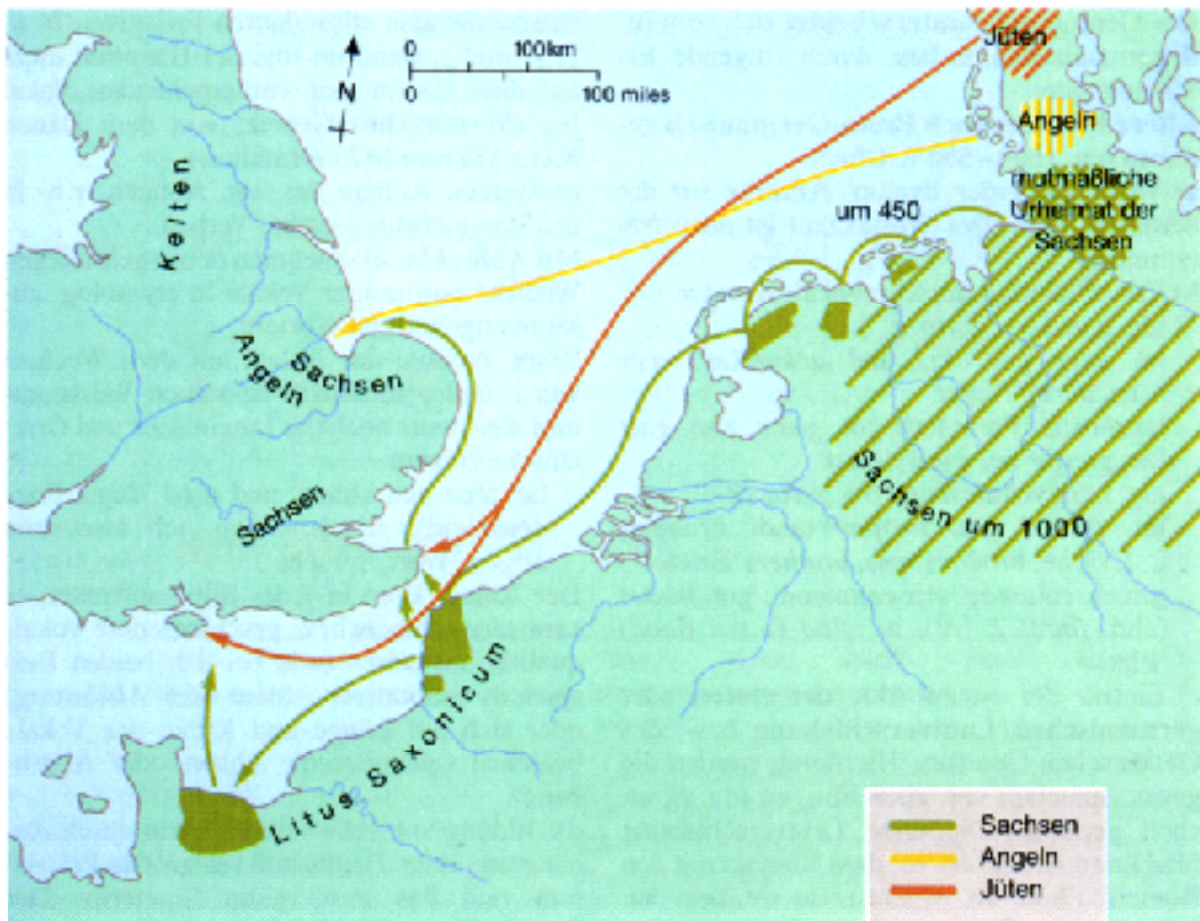# English - a German dialect?

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Rotary Club Munich International

Hilton Hotel Am Tucherpark

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Conquest of Celtic speaking Britannia ca. 450 A.D.
from the Low German speaking Continental coastal regions

Mr. President,

dear Rotarian Friends,

dear Guests:

As you can see on my title page, the people who were to become the English came from the Continent - as they say in England -, more precisely: from the German coastal regions. They were - and they understood themselves to be - Angles and Saxons; they called their language *Saxon*; and it is only owed to a long and complicated one-thousand year history that the name *Anglian — English —* won out over *Saxon.*

In the middle of the fifth centuy, the Angles and the Saxons came from what is now Germany, namely Lower Saxony and Sleswig-Holstein, where Low German is spoken to the present day; and they took with them to Britannia the language as it was spoken in their ancestral homeland fifteen hundred years ago.

There were also minor groups of different tribal origin — Beda, the Venerable Bede, the early 7-th century British historian, specifically mentions the Jutes from Jutland; but they too spoke Low German, because Jutland became Danish only after it was militarily weakened by the exodus of many capable people in the course of this conquest of Britannia.

The language spoken in Britannia where the Anglo-Saxons arrived was a variety of Celtic called Brittonic, the people themselves were called Britons; that name survives in the designations *British* and *Great Britain.*

The Brittonic language gradually died out in what was to become England but it survives in the extreme West of Britain, namely in Wales, where it is called Welsh, German *Walisisch.* Brittonic was very different from Anglo-Saxon; so there cannot be any doubt that Contemporary English continues the language of the Low German conquerors. And in that sense, the historical sense, the answer to the question formulated in the title of my talk has to be an unequivocal Yes.

And indeed it is quite easy to demonstrate the German-ness of English. Any bilingual layman can do this; and a language historian can show it even better for the old Anglo-Saxon language copiously attested from the seventh to the eleventh centuries.

Word list	German	English
	Pfennig	*penny*
	zehn	*ten*
	Korn	*corn*
	hoffen	*hope*
	essen	*eat*
	machen	*make*
	Apfel	*apple*
	Witz	*wit*
	Bock	*buck*

The similarity of these words by sound and meaning is, of course, not accidental. It proves that German and English are, as linguists say, closely related languages and thereby that only a short while ago — and fifteen hundred years **is** only a short while in terms of language history — they were the same language. If we compare these words to corresponding words in other languages you know — French, Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Hebrew — it becomes quite clear that this is so. I have chosen Spanish, a related but less closely related language than English, and Basque, an unrelated language.

German	English	Spanish	Basque
Pfennig	penny	(centavo)	(⇒ zentabo)
zehn	ten	diez	(hamar)
Korn	corn	grano/(cereal)	(⇒ garaun)
hoffen	hope	(esperar)	(itxaro)
essen	eat	(comer)	(jan)
machen	make	(hacer)	(egin)
Apfel	apple	(manzana)	(sagar)
Witz	wit	(ingenio)	(umore, Span.), (gatz)
Bock	buck	(cabrón), (ciervo)	(aker), (-ar)

1. German and English are closely related.
2. German/English and Spanish are distantly related.
3. German/English/Spanisch and Basque are unrelated.

I think this makes it obvious what is meant by "closely related". The following overview shows it again by the systematicity it maps.

<u>Indo-European languages</u> ([†] means 'extinct', numbers indicate main branches)

1 Germanic

    West Germanic   _____

        [†]Langobardic   ⇑

        High German dialects   High Germanic

            Standard German   ⇓

                              _____

        Low German   ⇑

        Netherlandish

            Dutch

                Afrikaans

            Flemish

        Frisian

        English

    North Germanic

        West Norse

            Icelandic, Faroese   Low Germanic

        Norwegian

        East Norse

            Danish

            Swedish

            Gutnish

        [†]East Germanic ([†]Gothic)   ⇓

                              _____

2 Italic ([†]Oskian-[†]Umbrian; Latino-[†]Faliscan - Latin, Romance langs. incl. **Spanish**)

3 Celtic

    [†]Continental Celtic: [†]Gaulish, [†]Ibero-Celtic [= Celtiberian]

    Insular Celtic: Irish, Scottish-Galic, <u>Welsh</u> (with [†]<u>Brittonic</u>), Breton

4 Baltic (Lithuanian, Latvian, [†]Old Prussian)

5 Slavic

    West Slavic

        Wendish, Polish, Kashubic, Czech, Slovak

    East Slavic

        Belorussian, Russian, Ukrainian

    South Slavic

        [†]Old Church Slavonic (Old Bulgarian)

        Bulgarian, Slovenian, Serbian, Croatian, Macedonian

6 Greek

7 Armenian

8 Albanian

9 [†]Anatolian ([†]Hittite, [†]Luvian a.o.)

10 [†]Tocharian ([†]Tocharian A, [†]Tocharian B)

11 Indo-Iranian: [†]Vedisch, Sanskrit; New Indic languages such as Hindi;
        [†]Avestan, Persian, Pashto, Kurdic

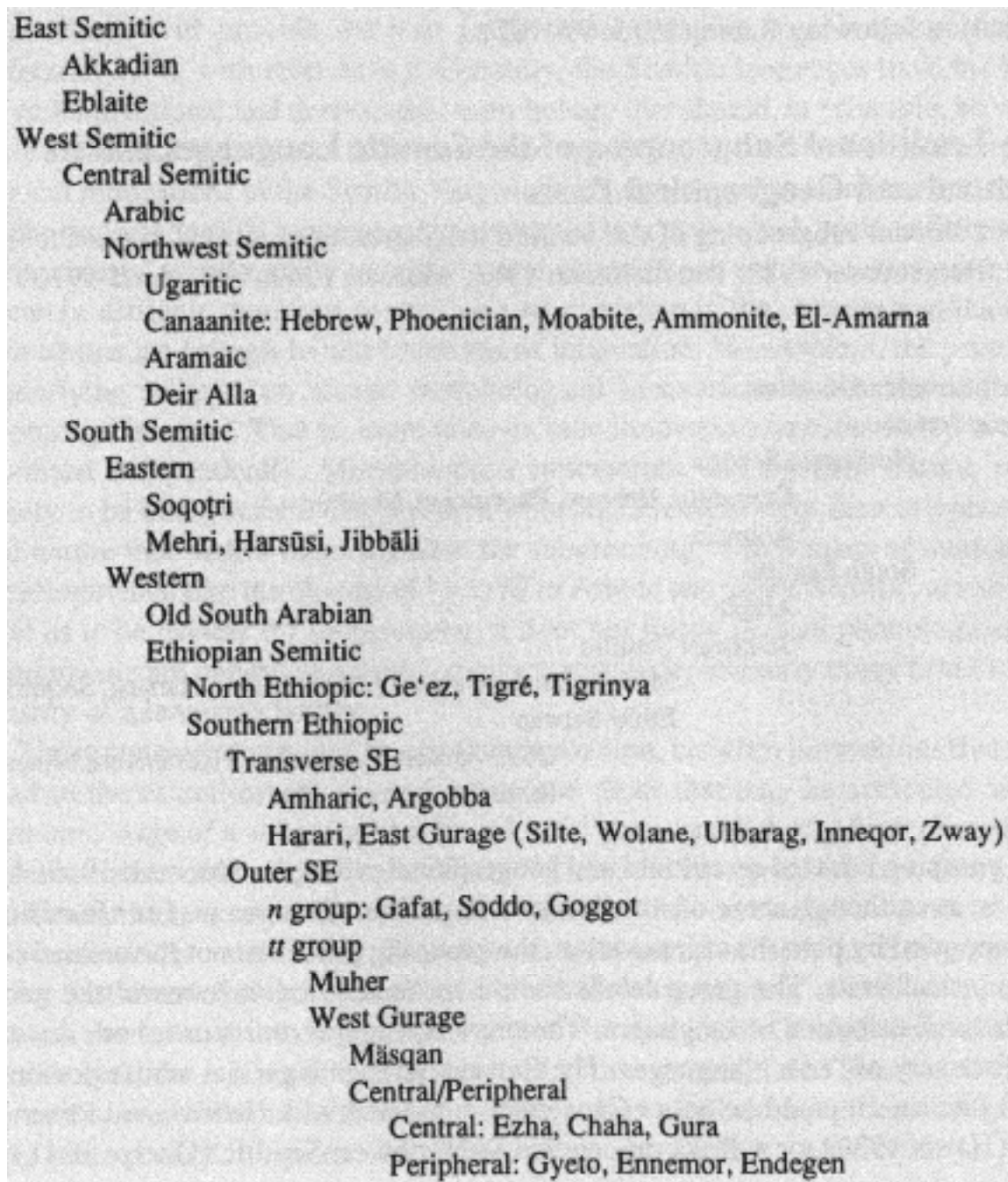12 [†]A number of further languages of which little more is known than their names.

Here you see Low German and English in the same subgroup of the same branche, and Spanish in a different branch — and Basque not at all: Basque is in a different family, where it is the only member. That is somewhat unusual, like a human family consisiting of a single person; but you may think of a single family member surviving a tsunami or some other catastrophy, and that is indeed no bad picture of what happened to the Old Basque language family, the tsunami being the Indo-European peoples flooding almost the entire Eurasian continent.

A "normal" language family beside Indo-European is Uralic, to which dozens of languages belong, among them — in the Finno-Ugric branch — Finnish, Hungarian, and Estonian.

Another well-known family — and one to which I will make brief reference later tonight — is the Hamito-Semitic family, to which the Semitic sub-family belongs, exactly as Germanic belongs to the Indo-European language family.

The Semitic languages

From: Robert Hetzron[†], *The Semitic languages*, London: Routledge, 1997, page 6.

```
East Semitic
    Akkadian
    Eblaite
West Semitic
    Central Semitic
        Arabic
        Northwest Semitic
            Ugaritic
            Canaanite: Hebrew, Phoenician, Moabite, Ammonite, El-Amarna
            Aramaic
            Deir Alla
    South Semitic
        Eastern
            Soqoṭri
            Mehri, Ḥarsūsi, Jibbāli
        Western
            Old South Arabian
            Ethiopian Semitic
                North Ethiopic: Ge'ez, Tigré, Tigrinya
                Southern Ethiopic
                    Transverse SE
                        Amharic, Argobba
                        Harari, East Gurage (Silte, Wolane, Ulbarag, Inneqor, Zway)
                    Outer SE
                        n group: Gafat, Soddo, Goggot
                        tt group
                            Muher
                            West Gurage
                                Mäsqan
                                Central/Peripheral
                                    Central: Ezha, Chaha, Gura
                                    Peripheral: Gyeto, Ennemor, Endegen
```

Semitic is one of five (or more) branches of Hamito-Semitic (also named Afro-Asiatic): **Semitic**, **Libyco-Berber** (North and Northwest Africa), **Cushitic** (Ethiopia), **Egyptian**, **Chadic** (West Africa). Cf. Edward Lipiński, *Semitic languages: Outline of a comparative grammar*, Leuven: Peeters, 1997, page 41.

Returning once again to our word list, we see that by the criterion of the so-called High Germanic (or High German) consonant shift, English is not only very close to German in general but to Low German in particular.

German and English compared in relation to the High Germanic consonant shift, which turned plosives, *p t k*, into affricates, *pf (t)z kch*, and fricatives, *ff ss ch*, in different positions within the word:

	High German	Low German	English

1. *p t k* at the beginning of words:

Pfennig	penning	penny
zehn	tien	ten
Korn/Kchorn	korn	corn

2. Single *p t k* after vowels:

hoffen	hopen	hope
essen	eten	eat
machen	maken	make

3. Double *p t k* (occurs only after vowels):

Apfel	appel	apple
Witz	witt	wit (witty)
Bock/Bokch	bock	buck

If we look at English not only in lexical terms but also in grammatical terms, we see once again that syntactically and morphologically — in short: grammatically — English is German, a variety of German, especially looking at the oldest form of English accessible to us in the texts.

Anglo-Saxon (Old English) word order

(1)   Ac   him <u>hæfdon</u>   Pene   þone weg <u>forseten</u>.
        Aber   ihm   <u>hatten</u>   Karthager   den Weg   <u>verlegt</u>

This example shows the so-called sentence brace (German "Satzklammer") for which the German language is famous (or rather: notorious).

(2)   Ōhthere   <u>sǣde</u>   his   hlāforde, ...,
        Ōhthere   <u>sagte</u>   seinem   Herrn

        þæt hē ealra Norðmonna   norþmest   <u>būde</u>.
        daß   er   von-allenNordleuten   am-nördlichsten   <u>wohnte</u>

This example shows the position of the conjugated verb in the second position in main clauses ("Hauptsätze") and in later (often final) position in dependent clauses ("Nebensätze") — for which again the German language is famous (notorious).

A morphological detail
(see above example 2, second line)

Anglo-Saxon	English	Low German	HighGerman
hē	*he*	*he*	*er*

Of course, the Anglo-Saxon word order shown in this transparency is that of German but no longer that of English:

_____

Anglo-Saxon (Old English) word order

(1)　　Ac　　him　<u>hæfdon</u>　　Pene　　þone weg　<u>forseten</u>.
　　　　Aber　　ihm　<u>hatten</u>　　Karthager　　den　Weg　<u>verlegt</u>

　　　*But　　to-him　<u>had</u>　　Carthaginians　the　way　<u>blocked</u>

　　　But Carthaginians <u>had</u> <u>blocked</u> his way.

Verb follows the subject; no sentence brace.

(2)　　Ōhthere　　<u>sǣde</u>　　his　　hlāforde, ...,
　　　　Ōhthere　　<u>sagte</u>　seinem　　Herrn
　　　　Ōhthere　　told　　his　　lord

　　　þæt　hē　ealra Norðmonna　　norþmest　　<u>būde</u>.
　　　daß　er　von-allenNordleuten　am-nördlichsten　<u>wohnte</u>

　　　*that　<u>he</u>　　of-allNorthmen　　northmost　　<u>lived</u>

　　　that <u>he</u> <u>lived</u> farther north than any other Norwegians.

Verb follows the subject; no difference between main and dependent clauses.

_____

I will return to structural differences later.

　　　To summarize what I have said so far: Yes, English is a German dialect; it is, indeed, a Low German dialect.

<div align="center">＊＊＊</div>

Now, if this were in earnest the statement I wanted to make, I certainly would not have had the courage to stand up in front of you and talk about it; because this much is simply too obvious, and so simple that it is probably part of the curricula of good high-schools. This was merely the introduction.

　　　In the two main parts of my talk I will show that the answer is really wrong, namely: that it is only correct if one adopts a strictly historical — or: descent — perspective on language, without proper regard to what the language is really like, **and why**.

Looked at it in terms of the total vocabulary, and in terms of grammatical structure, English does not at all give the appearance of a German dialect. And if we consider its real-world history, it is easy to understand why. Modern English is indeed so different from Modern German that it is one of the most difficult languages for Germans to learn — and vice versa.

So now I come to:

Part 1: Lexical influence from French

When earlier on I compared German and English words, some of you may have noticed that they had been carefully selected. If I had taken a random selection of words the number of identicals would have been much smaller. The reason is that the English vocabulary is an amazing mixture of Anglo-Saxon words with French and Latin words plus a number of others from many languages of the world.

The composition of the English lexicon (without names):

1.	**Anglo-Saxon**		**22.96 %**
2.	Other Germanisc Languages		4.21 %
	a. Scandinavian	2,23 %	
	b. Low German	1,46 %	
	c. High German	0.52 %	
3.	Romanice languages		31,28 %
	a. **French**	**29,36 %**	
	b. Other	1,92 %	
4.	**Latin**		**29,25 %**
5.	Greek		5,50 %
6.	Celtic languages		0,44 %
7.	Other European languages		0,13 %
8.	Non-Indo-European languages		2,07 %
9.	Of unknown origin		4,17 %
			————
			100,01 %

You see that in sheer numbers, both the French and the Latin parts of the English vocabulary are larger than the inherited Anglo-Saxon part. The following table shows that there remains a higher proportion of Anglo-Saxon words in the most basic every-day vocabulary:

The composition of the English lexicon (without names), arranged by word lists (dictionaries) of decreasing length:

Length (number of words)	77,464	26,784	3,984
1. Anglo-Saxon	22.96 %	27.90 %	47.08 %
2. French	29.36 %	36.50 %	38.00 %
3. Latin	29.25 %	22.43 %	9.59 %
4. Other	18.75 %	13.20 %	5.32 %
	100.00 %	100.03 %	99.99 %

For German we do not have such telling counts as for English in these tables. But let us look at a piece of text in English and German; it is a passage from Thackerey and a plain idiomatic translation into German by myself.

Miss Sharp's father was an *artist*, and in that *quality* had given *lessons* of drawing at *Miss* Pinkerton's *school*. He was a clever man, a *pleasant companion*, a careless *student*, with a great *propensity* for running into *debt*, and a *partiality* for the *tavern*. When he was drunk he *used* to beat his wife and daughter; and the next morning, with a headache, he would *rail* at the world for its *neglect* of his *genius*, and *abuse*, with a good deal of cleverness, and sometimes with *perfect reason*, the *fools*, his brother *painters*.

English: 21 different loan-words from French and Latin.

Fräulein Sharps Vater war *Künstler* und hatte in dieser *Eigenschaft* an *Fräulein* Pinkertons *Schule* Zeichen*unterricht* erteilt. Er war ein kluger Mann, ein *angenehmer Geselle*, ein nachlässiger *Student*, mit einem großen *Hang* zum *Schulden*machen und einer *Vorliebe* für die *Schenke*. Wenn er betrunken war, *pflegte* er seine Frau und seine Tochter zu schlagen; und am nächsten Morgen *spottete* er dann, von Kopfschmerzen geplagt, über die Welt, weil sie sein *Genie verkannte*, und *beschimpfte*, mit ziemlichem Geschick und oft genug mit *völligem Recht*, jene *Narren*, seine *Maler*genossen.

German: 3 different loan-words from French and Latin.

In this text English has seven times as many Romance (French and Latin) loan-words than German; and that number may well represent the proportion more generally.

How did Anglo-Saxon contract so many French loan-words, with the effect that the language was opened to excessive borrowing from Latin and other languages as well?

The answer is easy: England was conquered in the year 1066 by Duke William of Normandy, a French-speaking duchy. William made himself king of England. He eliminated the entire Anglo-Saxon ruling class in state and church, and quite literally so, namely in the typical way of a competent conqueror, i.e. by killing them, blinding them, putting them in monasteries, or driving them out of the country. He replaced them with his own Norman nobles, and he declared French to be the official language of England. Thus, for about three hundred years the upper classes of England spoke French, while Anglo-Saxon was reduced to a language of the subdued, the uneducated, the farmers, the slaves.

In these three centuries an ever increasing number of French words were borrowed into Anglo-Saxon, with a big push toward the end of this period when the French ruling class, losing their strongholds on the Continent, began learning Anglo-Saxon and, in the process, lazily took their French vocabulary with them into the new language.

When did the French loan-words enter Anglo-Saxon?
Distribution by percentages:

until 1150	0,3%	
until 1200	0,6%	
13th c.	13,6%	
14th c.	**31,8%**	(ca. 300 years after 1066!)
15th c.	15,7%	
16th c.	14,6%	
17th c.	8,9%	
18th c.	5,4%	
19th c.	7,2%	
20th c.	1,9%	
	————	
	100,0%	

Entire lexical fields were replaced by French terminology in this process, such as military terms, governmental terms, legal terms:

The superstratal character of many French loan-words in English

1. War, weapons, and the military

army, *navy*, *peace*, *enemy*, *battle*, *arms*, *siege*, *defense*, *ambush*, *retreat*, *soldier*, *guard*, *spy*, *sergeant*, *brandish*, *vanquish* etc.

2. The law

judgement, *justice*, *crime*, *plea*, *suit*, *advocate*, *prison*, *punishment*, *accuse*, *arrest*, *seize*, *pardon*, *just*, *innocent*, *property*, *heritage*, *estate* etc.

3. State and society

state, *government*, *court*, *crown*, *council*, *sovereign*, *treaty*, *tax*, *treason*, *public office*, *noble*, *duke*, *peasant*, *servant*; *sermon*, *prayer*, *penance*, *parson*, *saint*, *pity*, *virtue*, *penitence* etc.

Since we have several members in our club working in law-related professions, I show this replacement with a list I have borrowed from a publication by Angelika Lutz, professor of the history of the English language at the University of Erlangen.

The replacement of Anglo-Saxon legal terms by French ones

Anglo-Saxon: Germanic terms		Modern English: French terms
dōm	—	*judgment*
dōmærn†, dōmhūs†	—	*court[-house]*
dōmlic†	—	*judicial*
dēma†, dēmere†	—	*judge*
dēman	—	*to judge*
fordēman†	—	*to condemn*
fordēmend†	—	*accuser*
betihtlian†	—	*to accuse, charge*
gebodian†, gemeldian†	—	*to denounce, inform*
andsacian†, onsecgan†	—	*to renounce, abjure*
gefriþian†	—	*to afford sanctuary*
mānswaru†, āþbryce†	—	*perjury*
mānswara†	—	*perjurer*
mānswerian†	—	*to perjure oneself*
(ge)scyld†, scyldignes†	—	*guilt*
scyldig†	—	*guilty, liable*
scyldlēas†	—	*guiltless*

The exceptions that prove the rule:

āþ	>	*oath*
þēof	>	*thief*
þēofþ	>	*theft*
morþ(or) + French *murdre*	>	*murder*

Legend:	†	died out
	—	replaced by
	>	developed into, preserved as

In German one can conduct a juridical discourse for minutes using Germanic terms only, such as *Gericht*, *Rechtsanwalt*, *Richter*, *Urteil*, *Schöffe*, *Meineid*, whereas in English it is difficult to form a single such sentence without using terms of French origin.

English is famous for a property which no other known language possesses: It has two words each for edible animals, depending on whether the animal is outside the house — or inside, namely as meat for the dinner-table.

Designations of edible animals

On the farm, in the forest	In the kitchen, on the dinner-table			
Anglo-Saxon	English	⇐	French*	meaning in French
ox	*beef*		*bœuf*	'ox' & 'beef'
calf	*veal*		*veau*	'calf' & 'veal'
sheep	*mutton*		*mouton*	'sheep' & 'mutton'
pig	*pork*		*porc*	'pig' & 'pork'
deer	*venison*		*venaison*	(≈ German *Wild***)

*   Actually, from the Old French of the 13th century into the late Anglo-Saxon of that time.

**   I.e., the word means both the huntable animal and its meat. The word derives from Latin *venationem* 'hunt, hunting', from *venari* 'to hunt'.

This is regularly interpreted as a special refinement and culturedness of this language. But that is quite wrong. The Anglo-Saxons were a conquered, subjugated nation without a native upper class of their own. They were servants to their French-speaking masters; they were to a large extent slaves. And naturally they also had to serve their French masters at the dinner table, and they equally naturally had to respond to their masters' French commands. That is how they learned these French words for the various meats, whereas on the farm and in the woods they continued using their native Anglo-Saxon words for the animals. In short, this much admired division between *pig* and *pork*, *sheep* and *mutton* etc. does not at all reflect a language of culture and refinement but a language of servitude and slavery. It was merely preserved by the speakers of the language as it rose again to a language of writing and culture when French lost its hold in the upper echelon of society and the new idiom, English, rose to the status of national language.

***

Up to this point all I have said may still be well-known; and indeed all I have explained is the partly German, partly French character of English. What I have not yet explained at all is the un-German grammar of English. And in fact the amazing grammatical peculiarities of this language cannot be ascribed to French influence, simply because French does not itself have them. So I turn to the second and final main part of my talk:

Part 2: Grammatical influence from Brittonic, i.e. from Celtic

Linguists differentiate between essentially two effects of language contact: **borrowing** and **language shifting**. They have discovered the following generalizations.

Borrowing as a rule takes place when speakers take over words, and habits of speaking, from a more prestigious language, most commonly the language of conquerors, a **superstratum**, as it is called.

Language shifting as a rule takes place when rather than continue borrowing, speakers of the less prestigious language, the **substratum**, simply shift to the superstate language, such as the language of the conquerors. You can see that going on in colonial areas all over the world.
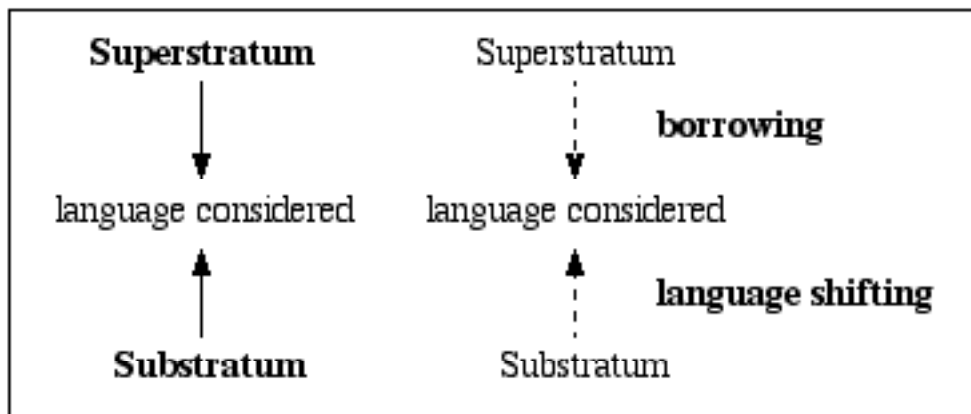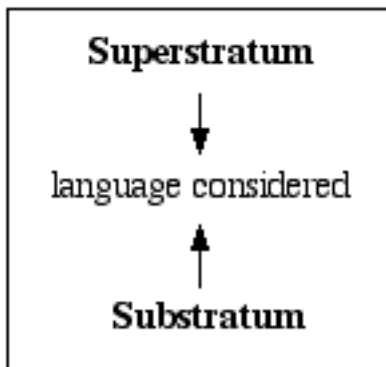
Superstrate rule: Superstrata give words to their substrata, less so structure.

Substrate rule: Substrata give structure to their superstrata, less so words.
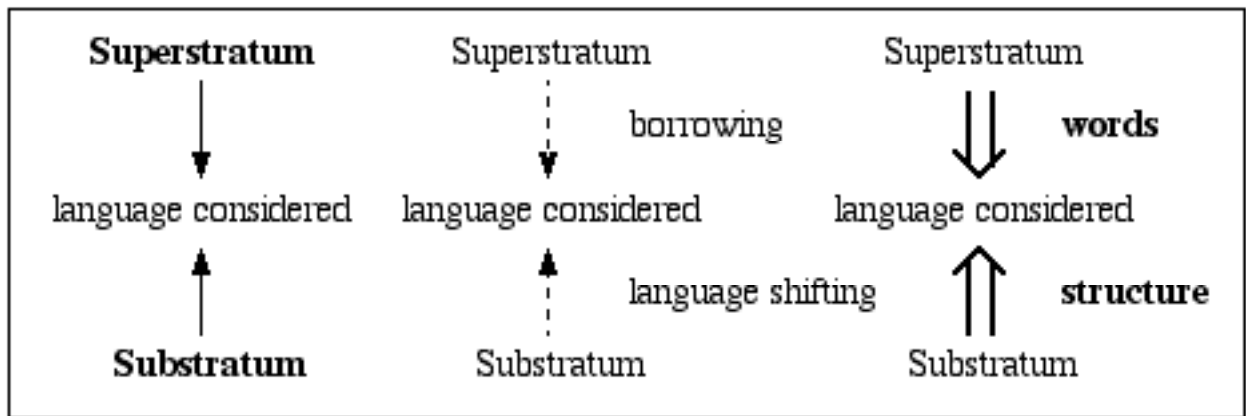
Time rule for borrowing:
The effect of borrowing is reflected in the substratum with no delay.

Time rule for language shifting:
The effect of language shifting is reflected in the superstratum only centuries later, and usually only after some social upheaval unsettling the ruling class.

We have already seen how these rules work for borrowing from a superstratum, namely borrowing of thousands of words but no structure into Anglo-Saxon from the French of the conquerors. So the remaining question is: How did English get its new, un-German structure? The answer is straightforward: From the substratum, the Celtic substratum.

English has very few Celtic loan-words; the best known is *clock*, which was also carried as *Glocke* into Old High German by Irish missionaries. I mention in passing that this very fact, the small number of Celtic loan-words in English, has been interpreted by people with little linguistic knowledge but strong prejudices as suggesting that the Anglo-Saxons from the Continent killed all Celts or drove them off to Wales and beyond, so that the English could boast, as they did until the First and Second World Wars, that they were pure-blooded Germans, with no Celtic blood admixture whatsoever.

Now linguistic knowledge has grown (I won't say anything about prejudice). We know that substrata do not give words but structure to their superstrata, and linguists on the Continent, though not yet in England, have begun studying Celtic structural features of English with increasing intensity — I am proud to say that I have done much to enliven this research.

The following picture shows a book emanating from a conference in Finland (I am in the book with an essay); in Finland they even have a nationally funded research project studying the Celticity of English.
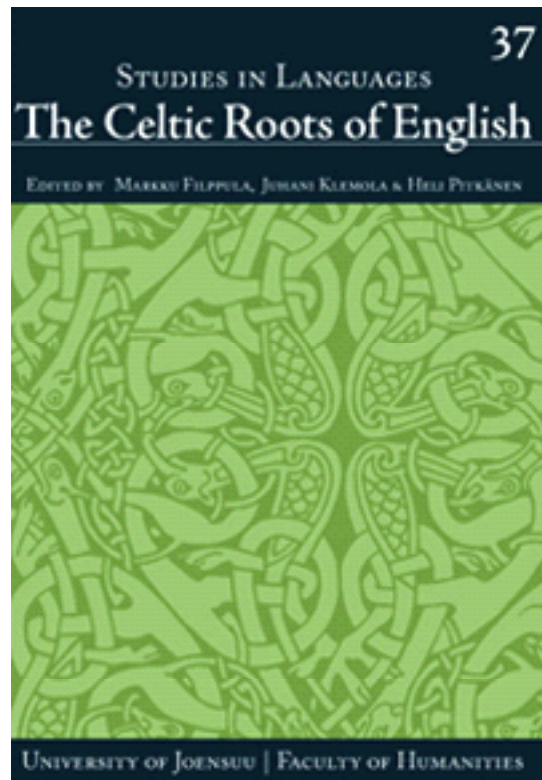
But in Germany too there are conferences and publications on the matter — I am in this book too:
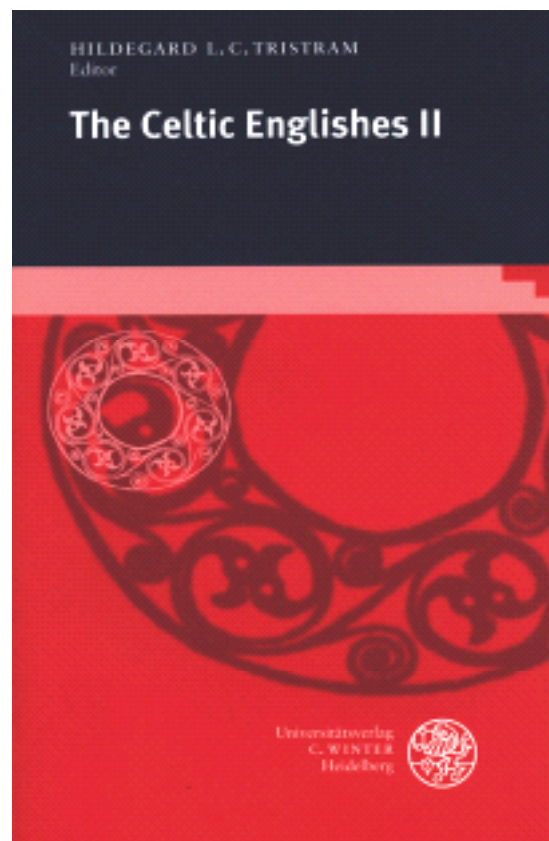
First signs of Celtic structure begin to show as early as in Old English, and it shows massively after the social upheaval of 1066, namely three hundred years later when the Celtically influenced language of the lower classes rises to the top with the demise of French in England.

Dear Rotarian Friends, I could now talk until midnight and longer about the Celtic structure of English. But unfortunately I have to be brief. So I will only mention that dozens of Celtic features have been identified in English, that which has been most discussed being the early rise of the progressive aspect, the difference between *Peter works* and *Peter is working*, which no other Germanic language has developed as early and as thouroughly as English and which is formally and functionally the same as in Welsh — and which, incidentally, is one of the hardest part of English grammar for Germans to master.

I would like to illustrate only one feature which is among the most astounding differences between English and German, indeed between English and all the other languages on the European continent.

In German, as indeed in all Indo-European and other European languages, there is a construction called the **external possessor construction**, whereby it is expressed that the possessor of an object is personally affected by some action. It is put in the dative case. E.g.:

*Die Mutter wäscht **dem Kind** (DAT) die Haare*
*Er demolierte **ihr** (DAT) das Auto*
*Sie warf **ihm** (DAT) einen Stein an den Kopf*
*Dann wurden **ihnen** (DAT) die Augen ausgestochen.*
*Die Königin ließ dann **dem König** (DAT) den Kopf abschlagen*

The same construction (also called the "sympathetic dative" [!]) was common in Anglo-Saxon — of course, Anglo-Saxon being a German dialect:

(1) Seo   cwen   het   þa   **þæm cyninge**   **þæt heafod**   of aceorfan
    Die   Königin   hieß   dann   **dem König**   **das Haupt**   abschneiden.
                                DAT   ACC

But the construction is totally impossible in Modern English:

(2.a) *The queen then ordered **the king the head** to be cut off.
                                DAT   ACC

(2.b) *The queen then ordered **the head** to be cut off **to the king** .
                                ACC   DAT

English can only use the internal possessor in the genitive case:

(4.a) The queen then ordered **the king's the head** to be cut off.
                              GEN

                              ACC

(4.b) The queen then ordered **the head of the king** to be cut off.
                                  GEN

                              ACC

The internal possessor construction is possible in all languages. But in languages with external possessors it is only used when the possessor is not affected, e.g. when he is dead:

(5.a) ?Die Königin ließ dann **des Königs Kopf** abschlagen.
                              GEN

                              ACC

(5.b) ?Die Königin ließ dann **den Kopf des Königs** abschlagen.
                                  GEN

                              ACC

The English development is succinctly summarized in (6):

(6)   "This construction, common in O[ld] E[nglish] ..., is comparatively infrequent in M[iddle] E[nglish] and loses ground steadily" (Tauno F. Mustanoja, *A Middle English syntax*, 1960, page 98).

The question is **why**, especially in view of the fact that very many languages all over the world and in particular all languages on the European continent do have extermal possessors.

The answer was suggested eighty years ago by an Indo-Europeanist and recently proved by myself; and everyone may by now be able to guess what it might be: Celtic does not have external possessors, and when the Celts shifted to Anglo-Saxon they simply failed to learn the construction. Not having external possessors is a **substratum feature** of English, it is a remnant of the language of the English from the time when most of them were still Celts, and Celtic speaking.

Now comes a final question, and a final answer, perhaps the only real surprise for some tonight: Why does Celtic not have external possessors? Or, more generally: How did Celtic acquire all those un-European, un-Indo-European features that it then passed on to English? After all, the Celts too are Indo-European speaking, and they came from the Continent only a

thousand years earlier than the Anglo-Saxon, and thus Celtic should be much like Anglo-Saxon and thus unable to influence it structurally to any large extent.

From a scientific point of view, the best answer would undoubtedly be the same as in the case of English: Not having external possessors should be a substratum feature of Celtic, too. Right! But what was that substratum?

The answer was given exactly 105 years ago by a famous Celtic language historian, and proved several times over since then, most recently — and most cogently, I believe — by myself: That substratum was Semitic. And indeed, all ancient Semitic languages lack external possessors.[1]

Needless to say in my published work I give examples from Celtic and Semitic to show this, but in the present context I simply have to ask you to believe me when I say that in all of the Hebrew Bible, and in all the Koran, and in all of the Welsh and Irish translations of the Bible there is not a single example of an external possessor, even though in the German *Einheitsübersetzung* of the Old Testament there are plenty.

The following picture shows the distribution of external possessor languages in and around Europe:
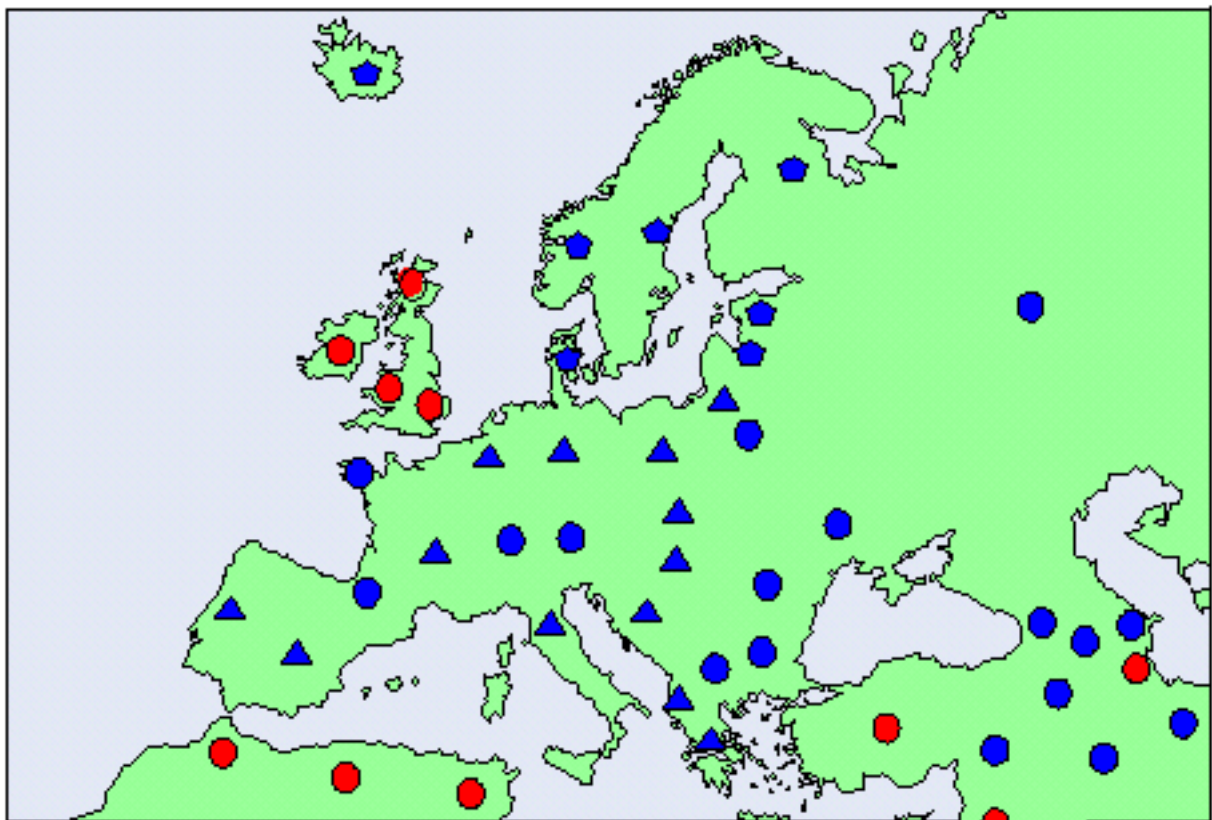
Graphik Hamel

Languages with external possessors: blue
Languages without external possessors: red

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[1] Modern Hebrew (Ivrit) and Maltese, an Arabic dialect, have acquired external possessors under European influence.

As one can see, it is precisely the Celtic Isles and the Semitic world (and then Asian languages such as Turkish that are of no interest in this context) that go together with regard to this feature. And the same, as linguists have shown during the last 105 years, holds true for numerous other specific grammatical features as well.

I summarize my talk in my final transparency:

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        French
           ↓
    Anglo-Saxon      ⟶   English
           ↑
        Celtic
           ↑
        Semitic
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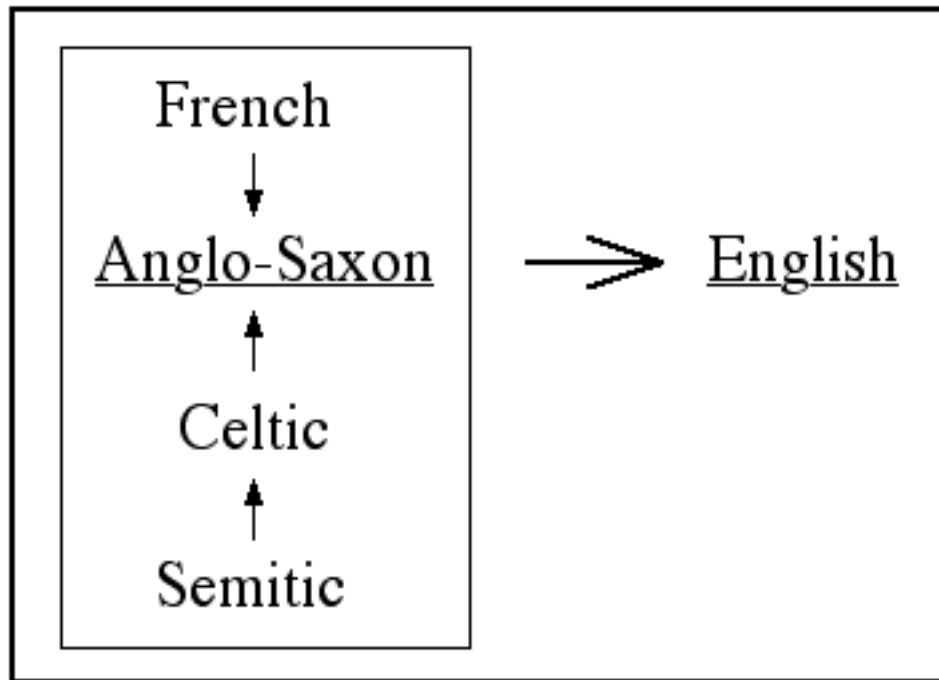
Today's talk in a nut-shell:

English is a substratally Celticized
(and thereby indirectly Semiticized),
superstratally Romanized
Low German dialect.

A German linguist's footnote:

The German-speaking peoples may be proud that a
marginal dialect of their language has advanced to
the status of the first universal *lingua franca* in
world history.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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