

1. Course Introduction

The History of English (Ling 390)

Prof. Pentangelo

Fall 2025

What We'll Cover

1. Personal introductions
2. Course introduction
3. A bit of English's history
4. For next time

Personal Introductions

- I'm Joseph Pentangelo.
- I live on Staten Island with my wife, Rebecca, our daughter, Elizabeth, and our cat, Babycat.
- I'm a linguist and folklorist.
- I graduated from the Macaulay Honors College at the College of Staten Island in 2012. Later, I got my PhD in Linguistics from the Graduate Center, CUNY, in 2020.
- Your turn! Name, major, year, and a hobby or anything cool.

Icebreaker

- Find Someone Who...
- Don't fill in yourself on your own sheet.
- Don't use the same person for two squares.

Find Someone Who...			
Has a dog	Knows ASL	Knows how to knit	Drives
Shares a hobby (name & hobby)	Has been to California	Has a cat	Hates cilantro
Is a painter	Loves the same show (name & show)	Free Space (name & fun fact)	Knows CPR
is multilingual (name & languages)	Lives outside NYC	Loves to garden	Skates



Syllabus and Website

Ling 390: History of English
The College of Staten Island, CUNY
Fall 2025

Day/Time: Mondays, 6:30-9:50pm
Room: 2N108
Website: <https://ling390fall25.commons.gc.cuny.edu/>

Instructor: Joseph Pentangelo
joseph.pentangelo@csi.cuny.edu
• Please don't send emails to "cix.csi.cuny.edu" — I won't see them.
• Please include "Ling 390" in the subject of any emails for this class.

Office Hours: Mondays, 5:30-6:30pm, 2S 225 (in-person)
Email me to set up remote office hours.

Catalogue Description:
4 hours; 4 credits. How the sounds, grammar, spelling, and words of English came to be the way they are. For English majors and minors, this is designated as a linguistics course. NOTE: Not open to students who have already completed ENL 424. Enrollment Requirements: Prerequisites: ENG151. Requirement Designation: Regular Liberal Arts.

1. Requirements

1.1. Readings
The principal textbook for this course is *The Origins and Development of the English Language*, 6th edition, by the late John Algeo. Other texts are listed on the course calendar. Expect to read about 20 to 40 pages per week in this class.

In addition to the textbook, you will be reading works from four different stages of the English language—Old English, Middle English, Early Modern English, and Modern English. All readings will be made available for you to download on the course website.

Grade Key			
A	93%-	B-	80-82%
A-	90-92%	C+	77-79%
B+	87-89%	C	70-76%
B	83-86%	D	60-69%
		F	<60%

1.2. Grading
The breakdown is as follows:
20%

1.2.1. Participation
Active and engaged participation is essential. You are expected to attend class regularly and participate in class discussions and in class exercises. It is essential that you do the readings in order to participate actively in class discussions. Participation is worth a full 30% of your overall grade, so participate at least every other week.

Keep your paper copies!

Bring them to class!

History of English
(Fall 2025)
College of Staten Island, CUNY

Home

Syllabus

Assignments

Home

Welcome to the course website for the Fall 2025 History of English class at the College of Staten Island, CUNY. Here, you can find the syllabus, assignments, slides, and other course materials.

You are encouraged to bookmark this website and check it regularly for updates. We will not really be using Brightspace for this class, for reasons which we can discuss in class.

ling390fall25.commons.gc.cuny.edu

Before it was England

- Who were the Britons?
- What kind of language did they speak?
- Who were the Anglo-Saxons?
- What kind of language did they speak?
- What did Rome have to do with England?
- Is there a difference between Britain and England?
- Does English come from German?



ATLANTIC OCEAN

NORTH SEA

ENGLISH CHANNEL

ICELAND

NORWAY

SWEDEN

UNITED KINGDOM

DENMARK

IRELAND

NETHERLANDS

LONDON

GERMANY

BELGIUM

FRANCE

SPAIN

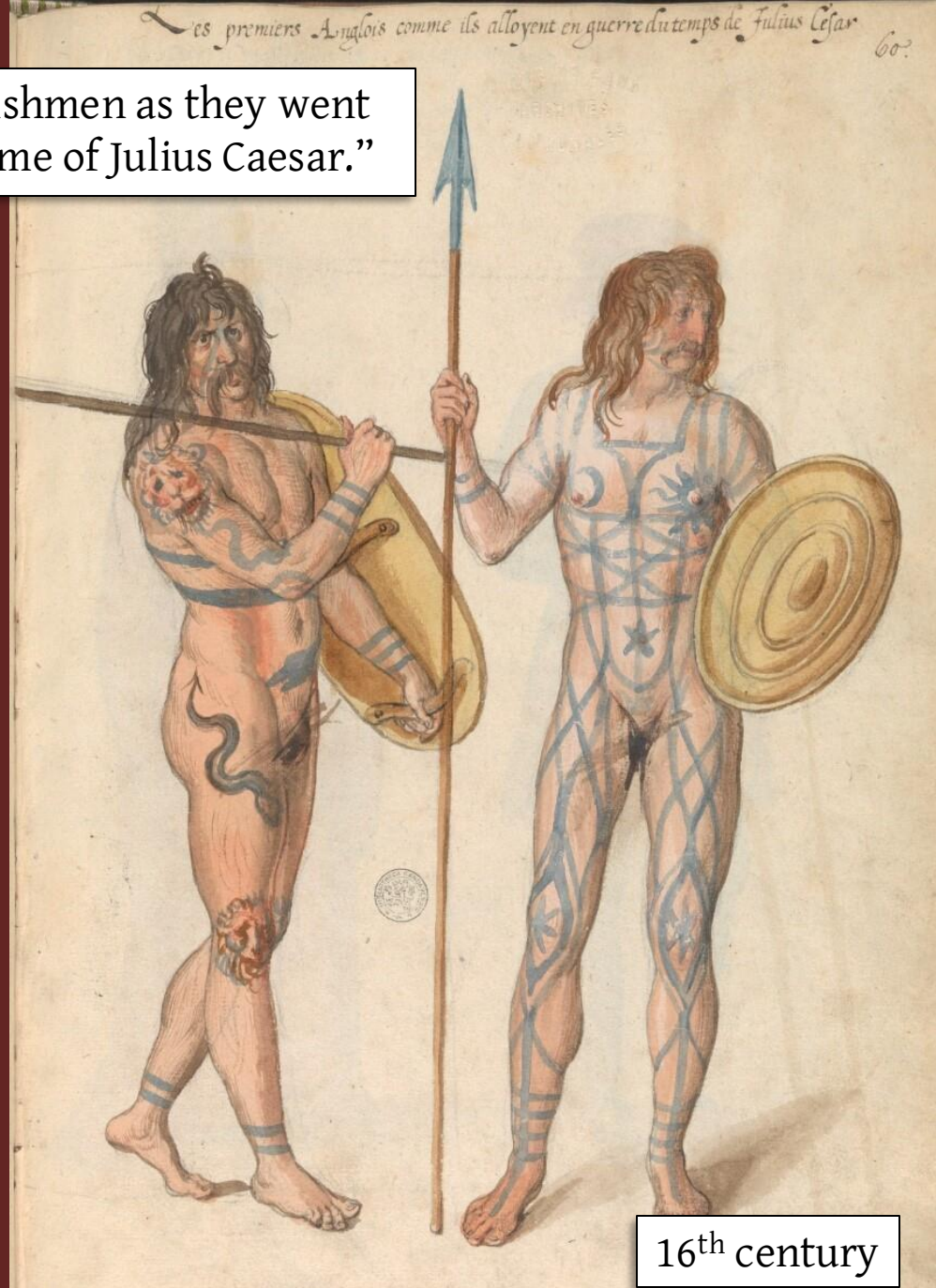


“The first Englishmen as they went to war in the time of Julius Caesar.”



Aborigines of England?

1804

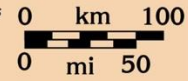


16th century

Roman Conquest of Britain

43 – 84

Based on Frere's *Britannia*,
Jones & Mattingly's *Atlas
of Roman Britain*, and
The Agricola by Tacitus



Campaigns

- 43 (Claudius)
- 43-47 (Aulus Plautius)
- 47-52 (Ostorius Scapula)
- 52-57 (Didius Gallus)
- 57 (Quintus Veranus)
- 58-60 (Suetonius Paulinus)
- 69-71 (Vettius Bolanus)
- 71-73 (Pettilius Cerialis)
- 73-77 (Julius Frontinus)
- 77-84 (Agricola)



Agricola

- In about AD 98, the Roman historian Tacitus wrote *Agricola*, about his father-in-law who served as governor of Roman Britain for six years.

“Who were the original inhabitants of Britain, whether they were indigenous or foreign, is, as usual among barbarians, little known. Their physical characteristics are various and from these conclusions may be drawn. The red hair and large limbs of the inhabitants of Caledonia point clearly to a German origin. The dark complexion of the Silures, their usually curly hair, and the fact that Spain is the opposite shore to them, are an evidence that Iberians of a former date crossed over and occupied these parts. Those who are nearest to the Gauls are also like them, either from the permanent influence of original descent, or, because in countries which run out so far to meet each other, climate has produced similar physical qualities. But a general survey inclines me to believe that the Gauls established themselves in an island so near to them. Their religious belief may be traced in the strongly-marked British superstition.” (Agricola 12)



Roman Britain

- Rome conquered much of Britain, founded cities like Bath, fortified cities like London, built roads and infrastructure, introduced a number of religions (including Christianity), and created a local elite who were ethnically British but culturally Roman.
- Brittonic survived – was never fully replaced by Latin.
- Much of Britain was a part of the Roman Empire until AD 410.
- Roman Britain lasted for nearly 400 years.
- Then, Rome left.



Bath

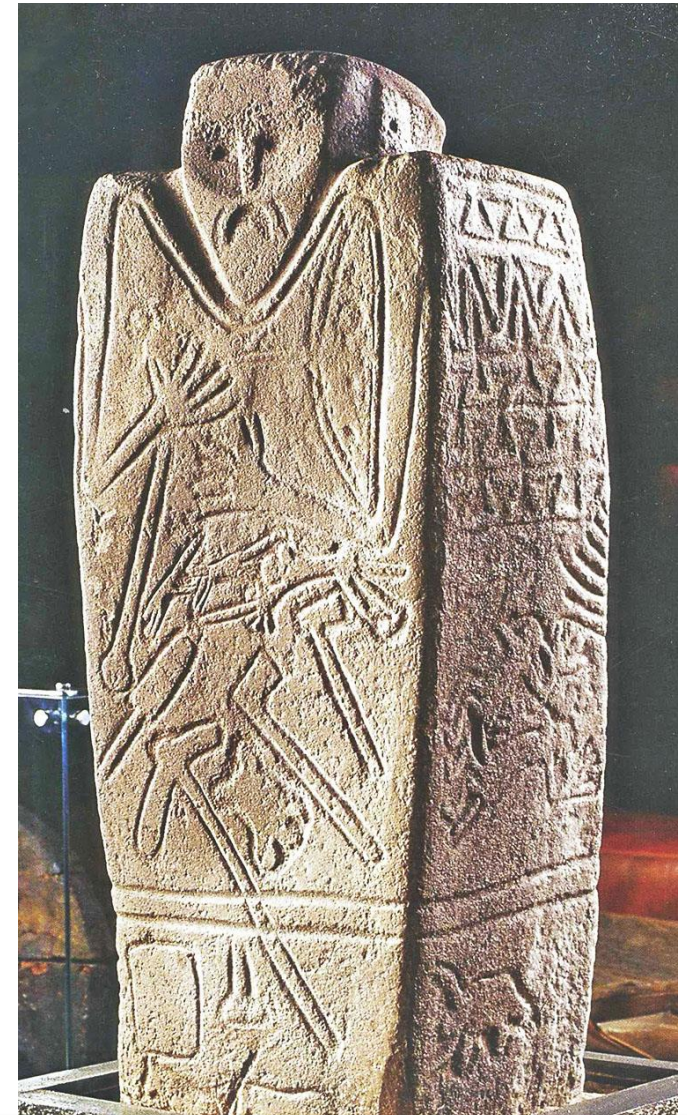


Child's shoe and board game from Vindolanda excavation



Brittonic and Latin

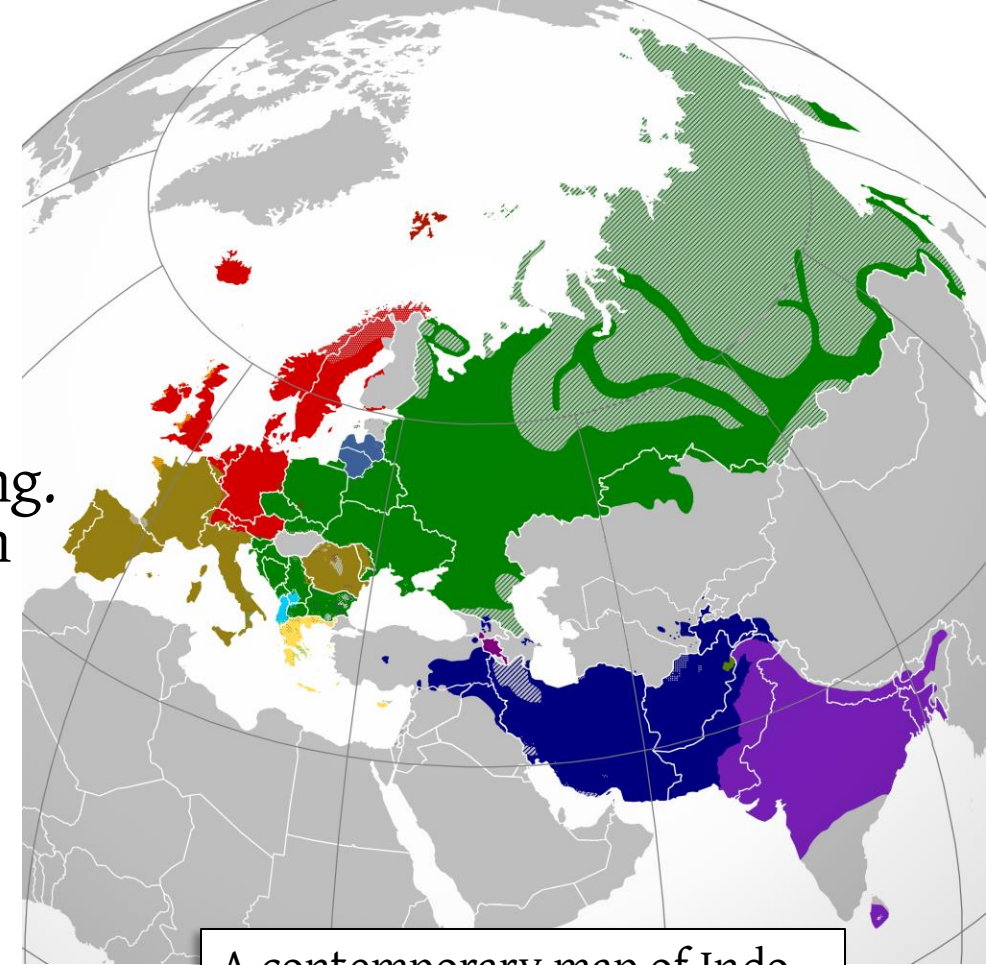
- The Britons spoke a Celtic language known retrospectively as **Common Brittonic**, and the Romans spoke **Latin**.
- (The Gauls were also Celts — Tacitus was right about the connection between the Gauls and the Britons.)
- These are both **Indo-European** languages, along with many languages spoken throughout Europe and much of Asia (and, through colonization, most of the Americas and some of Africa, too.)



The Kernosovskiy Idol (mid-3rd millennium BC), discovered in Ukraine, believed to represent the Indo-European chief deity.

Proto-Indo-European

- Historical linguistics dates back to the late-18th century, when European colonization was spreading. Scholars discovered that many European and Asian languages shared a substantial number of features.
- They hypothesized that these languages all descended from a single common ancestor, Proto-Indo-European (PIE).
- These Indo-European languages constitute one family.
- Note: Indo-European is **not** the ancestor of all modern languages. Even many languages spoken in Europe and India aren't Indo-European (e.g. Basque, Finnish, Tamil).



A contemporary map of Indo-European languages.

Proto-Indo-European

- Indo-European, or **Proto-Indo-European (PIE)**, is the name given to the hypothetical ancestral language that all of today's Indo-European languages are descended from.
- It has never been directly attested to – its speakers didn't write it down – but it has been reconstructed with a reasonable degree of confidence.
- It is also used to describe the culture of the people who would have spoken this language.



Simplified Indo-European family tree by Fortson

Roman Control Falters

- Towards the end of Roman control in Britain, the east coast of England had seen a number of seaborne invasions and raids from Germanic warriors sometimes known as the Saxons.
- The Britons also faced raids and attacks from the Picts and Scotti, Celts from beyond the borders of Roman Britain who were never Romanized.
- During the “barbarian conspiracy” (AD 367) there was coordination between these groups aimed against Roman Britain.



Roman Control Falters

- Roman military occupation pulled out around 410 AD.
- Raids against the Romano-British cities and people continued.
- Britons begged Romans in Gaul to send help, but none came.
- Imagine their desperation.
- One British leader, hoping to expel the raiders, hired Germanic mercenaries: Angles, Saxons, and Jutes.
- They came to Britain and took control around 440 AD.

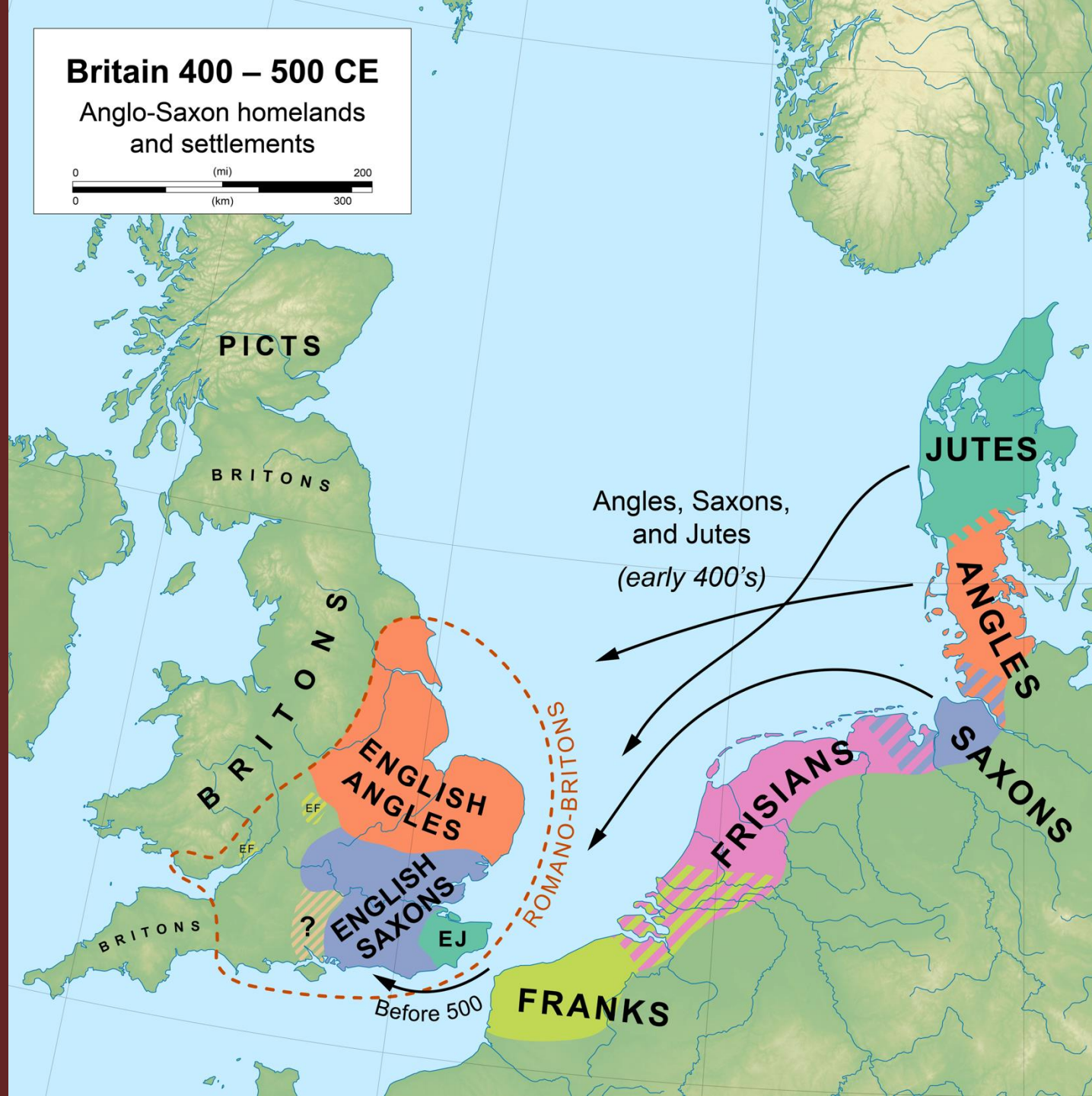
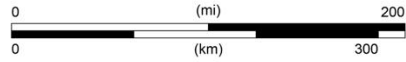


441: “The British provinces, which to this time had suffered various defeats and misfortunes, are reduced to Saxon rule” — *Chronica Gallica of 452*

Much of this history can be found in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (c. 731).

Britain 400 – 500 CE

Anglo-Saxon homelands
and settlements





Reconstruction of Anglo-Saxon helmet buried at Sutton Hoo



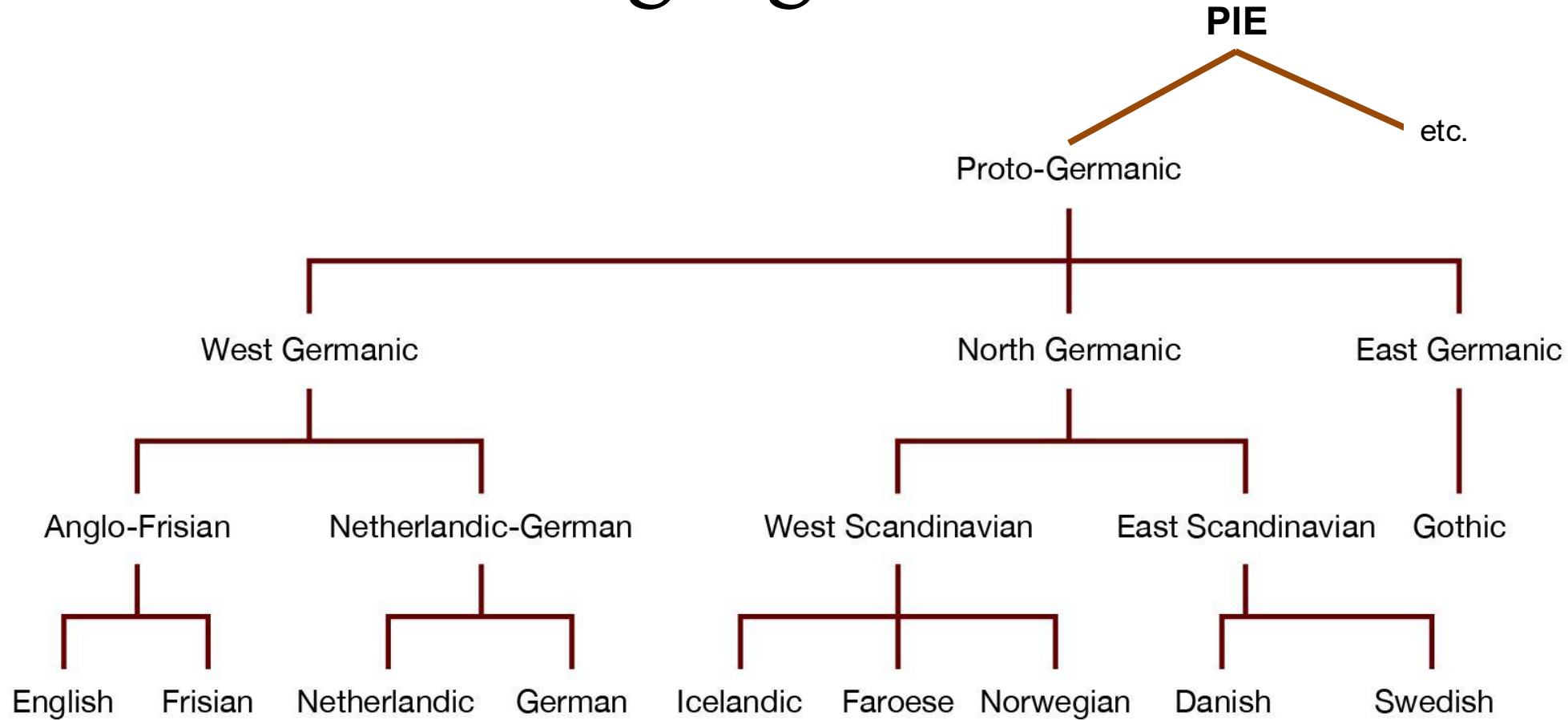
Bucket buried at Sutton Hoo

Anglo-Saxons

- The Anglo-Saxons were Germanic peoples who spoke mutually-intelligible Germanic languages.
- (Germanic languages are, like the Celtic and Italic languages, Indo-European.)
- Old English is the name for the language that the Anglo-Saxons spoke. It developed throughout the generations as the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and other Germanic peoples settled in great numbers in Britain, mixing with the local population and largely supplanting Latin and Brittonic.
- Wales, Scotland, Brittany were bastions for escaping Britons.



Germanic Languages



For next time

- Read pp.78–86 in the Algeo textbook.
- There will be a quiz on this reading at the start of our next class on September 15th.