Chapter 2
English and the Indo-European Family of Languages

The kinship of English with certain other languages of Europe and Asia is not superficially apparent, but has been fully established by researches made in the 19th Century. Together, all these languages make up the Indo-European family of languages.

Having observed that there exist related forms in a number of European and Asiatic languages and that the relationship shows itself in certain resemblances reflected in phonetic correspondence which can be explained only on the assumption that the languages are divergent forms of a single older language, scholars have concluded that these languages belong to a common ancestor.

For example, the word "is" is more or less similar in some of the better known European and Asiatic languages:

Sanskrit : asti

Persian : ast

Greek : esti

Latin : est   Ancestral Prehistoric Form: esti

Russian : jest

Italian : é

German : ist

English : is

Having this bit of knowledge in their service, scholars are able to reconstruct the ancestral prehistoric form from which the various related forms must be descended. However, they do not know that all these forms co-existed in one language. Nor would they be right to assume that there was necessarily a race or people who spoke this Indo-European as their language. The term Indo-European is used because it merely suggests that the languages it comprises cover most of Europe and India, or that Europe and India mark the length of its confines.

The Indo-European Hypothesis:

The Indo-European Hypothesis is based on the idea that towards the end of the stone age there lived a people or peoples speaking a tongue that was the common ancestor of a great number of languages of Europe and Asia. This does not imply either that the original Indo-Europeans were racially a unit or their speech descendants are racially akin. It does imply, however, that there was a focal area from which radiated all the subdivisions of the Indo European family of languages.

In order to determine where the focal area was, anthropological, archaeological and chiefly linguistic investigations were made, and it is now generally believed that the Indo-European home was in central or south-eastern Europe, though some scholars contended that it was farther to the north. At about the year 1000 B.C. the Aryans, (from Sanskrit aryans - noble - as the fair - skinned conquerors of India called themselves) who had lived at a point in south-eastern Europe near the Asian border, spread East and West and mixed with the

people of the lands they reached. This mixture brought about as the centuries went by, the modern languages of Europe, Persia and India.

The Discovery of Sanskrit[1]:

The most important factor leading to the Indo-European Hypothesis was the discovery of the similarity of many Sanskrit words with Greek and Latin. As early as 1767 the French Jesuit missionary Coeurdoux sent to the French Institute a memoir in which he called attention to the similarity of many Sanskrit words with Latin, and even compared the flexion of the present indicative and subjunctive of Sanskrit asmi, "I am," with the corresponding forms of Latin grammar. Then in 1796, Sir William Jones wrote the following:

"The Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; 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, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perphaps, no longer exists. there is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the Gothic and the Celtic had the same origin with the Sanskrit; and the old persian might be added to the same family".

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(1) Sanskrit is a language of Ancient India.

Sir William Jones, however, did nothing to carry out in detail the comparison thus begun, and it was reserved for other scholars such as Friedrich von Schlegel, Rasmus Rask, Jacob Grimm and others to follow up the clue he had given and fully establish the Indo - European Hypothesis.

The Indo - European Family of Languages:

The Indo-European family of languages comprises a great variety of languages, including, besides some languages of less importance, Sanskrit and many living languages of India; Iranian with modern Persian; Greek; Latin with the Modern Romance languages (Italian, Spanish, French etc.); Celtic, two divisions of which still survive, one is Welsh, the other is the closely connected Irish and Scotch-Gaelic Baltic; (Lithuanian and Lettic) and Slavonic (Russian Czech, Polish, etc.). It also includes Germanic with the extinct Gothic and the living German, Dutch, Frisian, English, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian and Icelandic.

The Indo - European family of languages is divided into two main groups according to the sound of the initial consonant that appears in such words as the Latin **Centum**, and the Avestan **Satem**, the word for "hundred". The centum group includes Germanic, Celtic, Italic, Hellenic and Tokharian and the Satem group includes Balto-Slavic Albanian, Armenian and Indo-Iranian.

The centum group is further subdivided into two sub-groups; Germanic on one side and Celtic, Italic and Hellenic on the other. This sub-division results from observations made by Jacob Grimm on certain phonetic correspondences, one of which is that

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the [k] in non Germanic (Celtic, Italic and Hellenic) is [h] in Germanic. For example:

Non-Germanic	Germanic
Celtic (Old Irish) : cride	English : heart
Italic (Latin) : cordis	German : herz
Hellenic (Greek) : kardia	Old Norse : hjarta
	Danish : hjerte
	Swedish : hjárta

General characteristics of the Indo - European Languages:

1- Indo - European Languages generally lend themselves in structure to that description of forms invented by the ancient Greeks and named by them "Parts of Speech", that is forms thought of as "nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc".

2- These languages have so much in common, namely, a shared nucleus of fundamental vocabulary which serves to distinguish them from all other languages. Among the words that can be shown to be still common to all the members of the family are the numerals from one to ten, the words father, mother, brother, sister, and the names for many of the commonest things, qualities and actions. For example:

Sanskrit	: bhrātā	Russian	: brat
Bengali	: bhrata	German	: Bruder
Greek	: phratēr	Danish	: broder
Latin	:frater	Dutch	: broeder
Old Irish	: brathir	English	: brother

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3- What is even more important is that these languages have a full system of declensions and conjugations. Compare the following forms of verb to be:

Sanskrit	Greek	Latin	Gothic	Old English	
Asmi	eimi	sum	im	eom	(am)
Asi	ei	es	is	eart	(are)
Asti	esti	est	ist	is	(is)
Smas	esmen	sumus	sijum	sindon	(are)
Stha	este	estis	sijuФ	sindon	(are)
Santi	eisi	sunt	sind	sindon	(are)

English and the Germanic Languages:

It has already been mentioned that the Indo-European Family of Languages is divided into two main groups: the centum or western group including Gremanic, Celtic, Italic, Hellenic and Tokharian. The Germanic group is in turn subdivided into East Germanic, North Germanic, and West Germanic. Gothic, now extinct, the languages of some Germanic (Teutonic) tribes which settled on the lower Danube, belongs to East Germanic. The North Germanic or Scandinavian group is now represented by Swedish, Danish, Norwegian and Icelandic. The West Germanic includes Low and High German. Low German includes Dutch, Frisian, Old Saxon, Anglo-Saxon, (Old English), and Middle and Modern English. High German includes Old High German, Middle High German, and Modern German. Low German, here represented by English, is chiefly distinguished from High

German, here represented by the language we now call German, by certain consonantal features. These resulted from what is called the Second or High German Sound Shift. The effect of this shifting may be seen by comparing the English and German words in the following pairs:

English	German
Open	Offen
Water	wasser
Pound	pfund
Tongue	zunge
Over	ober
Thing	ding
Sit	sitzen

The main characteristics of the Germanic languages:

1- These languages have so much in common, namely, a shared nucleus of fundamental vocabulary which serves to distinguish them from the non-Germanic languages. So close is this relationship among them that, allowing for the change which many centuries have brought about in the sound and form of words and often in their meanings, the kernel of their vocabularies, that is, the names of the commonest objects, qualities and actions, remain almost identical. For example, the English adjective **small**, corresponds to Dutch **smal**, German **schmal**, Danish, Norwegian and Swedish **smal**, Gothic **smals**, and Old Frisian **smel**. Similarly the English noun heart, corresponds to German **herz**, Danish **hjerte**, and Gothic **hairto**.

This close relationship is even more apparent in the following examples:

English : Give us this day our daily bread.
German : Gib uns heute unser taglich Brot.
Dutch   : Geef ons heden ons dagelijksch brood.
Danish : Give os Day vort daglige Brod.
Swedish : Giv oss i dag vorr daglia brod.
Icelandic : Gef oss i dag vort daglegt braud.

2- The Germanic languages are also characterized by a simple conjugation of verbs comprising chiefly two tenses - past and present - compared to, for example, Latin verbs which have a very elaborate series of synthetic forms to differentiate various concepts of voice, mood, tense, person and number. The most distinctive feature of the Germanic verb, however, is its development of a new way of indicating the past simple and past participle by means of a dental suffix, the -ed of English and the -te and of German. The old pattern inherited from Indo-European and comprising "internal vowel change", then is traditionally called "strong", and the new pattern is called "weak". Examples:

1- Strong (irregular) using internal vowel change:

sing - sang - sung

swim - swam - swum

2- weak (regular) adding the suffix-ed:

walk - walked - walked

beg - begged - begged

3- In all Germanic languages the adjective has two declensions, the strong and the weak. The strong declension is used when an adjective stands alone before a noun or is used in the predicate relation, and the weak declension is used substantively or when preceded by a defining element (e.g. the definite article). Following is an example showing the strong and weak declensions of the Old English adjective god (good):

Paradigm of the strong declension[1]:

Sing.	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
Nom.	gōd	gōd	gōd
Gen.	gōd-es	gōd-re	gōd-es
Dat.	gōd-um	gōd-re	gōd-um
Ace.	gōd-ne	gōd-e	gōd
Inst.	gōd-e	gōd-re	gōd-e

plur.	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
Nom., Acc.	gōd-e	gōda, gōde	gōd, gōde
Gen.	gōdra	gōd-ra	gōd-ra
Dat., Inst.	gōdum	gōd-um	gōd-um

Paradigm of the weak declension:

Sing.	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
Nom.	gōd-a	gōd-e	gōd-e
Gen.	gōd-an	gōd-an	gōd-an
Dat.	gōd-an	gōd-an	gōd-ab

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(1) The Elements of Old English: Moore & Knott. The George Wahr Publishing Company, Co. Ann Arbor, Michigon. 1955. (pp. 35 - 37).

Sing.	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
Acc.	gōd-an	gōd-an	gōd-e
Inst.	gōd-an	gōd-an	gōd-an

plur. All Genders

Nom., Acc.	gōd-an
Gen.	gōd-ena, god-ra
Dat., Inst.	gōd-um

4- The fourth characteristic feature of Germanic languages is their stress, fixed rather than free or variable. The original Indo-European and primitive Germanic stress was variable; e.g. it might shift, in the inflection of a word, from the base syllable to a syllable of the inflectional ending. The Germanic branch during the primitive period, when it was becoming separated from the Indo-European parent language, shifted its stress back to the base syllable, when it became fixed, and this is inherited in Modern English, where the tendency is generally to stress strongly the first syllable of a word excluding prefixes that are felt as such.

The most important effect that the heavy Germanic stress has had upon the development of English has been that of slurring and frequently altogether dropping unstressed vowels. Because the stress usually falls on the first syllable of words and because English inflections are chiefly on the final syllables, it has been easy for inflectional endings to become weakened, obscured, and lost, and consequently to simplify the whole system of

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inflections. Here is the chief reason, too, for the largely monosyllabic form of the native English word stock.

5- The fifth characteristic feature of the Germanic languages is the regular shifting of the Indo-European stopped consonant sounds known as Grimm's Law (now more often called the First Germanic Consonant Shift). The feature was arrived at and testified by Rask, Grimm and others through observation of correspondences between Germanic and other Indo-European languages. From among the huge mass of resemblant forms, they selected certain ones which exhibited uniform phonetic correlations. Stated in present-day terms, these phonetic correlations appear as follows:

1. Indo-European voiced aspirated stops became Germanic voiced stops:

    [bh] - [b] : Sanskrit (bhrātā) - English brother

    [dh] - [d] : Sanskrit adhāt   - English did

    [gh] - [g] : I.E. ghostis   - English guest

2. Indo-European voiced stops became Germanic voiceless stops:

    [b] - [p] : Greek kannabis   - English hemp

    [d] - [t] : Latin duo   - English two

    [g] - [k] : Latin ager   - English acre

3. Indo-European voiceless stops became Germanic voiceless stops:

    [p] - [f] : Latin pēs   - English foot

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[t] - [o] : Latin trēs	- English three	
[k] - [h] : Latin centum	- English hundred	
cronū	- English horn	

Certain apparent exceptions to Grimm's Law were subsequently explained by Hermann Grassmann and Karl Verner. It was observed that there was a number of words in which the initial voiced stops (b. d. g) of Germanic are parallelled in Sanskrit not by (bh. dh. gh), as Grimm would have it, but by (b, d, g), and in Greek not by the expected (ph, th, kh), but by (p, t, k). Hermann Grassmann (1809-1877) showed that Sanskrit and Greek do not have aspirated stops at the beginning of two successive syllables, but wherever the related languages show this pattern, have the first of the two stops unaspirated.

It was also noted that between such a pair of words as Latin **centum** and English **hundred** the correspondence between the **c** [k] and **h** was according to rule, but that between the **t** and **d** was not. The d in the English word would have been a voiceless fricative, that is, a [ø]. In 1875 Karl Verner showed that when the Indo - European stress was not on the vowel immediately preceding, such voiceless spirants (fricatives) became voiced in Germanic. In West Germanic the resulting [t] became a [d], and the word **hundred** is therefore quite regular in its correspondence with **centum**. Similarly in Old English the past singular of **cweøan** (to say) is **cwaø** but the plural is we **cwædon**. In the latter word, the stress was originally on the second syllable, as it was in the past participle **cweden**, where we also have a **d**.

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