

## Germanic languages

### The Development of Proto-Germanic

#### Introduction

PIE was probably spoken some 6,000 years ago, conceivably even earlier. Even the last common ancestor of Germanic and Italo-Celtic was probably spoken at least 5,000 years ago. Proto-Germanic, by contrast, is unlikely to have been spoken before about 2,500 years ago (c.500 bc). Thus a generous half of the reconstructable development of English occurred before the PGmc period.

The consequences of that fact are clear enough on an intuitive level.

A student who has studied only Germanic languages typically finds the grammar of PIE very unfamiliar, perhaps even bewildering or intimidating. On the other hand, the grammar of PGmc, while it exhibits plenty of curious archaisms, is recognizably similar in outline even to the grammar of modern German.

As might be expected, the extensive changes that occurred in the development from PIE to PGmc are not evenly distributed throughout the grammar.

Hardly any syntactic change can be demonstrated, though that might be partly a result of our relative ignorance. A significant reorganization of nominal inflection took place. Sound changes were much more extensive; some forty regular sound changes can be reconstructed, and their relative chronology is partly recoverable. But the most striking changes affected the system of verb inflection, which was completely reorganized and drastically altered in detail. In consequence, a Germanic language is today immediately recognizable by the inflection of its verbs.

Of the 4,000 to 6,000 languages presently spoken in the world, the Germanic languages form a very small subset. For the purposes of this book, there are only twelve modern Germanic languages, and even with the inclusion of varieties like Luxembourgish and Swiss German, and perhaps some 40 to 50 Creoles, the membership remains modest. In terms of numbers of speakers, the Germanic group scores much better, for there are at least 450 million native speakers, which is approximately one twelfth of the world's population. Still, even within Indo-European, the Romance languages with an estimated 580 million native speakers rank higher. What the Germanic languages are unrivalled in, however, is their geographical distribution. While originally these languages were confined to a small part of Europe, colonizers and immigrants successfully implanted them, particularly English, in the Americas, Africa (e.g. South Africa), Asia (e.g. India), as well as in the Pacific (e.g.

Australia). Moreover, English has become the world's most important international language, serving commerce, culture, diplomacy, and science, including linguistics.

The modest beginnings of this evolution seem to be found in the southern Baltic region (northern Germany, the Danish Isles, southern Scandinavia), which according to accepted opinion had been settled by speakers of Indo-European around 1000 BC. They encountered speakers of non-Indo-European origin, gradually changed their Proto-Indo-European into Proto-Germanic, and dispersed beyond the original homeland to occupy the region from the North Sea stretching to the River Vistula in Poland by 500 BC. The language spoken during this period is attested only indirectly, in the foreign words, usually proper names, used by Greek and Latin authors, and in early loans in neighbouring and co-territorial languages, especially Finno-Ugric and Baltic. The earliest direct records are Scandinavian runic inscriptions from the beginning of the third century AD.

It is customary to divide Germanic into East Germanic, with Gothic as its prominent member, North Germanic, with Icelandic, Faroese, Norwegian, Danish and Swedish, and West Germanic (sometimes 'South Germanic'), with German, Yiddish, Pennsylvania German, Dutch, Afrikaans, Frisian and English. If we relate this variety to the one Common Germanic language of two thousand years ago, we face the question of how we got from the one parent language to the three branches and to the dozen or so descendant languages.

One factor to bear in mind is that every language is inherently variable. A language only exists through speakers that speak an idiolect, and typically share a dialect - and sociolect - with the people with whom they communicate most often or want to be associated. Thus some degree of dialectal variation must have prevailed in Common Germanic too, an assumption plausible also on purely linguistic grounds. Standard methods of linguistic reconstruction sometimes lead to two reconstructed forms rather than only one, suggesting that Common Germanic allowed both. Thus the inherent linguistic variation within Common Germanic itself may safely be taken as a partial explanation of later diffusion, in particular, of the distinction between North and West Germanic.

A second factor responsible for the variety in Germanic is migration. When speakers move away from their homeland and cut or strongly diminish communication with those who stay behind, the inherent tendency for dialect variation increases. The migrants, moreover, may come into contact with speakers of another language, which may alienate either language, in varying degrees, from the language of the previous generations. It may also lead to the disappearance of one or even both of the languages. A distinction may be

made in terms of the language variety with which the migrants left. Did they leave with Common Germanic, with a branch of Germanic like relatively undifferentiated North Germanic, or with a fully differentiated separate Germanic language like English? Germanic illustrates each of these types and scenarios.

Towards the end of the pre-Christian era, Germanic tribes, including the Vandals, Burgundians and Goths, left the Common Germanic homeland. The Goths, the only ones that left any significant linguistic records, moved to the Baltic shores east of the Oder, some of them moving on to the Balkans around AD 200, and from there westward to Italy, France and Spain. Because of the initially eastern orientation of the migration, the language of the Goths is called 'East Germanic', and because it is generally taken to have separated from Common Germanic, it is considered a branch, on the same level as West and North Germanic.

Migrations that lead to increased linguistic diversity took place with respect to both North Germanic and West Germanic. During the Viking Age (c.800-c.1050) speakers of North Germanic settled in Iceland, Greenland, the Faroes, the Shetlands, the Hebrides and the Orkney Islands, parts of Ireland, Scotland, England, the Isle of Man and Normandy, along the shores of Finland and Estonia, and even in Novgorod, Kiev and Constantinople. Only in the case of Iceland and the Faroes did these migrations eventually lead to separate modern languages. In Finland, North Germanic was to be retained as a variant of Swedish, and in all other areas North Germanic was gradually given up. As for West Germanic, tribal groups of Angles, Saxons and Jutes invaded England during the fifth and sixth centuries, and the Langobard(ic) (Lombard) tribe moved into Italy. Whereas the southward expansion proved unsuccessful (by the end of the first millennium Langobardic was basically extinct), the westward expansion led to modern English.

The third type of migration resulted primarily from the exploration and colonization of the world by Europeans from the fifteenth century onwards. Its strongest effect was to spread English around the globe. In terms of the fragmentation of Germanic, it led to the creation of colonial variants of Dutch, German and English, and to several Creoles, especially of English. A special case is the development of Yiddish. The main form, Eastern Yiddish, is the result of the eastward migration of German-speaking Jews to Slavic territories from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, and from there back to the west (Europe, Palestine-Israel, and the general migration poles of the Americas, South Africa and Australia) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A third factor needed to explain how one ancestral language relates to a dozen descendant languages is standardization. Without this concept one would still not know why Swedish, Danish and Norwegian are considered

different languages, even though mutual intelligibility is very high, whereas some northern and southern dialects of German, which are hardly mutually intelligible, are not considered separate languages. Standardization is the process whereby a community, typically a literate one, imposes a uniformity on its language in response to a growing desire of political, religious or cultural authorities for improved communication across dialects. The standard which then emerges is typically based on dialects that are (a) spoken in the economically and culturally strongest region; (b) deemed 'authentic' in a way that satisfies a sense of national identity in search of a national language; and/or (c) more highly cross-dialectally intelligible than others. Early catalysts were the printing press; the attention for the native vernacular as opposed to Latin during the Renaissance, giving rise to the first grammars, dictionaries and academies; the Bible translations of the Reformation; and the appearance of strong centralized governments. One or more of these factors were at work in the making of standard Danish, Swedish, German, Dutch and English, and to a small extent Icelandic. The nationalism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the major impulse for the development of Afrikaans, Faroese, Norwegian, and again Icelandic. Norwegian even has two standards, one based on the Danish-influenced language spoken by the elite, and the other reconstructed from conservative, 'pure' dialects. In the case of the languages without a nation state - Pennsylvania German, Yiddish and Frisian - standardization is a part of language promotion and maintenance efforts, initiated primarily by small numbers of nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary figures, journalists and linguists.

### **East Germanic**

The first of the Germanic tribes to migrate from the Danish Isles and southern Sweden were the Goths, who presumably departed from the Common Germanic area around 100 BC. After crossing the Baltic they were joined by the Rugians, the Vandals and the Burgundians. Together these tribes constitute the eastern branch of Germanic known to us primarily from biblical translations from around AD 350. These translations, the majority of which have been attributed to Wulfila, the Bishop of the Western Goths, were undertaken after the Goths had settled on the Black Sea and become Christians.

The manuscript fragments which have come down to us containing a translation of the Bible into Gothic are not contemporary with Wulfila but were transcribed in Italy around AD 500. The most important are the *Codex Argenteus* in the University Library in Uppsala (330 leaves, of which 187 are still preserved, of the four Gospels), the *Codex Carolinus* in the library in Wolfenbützel (four leaves containing about 42 verses from the Epistle to the

Romans), the *Codices Ambrosian* 5 fragments in the Ambrosian Library in Milan (185 leaves containing portions of Epistles, a small fragment of a Gothic Calendar, St Matthew, Nehemiah and a commentary on St John), the *Codex Turinensis* in Turin (4 damaged leaves containing fragments of Epistles), and the *Codex Gissensis*, discovered in Egypt near the ancient town of Antinoe (a double sheet of parchment containing fragments from St Luke in Latin and Gothic).

Due to the early migration of the Gothic tribes, the language of the Goths developed differently from that of the West and North Germanic peoples, and as a consequence of subsequent migration into Italy, France and Spain, the Goths gradually became absorbed by other tribes and nations, thus leaving us with little more than Wulfila's Bible translation as evidence of an East Germanic variety of the Germanic languages.

### **North Germanic**

'Common Scandinavian' is a term often used for the Germanic language spoken in Scandinavia in the period after the 'Great Migrations' in which the organization of power was still local and tribal (c.550-c.1050). According to the historians Jordanes (c.550) and Procopius (c.554), there were many small tribal kings in the area which is now Scandinavia, all rivalling to extend their domain at the expense of the others. Of these, the dynasties of the Skjoldungs in Denmark and the Ynglings in Sweden and Norway were the most prominent. Like Common Germanic, Common Scandinavian is attested in runic inscriptions.

The language of the Viking Age (800-1050) was still relatively uniform, referred to as *dānsk tunga* 'Danish tongue' well into the Middle Ages. Since there are no native manuscripts from this period, our knowledge of the language derives from foreign texts, loanwords in other languages, place names datable to this period, runic inscriptions, and later manuscripts, which either go back to an earlier oral tradition or are copies of earlier documents now lost.

Regarding the runic inscriptions, it is interesting to note that there are no or very few Danish inscriptions from around 600 to 800 and only a few, though very important ones, from Norway and Sweden. Around 800 we encounter a revival of runic writing in Denmark, but now in a new alphabet, the younger *futhark*. During this period there are 412 Danish inscriptions, 240 of them on stones erected by wealthy families to commemorate their dead. The younger *futhark* reached Norway around 800, but only a few inscriptions are preserved from this area. Runic writing is also found in the British Isles, Greenland and the Faroes, but in Iceland it is surprisingly sparse and late. Sweden became the great home of runic epigraphy in the younger *futhark*

with more than 2,500 preserved inscriptions, testifying to the wealth and power of the leading families and at the same time providing valuable information concerning the fates of those who fell abroad on Viking expeditions. The fragments of poetry found in the runic inscriptions belong to the rich poetic tradition represented in the later Old Icelandic manuscripts. Since the peoples of the north were linked together primarily by sea routes, it is easy to see how three separate centres of power began to emerge, a southern one (Denmark), a Baltic one (Sweden) and an Atlantic one (Norway). The Danish kings controlled the approaches to the Baltic, the Swedes occupied the region around Lake Mblar, and the Norwegians controlled the fjords, primarily those on the west coast where navigation was best and access to foreign wealth close at hand. The establishment of a Danish archbishopric of the Roman Catholic Church in Lund in 1104, a Norwegian archbishopric in Trondheim (Nidaros) in 1152, and a corresponding Swedish archbishopric in Uppsala in 1164 reflects this political division of Scandinavia into Danish, Norwegian and Swedish kingdoms.

Towards the end of the Viking Age we find a gradual splitting up of Common Scandinavian, initially into two branches: East Scandinavian, comprising the kingdom of Denmark and the southern two-thirds of Sweden and adjacent parts of Norway; and West Scandinavian, comprising most of Norway and the Norwegian settlements in the North Atlantic, in particular Iceland.

#### East Scandinavian

The East Scandinavian branch is not so much a distinct language as the sum of the innovations that encompassed Denmark, most of Sweden, and adjacent parts of Norway at the end of the Viking Age, splitting during the Middle Ages (1050-1340) into Old Danish, Old Swedish and Old Gutnish, the written language of the island of Gotland. Of these, only Danish and Swedish survived the later processes of political centralization and linguistic standardization.

### **Danish**

Danish (*danske*) is the official language of the kingdom of Denmark (comprising Denmark, the Faroe Islands and Greenland), where it is native to the majority of a population of over 5 million. Danish is also the first language or 'cultural language\*' of some 50,000 inhabitants in German Schleswig-Holstein, south of the Danish border.

Modern Standard Danish developed on the basis of the written language of the Reformation, further influenced during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the spoken language of the influential citizens of Copenhagen, the economic and cultural centre of the emerging nation state.

The history of the Danish language falls into three major periods: Old Danish (c.800-c.1100), corresponding roughly to the Viking Age; Middle Danish (c.1100-c.1525), corresponding to the Middle Ages; and Modern Danish (after c.1525), the period after the Reformation and up to modern times.

Danish is the Scandinavian language that has moved farthest away from its Common Scandinavian roots, primarily due to Denmark's geographic location, which forms a bridge between the Nordic countries and the European mainland.

### **Swedish**

Swedish (*svenska*) is spoken as the official language of Sweden by a population of some 8.5 million inhabitants. It is also the first language of some 300,000 speakers in Finland (on the semi-independent Åland Islands and on the west and south coast) and the second language of various linguistic minorities, altogether up to a million, mostly recent immigrants but also indigenous Finns and Saamis (Lapps).

Prior to the Viking Age it is difficult to distinguish Swedish from Danish, but after c.800 the East Scandinavian languages begin to separate, with a major cleavage taking place after extensive Danish innovations around 1300. Modern Standard Swedish developed in the Mälardalen region, the location of the chief centres of government and learning since the Middle Ages (Stockholm and Uppsala), but the standard language was also influenced by the dialect of the Götaland region immediately to the south. While the cultivated pronunciation of Stockholm enjoys considerable prestige, there are also strongly resistant regional norms, particularly those of southern Sweden (*skaenska*) and Finland (*finlandssvenska*).

The history of the Swedish language falls into two major periods: an Old Swedish period covering the Viking Age and the Middle Ages, further subdivided into the runic period (c.800-c.1225), the classical period (c.1225-c.1375) and the younger period (c.1375-c.1526); and a Modern Swedish period with Older Modern Swedish from c.1526 to c.1732 and Younger Modern Swedish from c. 1732 to the present.

### **West Scandinavian**

We can assume that there was regional variation even in the Common Scandinavian period, but by the Viking Age a split is observable between the more conservative west facing the Atlantic and the more innovative east that looked to the Baltic. The West Scandinavian branch of Common Scandinavian consists of Old Norwegian and Old Icelandic, the latter deriving from a form of West Norwegian brought across the ocean and developed in relative

isolation after the period of settlement (870-930). Otherwise West Scandinavian covered what is present-day Norway, the provinces of Jämtland, Heijedalen, and Bohuslän, now belonging to Sweden, the western isles of Shetland, the Faroes, the Orkneys, the Hebrides, the Isle of Man, coastal areas of Scotland and Ireland, and Greenland.

### **Icelandic**

Icelandic (*islenska*) is the West Scandinavian language that has been spoken on Iceland ever since the country was settled over a thousand years ago. Today Modern Icelandic is spoken by a population of close to 260,000.

Since the Icelandic settlers came from different localities along the extensive coastal stretch from northern Norway all the way down to the south, as well as from the British Isles, it is hardly possible that the early language was free of variation. In spite of this, Icelandic has never shown any real tendency to split into dialects. Today regional variation in pronunciation and vocabulary is so insignificant that it would be misleading to speak of Icelandic dialects.

The modern standard is a direct continuation of the language of the original settlers, most strongly influenced by the language of southwestern Norway. During the first 200 years there was no marked difference between Norwegian and Icelandic. Cultural ties between the two countries were strong, even into the fourteenth century. However, in the wake of the Kalmar Union, the political union of Denmark, Norway and Sweden between 1397 and 1523, Icelandic and Norwegian went their separate ways. While Danish became the official language of the State and Church in Norway, the Icelanders translated the Bible and other religious literature into their own native Icelandic.

Icelandic is the most conservative of the Scandinavian languages and represents a unique case of linguistic continuity in that it has retained its original inflectional system and core vocabulary relatively unaltered up to this very day. Various developments in pronunciation make it possible, however, to speak of Old Icelandic (up to c.1550) and Modern Icelandic periods (from c. 1550), less clearly also of Middle Icelandic (c.1350-c.1550).

### **Norwegian**

Norwegian (*norsk*) in two varieties, Neo-Norwegian (*nynorsk*) and Dano-Norwegian (*bokmål*), is the language of over 4 million inhabitants of Norway, including somewhat more than 20,000 Saamis (most of them bilingual). Both Neo-Norwegian and Dano-Norwegian are official languages in Norway. Both are used by national and local officials, and citizens writing to a public institution have the right to receive an answer in the language of their own letter. School districts choose one of the official languages as the language of



instruction and teach the parallel language in separate classes.

During the period in which Danish was the written language of Norway (1380-1814), most Norwegians spoke their local dialects and pronounced Danish using their own Norwegian sounds. The lack of a strong native norm explains in part why the Norwegian dialects were able to thrive on a much larger scale than in Denmark or Sweden. They are still very much alive and socially acceptable even outside the geographic area in which they are spoken.

Since for historical reasons there was no standard Norwegian alternative, such a standard had to be created, either on the basis of the popular dialects or through gradual changes in the Danish norm in the direction of the spoken Norwegian of the urban educated classes. As a result two modern standards developed. The written standard of Neo-Norwegian was established on the basis of the local dialects by the linguist and poet Ivar Aasen in the middle of the nineteenth century. It was officially recognized in 1885 and spread rapidly through the western and midland regions, being taught today as a first language to somewhat less than one fifth of the Norwegian schoolchildren and as a second language to the rest. Dano-Norwegian, or 'book language', is the first language of the majority of the population. Linguistically it is the result of the gradual Norwegianization of the Danish standard which was inherited from the period prior to Norway's independence.

Although it was originally hoped that the two standards could be amalgamated into one 'United Norwegian' (*sammorske*), this seems farther away today than some years ago, the current solution being peaceful co-existence. The presence and daily use of two standard languages and numerous local dialects does not seriously affect communication in Norway, a country which is exemplary today when it comes to the question of linguistic tolerance.

### **Faroese**

Faroese (*føroyskt*) is the first language of the approximately 47,000 inhabitants of a small group of islands in the North Atlantic, midway between Scotland and Iceland (18 in all, of which one is uninhabited), and along with Danish it is one of the official languages of the Faroe Islands. The Faroes, previously under the Norwegian crown, officially became part of Denmark in 1816, receiving semi-independent political status in 1948. Unlike Denmark proper, for example, they have not chosen membership in the European Community.

As a West Scandinavian language, Faroese is related to Icelandic and several of the West Norwegian dialects. It has developed into its present form from the language spoken by the Norwegians who colonized the islands in the

early 800s. Although there is significant variation in pronunciation from island to island, there are no true dialects.

In contrast to Icelandic, the Faroese written tradition is recent and sparse. Aside from a few Faroese characteristics in some of the Old Norwegian texts from the Middle Ages, the earliest texts in Faroese are three ballads recorded around 1773 by J. C. Svabo, the first to record Faroese folk ballads and to collect material for a Faroese dictionary. In 1846 a literary orthography was devised by V. U. Hammershaimb, based on the Icelandic tradition, and in the 1870s a group of Faroese students in Copenhagen began writing creatively in the language. From these beginnings, Faroese was transformed in the course of a century from a mere spoken language into a language used in schools, newspapers, churches, radio and public administration.

The development of a native literary tradition has been slow, but today there exists a sizeable body of Faroese poetry, fiction, educational material and journalism.

### **West Germanic**

Whereas the origin of the modern North Germanic languages can be traced back to one relatively homogeneous North Germanic parent language, the case for a similar parentage of the West Germanic languages is less clear. It has been suggested instead that ancient West Germanic only existed as a conglomerate of three dialect groups, sometimes referred to after Tacitus as 'Ingwaeonic', 'Istwaeonic' and 'Herminonic' or, in modern terms, 'North Sea Germanic', 'Rhine-Weser Germanic, and 'Elbe Germanic'. This tripartite division bears no direct relation to the division of the modern descendant languages, however. Thus standard (High) German is related to two of these hypothetical dialect groups, namely Istwaeonic and Herminonic. English, Frisian, and to a lesser extent Low German and Dutch, can arguably all be traced back to Ingwaeonic, but because of the geographical discontinuity and because of the Viking and Norman French invasions in the ninth to eleventh centuries and resulting language interference, English developed in an idiosyncratic way such that modern English is strongly estranged from both its Anglo-Saxon ancestor and its modern continental Ingwaeonic counterparts. Interestingly, in the case of English insularity lacked the conservative effect it had for North Germanic, Romance (cf. Sardinian as the most conservative Romance language), Celtic (cf. the fact that Celtic, once spoken over vast areas of continental Europe, now only survives on islands - Britain, Ireland - and a peninsula - Brittany) and, within Germanic, for the conservative insular variety of North Frisian.

## German

German (*Deutsch*) is spoken as an official language of the Federal Republic of Germany, as of 1990 united with the former German Democratic Republic (close to 80 million native speakers), Austria (7.5 million), Liechtenstein (15,000), the larger part of Switzerland (4.2 million out of a total of 6.4 million), South Tyrol and a few isolated villages further south in Italy (270,000), the part of Belgium along the border with Germany (65,000), and Luxembourg, which recognizes both the non-indigenous Standard German and the native *Lëtzebuergesch* (360,000), traditionally a Central Franconian dialect. The Swiss, Tyrolean, Belgian and Luxembourg speakers are all in varying degrees diglossic in the local variety and Standard German, as well as bilingual in a Romance language. German is also spoken by autochthonous minorities in Belgium, primarily on the southern side of its border with Luxembourg (estimates vary between 1,000 and 30,000), the French Lorraine (some 300,000) and Alsace (perhaps 1 million), the Danish southern Jutland (20,000), ancient immigrant groups in Eastern Europe, especially the former Soviet Union (1.2 million), Romania (400,000) and Hungary (250,000), in former German colonies (Namibia, Togo, Cameroon), and by a millionfold of relatively recent immigrants especially to the Americas and Australia, most of these again both diglossic and bilingual. German furthermore functions as the second language for the indigenous minorities, Frisian (12,000), Danish (up to 50,000) and Sorbian (anywhere between 20,000 and 100,000) in Germany; Slovene (17,000), Croatian (18,000) and Hungarian (4,000) in Austria; some of the French, Italian, and Romansch-speaking Swiss (more than a million, 600,000, and 40,000, respectively), and for several millions of foreign nationals residing within the German speech area.

The German dialects go back to the dialects of the West Germanic tribes, Franks, Saxons, Hermunduri (Thuringians), Alemanni, Suebi (Swabians) and Bavarians, who settled in the area roughly corresponding to Germany west of the Elbe and Saale, present-day Austria and German-speaking Switzerland. From the time of Charlemagne up to the eighteenth century, a colonizing and merchandizing movement took these dialects eastward, primarily into Bohemia, Slovakia, Upper Saxony, Silesia, Mecklenburg, Brandenburg, Pomerania, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, and even created linguistic enclaves as far east as the Volga or southeast as the Romanian Banat. With the resettlements in the aftermath of the Second World War, some of the eastward expansion was undone, so that except for some isolated speakers and enclaves and some border regions, the German/Slavic-Hungarian border has joined the modern state borders of Germany and Austria.

The dialects of German subdivide into Low German (*Niederdeutsch*, *Plattdeutsch*) and High German (*Hochdeutsch*). The former are spoken in the north of Germany, the latter in the centre and the south. In linguistic terms, the criterion is the degree to which the dialects have been affected by the so-called 'High German Consonant Shift': Low German has not been affected by it, 'Central' German partially, and Southern or 'Upper' German (almost) completely. Modern Standard German developed primarily on the basis of the late medieval chancery language of the court of Saxony and the East Central dialect area around Dresden. In the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries this written language gained gradual acceptance throughout the entire German-speaking area, in part because of the economic power of Saxony and the position of the dialect, intermediate between Low and Upper German and thus more widely comprehensible than either, and in part because Luther made it the language of the Reformation. In this process of geographical expansion, the emerging Modern German standard ousted - but was also influenced by - competing regional standards, the Low German standard of the Hanseatic League in the north, and the Upper German 'Common German' (*gemeines Deutsch*) in the south. The spoken standard spread much later and is based on the North German pronunciation of the written standard, bearing witness to the fact that by the end of the eighteenth century Saxony had lost political power and cultural prestige to Prussia. The expansion of the spoken standard was never completed, however: both in Switzerland and in Luxembourg the local dialects, when spoken, have the social prestige normally associated with a standard language.

High German is documented first in runic inscriptions and glosses, and later in clerical texts, a phase called Old High German (until c.1100), followed by Middle High German (until 1400 or 1500), the period of courtly and epic poetry, then Early New High German (until c.1650), which laid the foundations of the modern New High German (from c.1650). For Low German, one distinguishes between Old Low German or Old Saxon (until c. 1100), Middle Low German (until 1400 or 1500), contemporaneous with the heyday of the Hanseatic League, and thereafter New Low German.

## **Yiddish**

Yiddish (*yidish* 'Jewish') is one of many Jewish languages and in quantitative terms it used to be the most important one. The origin of Yiddish is traced back to medieval Germany, where Jewish settlers adopted the local German as well as adapted it, mixing it partly with elements of Hebrew and Aramaic, which were kept for religious purposes. These Jews are called 'Ashkenazic', after the Hebrew word *Ashkenaz*, roughly meaning 'Germany', different from 'Sephardic', the other large European group, named after

*Sepharad* 'Spain'. From the twelfth to the sixteenth century Ashkenazic groups spread towards Slavic territories (especially present-day Poland, the Ukraine, Byelorussia and Russia, but also Lithuania), and their language absorbed elements from Slavic. From the seventeenth century onwards, their language differed sufficiently from that of the Jews that had stayed in German-speaking areas to justify the modern terms 'Eastern Yiddish' and 'Western Yiddish'. The latter variant began to decline towards the end of the eighteenth century and disappeared nearly completely during the nineteenth century. In the east, however, the nineteenth century saw the language strengthened: instead of, or in addition to, using Hebrew, German or a Slavic language, artists, religious propagandists, socialists, and Zionists turned to the language actually spoken by the Jewish masses, which was Yiddish. In 1908, at a Conference for the Yiddish Language in Czernowitz (today in the Ukraine), Yiddish was accepted as 'a national language of the Jewish people'. Yiddish continued to flourish in literature, the theatre and the press, and it became a language of education, especially in interwar Poland, with Vilnius (now in Lithuania) and Warsaw as its intellectual centres, and a standard language developing on the basis of both Lithuanian and Polish Yiddish dialects. Westward migrations, which started as early as the second half of the seventeenth century and gathered momentum from the end of the nineteenth century, had also taken the language overseas, primarily to North America. On the verge of the Second World War, North America probably had at least three million speakers of Yiddish, while more than seven million had stayed in Eastern Europe, another million being spread over western Europe, Palestine, Central and South America, Africa, Asia and Australia. This meant that more than half of the total Jewish population of the world spoke Yiddish. But then came the Holocaust of six million Jews, subsequent dispersion of the survivors over both the typical immigration countries and western Europe, and linguistic assimilation, partially forced but largely spontaneous, especially to Russian in the former Soviet Union, to English in North America, and to Hebrew in the state of Israel, which was founded in 1948 with Hebrew as its official language. Today Yiddish is estimated to have between one and three million speakers, half of them in the United States, but in every country that has a Jewish population, Yiddish speakers form a minority, usually secular and not passing on the language to the following generation. It is chiefly in orthodox communities that Yiddish is maintained, but then primarily as a spoken in-group language, with Hebrew for religion and the local co-territorial language for contact with outsiders. Throughout its entire history, speakers of Yiddish have attained high levels of bilingualism. Yiddish has always used a version of the Aramaic alphabet, employing its own orthographical rules. The periodization of Yiddish

distinguishes between Early Yiddish (up to c.1250), evidenced by glosses only; Old Yiddish (c.1250 to c.1500); Middle Yiddish (c.1500 to c.1700), the period when the centre of gravity moved east; and New or Modern Yiddish (from c.1700). Sometimes Middle Yiddish is not distinguished and the period of Old Yiddish extended.

### **Pennsylvania German**

Pennsylvania German (*Pensilfaanish, Deitsch*), also popularly known as 'Pennsylvania Dutch' or just 'Dutch', has an estimated 300,000 native speakers chiefly in the United States of America. These speakers descend from German colonists who hailed from all regions of German-speaking Europe, but primarily from the Palatinate (the *Pfalz*), and settled mostly in the eastern part of Pennsylvania during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The first groups consisted primarily of religious sects, but later waves were increasingly comprised of economic migrants. From their primary settlements in Pennsylvania, sectarian groups moved to Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia and North Carolina, but also to the Midwest, Canada and even Central and South America. These groups have kept the language up to the present day.

On the continuum between dialect and language Pennsylvania German gravitates more towards the dialect pole than any other Germanic 'language' treated in this book. The reason for not just calling it a dialect is that it underwent both spontaneous uniformization (dialect levelling) and some standardization efforts, and that it marginally also functions for written communication. All speakers are bilingual in English, and earlier generations diglossic in High German, which was - and still is - used for liturgy. Among secular speakers, the language is in a state of attrition, but in some Old Order Amish and Mennonite communities, for which language is synonymous with religion and which have a high birth-rate, there is no immediate threat to continuity.

### **Dutch**

Dutch (*Nederlands* 'Netherlands, earlier *Dietsch* or *Duytsch* '(language) of the people' - as distinguished from Latin - and *Nederduytsch* 'low Dutch' - as distinguished from German) is the official language of the Netherlands, where it is native to the majority of a population of some fourteen million, with the exception of two or three hundred thousand Frisians and diverse ethnic minorities of seven hundred thousand. It is also an official language of Belgium, where it is the native language in the Flemish community counting up to six million native speakers, thus forming the majority of the population, also comprising c.3.7 million French-speaking Belgians, 900,000 foreign nationals, and up to 90,000 German-speaking Belgians. Dutch is a school

language for many Dutch and Belgians that do not have Dutch as their native language, but the level of competence in Dutch differs enormously, with native Frisians reaching the highest levels of bilingualism. The Brussels conurbation is north of the French-Dutch language border and was thus originally Dutch-speaking, but it is now officially bilingual and the dominant language of its inhabitants has become French. This is one language change among others in the vicinity of the language border which together with a general revival of Dutch plagued twentieth-century Belgium with ethnic and political conflict. A Dutch dialect is still spoken by a dwindling minority in the northwestern corner of France (French Flanders) and it is the language of administration and education in the Dutch Antilles and in Surinam (formerly Dutch Guyana). Afrikaans is sometimes considered to be a Creole of Dutch (see p. 15) and *Negerhollands* is the name of a virtually extinct Dutch Creole on the Virgin Islands. Dutch derives from Old (West) Low Franconian (c.400 to c.1100), the language associated with the tribal settlements from the fourth to the ninth century in what is now The Netherlands and Dutch-speaking Belgium, except for Frisian and Saxon settlements in the north and east of the Netherlands respectively. In view of its later development Old Low Franconian is also called 'Old Dutch'. There are few direct records of this language. Its Middle Dutch successor (c.1100 to c.1500) is well documented from the end of the twelfth century, especially in the western (Flemish) and centre (Brabantic) dialects of the economically more prosperous southern area, now Belgium. Standard Dutch is the variety of Modern Dutch (from c.1600 onwards, after the sixteenth century as a transition period with Middle Dutch) based primarily on the dialect of the Amsterdam region after it had become the capital of an independent nation. After the separation of the north, the south saw its upper layers of society and their transactions in the field of culture, education, administration and religion become increasingly romanized, a process which started in the Middle Ages, and when Belgium acquired its independence in 1830 it only had French as a national language. When Dutch slowly reassumed its social prestige and came to be used again for more forms of communication during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the northern standard was accepted.

### **Afrikaans**

Afrikaans is one of the two official languages of the Republic of South Africa, where it has some 5 million native speakers, i.e. 14 per cent of the total population of 36.5 million, including the inhabitants of the homelands. A little less than half of them are whites, called *Afrikaners*, formerly *Boers* 'farmers', while the other half are Cape Coloureds (*Kaapse kleurlingen*), who are descended from the original Dutch settlers, indigenous Hottentots, and Indian,

Malay and Black slaves. Some further tens of thousands of native speakers live in Namibia, the former German colony of South West Africa, under the control of South Africa from 1914 to 1990, also consisting of both whites and people of mixed race. In both South Africa and Namibia, especially in the rural areas, Afrikaans further serves as a lingua franca for hundreds of thousands of people of all races. As an official language, Afrikaans is in competition with English, the mother tongue of a little less than 3 million, mostly white but some Coloureds and many of the 1 million Indians living in the country. Afrikaans is also the second language of the majority of Afrikaners and Coloureds and many Blacks. Afrikaans and English coexist with several indigenous languages, especially Sotho (9 million), Zulu (7 million) and Xhosa (7 million), all of them Bantu.

South Africa is the result of Dutch and British expansion into the interior of southern Africa from Cape Town, founded in 1652 by the Dutch East India Company. Cape Town is now the legislative capital of the republic as well as of the Cape Province, the largest of the country's four provinces. As Dutch settlement proceeded along the southern coast in an easterly direction throughout the eighteenth century, so their language spread across southern Africa. In 1806 the British took over the Cape - after an earlier brief occupation from 1795-1803 - and started to encourage British emigration to the territory. As a result the Cape Province became bilingual, though Afrikaans remained dominant in the rural areas, mainly because it had become the mother tongue of the Cape Coloured.

The provinces of the Orange Free State, Transvaal and Natal are the result of the *Great Trek*, which took place in the latter half of the 1830s. The *Trek* was the attempt of the Boers to find farmland beyond the reach of the British authority and the English language. Natal was annexed by the British as early as 1843, but the Orange Free State and Transvaal enjoyed the status of independent republics until their defeat by the British in the Boer War of 1899-1901. When founded in the middle of the century, their white population was overwhelmingly Afrikaans-speaking, although the discovery of diamonds and gold in the 1870s and 1880s in these areas attracted many non-Afrikaans-speaking immigrants. These historical events explain why the white population of Natal is predominantly English-speaking, whereas that of Transvaal and the Orange Free State speaks predominantly Afrikaans, especially in the rural areas but also in some cities, as Boers later became city dwellers. In the administrative capital of Pretoria the dominant language is also Afrikaans, since the government and its bureaucracy has been manned chiefly by Afrikaners since the victory of the National Party in the election of 1948. The language of commerce, however, is English.

It is now generally agreed that the Dutch spoken at the Cape had become



a separate idiom by the early nineteenth century ('Cape Dutch'), but the first written records did not appear until half a century later and only in 1925 did the parliament officially adopt Afrikaans as the country's other official language. There is still some disagreement as to whether Afrikaans is an essentially spontaneous development of seventeenth-century Dutch dialects, influenced by neighbouring and co-territorial indigenous and colonial languages, or more of a Creole developed by the non-Dutch inhabitants of the Cape. Independently of whether Afrikaans is to be regarded as a creole of Dutch or not, however, certain sectors of the non-white population speak a variety of Afrikaans called *Oorlams*, dialects which betray a greater number of creole features than standard Afrikaans. Because most native speakers of Afrikaans are bilingual in English and because the two languages are not geographically separated, the latter is in the process of exerting a tremendous influence on the former.

### **Frisian**

Modern Frisian exists as three mutually unintelligible varieties: (a) West Frisian (*Frysk*), spoken in the northern Dutch province of *Fryslân* (*Friesland*) by four hundred thousand people, half of whom have it as their mother tongue; (b) East Frisian or Saterlandic (*Friisk*), spoken in the three villages of Saterland, an islet in a moorland area between Bremen and the Dutch border, probably only by a thousand speakers; and (c) North Frisian (*Friisk*, *Frasch*, *Fresk*), spoken on the islands and the northwestern coast of Schleswig-Holstein by up to ten thousand people. Most of the speakers of Frisian are bilingual in Dutch (West Frisian), Low and High German (East and North Frisian), and even in the Jutish dialect of Danish (northern North Frisian). Each of the varieties is in decline, East Frisian more than North Frisian and both more than West Frisian. Especially during the last two decades, language-preservation attempts have been undertaken, which have resulted in little more than a dictionary and an occasional publication for East Frisian; a regular publication scheme and tuition for North Frisian; and, for West Frisian, regular publications, access to the media of radio and television, mandatory tuition and local governments' assessments of Frisian as an asset. The present geographical location is essentially the result of the gradual reduction of a Frisian territory once stretching continuously along the North Sea coast from North Holland to the Weser and discontinuously extending into the North Frisian area. The oldest direct records are from the late thirteenth century in the variant now called Old Frisian'. For post-1550 records one uses the term 'Modern (New) Frisian' or 'Middle Frisian', and in the latter case 'Modern Frisian' takes over from 1800 onwards.

## English

From the middle of the fifth century, Germanic federates of Jutes, Angles and Saxons left the Danish and German North Sea coast and settled in England, the Angles in the north and the Saxons in the south, except for Kent, which was seized by the Jutes. The native Celts retained control of most of Cornwall, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, but in England they gradually assimilated to the newcomers. The West Germanic dialects spoken then are now referred to collectively as Anglo-Saxon or Old English (up to c.1150), first documented in runic inscriptions, with literary, documentary and religious texts from the eighth century onwards, mostly from the southern, so-called 'West Saxon' area. From the end of the eighth century until the beginning of the eleventh century, the Anglo-Saxon population was itself the victim of an invasion, namely by Vikings, who established themselves in the east of England in the area called the 'Danelaw', merged with the earlier inhabitants and influenced the language, especially the lexicon. A third invasion which shaped the English language, again primarily its lexicon but also the orthography, started in 1066 when the Norman French duke, William the Conqueror, forcefully seized the throne of England and started to colonize the land and introduce a French-speaking administration, nobility and clergy. French was to remain the prestige language until the fourteenth century. The lexical and orthographical changes together with a levelling of the Anglo-Saxon inflectional system characterize the 'Middle English' period, conventionally taken to extend from c.1150 to c.1500, the beginning of 'Modern English'. The latter is the period of the enormous geographical dispersion. In nearby Cornwall, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, English nearly ousted Celtic, and on the Shetlands and Orkneys English replaced the descendant of Old Norwegian called *Norn*. With Britannia's and later the United States' rule of the waves, English was exported around the globe, with the creation of numerous English-based **Creoles** as a side-effect. Today more than 300 million people have English as their native language, and a similar number may have it as a daily second language, and many more as the lingua franca for science, international trade and politics.

The most important predominantly English-speaking areas are the United States (240 million), the United Kingdom (56 million), Canada (24 million), Australia (17 million), Ireland (3.5 million) and New Zealand (3.2 million), though none of them is linguistically homogeneous. Furthermore, English is an official language in a number of countries that lie, or used to lie, in the British colonial or United States' spheres of influence, where it either has substantial numbers of native speakers (e.g. South Africa with nearly 3 million) but more often of second-language speakers (e.g. the Philippines with 11 million), and where it is co-territorial with indigenous languages,

other western languages (e.g. Cameroon with French, and South Africa with Afrikaans) or with **Creoles** (e.g. Jamaica). There are many national variants of English, differing primarily in pronunciation and less so in grammar and spelling. British English has a standard that originated in the London dialect area, but has now become a sociolect, associated with the educated upper classes and often heard on radio and television.

### **Into the Twenty-first Century**

Most of the Germanic languages are not 'endangered species'. On the contrary, most of them lead the protected life of a national language of one or more states. English will most likely increase its role as an international language, and within Europe the liberalization in Eastern Europe will probably revitalize German as a lingua franca. The three Germanic languages that are not associated with a modern state will have a harder time surviving through the next century, however. The fate of Pennsylvania German and Yiddish probably depends on whether or not the sectarian lifestyle of Amish, Mennonite and Jewish communities will continue to attract followers. Most threatened perhaps is Frisian, since it has neither a state nor a religion to support it.