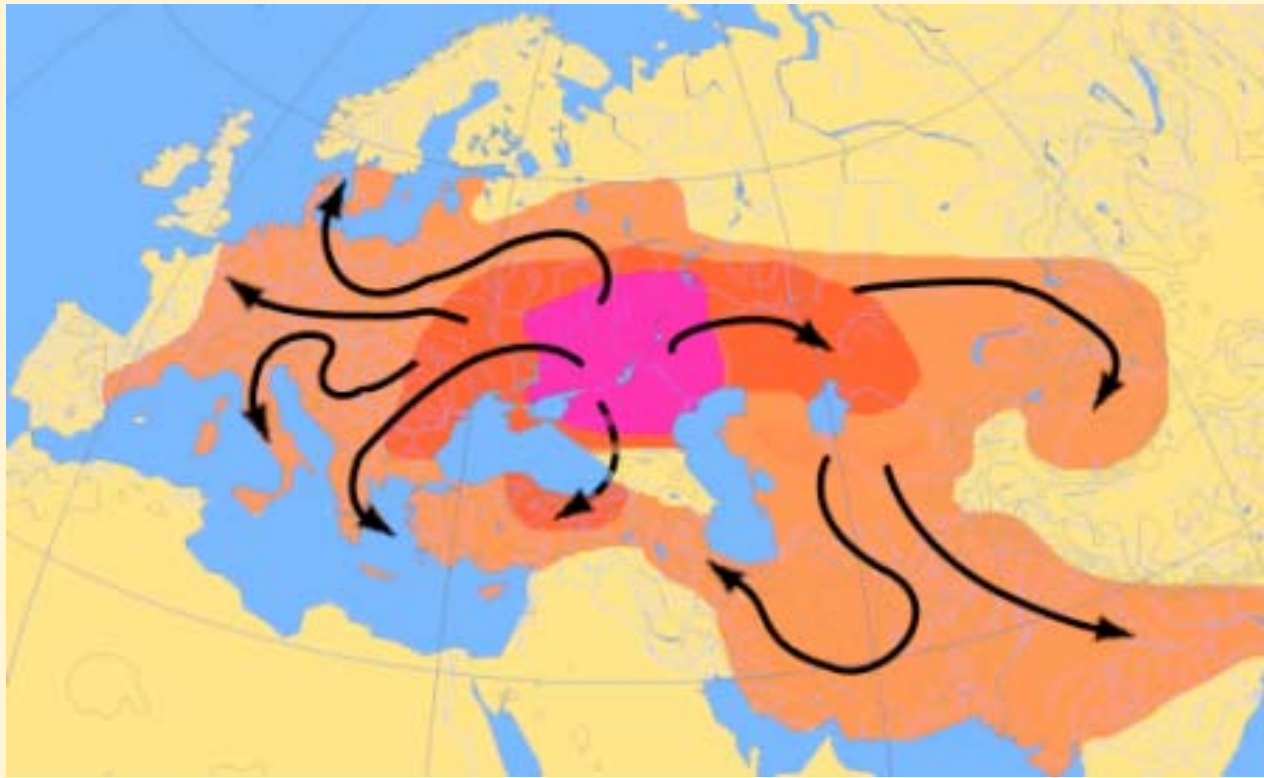


The prehistory of English



- English comes on the scene in the 5th century, CE
- what about before then?

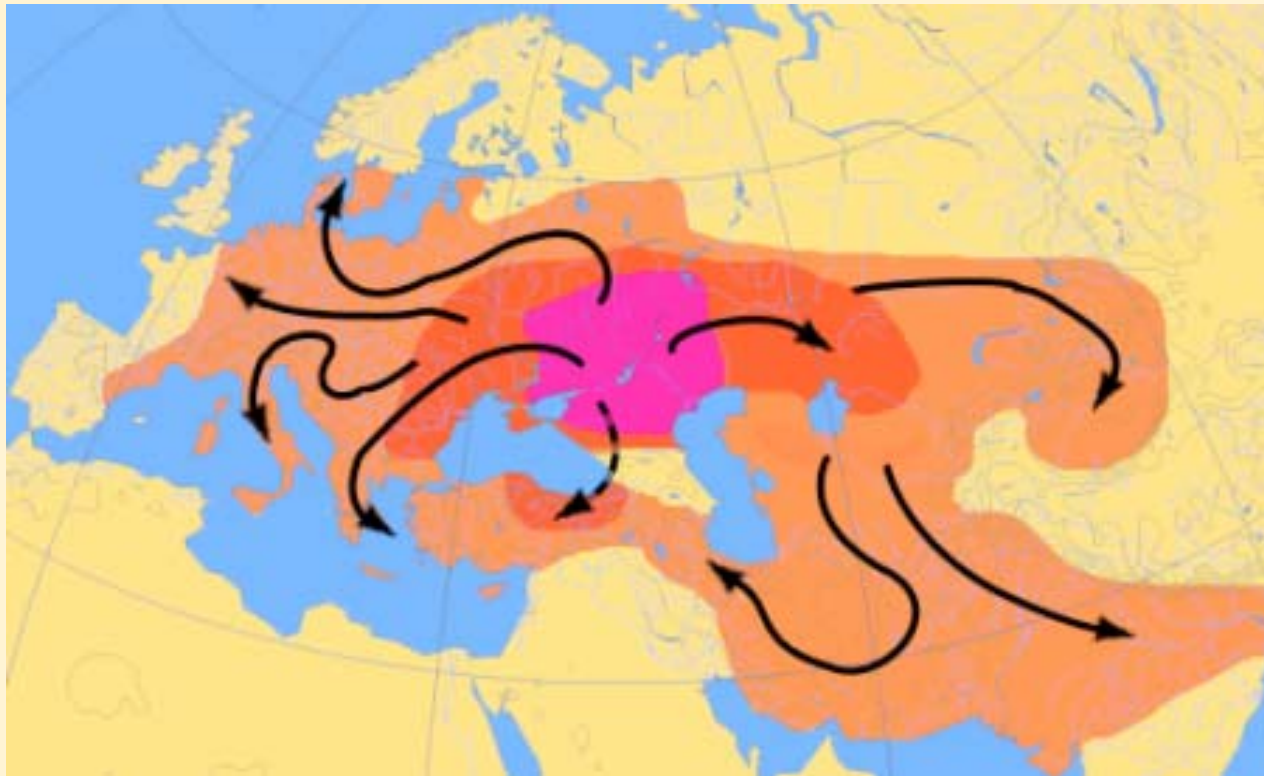
- The concept of language families: English came from somewhere -- it wasn't just dropped into England by the stork.

- concept of the Indo-European language family

Some linguistic assumptions

- that any child born into a linguistic community can learn that group's language
- that all languages are able to express whatever speakers need to express
- in that sense, all languages are equal

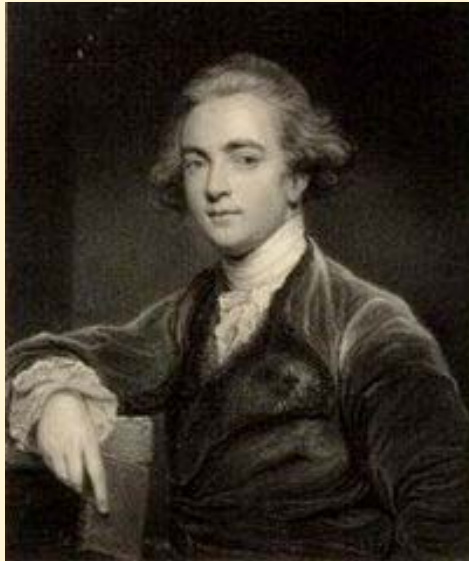
- IE people, and their language, probably come from an area near the Black Sea, and ultimately spread into Europe and Asia



- similarities in languages led people to seek connections that explain them

English	German	Swedish	Finnish
one	eins	en	yksi
two	zwei	två	kaksi
three	drei	tre	kolme
four	vier	fyra	neljä
five	fünf	fem	viisi
six	sechs	sex	kuusi
seven	sieben	sju	seitsemän
eight	acht	åtta	kahdeksan
nine	neun	nio	yhdeksän
ten	zehn	tio	kymmenen

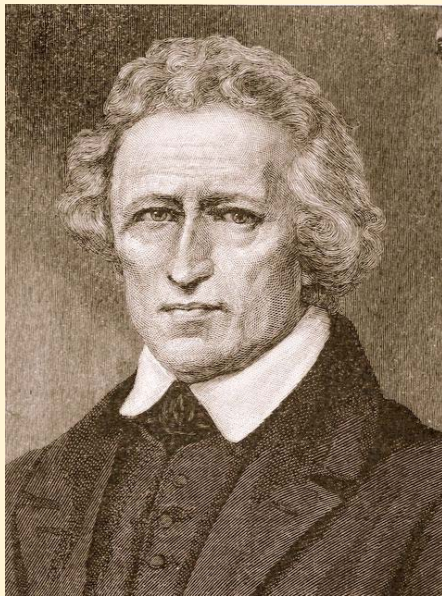
- when you find the same, or similar, words in a group of languages, those languages may be related historically
- these related words are called *cognates*



-- in 1786 Sir William Jones showed that Sanskrit was related to Latin and Greek

- Jones argued that Sanskrit was “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 ... than could have possibly been produced by accident.”

Jakob Grimm, of the Brothers Grimm who collected fairy tales, formulated “Grimm’s Law” to explain the systematic differences between the Germanic language group and the Indo-European source language



Stops	IE	Germanic
-voice	p,t,k	f, θ, h
+voice	b, d, g	p,t,k
+voice +aspiration	bh, dh, gh	b,d,g

Examples of Grimm's law:

IE p,t,k > Gmc f, th, h

pedis > foot

pater > father

tres > three

canis > hound

cornu > horn

Examples of Grimm's law:

IE b,d,g Gmc p,t,k

tur**b**a > thorp

dentis > **t**ooth

duo > **t**wo

granum > **c**orn

ager > **a**cre

Examples of Grimm's law:

IE bh, dh, gh > Gmc b,d,g

frater > brother

foris > door

hortus > garden

the philosopher's stone changes lead into gold, but
Grimm's law shows us how to change --
cannibis into **hemp**

in 5 easy steps . . .

1. Latin /k/, which is spelled with a c, becomes Gmc. /h/
2. at some point, the Latin unstressed /ə/ disappears,
3. producing an intermediate ***canbis**
4. but then Latin /b/ becomes Gmc /p/, giving ***canpis**
5. with the central vowel gone, the Latin nasal /n/ assimilates to the following consonant; since /p/, is a *bilabial* stop, assimilation requires alveolar nasal /n/ to become the *bilabial* nasal, /m/, thus **cannibis** gives us **hemp**

... but don't try this at home!

Verner's Law resolves an inconsistency in Grimm's law...

in voiced environments, or
after unstressed syllables,

IE p, t, k, s > Gmc b, d, g, z

Latin centum > Gmc hundred

(Grimm's law would have predicted *hunthred*)

Some features of Indo-European

- notion of grammatical inflection
- number: singular, dual, plural (the dual dies out in Gmc)
- case: IE had 8 cases, but Gmc has only 6; case merging is fairly common in languages with case --
- nominative, accusative, genitive, dative (includes ablative and locative), instrumental, and vocative
- English retains case only in nouns (general/possessive) and in pronouns (subject, object, possessive); German retains Nom, Gen, Dat, Acc.

- verbs: IE verbs mark person, number, aspect, voice and mood
- Gmc verbs focus on tense (present, past)
- IE had **active, passive, and middle voice**; Gmc reduces this to active (passive expressed by a phrase, rather than an inflection)
- IE had 7 classes of **“strong”** verbs using **ablaut**, changes in vowels of roots to indicate tense, number; Gmc adds a new category: the “dental past” or **“weak” verbs** (take -ed in past tense and past participle)
- IE had free stress; Gmc developed fixed stress, usually the first or the root syllable of the word

- IE had more flexible word order; with reduction of cases, word order becomes more fixed

for example:

Latin *Brutus Caesarum caedit*
Brutus caedit Caesarum
Caesarum caedit Brutus

all mean the same thing, whereas

English *Brutus killed Caesar*
Caesar killed Brutus

mean very different things

Language universals --

1. which properties are necessary to any human language?
2. which are possible but not necessary?
3. which are impossible?

in terms of word order, we find languages with three of the four possible combinations of VSO (verb, subject, object, in that order)

VSO + preposition

non-VSO + preposition

non-VSO - preposition

but not VSO -preposition

we conclude that human languages must fall into the first 3 types,
but the 4th type is impossible

- the notion of marking

- subject tends to precede object
- when object precedes subject, which is less common, we say it's a **marked** form.

unmarked: *I like history of the English language*

marked: *Shakespeare's pretty cool; history of the English language I could do without.*



- The great eskimo snow hoax:
 - Everybody knows Eskimo has dozens of words for **snow**, but a language like English has only one. This gives us great insight into Eskimo culture.
 - It's a myth! What Eskimo has is lots of phrases and metaphors for talking about snow, since they do tend to get a lot of it.

hiryla	snow in beards
wa-ter	melted snow
tlaying	snow mixed with mud
quinaya	snow mixed with Husky shit
quinyaya	snow mixed with the shit of a lead dog
slimtla	snow that is crusted on top but soft underneath
kriplyana	snow that looks blue in the early morning
puntla	a mouthful of snow because you fibbed
allatla	baked snow
fritla	fried snow
gristla	deep fried snow
MacTla	snow burgers
jatla	snow between your fingers or toes, or in groin-folds
dinliltla	little balls of snow that cling to Husky fur

Of course, English has lots of different words for **hamburgers**.
What does that tell us about our fast food nation?



- What we don't know about Indo-European --
 - there are no written (or taped) records, no inscriptions or great national epics; so we reconstruct what we think it was like by comparing it to languages that came much later
 - we don't know why the Germanic languages split off; was it migration, separation from the mother ship, contact with the languages of other groups
 - scholars used to assume that the Indo-European people migrated because they were a warlike group bent on conquering their neighbors
 - now we think there may have been more realistic motivations: seeking better land or sources of food; seeking better climate or natural resources; just wanting to look around and see what was out there (discovering new life forms, you know, the old Star Trek mantra).