

GERMANIC LANGUAGES

Plan

1. Modern Germanic languages.
2. The earliest period of Germanic history. Proto-Germanic (PG).
3. Linguistic features of Germanic languages.

The earliest period of Germanic history. Proto-Germanic (PG)

PG is the parent-language of the Germanic group. It is supposed to have split from related IE tongues sometime between the 15th and 10th c. BC. The ancient Germans settled on the southern coast of the Baltic sea. Then they extended over a larger territory and the common period of their history came to an end.

The tri-partite division of the Germanic languages proposed by the 19th c. philologists corresponds, with a few adjustments, to Pliny's grouping of the Teutonic tribes. According to this division PG split into: East Germanic (Vindili in Pliny's classification), North Germanic (Hillevones), and West Germanic (Ingveones, Istævones and Herminones).

The first mentions of Germanic tribes was made by Pitheas, a Greek historian and geographer of the 4th c BC. In the 1st c. BC in Commentaries to the Gallic War Julius Caesar described some militant Germanic tribes.

In the 1st c. AD Pliny the Elder in Natural History made a classified list of Germanic tribes. A few decades later Tacitus compiled a detailed description of the life and customs of the ancient Teutons and reproduced Pliny's classification. F. Engels' work "On the History of Ancient Germans" describes the evolution of the economic and social structure of the Teutons and analyses Pliny's classification of the Teutonic tribes.

Germanic Languages

	East Germanic	North Germanic	West Germanic
Old Germanic languages (with dates of the earliest records)	Gothic (4 th c.) Vandalic Burgundian	Old Norse or Old Scandinavian (2nd-3rd c.) Old Icelandic (12th c.) Old Norwegian (13th c.) Old Danish (13th c.) Old Swedish (13th c.)	Anglian, Frisian, Jutish, Saxon, Franconian, High German (Alemannic, Thuringian, Saxonian, Bavarian) Old English (7th c.) Old Saxon (9th c.) Old High German (8th c.) Old Dutch (12th c.)

Modern Germanic languages	No living languages	Icelandic Norwegian Danish Swedish Faroese	English German Netherlandish Afrikaans Yiddish Frisian
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3.Linguistic features of Germanic languages.

1) Phonetics.

The peculiar Germanic system of word accentuation.

In IE there existed two ways of accentuation: musical pitch and force stress. The position of the stress was free and movable.

Both these properties changed in PG. Force stress became the only type of stress used. In early PG the stress was movable, in late PG its position in the word stabilised. The stress was now fixed on the first syllable and could not move in form- or word-building.

This played an important role in the development of Germanic languages: in the development of stressed and unstressed vowels, in the development of unstressed grammatical endings and suffixes.

Vowels underwent qualitative, quantitative, positional and spontaneous changes. Differentiation of long and short vowels is regarded as an important characteristic of the Germanic group.

By the terms of Grimm's law voiceless plosives developed in PG into voiceless fricatives (ACT I), IE voiced plosives were shifted to voiceless plosives (ACT II), and IE voiced aspirated plosives were reflected either as voiced fricatives or as pure voiced plosives (ACT III).

Cases which contradict the Grimm's law. Voicing of fricatives in PG, or K. Verner's law.

K.Verner's law: all the Early PG voiceless fricatives [f, θ, x] which arose under Grimm's law and also [s] inherited from PIE, became voiced between vowels if the preceding vowel was unstressed, in the absence of these conditions they remained voiceless.

Voicing of Fricatives in Proto-Germanic (Verner's Law)

Change illustrated		Examples		
PIE	PG	Non-Germanic	Germanic	
	Early Late		old	modern

P	f > v	L caput	Gt haubiþ, O Icel haufoð, OE hēafod [v]	Sw huvud, G Haupt, NE head
		L septern	Gt sibun, OE seofon [v]	G sieben, NE seven
t	θ > ð, d	O Ind satam, R cто	Gt hund, O Icel hundrað, OE hund	G Hundert, Sw hundrade, NE hundred
		L pater, O Ind pitā	Gt fadar [ð], O Icel faðir, OE fæder	G Vater, Sw fader, NE father
k	x > γ, g	L cunctāri	O Icel hanga, OE han3ian	Sw hānga, NE hang
		L socrus, R свекровь	Gt swaiþro, OHG swigur, OE swezer	G Schwager
s	s > z	L auris, Lith ausis	Gt auso, O Icel eyra, OE ēare	Sw öra, G Ohr, NE ear
(Note: [z] in many languages became [r]) Rhotacism.				

Grammar.

Form-building means, synthetic and analytical languages.

Both PG and OG languages had a synthetic grammatical structure, which means that the relationships between the parts of the sentence were shown by the forms of the words rather than their position or by auxiliary words.

Synthetic means of form-building: inflective, suppletive, reduplication, vowel gradation, or ablaut.

Ablaut is an independent vowel interchange unconnected with any phonetic conditions. Ablaut was inherited by Germanic from ancient PG. The principal gradation series used in the IE languages – [e~o]- can be shown in Russian examples: нести - ноша. Qualitative and quantitative ablaut. In qualitative ablaut vowels differ only in their quality. Alteration of short and long vowels, and also alteration with zero represent quantitative ablaut. L. Lēgi ‘elected’ – lego ‘elect’, R. берy - cбор.

Gradation series in Gothic strong verbs.

Examples of Vowel Gradation in Gothic Strong Verbs

IE	e	o	zero	zero
PG	e/i	a	zero	zero
Principal forms	infinitive	Past sg	Past pl	Participle II

<i>Class 1</i>	reisan	rais	risum	risans	NE	<i>rise</i>
<i>Class 2</i>	kiusan	kaus	kusum	kusans		<i>choose</i>
<i>Class 3</i>	bindan	band	bundum	bundans		<i>bind</i>

Strong and weak verbs.

The terms were proposed by J.Grimm. The strong verbs built their principal forms with the help of root vowel interchanges plus certain grammatical endings. The weak verbs are a specifically Germanic innovation, they built the Past Tense and the Participle II by inserting the dental suffix between the root and the ending.

Simplification of word structure in late PG. Role of stem-suffixes in the formation of declensions.

Originally, in Early PG the word consisted of three main component parts: the root, the stem-suffix and the grammatical ending. In Late PG the old stem-suffix lost its derivational force and merged with other components of the word. The word was simplified: the three-morpheme structure was transformed into a two-morpheme structure: stem+grammatical ending. e.g. PG *fisk-a-z, Gt fisks (NE fish).

Most nouns and adjectives in PG, and also many verbs, had stem-forming suffixes; according to them they fell into groups or classes: a-stems, i-stems, ō-stems, etc. This grouping accounts for the formation of different declensions in nouns and adjectives, and for some differences in the conjugation of verbs.

The history of the English language begins with the invasion of the British Isles by Germanic tribes in the 5th c.

The Roman occupation in Britain.

In the 1st c. B.C. having occupied Gaul Julius Caesar made two raids on Britain, in 55 and 54 B.C., and failed to subjugate Britain. In A.D. 43 Britain was invaded by Roman legions under Emperor Claudius and made a province of the Roman Empire. The Roman occupation lasted nearly 400 years. In A.D. 410, the Roman troops were withdrawn to Rome by Constantine.

Germanic settlement of Britain.

The first wave of the Invaders, the Jutes or the Frisians occupied the extreme south-east: Kent and the Isle of Wight. The second wave made up of the Saxons settled along the south coast and on both banks of the Thames. Last came the Angles and made their landing on the east coast and moved to the central parts of the island.

Formation of Germanic states.

Germanic tribes founded large kingdoms: the most powerful of them being Wessex, Anglia, Mercia, Northumbria and Kent.

The beginning of English.

Geographic separation from the Germanic tribes as well as mixture and unification of people played an important role in the development of a new Germanic language - English

Economic, historic and cultural situation.

The period from the 5th till the 11th century was a transitional period from the

tribal and slave-owning society to feudalism. The basic economic unit was the feudal manor, a self-contained economic unit. Tribal division was gradually superseded by local division into shires and townships.

Rise of Wessex. The role of the West Saxon dialect in IX - XI centuries.

Four of the kingdoms at various times secured superiority in the country: Kent, Northumbria and Mercia in Early OE, pre-written period; and Wessex – all through the period of Written OE.

Scandinavian invaders.

In the 8th c. Raiders from Scandinavia made their first attacks on England. The struggle lasted over 300 years. The Scandinavians subdued Northumbria and East Anglia, ravaged Mercia and advanced on Wessex. Wessex stood at the head of the resistance. Under King Alfred by the peace treaty of 878 England was divided into two parts: Danelaw – under Danish control – and south-western half – under the leadership of Wessex. In 1017 under Canute, the Danish king, England became a part of the Danish Empire. On Canute's death in 1035 England regained political independence.

The introduction of Christianity.

The first attempt was made in the 6th c. Missionaries from Rome came to Kent, made Canterbury their center, expanded to Kent, East Anglia, Essex. Missionaries from Ireland brought the Celtic variety of Christianity to Northumbria. The introduction of Christianity gave a strong impetus to the growth of culture and learning.

Old English dialects.

The following four principal OE dialects are commonly distinguished: Kentish, West Saxon, Mercian, Northumbrian.

Writings in Old English.

The length of vowels is shown by a macron: *bāt* [ba:t], NE boat, or by a line above the letter. Long consonants are indicated by double letters.

The letters *f*, *s* and *ð* or *þ* stand for voiced fricatives between vowels and also between a vowel and a voiced consonant; otherwise they indicate corresponding voiceless fricatives.

In general, Pre-Germanic Britain was inhabited by the Celts. Celtic languages: the Gaelic and Brittonic branches. The Gaelic branch has survived as Irish (or Erse) in Ireland, has expanded to Scotland as Scots Gaelic of the Highlands and is still spoken by a few hundred people on the Isle of Man (Manx). The Brittonic branch is represented by Kymric or Welsh in modern Wales, and by Breton or Armorican in modern France in the area called Bretagne where the Celts came as emigrants from Britain in the 5th c. Another Brittonic dialect – Cornish – was spoken in Cornwall until the end of the 18th c.

Questions for discussion

1. What is meant by the term *Proto-Germanic*, and why is it considered the ancestor of all Germanic languages?

2. What were the main phonological changes that distinguished Proto-Germanic from other Indo-European languages?
3. How did the Germanic tribes' migration and separation contribute to the diversification of the Germanic languages?
4. What are the main sources of information about Proto-Germanic, given that no written records of it exist?
5. What linguistic features (e.g., stress patterns, vowel shifts, consonant changes) are characteristic of Proto-Germanic?