

Università di Cagliari



**CDL LINGUE E
COMUNICAZIONE
A.A. 2022-2023
INGLESE 1**

The English Language, an Introduction

English language
an introduction (2:22)

LEARNING ABOUT ENGLISH

English is a very rich language, with over 1 million different words.

What is the reason for this diversity?

What is the reason for its spelling (written and spoken do not correspond)?

- a. The language originated in the British isles
- b. Islands normally get invaded by different people speaking different languages
- c. The English lexis – its vocabulary - , as a consequence of such invasions, is mixed:

29% LATIN; **29% FRENCH**
26 % GERMANIC **8% GREEK**
10% OTHER

English language
an introduction (2:20-4:05)

English is a member of the Indo-European family of languages.

This broad family includes most of the European languages spoken today.

The Indo-European family includes several major branches:

Latin and the modern Romance languages (French, Spanish, Italian etc.);

the **Germanic** languages (English, German, Swedish, **Friesian**, etc.);

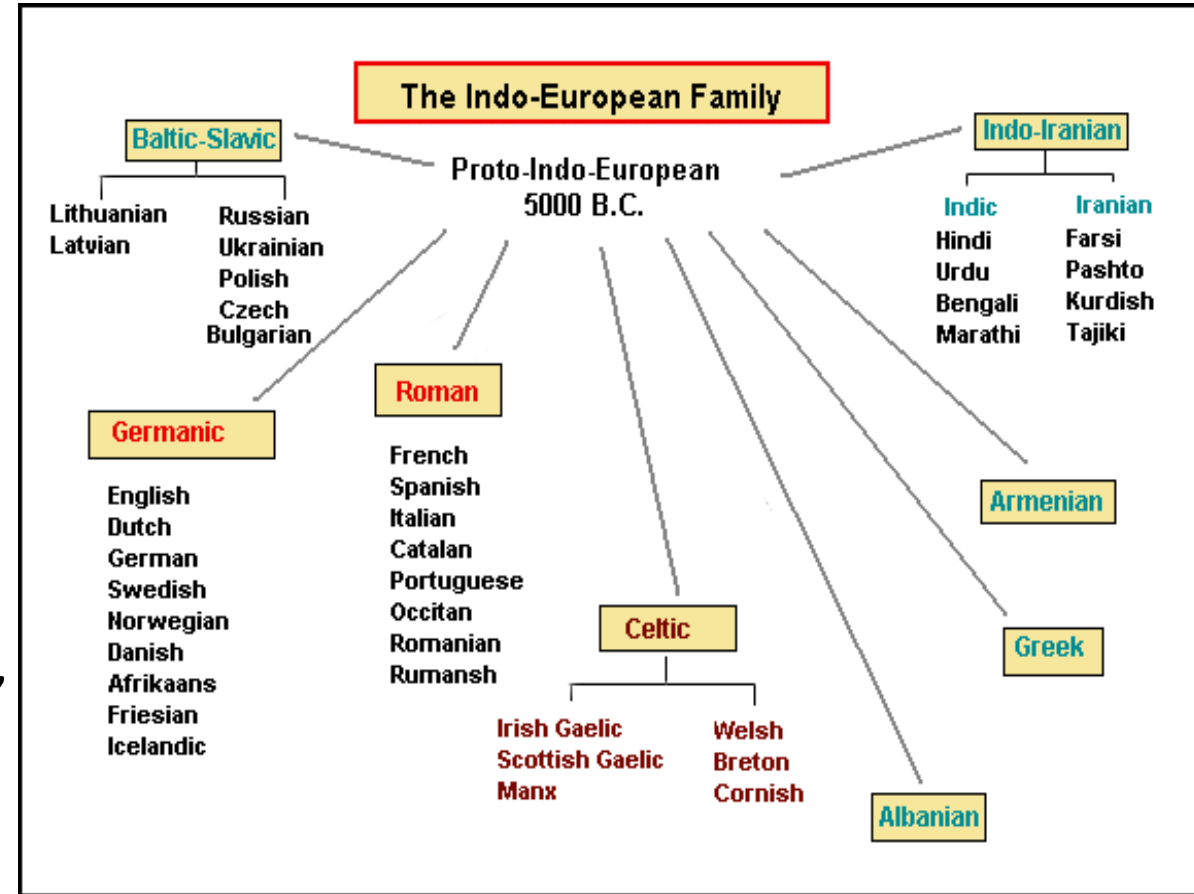
the **Indo-Iranian** languages (Hindi, Urdu, Sanskrit etc.);

the **Slavic** languages (Russian, Polish, Czech etc.);

the **Baltic** languages of Latvian and

Lithuanian; the **Celtic** languages (Welsh, Irish

Gaelic etc.); **Greek**.



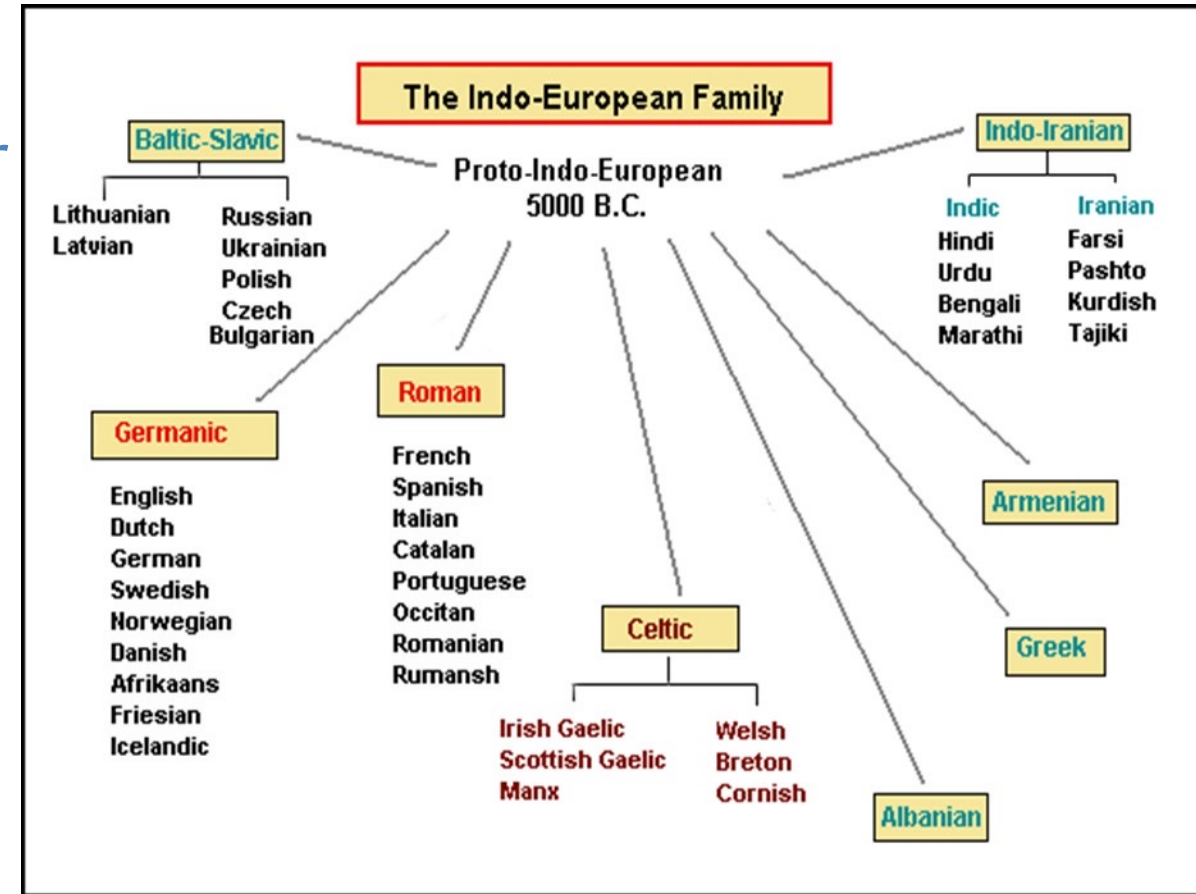
The influence of the original Indo-European languages can be seen today, even though no written record of it exists.

The word for *father*, for example, is *vater* in German, *pater* in Latin, and *pitr* in Sanskrit.

These words are all **cognates**, similar words in different languages that share the same root.

Of these branches of the Indo-European family, two are, as far as the study of the development of English is concerned, of paramount importance:

the **Germanic (especially Friesian)** and the **Romance** (called that because the Romance languages derive from Latin, the language of ancient Rome).



English is a member of the **Germanic group** of languages.

It is believed that this group began as a common language in the Elbe river region about 3,000 years ago.

By the second century BC, this Common Germanic language had split into three distinct sub-groups:

- ✓ East Germanic was spoken by peoples who migrated back to southeastern Europe. No East Germanic language is spoken today, and the only written East Germanic language that survives is Gothic.
- ✓ North Germanic evolved into the modern Scandinavian languages of Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, and Icelandic (but not Finnish, which is related to Hungarian and Estonian and is not an Indo-European language).
- ✓ **West Germanic is the ancestor of modern German, Dutch, Flemish, Frisian, and English.**



English language
an introduction (4:05-5:05)

The Romans in Britain

55 BC: Invasion of J. Caesar

55 BC-388 AD: 500 years of permanence

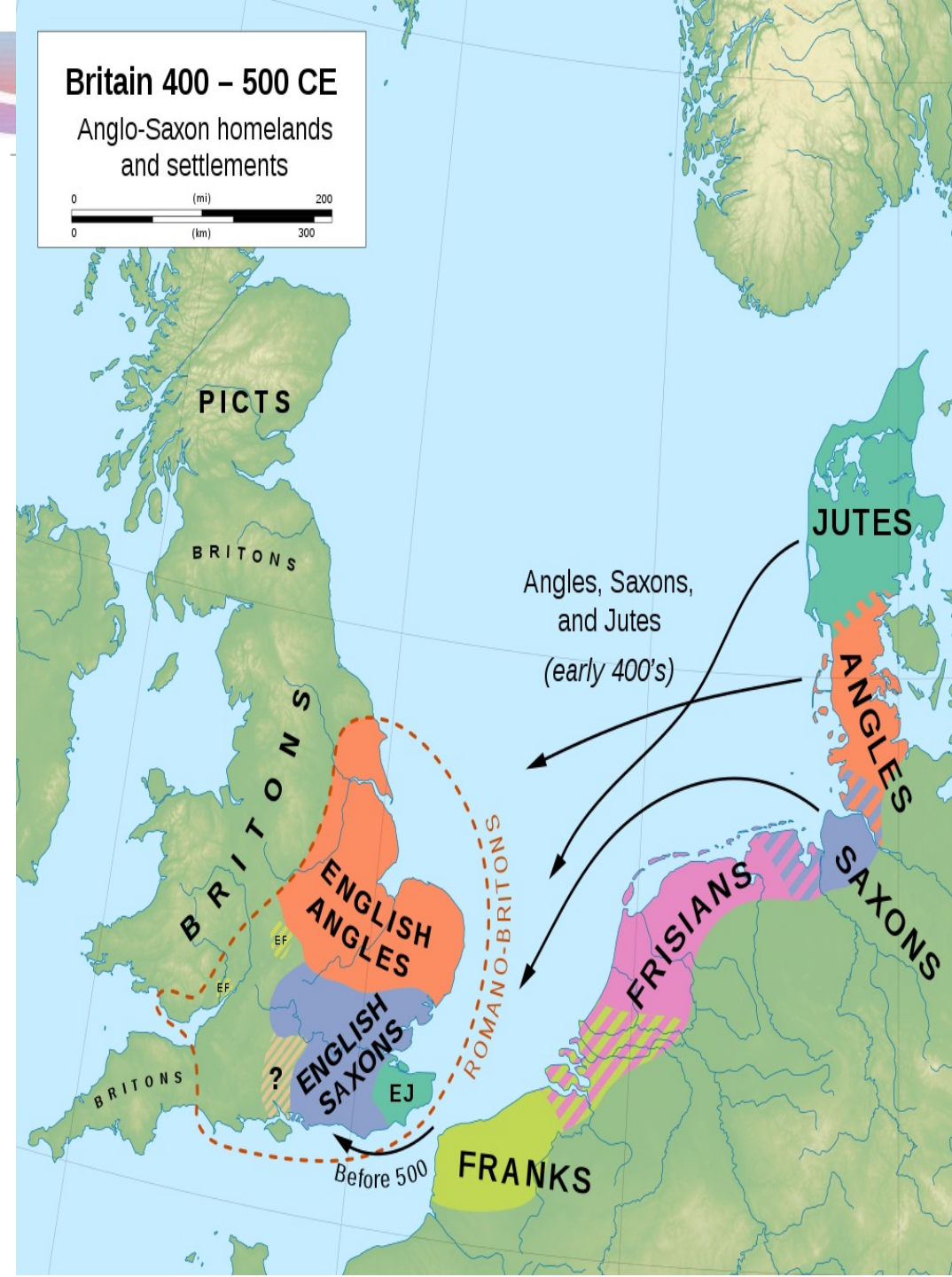
LATIN AND GREEK WERE SPOKEN DURING
THAT PERIOD



English language
an introduction (5:05-6:18)

Introduction

- *The early inhabitants of the British isles spoke Celtic Languages which belonged to the Indo-European family.*
- *There are three phases in the evolution of the English Language:*
- *Old English (450-1150); Middle English (1150-1500) and Modern English (1500-present)*

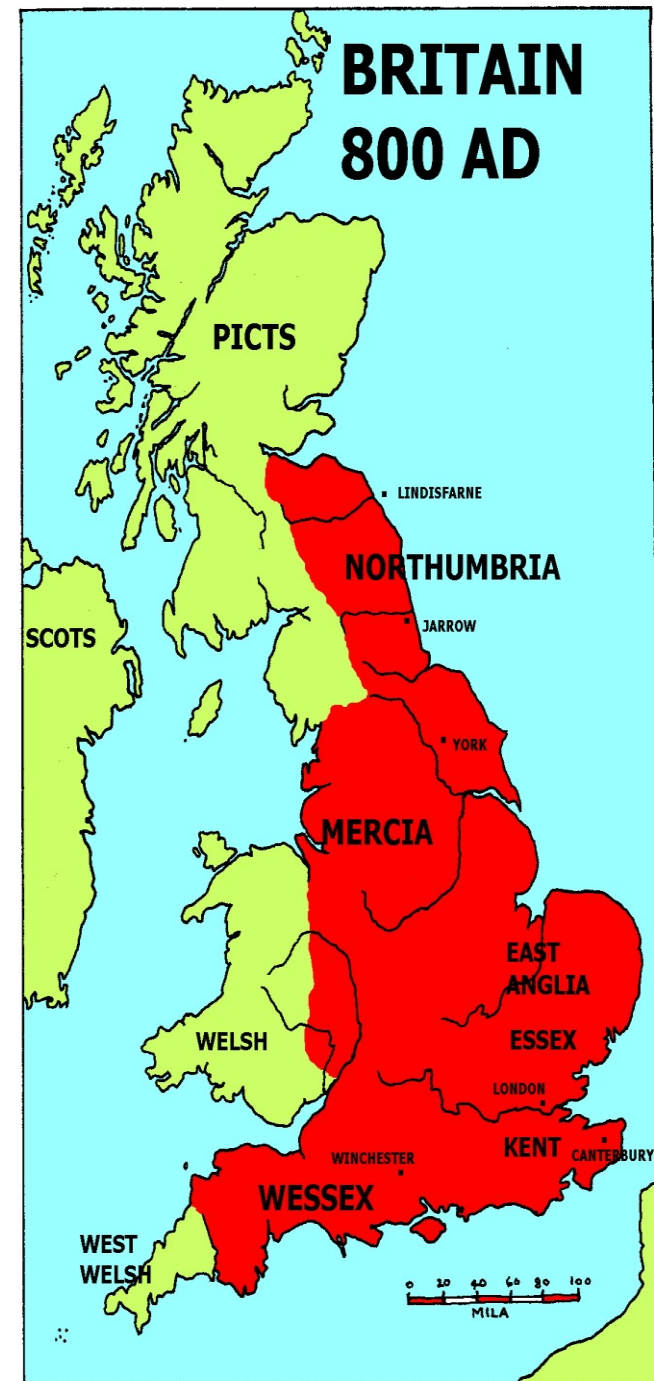


Old English (500-1100 AD)

West Germanic invaders from Jutland and southern Denmark: the **Angles** (whose name is the source of the words England and English), Saxons, and Jutes, began to settle in the British Isles in the fifth and sixth centuries AD.

They spoke a mutually intelligible language, similar to modern Frisian - the language of the northeastern region of the Netherlands - that we call **Old English**.

These invaders **pushed** the original, Celtic-speaking inhabitants **out of what is now England** into Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, and Ireland, leaving behind a few Celtic words. The Celtic languages survive today in the in the **Gaelic languages** of Scotland and Ireland and in Welsh.



English language
an introduction (6:18-7:36)



Old English



- Old English did not sound or look like English today. Native English speakers now would have great difficulty understanding Old English.
- The most representative work in Old English is the poem *Beowulf* (700-1000 AD)
- It was an inflecting language (the meaning of words changed according to their declensions)
- **The Viking invasion also had a significant influence** in the development of the English language (Old Norse spoken especially by Danes):
 - ✓ They brought shorter than Latin words
 - ✓ Consonant clusters (*sky, skin, leg, husband, knife, gap*)

English language
an introduction (da 7:36 a 9:01)

Anglo-Saxons and King Alfred the Great

Alfred, also spelled Aelfred, by name **Alfred the Great**, (born 849—died 899), king of Wessex (871–899), a Saxon kingdom in southwestern England.

He prevented England from falling to the Danes and promoted learning and literacy. Compilation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle began during his reign, circa 890.

- ✓ The preservation of Old English
- ✓ Influence of Latin due to the missionaries coming from Rome and France speaking Latin
- ✓ As a consequence, many Latin and Greek words came into the language

English language

an introduction (da 9:01 a 12:30)

Old English, whose best known surviving example is the poem [Beowulf](#), lasted until about 1100. Shortly after **the most important event** in the development and history of the English language, the **Norman Conquest** (1066 AD).

The Norman Conquest and Middle English (1100-1500)

William the Conqueror, the Duke of Normandy, invaded and conquered England and the Anglo-Saxons in 1066 AD.

The new overlords spoke a dialect of Old French known as Anglo-Norman.

The Normans were also of Germanic stock ("Norman" comes from "Norseman") and Anglo-Norman was a French dialect that had considerable Germanic influences in addition to the basic Latin roots.

Prior to the Norman Conquest, Latin had been only a minor influence on the English language, mainly through vestiges of the Roman occupation and from the conversion of Britain to Christianity in the seventh century.

Now, there was a wholesale infusion of Romance (Anglo-Norman) words.

THE NORMAN INFLUENCE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH

The influence of the Normans can be illustrated by looking at two words, **beef** and **cow**.

Beef, commonly eaten by the aristocracy, derives from the Anglo-Norman, while the Anglo-Saxon commoners, who tended the cattle, retained the Germanic **cow**.

Many **legal** terms, such as *indict*, *jury*, and *verdict* have Anglo-Norman roots because the Normans ran the courts.

This split, where words commonly used by the aristocracy have Latin/French roots and words frequently used by the Anglo-Saxon commoners have Germanic roots, can be seen in many instances.

Sometimes French words replaced Old English words; **crime** replaced **firen** and **uncle** replaced **eam**.

Other times, French and Old English components combined to form a new word, as the **French gentle** and the **Germanic man** formed **gentleman**.

Other times, **two different words with roughly the same meaning survive into modern English**. Thus we have the Germanic **doom** and the French **judgment**, or **wish** and **desire**.

This mixture of the two languages came to be known as [Middle English](#). The most famous example of Middle English is [Chaucer's Canterbury Tales](#).

Unlike Old English, Middle English can be read, albeit with difficulty, by modern English-speaking people.

By 1362, the linguistic division between the nobility and the commoners was largely over. In that year, [the Statute of Pleading was adopted, which made English the language of the courts and it began to be used in Parliament](#).

The Middle English period came to a close around 1500 AD with the rise of Modern English.

Many students having difficulty understanding [Shakespeare](#) would be surprised to learn that he wrote in modern English.

Elizabethan English has much more in common with our language today than it does with the language of Chaucer.

Many familiar words and phrases were coined or first recorded by Shakespeare, some 2,000 words and countless idioms are his.

Early Modern English

Early Modern English (1500-1800)

Towards the end of Middle English, a sudden and **distinct change in pronunciation (the Great Vowel Shift)** started, with vowels being pronounced shorter and shorter. From the 16th century the British had contact with many peoples from around the world.

This, and the **Renaissance of Classical learning**, meant that many new words and phrases entered the language.

The **invention of printing** also meant that there was now a common language in print. Books became cheaper and more people learned to read. Printing also brought **standardization to English**. Spelling and grammar became fixed, and the **dialect of London**, where most publishing houses were, **became the standard**. In 1604 the first English dictionary was published.



Late-Modern English (1800-Present)

The principal distinction between early- and late-modern English is **vocabulary**.

Pronunciation, grammar, and spelling are largely the same, but Late-Modern English has many more words. **These increase the result of two historical factors.**

The first is the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the technological society. This necessitated new words for things and ideas that had not previously existed.

The second was the British Empire. At its height, Britain ruled one quarter of the earth's surface, and English adopted many foreign words and made them its own.

Varieties of English

From around 1600, the **English colonization of North America** resulted in the creation of a distinct American variety of English.

Some English pronunciations and words "froze" when they reached America. In some ways, American English is more like the English of Shakespeare than modern British English is.

Some expressions that the British call "**Americanisms**" are in fact original British expressions that were preserved in the colonies while lost for a time in Britain (for example *trash* for rubbish, *loan* as a verb instead of lend, and *fall* for autumn; another example)

Varieties of English

Spanish also had an influence on American English (and subsequently British English), with words like *canyon*, *ranch*, *stampede* and *vigilante* being examples of Spanish words that entered English through the settlement of the American West.

French words (through Louisiana) and **West African words** (through the slave trade) also influenced American English (and so, to an extent, British English).

Today, **American English** is particularly influential, due to the USA's dominance of cinema, television, popular music, trade and technology (including the Internet). But there are many other **varieties of English** around the world, including for example Australian English, New Zealand English, Canadian English, South African English, Indian English and Caribbean English.