

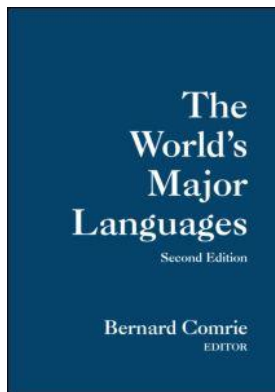
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Comrie Bernard

### Germanic Languages

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## Germanic Languages

*John A. Hawkins*

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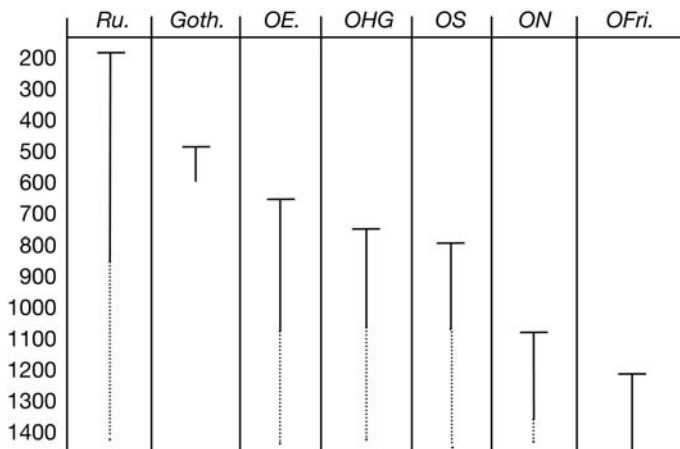
The Germanic languages currently spoken fall into two major groups: North Germanic (or Scandinavian) and West Germanic. The former group comprises: Danish, Norwegian (i.e. both the Dano-Norwegian Bokmål and Nynorsk), Swedish, Icelandic, and Faroese. The latter: English (in all its varieties), German (in all its varieties, including Yiddish and Pennsylvania German), Dutch (including Afrikaans and Flemish) and Frisian. The varieties of English are particularly extensive and include not just the dialectal and regional variants of the British Isles, North America, Australasia, India and Africa, but also numerous English-based pidgins and creoles of the Atlantic (e.g. Jamaican Creole and Pidgin Krio) and the Pacific (e.g. Hawaiian Pidgin and Tok Pisin). When one adds to this list the regions of the globe in which Scandinavian, German and Dutch are spoken, the geographical distribution of the Germanic languages is more extensive than that of any other group of languages. In every continent there are countries in which a modern Germanic language (primarily English) is extensively used or has some official status (as a national or regional language). Demographically there are at least 450 million speakers of Germanic languages in the world today, divided as follows: North Germanic, over 18 million (Danish over 5 million, Norwegian over 4 million, Swedish approximately 8.8 million, Icelandic 260,000 and Faroese 47,000); West Germanic apart from English, approximately 125 million (90 million for German in European countries in which it has official status, German worldwide perhaps 100 million, Dutch and Afrikaans 25 million, Frisian over 400,000); English worldwide, 320–80 million first language users, plus 300–500 million users in countries like India and Singapore in which English has official status (cf. Crystal 2003).

There is a third group of languages within the Germanic family that needs to be recognised: East Germanic, all of whose members are now extinct. These were the languages of the Goths, the Burgundians, the Vandals, the Gepids and other tribes originating in Scandinavia that migrated south occupying numerous regions in western and eastern Europe (and even North Africa) in the early centuries of the present era. The only extensive records we have are from a fourth-century Bible translation into Gothic. The Goths had migrated from southern Sweden around the year nought into the area around what is now Gdańsk (originally Gothiscandza). After AD 200 they moved

south into what is now Bulgaria, and later split up into two groups, Visigoths and Ostrogoths. The Visigoths established new kingdoms in southern France and Spain (AD 419–711), and the Ostrogoths in Italy (up till AD 555). These tribes were subsequently to become absorbed in the local populations, but in addition to the Bible translation they have left behind numerous linguistic relics in the form of place names (e.g. *Catalonia*, originally ‘Gothislandia’), personal names (e.g. *Rodrigo* and *Fernando*, compare Modern German *Roderich* and *Ferdinand*), numerous loanwords (e.g. Italian-Spanish *guerra* ‘war’), and also more structural features (such as the Germanic stress system, see below). In addition, a form of Gothic was still spoken on the Crimean peninsula as late as the eighteenth century. Eighty-six words of Crimean Gothic were recorded by a Flemish diplomat in 1562, who recognised the correspondence between these words and his own West Germanic cognates.

The earliest records that we have for all three groups of Germanic languages are illustrated in Figure 2.1. These are runic inscriptions dating back to the third century AD and written (or rather carved in stone, bone or wood) in a special runic alphabet referred to as the Futhork. This stage of the language is sometimes called Late Common Germanic since it exhibits minimal dialect differentiation throughout the Germanic-speaking area. Further evidence of early Germanic comes from words cited by the classical writers such as Tacitus (e.g. *rīna* ‘rune’) and from some extremely early Germanic loanwords borrowed by the neighbouring Baltic languages and Finnish (e.g. Finnish *kuningas* ‘king’). The runic inscriptions, these early citations and loans, the Gothic evidence and the method of comparative reconstruction applied to both Germanic and Indo-European as a whole provide us with such knowledge as we have of the Germanic parent language, Proto-Germanic.

There is much uncertainty surrounding the origin and nature of the speakers of Proto-Germanic, and even more uncertainty about the speakers of Proto-Indo-European. It seems to be agreed, however, that a Germanic-speaking people occupied an area comprising what is now southern Sweden, southern Norway, Denmark and the lower Elbe at some point prior to 1000 BC, and that an expansion then took place both to the north



**Figure 2.1** The Earliest Written Records in the Germanic Languages.

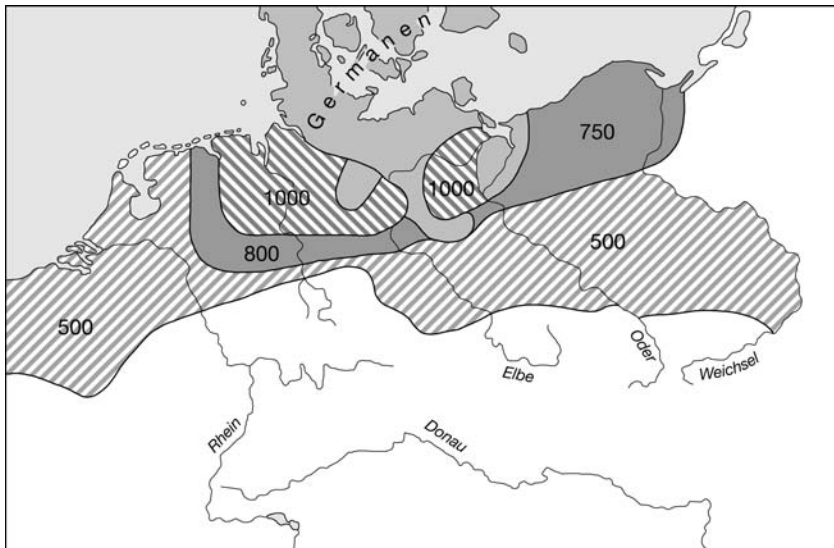
Source: Kufner 1972.

and to the south. Map 2.1 illustrates the southward expansion of the Germanic peoples in the period 1000 to 500 BC. A reconstruction of the events before 1000 BC is rather speculative and depends on one's theory of the 'Urheimat' (or original homeland) of the Indo-European speakers themselves (see pages 25–26). The pre-Germanic speakers must have migrated to their southern Scandinavian location sometime before 1000 BC and according to one theory (cf. Hutterer 1975) they encountered there a non-Indo-European-speaking people from whom linguistic features were borrowed that were to have a substantial impact on the development of Proto-Germanic from Proto-Indo-European. According to Hutterer as much as one-third of the vocabulary of the Germanic languages is not of Indo-European origin (see page 56).

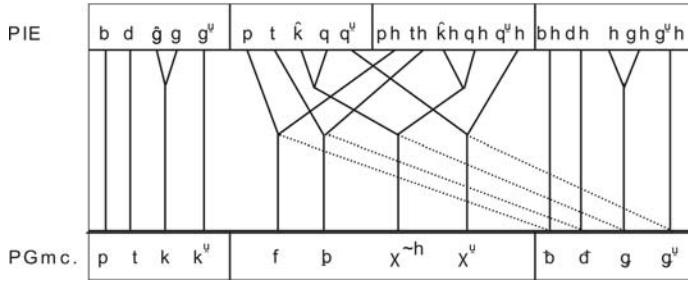
The major changes that set off Proto-Germanic from Proto-Indo-European are generally considered to have been completed by at least 500 BC. In the phonology these were the following: the First (or Germanic) Sound Shift; several vowel shifts; changes in word-level stress patterns; and reductions and losses in unstressed syllables.

The First Sound Shift affected *all* the non-nasal stops of Proto-Indo-European and is illustrated in Figure 2.2.

The reconstructed Proto-Indo-European consonants of Figure 2.2 are those of Brugmann (1903) (see Baldi, this volume, page 11). According to this reconstruction Proto-Indo-European had a voiceless and a voiced series of consonants, each of which could be unaspirated or aspirated, and within each series there was a bilabial, a dental, a palatal, a velar and a labio-velar (labialised velar) stop, as shown. Proto-Germanic abandoned the palatal/velar distinction throughout, and collapsed the unaspirated and aspirated series of voiceless stops. Unaspirated voiced stops shifted to their voiceless counterparts (see, for example, Lat. *decem*, Eng. *ten*), voiceless stops shifted to voiceless fricatives (e.g. Lat. *tres*, Eng. *three*), and aspirated voiced stops shifted to voiced fricatives (most of which subsequently became voiced stops). The dotted lines in Figure 2.2 indicate the operation of what



**Map 2.1** Expansion of the Germanic People 1000–500 BC.  
Source: Adapted from Hutterer 1975.



**Figure 2.2** The First (Germanic) Sound Shift.

Source: Adapted from Krahe 1948.

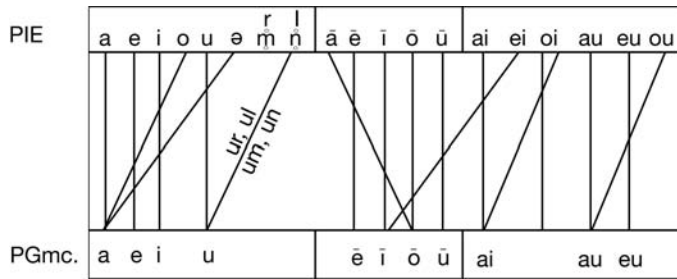
is called ‘Verner’s Law’. Depending on the syllable that received primary word stress, the voiceless fricatives of Germanic would either remain voiceless or become voiced. For example, an immediately following stressed syllable would induce voicing, cf. Go. *fadar* ‘father’ pronounced with [ð] rather than [θ], from PIE *\*pátēr*, cf. Skt. *pitár-*, Gk. *patér*.

According to the more recent Proto-Indo-European consonantal reconstruction of Gamkrelidze (1981) (see Baldi, this volume, page 14) the unaspirated voiced stops of Figure 2.2 were actually glottalised stops, which lost their glottalic feature in Proto-Germanic, resulting in the voiceless stops shown. For further details, and also a critique, of this reconstruction see Voyles (1992).

The vowel shifts are illustrated in Figure 2.3. Short *a*, *o* and *ə* in Proto-Indo-European were collapsed into Germanic *a* (compare Lat. *ager*, Go. *akrs* ‘field, acre’; Lat. *octo* (PIE *ók̑tō*), Go. *ahtau* ‘eight’; PIE *pátēr*, Go. *fadar* ‘father’). The syllabic liquids and nasals of Proto-Indo-European became *u* plus a liquid or nasal consonant. Long *ā* and *ō* collapsed into *ō* (Lat. *frāter*, Go. *brōþ\*ar* ‘brother’; Lat. *flōs* (PIE *\*bh̑lōmen*), Go. *blōma*, ‘flower, bloom’), and the number of diphthongs was reduced as shown.

The changes in word stress resulted in the many word-initial primary stress patterns of the Germanic languages where in Proto-Indo-European the stress had fallen on a variety of syllable types (the root, word- and stem-forming affixes, even inflectional endings). This shift (from a Proto-Indo-European accentual system that has been argued to be based on pitch originally, i.e. high versus low tones) is commonly assumed to have occurred after the First Sound Shift, since the operation of Verner’s Law presupposes variable accentual patterns of the Indo-European type that were subsequently neutralised by the reassignment of primary stress. Thus, both PIE *\*bhrátēr* ‘brother’ and *\*pátēr* ‘father’ end up with primary stress on the initial syllable in Go. *brōþar* and *fadar*, and yet the alternation between voiceless [θ] in the former case and voiced [ð] in the latter bears testimony to earlier accentual patterns. Had the stress shifted first, both words should have changed *t* in the same way. A major and lasting consequence of initial stress was the corresponding reduction and loss of unstressed syllables. This process was well underway in predialectal Germanic and was to continue after the separation of the dialects. Indo-European final *-t* was regularly dropped (Lat. *velit*, Go. *wili* ‘he will/wants’), and final *-m* was either dropped or reduced to *-n* (OLat. *quom*, Eng. *when*). Final short vowels were dropped (Gk. *oīda* ‘I see’, Go. *wait* ‘I know’), and final long vowels were reduced in length.

The extremely rich morphology of Proto-Indo-European was reduced in Proto-Germanic. The Proto-Indo-European noun distinguished three genders (masculine, feminine, neuter),



**Figure 2.3** Germanic Vowel Shifts.  
Source: Krahe and Meid 1969.

three numbers (singular, plural, dual) and eight cases (nominative, vocative, accusative, genitive, dative, ablative, instrumental and locative). The three genders were preserved in Germanic, but special dual inflections disappeared (though residual dual forms survive in the pronominal system of the early dialects). The eight cases were reduced to four: the original nominative, accusative, and genitive preserved their forms and functions; the vocative was collapsed with the nominative; the dative, instrumental and locative (and to some extent the ablative) were united in a single case, the Germanic dative, though occasional instrumental forms are attested; and some uses of the ablative were taken over by the genitive.

Proto-Indo-European nouns were also divided into numerous declensional classes depending on the final vowel or consonant of the stem syllable, each with partially different inflectional paradigms. These paradigms survive in Germanic, though some gained, and were to continue to gain, members at the expense of others (particularly the PIE *o*-class (Gmc. *a*-class) for masculine and neuter nouns, and the PIE *ā*-class (Gmc. *ō*-class) for feminine nouns). The inflectional paradigm for masculine *a*-stems in the earliest Germanic languages is illustrated in Table 2.1.

The syncretism of the case system was accompanied by an expansion in the use of prepositions in order to disambiguate semantic distinctions that had been carried more clearly by the morphology hitherto.

The pronouns of Germanic correspond by and large to those of Indo-European, except for the reduction in the number of dual forms.

As regards the adjective, Germanic innovated a functionally productive distinction between 'strong' and 'weak' inflections, which is still found in Modern German (cf. pages 97–98 for illustration). Proto-Indo-European adjectival morphology was fundamentally similar to that for nouns. The Germanic strong adjective inflections were formed from a fusion of pronominal inflections with the declensional paradigm for nouns and adjectives ending in a stem vowel, while the weak adjective inflections were those of nouns and adjectives with *n*-stems. Strong and weak adjectives in the early dialects carried a meaning difference similar to that of the indefinite versus definite articles of the modern Germanic languages, and it is no accident that adjectives within indefinite versus definite noun phrases are typically strong and weak respectively in German today.

Proto-Indo-European verbal morphology was considerably reduced in Germanic. The Proto-Indo-European medio-passive voice was lost (except for a few relics in Gothic and Old English), and only the active survives. Distinct subjunctive and optative forms were

**Table 2.1** The Inflectional Paradigm for Germanic Masculine *a*-Stems

		<i>Go.</i>	<i>ON</i>	<i>OE</i>	<i>OS</i>	<i>OHG</i>
Sg.	Nom.	dags	dagr	dæg	dag	tag
	Gen.	dagis	dags	dæges	dages	tages
	Dat.	daga	dege	dæge	dage	tage
	Acc.	dag	dag	dæg	dag	tag
	Voc.	dag	(= Nom.)	(= Nom.)	(= Nom.)	(= Nom.)
	Inst.	—	—	dæge	dagū	tagū
Pl.	Nom.	dagōs	dagar	dagas	dagos	taga
	Gen.	dagē	daga	daga	dago	tago
	Dat.	dagam	ḍogom	dagum	dagum	tagum
	Acc.	dagans	daga	dagas	dagos	taga

Notes: Germanic *a*-stems exemplified by Gothic *dags* 'day' and cognates in the other Germanic dialects derive from Indo-European *o*-stems (cf. Latin *lupus*, earlier *lupos* 'wolf').

collapsed, and only two of several tense and aspect distinctions were maintained in the Germanic present versus past tenses. Separate verb agreement inflections for dual subjects survive only (partially) in Gothic and Old Norse. A special innovation of Germanic involved the development of a systematic distinction between strong and weak verbs. The former (exemplified by Eng. *sing/sang/sung*) exploit vowel alternations, or 'ablaut' (see pages 14–15), in distinguishing, for example, past from present tense forms, the latter use a suffix containing a dental element without any vowel alternation (e.g. Eng. *love/loved*). The verbal morphology of Proto-Germanic has been maintained in all the modern Germanic languages (though the number of strong verbs has been reduced in favour of weak ones), and in addition new periphrastic forms have evolved for the tenses (e.g. perfect and pluperfect) and voices (the passive) that were lost in the transmission from Proto-Indo-European to Proto-Germanic.

The Germanic lexicon, like the phonology and morphology, reveals clearly the Indo-European origin of Germanic. Yet, as pointed out earlier, Hutterer (1975) argues that as much as a third of Germanic lexical items cannot be derived from Proto-Indo-European. These items, far from being peripheral, belong to the core of the basic vocabulary of Common Germanic. They predominate in the following semantic fields: seafaring terms; terms for warfare and weaponry; animal names (particularly fish) and terms for hunting and farming; communal activities and social institutions and titles; and miscellaneous terms. Some examples (taken from English) are: *sea, keel, boat, rudder, mast, steer, sail; sword, bow; carp, eel, calf, lamb; thing* (originally a communal meeting), *king, knight; and leap, bone*. In the absence of independent evidence for the Germanic substrate language, arguments for lexical borrowing, or for other distinctive features of Germanic from the substrate must be considered speculative. More recent studies of early Germanic such as Voyles (1992) and Robinson (1992) do not refer to it. On the other hand, the Dutch dictionary of Marlies Philippa et al. (2003) gives systematic attention to the substrate idea, and unless Indo-European etymologies can be found for these basic vocabulary items in Germanic it must be considered a serious possibility worthy of further research.

Common Germanic also took numerous loanwords from neighbouring Indo-European peoples, especially from Latin, though also from Celtic. The Latin loans reveal the strong influence of Roman culture on the early Germanic peoples in areas such as agriculture

(cf. Eng. *cherry*/Lat. *ceresia*, *plum/pluma*, *plant/planta*, *cheese/caseus*), building and construction (*street/strata*, *wall/vallum*, *chamber/camera*), trade (*pound/pondo*, *fishmonger/mango* (= slave-trader), *mint/moneta*), warfare (*camp/campus*). Most of the days of the week are loan translations from the Latin (e.g. *Sunday/solis dies*, etc.).

There is much less certainty about the syntax of Proto-Germanic, though the word order of the earliest inscriptions (Late Common Germanic) has been quite extensively documented by Smith (1971). He establishes that the basic position of the verb was clause-final (62 per cent of the clauses he investigated were verb-final, with 19 per cent verb-second and 16 per cent verb-first). Within the noun phrase, however, the predominant order of adjectival modifiers and of possessive and demonstrative determiners is after the noun, and not before it, as in many OV languages. In the earliest West Germanic dialects, by contrast, the verb is correspondingly less verb-final, and modifiers of the noun are predominantly preposed.

The precise manner in which the proto-language split up into the three groups (North, East and West) is a question of long-standing dispute. With the exception of the earliest runic inscriptions, the tripartite division is already very clearly established in the earliest records of Figure 2.1: each of the groups has undergone enough characteristic innovations to justify both the existence of the group itself and the assumption of a period of separate linguistic development for the languages involved following migration from the homeland. But whether these innovations point to the existence of, for instance, a West Germanic parent language which split off from Proto-Germanic and from which all the later West Germanic dialects are descended, or whether the innovations are the result of contact and borrowing between geographically proximate tribes speaking increasingly distinct dialects whose common point of departure was the Germanic parent language, is almost impossible to tell. Some scholars argue against the assumption of a West Germanic parent language on the grounds that a threefold dialect grouping within West Germanic (into North Sea Germanic, Rhine-Weser Germanic, and Elbe Germanic – also called respectively Istveonic, Ingveonic and Erminonic) can be reconstructed back as early as the second century AD. The runic inscriptions of this early period do not lend credence to such an early dialect split, however.

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For the Indo-European background, see Baldi (Chapter 1, this volume), Brugmann (1903), Krahe (1948), and Gamkrelidze (1981). Van Coetsem and Kufner (1972) contains many papers (in English) on the phonology, morphology and syntax of Proto-Germanic, on the position of Germanic within Indo-European as a whole and on the reconstruction of developments within Germanic prior to the first records. It includes Kufner's (1972) summary and synthesis of the different theories concerning subgroupings within Germanic.

For the phonology and morphology of early Germanic languages, see Krahe and Meid (1969), Voyles (1992) and Robinson (1992). Robinson also includes discussion of syntax. Hutterer (1975) is a general compendium of the grammars and histories of all the Germanic languages and of the cultures of their speakers. Smith (1971) gives a summary of word order in early Germanic.

The chapters in König and van der Auwera (1994) give grammatical summaries (in English) of all the modern Germanic languages, including Germanic creoles (Romaine 1994). This volume also includes an overview chapter on the Germanic languages (Henriksen and van der Auwera 1994), a chapter on Gothic and the reconstruction of Proto-Germanic (W.P. Lehmann 1994), plus chapters on the historical stages of North and West Germanic languages.



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