

# EXPANSION OF INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGE SPEAKERS



The Indo-European language family was first identified in the 1780s by a British judge, William Jones, who compared the ancient Indian language Sanskrit with Greek and Latin. He said that

*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 philologist could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source... There is a similar reason,... for supposing that both the Gothick [Germanic] and the Celtick... had the same origin with the Sanscrit; and the old Persian might be added to the same family . . . .*

Jones noticed similarities among those languages in basic words, as well as in grammatical forms (inflections). Inflections refer to the exact way to pronounce and spell a word, that would change depending on how it is used in a sentence. For example, English, German, and Greek all tend to give the possessive form of a word an *s* at the end.

Scholars call this common source *proto-Indo-European*—an unattested language that gave birth to many later languages. The most common opinion is that PIE was formed between 4000 and 3000 BC, somewhere on the steppes of southwest Russia, north of the Black and Caspian Seas. By the 1000s BC, several daughter languages have been attested: Greek, Hittite, Sanskrit, Avestan, and Tocharian being the most prominent. Most of the languages of Europe are Indo-European.

Pre-literate societies were responsible for the domestication of the horse, as well as the Secondary Products Revolution, so it is not clear exactly what peoples were responsible for this. But without a doubt, early Indoeuropean speakers took advantage of these new technologies.

IE speakers benefited from the domesticated horse, using it for meat, herding other animals, as well as hunting. The horse was domesticated somewhere in modern day Kazakhstan at some time after 4000 BC. In addition to the above uses, horses were used to pull wagons and chariots.

The Secondary Products Revolution swept through Eurasia from 4000 BC onward. This involved the use of animals not only for meat, but for milk, work, and wool as well. This allowed for much more animal protein to be taken from the cows, as well as the use of them to pull plows, and provide wool, the raw material for clothing.

The use of horses to help herd flocks, hunt, and pull wagons and chariots, allowed peoples such as the speakers of Indo-European languages to expand across the Eurasian steppes, turning previously worthless lands into valuable grazing pasturelands. These advantages allowed this group to expand some 8000 kilometers, from the Atlantic coast to the western regions of China. The steppes, previously a wasteland, was turned into not only an economic resource, but into a bridge across which technology was transferred long distances.