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English (Hons.)

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Topic: Grimm's Law (The First Sound Shift)

The hypothesis leading to the establishment of the Indo-European languages was strengthened by the German philologist Jacob Grimm. Though a scholar of varied interest in several fields of knowledge, his contribution in the linguistic domain is beyond any dispute. He is remembered mainly for his study of the sound shift that took place sometime very early in the history of Indo-European languages and ~~and~~ made Germanic language (eg, English) of Indo-European family different from the other languages of that family. His explanation, though subsequently modified and still a subject of dispute in some of his details, accounted for the correspondences between certain consonants in the Germanic languages and those found, for example, in Sanskrit, Greek and Latin.

Grimm described the aforementioned sound shift in terms of certain

consonantal changes and argued that these changes were so regular and uniform in nature that they could be described with the accuracy of a scientific law. In the honour of its inventor the law was called "the Grimm's Law". This can be stated

in three parts as follows:-

I.E. Language (Parent)		Germanic (Derivative)
(i) /b ^h / (28)	was changed into	/b/
/d ^h / (3)	" " "	/d/
/g ^h / (47)	" " "	/g/

As we see above, the phonemes ~~/b^h/~~, /d^h/ and /g^h/ lost their respective aspirations to become /b/, /d/, and /g/ respectively. Further the second group of phonemes belonging to the Indo-European were to lose their "voicing" to change as the following:-

(ii) /b/	was changed into	/p/
/d/	" " "	/t/
/g/	" " "	/k/

The third group of phonemes comprising

of the 'stop' phonemes /p/ (bilabial), /t/ (alveolar) and /k/ (velar) were changed into 'fricatives' as follows:-

(ii) /p/ was changed into /f/

/t/ " " " /θ/

/k/ " " " /h/

In technical phonetic terms the changes can be described in the following words:-

(i) Aspirated voiced plosive consonants of parent Indo-European language were changed into non-aspirated voiced plosive consonants in the Germanic languages:-

Bhratri (भ्रातरि) (Sanskrit) > brother (Eng.)

(ii) voiced stops consonants of the parent Indo-European became voiceless stop-consonants as follows in the Germanic languages:-

troba (Lithuanian) > ~~thorpe~~ thorp (Old Norse)
(house) (village)

Slabu (Old Bulgarian) > Sleep (English)

(Slack)
dubus (Lithuanian) > deep (English)

(222) Voiceless-stop consonant phonemes gave way to voiceless fricatives as they passed on from the Non-Germanic Indo-European languages into the Germanic languages :-

- ① Petra (Sanskrit) or Peter (Latin) > father (English)
- ② (tre) √ (Sanskrit) or Tres (Latin) > three (English)
- ③ Centum (Kerhum) Latin > hundred (English)
- or Canem (Latin) > hound (dog) (Germanic)
- (dog)

These changes can well be illustrated with the help of the following circular diagram :-

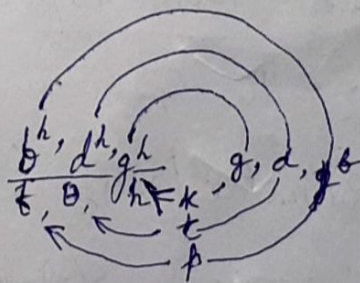
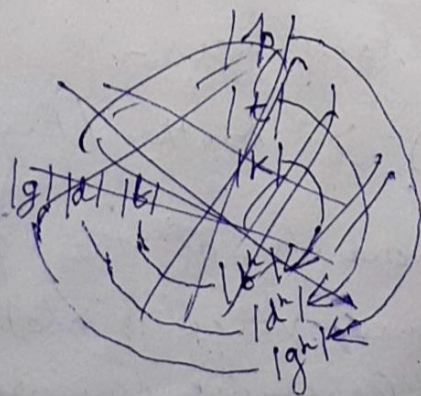


fig: the shift diagram of the Grimm's Law.

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(Source book: A Concise History of English by D. Thomson)
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