

GENEALOGICAL CLASSIFICATION (Part 1)

THE FAMILY TREE THEORY



It was formulated by August Schleicher (1871).

The theory assumes that languages change in regular, recognizable ways (the **Regularity Hypothesis**) and because of this, similarities among languages are due to a “genetic” relationship among those languages (the **Relatedness Hypothesis**).

In order to fill the particulars of such a relationship among those languages, it is necessary to **reconstruct** the hypothetical **parent** language from which the related languages are derived.

In keeping with the analogy of language relationships to human families, the theory makes use of the terms **parent** (or **mother**), **daughter**, and **sister** languages.

For example, in the family tree of IE, French and Spanish are **sisters**, both are **daughters** of Latin; Germanic is the **mother** of English.

The family tree model shows the **direction of change** and the **relations among languages**; the older stages of the languages being located higher in the tree and direct descendants being linked to their ancestors through straight lines (or branches).

Study the handout! Compare it with the one by Schleicher (p. 120).

Shortcomings of the family tree model resulting from considering a language as a biological organism:

- i. faulty views with regards to language change

- each language forms a uniform speech community without internal variation and without contact with its neighbour languages (e.g. it was assumed that all speakers of Latin spoke exactly the same way at the time when French and Spanish split off)
- the split of a parent language into its daughter languages is an abrupt occurrence, happening without intermediate stages.

The above two assumptions are false: no language is uniform or isolated from others, and languages do not split apart abruptly but rather drift apart indiscernibly, starting as dialects and only ending up as separate languages after years of gradual change.

(In fact, the dividing point between two “dialects” and “two languages” is often impossible to locate and is often obscured by non-linguistic (social, political) factors.)

Languages, unlike animals or trees, do not have an independent existence: they are sets of conventions. Changes are introduced by their speakers and not by the language itself.

- distinct branches or sub-branches of the family tree should not undergo change caused by another branch (or sub-branch) that separated from the stem earlier (e.g. English should not be influenced by Latin -- yet, there are many words borrowed from Latin into English).
- ii. misconceptions that result from names of successive stages of a language (e.g. OE, ME, NE -- these terms suggest that NE is a direct descendant of OE; however, modern standard English developed from the London dialect, while OE has come down to us in a West Saxon form).

Because of its simplicity the family tree has remained a useful model -- all genealogical relationships have been based on it and terminology associated with this model is widely used.

THE INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGE FAMILY

PIE was spoken between 5,000 and 6,000 years ago, probably in Southern Russia, possibly by a people of the so-called Kurgan culture, see p. 42 and pp. 300-301 (there are several other theories).

1. The Indo-Iranian subgroup

INDIC:

- *Rigveda* (the earliest Indic text; before 1000 BC)
 - the language of the *Rigveda* and the *Vedas* has become obsolete -- commentaries and grammars were prepared by priests. The result of these linguistic interpretations was the development of a standardized language that did not undergo change; it was completely regulated and described in detail: *sanskṛta* or **Sanskrit**.
 - beside the *sanskṛta* (regulated, cultivated, correct) language there existed spoken languages called *prakṛta* (popular, natural) or **Pankrits** languages.
 - Three stages of Indic:
 - a. Vedic Sanskrit or Vedic (1,200-800 BC)
 - b. Classical Sanskrit (400 BC)
 - c. Pankrits
- } Old Indic
- Middle Indic
- From the end of the Middle Indic period (before 1,000 AD) there are documents written in languages referred to as Apabhamsas (off-branchings):
- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| MODERN INDIC
LANGUAGES/DIALECTS
(developed from the | } | Hindi
Urdu (a version of Hindi spoken in Pakistan)
Bengali
Gujerati |
|---|---|--|

Apabhamsas)

Marathi

Punjabi

Sinhalese (spoken in Ceylon)

Romany (spoken by the Gypsies)

IRANIAN

- **Old Iranian** > Avestan and Old Persian
- The book *Avesta* is a sacred book of the Zoroastrian religion; the poems of *Gathas* are from 1,000 BC
- Old Persian is documented from inscriptions (by Darius and Xerxes); among these the most important is the Behistan (Iran) inscription → trilingual text (Old Persian, Akkadian and Elamite)!

They illustrate the close relationship between Old Persian, Avestan and Sanskrit (see the example on p. 70.)

- **Middle Iranian:** 300BC - 900 AD



Pehlevi or Middle Persian (the language of the Persian Empire)

Sogdian

Saka or Scythian (texts discovered recently!)

- **Iranian languages at present:**

Balochi (West Pakistan)

Pashtu or Afghan (Afghanistan)

Farsi or Persian (Iran)

Kurdish (Western Iran, Iraq, Turkey and the former Soviet Union)

Ossetic (Northern Caucasus)

etc.

1. The Indo-Iranian subgroup (see above)
2. The Armenian subgroup
3. The Albanian subgroup
4. The Slavic subgroup
5. The Baltic subgroup
6. The Greek subgroup
7. The Italic subgroup
8. The Celtic subgroup

9. The Germanic subgroup
10. The Tocharian subgroup
11. The Anatolian subgroup

Study these subgroups from the book, pp. 68-83.

The discovering old documents/texts in the 20th century contributed greatly to the reconstruction of PIE -- now we can reconstruct PIE as of a period before 3,000 BC.

Tablet in Crete (pp.74-75)

- 1400 to 1200 BC
- a variety of Greek (Mycenaean Greek)

Chinese-Turkestan Buddhist writings from the sixth to eighth centuries

- Tocharian language (IE)! (pp. 81-82)

preserved IE palatals as *k* before back vowels (the change of some IE palatals to sibilants took place **after** the Hittites left the IE community!
Significance: we now know the earlier state of PIE!

Boğaz-köy (Turkey) discovery: Hittite (1700- 1200 BC) -- another IE language! (pp. 82-83)

The satem-centum subdivision

This classification is based on the sibilants (in three branches) vs. velars (in the remaining branches) in IE languages.

(Study the examples on p. 73)

Earlier assumption: PIE had split into two groups (eastern and western groups).

However, because there is no additional evidence for the split, it is not accepted today that there was a single predecessor for *satem* and *centum* languages -- there is only one such change, and even that does not show up everywhere it would be expected (e.g. in Baltic languages not all palatalized velars have become fricatives).

Anatolian languages, Tocharian – the change from *k* > *sibilant* did not take place because they had left the IE speech community before the sound change took place.

Significance of the satem/centum subdivision: it assists in the establishing of relationships to **other** language families.

Example: the FU language family was still unified when this change took place in IE (around 4,000 BC):

Hu = Fi > PFU = PIran.

száz *sata* *s'ata *s'ata > PIE **kmto*- 'hundred'

szarv *sarvi* *s'arwe *s'arva > PIE **krwo*- 'horn'

We may adopt the view that by the fourth millenium BC certain independent languages had already emerged in IE -- using this as a starting point from which it is possible to postulate the dates of the FU period.