m̪		n		ɳ	ɲ	ɳ	N		
Trill	B			r					R		
Tap or Flap		v̪		f̪		t̪					
Fricative	ɸ β	f v̪	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ	ʂ ʐ	ç ɿ	x ɣ	χ ʁ	ħ ʕ	h ɦ
Lateral fricative				ɬ ɺ							
Approximant		v̪		r̪		ɻ	j̪	w̪			
Lateral approximant				l̪		ɭ	ɻ̪	L̪			

# Grimm's law

Tenuesverschiebung

p	t	k	$k^u$
f	$\theta$	X	$X^u$
	/h	/h <sup>u</sup>	

Medienverschiebung

b	d	g	$g^u$
p	t	k	$k^u$

Verschiebung der aspirierten Medien

bh	dh	gh	$g^u h$
$\beta$	$\ð$	$\gamma$	$\gamma^u$

# Grimm's law

- Grimm's law separates the Germanic languages from all other Indo-European languages:

poln. *voda*

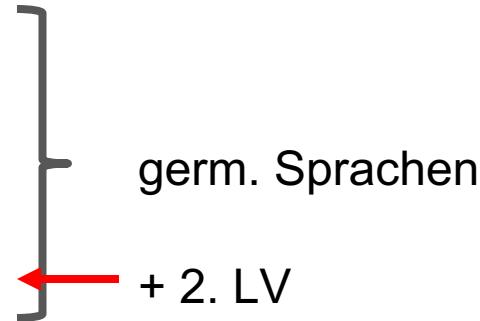
engl. *water*

nl. *water*

schwed. *vatten*

hochdt. *Wasser*

ohne 1. LV



# Shift of voiceless plosives (tenues)

Tenuesverschiebung	Medienverschiebung	Verschiebung der aspirierten Medien
p t k $k^u$	b d g $g^u$	bh dh gh $g^uh$
f θ X $X^u$	p t k $k^u$	β ð γ $γ^u$
/h / $h^u$		

- le. \*pélu (vgl. Gr. poly) > Got. filu ‘viel’
- le. \*tu (vgl. Lat. tu) > Got. þu ‘du’
- le. \*km̥tóm (vgl. Lat. centum) > Got. hund  
‘hundert’
- le. \*kuôd (vgl. Lat. quod) > Ahd. (h)waz ‘was’

# Exceptions

- In /sp/, /st/, /sk/ all tenues remain unshifted
  - cf. lat. *specio* – OHG. *spehōn* 'look'
  - lat. *stella* – OHG. *sterno* 'star'
  - gr. *skotos* – OHG. *skato* 'shadow'.
- In PIE /kt/ and /pt/, /t/ remains unchanged:
  - cf. lat. *captus* – NHG. *Haft* 'captive';
  - idg. kt > germ. X: lat. *noctem* – nhd. *Nacht* 'night'

# Shift of voiced plosives

Tenuesverschiebung				Medienverschiebung				Verschiebung der aspirierten Medien			
p	t	k	k <sup>u</sup>	b	d	g	g <sup>u</sup>	bh	dh	gh	g <sup>u</sup> h
f	θ	X	X <sup>u</sup>	p	t	k	k <sup>u</sup>	β	ð	ɣ	ɣ <sup>u</sup>
/h	/h <sup>u</sup>										

- Lat. cannabis  
‘Hanf’
- le. \*dwōu       (vgl. Lat. duo)                      –
- le. \*ǵenu-       vgl. Lat. genu                      >        Got. twai ‘zwei’
- le. \*guēm-       vgl. Lat. genu                      >        Nhd. Knie ‘Knie’
- le. \*guēm-       ‘kommen’                              >        Ahd. queman

Altengl. hænep

# Shift of voiced plosives

Tenuesverschiebung				Medienverschiebung				Verschiebung der aspirierten Medien			
p	t	k	k <sup>u</sup>	b	d	g	g <sup>u</sup>	bh	dh	gh	g <sup>u</sup> h
f	θ	X	X <sup>u</sup>	p	t	k	k <sup>u</sup>	β	ð	ɣ	ɣ <sup>u</sup>
		/h	/h <sup>u</sup>								

- le. \***bhrator** > Ahd. **bruoder**
- le. \***dhwer-** (vgl. Gr. thýra) > Engl. **door**
- le. \***ghost-** (vgl. Lat. hostis) > Ahd. **gast**
- le. \***ghuþonos**  
‘Kampf’ > Ags. **guð**

# Verner's law

- Special development within Grimm's law
- pertains to the plosives p,t,k and the fricative s
- According to Grimm's law, they become Germ. þ, f, x, s (voiceless fricative Frikative).
- If Verner's law applies, they become the voiced fricatives ð, þ, g, z.

# Verner's law

- applies when
  - the Indo-European accent was not on the immediately preceding syllable,
  - the sound is in a voiced environment.

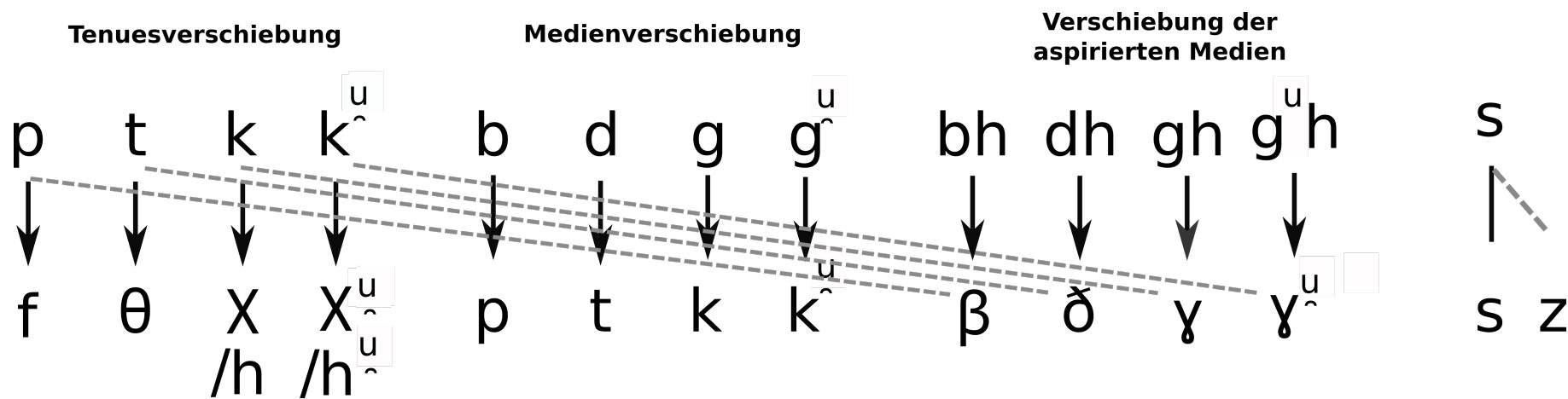
# Grimm's law and accent change

- Accent change as possible causal factor for Grimm's law  
(but: also alternative explanations, e.g. language contact to non-IE languages)
- first: change of accent type → from tonal accent to stress accent
- then: change of accent position → dynamic accent in PIE,  
initial accent in Germ.



Grimm's law +  
Verner's law

# Grimm's law and Verner's law



# Example: *Bruder* vs. *Vater*

	"normal"	Verner's law
idg.	*'bh̥ r̥ ð̥ t̥ ē r̥	*p̥ ə 't̥ ē r̥
vorgerm.	*'b̥ r̥ ð̥ þ̥ a r̥	*f̥ a 'd̥ ē r̥
germ.	*'b̥ r̥ ð̥ þ̥ a r̥	*f̥ á d̥ ē r̥
ahd. (nach 2. LV)	'b̥ rúo d̥ e r̥	'f̥ á t̥ e r̥
nhd.	[b̥ ɹ̥ u: ð̥ a]	[f̥ a: t̥ ḁ]

:

# **Grimm's law and Verner's law**

- Verner's law can explain synchronic sound alternations
  - they are called "grammatischer Wechsel" in the German literature:

*schneiden* – *geschnitten* (PIE \**sneit-*)

Hefe – heben (PIE \*kap-)

ziehen - gezogen (PIE \*deuk-)

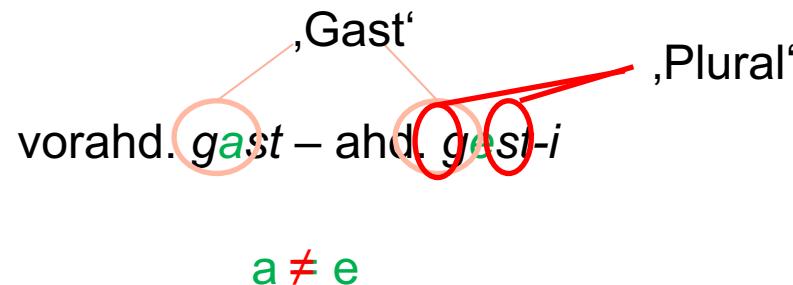
Frost – frieren (PIE \*preus-)

# Umlaut

- Umlaut: "Process of **partial assimilation** of the vowel in the syllable carrying main stress to the vowel of the subsequent syllable" (Bergmann et al. 2016: 238)
- e.g. pre-OHG \**far-is* > OHG *fer-is* – cf. NHG. *du fährst*

# Phonologisierung und Morphologisierung

- Umlaut is first phonologized and then morphologized in German
- Phonologization means: The umlaut variables gain phoneme status, i.e. they become meaning-differentiating units



# Phonologization and morphologization

- Umlaut is first **phonologized** and then **morphologized** in German
- Phonologization means: The umlaut variables gain phoneme status, i.e. they become meaning-differentiating units
- Morphologization means that the umlaut becomes tied to morphological information (e.g. 'plural', cf. *Mutter* - *Mutter* 'mother - mothers'

# Semantic change

geil

340

Der Landstörzer.

muß man mit dergleichen schwachen vnd  
vnnothfesten Frawen vmbgehen: Ist sie von  
Natur geyl vnd vnkeusch/ so hilfft kein eyferen/  
ihre List vnd verschlagenheiten seind vne-  
ndlich vnd vniuerschlich: Pone seram,  
cohibe: sed quis custodiet ipsos Custo-  
des? cauta est & ab illis incipit vxor.  
Vileichter ist ein Wanne voller Flöh zu hib-  
ten/denn ein liderliches Eheweib. Die raach  
welche bisweilen darwider für genoissen wird/  
heylet unsere Kinder mit allein mit/ sonder ver-  
wundet sie vilmehr / nichts ist den Eheleuten  
notwendiaer / als ehen ein bescheidene/ Gea-

Doh wafer fro vn̄ geil  
(Konrad Fleck, Flore, 13. Jh.)

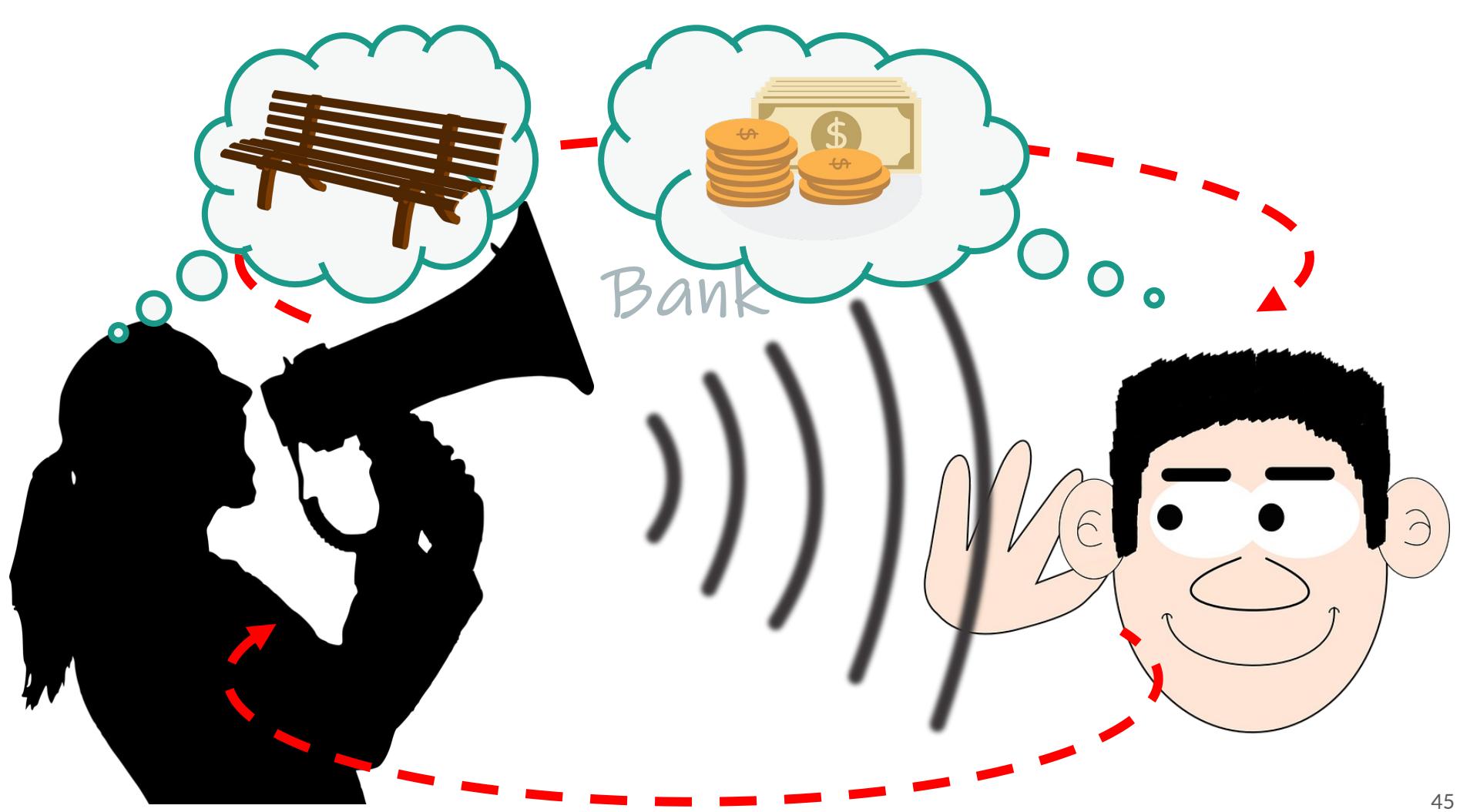
Ist sie von Natur geyl vnd  
vnkeusch/ so hilfft kein eyferen/  
(Aegidius Albertinus, Der  
Landstörtzer, 1615)

# Semantic change

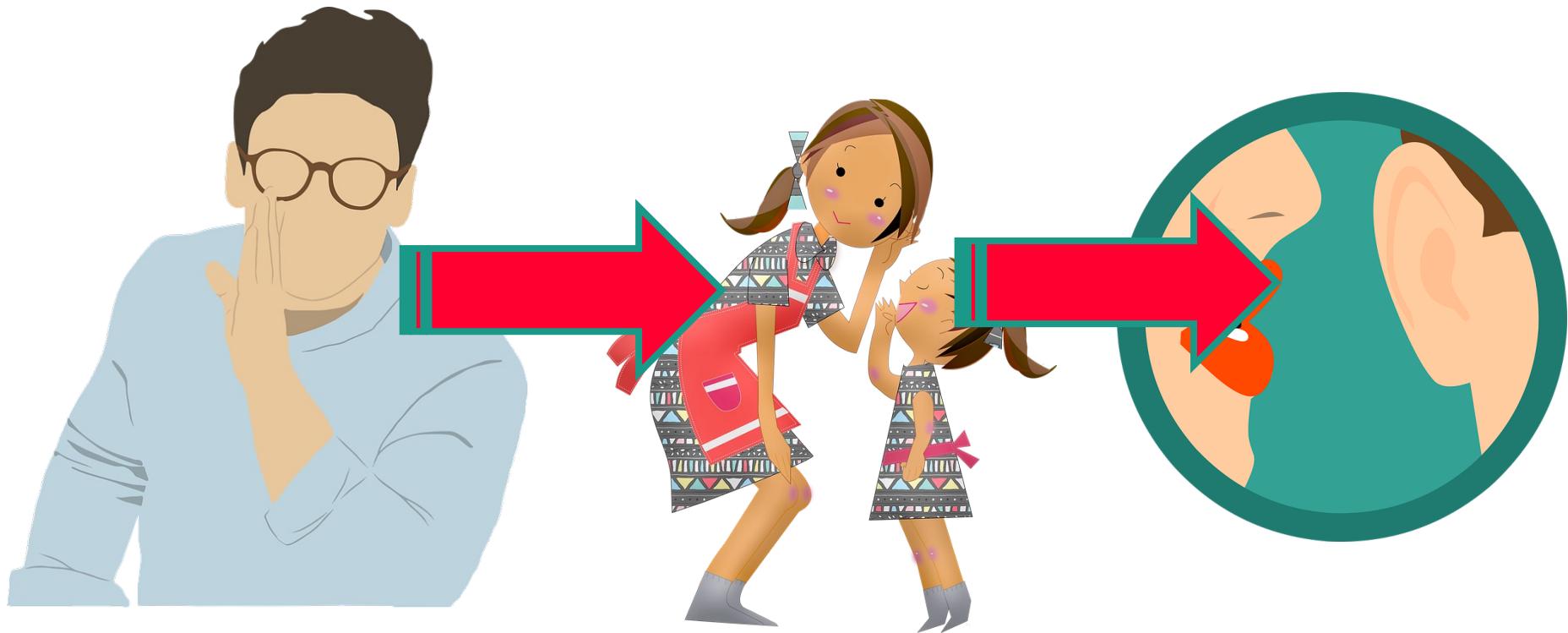
- Linguistic expressions change their meaning over time.
- How does this happen?

# Form and meaning





# Flüsterpost

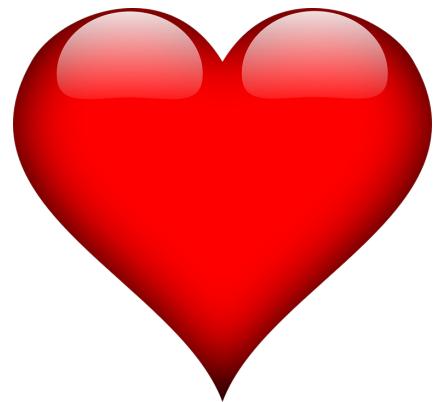


# How do words change their meanings?



metaphor

# How do words change their meanings?



'love'

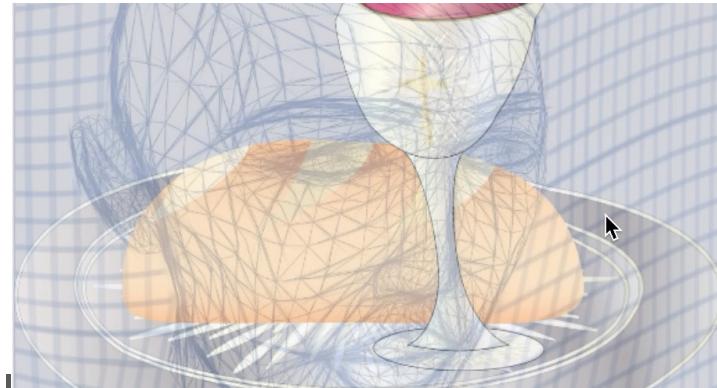
metaphor

# Example: *Kopf*

filberinenaphfe. guldine **cophfe**  
(Altdeutsche Exodus, 12. Jh.)

... Daz eme der **kopf** alzo brach  
(König Rother, 12. Jh.)

daz ir mineme herren fo habet gelonet. daz ir me innen **cophf** traet  
(Altdeutsche Genesis, 12. Jh.)



## Example: *Kopf*

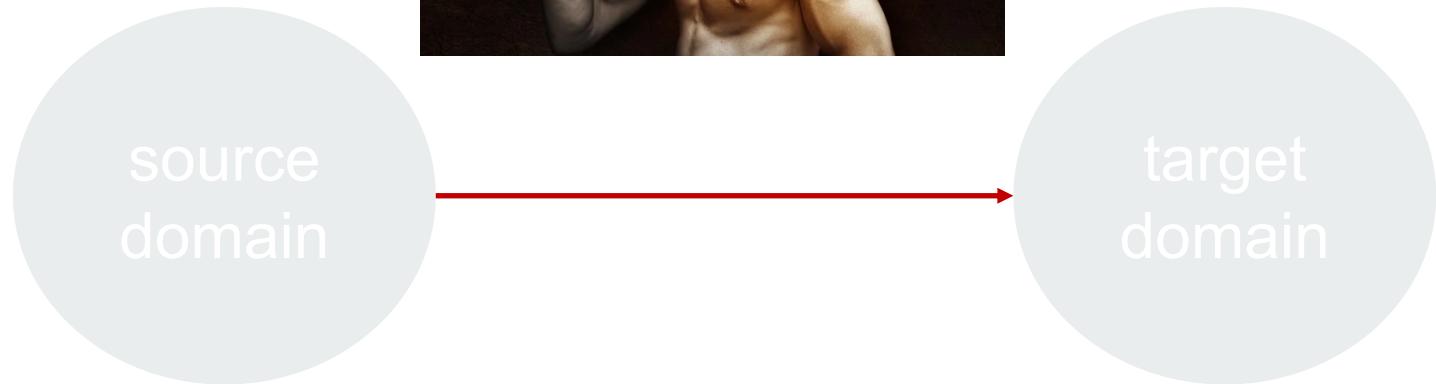
Er nam ein gar schoñen grossen doppelten übergulten **kopff**  
(Jörg Wickram, Von guten und bösen Nachbarn, 1556)

einer schlache dem anderen den **kopff** ab  
(Lavater, Gespenster, 1578)

# Types of meaning change

- meaning extension: *fertig* 'ready for travelling' > 'ready'
- narrowing of meaning: *fahren* 'move' > *fahren* 'move with a means of transportation'
- meaning shift: MHG. *vrech* 'brave' > nhd. *frech* 'outrageous, shaneless'
- meaning transfer: e.g. *realisieren* 'realize / put into practice' > 'realize / recognize' (here: loan meaning); MHG. *smutze lachen* 'smirk' > NHG *schmutzig lachen* 'lough out crudely' (folk etymology)
- pejoration: *wîp* 'woman' > *Weib* 'woman (pejorative)'
- melioration: OHG *mara-scalc* 'groom' (cf. *Mähre* und *Schalk*) > *Marschall* 'high officer'; *schwul* 'homosexual (pejorative)' > 'homosexual (neutral)' (also see *gay* in English)

# Example: *Kopf*



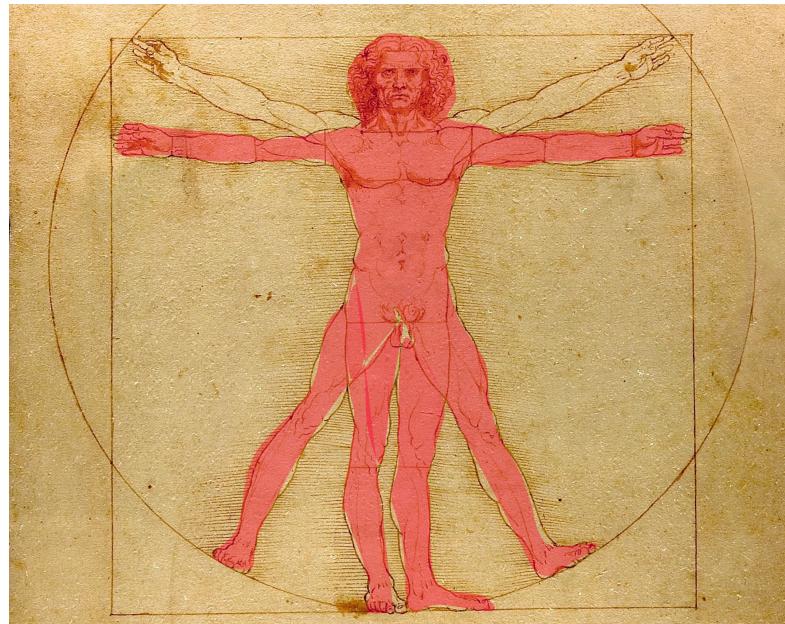
*tertium comparationis*

# Example: *Kopf*

- Fr. *tête* < Lat. *testa* 'cup, bown'
- (replaces *caput* over time)



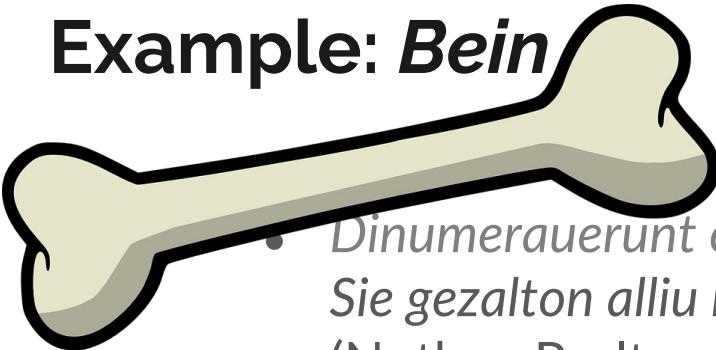
# How do words change their meaning?



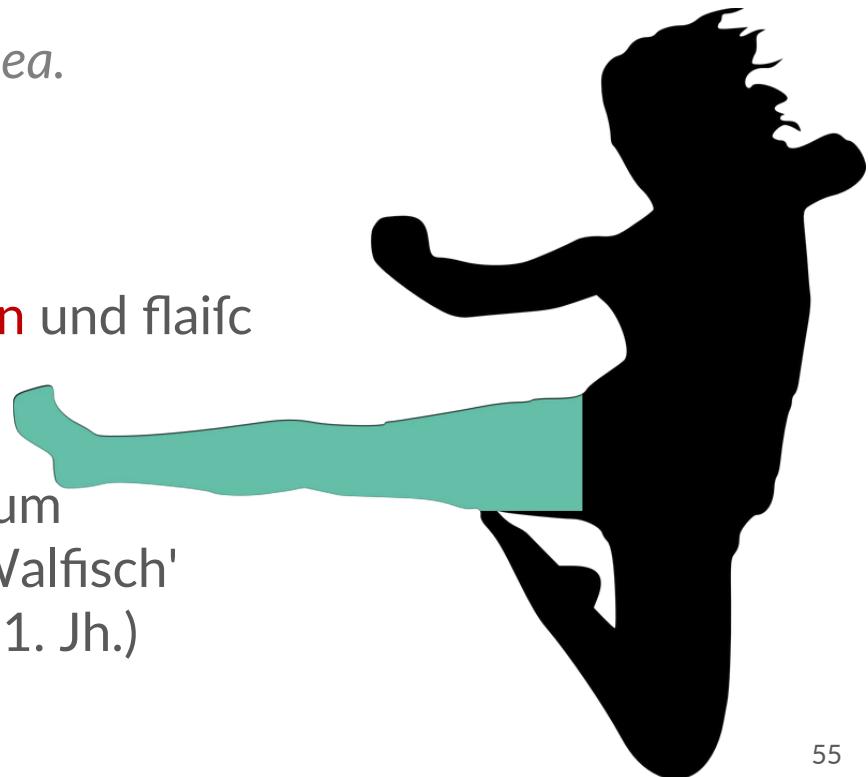
- **pars pro toto:**  
part for whole  
*(Berlin is skeptical)*
- **totum pro parte:**  
whole for part  
*(Germany wins world cup)*

metonymy

# Example: *Bein*



- *Dinumerauerunt omnia ossa mea.*  
*Sie gezalton alliu miniu bēin*  
(Notker, Psalter, 11. Jh.)
- durch unfer brode nam er **bain** und flaifc  
(Kaiserchronik, 12. Jh.)
- Mít tien **béinen** tréttot ér cętum  
'Mit den Beinen tritt er den Walfisch'  
(Notker, Martianus Capella, 11. Jh.)



# Connotation and denotation

verscheiden

sterben

den Arsch  
zukneifen

krepieren

ins Gras  
beifßen

entschlafen

das

Zeitliche  
segnen

über die  
Wupper gehen

abnippeln

hops gehen



# Connotation and denotation

euphemistic

ameliorative

verscheiden

entschlafen

das

Zeitliche

segnen



ins Gras  
beifßen

dysphemistic  
pejorative  
über die  
Wupper gehen

krepieren

abnippeln

hops gehen

den Arsch

zukneifen

# Pejorization and (a)meliorization

*vrouw*

*wîp*



# Pejorization and (a)meliorization

*Dame*

positive  
connotation

*vrouw*

*wîp*

negative  
connotation



# Wrapping up

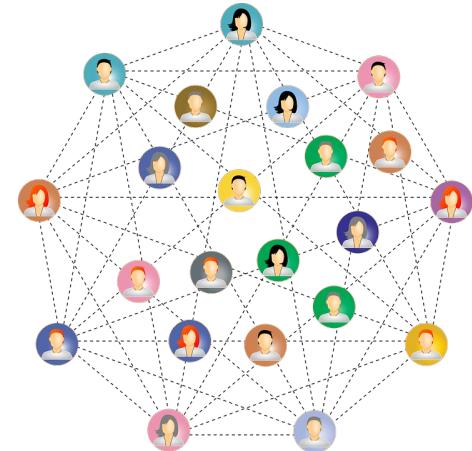
- Meaning change reveals a lot about



cognitive  
processes



socio-cultural  
contexts



cultural dynamics