NEW COLLEGE EDITION

# THE AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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# Introduction

by William Morris

This Dictionary of the English language is an entirely new work and it represents in many respects a notable departure from previous British and American lexicographical practice. The editors of this Dictionary approached their task imbued with a deep sense of responsibility as custodians of tradition in language. Consequently at a time when language, already a historical melting pot, was and is under constant challenge– from the scientist, the bureaucrat, the broadcaster, the innovator of every stripe, even the voyager in space– the editors undertook to prepare a new dictionary. It would faithfully record our language, the duty of any lexicographer, but it would not, as so many others in these permissive times, rest there. On the contrary, it would add the essential dimension of guidance—that sensible guidance toward grace and precision that intelligent people seek in a dictionary.

To many people a dictionary is a forbidding volume, a useful but bleak compendium, to be referred to hastily for needed information, such as spelling and pronunciation. Yet what a dictionary ought to be is a treasury of information about every aspect of words, our most essential tools of communication. It should be an agreeable companion. By knowledgeable use of the dictionary we should learn where a word has come from, precisely what its various shades of meaning are today, and its social status.

In the five years of preparation of this work, many of the leading scholars and scientists of the English-speaking world have collaborated with our permanent editorial staff in the enterprise of recording with accuracy and authority those elements of our language which are of concern to literate people. The vocabulary recorded here, ranging from the language of Shakespeare to the idiom of the present day, is that of the educated adult. The "educated adult" referred to is, of course, a kind of ideal person, for he has at his fingertips a most comprehensive lexicon, not only for the conduct and discussion of everyday affairs, but also for all of the arts and all of the sciences.

We have had the enthusiastic cooperation of many distinguished linguists, several of whom have contributed articles on their areas of special interest in the pages following. Morris Bishop, poet and past president of the Modern Language Association, comments with wit and keen perception on the levels of usage to be found in our society today and the contributions of our Usage Panelists (described below) in resolving controversial questions of linguistic propriety. Morton Bloomfield, Professor of English at Harvard University, records the story of the evolution of the English language from its Germanic origins to the present day. Calvert Watkins, Professor of Linguistics and the Classics at Harvard University, contributes a fascinating account of the Indo-European origins of English. Henry Lee Smith, Jr., one of the nation's best-known linguistic scholars, Professor of Linguistics and English at the State University of New York at Buffalo, analyzes the relationships among the diverse American dialects. Richard Ohmann, Professor of English at Wesleyan University and editor of *College English*, the journal of the National Council of Teachers of English, analyzes grammar and meaning in light of the most recent research. Wayne O'Neil, Professor of Humanities at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, explicates new insights into the relationship of spelling to pronunciation in English. Henry Kučera, Professor of Linguistics and of Slavic Languages at Brown University, describes the application of computers to linguistic analysis and lexicography. Taken together, these introductory articles bring layman and student alike abreast of the latest important

developments in language study.

We have engaged the services of hundreds of authorities in every range of human endeavor and scholarship, from archaeology to space research, from Indo-European to computer programming. Over a four-year period, many thousands of definitions were sent to these specialists for emendation or approval.

To furnish the guidance which we believe to be an essential responsibility of a good dictionary, we have frequently employed usage-context indicators such as "slang," "nonstandard," or "regional." But going beyond that, we asked a panel of 100 outstanding speakers and writers a wide range of questions about how the language is used today, especially with regard to dubious or controversial locutions. After careful tabulation and analysis of their replies, we have prepared several hundred usage notes to guide readers to effectiveness in speech and writing. As a consequence, this Dictionary can claim to be more precisely descriptive, in terms of current usage levels, than any heretofore published—especially in offering the reader the lexical opinions of a large group of highly sophisticated fellow citizens.

In order to acquaint the reader with the history of our language, we engaged a special staff of more than a score of linguistic scholars, working under the direction of Professor Watkins at Harvard. With the help of the Dictionary's own staff of etymologists, they conducted a five-year research program amounting to a re-evaluation of the histories of all the words in the Dictionary. The etymologies are written in plain language with no abbreviations or symbols. In addition, an innovation was made in presenting more fully than ever before the *prehistoric* origins of the language; following the main body of the Dictionary is an Appendix of Indo-European roots, giving detailed and fascinating information about the ancient interrelationships of thousands of widely different words.

A major concern of the editors has been the language used in the word definitions themselves. Our aim has been to phrase definitions in concise, lucid prose. Here, too, we have undertaken to eliminate "dictionary shorthand"—the frustrating signs, symbols, and abbreviations that are commonplace in other dictionaries. Except for a few obvious abbreviations (*n.* for *noun*, *v.* for *verb*, and the like), we have followed a policy of spelling out all definitions. Where necessary to clarify a meaning or idiomatic usage, the editors have included an example, either quoted from literature or staff-written. We have also eliminated the meaningless lists of undefined compound forms which serve, in many American dictionaries, merely the purpose of inflating the so-called "entry count."

Simplicity and clarity have been sought in the system of representing the pronunciations. American speech takes many forms. The aim here is not to represent all or even most of its variations, but to provide one or more pronunciations for each word that can be easily reproduced from familiar symbols by the reader untrained in phonetics. The pronunciations are those that would be regarded as standard even by those who may themselves have regional "accents."

One important aspect of the fresh approach taken by the editors of this Dictionary is obvious at a glance. Utilizing the most recent advances in typographic design and printing, we have created what we believe to be a most attractive dictionary. The page, with its large, readable type and wide margins, was expressly designed to invite *reading*. The inclusion of several thousand illustrations, both in line drawings and photography, represents another notable advance in dictionary design. The pictures have been chosen as much as possible in an attempt to add genuine meaning to the subjects they illustrate. Though the pictures are in many cases attractive in themselves, the aim has been less to add beauty to the book than to give the reader fuller information than would be possible in a dictionary of traditional design.

As has been implied above, a primary aim of our staff has been to make this Dictionary as readable as we possibly could. We editors know that dictionaries can be fascinating. Working closely with them day by day, we see the vast amounts of interesting information that many users are not aware of, usually because it is hard to work one's way through the thorny underbrush of conventional sign language to find the treasure that lies buried in the entries. It is our earnest hope that, by presenting our Dictionary in inviting and readily readable fashion, without any lessening of authority, we will encourage the reader to explore and enjoy the riches of our remarkable tongue.

In the preparation of a work of this magnitude the cooperation of many hands and minds is essential. Of greatest significance, perhaps, has been the generous contribution of the members of our Usage Panel, who borrowed many hours from their busy pursuits to the end of creating what one panelist calls "a dictionary put together with deep respect for people who have an eye and ear and tongue for what is still the richest, most rewarding language in the world."

Thanks, too, are due to our many consultants and advisors in the various scholarly, scientific, and technological disciplines. To the scores of our editorial staff associates involved in the day-to-day tasks of creating and editing this Dictionary, we extend our unstinting thanks and appreciation.

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# A Brief History of the English Language

by Morton W. Bloomfield

Language, like other important patterns of human behavior, slowly but constantly evolves from older forms into newer ones. When different groups of people speaking one language become separated by geographical, political, or social barriers, each group gradually develops its own variety of the language, which we call a dialect. So long as the differences between two varieties do not make mutual comprehension impossible (though they may make it difficult), and so long as the speakers of each do not consider themselves to be speaking a different language, we may say that these varieties are dialects of the same language.

However, the tendency of language throughout the early centuries of human civilization, as tribal groups broke up into subdivisions and migrated, was to split again and again into dialects that in time became mutually incomprehensible. At that point they are recognized as separate languages. Most of the languages spoken today in western Asia and Europe can be traced back to a remote "ancestor" language which we call Indo-European. It was an unwritten language and therefore, of course, no records of it survive. Yet, as the Appendix devoted to Indo-European in this Dictionary demonstrates, it can be reconstructed. The character of its words and phrases and of its grammatical structure can be inferred by comparative study of the many languages which are its descendants.

As a matter of fact, the early history of any given descendant has to be reconstructed too, by essentially the same method, for written records are a relatively recent development. In the case of English, which is our subject here, we have no written records surviving from earlier than the eighth century A.D., and they do not become common before the tenth and eleventh centuries. But by studying the written records of other languages that clearly show a common ancestry with English —Dutch and German, for example—and by assuming that evolutionary changes before the existence of writing were generally similar in kind to observable changes since, we can make a reasonable guess as to the vocabulary and structure of the earlier forms of the three sister languages, as well as of their common parent. Thus, for instance, the Modern English *blue eyes* and the modern German *blaue Augen* are both traced back to a presumed parent language which we designate as West Germanic; this in turn is considered to be a major dialect of Primitive or Common Germanic, in which language the phrase is reconstructed as *blaewō augona*. All the steps from *blaewō augona* to *blue eyes* can be traced or reasonably assumed.

Various kinds of historical evidence indicate that about 1,500 years ago three closely related tribes, the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes, dwelt beside each other on the North Sea shore in what is today northern Germany and southern Denmark. Their language was a variety of West Germanic; and when it began to show significant differences from the other West Germanic dialects spoken around them, we may say that the English language was born. The speakers of this language were probably not aware for some time that it was different, but ultimately political and geographical circumstances created such an awareness. For many decades, however, Old English (as we call it) must have been very similar to other West Germanic dialects, and especially to the other North Sea dialects of Old Saxon and Old Frisian. A modern variant of Old Frisian is still spoken in the northern Netherlands and the extreme northeast of Germany. Old Frisian and Old English uniquely share certain sound developments. But gradually Old English became a distinctively different language, even though it continued to bear, as its modern form still bears, marks of its Germanic ancestry.

The chief political events that tended toward the development of Old English as a separate language were no doubt the effects of the invasion of England by the Angles and the Saxons, which began around the middle of the fifth century. We do not know exactly what pressures caused the Germanic invaders to cross the channel, but it seems clear that the ease with which they overcame the native Britons encouraged further invasion and settlement. Britain, of course, had already been subdued by Caesar's Roman legions in the first century, and only the gradual collapse of the Roman Empire, including Roman withdrawal from Britain, made the success of the Germanic tribes possible.

During the next two or three centuries these tribes conquered most of England and parts of Scotland. They drove back the British inhabitants into Wales and Cumberland, killing many and enslaving others. They developed kingdoms and a settled form of life. So complete was their domination of their new land that almost no words have come down to us from the older forms of Celtic, the language of the ancient Britons. Welsh, the language of Wales, is a modern descendant of Celtic, and in more recent centuries there have been borrowings from Welsh. Meanwhile, even as Old English continued to evolve away from its West Germanic sister languages on the continent, it began to develop regional dialects of its own. The evidence indicates that the four main dialects, identified as West Saxon, Kentish, Mercian, and Northumbrian, differed mostly in pronunciation, their syntax and vocabularies remaining more or less similar.

The West Saxon dialect occupies an especially important role in Old English. It is the dialect of most of the documents that have come down to us, and was the basis of a kind of standard language which by the tenth century was widely used as the cultural linguistic norm of England. The political dominance of Wessex among the various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms assured the victory of its dialect. A standard language meant that there was a prestigious, relatively fixed form of Old English which was widely understood, and that the scribes who wrote down literary, political, and legal documents were learned in the use of it. Anglo-Saxon England is remarkable in Europe, after the fall of Rome, in having developed a standard literary and official language centuries before all the other European countries. However, as we shall see, this standardization was to be violently upset by political events.

As a Germanic language, Old English had inflectional endings resembling those of modern German. New words were largely formed by compounding and derivation; borrowing from other languages was not frequent, although some Latin and Greek words and a few from other tongues did enter Old English. The language had a much freer word order than Modern English because the inflectional endings indicated grammatical relations which are shown by function words and word order in the language as we speak it today. However, Old English is by no means as free in its word order as Latin, various constraints of linguistic custom operating to restrict its freedom. There is a kind of compression in its style that gives Old English prose a special kind of dignity. Old English poetry had a very rich vocabulary, probably partly archaic at the time of its use. The verse was composed in great measure by formulas, using phrases of fixed metrical pattern which could be repeated in endless and fascinating variation. As we have noted, grammatical forms were much like those of modern German, with a number of noun declensions (although in later Old English these tend to fall together), strong and weak adjectives (two sets of declensions for all adjectives, depending on degree of particularity wished for), and strong and weak verbs rather like the same categories in Modern English. Nouns were of the masculine, feminine, or neuter gender, which determined the form of accompanying adjectives and the gender (and form) of referential pronouns. One cannot understand Old English without special study, yet even the most untutored reader of Modern English can grasp the meaning of some words or phrases. Here is Mark 12:1 in Old English:

> *Sum monn him plantode wingeard and betynde hine ond dealf anne seath and getimbrode anne stiepel and gesette hine mid eorthtilium and ferde on eltheodignesse.*

Here is a fairly literal translation of it:

> A certain man planted a vineyard for himself and enclosed it (him) and dug a pit and built a tower (steeple) and peopled (set) it (him) with farmers (earth-tillers) and went into a foreign country.

Old English is preserved in a rich literature, the oldest of any produced by the Germanic peoples, and in legal documents, inscriptions, and glosses. Much of this must be credited to the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon people to Christianity in the seventh and eighth centuries. The clerical scribes learned Latin, the language of their church, and then began to represent the vernacular language, Old English, with adaptations of the Roman alphabet. A few early inscriptions are preserved in the runic alphabet, which is an older form of the Roman alphabet borrowed by the Germanic peoples from the Romans much earlier. It is largely because we know rather precisely what sounds the Latin letters stand for that we can reconstruct the pronunciation of Old English with considerable certainty.

Some Old English literature is in the form of translations from religious classics; some of it consists of paraphrases and reworkings of religious stories. There are also original meditations, saints' lives, epics, practical work like collections of charms, and entertaining moralistic works like gnomes and riddles. It is an impressive body of work, and owes much to King Alfred (849–899),

who actively encouraged the widespread literary use of Old English. He was himself a writer and translator, and he employed many other scholars at his court.

During much of King Alfred's reign, and again early in the 11th century, England was under invasion by Danes and Norwegians – or, as they are often called, the Vikings. The linguistic result of extended Viking occupation of parts of the country was a good deal of exchange and assimilation between the languages of the rival peoples. Since, however, the two were still quite closely related Germanic tongues at this point in their development, this interchange produced no striking shift in the history of English, despite the introduction of some Scandinavian (Old Norse) words and, to a lesser extent, grammatical forms.

A much more drastic change was brought about by the invasion and conquest of England by the Normans from northwestern France in 1066. Originally of Viking ancestry, the Normans had, by the middle of the 11th century, become Frenchified in language and culture; their language is designated as Norman French – a dialect of Old French. The effects of the Norman Conquest were profound in the field of language no less than in other fields. So immense were the changes this event brought about that we give a special name to the period of English after they begin to show themselves, from about 1100; we call the language, from then to about 1500, Middle English.

The replacement of the Anglo-Saxon upper classes by a French-speaking group led to the disappearance of the standard Old English language. As it lost its cultural linguistic center, English fell back completely onto its various dialects and became a language of peasants and laborers and therefore, largely, unwritten. The early Middle English manuscripts that we have inherited simply represent late Old English, spelled in whatever way seemed to the local scribe (who was likely to be a Norman) to duplicate the sounds of the language as he heard it. This at least has the advantage of giving us clues to the changes that had been taking place in spoken Old English for many decades – changes that to some extent were concealed as long as the scribes used the standardized and relatively fixed literary language.

William the Conqueror and his successors ruled not only England but Normandy, across the English Channel, until 1204. Then France won back the Duchy of Normandy, and the Anglo-Normans, politically detached from the continent, began to regard England as their permanent homeland. One result was the gradual adoption of English as their ordinary form of speech, rather than Norman French. But they brought to English, of course, the influence of Norman French, with its Latin background. Not only did French words come into the English vocabulary in large numbers, but English speech and literary style began to be receptive to borrowings from other languages, particularly Latin.

Middle English, then, comprises the various dialects of late Old English, modified both by evolutionary changes that were already in process and that continued for centuries, and by influences from Norman French. It is clear that English had been steadily losing or reducing its inflections, and consequently was becoming less free in word order; it was also losing its grammatical gender. By the later Middle English period, regardless of the many changes in sound and syntax yet to come, the essentials of Modern English had been created through these evolutionary changes and through the mingling of French and English, with an injection of Scandinavian.

The resurrection of English, in the 13th and 14th centuries, as the universal language of England once again made a standard dialect inevitable. Because London became the capital, its dialect won out over the other dialects of Middle English. Normally we recognize five of these: Northern (descended in the main from Northumbrian), spoken north of the Humber; Midland (descended from Mercian), spoken between the Thames and the Humber and usually divided into East and West Midland; Southern, or South Western (descended from West Saxon), spoken south of the Thames except in Kent; and Kentish, or South Eastern (descended from Kentish), spoken in Kent and its environs.

London was in the East Midland area, and its variety of East Midland as spoken by the court, governmental officials, and university men (both Oxford and Cambridge are in the East Midland area) became the basis for standard English. By the end of the Middle Ages it was victorious and was gradually depressing the other dialects, except for Scottish, which has continued a lively existence as a literary and standard language down to today, though not uninfluenced by the London dialect.

It should be noted that the proper Old English ancestor of standard English is not the Wessex dialect, in which practically all our Old English documents are written, but the Mercian (for London was in Mercia), in which little is preserved. However, in spite of this break, we can still trace our English vocabulary back to Old English with confidence.

The position of the London dialect was further strengthened, though not determined, because it was the language in which Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate, the major writers of England in the later Middle Ages, wrote. After a lapse of some 350 years, England again had a standard language; but the battle of the vernacular was not yet won.

Middle English in its later forms is recognizably English, and a modern speaker could certainly understand a fair amount of it, although there are traps to be avoided. Some words still used today no longer have the same meaning – for example, *hope* meant "expect," and *edify* meant "build" – and some words have disappeared. Yet the vocab-

ulary is basically familiar. The following passage from Chaucer's Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, written about 1387, is not unrepresentative and is clearly English:

> Ther was also a Nonne, a Prioresse,
> That of hir smylyng was ful symple and coy;
> Hir gretteste ooth was but by Scinte Loy;
> And she was cleped [called] madame Eglentyne.
> Ful weel she soong the service dyvyne.

The spelling of Middle English is much more phonetic than that of Modern English, so that the strange orthography often indicates differences in pronunciation from the way we speak today. A final *e*, when not before a vowel, was sounded as a separate syllable, the phonetic value being that of the *a* in Modern English *sofa*. All the consonants were pronounced; for example, the *k* and *gh* in *knight*, and the *l* in *walked*. Yet almost any passage from Chaucer is felt as English, as Old English is not.

A series of major vowel changes from about 1350 to 1550 marks the shift from Middle English to Modern English, and is usually termed the Great Vowel Shift. It is the demarcation between the older stages of the language, strange to modern ears, and the later, which are recognizable as essentially what we speak today. Readers of Shakespeare are aware that his English is not the same as ours, but feel that it is close to our kind of English. The Great Vowel Shift in effect moved the long stressed vowels forward in the mouth and diphthongized long *i* and long *u* to (aī) and (au) respectively, so that Middle English *I*, pronounced (ē), became the Modern English pronunciation of the first person singular pronoun, and Middle English *hous*, pronounced (hōōs), became Modern English *house*. Printing, introduced into England by William Caxton in the midst of this shift, tended to preserve the old Middle English spelling and thus helped to put our orthography into the rather disorganized state from which it has suffered down to our day.

As English was called upon to perform a wider and wider variety of functions, and above all to increase its vocabulary to cope with tasks formerly left to Latin, it modified itself to fit the new needs. The Renaissance period is noted for its great influx of vocabulary, especially from the classical languages, and from French and Italian. Englishmen adopted words right and left; and although some words did not survive, enough did to make the vocabulary of English perhaps the largest of any language. This has created certain difficulties. For example, adjectives and nouns referring to the same thing may be unrelated in root to each other (*oral/mouth; ocular/eye*). But the wide borrowing has produced a rich store of synonyms from different linguistic sources (for example, *royal, kingly,* and *regal*).

A good example of this lexical movement may be seen in Andrew Borde's prologue to his *Breviary of Healthe*, written in 1552: "Egregious doctours and maysters of the Eximiouse and Archane Science of physicke, of your Urbanitie Exasperate not your selfe agaynste me for makyinge of this lytle volume of Phisycke." These "inkhorn" terms, as they were called, provoked some indignation, yet the demands made upon English led to the adoption of many of these words. *Eximiouse* (which meant "excellent") has disappeared, but *exasperate* is a word heard every day, and *egregious* is not rare, although its meaning has shifted from "distinguished" to "flagrant." We now have thousands of long and short, hard and easy, Germanic and Romance (that is, derived from Latin) words in our language, each with its particular powers. Shakespeare can be as moving when he writes "the multitudinous seas incarnadine" as when he writes "to be or not to be." English has extensive resources, both concrete and abstract, everyday and elegant or academic, to satisfy various kinds of users and various goals.

American English is descended from that variety of English brought over to the colonies in the 17th century. It developed on its own to some extent—obviously in the matter of names for new objects, peoples, and flora and fauna—without ever losing contact with its base in England. The American and British varieties of the language have persisted, and seem in this era of mass communications and easy travel to be getting closer to each other. The fate of a language is closely bound up with the political fate of its speakers, and the world role of the United States in the past 30 years has strengthened the position of American English.

The regional dialects of English in America have traditionally been called New England, General American, and Southern; and although there has been some questioning of this categorization in recent years, it still seems more useful than the Northern, Midland, and Southern division some favor. In any event, the mobility of modern life and communication devices such as radio and television are profoundly affecting regional dialects, and they seem on the way to merging with each other. Social dialects, on the other hand, are extremely persistent, especially in England and to some extent in America. We are very much aware of the problem of ghetto and urban dialects today, and consequently of the value of bidialectism as well as of bilingualism. It is sufficient merely to mention the other major dialects of English: Canadian English, Irish English, Australian English, Scottish, Indian English—each, it must be emphasized, with its own subdialects.

In spite of some differences, there has been a basic stability in the rules or inner regulations of English over the centuries. As Professor Ian Gordon has written in *The Movement of English Prose:* "The segmented English sentence, stressed in word-groups, each word-group separated from its neighbour by a boundary-marker, the major stress of each group falling on the semantically important word in the group, the groups

occurring in a relatively fixed order, the words in each group generally falling in a precisely fixed order—all this, plus the continuity of the original vocabulary and the preservation of the original structural words, has ensured an underlying stability in English speech, and in the prose which is based upon it."

With the establishment of a standard dialect in the late 14th century and the acquisition of an adequate vocabulary in the 16th and 17th centuries, it was left to the 18th and 19th centuries to create adequate grammars and dictionaries, so that by about 1800 English was fully ready to assume the international responsibility that the cultural, scientific, and political importance of England and America was to thrust upon it. English in 1750 was a language of more or less minor importance in the world; by 1850 it was a world language. Since then it has spread all over the globe and is the international language par excellence. If there are more speakers of some varieties of Chinese than English, a fact not completely established, Chinese does not have the world authority, the geographic spread, the important literature and scientific writings, or the commercial significance of English. English opens gates to great literature and philosophy and makes possible the universality of science. Although this high eminence is not fundamentally because of its innate superiority, it is certainly well fitted for its eminence and for the task of bringing various peoples together and establishing ties rather than severing them.

We have seen, then, how Modern English has developed a vocabulary of great extent and richness, drawn from many languages of the world. Its inflections are few, but its syntactic rules are probably as intricate as those of any language. Its verbal system presents great complexities, making for subtle distinctions. It is both a very concrete and an abstract language. It favors sibilants over other sounds, and yet possesses a wide phoneme repertory. Its spelling is fairly irregular, although not without some patterns and rules. Above all it is a supple and variegated language, which its native speakers should cherish and which provides them with their hold on the past, their contact with the present, and their claim on the future. Finally, it makes possible their view of the world and of themselves.

# The Indo-European Origin of English

by Calvert Watkins

Speaking to the Asiatick Society in Calcutta on February 2, 1786, the English orientalist and jurist Sir William Jones uttered his famous pronouncement:

> . . . the Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong, indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists.

Jones was content with the assertion of a common original language, without exploring the details. Others took up the cause, notably the German philosopher Friedrich von Schlegel, to whom is principally due the popular diffusion of the long-lived misconception that the European languages were in some sense derived from Sanskrit. But it remained for another German, Franz Bopp, to found the new science of comparative grammar, with the publication in 1816 of his work *On the conjugational system of the Sanskrit language, in comparison with that of the Greek, Latin, Persian, and Germanic languages*. He was twenty-five when it appeared.

It has been rightly said that the comparatist has one fact and one hypothesis. His one fact is that certain languages present similarities among themselves which are so numerous and so precise that they cannot be attributed to chance, and which are such that they cannot be explained as borrowings or as universal features. His one hypothesis is that these languages must then be the result of descent from a common original. Certain similarities may be accidental: the Greek verb "to breathe," "blow," has a root *pneu-*, and in the language of the Klamath Indians of Oregon the verb "to blow" is *pniw-*. Other similarities may reflect universal or near-universal features of human language: in the languages of most countries where the bird is known, the *cuckoo* has a name derived from the noise it makes. A vast number of languages around the globe have "baby-talk" words like *mama* and *papa*. Finally, languages commonly borrow words and other features from each other, in a whole gamut of ways ranging from casual or chance contact to learned coinages of the kind that English systematically makes from Latin and Greek.

But where all of these possibilities must be excluded, the comparatist assumes genetic filiation: descent from a common ancestor, which, in the case of Indo-European, as Sir William Jones surmised almost two centuries ago, no longer exists.

In the early part of the 19th century, scholars set about exploring systematically the similarities observable among the principal languages spoken now or formerly in the regions from Iceland and Ireland in the west to India in the east, and from Scandinavia in the north to Italy and Greece in the south. They were able to group these languages into a *family* which they called *Indo-European* (the term first occurs in English in 1813, though in a sense slightly different from today's). The similarities among the different Indo-European languages require us to assume that they are the continuation of a single prehistoric language (called *Indo-European* or *Proto-Indo-European*). In the words of the greatest Indo-Europeanist, the French scholar Antoine Meillet, "we will term *Indo-European language* every language which at any time whatever, in any place whatever, and however altered, is a form taken by this ancestor language, and which thus continues by an uninterrupted tradition the usage of Indo-European."

Those dialects or branches of Indo-European still represented today by one or more languages are: Indic and Iranian, Greek, Armenian, Slavic, Baltic, Albanian, Celtic, Italic, and Germanic.