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978-1-108-43438-6 — The Cambridge Handbook of Germanic Linguistics
Edited by Michael T. Putnam , B. Richard Page
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Germanic Languages

An Overview

B. Richard Page and Michael T. Putnam

I.1 Introduction

The Germanic languages include some of the world's most widely spoken and thoroughly researched languages. English has become a global language that serves as a lingua franca in many parts of the world and has an estimated 1.12 billon speakers (Simons and Fennig 2018). German, Dutch, Icelandic, Swedish, and Norwegian have also been studied and described extensively from both diachronic and synchronic perspectives. In addition to the standard varieties of these languages, there are available descriptions of many nonstandard varieties as well as of regional and minority languages, such as Frisian and Low German. There are several possibilities to consider when putting together a handbook of a language family. One would be to have a chapter devoted to each language, as in König and Auwera (1993). This would require the choice of which languages to include and would make cross-linguistic comparisons difficult. In the alternative, one could take a thematic, comparative approach and examine different aspects of the Germanic languages, such as morphology or syntax, as in Harbert (2007). We have chosen the latter approach for this handbook. The advantage of such an approach is that it gives the contributors in the volume an opportunity to compare and contrast the broad range of empirical phenomena found across the Germanic languages that have been documented in the literature. As a result, this handbook extends beyond treatments of the phonology, morphology, and syntax of the standard varieties of the Germanic languages to include the nonstandard varieties and topics such as semantics, second language acquisition, Germanic contact languages, and Germanic minority languages. The focus is on contemporary Germanic languages and synchrony. Earlier stages of the Germanic languages and historical developments are not treated in any kind of systematic way in this volume (see Fulk 2018 for an in-depth treatment of the early Germanic languages).

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The Germanic languages are genetically related and constitute a branch of the Indo-European language family. Germanic is generally divided into three branches: East, North and West. The chief representative of East Germanic is Gothic, the earliest attested Germanic language. Wulfila, a bishop to the Goths, translated the Bible into Gothic in approximately 350 CE, and the earliest surviving manuscripts were transcribed around 500 CE. The East Germanic languages are now extinct though a dialect of Gothic known as Crimean Gothic was spoken in the Crimea into the eighteenth century (see Stearns 1978). Of the 47 Germanic languages spoken today and listed by *Ethnologue*, six belong to North Germanic and 41 to West Germanic. Louden (Chapter 34) provides a discussion of the difficulty of classifying some of the language varieties listed by *Ethnologue* as languages or dialects before proceeding to an overview of the Germanic languages spoken in minority language communities around the world. Examples of languages discussed in the chapter on minority languages by Louden include Pennsylvania German, different varieties of Frisian, Mennonite Low German (also called Plautdietsch), and many others. This chapter will focus on those Germanic languages which may be regarded as majority languages. Roberge (Chapter 35) discusses Germanic-based creoles and pidgins. Roberge follows Thomason's (2001: 158) definition of a contact language as "any new language that arises in a contact situation. Linguistically, a contact language is identifiable by the fact that its lexicon and grammatical structures cannot all be traced back primarily to the same source language; they are therefore mixed languages in the technical historical linguistic sense; they did not arise primarily through descent with modification from a single earlier language." The classification of a language as a majority language, a minority language or a contact language can be quite clear. For example, one can readily agree that Icelandic is the majority language in Iceland, Low German is a minority language in Germany, and Unserdeutsch is a contact language spoken in New Guinea. However, these classifications often overlap. For example, Swedish is the majority language in Sweden but a minority language in Finland. Moreover, it is sometimes debatable whether or not a language is in fact a contact language. Two examples discussed by Roberge (Chapter 35) as noncanonical contact languages are Afrikaans and English. Scholars often have conflicting opinions about how these two languages should be categorized. For instance, Bailey and Maroldt (1977) maintain that English is a French creole whereas Poussa (1982) claims that English is a Norse creole. Lutz (2012) argues that both analyses are wrong and that English is not a creole language.

In this chapter, we provide a brief survey of Germanic languages that are commonly held to be majority languages followed by an overview of the chapters in the handbook. We begin with West Germanic followed by North Germanic. Majority languages in the West Germanic branch of the family are English, Dutch, German, and Luxembourgish. The North Germanic languages that may be classified as majority languages include

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Icelandic, Faroese, Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish. Of course, these majority languages also have dialects. West Germanic dialects are addressed in Chapter 31 by William D. Keel, and Charlotte Gooskens discusses the North Germanic dialects in Chapter 32.

I.2 West Germanic

English, the most widely spoken Germanic language, belongs to the West Germanic branch of the family. English is estimated to have 1.12 billion users including over 370 million speakers for whom English is their first language or L1 (Simons and Fennig 2018). The nation with the greatest number of speakers is the United States with more than 300 million followed by India with over 200 million. The two nations provide excellent examples of the global diversity of English. In the United States, the approximately 260 million L1 English speakers constitute the great majority of total English speakers in the country. The United States also has a great number of varieties of English, including African American Vernacular English and many regional and social dialects. In contrast, in India almost all English users acquired English as a second language (L2), and the language serves as a lingua franca. Indian English is a distinct variety of English and is one of many indigenized varieties of English found globally that are often referred to as World Englishes (see Kirkpatrick 2010 for a discussion of World Englishes). English has also played a crucial role in the development of many contact languages. Roberge (Chapter 35) provides a discussion of the many English-based pidgins and creoles.

German is the second most widely spoken Germanic language and has approximately 130 million speakers. German is the statutory national language of Germany, Austria, and Liechtenstein. It is also a national language in Switzerland, co-equal with French and Italian on the federal level. Germany, Austria, and Switzerland each has its own variety of the standard language (Ammon 1995). In Luxembourg, German is one of three official languages. It is also a statutory provincial language in German-speaking areas of Belgium, in the Syddanmark region of Denmark, and in the South Tyrol region of Italy (Simons and Fennig 2018, see also Louden, Chapter 34). German has a great number of regional dialects that often diverge quite significantly from the standard varieties.

Dutch has approximately 23 million speakers and is the national language of the Netherlands and Suriname. It is also the national language of Belgium alongside French. There are approximately 16 million Dutch speakers in the Netherlands, 6 million in Belgium, and 280,000 in Suriname (Simons and Fennig 2018). Dutch is also the principal lexifier of a number of creoles, and Afrikaans arose from Dutch in colonial southern Africa via language contact (Roberge, Chapter 35).

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Luxembourgish has close to 400,000 L1 speakers. The great majority of Luxembourgish speakers (303,000) are in Luxembourg, where Luxembourgish is one of three national languages, alongside German and French. Luxembourgish is also spoken by 40,000 in the Grand-Est region of France, by 30,000 in parts of the Luxembourg province of Belgium, and by 18,200 in the Bitburg area of Rheinland-Pfalz in Germany (Simons and Fennig 2018).

I.3 North Germanic

Swedish has approximately 9.6 million L1 speakers and 3.2 million L2 speakers and is the national language of Sweden. It is a minority language in Finland where there are 274,000 L1 Swedish speakers (Simons and Fennig 2018). Swedish has a number of dialects with significant differences in phonology. However, the dialects appear to be largely mutually intelligible. In fact, there is a large degree of mutual intelligibility across Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish, which make up the Scandinavian group of North Germanic languages (Gooskens, Chapter 32). Norwegian has slightly more than 5 million users, almost all of whom live in Norway. Norway is unusual in that there are two written standard languages, Bokmål and Nynorsk. Bokmål is used by the majority of Norwegians. Nynorsk has been declared the official written language for some municipalities in western areas of Norway that are largely rural (Simons and Fennig 2018). As is the case for Swedish dialects, there is much grammatical and phonological variation in Norwegian dialects. Swedish and Norwegian can be classified together as North Scandinavian in opposition to Danish, which has approximately 5.6 million speakers and is the national language of Denmark. Danish is a minority language in Germany, where it has official status in Schleswig-Holstein (see Louden, Chapter 34). Danish also displays a lot of regional, ethnic, and social variation though many dialects are moribund or extinct (Gooskens, Chapter 32).

The insular group of North Germanic languages comprises Icelandic and Faroese. Icelandic has approximately 321,000 speakers, almost all of whom live in Iceland. Icelandic has relatively little dialectal variation in comparison to the languages in the Scandinavian group. Faroese is spoken on the Faroe Islands by approximately 48,000 speakers. It is an official language on the Faroe Islands, alongside Danish. Faroese and Icelandic are not mutually intelligible (Gooskens, Chapter 32).

I.4 The Organization of This Handbook

This handbook is comprised of five subsections that address major themes in the study of Germanic linguistics; namely, (i) phonology, (ii) morphology and agreement systems, (iii) syntax, (iv) semantics and pragmatics, and

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(v) language contact and nonstandard varieties. Part I (Phonology) begins with Tracy Alan Hall's review of phonological processes in Germanic language, which provides an overview of synchronic phonological processes in both standard and nonstandard varieties of Germanic languages (Chapter 1). Hall's review of phonological processes is followed by Marc van Oostendorp's treatment of Germanic syllable structure (Chapter 2). Laura Catharine Smith provides an overview of the role of foot structure in Germanic in Chapter 3, which sheds light on the role of prosody in shaping the history of the (morpho)phonology of Germanic languages. In connection with Smith's discussion of the role of the foot in Germanic phonology, Birgit Alber addresses the typology of word stress (i.e., metric parametrization) in Germanic phonology in Chapter 4. Richard Page's contribution on quantity in Germanic (Chapter 5) focuses on the contrastive quality of both vowels and consonants, with a particular focus on geminate consonants. The phonetics and phonology of Germanic laryngeals is investigated in depth by Joseph Salmons in Chapter 6. Focusing primarily on assimilations and final neutralization, Salmons provides a detailed survey of selected patterns of alternations (in particular, the contrast between sounds written *b* versus *p* or *v* versus *f*), and presents a pan-Germanic view of these observed differences. This section finishes with two chapters dedicated to suprasegmental elements of Germanic phonology. In Chapter 7, Björn Köhnlein explores the role of tone accent in North and West Germanic. In this chapter, Köhnlein concentrates primarily on tone-based oppositions within stressed syllables that are lexically contrastive. In contrast, Mary Grantham O'Brien's chapter addresses the role of intonation at the postlexical, i.e., sentential, level in Germanic languages (Chapter 8).

Part II (Morphology and Agreement Systems) begins with David Fertig's treatment of verbal inflectional morphology in Germanic (Chapter 9). In this chapter, Fertig provides an overview of the morphosyntactic categories associated with the verb in Germanic and the various inflectional and periphrastic exponents of those categories. Damaris Nübling's contribution examines the inflectional morphology of nouns (Chapter 10). Nübling engages in a detailed treatment of the various inflectional categories and patterns that persist in synchronic Germanic language nouns, while also incorporating a brief discussion of historical developments. Moving beyond inflectional categories, Geert Booij delivers an overview of the fundamental principles of word formation in Germanic (Chapter 11). Booij's primary focus in this chapter is directed at the role of compounding and affixation in word formation in Germanic. Sebastian Kürschner's chapter on grammatical gender in modern Germanic languages (Chapter 12) serves as a detailed summary of the role and variation of grammatical gender as a classifying system in Germanic languages. Tom McFadden discusses the role that morphological case has played in both the development and classification of Germanic languages (Chapter 13). In addition to this overview, McFadden also highlights the significant impact

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that morphological case has played in recent developments in linguistic theory. Marjo van Koppen's treatment of complementizer agreement in contemporary Germanic languages concludes this section (Chapter 14).

The initial focus in Part III (Syntax) concerns word order variation among modern Germanic languages. Hubert Haider's contribution (Chapter 15) addresses the base order serialization of verbs in relation to their nominal object, with a focus on the primary distinction between VO-languages (North Germanic and English) and those that exhibit a base OV-ordering (Afrikaans, Dutch, Frisian, German, and various regional varieties). Sten Vikner discusses the placement of the finite verb in contemporary Germanic languages (Chapter 16). Making use of basic generative notation, Vikner captures the variation present in this language family by appealing to the placement of finite verbs in particular structure positions (i.e., head positions). Susi Wurmbrand and Christos Christopoulos summarize the distribution of infinitival constructions in Germanic languages and the important role they play in shaping linguistic theory (Chapter 17). In this chapter they restrict their treatment to two important phenomena; namely, (i) *exceptional case marking* (ECM) and (ii) *restructuring*. In his examination of object shift and object scrambling in Germanic (Chapter 18), Hans Broekhuis reviews evidence that suggests that both phenomena should be given a unified treatment. In Chapter 19, Martin Salzmann provides a detailed overview of filler-gap dependencies (i.e., unbounded dependency constructions) across Germanic languages. Turning to argument structure and the fundamental role of voice alternations, Artemis Alexiadou and Florian Schäfer review the syntactic and semantic properties of the verb's external argument with an empirical focus on Germanic languages (Chapter 20). Vera Lee-Schoenfeld's treatment of the morphological, syntactic, and semantic conditions that affect the binding relations of reflexives and nonreflexives appears in Chapter 21. In addition to a detailed treatment of the relevant data, Lee-Schoenfeld also ties these findings to controversies in the theoretical literature. Ida Toivonen's contribution (Chapter 22) addresses the morphological, syntactic, and semantic factors that contribute to particle verb formation (and related structures, such as resultatives and directed motion predicates) in Germanic. The section on syntax concludes with Dorian Roehrs's overview of the structure of noun (NP) and determiner (DP) phrases in Germanic (Chapter 23).

Kristin Melum Eide leads off Part IV (Semantics and Pragmatics) with her contributions on modality (Chapter 24) and tense and aspect (Chapter 25) in contemporary Germanic languages. Joost Zwarts delivers an overview of the semantic properties of prepositions and particles in English, German, and Dutch, with a specific focus on the roles of place and path (Chapter 26). Negative and positive polarity items are the focus of Doris Penka's contribution (Chapter 27). This section concludes with Caroline Féry's treatment of the roles of prosody, information structure, and syntax in modern Germanic languages.

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The final section (Part V) of this handbook concentrates on language contact and nonstandard varieties. Carrie Jackson provides an exhaustive overview of themes related to L2 acquisition in Germanic languages (Chapter 29). Pia Quist and Bente A. Svendsen shift their focus to elements of grammar attested in urban speech styles of Germanic languages in Chapter 30. These two chapters stand to enrich our understanding of classroom-based research and emergent forms in naturalistic environments. Chapters 31 and 32 hone in on the dialectal variation found in West and Northern Germanic languages respectively. William D. Keel discusses the West Germanic dialect continuum in Chapter 31, while Charlotte Gooskens addresses the dialect continuum in Northern Germanic in Chapter 32. The final three contributions of this section provide an overview of contract varieties of Germanic languages. Janne Johannessen and Michael T. Putnam discuss developmental trends observed in heritage Germanic languages throughout the world, with a particular focus on the Midwestern United States (Chapter 33). To complement this previous chapter, Mark Louden's treatment of Germanic minority languages, whose speakers, in contrast to heritage speakers, continue to pass their L1 minority language on to their children, reviews the sociolinguistic characteristics of these groups in Chapter 34. This section concludes with Paul Roberge's contribution on Germanic contact languages, i.e., Germanic-based pidgins and creoles, in Chapter 35.

I.5 The Future Study of Germanic Languages

As may be surmised by the survey of chapters in this volume, the study of Germanic languages continues to broaden and deepen. For example, the study of heritage Germanic languages is relatively new and has produced empirical data of theoretical significance. Similarly, the field of second language acquisition has seen rapid growth in this century and more than a single chapter could easily be devoted to the topic. In addition, the Germanic languages themselves continue to change and diversify as witnessed by the emergence of World Englishes globally and new urban vernaculars of German, Dutch, Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish in Europe. It is hoped that the contributions in this handbook spur more research, new theoretical insights, and further growth in the investigation of Germanic languages.

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Part I

Phonology

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Chapter 1

Phonological Processes in Germanic Languages

Tracy Alan Hall

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of synchronic phonological processes in modern Germanic languages, including standard languages as well as nonstandard varieties. Sound changes as well as processes that might have been synchronically active at earlier stages are not taken into consideration. I refrain from discussing overly morphologized patterns – a restriction that is admittedly difficult to achieve because it is not always clear where to draw the line between phonology and morphology.[1] Processes involving laryngeal features (e.g., voicing assimilation) are discussed in Salmons (Chapter 6).

Since the article is intended to be accessible to readers from a variety of backgrounds, the overview I provide below is not overly technical. I stress description, although I also consider some of the important research questions for many of the processes discussed below.

In the remainder of this chapter, I consider assimilation (Section 1.2), dissimilation (Section 1.3), epenthesis (Section 1.4), deletion (Section 1.5), coalescence, vowel reduction, strengthening and weakening (Section 1.6), and other processes (Section 1.7). In Section 1.8, I conclude.

1.2 Assimilation

The most common type of assimilation in Germanic languages involves the place dimension among consonants; assimilation of manner features to vocalic or consonantal targets is not as well-attested and appears to be restricted to the spreading of nasality. The typical consonantal target for

[1] Examples of once productive historical rules no longer analyzable in phonological terms include umlaut in German and breaking in Frisian.

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