

Language Fossils

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Handout available at <http://www.umich.edu/~jlawler/LanguageFossils.pdf>

“We’ll talk about outmoded words and expressions that we still use.” – Well, not *exactly*...

< OFr ~ < OE
pork ~ *swine*
beef ~ *cow*
veal ~ *calf*

Zounds! < *God’s Wounds!*
Good-Bye < *God Be With You*
Holiday < *Holy Day*

Most educated people know that English is a member of the Indo-European language family, which also contains most European, N. Indian, Persian, and Afghan languages. I-E languages all descend from dialects of a single language first appearing in E. Europe or W. Russia. The last two centuries of historical linguistics has reconstructed a vast amount of this language:

Proto-Indo-European ← 8 Ky or less before present

(8 Ky is the conservative limit of the Comparative Method used for reconstruction, for the same reason that limits C₁₄-dating: decay rates)

One example of a reconstructed* Proto-Indo-European word root, and some English words that come from it, via one source or another. There are thousands more such roots.

P.I.E. ***teks-** Source of: *textile text tissue context pretext subtle architect technical* ++

- To weave; also to fabricate, especially with an ax; also to make wicker or wattle fabric for (mud-covered) house walls. *text, tissue; context, pretext*, from Latin *texere*, to weave, fabricate.
- Suffixed form **teks-la. tiller[2], toil[2]*, from Latin *tela*, web, net, warp of a fabric, also weaver's beam (to which the warp threads are tied);
- Prefixed form *subtle*, from Latin *subtilis*, thin, fine, precise, subtle (< **sub-tela*, "thread passing under the warp," the finest thread; *sub*, under; see **hupo-*).
- Suffixed form **teks-on*, weaver, maker of wattle for house walls, builder, akin to **teks-tor*, builder; *tectonic, architect*, fr. Gk *τέκτων (tektōn)*, carpenter, builder.
- Suffixed form **teks-na-*, craft (of weaving or fabricating). *technical, polytechnic, technology*, fr. Gk *τέχνη (tekhnē)* ‘art, craft, skill’.

(Source: Watkins (2000), Pokorny (1959) *tekt-* 1058.*teks-*)

***teks-** metaphors in writing (i.e, lying):

<i>boustrophedon</i>	<u><i>fabricating evidence</i></u>	<i>structured prose</i>
<i>loom of language</i>	<u><i>spin a yarn</i></u>	<i>repairing a scene</i>
<i>weave a story</i>	<u><i>tissue/fabric of lies</i></u>	<i>putting a play together</i>
<i>thread of discourse</i>	<u><i>pull the wool over X’s eyes</i></u>	<i>practicing the craft</i>
<i>warp and woof</i>	<u><i>made out of whole cloth</i></u>	...

Sources: 1) Calvert Watkins, *American Heritage Dictionary of Proto-Indo-European Roots*, 3rd ed 2011.

2) Lewis Thomas, *Et Cetera, Et Cetera: Notes of a Word-Watcher*, 1990.

3) Carl D. Buck, *A Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages*, 1949.

4) Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 1949.

* before a form means it is a reconstructed rather than an attested form

○ <i>*sta-</i>	'To stand, with derivatives meaning "place or thing that is standing"' (Pok <i>sta-</i> 1004) <i>style, stand, steed, stud, stay, stage, stamen, standard, stem, station, stasis, static, status, stable, stoic, store, stylite, steer</i>
○ <i>*steigh-</i>	'To stride, step, rise' (Pok <i>steigh-</i> 1017) <i>stile, stirrup, stickle, distich, acrostic</i>
○ <i>*steu-</i>	'To push, stick, knock, beat' (Pok 2. <i>steu-</i> 1025) <i>stub, steeple, stoop, stutter, stock, stoke, steep</i>
○ <i>*stel-</i>	'To put, stand; with derivatives referring to a standing object or place' (Pok 3. <i>stel-</i> 1019) <i>stolon, stalk, stele, stilt, pedestal, stolid, stall, stout</i>
○ <i>*ster-</i>	'Stiff' (Pok 5. <i>ster-</i> 1029) <i>stare, starch, stork, starve, stark, stern, strut, start, stark, startle</i>
○ <i>*stebh-</i>	'Post, stem; to support, place firmly on, fasten' (Pok <i>steb(h)-</i> 1011) <i>stoop, staff, staple, stump, stamp, stomp, stave</i>
○ <i>*steip-</i>	'To stick, compress' (Pok <i>steib(h)-</i> 1015) <i>stubble, stiff, stipple</i>
○ <i>*steg-</i>	'Pole, stick' (Pok 2. (<i>s</i>) <i>teg-</i> 1014) <i>stake, stack, stagger</i>
○ <i>*stegh-</i>	'To stick, prick; pointed' (Pok <i>stegh-</i> 1014) <i>stair, stick, sting, stigma, stimulate, stag</i>

ST-initial PIE roots, with some reflexes in Modern English

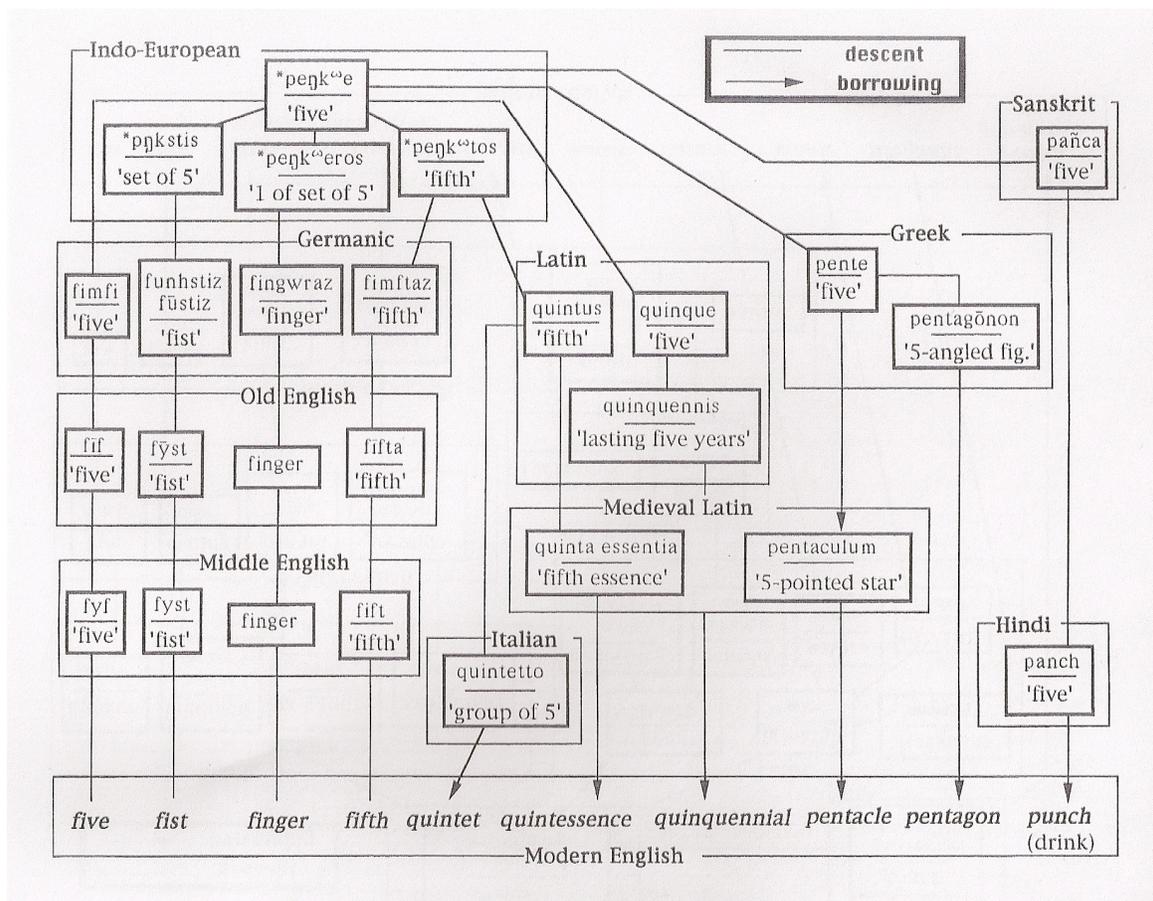
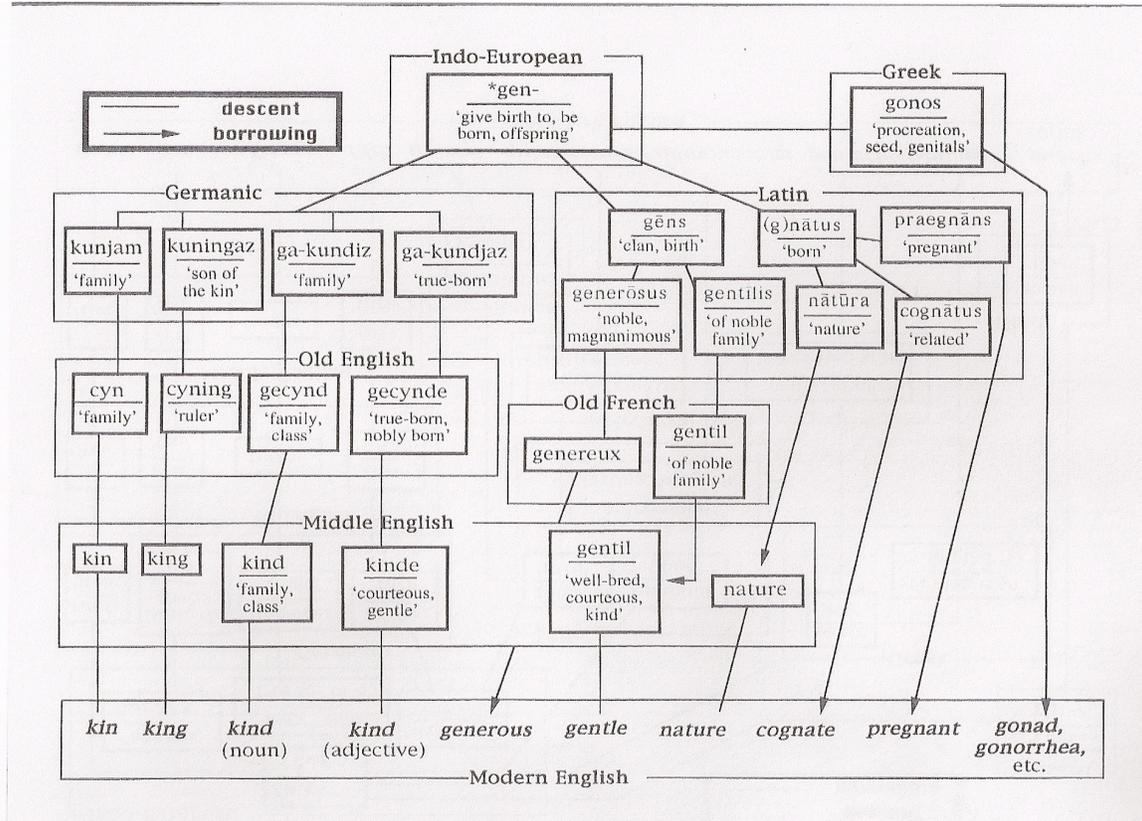
Source: Watkins (2000), Pokorny (1959)

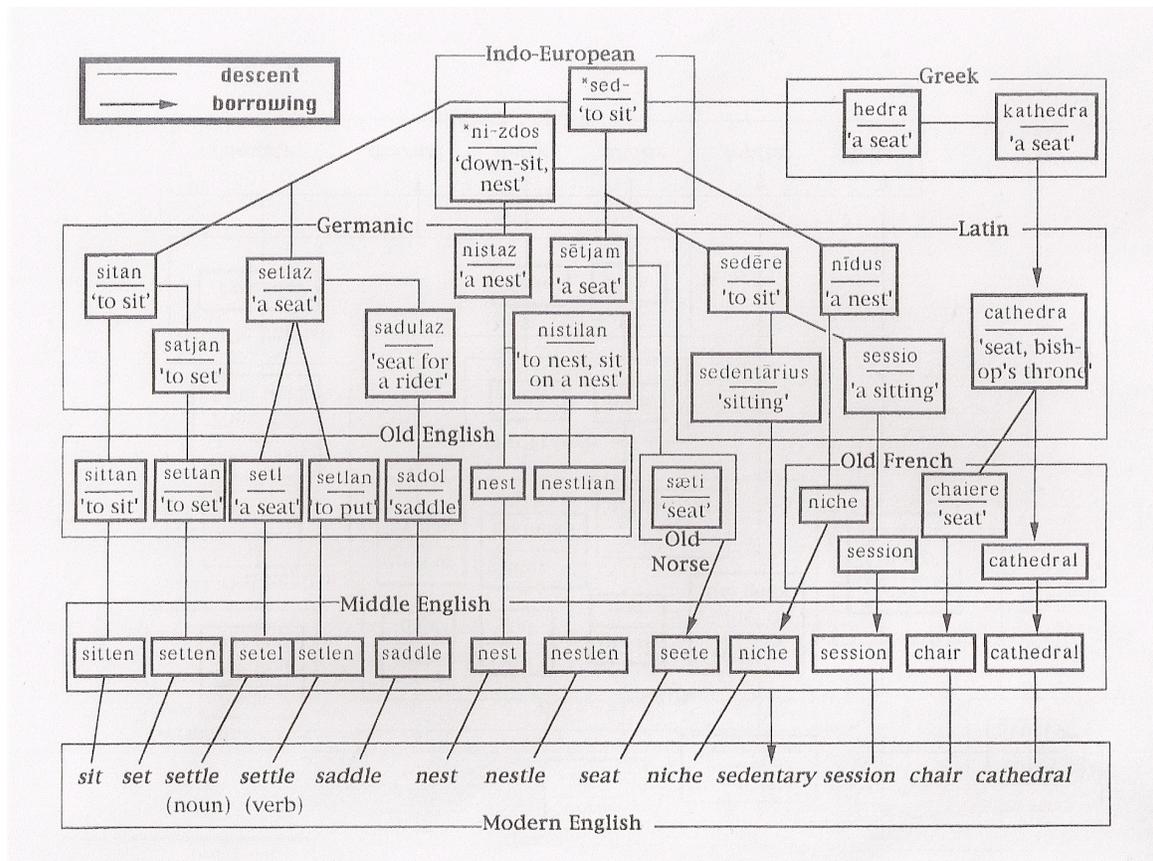
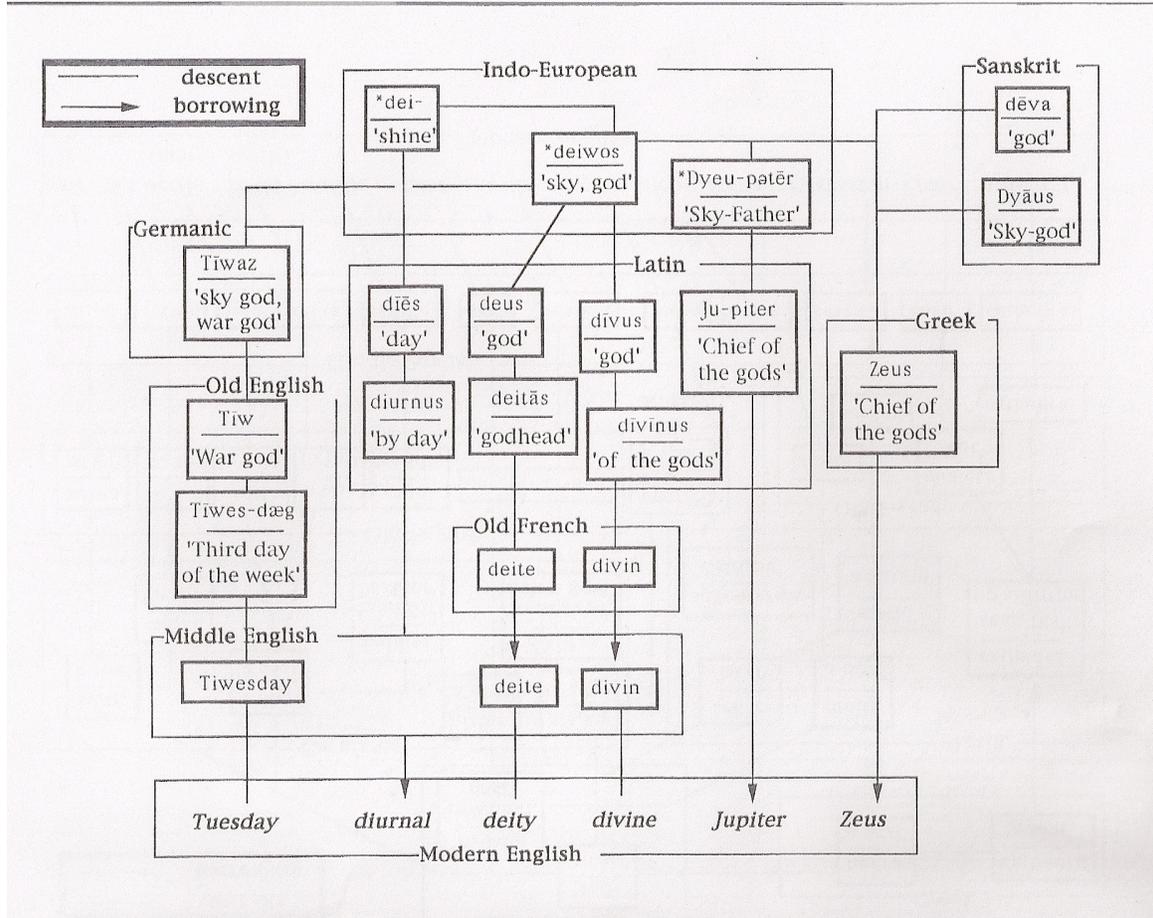
st-	1-Dimensional Rigid	<i>stick staff stem stub stab step stake stave stiff stilt steep</i>
str-	1-Dimensional Non-Rigid	<i>strap string strum strain strip streak stream straw</i>
pr-	1-Dimensional Extended	<i>prick prod prop prow pretzel privet prong probe</i>
kr-	1-Dimensional Bent	<i>crutch cripple crack crotch cross crank crimp crevice</i>
br-	1-Dimensional Connected	<i>brush break bridge brim briar browse branch</i>
fl-	2-Dimensional	<i>float flat flap flense fletch flood flam flange flea fleece floe</i>
sk-	2-Dimensional Extended	<i>sky scum scuff scarf scour scale skate skid skim skip</i>
pl-	2-Dimensional Thick	<i>plush plump plaque plaster plank plate plow pleat</i>
n-	3-Dimensional	<i>nick niche nook nub nugget knuckle knurl knob nipple</i>
br-	Human (Gender Roles)	M: <i>brute brawl bruise bris</i> F: <i>breed broad breast bread</i>
pr-	Human (Social Roles)	<i>proper prim priest prom prissy primp proud pray preen</i>
kl-	Connection ('together')	<i>club clutch clam clamp clap cluster clench click cling</i>
bl-	Color (Reflected Light)	<i>blue blood blush black blank blotch blaze blind blond</i>
bl-	Contained Fluid	<i>blimp blush bloom blot blain blintz blood blow bloat</i>
dr-	Liquid	<i>dredge drink drop drown drought dry drain dribble drizzle drool</i>

Some English phonosemantic assonance classes

Both from: Lawler, '[Style Stands Still](#)', *Style* 37.2:220-237, 2003

Four fossilized P.I.E. roots and their progeny





Grimm's Law (yes, *those* Grimms) accounts for (among other things in the charts above):

- the *k*'s instead of *g*'s in the Germanic reflexes of **genǝ-*
- the *f*'s instead of *p*'s in the Germanic reflexes of **peŋk^we-*
- *T* instead of *D* in *Tuesday*.

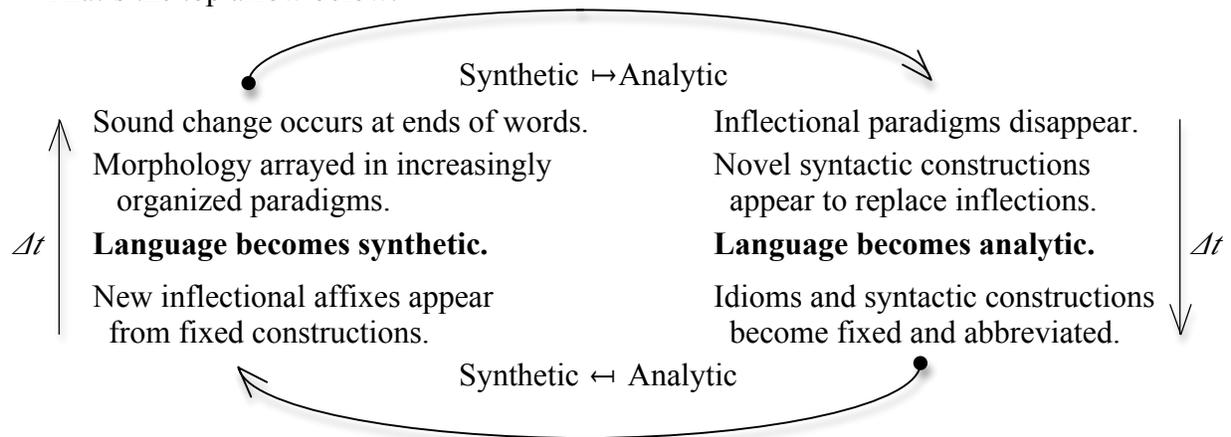
What the Grimms found was that P-I-E stops (12 of them, 3 in each mouth position: labial **bh*, **b*, **p*, dental **dh*, **d*, **t*, velar **gh*, **g*, **k*, labiovelar **gh^w*, **g^w*, **k^w*) all showed up in Germanic languages with predictably different features. P-I-E aspirated stops became Germanic voiced stops (e.g. **bh* became *b*); voiced stops became voiceless stops (**b* became *p*), and voiceless stops became voiceless fricatives (**p* became *f*). The pattern is astonishingly regular, leading to the motto *Sound laws have no exceptions*. (ca 1880)

The Grammaticalization Cycle

Why does language change? The real answer is that nobody knows; it's too complicated and there's too little data. There are, however, theories. Boy, are there theories. Here's one that clearly explains some things (the link above gives a more complete description).

Most affixes occur at the ends of words; this is also where most sound changes happen. When a phonetic change occurs at the end of a word, like final *-m* and *-s* going silent in Vulgar Latin, a lot of the paradigmatic endings that Latin inherited from PIE disappeared, leading to the modern Romance languages. This moves Latin (catastrophically) from being a synthetic (inflected) type language to being an analytic (uninflected) type.

That's the top arrow below:



Δt, in this case, is probably 1 kiloyear or so, as Old English→Modern English shows. The bottom arrow is what has started to happen in French (which is becoming a prefixal language), and in the English eye dialect words *gotta*, *wanna*, *oughta*, *shoulda*, *shouldna*, *coulda*, *hadna*, *usta*, *hafta*, *lookit*, etc.

It's already happened in Romance future tenses, which are the remnants of a Vulgar Latin construction that replaced the Latin future paradigm, much like *He is to leave tomorrow*, but with the auxiliary verb *haber* following the infinitive in Vulgar Latin. Combining the infinitive (e.g. Sp *comer* 'to eat') + the present form of *haber* (*he*, *has*, *ha*, *hemos*, *heis*, *han*) forms the Spanish future conjugation: *comeré*, *comerás*, *comerá*, *comeremos*, *comeréis*, *comerán*.

This is a university entrance (“matriculation”) exam. It gives some idea of what used to be expected a century ago in order to get *into* college. Few if any modern university *graduates* in English could pass it. I give it as an example of what Anglophone education systems no longer teach, including English grammar.

The English language paper which was set as part of the London Matriculation examination for senior pupils in June 1899.

(from *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, p.192)

N.B. CANDIDATES MUST NOT BREAK UP THEIR ANSWERS INTO SCATTERED PIECES. GREAT IMPORTANCE WILL BE ATTACHED TO CLEARNESS AND ACCURACY OF EXPRESSION AND STYLE.

I. – LANGUAGE

(Not more than seven of these ten questions are to be attempted)

- 1 Explain carefully what is meant by the term “grammar.” Give the chief divisions of “grammar,” with definitions and examples.
2. Comment on the following statements:
 - a) “To reform Modern English spelling would be to destroy the life-history of many of our words.”
 - b) “The spelling of Modern English is little better than a chaos.”
3. At what periods, and under what conditions, have Latin words been introduced into English directly or indirectly? Give examples.
4. Derive and explain: *matriculate, parliament, isle, mayor, cricket*; and mention some derivatives from and some cognates with these words.
5. What is meant by “relative pronouns”? Differentiate the uses of the relative pronouns in Modern English, giving instances of each.
6. Write notes on the following words:
worse, nearer, but, it, songstress, riches, alms, ye, first, Wednesday.
7. Classify adverbs, according to their origin and formation, with examples.
8. How are (i) infinitives, and (ii) participles distinguished from other parts of verbs? Write down and discuss six sentences illustrating the various uses of (i) the Infinitive and (ii) the Present Participle.
9. What is meant by “defective verbs”? Discuss the conjugation of any three.
20. “To make a revolution every day is the nature of the sun, because of that necessary course which God hath ordained it, from which it cannot swerve but by a faculty from that voice which first did give it motion.”
 - (i) analyse this sentence;
 - (ii) underline the words of Latin origin.