



# History of English

## *Lecture 1*

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# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

**English language**, West Germanic language of the Indo-European family of languages; it is closely related to (German, Dutch [and Flemish], Frisian). English originated in England and is the dominant language of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, and various island nations in the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean.

It is also an official language of India, the Philippines, Singapore, and many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including South Africa. English is the first choice of foreign language in most other countries of the world, and its status has given it the position of a **global lingua franca**. It is estimated that about a third of the world's population, some two billion persons, now use English.

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# Germanic Languages Ancestry

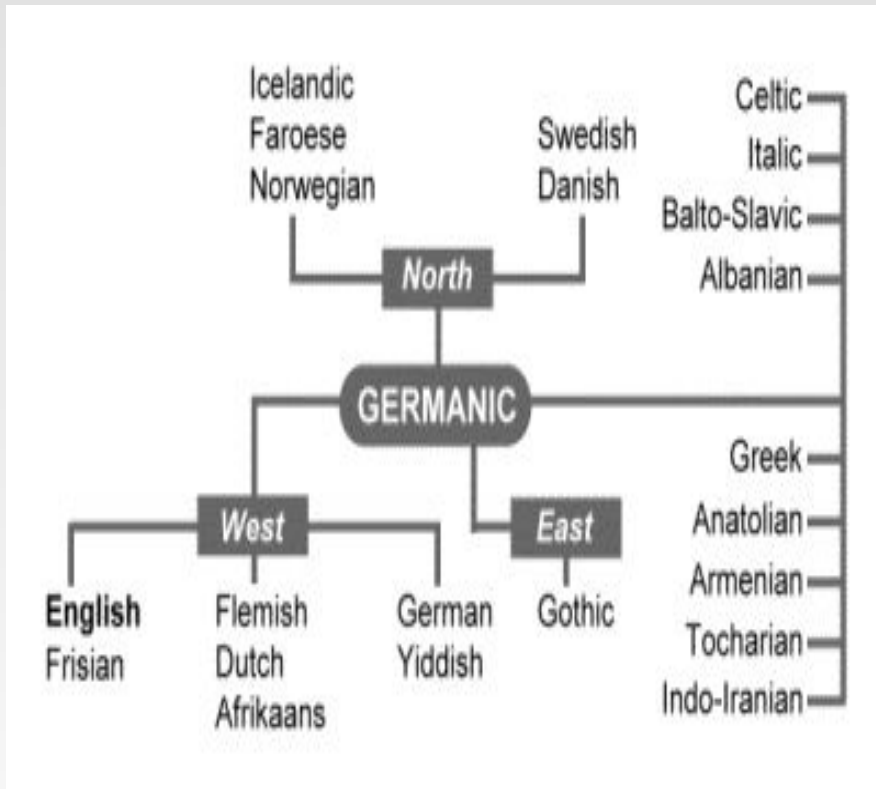
English belongs to the Indo-European family of languages and is therefore related to most other languages spoken in Europe and western Asia from Iceland to India.

The parent tongue, called **Proto-Indo-European**, was spoken about 5,000 years ago by nomads believed to have roamed the southeast European plains.

**Germanic**, one of the language groups descended from this ancestral speech, is usually divided by scholars into three regional groups: **East** (Burgundian, Vandal, and Gothic), **North** (Icelandic, Faroese, Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish), and **West** (German, Dutch [and Flemish], Frisian, and English).



# Germanic Languages Ancestry



55 BC

Roman invasion  
of Britain by Julius  
Caesar

AD 43

Roman invasion  
and occupation.  
Beginning of  
Roman rule of  
Britain

Local  
inhabitants  
speak  
Celtish

436

Roman  
withdrawal from  
Britain complete

449

Settlement of  
Britain by  
Germanic  
invaders begins

450-480

Earliest known  
Old English  
inscriptions

1066

William the  
Conqueror, Duke  
of Normandy,  
invades and  
conquers England

Old  
English



# Germanic Invasion

The history of English started with the arrival of three Germanic tribes, who invaded Britain during the 5th century AD. These tribes, **the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes**, crossed the North Sea from what today is Denmark and northern Germany.

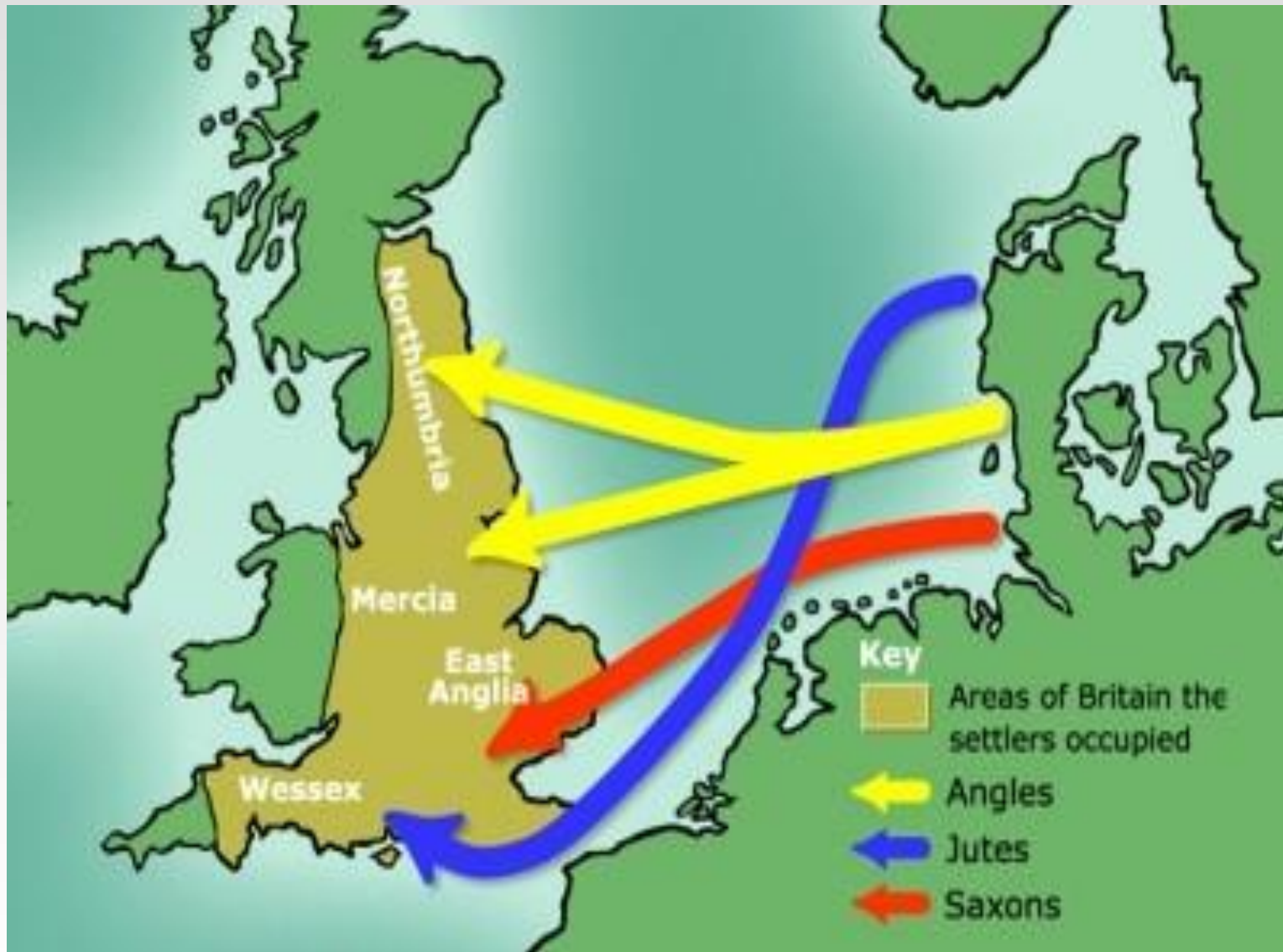
At that time the inhabitants of Britain spoke a Celtic language. But most of the Celtic speakers were pushed west and north by the invaders – mainly into what is now Wales, Scotland and Ireland. The Angles came from "Englaland" and their language was called "Englisc" – from which the words "England" and "English" are derived.

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# Germanic Invasion, Vth c.



# Germanic Invasion, Vth c.







# The Anglo-Saxon Settlement

Germanic invaders came and settled in Britain from the north-western coastline of continental Europe in the fifth and sixth centuries. The invaders all spoke a language that was Germanic (related to what emerged as Dutch, Frisian, German and the Scandinavian languages, and to Gothic) but we will probably never know how different their speech was from that of their continental neighbours.

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## Celtic substratum

The Celts were already residents in Britain when the Anglo-Saxons arrived, but there are few traces of their language in English today. It is suggested that the Celtic tongue might have had an underlying influence on the grammatical development of English, but this is highly speculative.

The number of loanwords known for certain to have entered Old English from this source is very small. Those that survived in modern English include *brock* (badger), and *coomb* a type of valley, alongside many place names.

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## Tribal Division of Germanic invaders

Although the Germanic invaders must at first have had little greater organization than isolated war bands, they quickly united into larger territorial groups under kings. Seven kingdoms were set up on the territory of what we call now England. The centers of power in Anglo-Saxon England were to rest in the three kingdoms of **Northumbria, Mercia, and Wessex**. These were the kingdoms on the northerly and westerly frontiers of the area under Anglo-Saxon control. Their constant border wars with Picts, Scots and British kept their armies in fighting shape. The other kingdoms were **Kent, Sussex, East Anglia** and **Essex**.

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**East Anglia** was under Mercian rule on two separate occasions in the eighth and early ninth centuries, and under Norse rule when the Vikings invaded in the late ninth century. Kent was also under Mercian control, off and on, through much of the late eighth and early ninth centuries. Mercia was subject to Northumbrian rule in the mid-seventh century, to Wessex in the early ninth, and to Norse control in the late ninth century.

**Northumbria** was actually comprised of two other kingdoms - Bernicia and Deira - that were not joined until the 670s. Northumbria, too, was subject to Norse rule when the Vikings invaded -- and the kingdom of Deira re-established itself for a while, only to fall under Norse control, as well. And while Sussex did exist, it is so obscure that the names of some of their kings remain unknown.

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## The Heptarchy had become England

Wessex fell under Mercian rule for a few years in the 640s, but it never truly submitted to any other force. It was **King Egbert** who helped to make it so indomitable, and for that he has been called "the first king of all England." Later, **Alfred the Great** resisted the Vikings as no other leader could, and he consolidated the remnants of the other six kingdoms under Wessex rule. In **884**, the kingdoms of Mercia and Bernicia were reduced to Lordships, and Alfred's consolidation was complete.

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## King Alfred's overcoming the Danes in 886

The kingdoms were often at war with each other, and especially with great powers, Wessex and Mercia.

Viking attacks were to lead to a permanently united English Kingdom under Wessex in the 9th century.

King Alfred the Great overcame the Danes in 889, and he was recognized as the overlord of all the English not subject to the Danes.

**Treaty of Wedmore** with the Danes to secure the best possible treatment of the English living in Danish-dominated territories.

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