

# **A Brief History of the English Language and the Landmass now called “England”**

## **Part 1: Introduction**

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**Marist CLS**

**Fall 2025**

# HELP!

- **If you notice any mistakes please speak up.**
- **Ask questions, make comments.**
- **Tell us about the languages you speak.**

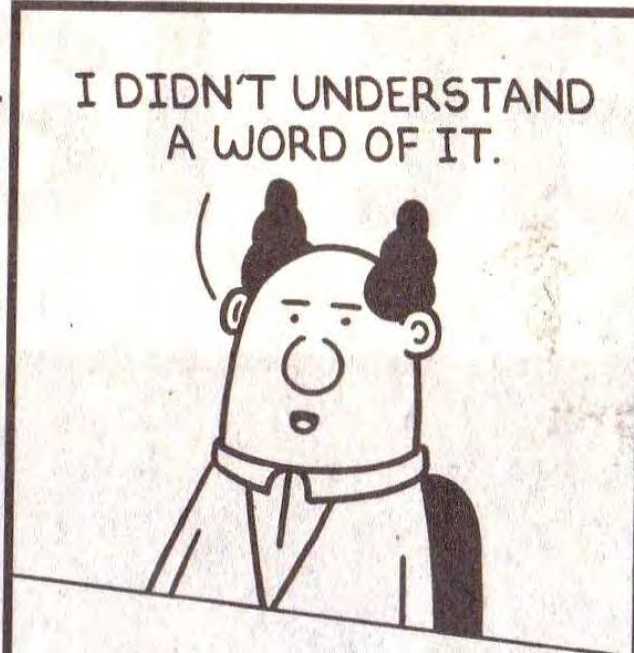
## My language background

- **Native Bronx-Irish language dialect**
- **Latin: four years in High School and one college course.**
- **Russian: 4 years: two in H.S. and two at CCNY**
  - **Went to USSR in 1973: “Please speak slowly and make believe I’m 8 years old!”**

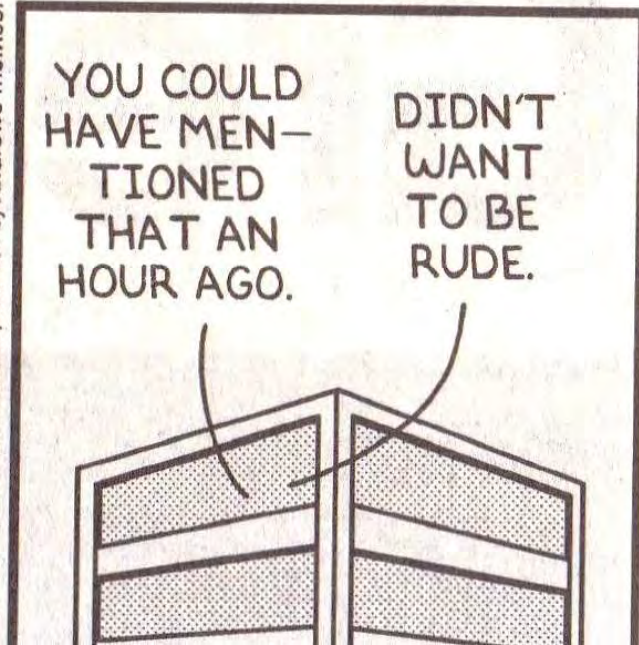
# Dilbert by Scott Adams



Dilbert.com @ScottAdamsSays



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# This course will be 4 weeks

1. The landmass we call England **before** the English Language
2. **Old English**: 450 to 1150 AD. A **foreign** Germanic language.
3. **Middle English**: 1150 to 1500 AD. Looks **sort of like** English.
4. **Modern English**: 1500 to 2025 AD.
  - **Why is English so difficult to learn as a second language?**

# I Googled “History of the English Language”

**Old English (c. 450–1100):** This earliest form of English, also called Anglo-Saxon, developed from the dialects of the people who migrated from modern-day Germany and Denmark to Britain.

- **Vocabulary and grammar:** Old English is a West Germanic language that is almost unrecognizable to modern English speakers due to its complex grammar and largely Germanic vocabulary.
- **Influences:** Latin was an early influence, primarily through Christian missionaries. Later, Viking invasions introduced numerous Old Norse words, including "sky," "leg," and "take".

# I Googled “History of the English Language”

**Middle English (c. 1100–1500):** The Norman French Conquest of 1066 marked the start of the Middle English period.

- **The Norman French influence:** With the new Norman rulers, French became the language of the court, government, and upper class, while English was spoken by the common people.
- **Grammatical changes:** The influx of French and Old Norse further simplified English grammar. Many old case endings were lost, and word order became more important for conveying meaning.
- **Chaucer and literature:** English re-emerged as a prestigious language in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, most famously in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*.

# I Googled “History of the English Language”

**Modern English (c. 1500–Present):** This period is marked by the Great Vowel Shift and the introduction of the printing press.

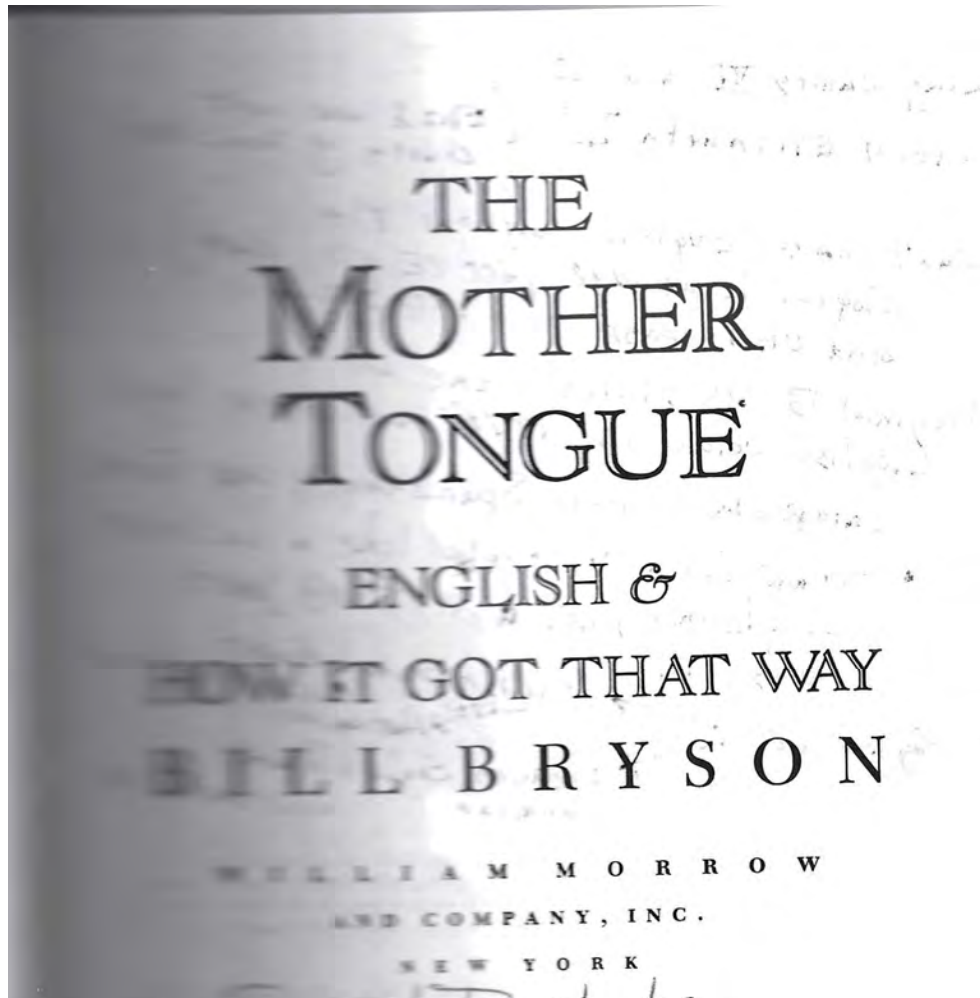
- **Early Modern English (c. 1500–1800):** A distinct change in the pronunciation of long vowels, known as the Great Vowel Shift, further separated English from its Germanic roots. The advent of the printing press in the 15th century and the publication of works by writers like William Shakespeare helped standardize spelling and grammar.
- **Late Modern English (c. 1800–Present):** The main difference between Early and Late Modern English is a significant expansion of vocabulary, driven by the Industrial Revolution, the rise of science, and the growth of the British Empire.
- **English today:** The English language continues to evolve, with new vocabulary constantly entering the language through technology and cultural exchange.

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# **Books, DVDs, Britanica**

# 1990 PBS Series and Book

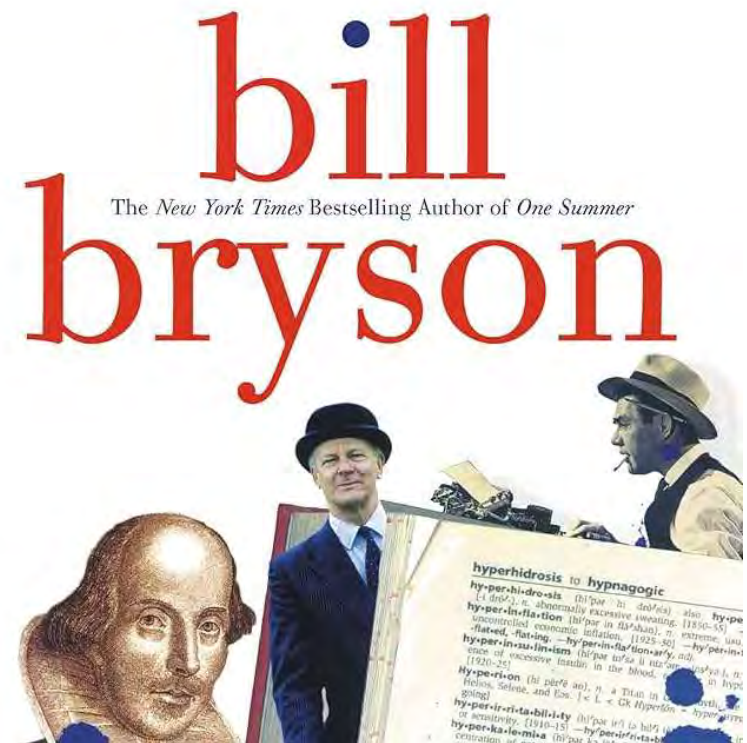


"English is spoken by more than 900 million people around the world. . . . Its story has been told before, but seldom as deftly or as memorably."

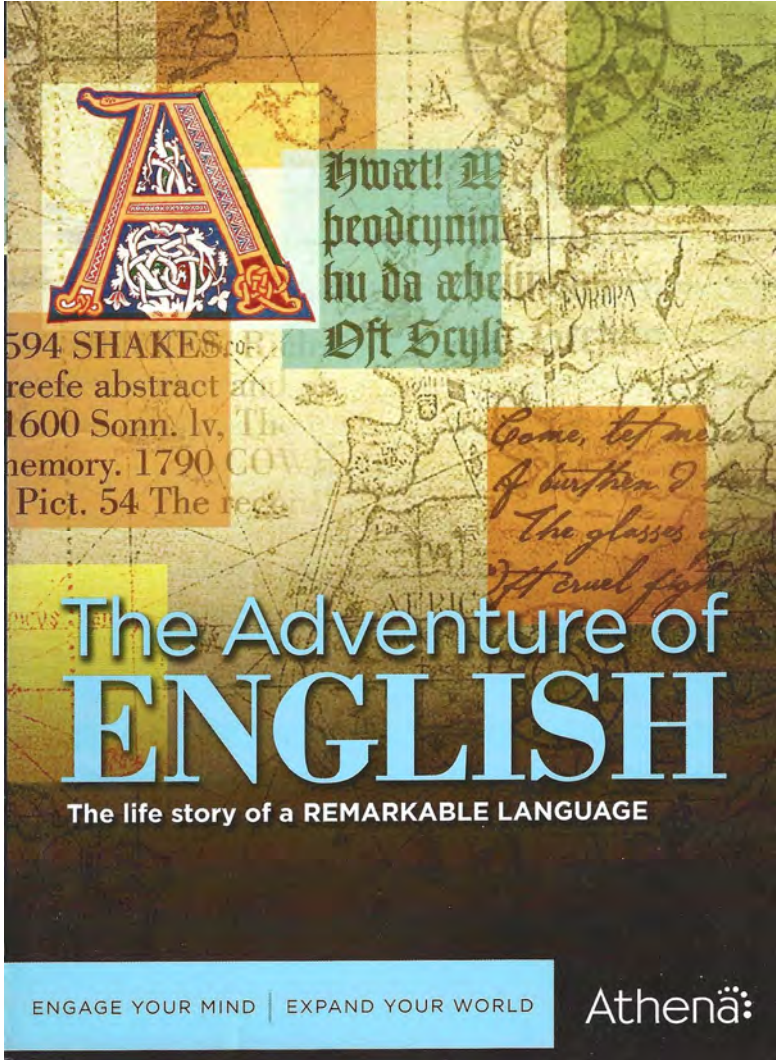
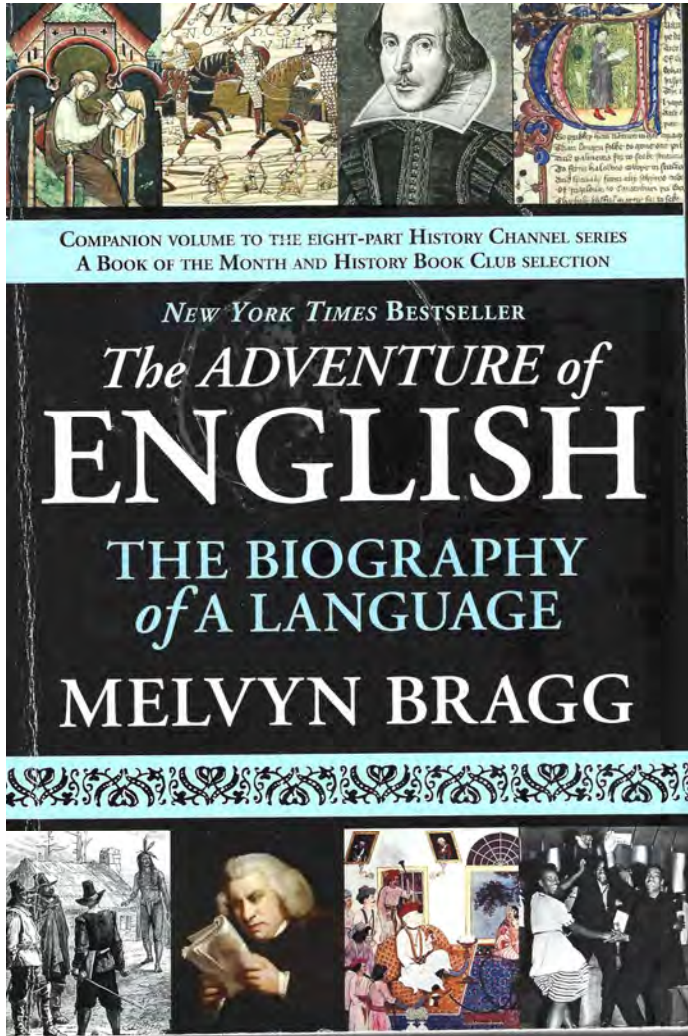
—*New York Times Book Review*

## The Mother Tongue

English and How It Got That Way



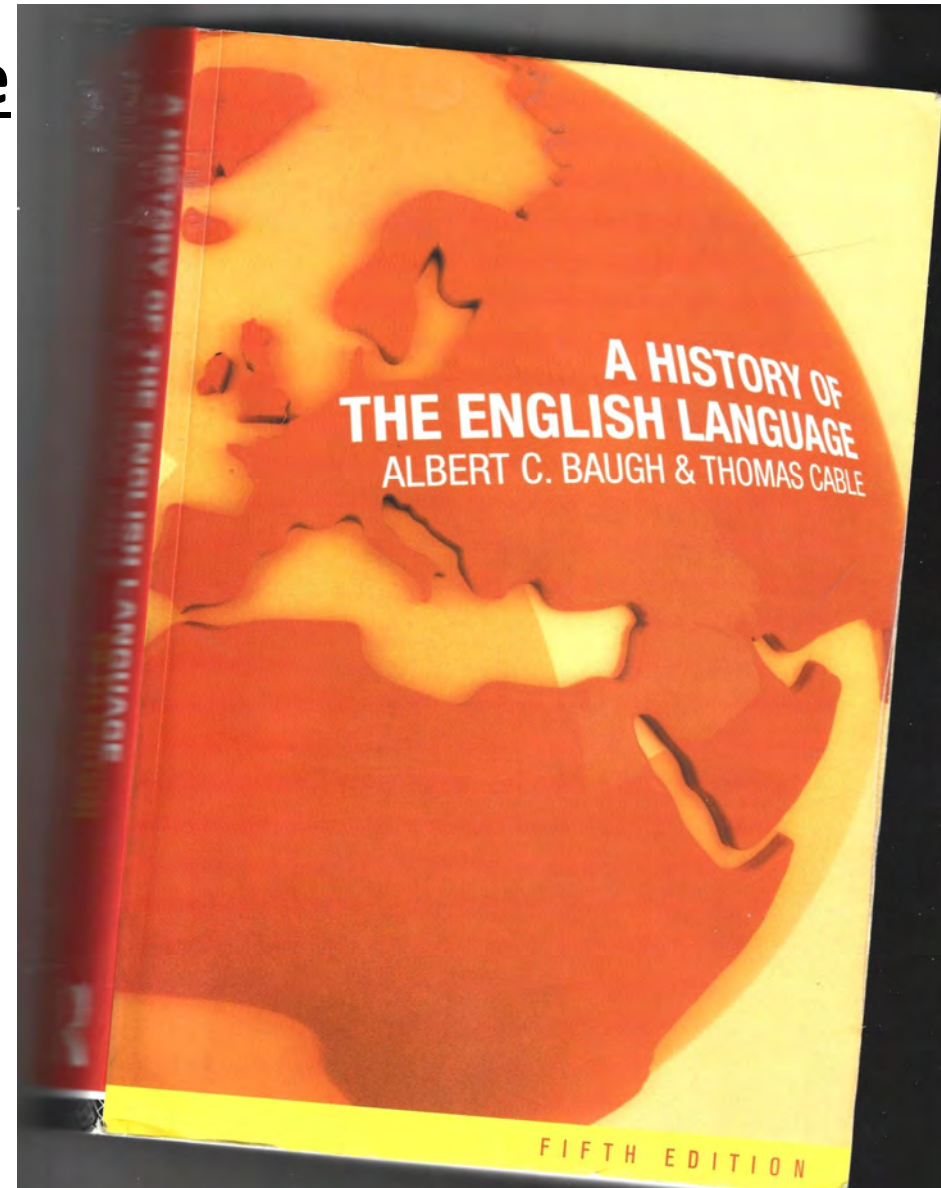
# 2003 Book and DVD Set



# A history of the English Language

by Albert C. Baugh & Thomas Cable

- The Textbook Bible of the Subject -



# The Great Mortality

An Intimate history of the BLACK DEATH

John Kelly 2006

Outstanding!

# The GREAT MORTALITY

*An intimate history of the*

# BLACK DEATH

"There has never been a better  
researched, better written or more  
engaging account of the worst  
epidemic the world has ever known."  
—S.MOM WILSON

*John Kelly*



# In the Beginning

The History of the King James Bible  
and How It Changed a Nation, a  
Language and a Culture  
by Allister E McGrath 2001

**Outstanding!**



*The Story of the*  
KING JAMES BIBLE  
*and How It Changed*  
*a Nation, a Language,*  
*and a Culture*

IN THE  
BEGINNING

ALISTER  
McGRATH

# Introduction

**selfish, shellfish**

**no outlet**

**no standing**

**stand pipe**

# Key Points in this course

- **England** has had the same basic borders since the Romans ruled Britania.
  - ✓ At that time everyone spoke **Latin or Celtic** until the Romans left in 410 CE
- **Old English** is the earliest form of the English language (German).
- **Middle English** evolved after the **Norman French** Invaded in 1066
  - ✓ All government, military and church offices were held by French speakers
  - ✓ Middle English was the spoke language of 90% of the people.
- **Modern English** evolved and standardized by the **Printing Press and Schools**
  - ✓ In 1600, England was the **only place in the world** where English was the dominant language.
  - ✓ Then came the Pilgrims and Jamestown, Australia and the British Empire.

# The evolving Political and Language History of England are closely linked

- You can't understand how the **English Language** developed **unless**
  - you understand a little about how **English Political History** unfolded
  - This is the key to this course: **English Political & Social History** and the **History of the English Language** are tightly linked.
- Time Period: 450 CE until today: more than 1500 years
- This course will not be a list of names, dates and details, but of concepts and trends

# Language is a Spoken Skill that disappears into the air, but Written Language can Survive

## Spoken Language

- Modern Humans have been speaking languages for 50,000+ years ???
- But Voice recording was not invented until 1877
  - ✓ No one knows what George Washington sounded like. He probably sounded like an Englishman.

## Written Language

- Written languages first appeared in Sumer and Egypt about 5,000 years ago
- **Prehistoric:** If there are no surviving written records, then the people and their languages are prehistoric.

# A word on how we write historical dates

- Traditional Christian Method
  - **AD**: Anno Domini, year of the Lord (Jesus)
  - **BC**: Before Christ
- More modern and less Christian Method
  - **CE**: Common Era
  - **BCE**: Before the Common Era
- I use both methods: old habits die hard.

# Key Points: England and English Language

- Geography: Today **England** is part of a country called the **United Kingdom (UK)**
- English Language: there was **no English-like Language** before 500 AD
  - English doesn't look like the language we speak until about 1500 AD
- Language is a **spoken (oral)** concept.
  - ✓ Language is an agreed upon **code** for communication
  - ✓ Certain grunts, groans and hisses mean "CAT" in English
  - ✓ Spoken Language changes / evolves **quickly** (think computers and cell phones)
- Language can be **written** and then **read**
  - ✓ Written language requires another code called an **Alphabet**
  - ✓ Reading and Writing were **very rare skills** before 1500 AD (**Printing**)
  - ✓ Written Language changes **slowly** due to education and printed material.

# Key Point: Written Language - Spelling Difficulties

## Here is the mathematics:

- 26 Letters in our Alphabet
- 45 Sounds in Modern English (International Phonetic Alphabet)
- 200+ ways to Spell those 45 Sounds using our Alphabet

## Pronunciation and spelling are confusing

- When you speak a word, you can't be certain how to write (spell) it
  - dark **NIGHT** / **KNIGHT** in shining armor
- When you see a written word, you can't be sure how to pronounce it.
  - There was a **MINUTE** layer of snow. I'll be there in a **MINUTE**.
  - I **READ** a book. The **RED** car.
- The sentence (**the context**) provides the clues to interpret the meaning.

**And AWAY WE GO!!!!**

**PS: God bless Spell Check!!!!**

# Background before we get to the English Language

1. Language in general
2. Two types of languages:
  - a) **Inflected languages**: lots of endings on nouns, adjectives, verbs, .....
  - b) **Word Order languages** (Subject, Verb, Object)
3. Language Families
4. Prehistoric England
5. Geography of England: same shape since Roman rule

## Language: from Wikipedia

- Language is a structured system of communication that consists of grammar and vocabulary.
- Language is the primary means by which humans convey meaning in **spoken (oral)** language. A Language may also be **written**.
- Human languages possess powerful properties:
  - you can create an infinite number of sentences,
  - you can refer to objects, events, and ideas that are not immediately present or even theoretical.
- The use of human language relies on social convention and is acquired through **learning**.
- The group must agree on what the “grunts” mean. We’ve been doing it so long, **It’s inbred in us**.

## Dialect: from Wikipedia

- A **dialect** is a variety of language spoken by a particular group of people.
- **Dialects of Modern English**
  - British English: including Scottish English, Welsh English, Irish English
  - American English: including Boston, Brooklyn, Alabama and Texas English
  - Australian, Canadian, New Zealand, Caribbean English
  - Indian, Sri Lankan, Pakistani, Nigerian, Philippine, Singaporean, and South African English.
- **High Prestige Dialects of English**
  - BBC English (King's English: aka London English)
  - Evening News English in the USA
  - Job Interview English
- A **language** is a **dialect** with an army and a navy!

# Two Major Categories of Languages

- **Inflected Languages**: nouns, adjectives, verbs etc. have word endings that tell you how to interpret a sentence.
  - ✓ **Old English** (Latin, French, Russian, .....)
- **Word Order Languages**: the order of the words in the sentence tells you how to interpret the sentence
  - ✓ **Modern English**
  - ✓ Subject / Verb / Object: **“SVO”**

## Two Types of Languages: Inflected Languages

- **Inflected Languages**: use **word endings (inflections)** and changes to the root word to communicate the meaning of a sentence.
  - Word Ending: dog / dogs, provide / provides / provided / providing
  - Changing the root word: woman / women, sing / sang / sung
  - Latin and the Romance languages are inflected languages.
  - **Old English** was an inflected language, as was its German root.

## Two Types of Languages: Word Order Languages

- **Word Order Languages**: use word order to communicate the meaning of a sentence.
  - Modern English uses word order to convey meaning
  - SVO: **Subject Verb Object**
  - Examples: **English**, Chinese, Vietnamese, ...
  - English uses auxiliary verbs and prepositional phrases **instead of word endings**, but a many word endings have survived.

**So →**

- **Old English** was an **Inflected Language**. The word endings tell you who is doing what to whom.
- **Modern English** is a **Word Order Language** that uses auxiliary verbs and prepositions to tell you who is doing what to whom.

## Modern English has retained a few inflections (word endings) to reflect tense, number, person, case, ...

- d, ed to show that a verb is talking about the **past**.
  - I raked**ed** the leaves yesterday.
  - I talked**ed** to Jane yesterday.
- s, es to show that a noun is **plural** (more than one)
  - kings**s**
  - tomato**es**, arch**es**, church**es**, latch**es**, stitch**es**
- er, est: Comparative and Superlatives: fast, faster**er**, fastest**est** and large, larger**er**, largest**est**
- 's, s': used to show possession. The Tom'**s** backpack. The soldier**s'** formation.
- There are **many exceptions** to the above due to traditional spelling and words from other languages.
- Changes to the root of the noun for **plurals**: man – men, foot – feet
- Changes to the root of a verb: sing, sang, sung

# Word Order (Subject Verb Object)

## Cases

- Nominative = Subject of Sentence
- Genitive = Possession
- Accusative = Direct Object
- Dative = Indirect Object ( the recipient of the verb)

The girl gave the books to David.

- **girl**: subject of sentence (singular, feminine)
- **gave**: verb of sentence (singular, past tense)
- **books**: direct object of sentence (plural, neuter)
- **David**: indirect object of the sentence (recipient, singular, masculine)

# **Quick Peek at an Inflected Language: Latin**

# Inflected Languages: use word endings for

“The girl gave the books to David”

## Inflected Language: word endings

The $xx$  girl $xx$  gave $yy$  the $zz$  book $zz$  David $bb$

- $xx$ : subject, singular, feminine
- $yy$ : past tense, singular
- $zz$ : object, plural neuter
- $bb$ : indirect object, singular, masculine

You could put the words in any order. The inflections give meaning.

David $bb$  book $zz$  the $zz$  girl $xx$  the $xx$  gave $yy$

# Inflected Language: Latin noun for “girl” - 1<sup>st</sup> Declension Feminine -

| <u>Case</u> | <u>Singular</u> | <u>Plural</u> | <u>Function</u> | <u>Example Sentence</u> | <u>Translation</u>          |
|-------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Nominative  | puella          | puellae       | Subject         | Puella amat puerum.     | The girl loves the boy.     |
| Genitive    | puellae         | puellārum     | Possession      | Librum puellae video.   | I see the book of the girl. |
| Dative      | puellae         | puellis       | Indirect object | Donum puellae do.       | I give a gift to the girl.  |
| Accusative  | puellam         | puellās       | Direct object   | Puer puellam videt.     | The boy sees the girl.      |
| Ablative    | puellā          | puellis       | "By, with, from | Cum puellā ambulat.     | He walks with the girl.     |
| Vocative    | puella          | puellae       | Direct address  | Ō puella, veni!         | O girl, come!               |

There are completely different declensions for Masculine and Neuter nouns.

**Memorize, memorize, memorize!**

**Inflected Language: conjugation of the Latin Verb “to love”**  
**- Present Tense -**

| <u>Person &amp; Number</u>    | <u>Ending</u> | <u>Example</u> | <u>Translation</u> |
|-------------------------------|---------------|----------------|--------------------|
| 1st Person Singular           | -ō            | Amō            | I love             |
| 2nd Person Singular           | -s            | Amās           | You love           |
| 3rd Person Singular           | -t            | Amat           | He/she/it loves    |
| 1st Person Plural             | -mus          | Amāmus         | We love            |
| 2nd Person Plural             | -tis          | Amātis         | You love           |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> Person Plural | -nt           | Amant          | They love          |

The past and future tenses have completely different endings

Plus

There are four other major categories of verbs that also have different endings.

**Memorize, memorize, memorize!**

## Final Jeopardy

- In Old English, plurals were often formed by adding “en”
- Can you think of a rare example in Modern English?

# Final Jeopardy Answer

- In Old English, plurals were often formed by adding “en”
- Can you think of an example in Modern English?

## Answer

- child – children
- ox – oxen
- brother – brethren

## Modern Personal Pronouns: you must memorize

| <b>Personal Pronouns</b> | <b>Subject of Sentence</b> |               |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
|                          | <b>Singular</b>            | <b>Plural</b> |
| <b>1st Person</b>        | <b>I</b>                   | <b>we</b>     |
| <b>2nd Person</b>        | <b>you</b>                 | <b>you</b>    |
| <b>3rd Person</b>        | <b>he, she, it</b>         | <b>they</b>   |

| <b>Personal Pronouns</b> | <b>Direct Object of Sentence</b> |               |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------|
|                          | <b>Singular</b>                  | <b>Plural</b> |
| <b>1st Person</b>        | <b>me</b>                        | <b>us</b>     |
| <b>2nd Person</b>        | <b>you</b>                       | <b>you</b>    |
| <b>3rd Person</b>        | <b>him, her, it</b>              | <b>them</b>   |

| <b>Possessive Pronoun</b> | <b>Singular</b>       | <b>Plural</b> |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| <b>1st Person</b>         | <b>mine</b>           | <b>our</b>    |
| <b>2nd Person</b>         | <b>yours</b>          | <b>yours</b>  |
| <b>3rd Person</b>         | <b>his, hers, its</b> | <b>theirs</b> |

| <b>Possessive Adjective</b> | <b>Singular</b>       | <b>Plural</b> |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| <b>1st Person</b>           | <b>my</b>             | <b>our</b>    |
| <b>2nd Person</b>           | <b>your</b>           | <b>your</b>   |
| <b>3rd Person</b>           | <b>his, hers, its</b> | <b>their</b>  |

| <b>Reflexive Pronoun</b> | <b>Singular</b>                     | <b>Plural</b>     |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>1st Person</b>        | <b>myself</b>                       | <b>ourselves</b>  |
| <b>2nd Person</b>        | <b>yourself</b>                     | <b>yourselves</b> |
| <b>3rd Person</b>        | <b>himself,<br/>herself, itself</b> | <b>themselves</b> |

# Humor of the English Language

We'll begin with **box**, and the plural is **boxes**;  
But the plural of **ox** is **oxen**, not **oxes**.  
Then one fowl is **goose**, but two are called **geese**,  
Yet the plural of **moose** should never be **meese**.  
You may find a lone **mouse** or a nest full of **mice**,  
Yet the plural of **house** is **houses**, not **hice**.  
If the plural of **man** is always called **men**,  
Why shouldn't the plural of **pan** be called **pen**?  
I speak of my **foot** and show you my **feet**,  
If I give you a **boot**, would a pair be called **beet**?  
If one is a **tooth**, and a whole set are **teeth**,  
Why shouldn't the plural of **booth** be called **beeth**?

# Humor of the English Language

So our English, I think, you all will agree,  
Is the craziest language you ever did see.

And **dead**; it's said like **bed**, not **bead**;

For goodness sake, don't call it **deed**!

A dreadful language? Why, man alive,

I'd learned to talk it when I was five,

And yet to write it, the more I tried,

I hadn't learned it at fifty-five!

## Another Example: **close**

- Close (near): I'm **close** to my destination.
- Close (shut): **Close** the door.
- Clothes (garb): I'm wearing new **clothes** today.
- Scotland: an alleyway or passage.
  - Turn left at **close** number four. (Local dialect word)

# Key Point: Written Language - Spelling Difficulties

## Here is the mathematics:

- 26 Letters in our Alphabet
- 45 Sounds in Modern English
- 200+ ways to Spell those 45 Sounds using our Alphabet

## Pronunciation and spelling are confusing

- When you speak a word, you can't be certain how to write (spell) it
  - NIGHT KNIGHT homophone
  - READ RED homophone
- When you see a written word, you can't be sure how to pronounce it.
  - MINUTE MINUTE homograph
  - LEAD LEAD homograph
- The sentence (**the context**) provides the clues to interpret the meaning.

# Language Families

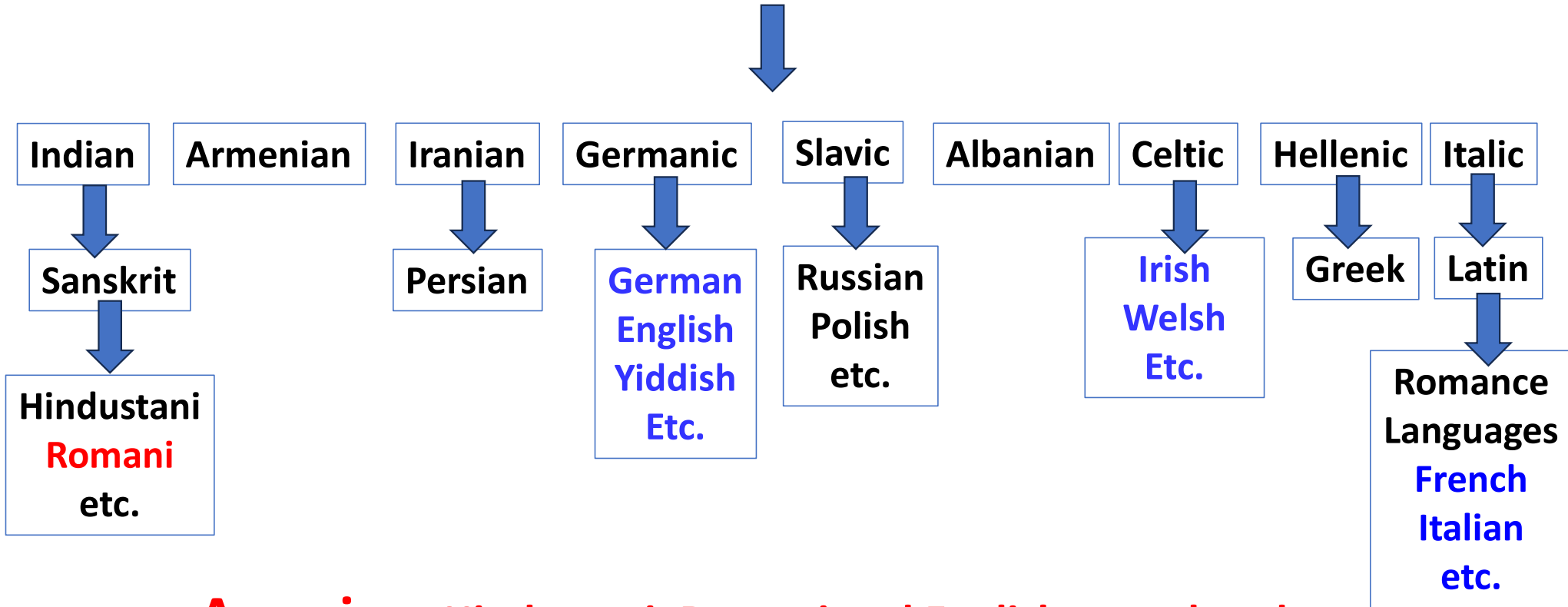
## The Language Families we're interested in

1. Germanic Family → English, Dutch, German, ...
2. Latin Family → Romance Languages (French, ...)
3. Celtic Family → Irish, Welsh, Scot's Gaelic, Breton

# Sir William Jones

- William Jones was a language genius and an English judge in Bengal, India.
- He took up **Sanskrit, a “dead” religious language**, as a hobby.
  - ✓ Like **Latin** was in the Catholic Church
  - ✓ Like Old Church Slavonic and **Church Slavonic**
- **1786: Sir William Jones first lectured on the striking similarities among three oldest languages he knew: Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit**
- He theorized that Latin, Greek and Sanskrit must have had a common ancestor language that no longer existed. Scholars later called this dead language **Proto Indo European (a reconstructed language)**
- Others had noticed this, but he studied and published it.

# The Indo-European Family of Languages



**Amazing: Hindustani, Romani and English are related.**

# North and West German Language Family



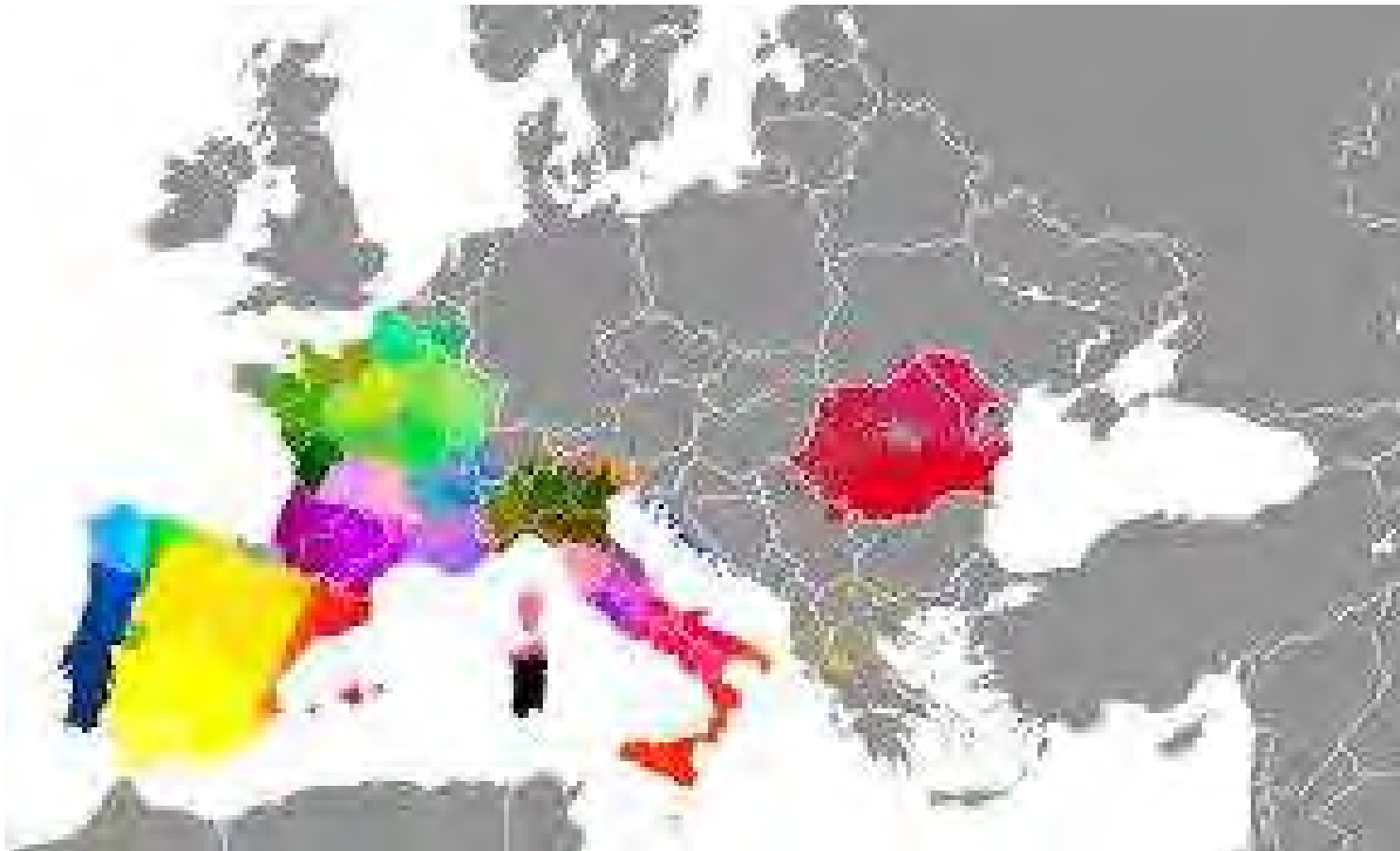
## North German

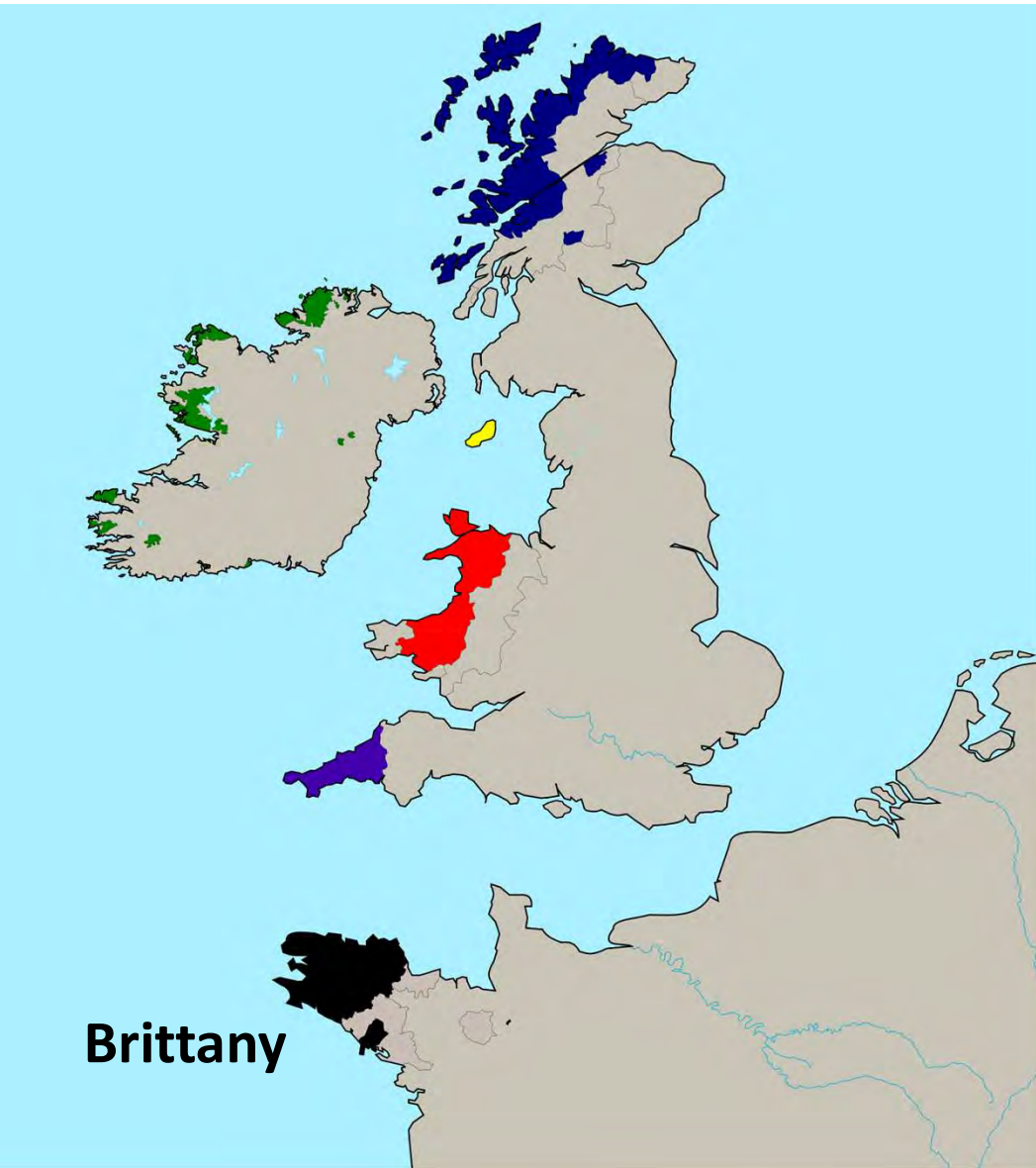
- Icelandic
- Norwegian
- Danish
- Swedish

## West German

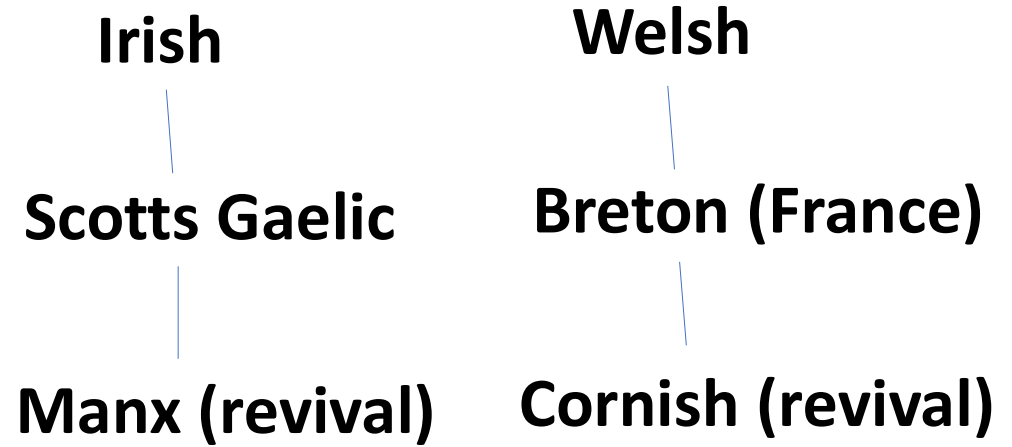
- English ←
- Scots
- Frisian
- Dutch
- Low German
- High German
  - Yiddish

# Romance Languages





## Celtic Languages Today

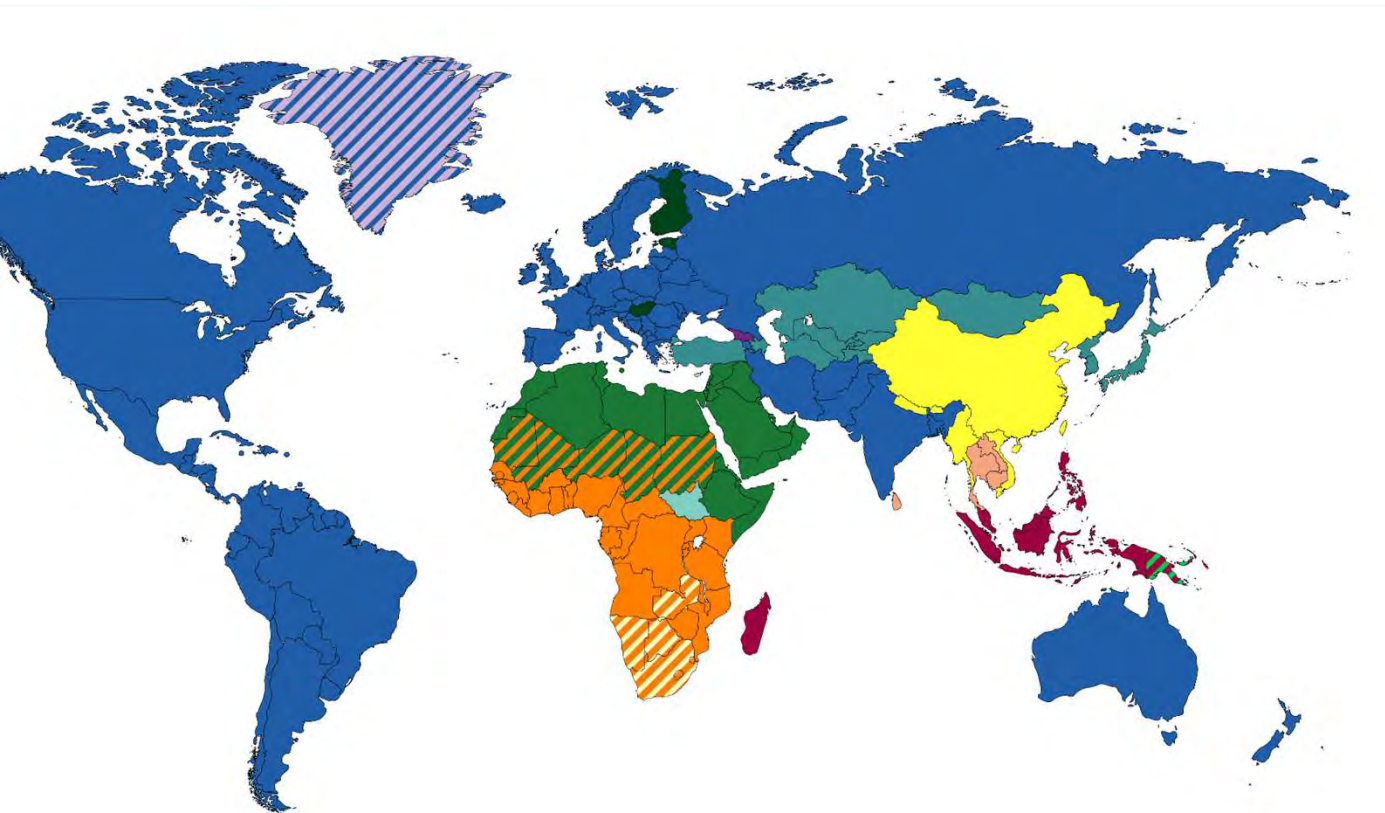


# Primary Languages in this course

- all Indo-European Languages -

- Celtic Languages: the earliest documented language in England
- Latin
  - ✓ Roman Empire
  - ✓ Roman Catholic Church
  - ✓ European scholarship
- English and related Germanic Languages
  - ✓ Anglo-Saxon (a term invented by historians)
  - ✓ **Old English, Middle English, Modern English**
    - Many regional and national dialects
- Old French
  - ✓ **Norman French**: the French spoken in Normandy and England.  
This is not **Paris French**: the French spoken in Paris.

# Language Families of the World



Some languages have no relatives: **BASQUE**

Created with mapchart.net ©

## Extremely Simplified Language families

- Indo-European
- IE and Native Languages
- Afro-Asiatic
- Kartvelian **Caucasus**
- Niger-Congo + Bantu
- Afro-Asiatic / Niger-Congo / Nilo-Saharan
- Khoisan / Niger-Congo + Bantu
- Nilo-Saharan
- Austronesian
- Sino-Tibetan
- Other
- Papuan / Austronesian **New Guinea**
- ~~Altaic (Theoretical)~~
- Finno-Ugric

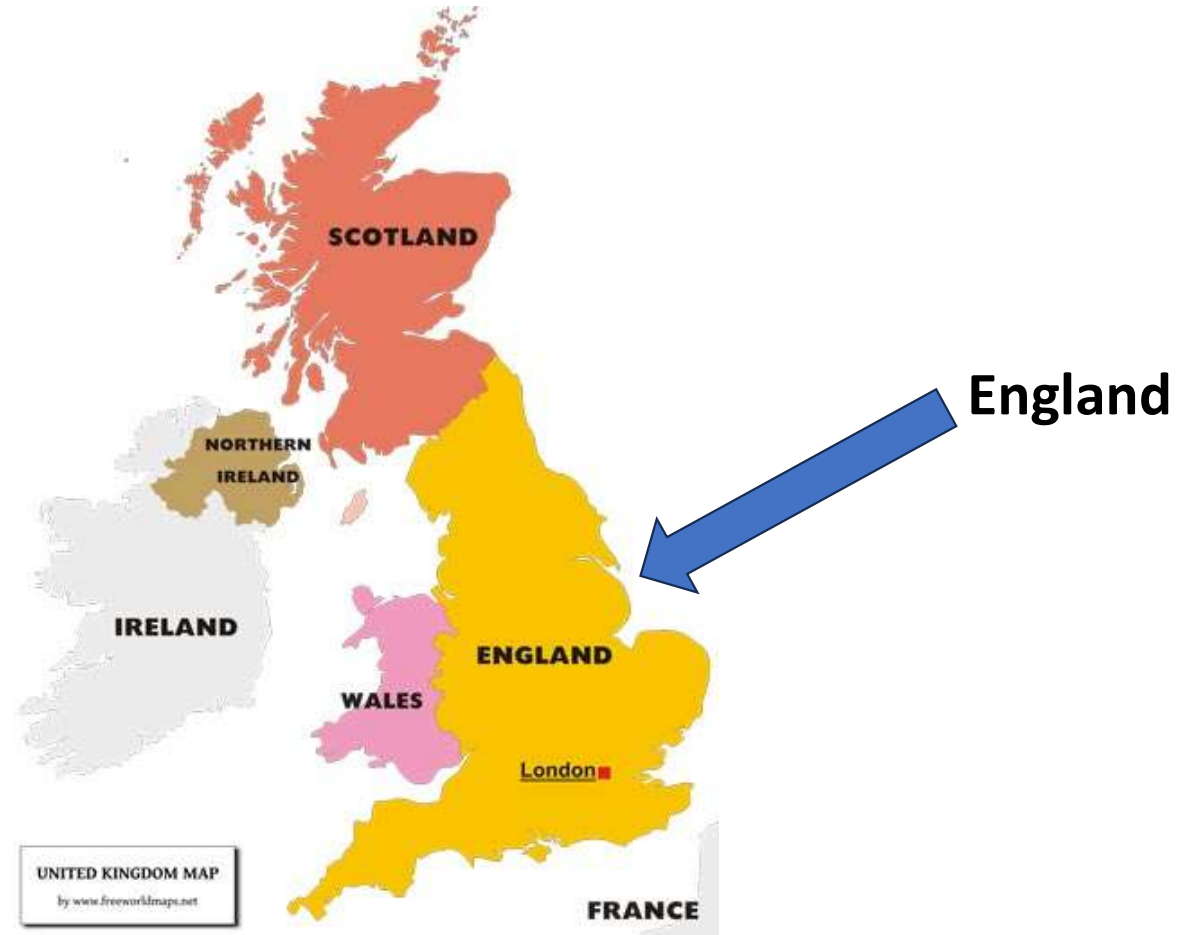
**The Landmass Call “England”**

# England

- **United Kingdom: England, Scotland, Wales & Northern Ireland**
- **Great Britain**: a old term for the one island that contains **England, Scotland, and Wales.**
- **British Isles**: a geographic term for the two main islands (Great Britain and Ireland) and more than 6,000 smaller islands
- **Until 1600, England was the only country where English was the dominant language**
- **Here come the maps → → →**

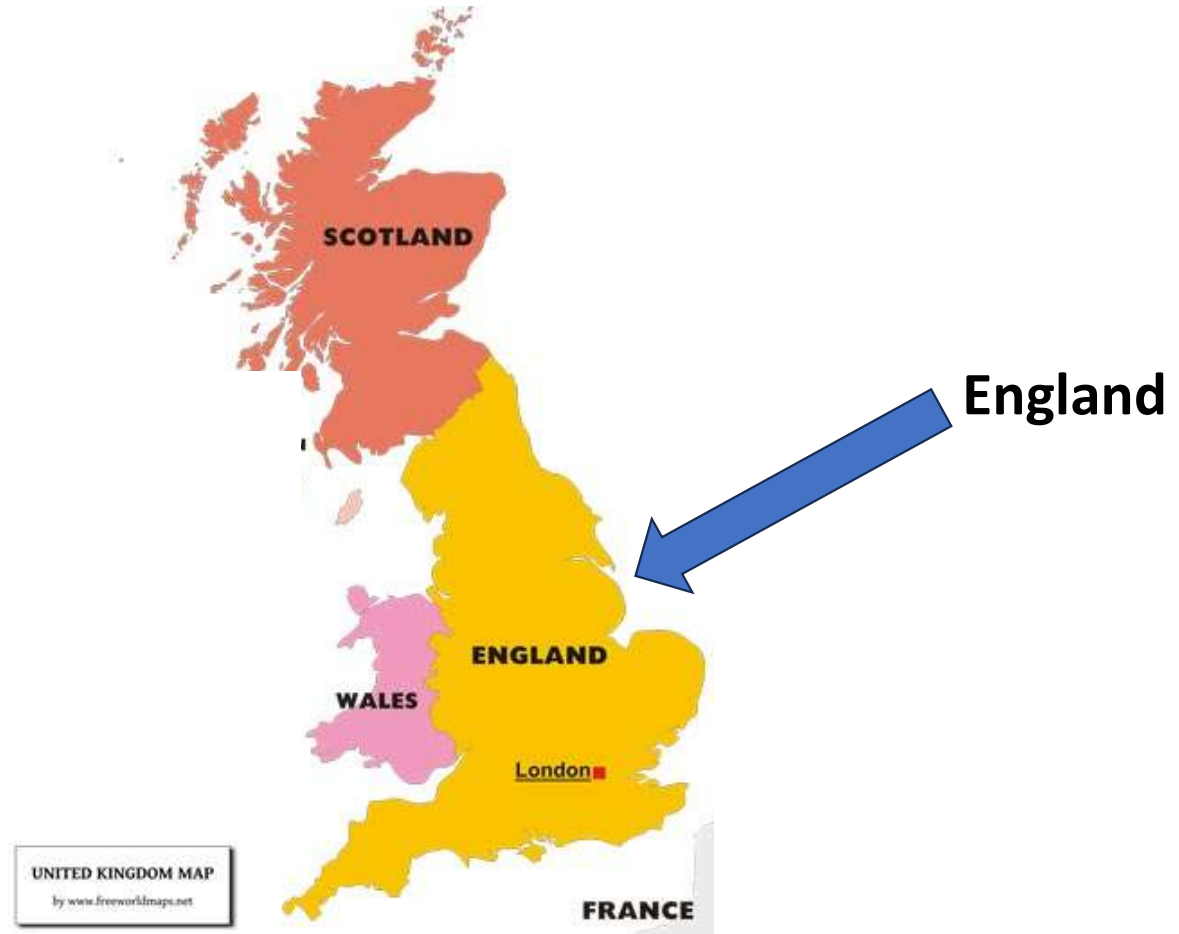
# Today's United Kingdom

England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

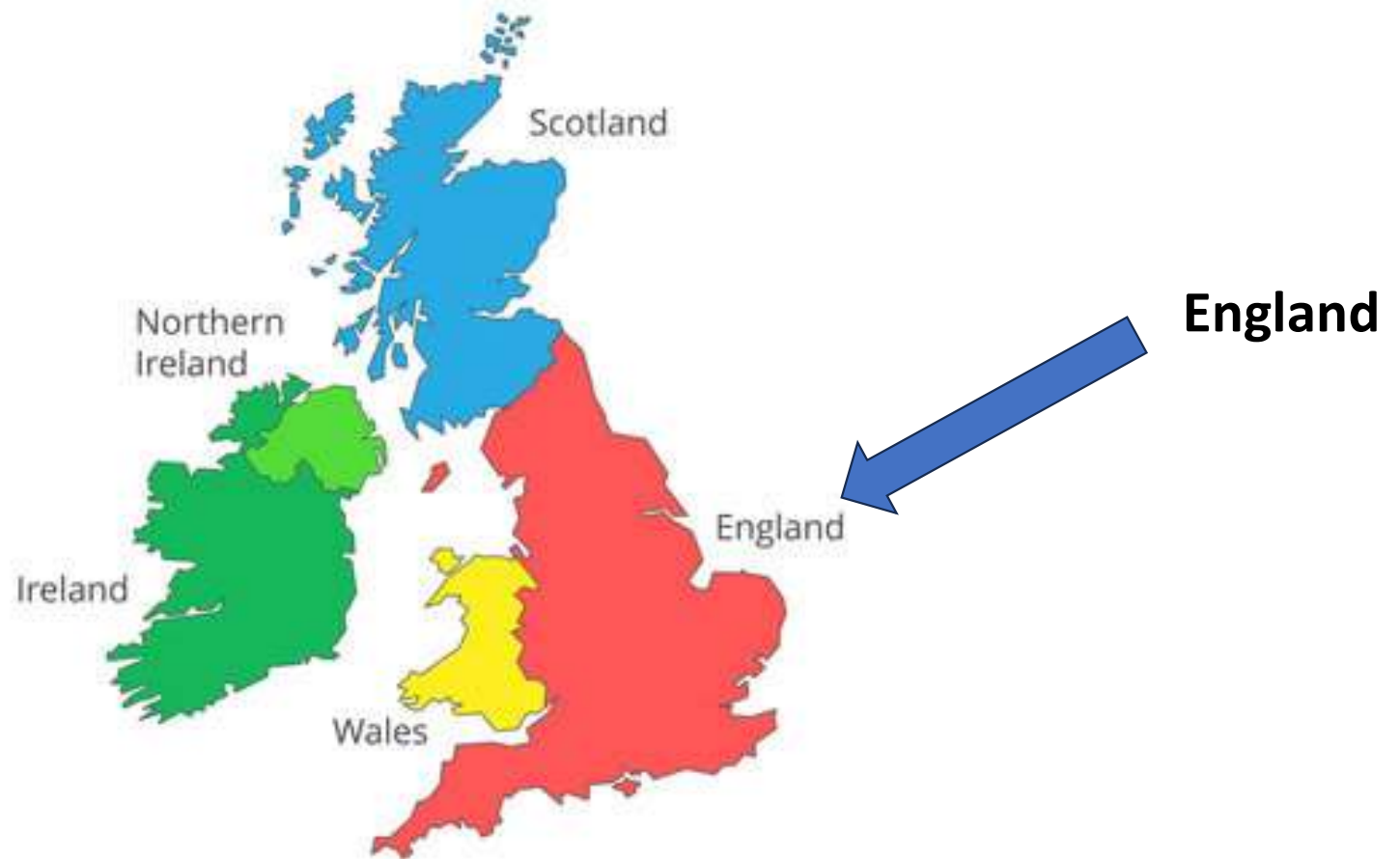


# Great Britain: the one island

## England, Scotland and Wales



# British Isles (both Islands): two nations



## Here is England

- basically, the same shape since the Romans



This is where the  
English Language  
evolved.



**Notice how close England is to France, Belgium and Holland**

## The Way-Back Machine

England before it was England

**Don't take any of these dates literally**

“A History of Ancient Britain” with Neil Oliver,  
Archaeologist. On BRITBOX steaming channel

## Way-Way Back in **England**

- **Old Stone Age (Paleolithic): 500,000 to 10,000 BCE.**
  - 500,000 years ago: Boxgrove Man. Not modern humans.
  - 400,000 years ago: Neanderthals. Not modern humans.
  - **40,000 years ago: Modern Humans reached England**
    - ❖ Very small population. Hunter / Gatherers
- Then there was a **Major Ice Age**, which ended around 10,000 BCE
  - **All humans in England probably died during the Ice Age**
  - This Ice Age ended the Old Stone Age (**Paleolithic**):

# The Ages Before The English Language

- **Middle Stone Age (Mesolithic): 10,000 – 4000 BCE**
  - Permanent human settlement begins
  - 6000 BCE: England becomes an island
  - 4500 BCE: Farming and domestic animals
- **New Stone Age (Neolithic) : 4000 to 2200 BCE**
  - **First Huge Stone Monuments built**
  - **Stonehenge: 3100 to 1600 BCE**
- **Bronze Age: 2600 – 700 BCE (Celts).** Bronze = 88% Copper + 12% Tin
- **Iron Age: 700 BCE – 43 CE (Celts).** Iron is contained in rocks

# Stonehenge: from the New Stone Age: Neolithic

You can see the New Stone Age in many places in England



**Roman Invasion and Occupation: 43 to 410 CE**

# Roman Empire (Britania in Red)

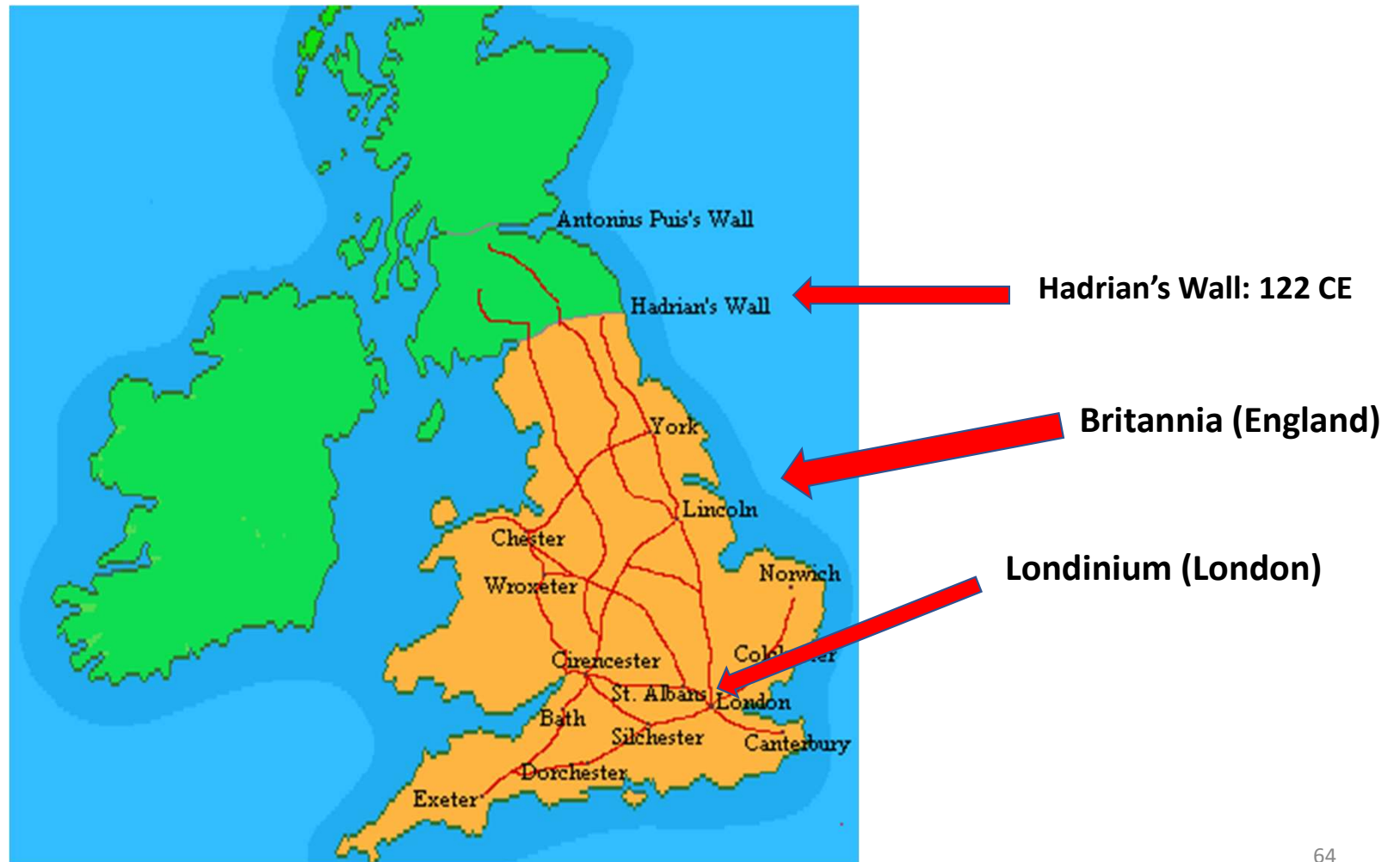


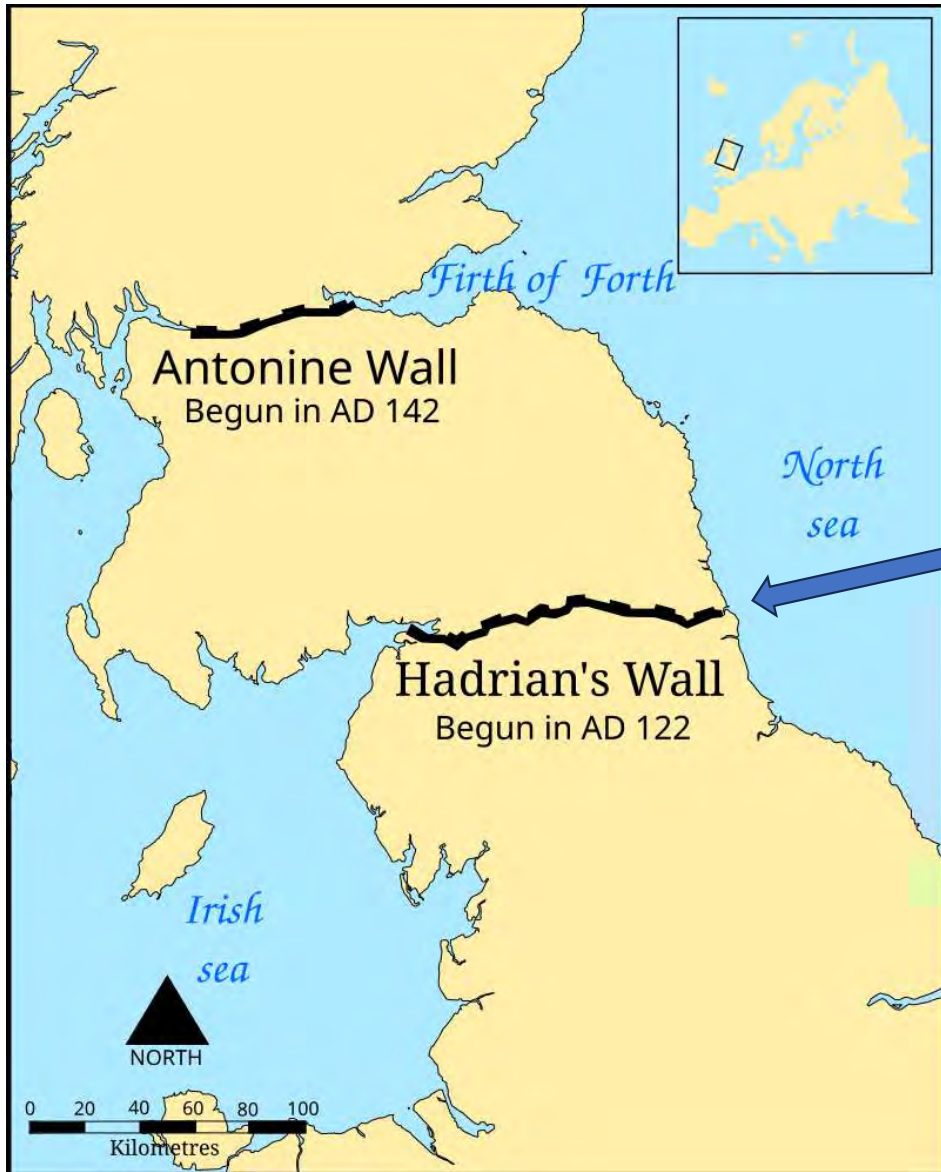
The Romans ruled and coexisted with the Celts

- Romans used Latin
- The Celts used Celtic
- Some were bilingual

Rome ruled Britania from 43 CE to 410 CE

# Roman Britain (43 AD to 410 AD)





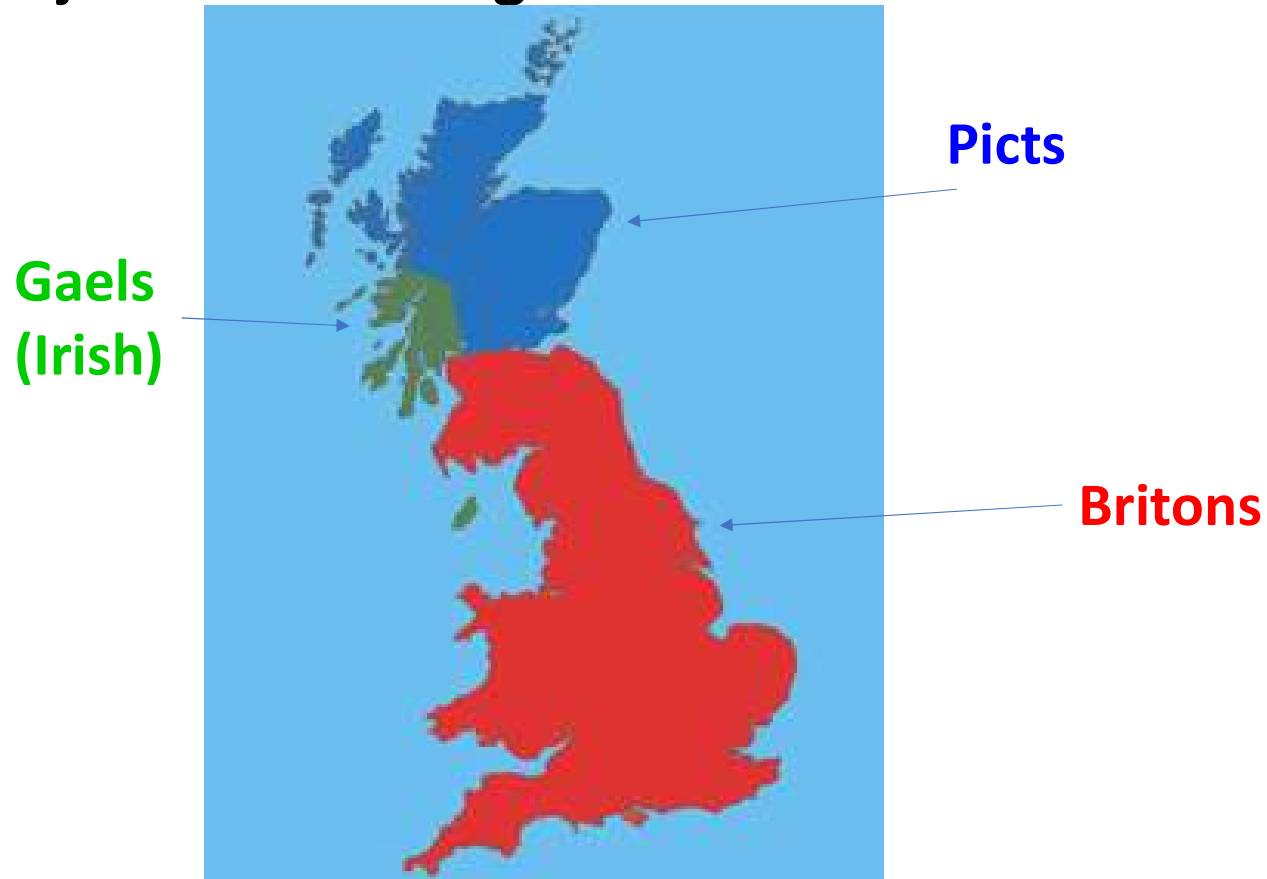
**Hadrian's Wall** is just south of the modern border of England and Scotland.



# Celts in Great Britain (410 CE)

a) when the Romans left

b) before the Anglo-Saxons arrived.



# Terminology: what is England?

- **England** has been a distinct geographic area since the Romans ruled the land.
  - ✓ Roman rule: 43 to 410 CE (almost 400 years)
  - ✓ **No one in England spoke English at that time. They spoke some sort of Celtic or some sort of Latin**
  - ✓ Almost all the major cities and roads in England were stated by the Romans.
- The later Germanic invaders and settlers (450 CE) spoke various West German languages, but there are very few written records before 700 CE
- You can say that Old English appeared in writing on or about 700 CE
- **England: united under one king or queen since 927 CE**

# What the heck is the English Language?

- English is classified as a West Germanic language
  - Our basic small common words come from Germanic languages
  - But our vocabulary is **loaded** with words that came from French, Latin and Greek

# Review

1. Language in general
2. Two types of languages:
  - a) **Inflected languages**: lots of endings on nouns, adjectives, verbs, .....
  - b) **Word order languages**
3. Language Families
4. Prehistoric England
5. Geography of England: same shape since Roman rule

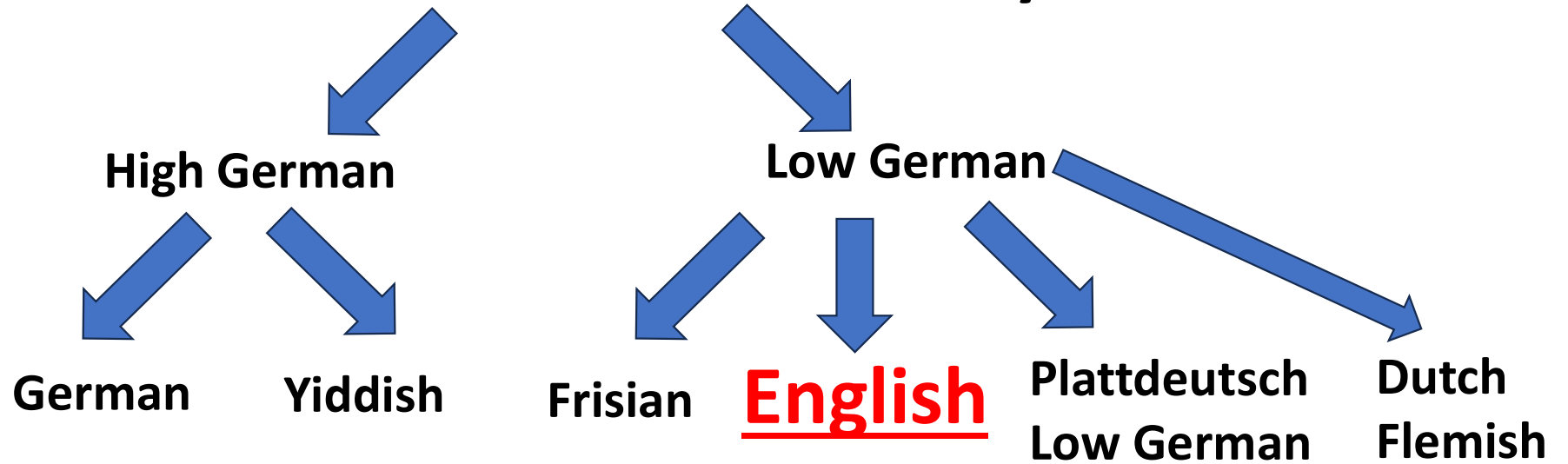
**This brings us to 410 CE and the story of  
England with the English Language is  
about to begin.**

**- Tune in Next Week –**

**Questions / Comments ?**

**Thank-you!!!!!!**

# West Germanic Family



# Romance Languages

LATIN



Spanish  
and  
Catalan

Portuguese

French  
and  
Provençal

Italian

Romanian