

PROJECT 11

Descent of the Indo-European Word *Mater*

If we return to the German and English words for *mother*, we can reconstruct a simple genealogy of German and English by diagramming the descent of this ancient word. Show the descent of the word *mother* by writing the word for *mother* in the box beneath the appropriate language in the chart on the following page. This project provides an example of words that are similar because of shared descent. The word *Mutter* in German descended from the Indo-European word for mother, *mater*. The same is true of the word *mother* in English; it also descended from the Indo-European word *mater*.

Language: Word Meaning *Mother*

Proto-Indo-European: mater

Proto-Germanic: mothaer

Old English: modor

Middle English: mother

Modern English: mother

Modern German: Mutter

Latin: mater

Old Irish: mathir

Irish Gaelic: mathir

Sanskrit: matar

Greek: meter

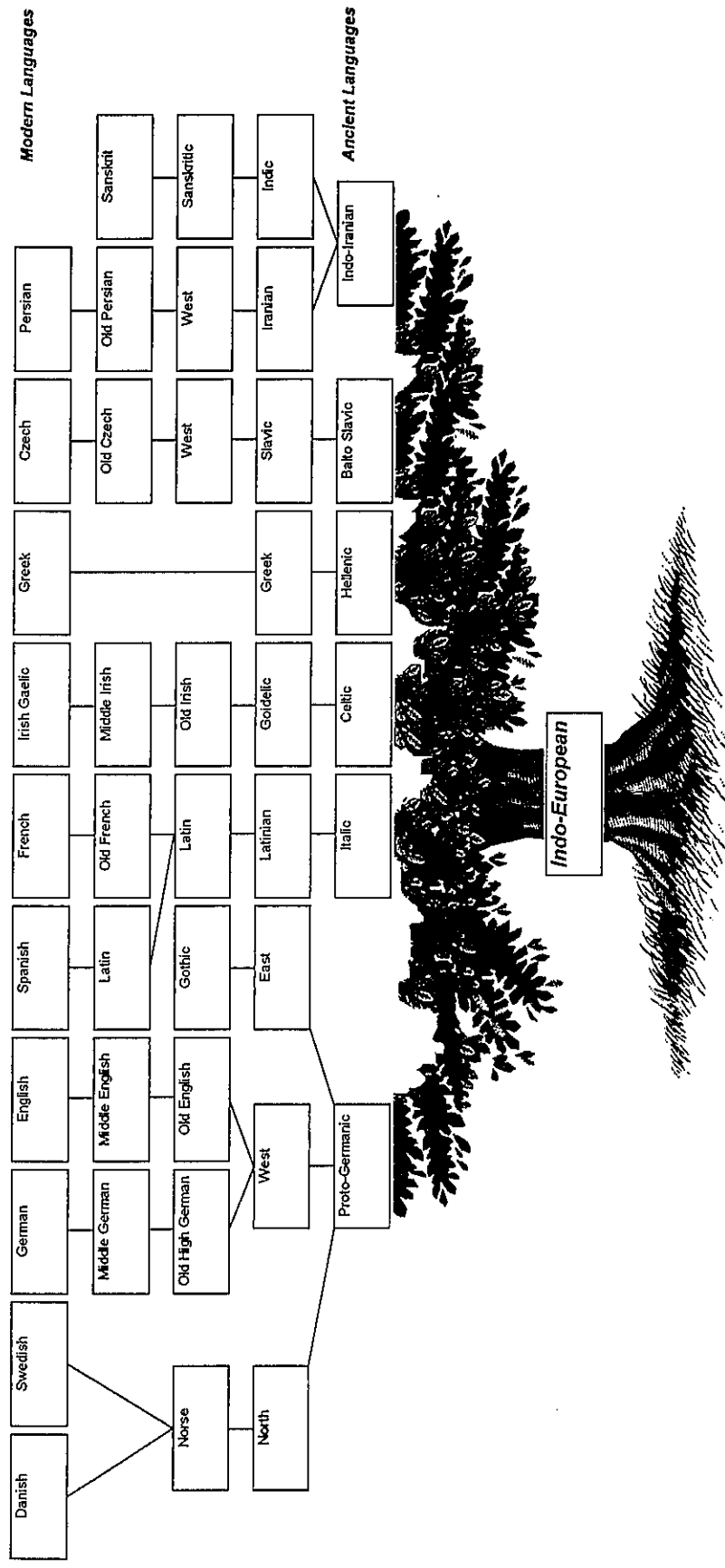
Spanish: madre

Danish: moder

Swedish: moder

Modern Czech: matka

Modern French: mère



Indo-European Languages II
 A simplified family chart of Indo-European languages. Following the list given, fill in the appropriate blocks to show the descent of the Indo-European word for mother.
 Courtesy of Paul Hertzell.

PROJECT 13

Borrowing Words and Adapting the Comparative Method

1. As we have seen, when one finds similarities of root words in multiple languages, this could indicate either mass borrowing or shared descent. But a word could not descend from a language that did not have the thing the word represents. Therefore, the word for *computer* could not have descended from Proto-Indo-European since the Indo-Europeans lived five thousand years ago and did not have computers. The words listed below are similar in many modern Indo-European languages. Could these words have descended from the Indo-European mother language of five thousand years ago? Write *possible* or *not possible* next to each word.

computer

brother

two

Internet

steel

New Jersey

mead

Jesus (of the New Testament)

eye

hunt

father

grass

telephone

moon

(continued)

2. Using the comparative method, explain the coincidence of themes, archetypes, and motifs in literature and myths throughout history and around the world. For specific examples around which to frame your answer, refer to Projects 7, 8, and 9.

THE STORY OF ENGLISH

English grew out of the Germanic family of languages. After Indo-European people migrated to different regions, each group gradually incorporated local cultures and environments to develop cultures and languages independent of other Indo-Europeans. Those who were to become Germanic people lived in tribal communities, each with a distinct language, customs, and kinship organization. Tribes interacted and shared many features, but each tribe also established a unique character.

For several centuries beginning with the third century A.D., large kinship or tribal groups of Germanic people migrated out from central and northern Europe into other parts of Europe and the Mediterranean world. The Vandals migrated through Spain into northern Africa, where they conquered local states but were eventually assimilated into the native populations. Goths split into two major groups, Visigoths and Ostrogoths, and also migrated south, the first to establish a kingdom in Spain, the other to assimilate into the native populations of southeastern Europe. Most important to the story of the development of English were the migrations of the **Saxon and Angle** tribes.

People of the Saxon tribe wandered from the central European homeland in numerous waves, including a series of migrations across the English Channel to the British Isles. These resettlements took place around the fourth and fifth centuries and coincided with migrations of Angle people to the same region. When the Saxons and Angles arrived, they encountered Celtic people who had inhabited the islands for many centuries. Eventually the culture of the Saxons and the Angles replaced the Celtic languages in the southeastern regions, and thus emerged a new language, Anglo-Saxon, also known as Old English. This language and culture dominated all aspects of life in the region and evolved as its own culture, independent of the Germanic cultures on the continent, though considerable contact continued. Over the next thousand years, many great influences and changes came to the Anglo-Saxon language and culture, particularly by Danish Vikings and in 1066 from **Normans**, invaders from the continent.

Normans were Norsemen (Northmen) who had lived long enough in the land of the Romanized Franks (modern France) that their old language had evolved into a language with a Latin base, called *French Norman*. When the Normans conquered Anglo-Saxon territory, they implemented French Norman as the language of administration. The new language thus entered English first as a language of foreign rule, but eventually its influence and use migrated into everyday speech. By the fourteenth century, English had become a language that was truly an amalgamation of different Indo-European languages: Celtic, Angle, Saxon, Danish, and Norman French. Because English

was a melting pot of many different languages, it still has one of the largest vocabularies of any language in the world.

As much as people frequently define themselves by distinguishing cultural differences, it should be evident from the story of English that the formation of culture is a historical process of exchange and intersection, or borrowing and descending (and rarely accident). Exchange and intersection are perpetual in human history and occur through contact and inheritance. No people are long isolated, and no culture is wholly original. People and languages disappear, while new ones emerge, but not from thin air. Every culture is unique, but, like individuals, is also a descendant and a relative. Indo-European languages are cousins, but so are all languages cousins. For, while English, Spanish, Russian, Sanskrit, and hundreds more languages descended from Indo-European, all languages ever spoken descended from the First Language.

PROJECT 14

Inherited Culture

Identify words and features of American life that are inherited from non-English-speaking or non-American cultures.

1. Foods: Name five dishes with non-English names; for example: pizza from Italian.
2. Music: Name three songs that come from non-American groups or traditions; for example: "Danny Boy" from Irish.
3. Corporations: Name three corporations with non-American headquarters and manufacturing; for example: Olivetti, Italy, printers.
4. Places: Name five place names that have become standard American English but that come from non-English words; for example: Los Angeles from Spanish; Bismarck from German.
5. Name four common words in English that do not fit the categories listed above but that represent actions, things, or mentalities and originate from a language other than English; for example: chauffeur from French.

