

Proto-Germanic and its conntection to Latin and Old English

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Principles in Historical Linguistics

- All languages are in continual process of change
- All languages are subject to the same kind of modifying influence
- Language change is regular and systematic, allowing for unhindered communication among speakers.
- Linguistic and social factors are interrelated in language change

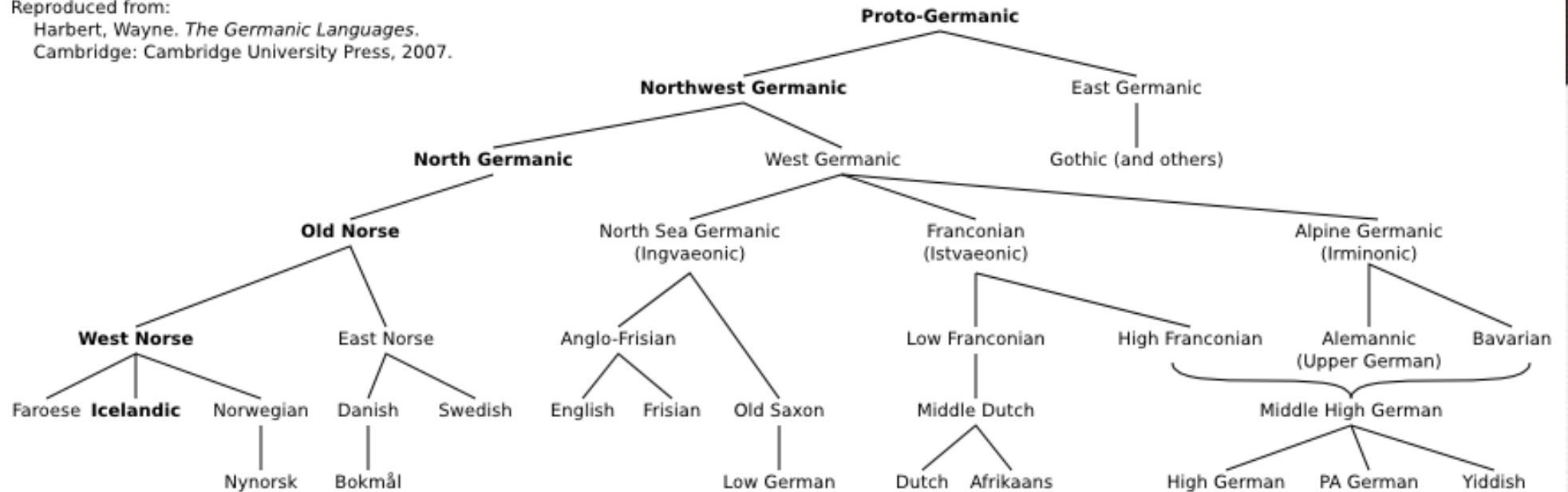
Inner and Outer History of Language

- The outer history of the language is the events in the life (history) of the people speaking the language affecting the language
- The inner history of the language is the description of the changes in the language itself, its grammar, phonetics, vocabulary and spelling

Chief characteristics of the Germanic languages

- Germanic – includes English, German, Dutch, Frisian, Danish, Swedish and Norwegian
- All these languages are descended from the dialect called Proto Germanic (PG)

Reproduced from:
Harbert, Wayne. *The Germanic Languages*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.



Old English	Gothic	Old High German	Old Norse
Stän	Stains	Stein	Stein
Bän	-	Bein	Bein
Äc	-	Eith	Eik
Häm	Haims	Heim	Heimr
Räp	Raip	Reif	Reip
Gät	Gaits	Geiz	Geit
än	ains	ein	einn

I: Phonetic and Phonology of Germanic Languages

- strong dynamic stress falling on the first root syllable
- Regarding vowels → ABLAUT - the spontaneous, positionally independent alteration of vowels inhabited by the Germanic languages from the Proto-Indo-European period
- Ablaut may be of two types:

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- 1. Qualitative ablaut: alteration of different vowels, mainly the vowel [e]/ [a] or [e]/ [o]
 - Indo-European

<u>hesi</u>	You are	Stress on the first syllable
<u>hsté</u>	You are (plural)	Stress on the suffix

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- 2. Quantitative ablaut: change in the length of qualitatively one and the same vowel. It can be normal, lengthened and reduced

Patér	[e:]	Nominative case – lengthened stage
Pater	[e]	Vocative stage – regular stage
Patros	-	Genitive case – reduced stage

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- Another feature: tendency of phonetic assimilation of the root vowel to the vowel of the ending, the so-called Umlaut, or mutation
 - Umlaut: sound change in which a vowel is pronounced more like a following vowel or semi-vowel
 - **ä, ö and ü**

II: Grammar

- Change in the word-structure
- The common Indo-European notional word consisted of three parts: the root, the inflection or ending, stem-forming suffix
- In Germanic languages, the stem-forming suffix fuses with the ending and is no longer visible, thus making the word structure two element one.
- the inflectional system of Proto-Germanic may be compared with Latin



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- “The master beat the servant” - Dominus verberavit servum.
 - “Servant beats the master” - Servus dominum verberavit
 - Latin inherited its system of case inflections from Proto-Indo- European, and a somewhat similar system was inherited by Proto- Germanic, though both Latin and Proto-Germanic reduced the number of case distinctions:

- In Proto-Germanic, as in other Indo-European languages, there was no single set of case inflections used for all nouns
 - All nouns, moreover, had grammatical gender: every noun had to be either masculine, feminine or neuter.
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- This grammatical gender had no necessary connection with sex or with animacy
 - the case in Modern German, where for example *das Mädchen* ‘the girl’, being neuter, has to be referred to as ‘it’, while *die Polizei* ‘the police’, being feminine, has to be referred to as ‘she’

- ADJECTIVES

- The distinction between the strong and the weak forms of the adjective has not survived in Modern English, but it can still be found in many of the other Germanic languages.
- In Modern Swedish, for example, ‘a good friend’ is *en god vän*, but ‘my good friend’ is *min goda vän*

- ARTICLES

- Where Modern English has the one form *the*, Proto-Germanic had a whole series of forms according to the case, number and gender of the noun that followed.
- The declension of the definite article is still found in Modern German, where the non-native learner early on learns the pattern *der, die, das*

- VERBS

- Proto-Indo-European also had a great array of inflections for its verbs
- Proto-Germanic retained many of these, but it simplified the system
- it had only two tenses of the verb, a present tense and a past tense: there were forms corresponding to *I sing* and *I sang*, but no distinct forms with such meanings as 'I shall sing', 'I have sung' and so on.
- **Strong verbs – weak verbs**

Proto-Germanic: Vocabulary

- Some of the vocabulary of Proto-Germanic also seems to be peculiar to it, since it is not paralleled in other Indo-European languages
- Among the words peculiar to Germanic are a number that have to do with ships and seafaring: words to which there are no certain correspondences in other Indo-European languages include *ship*, *sail*, *keel*, *sheet*, *stay* ('rope supporting a mast')

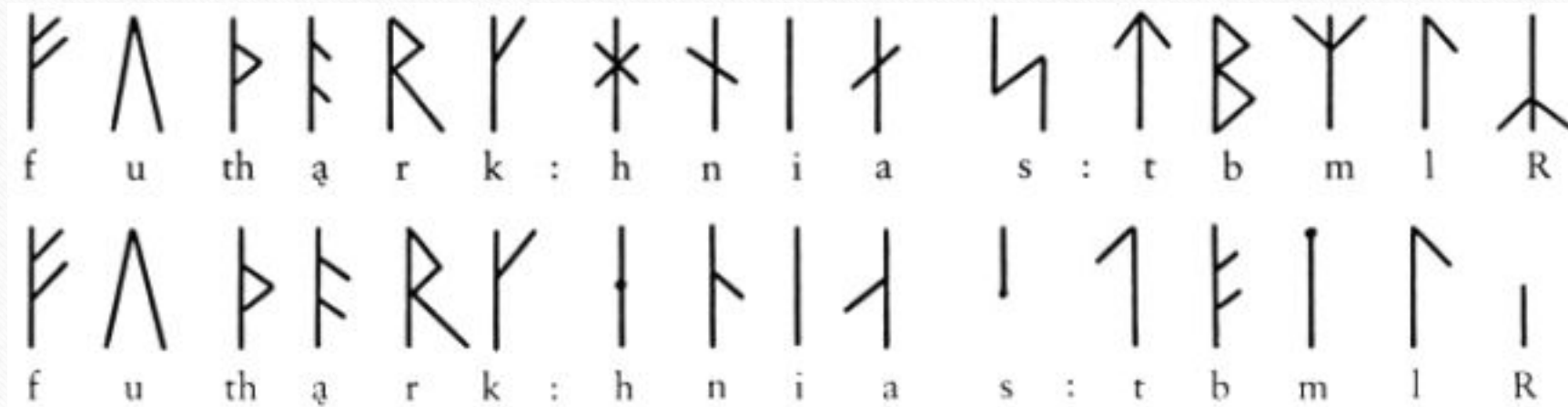
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- Proto-Germanic speakers borrowed a number of words from neighbouring speech communities, especially Celtic and Latin speakers
 - Celtic languages were skilled in metallurgy, and the Germanic words for iron and lead (seen for example in Old English *īren*, *lēad*) were probably borrowed from them. From the Romans were borrowed many words to do with war, trade, building, horticulture and food

Alphabet

- distinctive alphabet called runic, each letter of which was called a rune
- The oldest runes are dated to the 2nd cent. A.D. The early runes were not written but incised – runic script was designed for inscribing, at first on wood
- The earliest known runic alphabet had 24 letters arranged in a particular order which, from the name of its first 6 letters, is known as the futhork

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- Runes were widely used by many Germanic nations. By 500 A.D. they were found not only in Denmark, England, Sweden and Norway, but also in Poland, Russia and Hungary. Runes may have influenced the later Roman alphabet
 - Old English was written in the runic alphabet. This alphabet was used in Northern Europe – in Scandinavia, Present-day Germany and the British Isles
 - In its most developed form in the 9th century Northumbria, it consisted of 31 letters (symbols).

- The meaning of rune: What rune means is “debatable”
 - In terms of Christianity – sharing knowledge
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Old English Corpus

- There is a gap between the arrival of Anglo-Saxons and the first English manuscripts.
- A few scattered inscriptions in the language date from 5th and 6th centuries written in the runic alphabet which the invaders brought with them but these give very little evidence of what the language was like.
- The literary age began after the arrival of the Roman missionaries, led by Augustine who came to Kent in 597 A.D.

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- The first texts dating from about 700 A.D., are glossaries of Latin words translated into Old English and a few early inscriptions and poems
 - The chief literary work of that period, the heroic poem Beowulf
 - Most extent Old English texts were written in the period following the reign of King Alfred (849 – 899)
 - The number of words in the corpus of Old English compiled at the University of Toronto, which contains all the texts, is only 3.5 million words

Thank you!

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