



This area is under construction, with only a few preliminary links. In the meantime, see also instructional software and reference materials.

Old English, Middle English and *Modern English* are terms used by modern scholars to segment a continuum of language change which begins sometime after the 5th-century Germanic settlements in Britain. 'Old English' (or 'Anglo-Saxon', as it is sometimes called) is generally taken to cover the period c600-1100 AD. The earliest surviving text is the Northumbrian version of Cædmon's Hymn, in Cambridge University Library MS Kk.5.16 (c737). Inscriptions also offer evidence for Early Old English: for example, minting of coins began in the early 7th century (Mitchell and Reeds 1996), and early post-invasion runic inscriptions are found on objects such as cremation urns, sword pommels, and brooches (Page 1987).

Typology: the Indo-European language family; the Germanic languages

Old English is a Germanic language, and hence an Indo-European language.

- Dan Short's Indo-European Tree (33k, colour, based on information in Webster's 3rd)
- George Freeman's Tree of Germanic Languages

The syntax of Old English

- Verb Movement in Old and Middle English: Dialect Variation and Language Contact (Anthony Kroch and Ann Taylor, University of Pennsylvania)

References

Mitchell, Stephen and Brian Reeds. 1996. *Coins of England and the United Kingdom*. London: Seaby.

Page, R. I. 1987. *Runes*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.



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cball@guvax.georgetown.edu

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Germanic Languages

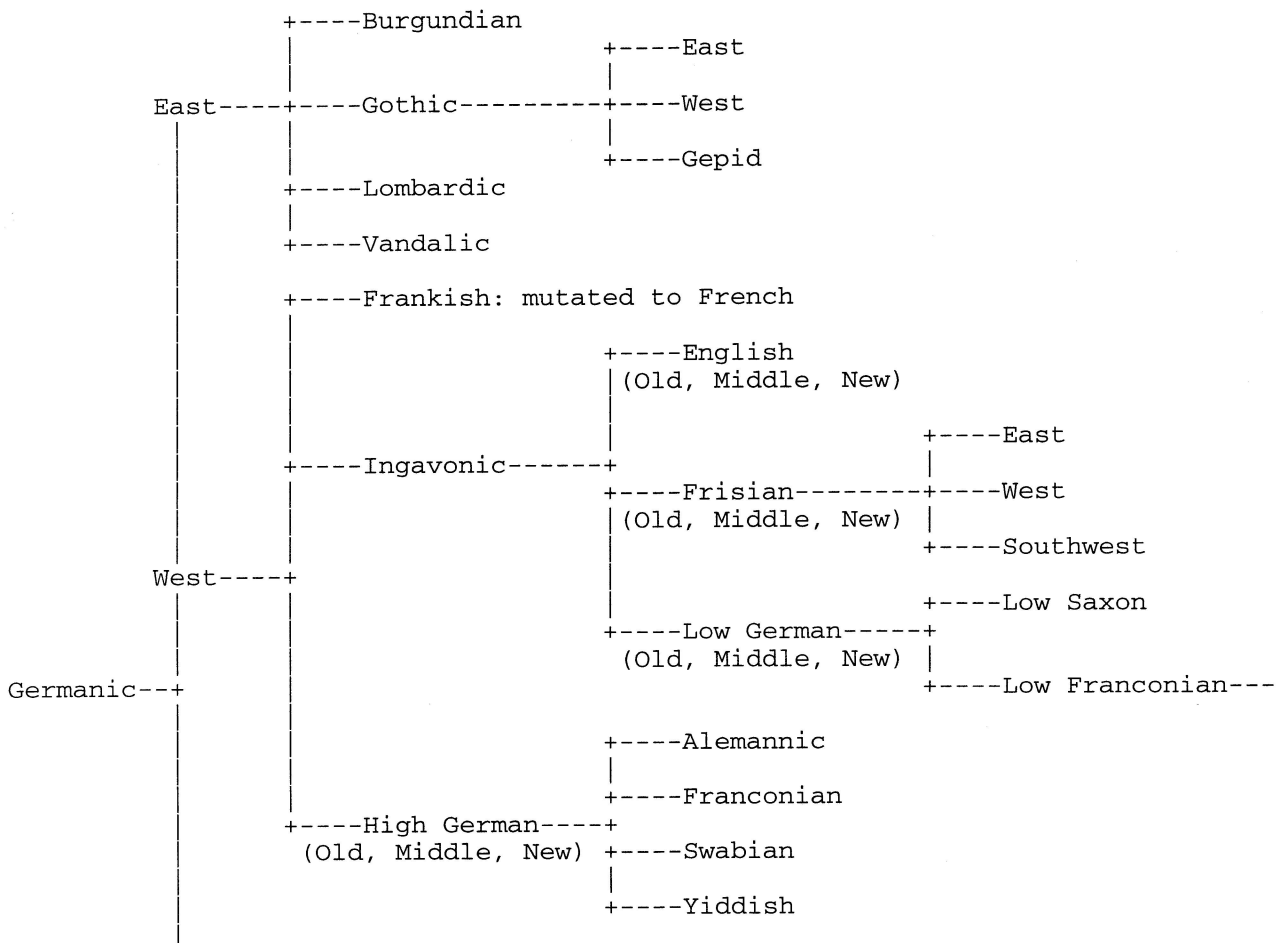
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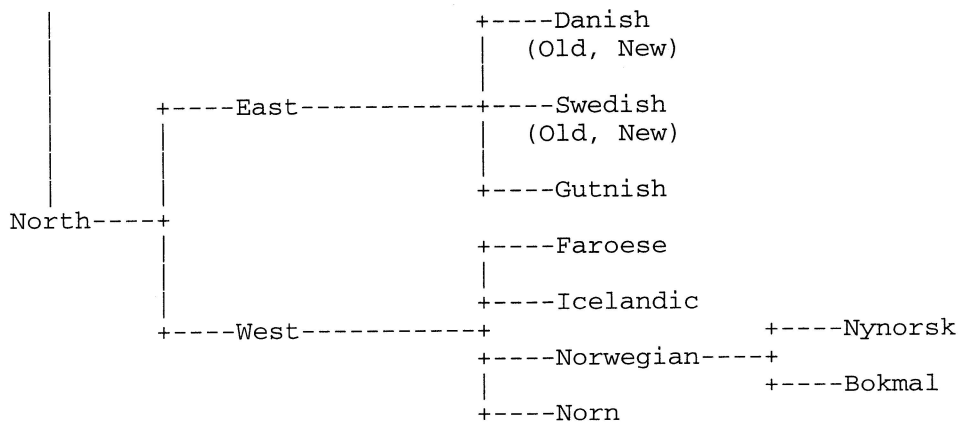
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Tree of Germanic Languages

The Germanic Languages are a branch stock of the Indo-European Languages. This stock itself branches out as shown below.





Language Descriptions

Afrikaans

Afrikaans is a contemporary West Germanic language developed from seventeenth century Dutch. It is an official language of the Union of South Africa.

Number of speakers (1988): 10 million

An example of Afrikaans (The Lord's Prayer).

Please supply further details if you have any.

Burgundian

Burgundian was the East Germanic language of the Germanic speaking people who ultimately settled in southeastern Gaul (Southeastern France, Western Switzerland, and Northwestern Italy) in the fifth century C.E. It is extinct.

Please supply further details if you have any.

Dutch-Flemish

Dutch or Flemish is the contemporary descendent of Middle Dutch. With slight differences, the same language is called Dutch in the Netherlands and Flemish in Belgium. It is the official language of the Netherlands and one of the two official languages of Belgium.

Number of Speakers (1988): 21 million

An example of Dutch (The Lord's Prayer).

Please supply further details if you have any.

East Germanic

The East Germanic branch of the Germanic languages was spoken by the Germanic speaking people who, in the second through fourth centuries C. E., migrated first to the Danube and Black Sea areas from the Germanic homeland. The languages of these people, which are poorly attested except for West Gothic, show characteristic differences from West and North Germanic branches.

The East Germanic Languages were Gothic, Vandalic, Burgundian, Lombardic, Rugian, Herulian, Bastarnae, and Scirian. It is said that the East Germanic languages were probably all very similar.

All of the East Germanic languages are extinct.

Please supply further details if you have any.

Faroese

Faroese is a contemporary Western North Germanic language spoken in the Faroe Islands. It is a descendant of Old Norse.

Number of Speakers (1988): 41,000

Please supply further details if you have any.

Frisian

Frisian is a contemporary West Germanic language spoken in the Netherlands and Germany.

Number of Speakers (1988): **TBS**

Please supply further details if you have any.

An example of Frisian (The Lord's Prayer).

Germanic

The Germanic branch of Indo-European is a *centum* language, characterized by systematic change in initial stops, a stress accent on the first syllable of the root, by the productive use of ablaut in verbs, by the use of a dental suffix in verb morphology, and by the use of strong and weak adjective conjugations. About **TBS** percent of Germanic roots are non-Indo-European.

Living Germanic Languages

- Afrikaans
- Danish
- Dutch-Flemish
- English
- Faroese
- Frisian
- High German
- Gutnish
- Icelandic
- Low German
- Norwegian
- Swedish

Extinct Germanic Languages

- Bastarnae
- Burgundian
- Frankish
- Gothic
- Herulian
- Lombardic
- Norn
- Rugian
- Scirian
- Vandalic

Please supply further details if you have any.

Gothic

Gothic was the East Germanic language of the Germanic speaking people who migrated from southern Scania (southern Sweden) to the Ukraine. From there the West and East Goths migrated to southern Gaul, Iberia, and Italy in the fifth and sixth centuries C. E. The Gepids were overcome by the Lombards and Avars in the fifth century and disappeared.

Gothic is recorded in translations of parts of the bible into West Gothic in the fourth century C. E. and by names.

Gothic is extinct. The last Gothic speakers reported were in the Crimea in the sixteenth century C. E.

An example of Gothic (The Lord's Prayer).

Please supply further details if you have any.

Gutnish

Gutnish is a contemporary Eastern North Germanic language spoken on the island of Gotland. It is first attested in legal documents of the fourteenth century C. E.

Number of Speakers (1988): **TBS**

Please supply further details if you have any.

Icelandic

Icelandic is the contemporary language of Iceland. It is a very conservative descendent of Old Norse. Many Icelandic readers are able to read the Norse Sagas, written in Old Norse, without much difficulty

Number of Speakers (1988): 250,000

Please supply further details if you have any.

Lombardic

Lombardic was the East Germanic language of the Germanic speaking people who invaded and settled in Italy in the sixth century C. E. It is said that Lombardic participated in the so-called *second* sound shift which is primarily attested in High German.

Lombardic is extinct.

Please supply further details if you have any.

Middle English

Middle English was the descendent of Old English. English after about 1100 C. E. had changed enough to warrant a different designation. Middle English had about five major dialects, Northern, West Midlands, East Midlands, Southwestern, and Kentish.

Middle English is characterized by the reduction and loss of inflectional endings and the introduction of a large number of words derived first from Latin through Norman or Middle French and subsequently from Middle Dutch. By the late fifteenth century, East Midlands Middle English, the language of London, had acquired enough changes to be designated Early New English, the language of Mallory (*Le Morte d'Arthur*).

Some examples of Middle English (*The Lord's Prayer*).

Please supply further details if you have any.

New Danish

New (or Modern Danish) is the contemporary descendent of Old Danish. It is the official language of Denmark.

Number of Speakers (1988): 5 million

An example of Danish (The Lord's Prayer).

Please supply further details if you have any.

New English

New (or Modern) English is the contemporary descendent of Middle English. It is the official language of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It is one of the official languages of India, the United Nations, and many other nations.

New English is characterized by a very large vocabulary, non-phonetic spelling, an almost total lack of inflection (most plurals of nouns are indicated), a syntax almost totally dependent on word order, and a very complicated periphrastic verb system.

Number of speakers (1988): 431 million

Some examples of New English (The Lord's Prayer).

Please supply further details if you have any.

New High German

New (or Modern) High German is the contemporary descendent of Middle High German. It is the official language of Austria, Germany, and Switzerland.

Number of Speakers (1988): 118 million

An example of High German (The Lord's Prayer).

Please supply further details if you have any.

New Low German

New (or Modern) Low German is the contemporary descendent of Middle Low German. It is spoken on the North German plain in Germany.

Number of Speakers (1988): **TBS**

Please supply further details if you have any.

New Swedish

New Swedish is a contemporary Eastern North Germanic language, a descendent of Old Swedish. It is the official language of Sweden and is spoken in Finland.

Number of Speakers (1988): 9 million

An example of Swedish (The Lord's Prayer).

Please supply further details if you have any.

Norn

Norn was a mixed language of Old Norse and Irish spoken in the Shetland Islands. It is extinct.

Please supply further details if you have any.

North Germanic

The North Germanic branch of the Germanic languages is spoken by the Germanic speaking people who stayed in northern part of the Germanic homeland. Between about 800 C. E. and 1000 C. E., the dialects of North Germanic diverged into West and East North Germanic. Old West Germanic is known as Old Norse; Old East Germanic is known as Old Danish or Old Swedish.

A characteristic of the North Germanic languages is the use of a postposed definite article.

Please supply further details if you have any.

Norwegian

Norwegian, a contemporary Western North Germanic language, is the official language of Norway. It has two major dialects: Nynorsk and Bokmal. Nynorsk is the contemporary descendent of Old Norwegian. Bokmal, also called Dano-Norwegian or Riksmal, is really a form of Danish. Nynorsk is more prevalent in rural areas; Bokmal in the cities. Since 1951 there has been a concerted effort to effect a merger of the two dialects.

Number of Speakers (1988): 5 million

An example of Norwegian (The Lord's Prayer -- Bokmal).

Please supply further details if you have any.

Old English

Old English (or Anglo-Saxon) is the oldest recorded form of English. It is said to be the language of the three tribes (Angles, Saxons, and Jutes) of West Germanic speaking people who invaded and occupied Britain in the fifth century C. E. It is very closely related to Old Frisian.

Old English developed four major dialects: Northumbrian, Mercian, West Saxon, and Kentish. The majority of recorded Old English is in the West Saxon dialect.

Old English is characterized by phonetic spelling, a moderate number of inflections (two numbers, three genders, four cases, remnants of dual number and instrumental case), a syntax somewhat dependent on word order, and a simple two tense, three mood, four person (three singular, one plural) verb system.

Old English is recorded from the late seventh century onwards. By about 1100 C. E. enough changes had accumulated so that the language is designated Middle English.

Some examples of Old English (The Lord's Prayer).

Please supply further details if you have any.

Old Danish

Old Danish was an Eastern North Germanic language, spoken in Denmark, the ancestor of New Danish and Bokmal.

Please supply further details if you have any.

Old High German

Old High German was an Southern West Germanic language, spoken in southern Germany, the ancestor of New High German.

Some examples of Old High German (The Lord's Prayer).

Please supply further details if you have any.

Old Low German or Low Saxon

Old Low German or Low Saxon is a West Germanic language which is the oldest attested form of

Low German. It is the ancestor of Middle Low German and the remote ancestor of New Low German. It was spoken on the North German plain in Germany.

Please supply further details if you have any.

Old Norse

Old Norse was a Western North Germanic language used in Iceland, Ireland, Norway, the Hebrides, Orkney, Shetland, and the Faroe Islands from approximately the tenth to thirteenth century. It started diverging from common North Germanic about 800 C. E. It is the language of the Norse Eddas and Sagas. Its living descendents are Norwegian, Icelandic, and Faroese.

Please supply further details if you have any.

Old Swedish

Old Swedish was an Eastern North Germanic language attested in about 2000 runic inscriptions of the eleventh and twelfth centuries C. E. Its contemporary descendant is New Swedish.

Please supply further details if you have any.

Vandalic

Vandalic was the East Germanic language of the Germanic speaking people who invaded Gaul, Iberia, and Africa. They founded a kingdom in Africa in the fifth century C. E. Vandalic is extinct.

Please supply further details if you have any.

West Germanic

The West Germanic branch of the Germanic languages was spoken by the Germanic speaking people who migrated to the west and south areas of the Germanic homeland which they still occupy. The languages of these people are well attested and have persisted until today.

The West Germanic Languages are divided into the so-called Ingaevonic or North Sea Languages (English, Frisian, and Low German) and High German. Each of these languages has an identified Old, Middle, and New (or Modern) period. The Germanic ancestor of French, Frankish, was also a West Germanic Language. (French is not further considered herein because it is primarily a Latin-based Romance language.)

Note that this division of the West Germanic Languages, like virtually divisions of similar languages, is an on-going subject of scholarly controversy, development, and discussion.

The oldest attested West Germanic Languages are Old English, Old Frisian, Old Low German, and Old High German.

Please supply further details if you have any.

Other Commentary

Grimm's Law

Grimm's Law describes the phonetic shift of initial stops from their Indo-European values to their Germanic values: voiceless stops become fricatives, voiced stops are devoiced, and voiced aspirate stops become deaspirate.

Please supply further details if you have any.

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Acknowledgments

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Universal Survey of Languages, e-mail: napoleon@teleport.com for Afrikaans, Dutch, and Frisian examples.
"To be determined" for Norwegian and Swedish examples.

Wishlist

The Lord's Prayer in Faroese, Gutnish, Icelandic, Low German, Norwegian (Nynorsk), and Old Norse.

Sound files of languages.

Characteristic descriptions of languages: Phonology, morphology, distinguishing features.

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