



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 classical Greek. He noticed two shared traits of Indoeuropean languages: (1) basic words in the various Indo-European languages, and (2) the way that words end, depending on how they are used in a sentence. These similarities were not due to chance, but to a common origin of these languages from the same original tongue, termed *proto Indo-European* (PIE).

Indo-european languages originally were **heavily inflected**, which means the exact way to say and spell a word would change depending on how it is used in a sentence. For example, English, German, and Greek all tend to give the possessive word an s at the end.

The most common opinion is that PIE was formed some time between 4000 and 3000 BC, somewhere on the steppes of southwest Russia, north of the Black and Caspian Seas. From this point onward, the various daughter languages slowly evolved. 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 IE, with a few exceptions such as Basque, Hungarian, Finnish, and Estonian.

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 benefitted from the use of the **domesticated horse**, using it for herding other animals, as well as hunting. The horse was domesticated somewhere in modern day Kazakhstan at some time after 4000 BC. Originally the horse was used for economic purposes; but at some point, chieftains used horses to pull 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 of sheep, cattle, and horses allowed these steppe tribes (such as the speakers of proto-Indoeuropean) to expand across the Eurasian steppes, turning previously worthless steppe 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.