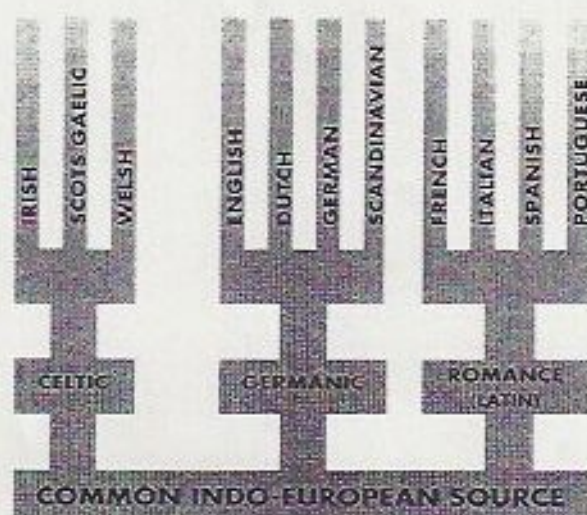


GERMANIC *R*ROOTS



Indo European is the ancient mother tongue of many European languages. Latin, Greek and Russian derive from it as well.

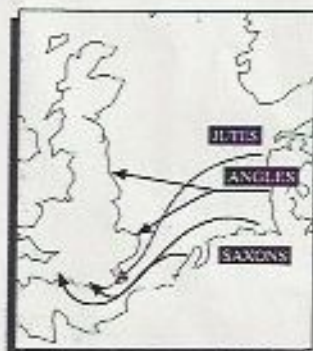
Before English

It is a curious fact that the original 'Britons' did not speak any English at all. They were Celtic-speaking tribes who had come to Britain between 1000 and 500 BC. They dominated the country until the Roman invasion of Britain in the first century.

When the Romans had to withdraw, Germanic-speaking tribes from Denmark and the north of Germany started coming across the North Sea and attack the coastal regions. The Celts were pushed further and further westwards and with them disappeared their language. The Celtic tongue survives, however, in parts of Wales (Welsh), Ireland and Scotland (Irish and Scots Gaelic). Only a few words like *whisky*, *flannel*, *slogan*, *Thames* and *Avon* have become part of English.

Old English or Anglo-Saxon

Up to this day every German immediately understands English words like *father*, *mother*, *brother*, *ship* and *wind*. In the 7th century he might have understood the rest as well. Old English, as we now call it, was nothing but a Germanic dialect. It was the language of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes – Germanic-speaking tribes



who had come over from what today is Denmark and the north of Germany. They spoke Angle-ish, and England simply means 'Angla-land – Land of the Angles'.

The language of these tribes – we now call it Old English or Anglo-Saxon – was West Germanic, from which also modern Dutch

and German developed. This common origin is the reason why many English and German words are so similar.

English (West G.)	German (West G.)	Dutch (West G.)	Swedish (North G.)
bread	Brot	brood	bröd
sister	Schwester	zuster	syster
apple	Apfel	appel	äpple
house	Haus	huis	hus
water	Wasser	water	vatten

The Vikings

So when the next wave of invaders arrived, this at first meant war and bloodshed. Linguistically speaking, however, it was all within the family, because these new invaders were the Germanic-speaking Vikings of Scandinavia. During the 8th and 9th centuries they conquered large parts of England, but in the end settled peacefully among the English. Their North Germanic tongue (Old Norse) was very similar to Old English, Danish words were easy to pronounce and to remember and blended into English. Hundreds of new words found their way into English in this way:

call, cast, die, egg, flat, gate, get, hit, give, guess, husband, ill, law, link, laase, low, root, seat, skin, skill, skull, sky, take, tight, window

As a separate language Danish disappeared quickly, however, and blended into English. Had Old English been left to itself, the modern language might still be very similar to German today. But . . .

Turn to page 52 to find out what happened.