

Historical Linguistics I

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Ling 301, Spring 2021

College of Staten Island

Quiz 5 due right now!

- Submit quiz 5 if you haven't already! We're going to go over it this class, so late submissions cannot be accepted.

Language Change

- All languages change over time. This is not ‘degeneration’ or ‘corruption’ — this is normal.
- The English spoken today is just as good, authoritative, and valid as the English spoken 100 or 1,000 years ago, even if it is different.
- Language change is driven by language variation: the fact that different populations speak a given language slightly differently than each other.
- We can illustrate this by talking about *eggs*.



fayn wolde I satysfye euery man/ and so to doo toke an olde
boke and redde therein/ and certaynly the englysshe was so ru
de and brood that I coude not wele vnderstande it. And also
my lorde abbot of Westmynster ded do shew to me late certa
yn euidences wryton in olde englysshe for to reduce it in to
our englysshe now vsed/ And certaynly it was wryton in
suche wyse that it was more lyke to dutche than englysshe
I coude not reduce ne brynge it to be vnderstonen/ And cer
taynly our langage now vsed varyeth ferre from that. Whi
che was vsed and spoken whan I was borne/ For the en
glysshe men/ then borne vnder the domynacyon of the mone.
Whiche is neuer stedfaste/ but euer wauerynge/ wexynge o
ne season/ and waneth & dyscreaseth another season/ And
that comyn englysshe that is spoken in one shyre varyeth
from a nother. In so moche that in my dayes happened that
certayn marchautes were in a ship in tanyse for to haue
sayled ouer the see into zelande/ and for lacke of wynde thei
taryed attē forlond. and wente to lande for to refreshe them
And one of thei named sheffelde a mercer cam in to an
holow and asped for mete. and specyally he asped after eggys
And the goode wyf answered. that she coude speke no fren
she. And the marchaūt was angry. for he also coude speke
no frenshe. but wolde haue hadde eggys/ and she vnderstode
hym not/ And thenne at laste a nother sayd that he wolde
haue eyren/ then the good wyf sayd that she vnderstod hym
wel/ Loo what sholde a man in thys dayes now wryte. eg
ges or eyren/ certaynly it is harde to playse euery man/ by
cause of dyuersite & chaunge of langage. For in these dayes
euery man that is in ony reputacyon in his countre. wyll st
te his comynycacyon and maters in such maners & ter
mes/ that felow men shall vnderstonde thei/ And som ho



From the preface to *Eneydos*, Caxton's translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, 1490.

On the Readings page of our website.

fayn wolde I satysfye euery man/ and so to doo toke an olde
 booke and redde therein/ and certaynly the englysshe was so ru
 de and brood that I coude not welk vnderstande it. And also
 my lord abbot of Westmynster ded do shewe to me late certa
 yn eydences wryton in olde englysshe for to reduce it in to
 our englysshe now vsed/ And certaynly it was wryton in
 suche wyse that it was more lyke to dutche than englysshe
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 And one of theym named sheffelde a mercer cam in to an
 hows and axed for mete. and specyally he axyd after eggys
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 hym not/ And thenne at laste a nother sayd that he wolde
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 wel/ Loo what sholde a man in thyse dayes now wryte. eg
 ges or eyren/ certaynly it is harde to playse euery man/ by
 cause of dyuersite & chaūge of langage. For in these dayes
 euery man that is in ony reputacyon in his couētre. wyll vt
 ter his comynycacyon and maters in such maners & ter
 mes/ that fewe men shall vnderstonde theym/ And som ho



From the preface to *Eneydos*, Caxton's
 translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, 1490.

And that comyn englysshe that is spoken in one shyre varyeth
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 certayn marchaūtes were in a ship in tanyse for to haue sayled
 ouer the see into zelande/ and for lacke of wynde thei taryed atte
 forlond. and wente to lande for to refreshe them And one of
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 mete. and specyally he axyd after eggys And the goode wyf
 answerde that she coude speke no frenshe. And the marchaūt was
 angry. for he also coude speke no frenshe. But wolde haue hadde
 eggys/ and she understode hym not/ And thenne at laste a
 nother sayd that he wolde haue eyren/ then the good wyf sayd
 that she understod hym wel/ Loo what sholde a man in thyse
 dayes now wryt. eggys or eyren/ certaynly it is harde to playse
 euery man/ by cause of dyuersite & chaūge of langage. For in
 these dayes euery man this is in ony reputacyon in his couētre.
 wyll utter his comynycacyon and maters in such maners &
 termes that fewe men shall understone theym



Eggs or eyren?

- Old English had *æg*, plural *ægru*.
- By Middle English, this had become *ey* and *eyren*.
- Vikings had conquered much of north and eastern England in the 9th century. They introduced a lot of new words, including Old Norse *egg*.
- Around 1490, some English speakers said *eggs*, while others said *eyren*. This is an example of **language variation**.

Which one was correct?

Both were!

- Today, we say *eggs*. This is an example of **language change**.



Eggs or eyren?

- Old English *æg* and Old Norse *egg* look and sound similar. In fact, they are related.
- In historical linguistics, when two words are related, it means that they came from a common ancestor, in this case Proto-Germanic.

Beware! Not all similar-sounding words are related. English *much* and Spanish *mucho* have different origins, even though they sound alike and have similar meanings.

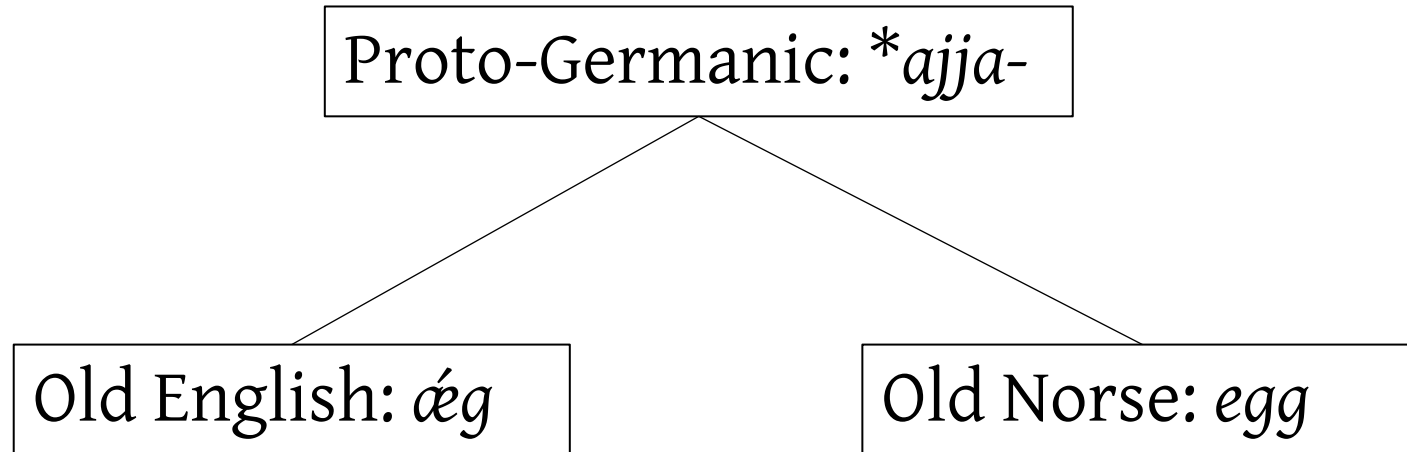
- Words that share a common ancestor are **cognates**.
- The Proto-Germanic word for ‘egg’ was **ajja-*

In historical linguistics, * means it’s a reconstruction, not that it’s ungrammatical.



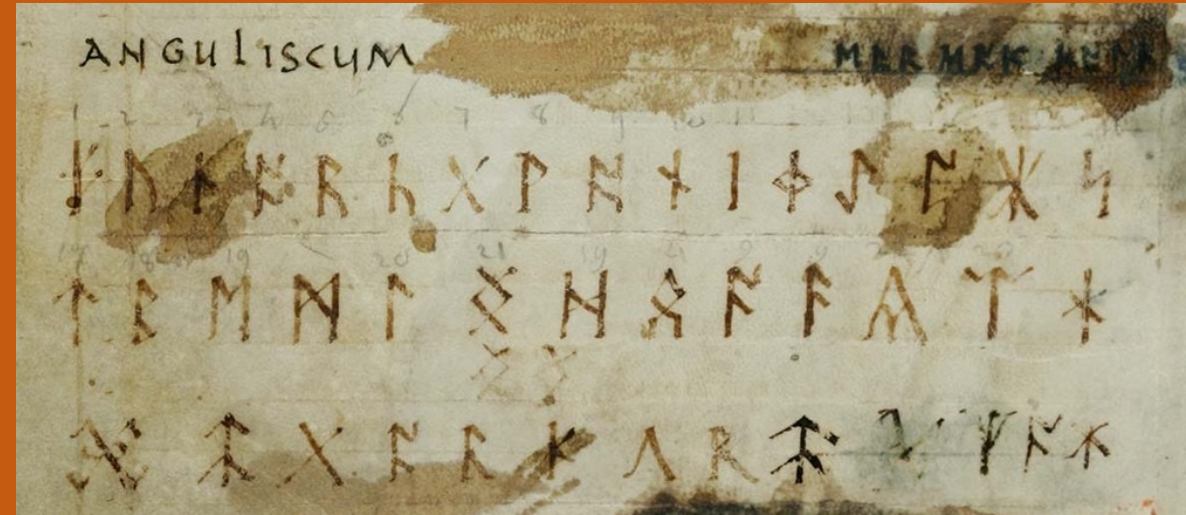
Eggs or eyren?

- Based on what we know so far, we can make a tree to show how Proto-Germanic, Old English, and Old Norse are related.



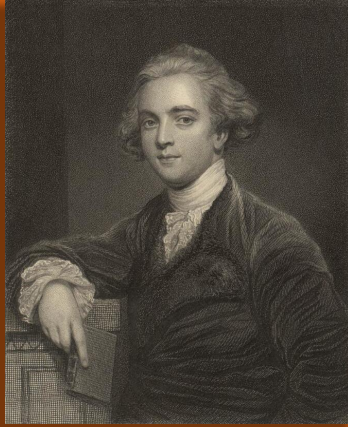
What kind of language is English?

- Based on what we've learned so far, what is English's language family?
- What does it mean for two languages to be related?
- Is English descended from German?
- Is English related to German?
- Is English descended from Latin?
- Is English related to Latin?



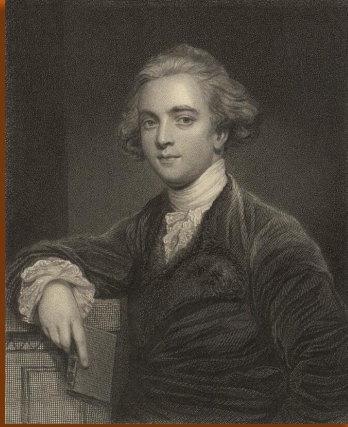
Historical Linguistics

- Historical linguistics is the branch of linguistics that studies language change.
- When we analyze a language as it exists at a particular time, e.g. the present, we are conducting a **synchronic** analysis.
- When we analyze how a language changes over time, we are conducting a **diachronic** analysis.
- Most analyses we've done in earlier classes have been synchronic, looking at the grammatical features of English as spoken today.
- In historical linguistics, we conduct diachronic analyses.



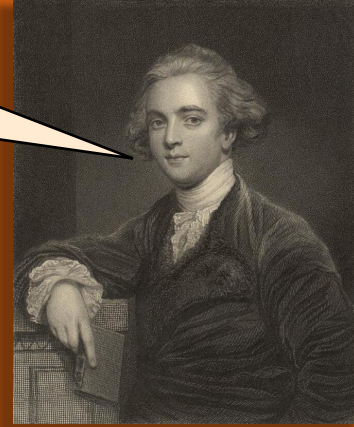
Historical Linguistics

- Historical linguistics dates back to the late-18th century, when European scholars discovered that many European and Asian languages shared a substantial number of features.
- They hypothesized that these languages all descended from a single common ancestor, Proto-Indo-European (PIE).
- These Indo-European languages constitute one family.
- In the centuries since, we've discovered many other families.



Historical Linguistics

I was right!



Sir William Jones correctly posited in 1786 that Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Celtic, Germanic, and Persian languages were all related.

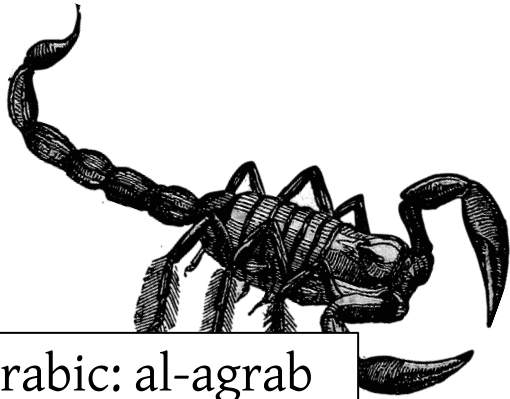
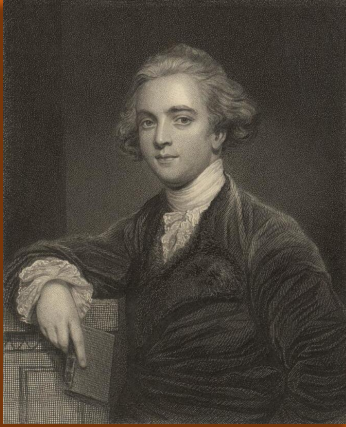
This is a **relatedness hypothesis**.

other kingdoms in some very remote age. The *Sanscrit* 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 form 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 perhaps no longer exists. There is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the *Gothick* and *Celtick*, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the *Sanscrit*; and the old *Persian* might be added to the same family.

some common source =
Proto-Indo-European

Historical Linguistics

- We must never assume that languages are related just because they share similar or even identical words.
- Sometimes, a language **borrow**s words from another. This does not mean the languages are related.



Arabic: al-agrab

Spanish: alacran



Arabic: nāranja

Spanish: naranja



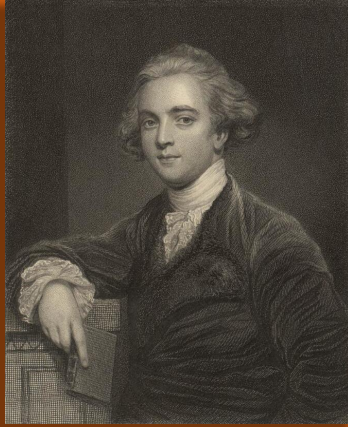
Arabic: al-qadi

Spanish: alcalde

Spanish borrowed these words from Arabic. Spanish and Arabic are not related, as we'll see.

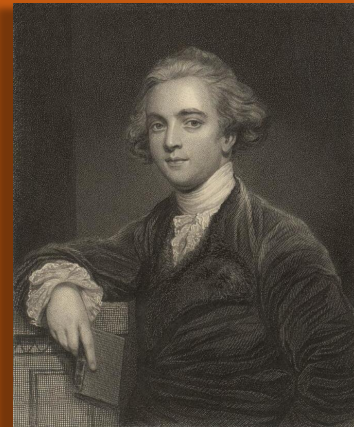
Historical Linguistics

- So how do we test our **relatedness hypothesis**?
- Find a large number of correlations between form and meaning in both languages. Not a few words, but across the language, including core vocabulary—where borrowings rarely occur.
- A list of core vocabulary was developed by Morris Swadesh, and it is called the Swadesh list. (A few different Swadesh lists, with varying lengths, are used today.)
- Let's compare Spanish and Arabic using a portion of the Swadesh list.



Spanish and Arabic core vocabulary

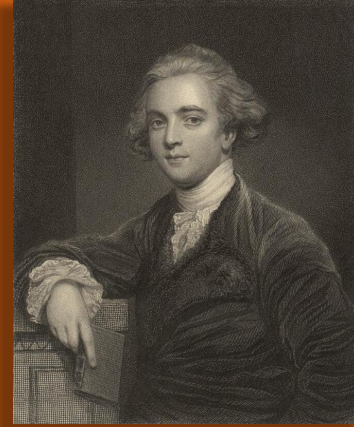
	Spanish	Arabic
I	yo	ʾanā
you (singular)	tú, vos, usted	ʾanta, ʾanti
he	él	huwa
we	nosotros, nosotras	naḥnu
five	cinco	ḵamsa, ḵams
long	largo	ṭawīl
thick	grueso	samīk
heavy	pesado	ṭaqīl
man (adult male)	hombre	rajul
husband	esposo, marido	zawj, baʿl
mother	madre	ʾumm
animal	animal	ḥayawān
snake	serpiente	ḥanaš, ṭuʿbān, ḥayya, ʾafʿan
forest	bosque	ḡāba



Spanish and Arabic have no similarity in core vocabulary. They are definitely **not** related.

Spanish and Italian core vocabulary

	Spanish	Italian
I	yo	io
you (singular)	tú, vos, usted	tu, Lei
he	él	lui, egli
we	nosotros, nosotras	noi
five	cinco	cinque
long	largo	lungo
thick	grueso	spesso
heavy	pesado	pesante
man (adult male)	hombre	uomo
husband	esposo, marido	marito
mother	madre	madre
animal	animal	animale
snake	serpiente	serpente
forest	bosque	foresta

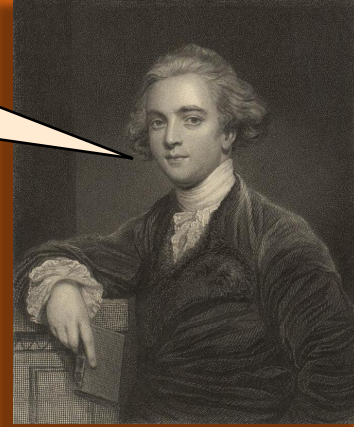


Spanish and Italian have substantial similarity in core vocabulary. They **are** related.

Both descended from Latin, and are sometimes called “Romance languages,” because Latin was the language of the Romans.

Historical Linguistics

I told you!

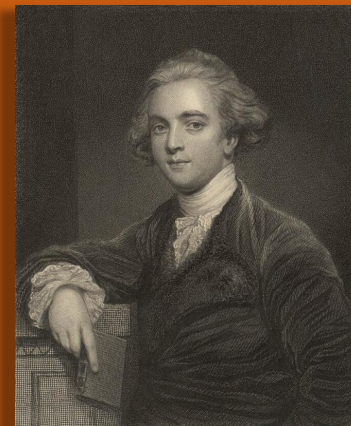
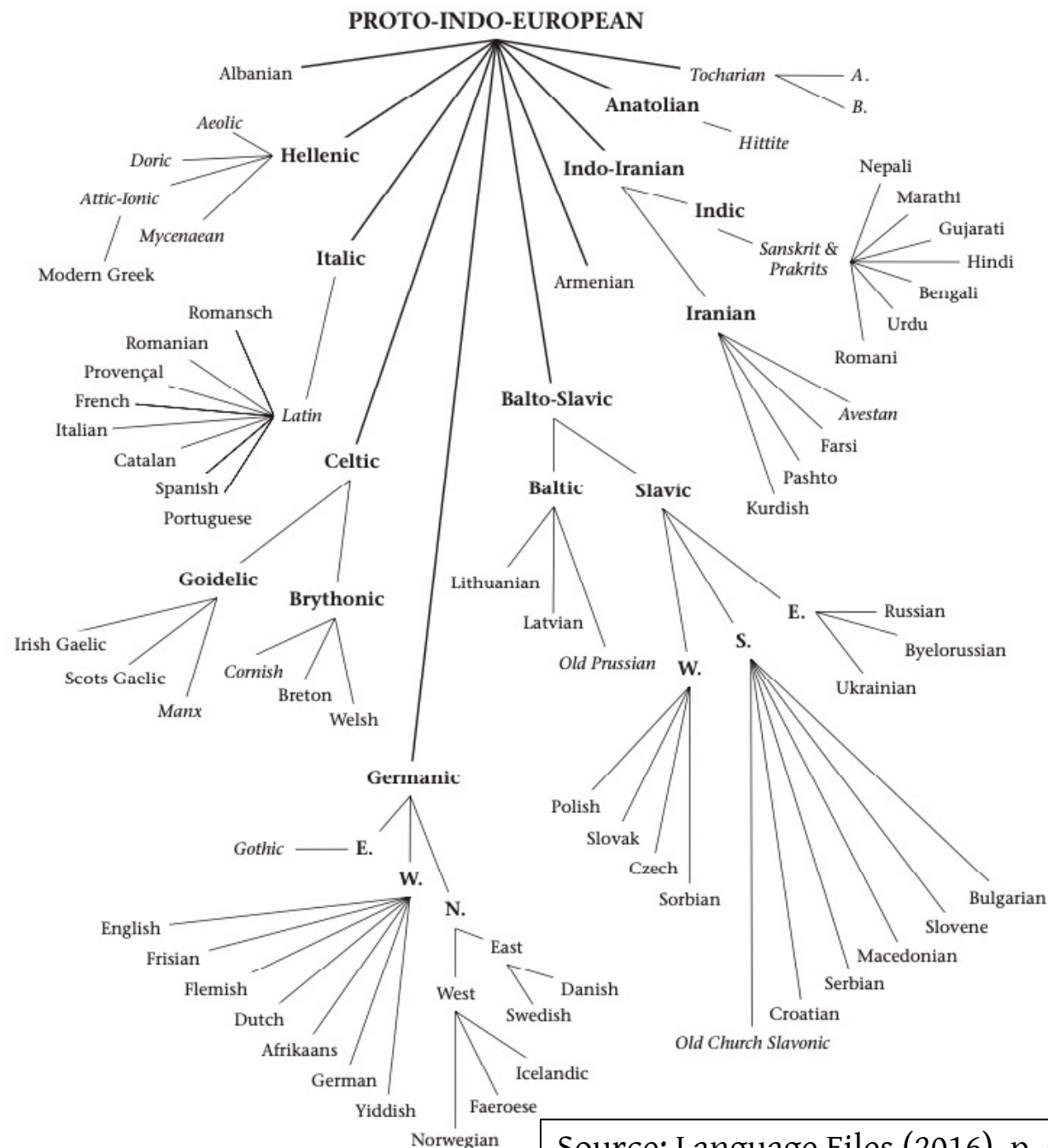


- Let's test Sir Jones's relatedness hypothesis.

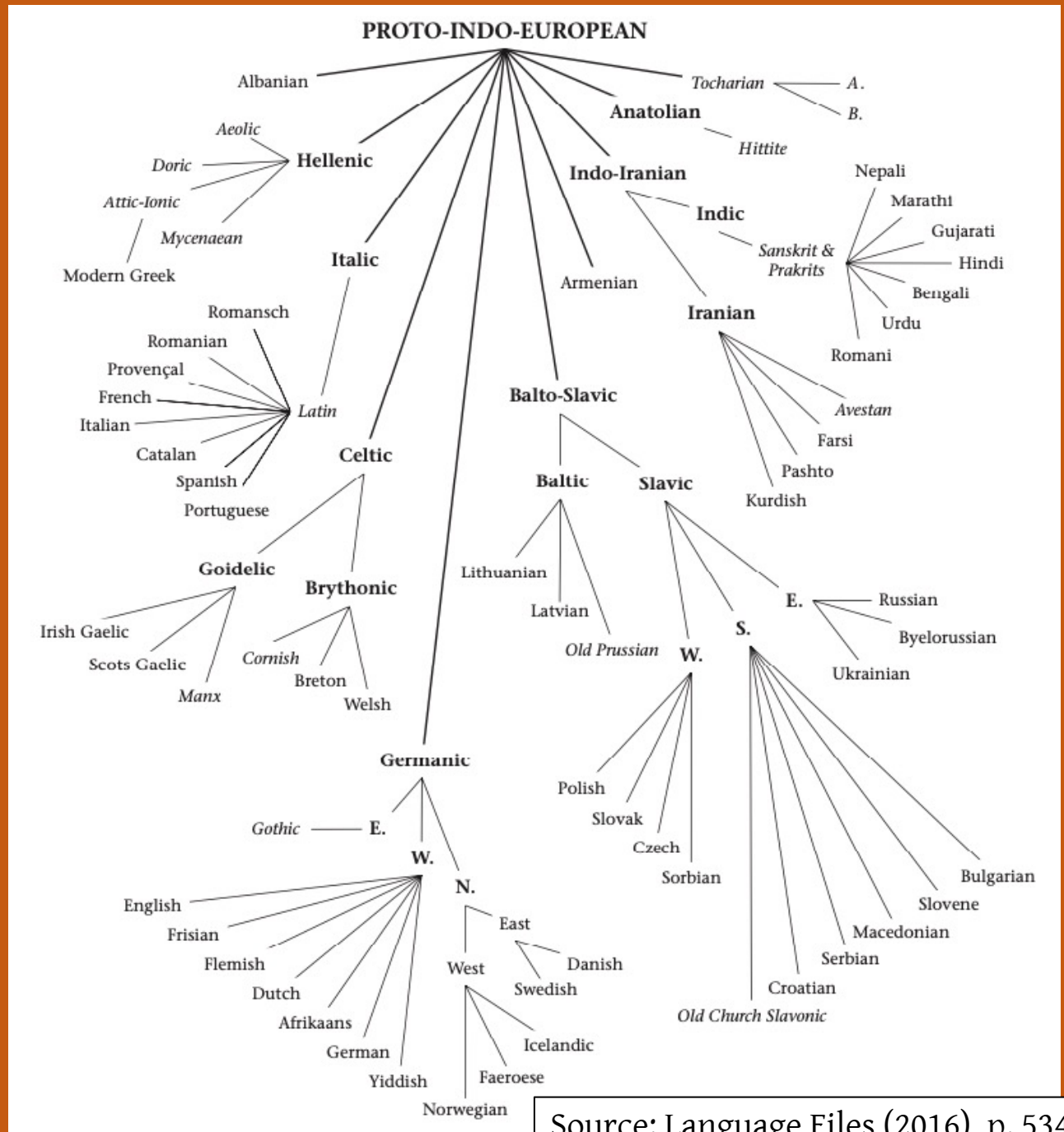
	Sanskrit	A. Greek	Latin	O. Irish	Gothic	Persian
mother	mātr̥	mētēr	māter	māthir	?	mādar
father	pit̥r̥	patēr	pater	athir	fadar	padar
brother	b ^h rāt̥r̥	p ^h rātēr	frāter	brāth(a)ir	brōþar	barādar
five	pāñca	pēnte	quīnque	cóic	fimf	panj
sweat	svēda	(e)ĩdos	sūdor	?	?	?
star	str̥	astēr	stēlla	réalt	staírnō	starh
to snow	sneha	neíp ^h ei	ninguere	snecht(a)e	snáiws	barf bārīdan

We can illustrate language relationships with a family tree.

This depicts the Indo-European family: all of the languages that descended from PIE.



- What are some European languages that are not Indo-European?
- What are some Asian languages that are not Indo-European?
- What other language families are there?
- Are all languages ultimately related?



Source: Language Files (2016), p. 534

Review

- All languages are in a constant state of change.
- Historical linguistics is the study of language change.
- Suggesting that two languages are related is called a relatedness hypothesis.
- Lexical similarities alone are not proof of relatedness – all languages borrow words!
- When two languages are related, they share a common ancestor.
- We can test our relatedness hypothesis by comparing languages using a Swadesh list.

Quiz 5 Review

1. Give two words with similar semantics but different syntactic properties. Explain how they differ.

Two words with similar semantics but different syntactic properties is "ate" and "devoured". Both words have similar semantics because ate and devoured have the same meaning. They have different syntactic properties because devoured requires the co-occurrence of an object noun phrase, while ate does not require it.

ate and ingested. These two words have similar semantics but different syntactic properties. They have similar meaning but they do not behave the same in syntax. You can say "I ate" by itself but you can not say "I ingested", because the sentence would need an object.

Talk and Speak. They are similar in semantics because they mean the same thing, both are using our voice. But for syntactic properties. I can say "I had a talk with my friend" but I can't say "I had a speak with my friend". You would say I am speaking with my friend.

Quiz 5 Review

2. Which of the following are syntactic properties? Check all that apply.



- word order

- constituency test



- co-occurrence

- grammaticality judgement

- semantics

Quiz 5 Review

3. In the sentence, "The chef salted the tasty soup," what is the verb, and what is its complement?

The verb is “salted” and the complement is “the tasty soup.”

verb: 'salted: complement: 'the tasty soup'

Salted is the verb. The tasty soup is the complement.

Quiz 5 Review

4. Use one of the three constituency tests described in your text and in class on April 21 to answer the following: In the sentence, "I love sailing on the lake," is "on the lake" a constituent? Why or why not? Make it clear what constituency test you used. (This question is worth 2 points.)

"On the lake" is a constituent because it was able to pass the pro-form substitution test. I am able to say "I love sailing there", replacing "on the lake" with "there" and still have the sentence be grammatical, therefore it is indeed a constituent.

yes it is a constituent.// constituency test using answers to question. // where do you/I love sailing ? "on the lake".

Yes, Using the cleft test it would be - it was on the lake that I love sailing. which would be grammatically correct.

For next week...

- Read part of chapter 10 from *Language Files* and “Why do Southerners Talk That Way?” by Walt Wolfram.