# THE DESCENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

II B.A English

II B.A English

The Descent of the English Language

Indo- European Family of Languages

The Indo European is the name given to an original homogenous language from which nearly all the languages of Europe, Persian and a large part of India are believed to have descended. The Indo European parent language was spoken by nomadic tribes which wandered on the lands around the Black Sea and even went to the steps of Siberia in the period between 3000 1500 BC. These tribes split into various groups which moved off in different direction in the continent of Euro Asia. Each group took the parent language with it and the language developed along different lines. Thus in the course of years several different dialects of the parent Indo European arose. By 200 BC the Indo European has split into 8 distinct language groups or dialects. In course of time each of these got subdivided and this process was repeated down the ages. Thus we have a number of languages like English, German, Dutch, Swedish, Danish, French, Italian, Greek, the north Indian languages etc. which may be traced back to a common ancestor.

The Eight branches of the Indo European parent languages are Indo Aryan, Armenian, Albanian, Balto Slavonic, Greek, Italic, Germanic and Celtic. Old English has descended from the Germanic branch of the Indo-European family of languages.

THE INDO-EUROPEAN FAMILY OF LANGUAGES
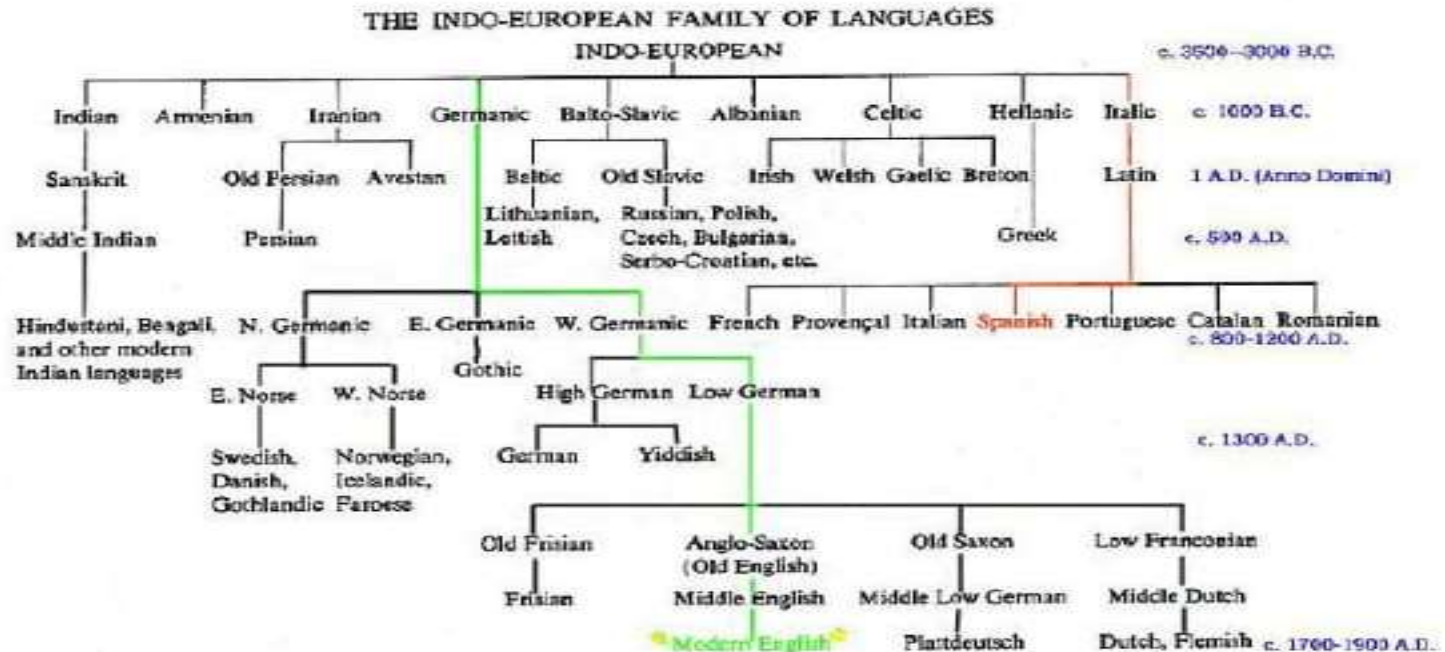
The eight branches of the Indo European can be classified into two groups — An Eastern Group and Western Group. The classification based on differences in grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary of the two groups. The eastern group is called Satem Group and the Western Group is called Centum Group. (Satem is the word for hundred in Sanskrit and Centum is the word for hundred in Latin)

- Centum and Satem Group
- Eight Groups
- Romance Languages
- Decent of English

OLD English (600 – 1100 AD)

Grimm's Law (The First Consonant Shift)

The consonant system of the Indo-European language has a rich array of stop consonants. This system underwent great changes in the Germanic group of languages. Erasmus Rask, a Danish scholar studied these changes and arrived at the conclusion that the changes were systematic and in accordance with a certain law of change. Jacob Grimm, a German philologist analyzed these changes and formulated an explanation in the form of a law. It is also called the first consonant shift to distinguish it from a later series of changes which took place in Old High German.

The following are the various changes brought under Grimm's Law.

I. The Indo-European voiceless stops /p/,/t/,/k/ became voiceless fricatives /f/,/ð/ and/ /h

1. IE /p/ > Germanic /f/
   Eg: Latin *Pater* > English *father*
   Latin Pes > English foot

2. IE /t/ > Germanic /ð/
   Eg: Latin Pater > English father
   Latin tres > English three

3. IE /k/ > Germanic /h/
   Eg: Lain caput > English head
   Lain cor > English heart

II. Indo-European voiced stop consonants /b/,/d/ and /g/ became voiceless stops /p/,/t/ and /k/ in Germanic

1. IE /b/ > Germanic /p/
   Eg: Latin *labum* > English *lip*
   Latin bursa > English purse

2. IE /d/ > Germanic /t/
    Eg: Latin *decem* > English *ten*
        Latin edo > English eat

3. IE /g/ > Germanic /k/
    Eg: Latin *ager* > English acre
        Latin genu > English knee

III.   Indo-European aspirates /bh/, /dh/ and/gh/ became voiced stops /b/,/d/, and/g/ in Germanic

1. IE /bh/ > Germanic /b/
    Eg: Sanskrit bhrata > English *brother*
        Sanskrit bharami > English bear

2. IE /dh/ > Germanic /d/
    Eg: Sanskrit madhya > English *middle*
        Sanskrit bandhanam > English bind

3. IE /gh/ > Germanic /g/
    Eg: Sanskrit dirgha > English *long*
        Sanskrit vyaghram > English tiger

These changes can be represented as follows

bh	b	p	f
dh	d	t	ð(th)
gh	g	k	h

Verner's Law

    After Grimm had formulated the law regarding the change of certain IE consonants, it was noted that there are certain exception to Grimm's Law which were subsequently explained by the Danish Philologist Karl Verner. This law formulated by Karl Verner is known as Verner's Law. It was noticed that between such a pair of words as Latin 'centum' and English 'Hundred', the correspondence between k and h was according to rule, but that between t and d was not. The t in English should have been 'th'. Verner showed that the change of t to d was caused by a change in the place of the accent. He explained that when the Indo-European accent was not on the vowel immediately preceding the consonant, such voiceless consonants became voiced in Germanic. This explanation was of great important in accounting for the forms of the past participle in many strong verbs.

    In old English the past tense (singular) of 'cwethan' (to say) is 'cawth', but the past participle is 'cewdan'. So also the past tense of 'weorthan' (to become) is 'wearth' but the past participle is 'worden'. In the past participle the accent is on the vowel after the consonant. This is why the 'th' has been voiced to'd'.

    Verner's Law is of great significance because it vindicates the claim of regularity for the sound changes which Grimm's Law attempted to define.

Mutation (Umlaut)

Mutation (Umlaut) is the term applied to certain changes in vowels that took place in Old English during the early Anglo-Saxon period. The word Mutation means 'change'. The process is also known as i-mutation, because the change was caused by the vowel 'i' (or sometimes 'j') Mutation may be defined as the process by which vowels in accented syallables were modified through the influence of an 'i' or 'j' subsequently disappearing. The plural of tooth (teeth) may be taken as an illustration for the process of mutation. In Old English the word for *tooth* was *toð* and the plural was *tōðiz*. The 'i' in the second syllable influenced the 'o' in the first syllable (accented syllable) and changed it to ē, so that the plural became tēðiz then the 'i' and 'z' disappeared. Thus the word became teeth. Similarly Old English fōt formed from its plural through mutation.

Mutated Abstract Nouns: In Old English, an abstract noun was formed form an adjective by the addition of an ending 'iðu'. Thus the adjective for Old English language was 'langiðu' (lengh). By the influence of the 'i' in the 2nd syllable, the 'a' in the first syllable changed to 'e'. So that 'langiðu' becomes 'lengð'. In the same way we have abstract nouns like strength (adjective strong).

Mutated Verbs: Certain verbs in Old English formed their infinitives by the addition of the suffix - -jan to a noun. Thus the word for 'to feed' was 'fodjan'. But due tothe influence of 'j' in the 2nd syllable, the vowel 'o' changed to e, so that the verb became fēdan (feed).

- Old English Dialects (Northumbrian, Mercian, West Saxon, Kentish)
- Old English Grammar
- Pronunciation and Spelling
- Vocabulary (Indo European, Celtic, Latin, Scandinavian)
- Latin Loan Words during Old English
- The Scandinavian/ Norse/ Danish (Vikings) element in English
- Anglo Saxon Element

Middle English Period (1100-1500 AD)

- Middle English Dialects (Northern, East Midland, West Midland and Southern)
- Middle English Grammar
- Pronunciation and Spelling
- Vocabulary

French Loan Words in Middle English

The influence of French on English was so great that there is nothing comparable to it in the previous history of the language. The number of French words that poured into English was unbelievably great. The Normans considered themselves to be politically, socially and culturally superior to the English men. Most of the loan words reflect the political, social and cultural dominance of the French over the English. The French loan words can be grouped into different categories.

1. **Titles of Rank** came mostly from French. These include words like sovereign, prince, duke, duchess, baron, baroness, marquis, count, countess, peer, squire etc.
2. Many words connected with **Administration and Government** were also borrowed from French. Government, govern, administer, crown, state, parliament, assembly, minister, mayor, council, chancellor, majesty, empire, nation, people, country etc.
3. The law courts in early Middle English period were conducted in French and as a result of this many **legal terms** were introduced into English from French. Judge, judgment, justice, jury, advocate, attorney, plaintiff, defendant, petition, complaint, bill, summons, inquest, bail, proof, evidence, verdict, sentence, punishment, prison etc.
4. Many **words related to church and religion** was also borrowed from French since many of the ecclesiastical posts were given to French men. Examples are religion, service, savior, virgin, saint, cathedral, chapel, parish, convent, friar, clergy, pray, prayer, sermon, baptism, communion etc.
5. The Normans were good fighters and may of the **military terms** have come from French. Examples are army, navy, war, peace, soldier, enemy, lieutenant, captain, general, battle, armour, siege, garrison, guard, spy, sergeant, corporal etc.
6. A variety of new words borrowed from French suggest the innovations made by the French in the **domestic and social life** of the English people. Words like chair, couch, cushion, curtain, blanket, guilt, towel, basin, screen, lamp, and chandelier indicate articles of comfort in domestic life.
7. Many words related to meals and cooking were also borrowed from French. Examples are dinner, supper, feast, mutton, beef, pork, sausage, gruel, soup, toast, biscuit, cream, salad, pastry, tart, jelly, confection and verbs like fry, roast, boil, parboil, stew, grate, mince etc.
8. In the case of occupations which are fundamental English words were used like ploughman, fisherman, weaver, smith etc. But the names of occupations connected with life of the more refined and better off classes were French. Examples: Tailor painter, mason, carpenter, jeweler, draper etc.
9. Words related to art, learning and medicine: The cultured and intellectual impress of the ruling classes are reflected in words related to art, learning and medicine which were borrowed form French. The words related to art are art, painting, colour, design, sculpture, figure, image, music, tone tec. The words related to learning are literature, prose, poet, story, chronicle, tragedy, prologue, preface, title, volume, chapter, paper, pen, study, grammar, logic, geometry etc. Words related to Medicine are medicine, physician, surgeon, anatomy, malady, debility, pain, plague etc.
10. There are French words existing side by side with English words. They are generally synonyms. But the French word s are more formal where as the English words are more homely.

English	French	
Child	infant	
Ask	demand	
Begin	commence	etc

Modern English Period (From 1500 ...)

- The Renaissance
- The Reformation
- Caxton and Printing Press

Contribution of the Bible Translations to the English Language

No other word except Shakespeare's had so much influence on the phraseology of the English language as the Authorized Version of the Bible and the earlier Bible translations, particularly those of Tyndale and Coverdale. The fact that the Bible had been the most widely read and most frequently quoted to all English books has made its phraseology enter into the speech of the multitudes of English speakers with ease and rapidity. The translations like those of Wycliffe and Purvey were made before the invention of printing and so they were restricted in circulation. Hence the novelties of expression contained in them did not influence the language, as did the expression in the later translation.

To Coverdale, the English language is indebted for such beautiful expressions as ' loving kindness', 'tender mercy', 'the valley of the shadow of death', 'the avenger of blood' etc. Tyndale (1484 -1568) who had en eye for the telling word and apt phrase has coined words and phrases like 'felted calf', 'long suffering', 'peace maker', 'stumbling block', 'day spring' etc. besides giving wide currency to the now familiar word 'beautiful' by using it in his translation of Bible. The word 'scape-goat' is Tyndale's mistranslation of the Hebrew word. But it has become a very useful and suggestive word in the vocabulary of English today. As Tyndale had a great genius for telling phrases and idiomatic rendering, a vast deal of his phraseology was taken over, without change, by the compilers of the Authorized Version. Now familiar phrases 'eat, drink and be merry', 'the burden and heat of the day', 'the powers that be', occurring in the Authorized Version were of Tyndale's coinage.

Most people expect the language of sacred truths to be a little archaic, a little removed form the familiar, everyday usage. The Authorized Version has also preserved some of the archaic words, which would otherwise have become obsolete by now. Among them are words like raiment, apparel, firmament, damsel etc.

While it is true that phrases, used with conscious allusion to scriptural incidents occur in all European Languages. They are far more frequent in English than in the language of any other Roman Catholic country, where the Bible is directly familiar only to the learned. In English there are many expressions which refer to incidents in the Bible, which are easily understood by the speakers of English. Eg: 'Noah's arc', 'a painted jezebel', 'the Benjamin of the family', 'a perfect babbler', 'a leviathan ship' etc.

Many of the biblical phrases which are actually literal renderings of Hebrew or Greek expressions have now come to assume the character of native English idioms and are often used without any consciousness of their origin. Among these may be mentioned expressions like, 'a howling wilderness', 'to cast pearls before the swine', ' a labour of love',' the eleventh hour' and 'to hope against hope'.

Thus the various translations of the Bible have greatly enhanced the English Vocabulary. The translations by Wycliffe, Tyndale, Coverdale and the Authorized Version of the Bible have made the language richer than it was before.

The Great Vowel Shift

Among the sound changes that occurred in early Modern English period, the most important is the Great Vowel Shift. The Great Vowel Shift relates to the series of changes that Middle English Vowel sounds underwent in Modern English. The changes in Modern English began to take place in the 14th century and were probably spread over the next few centuries. It is possible to detect two general tendencies in the development of the vowels.

1. The long vowels gradually came to be pronounced with a greater elevation of the tongue
2. Those which could not be raised became diphthongs.

The following changes occurred as a result of the Great Vowel Shift.

1. ME ā > ei
   Eg:

2. ME ī > ai
   Eg:

3. ME ē > i:
   Eg:

4. ME ō > u:
   Eg:

5. ME ū > au
   Eg:

There were relatively little changes in the short vowels. However in the 17th century a change took place in short 'u'. In some words, 'u' changed into '^' as in cut, nut, but etc. In certain words the 'u' sound was retained due to the influence of the neighboring consonants.
Eg: pull bull, push, put etc.

The linguistic importance of the Great Vowel Shift is that it accounts for the great disparity between spelling and pronunciation in English, since the series of vowel changes were not accompanied by simultaneous changes in spelling.

- **Growth of Vocabulary (Word Formation)**
- **Semantic Changes (Change in Meaning)**
- **Latin Loan words in English**

- Greek Words in English
- Contribution of Shakespeare

American English

English was brought to America by the colonists from England, who began their first settlements in the 17th century. In the three centuries which have elapsed, American English and British English have developed in divergent ways. American English has developed new ways of speech, partly through differing conditions of life and partly through the influences from languages of other immigrant population. Differences are discernible in pronunciation, spelling and vocabulary.

The most conspicuous difference between American English and British English is in pronunciation. There is a great diversity in the rhythm and intonation of speech. As a result an Englishman notices a 'drawl' and a 'nasal tone' in the speech of the American. In words like fast, half, bath, dance, can't etc... The American uses the 'æ' sound for the vowel 'a'. In words like hot, not, lot, top etc the vowel 'o' is pronounced like 'a' as in father. The phoneme 'r' is pronounced in all contexts in American English, except in certain geographical areas.

The distinctive feature of American spelling is the legacy left by Webster, whose "American Spelling Book" appeared in 1783, followed by his "American Dictionary of the English Language" in 1828. It sanctions such changes as

1. –er for –re as in center, meter, timber, caliber, theater etc
2. –or instead of –our as in color, honor, valor etc
3. Singular consonants in place of double consonants as in traveler, jewelry etc
4. –s instead of –c as in defense, offense etc
5. Simplified spelling like catalog, program, tire, plow etc

The Americans have made a lot of innovations in vocabulary also, like railroad for railway, railroad depot for railway station, automobile for car, side walks for pavement, subway for underground etc... The luggage is baggage for the American and luggage van is baggage car. For Timetable, they use the word schedule and for notice board they say bulletin board. Other differences in usage are gasoline (for petrol), movie (for cinema), mail (for post), package (for parcel), windshield (for windscreen), furnace (for boiler) etc...

A large part of American Vocabulary was borrowed form other languages. Form the native Red-Indians they have borrowed words like canoe, wigwam, tomahawk, tapioca, etc... The same process of word formation in Biritsh English like affixation, compounding, conversion etc... has been utilized in American English also for the coinage of new words. Besides these, the Americans have coined many lively and telling phrases like 'flying off the handle', 'face the music', 'paint the town red', 'blaze a trial' etc...