

# Indo-European Languages

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English 315

## Genetic Classification of Languages

- Grouping of languages according to common sources
- Concept that each language has descended from another
- Metaphor of parent and children
- Dangers of metaphors

## Biblical Groupings

- Based on sons of Noah:
  - Semetic
  - Hammitic
  - Japhetic (Indo-European)

## IE's Prominence

- Only 140 of about 5000 known languages are Indo-European (3%)
- IE languages are spoken by about half of the world's population

## Some non-IE languages

## William Jones & the Importance of Sanskrit



- Eighteenth-century interest in language families
- In 1786, Sir William Jones, a supreme court judge in India, proposed that because Sanskrit, the language of ancient India, was similar to Greek and Latin, the languages must have a common source

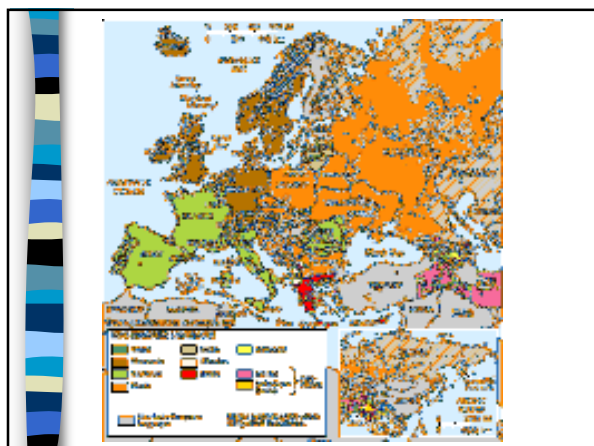
- Not only did Sanskrit have cognates with European languages, it had a similar inflectional system, suggesting that the inflectional systems also shared a common source.

### Key IE features

- Cognates: similar words exist across languages, suggesting a common source
- Inflections: language indicates syntax by adding endings or changing internal form of words

### Divisions of IE

- IE languages divide into two broad groups
- Division is geographical but based on initial consonant of a language's word for "100"
  - "Satem" languages are east of the dividing line
  - "Centum" languages are west of the dividing line



### Who were the Indo-Europeans?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Words for ...           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- snow, winter, spring</li> <li>- beech, oak, pine, willow</li> <li>- dog, horse, cow, sheep</li> <li>- wheel</li> <li>- bear</li> <li>- gold, silver</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ No words for ...           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- camel, lion, elephant</li> <li>- palm, <a href="#">banyan</a></li> <li>- copper, iron</li> <li>- ocean</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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## The Bee Puzzle



- Many I-E languages have cognates for the honey bee and for a fermented honey drink (e.g., Greek "méli" (honey) and "méliSSa (bee); Latin mel (honey); Old English milisc (honey sweet), medu (mead) and mildeaw (honey dew); Sanskrit madhu (honey); Dutch mede)
- Bees are not found in any of the Asiatic sites proposed as the IE homeland.

## A Guess at the IE People & their Homeland

- Lithuania?