

Teaching *about* language: engaging learners through language history and etymology

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#EAQUALS2025MALTA

Rationale

Teaching ***about*** language & its history, as well as learning a language :

- Develops *language awareness* for students & for new teachers
- Helps students become *multilingually & interculturally aware*
- Makes ***language*** the topic, the project, the activity, the story
- Uses *stories* to explain links between English & other languages
- Uses shared words and histories to support *shared understanding* & global community

“Stories not only inspire and activate the imagination, but they also increase vocabulary and demonstrate grammar within a specific context, with a beginning and an end”

1 - Language stories

Where does English fit in the history of human language?

The Trad Stories:

- You **can** tell the old story: Anglo-Saxons, Vikings, Normans, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Renaissance loan words, Hollywood...

The Deeper Stories:

- where did Anglo-Saxon & Germanic languages come from? Where did Indo-European languages come from? Who spoke these ancient languages, and where? What happened to those people?

The Word Stories:

- Cognates, roots, etymologies, borrowings & stealings, linguistic calques, endangered languages...

Activity: discuss & write together

Make a brief summary of your own language:

- *What do you know about your own language?*
- *How many people speak it? In how many countries?*
- *Where did it come from?*
- *Who spoke it first?*
- *Is it part of a language family?*

Deeper stories: speaking Hittite in 2500 BCE

Imagine a Hittite woman sitting by a river in Anatolia around 4500 years ago. She's sitting with her kids, trying to teach them basic numbers so they can count.

She sits and counts '1 - 2 - 3'. But of course she doesn't speak English - she speaks Hittite.

And so she counts like this: ***as, dan, teries....***

She asks the kids questions as she teaches:

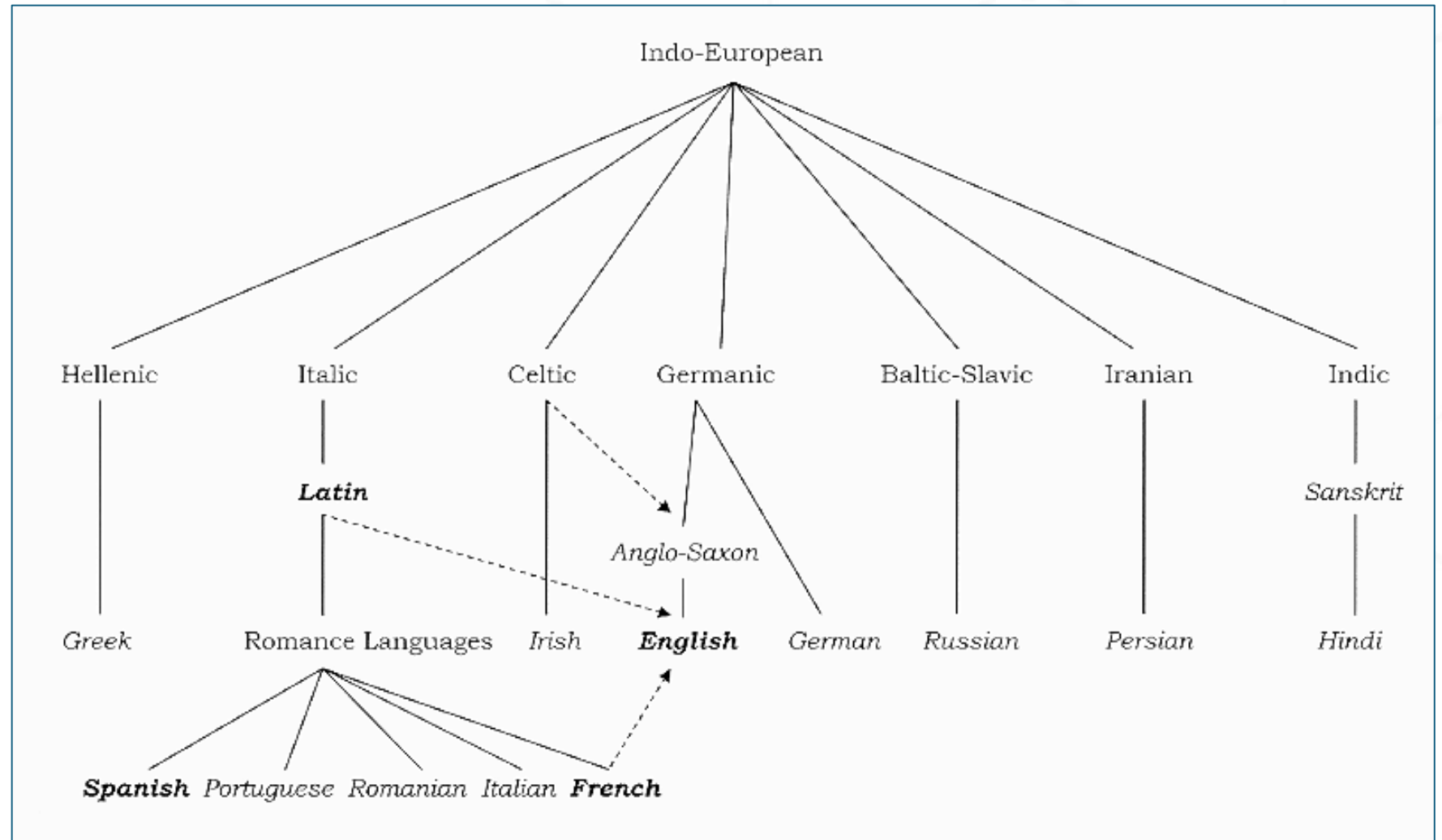
- **KUIS?** – 'who is that?'
- **KUIT?** – 'what is that?'
- **WATAR** – 'this is water'

She indicates their group, sitting by the river: **WES KA** – 'we (are) here'



2 - Language families

- English & Hittite are part of the same family
- Indo-European language family: 446 current living languages, spoken by 42% of the world (3.4 billion people)



3 - Indo-European roots

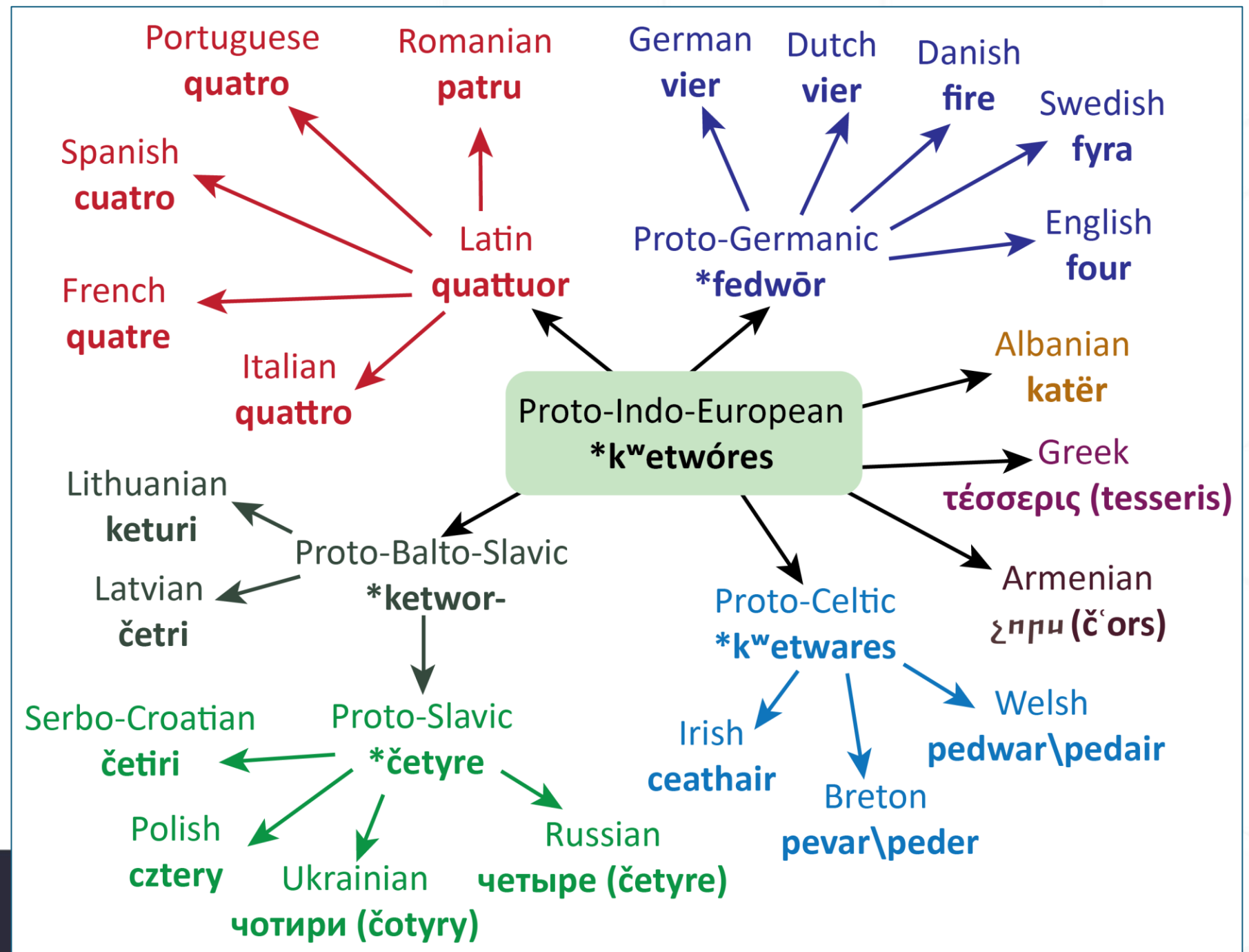
Root	English	Cognates
*tong-	thanks	Gm. danke
*steh-	stand	Latin statio –, Gm. Stehen, Eng. station, stasis, state
*heks-	out	Gk. ex-, Lat. ex-, English exit, exodus; Ukr. vyhkid
*sed-	sit	Lat. sedentary, English. seat, saddle, settle
*nisdos-	nest	Germanic *nestg
*kerd-	heart	Gk. kardia-, Latin cor, card-, Gmc. hert, Gm. Herz

*Kwetwores

Task:

- What does this ancient word mean?
- What does this sound like, in ancient or modern languages you know about?

*Kwetwores



4 – Migration stories

- The story of languages is the story of migrations
- Beginning with our migration out of Africa 60,000 years ago...
- We can tell stories about how our common languages evolved around 8000 years ago....
- Project activity - the story of Indo-European language migrations

Hunter-gatherers in Caucasus - 6000 BCE



Becoming the Yamnaya - 4000 BCE

Their Language

Proto-Indo-European (PIE) was a single language (with dialects) ca. 4000 - 3000 BCE.

It split when groups migrated away from the core homeland, creating different language families



The Yamnaya:

pastoralist groups blended from hunter-gatherers in Caucasus & Eastern Europe

They mainly had R1b DNA (shared by many Europeans today)

The Yamnaya: PIE splits from homeland - 3000 BCE

Their migrations:

They migrated through the river systems:

- Danube to central & SE Europe
- Dniester to northwest Europe
- Dnieper & Southern Bug to northeast Europe



Activities

Speaking:

Re-tell one of the stories (Anglo-Saxons or Vikings or Hittites...)

Listening:

Listen to a YouTube reconstruction of how old languages sound

Writing:

- Summarise one period of the language history
- Google 'The Yamnaya' & find out what animals they herded
- Find out what the Yamnaya burial places are called

Reading:

- Text + Fill in the gap / Cloze
- Matching 2 halves of sentence
- Matching words between languages

**Download Worksheets on
The Yamnaya &
The Anglo-Saxons:**

www.michaelcarrier.com

Reading – The Yamnaya

The Yamnaya people were a pastoralist culture that lived in the steppes of Eastern Europe from approximately 3600 to 2300 BCE. Archaeological evidence suggests that the Yamnaya people gradually migrated eastward over time, moving from the steppe into the Danube region.

Linguistic and genetic evidence suggest that the Yamnaya were the people who spoke Indo-European and spread the language into Europe, where it broke into different language families.

The legacy of the Yamnaya people can still be seen today in the languages and cultures of their descendants, which include many of the modern-day peoples of Europe, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent.

Comprehension

- 1 Where did the Yamnaya live, before they migrated?
- 2 What language did they speak?
- 3 Where do the descendants of the Yamnaya live?
- 4 Where did the Yamnaya move to?

Matching

Match these words with their meaning:

1 gradually	a information that proves something
2 evidence	b geographical area
3 approximately	c slowly
4 region	d way of life for a people
5 culture	e about, circa

Task

Work with a partner. Use Google to find out the answer to these questions:

- 1 What is a pastoralist?
- 2 What does genetic evidence tell us about the Yamnaya?
- 3 What are the modern countries in the Danube region?

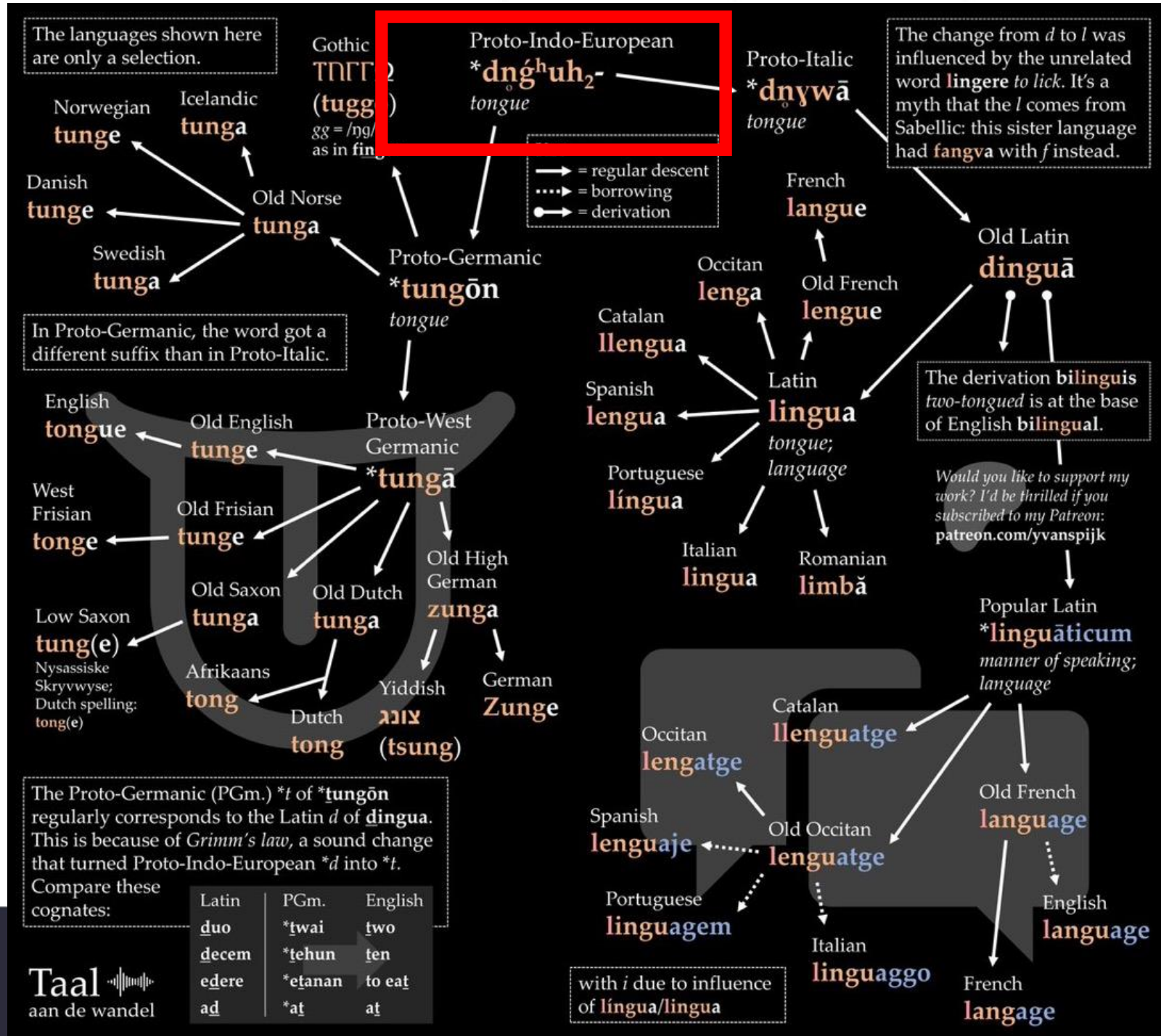
5 - Word stories: language change

Brother

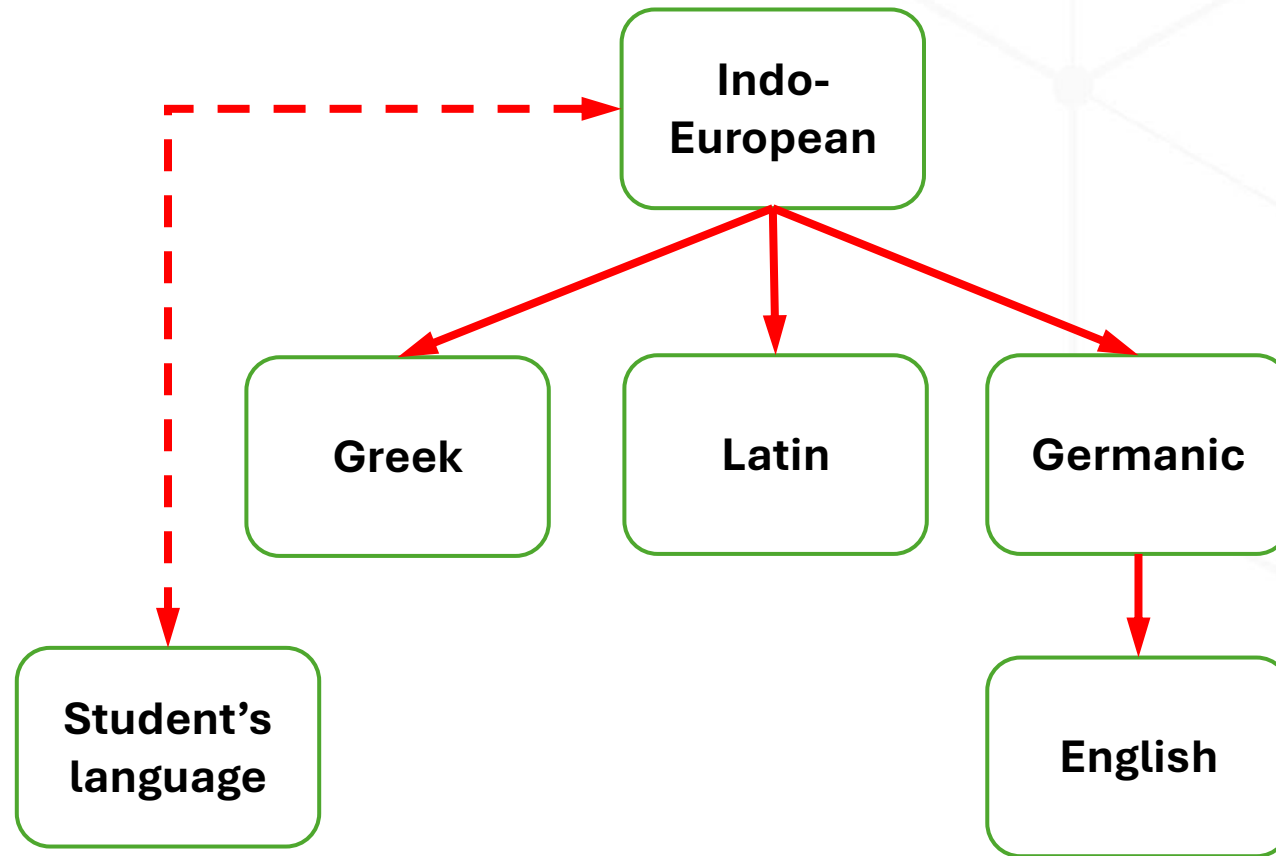


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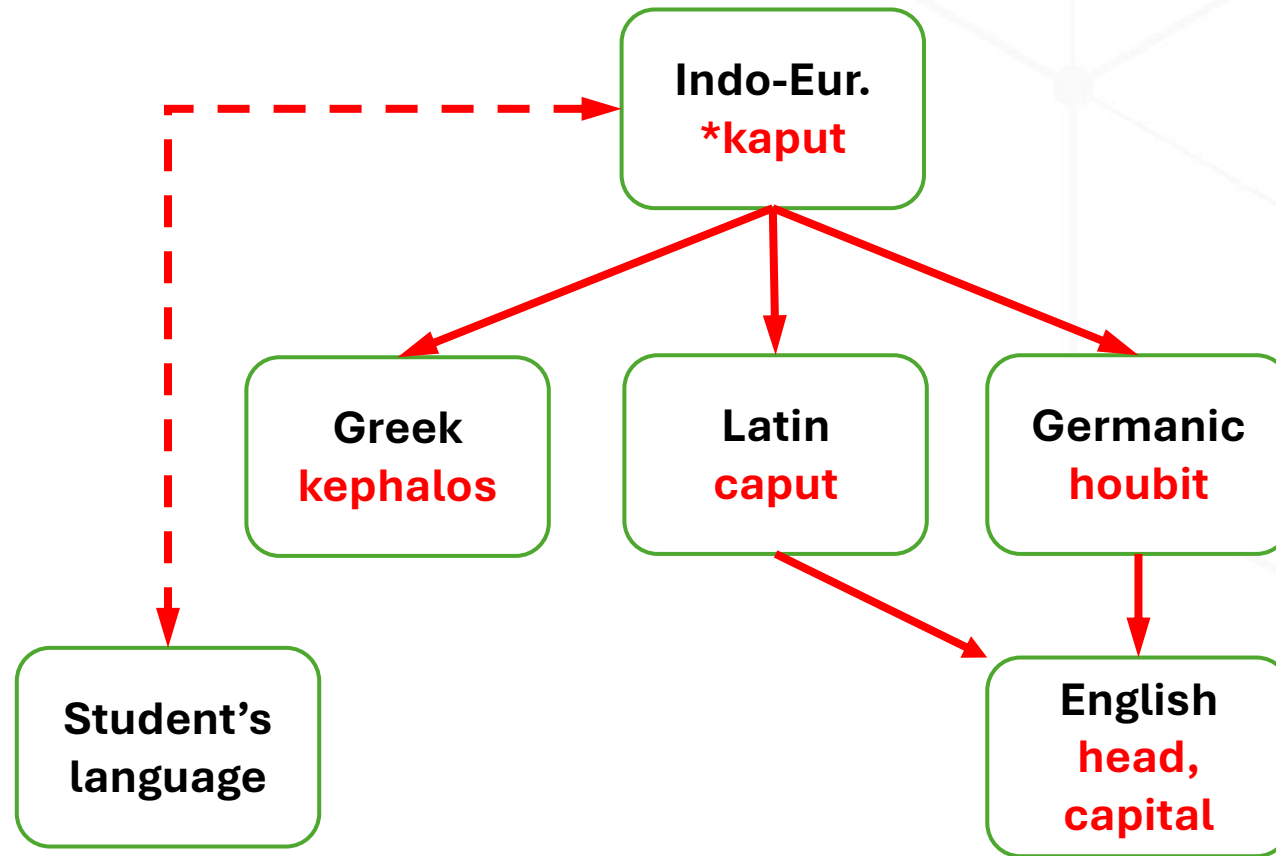
Tongue, language



Activity – join a root with modern cognates



Activity – join a root with modern cognates



Anglo-Saxon words unchanged

Anglo-Saxon words comprise around 20-30% of Modern English words, possibly up to 70% of informal everyday speech:

- **Unchanged:** *and, for, of, in, to, under, on*
- **Minor changes:** *æfter, beforan, behindan, bi, eall, ofer, uppan, æt, socc, scoh, scyrte, hætt, mete, butere, milc, hunig, cese*
- **Key change:** *hwæt* (what), *hwy* (why)
- **Family words:** *faeder, moder, sunu, dohtor, sweoster, brothor*

PIE to Germanic to Old English to now

Proto-Indo-European	Germanic (Gothic)	Old English	Modern English
ca. 3000 BCE	ca. 100 BCE	600 AD/CE	2025
*phter	fadar	faeder	
*dugther	dauhtar	dohtor	
*ghostis	gasts	giest	
*tu	thu	thu	
*dont	tunthus	toth	
*regs	reiks	rice	

PIE to Germanic to Old English to now

Proto-Indo-European	Germanic (Gothic)	Old English	Modern English
ca. 3000 BCE	ca. 100 BCE	600 AD/CE	2025
*phter	fadar	faeder	father
*dugther	dauhtar	dohtor	daughter
*ghostis	gasts	giest	guest
*tu	thu	thu	thou, you
*dont	tunthus	toth	tooth
*regs	reiks	rice	regal (Latin: rex)

What have the Vikings done for us?

Anglo-Saxon	Old Norse	Modern English
hie	they	
shank	leggr	
hide	skinn	
niman	tacan	
ey	egg	
steorfan	die	
scyrte	skirt	
hlaf	bread	

What have the Vikings done for us?

Anglo-Saxon	Old Norse	Modern English
hie	they	they
shank	leggr	leg
hide	skinn	skin
niman	tacan	take
ey	egg	egg
steorfan	die	die
scyrte	skirt	skirt / shirt
hlaf	bread	bread, loaf

Why we don't like the Normans...

The class system...

The aristocracy...

High house prices....



Old English	Norman French	Animal	Meat
swin	porc	pig	pork
sceap	mutun	sheep	mutton
cu	beof	cow	beef
deor	veneisun	deer	venison
		Lower status	Higher status
libban	resider	live	reside
hus	mansiun	house	mansion
thincan	penser	think	pensive
cynellic	real	kingly	royal

6 - Word stories: ~~Borrowing~~ Stealing

“We don't just borrow words;
on occasion, English has pursued
other languages down alleyways
to beat them unconscious,
and rifle their pockets
for new vocabulary.”

James D. Nicoll

Etymologies – “magazine”

- Arabic *khazana* = to store up, hence *makhazan* = storehouse, plural *makhazin* = storehouses

Then:

- Borrowed by Italian as *magazzino* = storehouse
- Borrowed from Italian by French as *magasin* = storehouse
- Borrowed from French by English as *magazine* = storehouse

Then:

- Edward Cave started a publication in 1731 that was a ‘storehouse’ of interesting information. He called it:

“The Gentleman’s Magazine”

- Since then, ‘*magazine*’ means a publication

Task:

*Which modern English use of the word ‘**magazine**’ keeps the original meaning of ‘storehouse’?*

Loan words

Origin:	Modern English:
French	<i>café, garage, cliché, ballet, champagne, déjà vu, clique, résumé, government, person</i>
Italian	<i>piano, alto, soprano, tempo, fresco, studio, zucchini, umbrella, balcony, regatta</i>
Spanish	<i>ranch, stampede, canyon, tornado, alligator, mosquito, patio, breeze, tequila</i>
Arabic	<i>average, lemon, tariff, zero, alcohol</i>
Hindi	<i>bungalow, pyjamas,</i>
Chinese	<i>tea, monsoon, tycoon, ketchup (kê-chiap)</i>

Activity:

Find loan words from English in your language

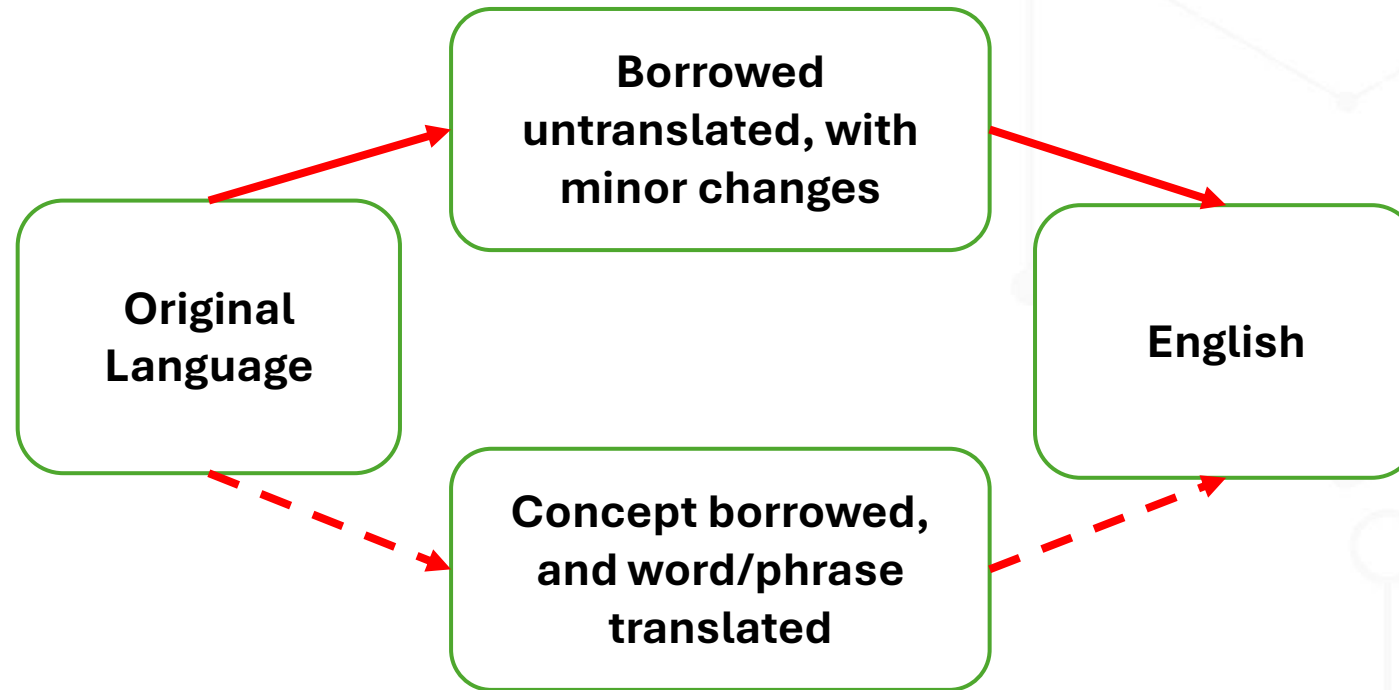
Find words from your language in English

Linguistic calque

A literal **translation** of the components of a foreign word or phrase, rather than a borrowing of the foreign word in its original form:

From:	Original:	Into English:
French	<i>marché aux puces</i>	flea market
	<i>pomme d'Adam</i>	Adam's apple
Dutch	<i>meesterstuk</i>	masterpiece
German	<i>Standpunkt</i>	standpoint
	<i>Biergarten</i>	beer garden
Greek	<i>evangelion</i>	gospel ('good news')
Mandarin	<i>tiánsuānjiàng</i>	sweet & sour sauce
Spanish	<i>sangre azul</i>	blue blood
Turkish	<i>derin devlet</i>	deep state

Loans vs Calques



Activity - matching

Match the words in the table with the languages they were borrowed from:

Arabic, Chinese, Czech, French, German, Greek, Hindi, Italian, Latin, Spanish, Welsh

Modern English	“Borrowed” from:
bungalow	
admiral	
robot	
chocolate	
leisure	
agenda	
anonymous	
loot	
penguin	

Worksheet

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The Anglo-Saxons:
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Reading

The English language has evolved over time from various sources, including the Germanic languages spoken by Anglo-Saxon and Viking settlers in England, French brought to England by the Norman Conquest of 1066, and later influence from Latin and Greek during the Renaissance. The earliest form of English, called Old English or Anglo-Saxon, was spoken in England from the 5th century until the Norman Conquest. It developed out of the languages of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes who settled in England from northern Germany and Denmark. After the Norman Conquest, French became the language of the ruling class in England, and Latin continued to be used as a written language for religious and scholarly purposes.

Comprehension

- 1 What did the Norman Conquest bring to England?
- 2 When was the earliest form of English first spoken?
- 3 Where did the Jutes come from?
- 4 Who used French in England after the Norman Conquest?

Matching

Match these words with their meaning:

evolved	different
various	Place where something comes from
source	first
settler	People in control of a country
earliest	developed
ruling class	Person who moves to live in a new place

Task

Work with a partner. Use Google to find out the answer to these questions:

- 1 Find the name of a famous poem written in Anglo-Saxon
- 2 Find the name of a famous Anglo-Saxon king
- 3 Find the original Anglo-Saxon words for modern 'mother', 'daughter', 'father'

Lexical practice

The English --1-- has evolved over time from various --2--, including the Germanic languages spoken by Anglo-Saxon and Viking --3-- in England, French brought to England by the Norman --4-- of 1066, and later influence from Latin and --5-- during the Renaissance. The earliest --6-- of English, called Old English or Anglo-Saxon, was --7-- in England from the 5th century until the Norman Conquest. It --8-- out of the languages of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes who --9-- in England from --10-- Germany and Denmark.

Fill in the gaps with these words:

Greek northern language developed sources settlers spoken settled Conquest form

Thanks!

Using language histories can:

- Build a love of language
- Build awareness of where words come from
- Build motivation to learn more
- Help students explore and play with words
- Help students see links from English to own language
- Give learners practice with reading, storytelling and narrative skills, summarising and presentation skills, and extended vocabulary
- Highlight our shared language roots and build an understanding of our shared global humanity

References

Luigi Cavalli-Sforza
Colin Renfrew
David Reich
Stephen Oppenheim
David Anthony
David Crystal

Worksheets & Powerpoint:

www.michaelcarrier.com

Comments:

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**QR link to
MC's website**

