



Unit 2. The origins of English

History of the English Language (G5061322)

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2.1. Indo-European culture and Indo-European languages

2.2. The Germanic languages

2.3. Britain before the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons

2.4. The Germanic settlement of Britain

2.5. Celtic and Latin borrowings

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Indo-European culture and Indo-European languages

Our species, *homo sapiens* 'knowing man' originated 500,000 years ago.

Language is assumed to have appeared between 150,000 and 50,000 years and to have spread through migration. Innovations in all parts of the world would give rise to the different languages we have today.



(map from van Gelderen 2006: 31)

Indo-European culture and Indo-European languages

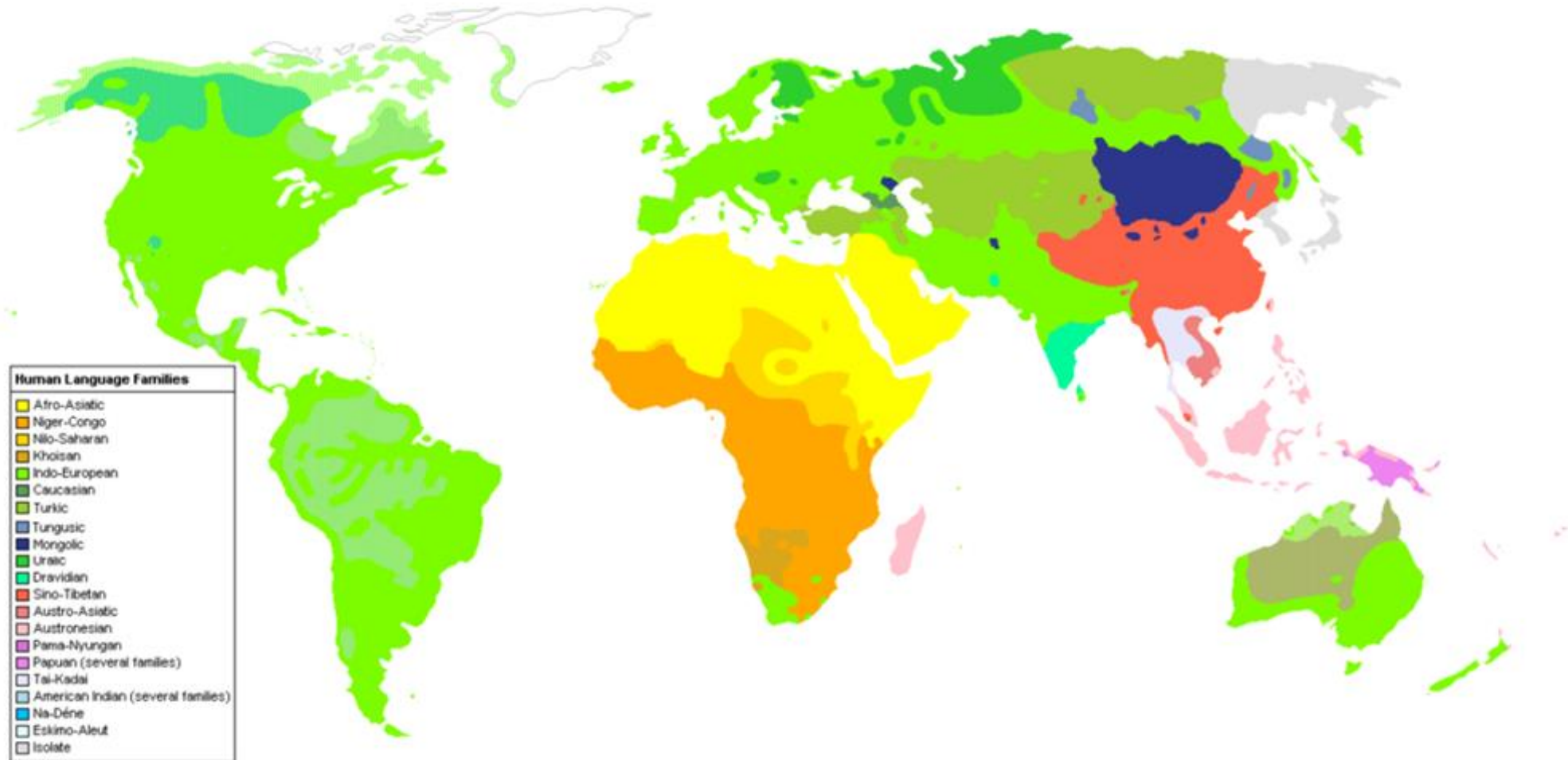
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If humans already had language by the time they started migrating from Africa [we can predict] that the languages of Asia are closest to those of the Americas, and the languages of Africa and Australia the most distinct since they developed independently of each other over a long period of time. (van Gelderen 2006: 30)

Indo-European culture and Indo-European languages

Some language families



Indo-European culture and Indo-European languages

Some language families



Ethnologue at www.ethnologue.com



<http://www.worldgeodatasets.com/language/huffman/#maps> (van Gelderen 2006: 29-34)

Semitic languages (Hebrew, Arabic, Ethiopian...)

Ural-Altaic, comprising Finno-Ugrian (Hungarian, Finnish, Estonian, and Lapp) and Altaic (Turkish and Mogol)

Sino-Tibetan (Chinese, Tibetan...)

Nilo-Saharan (Nubian, Sudanic...)

Niger-Congo (Wolof, Fula...)

Bantu (Swahili...)

Khoisan (click languages)

Mayan

Indo-European

Austro-Asiatic (Mon, Khmer)

Eskimo-Aleut (Eskimo...)

Athabaskan

Algonquian

Uto-Aztecan

Quechua...

Indo-European culture and Indo-European languages

It has been suggested that some of these language families have a common ancestor → **Nostratic**, which would include Indo-European, Altaic, Uralic, perhaps also some Afroasiatic languages.

Some scholars also believe that Nostratic and other language families not included in it actually go back to a common ancestor. Ruhlen (1994) proposed some common roots for what he called '**Proto-World**', the mother of all languages, among them *akwa* 'water' and *tik* 'finger'.

Monogenetic view of human language vs. multiple origin (the enormous linguistic diversity languages can be explained by multiple origins; the similarities derive from biological and cognitive pressures).



Further reading: Bergs & Burridge (2016: chapter 9)

English is an Indo-European language

The oldest Indo-European language was probably spoken some 6,000 years ago.

Over 2,500 mill. peoples speak an Indo-European language today. The next largest family is the Sino-Tibetan family, with over 1,000 mill. native speakers.

Sir William Jones, 1786



The *Sanscrit* language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the *Greek*, more copious than the *Latin*, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than would possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine all three without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists; there is similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the *Gothick* and the *Celtick*, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the *Sanscrit*; and the old *Persian* might be added to the same family. (William Jones; quoted from Brinton & Arnovik 2006: 96)

English is an Indo-European language

Similarities in vocabulary can be due to

- (i) chance: e.g. Greek *ματι* ['mati] vs. Malay *mata* 'eye';
- (ii) borrowing: e.g. Japanese *pan* and Portuguese *pão*;
- (iii) **common origin**: (cognates) e.g. PDE *mother*, German *Mutter*, Slovenian *mati*.

Once chance [...] and borrowing are eliminated as plausible explanations for similarity between languages the only explanation left is genetic relationship: languages are similar because they were once a single community that split into descendants that have diverged over time through the accumulation of innovations. (Blust 2018: 4)

English is an Indo-European language

Consider the following words in different languages:

OE *niht*

Ger *Nacht*

ON *nátt*

Goth. *nahts*

Lat. *noctis*

Gk. *Nuktos*

Russ. *noch'*

Lith *naktis*

Ir. *nocht*

Skt. *naktam*



IE **nokwt-* 'night'

* in historical
linguistics stands for
reconstructed form

cognate (1) A language or a linguistic form which is historically derived from the same source as another language/form, e.g. Spanish/Italian/French/Portuguese are 'cognate languages'[...]; *père/padre*, etc. ('father') are 'cognate words' or cognates. (Crystal 2008: s.v. *cognate*)

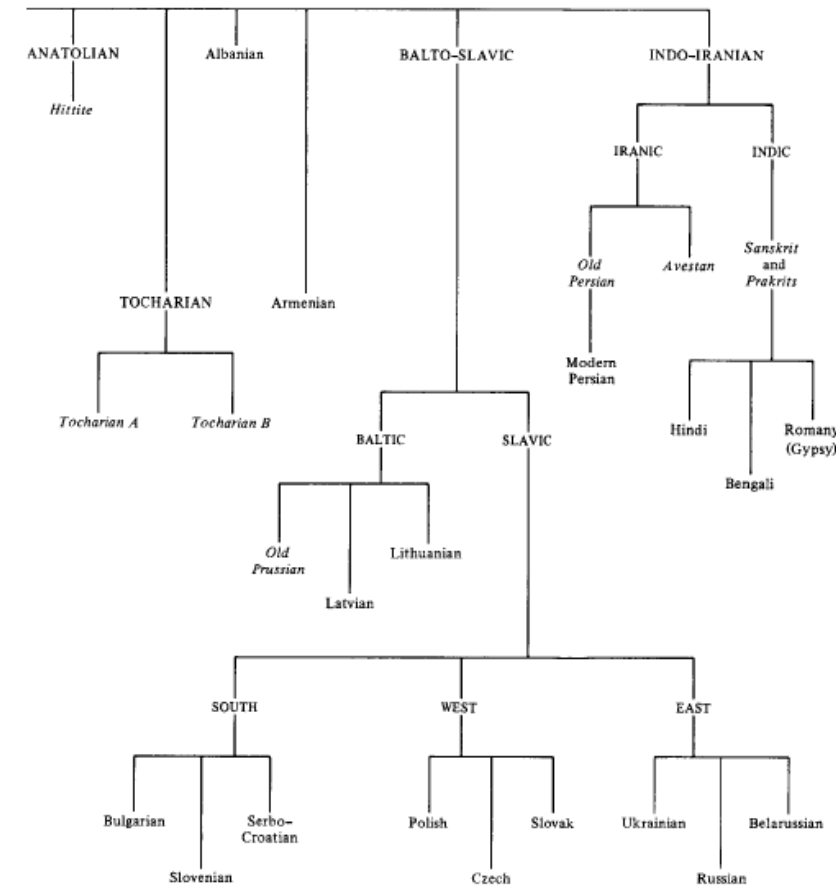
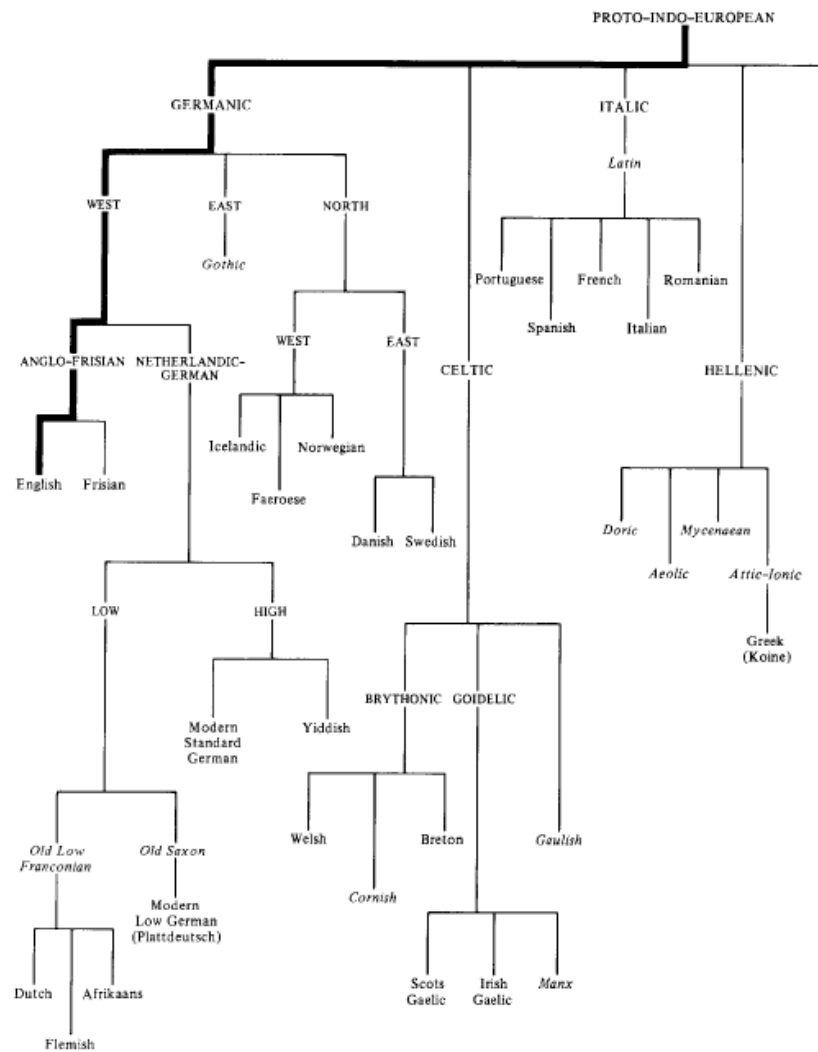
English is an Indo-European language

These correspondences cannot be put down to chance. The similarities in form can be explained by applying regular principles. Languages can be grouped into families or trees, deriving from the same parent language or **protolanguage**. If regular similarities are also found in the grammar of languages (e.g. paradigms), then we can be pretty sure that the languages in question are related.

Proto- indicates 'not attested; reconstructed'

Language	Old English	Gothic	Latin	Greek	Sanskrit
1st p. sg.	eom	im	sum	eimi	asmi
2nd p. sg.	eart	es	es	asi	asi
3rd p. sg.	is	ist	est	esti	asti
3rd p. pl.	sind	sind	sunt	eisi	santi

Family-tree model: The Indo-European family tree



THE INDO-EUROPEAN TREE
 MAIN BRANCHES
 SUB-BRANCHES
 Dead languages
 Living languages

(Pyles & Algeo 1982: 70-71)

English is an Indo-European language

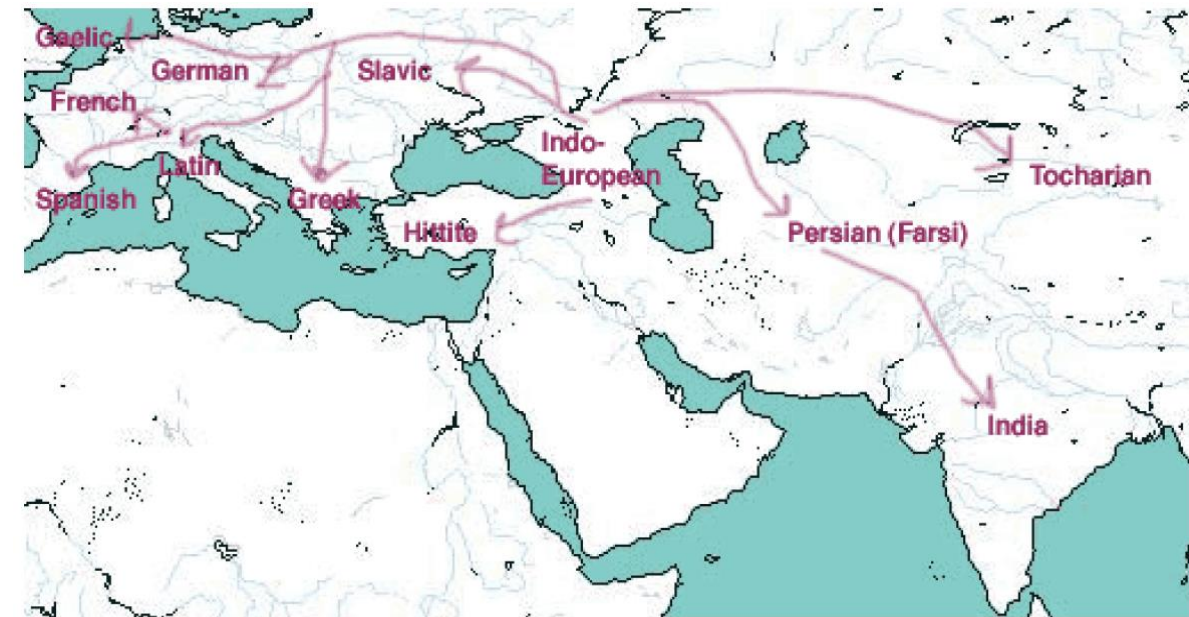
Who were the Indo-Europeans?

Traditional view holds that they were a nomadic or semi-nomadic people who invaded neighbouring agricultural areas and imposed their language on them. Archaeologist Marija Gimbutas linked the Indo-Europeans with the culture of the Kurgans.

Where did they live?

Standard view: the Indo-European homeland was in the southern steppes of Russia.

This brings together archaeological and linguistic evidence.



Indo-European languages: common vocabulary

By studying **cognates** (words going back to the same source and having similar form and meaning, see definition above) in different Indo-European languages we can have an idea of the Indoeuropeans' subjective and material culture. For instance:

- strong sense of **family** → *father, mother, son, daughter, widow*.
- nomadic or semi-nomadic, but with some kind of temporary **dwelling place** → *door, timber* (apparently related to Latin *domus*) and *thatch*; their means of transport used *wheels* and *axles*.
- pastoral people → names of **domestic animals** *dog, goat, goose, hound, sow*.
- cattle = wealth → Lat. *pecus*, OE *feoh* (> PDE *fee* 'sum of money for payment') 'cattle, wealth' (cf. Ger. *Vieh* 'cattle'; Sp. *pecuniario*; *pecuario*).
- **agriculture** → *grain (corn, grain, ear)* and *plough*.
- **flora and fauna** of temperate climates → *tree, birch; beaver, mouse, hare, otter, wolf* (vs. lack of vocabulary for animals and plants from eastern Asia).
- **religious feeling, similar myths** → bear was taboo; they had a sky god (Gr. *Zeus*, Skt. *Dyaus*, OE *Tīw*)

Indo-European languages: common vocabulary



Not all languages spoken in Europe are Indo-European.

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The Germanic languages

The Indo-Europeans migrated throughout Europe and Asia. **Migration** is an external factor for language change.

One group of speakers of Indo-European settled in the north of Europe, in southern Scandinavia and northern Germany.

Around 300 BC the **Germanic tribes** started to expand:

- N --> into the Scandinavian peninsula, pushing the Finns northwards;

- W --> into Germany and the Netherlands (areas which were occupied by Celts);

- E --> around the Baltic Sea.

Sources of information: Archaeology and contemporary sources: Tacitus's *Germania* (AD 98) provides a good description of the customs of the Germanic tribes.

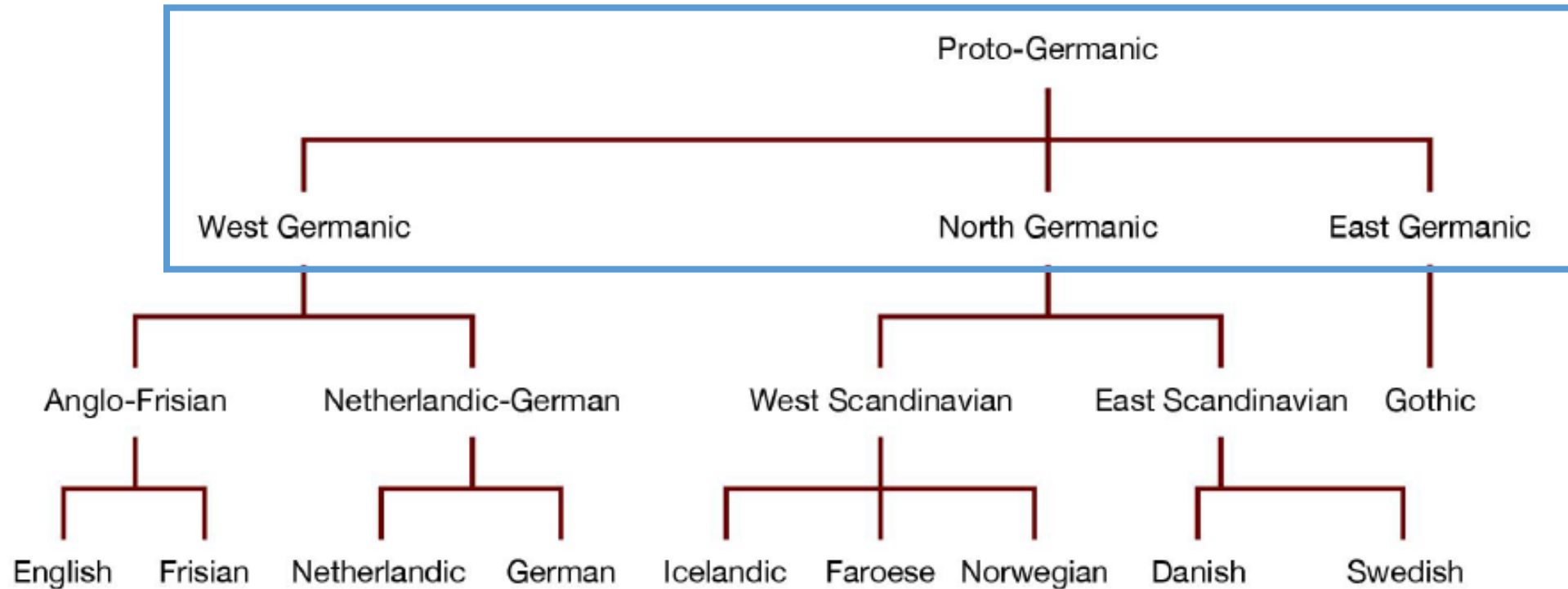
The Germanic languages

The language of the Germanic tribes became gradually different from Indo-European and around 2,000 ago, it became what we know now as **Proto-Germanic**.

Proto-Germanic can be reconstructed by comparing the various daughter languages, by using the Germanic names recorded by Latin and Greek authors and by studying borrowings into other languages, such as Finnish.

e.g. Finnish *kuningas* 'king' (< Gmc) preserves a more archaic form of the word than any of the Germanic languages (cf. OE *cyning* < **kuningaz*).

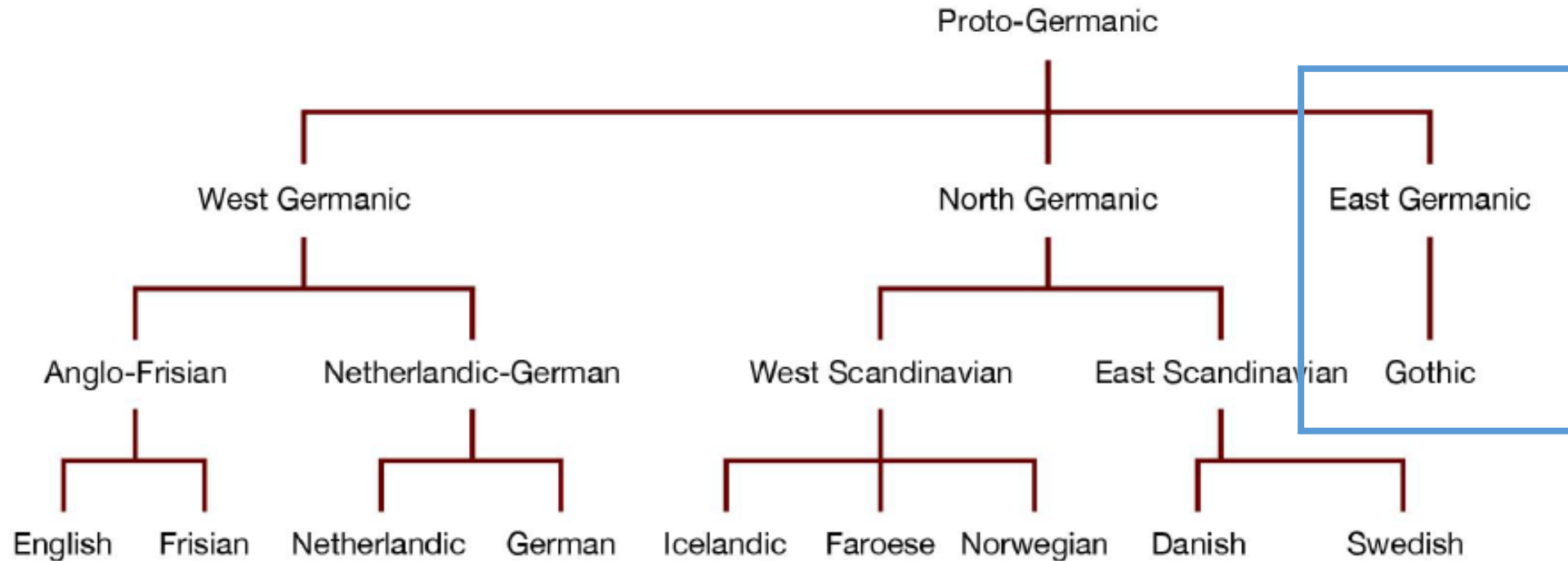
Branches of Germanic



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Scholars typically distinguish three branches of Germanic: North Germanic, East Germanic and West Germanic. The most widely accepted view nowadays is that this threefold division is rather late, and that Proto-Germanic was first split into North-West and East Germanic.

Branches of Germanic

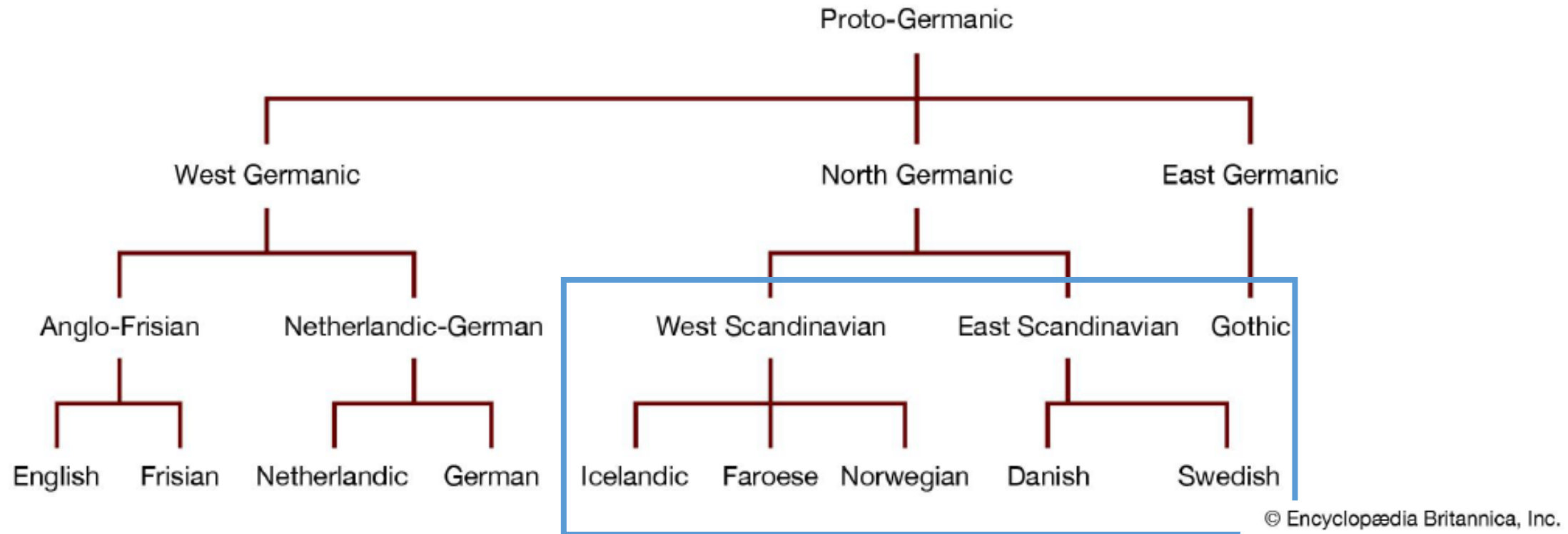


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The only language of the East Germanic branch is Gothic, an extinct language.

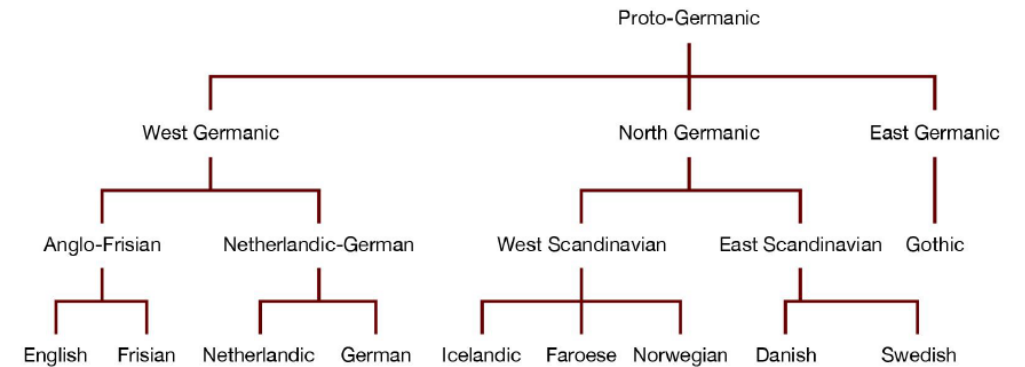
The Goths moved from the Baltic regions to what is now France, Italy and Spain, and they shifted to Romance languages. English, German, Dutch belong to the West Germanic branch.

Branches of Germanic



The Scandinavian languages belong to the North Germanic branch.

Branches of Germanic



The oldest text in Germanic is preserved in the runic inscription in the Golden Horn of Gallehus (North West Germanic, South Jutland ca. 400 AD)



ekhlewagastiz:holtijaz:horna:tawido

'I Hlewagastir of/from Holt made this horn'

Distinctive features of Germanic languages



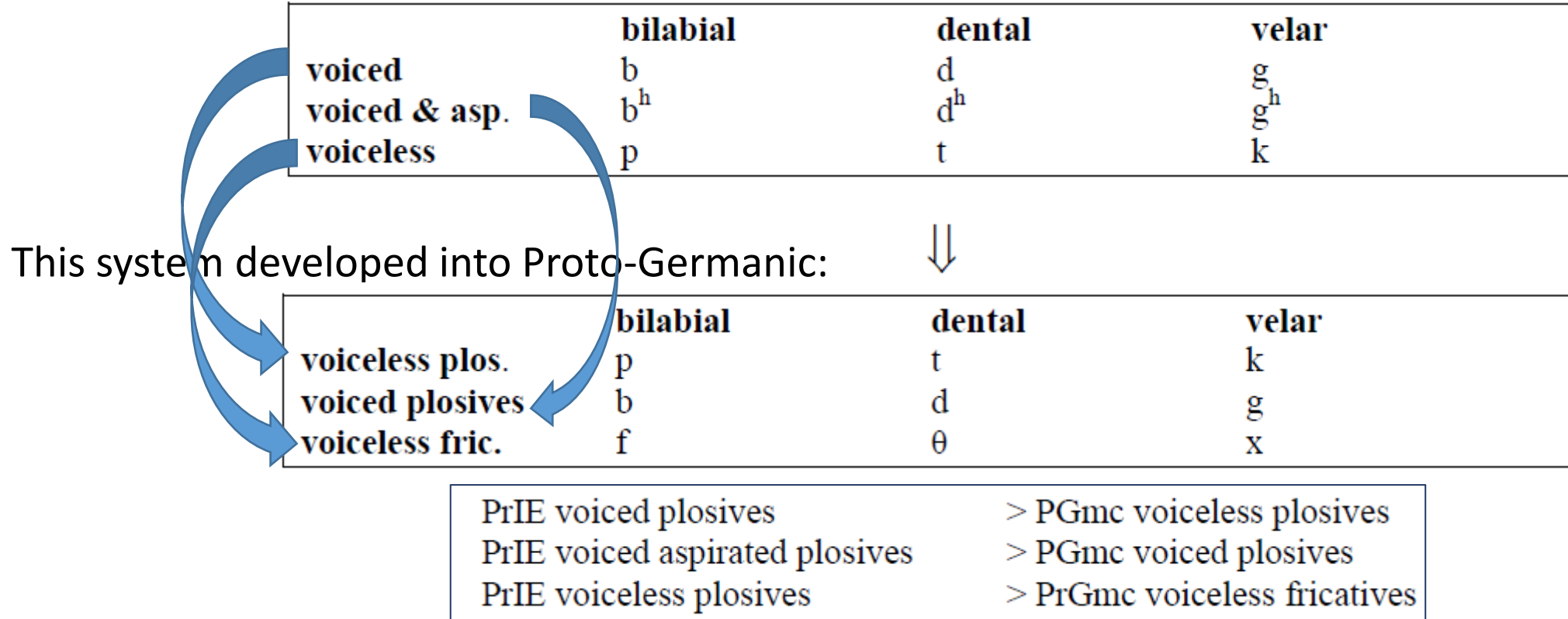
Further reading: Barber et al. (2009: Chapter 4)

- (i) Grimm's Law or the First Consonant Shift
- (ii) The modification of the accentual system
- (iii) The development of weak verbs
- (iv) Specific vocabulary
- (v) Other features

Distinctive features of Germanic languages

(i) Grimm's Law or the First Consonant Shift

This sound change took place ca. 500 B.C. and affected the PrIE system of plosives:



Distinctive features of Germanic languages

(i) Grimm's Law or the First Consonant Shift

Examples:

L <u>d</u> ent, <u>c</u> ord	PDE <u>t</u> ooth, <u>h</u> ear <u>t</u>	
L <u>g</u> enus 'race'	PDE <u>k</u> in	voiced > voiceless
L <u>d</u> ecem /Sanskrit <u>d</u> eka/	Gothic <u>t</u> ai <u>h</u> un/ English <u>t</u> en	
Sanskrit <u>b</u> hrat <u>a</u> r [<u>b</u> ^h rat <u>a</u> r]	OE <u>b</u> ro <u>þ</u> or	voiced aspirated plosive > voiced plosive
L <u>p</u> ater	Gothic <u>f</u> ader OE <u>f</u> æder PDE <u>f</u> ather	
L <u>t</u> res	PDE <u>t</u> hree	voiceless plosive > voiceless fricative
L <u>c</u> ord, <u>d</u> ecem	PDE <u>h</u> ear <u>t</u> , Gothic <u>t</u> ai <u>h</u> um	

Distinctive features of Germanic languages

(ii) Modification of the PrIE accentual system in PrGmc

PrIE had a **free accentual system**: the position of the word accent was not restricted to any syllable position, and it was a **musical** (i.e. pitch) rather than an **intensity** accent (i.e. stress).

L *hábeo* 'I have' / L *habémus* 'we have'

Greek *patér* nom.sg./ *páter* vocative sg. / *pat(e)rí* dative sg

Sometime after the operation of Grimm's Law, PrGmc modified the PrIE accentual system > fixed accentual system, where word stress (i.e. intensity accent) fell always on root syllable.

OE *fæder* nom.sg./ *fæderas* nom.pl./ *fæderum* dat.pl.

Distinctive features of Germanic languages

(ii) Modification of the PrIE accentual system in PrGmc

Consequences of this accentual modification: in several Germanic languages, the vowels of unstressed syllables became more and more obscure and indistinct, often developing into 'schwa', or even disappearing completely. This phonological change has a deep impact on morphology, since inflections were placed in unstressed syllables.

OE *sunu* 'son' /'sunu/ > ME *sune* /'sunə / > PDE *son* /sʌn/

OE *drifan* ['drivan] > ME *drifen* /'drivən/ > PDE *drive* /draiv/

Distinctive features of Germanic languages

(iii) Development of weak verbs

Germanic languages have two main types of verb:

Strong

drive *drove* *driven*
bear *bore* *born*
swim *swam* *swum*

vowel alternation (Ablaut)

-(e)n in the past pple

-(e)n is sometimes lost

Weak

work *worked* *worked*
burn *burnt* *burnt*
sell *selld* *selld*

dental suffix

Weak verbs are a Germanic innovation, they are characterized by the existence of a **dental suffix** marking the preterit and past participle. They are derivative, that is, they originally go back to nouns, adjectives or strong verbs.

Distinctive features of Germanic languages

(iv) Distinctive Germanic vocabulary

Germanic became an independent branch of the IE family ca. 2,000 years ago. Specifically Germanic words include words of the basic vocabulary, referring to everyday life, natural phenomena, land and sea:

boat, broad, drink, drive, earth, find, fowl, fox, hold, house, make, meat, rain, sail, sand, starve, storm, thief, wife, winter

Proto-Germanic vocabulary contains a number of words from Celtic and Latin, since these two speech communities inhabited neighbouring areas (see 2.5).

Distinctive features of Germanic languages

(v) Other features

Proto-Germanic was highly inflected (**synthetic** language).

Nouns ⇒ Case (nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, instrumental)
Different declensions (models)
Gender (masculine, feminine, neuter)

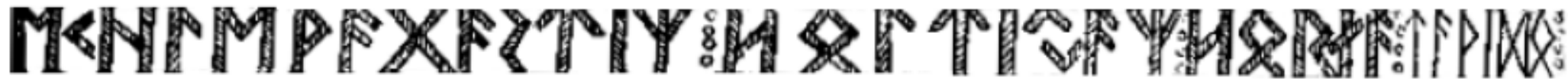
Adjectives ⇒ Strong and weak declensions (the adjective was inflected differently if it was in predicative or in attributive function, and depending on the structure of the NP).

Verbs ⇒ inflected for person and number, tense and mood
Two tenses (past and non-past)
Relics of a passive conjugation (OE *hätte* 'is/was called')

Distinctive features of Germanic languages

(v) Other features

Proto-Germanic was a **SOV** language.



ek	hlewagastiz	holtijaz	horna	tawido
I	Hlewagastir	of/from Holt	horn	made

Ancient Germanic languages: illustrations

The Lord's Prayer

Old English

Fæder ure þu þe eart in heofuna, si þin nama gehalgod. Tobecume þin rice. Geweorþe þin willa on eorþan swa swa on heofunum.

Old Saxon

Fader usa, thu bist an them himila rikea. Geuuihid sin thin namo. Cuma thin riki. Uuerta thin uuilleo, so sama an ertho, so an them himilo rikea.

Old High German

Fater unser, thu in himilon bist, geuuihit si namo thin. Qyaeme richi thin. Uuerdhe uuilleo thin, sama so in himile endi in erdu.

Old Icelandic

Faþer várr sa þu ert I hifne, helgesk nafn þitt. Til come þitt rike. Verþe þinn vile, suá a iorþ sem a hifne.

Gothic

Atta unsar þu in himinamn weihnai namo þein. Quimai þiudinassus þeins. Wairþai wilja þeins, swe in himina jah ana airþai.

Early Modern English

Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as in heaven.

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Britain before the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons

Britain was inhabited by the **Celts** (Britons, Picts and Scots), who probably entered the island during the Bronze Age.

They spoke varieties of Celtic languages: **British** (whose descendants are Welsh, spoken in Wales, and Breton, spoken in French Brittany; P-Celtic), and **Gaelic** (whose descendants are Irish and Scottish Gaelic, and Manx; Q-Celtic).

55 BC Julius Caesar decided to invade Britain. Not successful.



Relief, 'Caesar Invading Britain', John Deare



Roman invasion of Britain in Kent 55–54 BC

Britain before the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons

43 AD Claudius attempted and completed the conquest of Britain (Britannia). Wales and Scotland were never romanised.

Hadrian's wall and Antonine's wall were built to protect the Northern boundary from the attacks of the Celtic inhabitants of Scotland and the North of England.

The Romans built a number of roads (Latin *strata*) spreading fanlike from London to the north, northwest, west and the southwest. One of them is **Watling Street** from London to Chester.



Watling Street



Hadrian's Wall

Britain before the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons



[Roman Britain](#)



[An Overview of Roman Britain](#)

<https://historydilemmas.weebly.com/rome-in-decline.html>

Ca. 100 towns and some small cities, among them London (*Londinium*), Chester, Manchester, Aquae Sulis (Bath). Roman settlements, esp. in the South East.

British was the everyday language but Latin was established as the language of officialdom.

300 years of Roman Rule ended at the beginning of the 5th century (410 AD)

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The Germanic settlement of Britain

410 AD **End of Roman rule.** The Roman legions were withdrawn from Britain to defend Rome. The continental territory of the Roman empire was threatened by successive **invasions of Visigoths, Vandals and Huns**. Britain was then left unprotected

- (i) against the Scots and Picts;

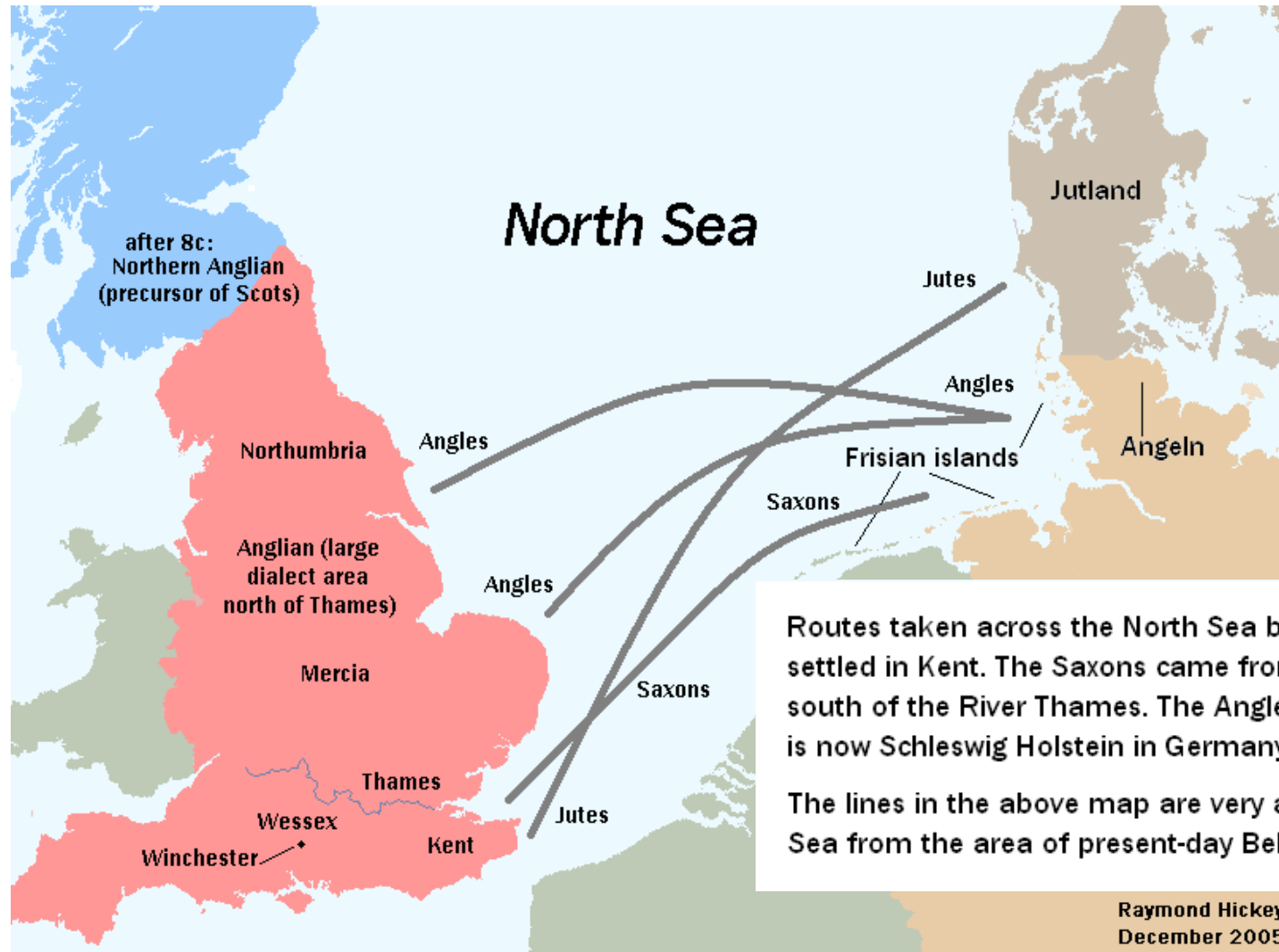
- (ii) against the attacks from other Northern Europe barbarians.

449 AD **Vortigern**, a leader of the Britons, made an appeal to the Germanic tribes of north-west Germany and Denmark to help the Celts against the Picts and Scots.

Also, population pressure in north-west Europe (temperatures lower than average) favoured **migrations**. These Germanic tribes first came as allies, but then fought against the Celts.

Angles (from Danish mainland and islands), **Saxons** (from north-west Germany) and **Jutes** (from northern Denmark). These groups are collectively known as the Anglo-Saxons.

The Germanic settlement of Britain



Routes taken across the North Sea by Germanic tribes in the 5c. The Jutes came from Jutland and settled in Kent. The Saxons came from the area of present-day (Lower) Saxony and settled largely south of the River Thames. The Angles came from the lower part of the the Jutland peninsula which is now Schleswig Holstein in Germany and settled in central and northern England.

The lines in the above map are very approximate. Many of the settlers may have crossed the North Sea from the area of present-day Belgium as this would have involved the shortest sea journey.

Raymond Hickey
December 2005

https://www.uni-due.de/SHE/HE_GermanicInvasions.htm

The Germanic settlement of Britain

Information Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, (from 55 BC to 731).

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (9th century) (from the Roman invasion to 1154, the death of King Stephen).

Bede:

They came from three very powerful Germanic tribes, the Saxons, Angles and Jutes. The people of Kent and the inhabitants of the Isle of Wight are of Jutish origin and also those opposite the Isle of Wight, that part of the kingdom of Wessex which is still today called the nation of the Jutes. From the Saxon country, that is, the district now known as Old Saxony, came the East Saxons, the South Saxons and the West Saxons. Besides this, from the country of the Angles, that is, the land between the kingdoms of the Jutes and the Saxons, which is called Angulus, came the East Angles, the Middle Angles, the Mercians, and all the Northumbrian race. (quoted from Barber et al. 2009: 107)

The Germanic settlement of Britain

Settlement began along the east and south coasts, and along valleys.

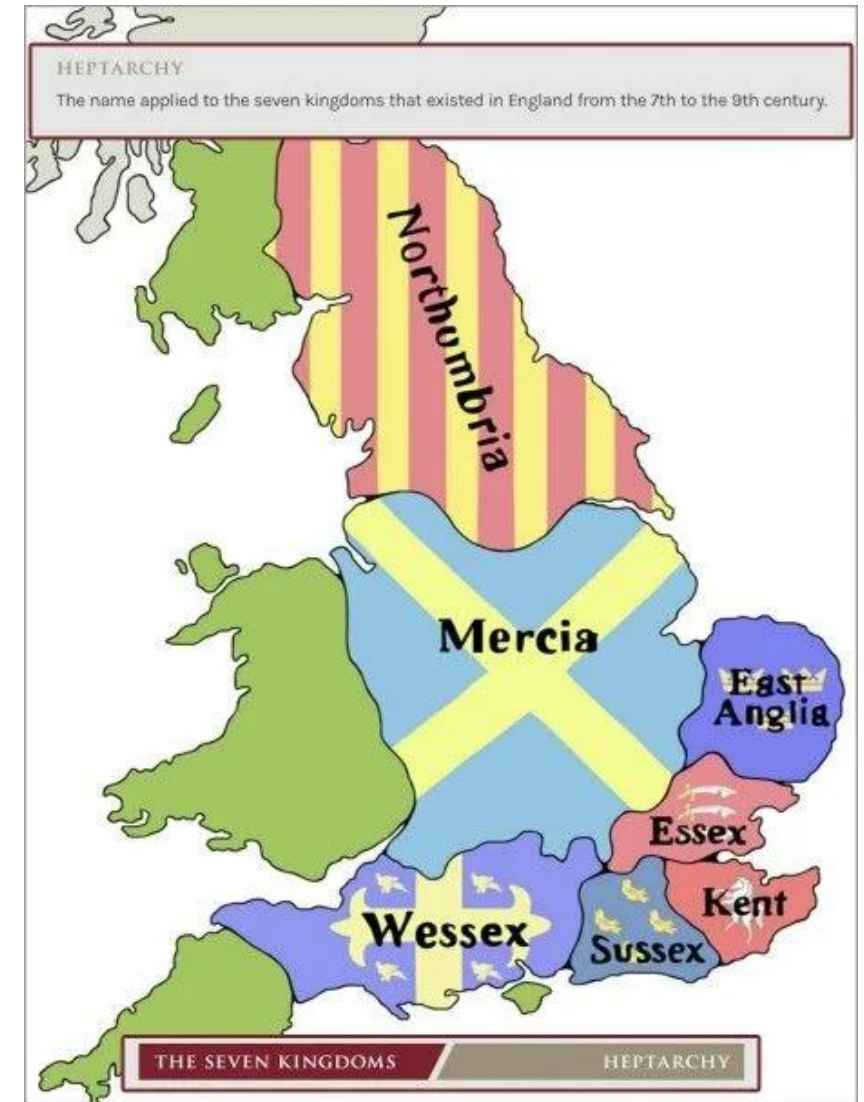
In some areas the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons may have lived together peacefully. In other areas (esp. in the West Saxon area) there was fighting. Many Britons fled to the West (Wales and Cornwall) and to the North (Scotland), and across the Channel to Brittany in France.

The Celtic culture was not assimilated by the Germanic invaders, who retained their own institutions, conception of family, etc., and specially their Germanic language, which was to become **Old English**.

The Germanic tribes referred to the Celts as *wealas* 'foreigners, slaves' (OE *wylisc* > *Welsh*; OE *wealh-hnutu* 'foreign nut' > *walnut*; *Cornwall* < Celtic *kernou* 'horn' + OE *wealh* 'foreigner').

The Germanic settlement of Britain

By the 7th century a number of settlements were established: Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Sussex and Wessex → the **Anglo-Saxon heptarchy**. The name *Engla* 'Angles' was used to refer to the different groups and the country came to be known as *Engla-land*, the land of the Angles.



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Celtic and Latin borrowings

Celtic borrowings:

Not many loanwords from Celtic are found in English.

Borrowings from Celtic include words related to metallurgy (e.g. OE *īren* 'iron', OE *lēad* 'lead').

And especially placenames (*carr* 'rock'; *luh* 'lake'; *torr* "rock") and names of rivers, etc. E.g. *London* and *Leeds*, *Kent*, *Devon*, *Cornwall*, *Cumberland* ('the land of the Cymry') bear Celtic names; rivers like *Avon* or *Thames* (cf. Gal. *Tambre*, *Támega*). Also **hybrid (Celtic-Latin)** place-names, e.g. *Manchester*, *Lancaster*, *Doncaster* etc. containing the Latin element *–castra* and a Celtic formative.

Recent research suggests that Celtic may have had considerable effect on low-status spoken varieties of Old English, esp. on morphology and syntax, which only became evident after the Old English period (e.g. *do*-support).

Celtic and Latin borrowings

Latin borrowings:

(a) continental loans: borrowed by Germanic on the continent (contact with Roman soldiers and Roman merchants), through the spoken language (Vulgar Latin). Mostly words related to the military, building and trade.

Military terms: OE *burh* ‘fortification’ > PDE *borough* (Latin *burgus*); OE *camp* ‘battlefield’ (Latin *campus*)

Building: OE *stræt* ‘road’ > PDE *street* (Latin *via strata*); OE *mīle* ‘mile, 1000 paces’ > *mile* (Latin *mille passuum*); OE *weall* > PDE *wall* (Latin *vallum*); OE *tigle* ‘tile’ < Lat. *tegula*

Trade: OE *wīn* > PDE *wine* (Latin *vinum*); OE *pipor* > PDE *pepper* (Latin *piper*); OE *cēse* > PDE *cheese* (Latin *caseus*); OE *disc* > PDE *dish* (Latin *discus*); OE *mynt* > PDE *mint* (Latin *moneta*); OE *pund* > PDE *pound* (Latin *pondo*).

Celtic and Latin borrowings

Latin borrowings:

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Everyday: OE *cuppe* > PDE *cup* (Latin *cuppa*); OE *cest* > PDE *chest* (Latin *cista*); OE *belt* > PDE *belt* (Latin *balteus*); OE *sicol* > PDE *sickle* (Latin *secula*); OE *candel* 'candle' < Lat. *candela*

Loanwords going back to the Continental period are typically shared by several ancient Germanic languages

e.g. E. *mile*--- Ger. *Meile*

E. *wine*---Ger. *Wein*

Celtic and Latin borrowings

Latin borrowings:

(a) continental loans: borrowed by Germanic on the continent (contact with Roman soldiers and Roman merchants), through the spoken language (Vulgar Latin). Mostly words related to the military, building and trade.

Also Gmc. loanwords into Latin: *glaesum* ‘amber’ (cf. E. *glass*); *sapo* ‘paint’ (cf. E. *soap*);

*Sed et mare scrutantur ac soli omnium succinum, quod ipsi **glesum** vocant, inter vada atque in ipso litore legunt.*

“But they also explore the sea, and are the only ones that seek for amber, which they call *glesum*. They pick it up in sandbanks and at the seashore.”

(Tacitus, *Germania*, 45-4-5)

Celtic and Latin borrowings

Latin borrowings:

(b) Roman rule (Latin loanwords through Celtic transmission)

OE *port* 'harbour, gate' < Latin *portus*

OE *munt* 'mountain' < Latin *mōns, montis*

OE *torr* 'tower, rock' > Latin *turris*

OE *wīc* (cf. *–wich*) < Latin *vīcus*.

Cf. also hybrid (Celtic-Latin) place-names



see further Baugh & Cable 2002: chapter 4

Celtic and Latin borrowings

Latin borrowings:

Latin loanwords going back to the continental period and to the period of Roman rule share some **phonological changes** which operated before the appearance of the earliest written records, among them:

- *i*-mutation

Latin *moneta* (V.Lat. *munita*) > *mint* (cf. Ger. *Münze*)

- palatalization of /sk/ > /ʃ/; /k/+front vowel > /tʃ/

Latin *discus* > *dish*

Latin *cocina* > OE *cycene* /'kytʃene/ > PDE *kitchen*

Latin *cista* > OE *cest* /tʃest/ > PDE *chest*

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