

Learn Proto-Germanic

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Comment: Copied from the internet, 2005-11-27, by Evert Mouw <evert@germanic.info>. I've copied this text from Gary's website, pasted it in Word, and converted it to PDF. I've added a few Dutch words in braces [] where the Dutch word was more similar to the Proto-Germanic word than the English one.

Example: krûdam n. herb [*kruid*]

About the author - Gary Taylor

I was born in Walthamstow in NE London in April 1971, so at time of writing I'm 33 (unfortunately very soon to be 34...) I lived in Woodford Green till I was 18, then went to Brighton to study - moved round lots since - lived in a few different countries, and am currently in Berlin where I'm studying for my PhD in Linguistics, concentrating on Historical Germanic phonology (title of PhD being Vocalisations in Germanic Dialects).

Key to Pronunciation

The vowels

In Germanic there are short vowels, long vowels and diphthongs just as in English.

The short vowels are :

i /i/ as in big

e /e/ as in bed

a /a/ as in a very short version of part

u /u/ as in bull

The long vowels are :

î /i:/ as in beat

ê /e:/ similar to the first part of the vowel in bait, but without changing the shape of your mouth, similar to a Northern English pronunciation

æ /E:/ similar to the first part of the vowel in bear, but with no offglide

ô /o:/ as in bored

û /u:/ as in pool

The diphthongs are :

ai /ai/ as in bite

au /au/ as in foul

ei /ei/ as in bait

eu /eu/ this starts like the vowel in bed but then changes to a w-like sound, quite similar to London pronunciations of bell. Try not to say this as two separate vowels, it should sound as one fluid vowel, like the others mentioned above.

The consonants are :

b /b/ like English b when initial and followed by another consonant, preceded by m or when written double, otherwise /β/ more like English v but without any vibration and said completely between the lips.

d /d/ like English d when initial and followed by another consonant, preceded by n or when written double, otherwise /ð/ like English th in this but without any vibration.

f /f/ like English f.

g /g/ like English g in get when initial and followed by another consonant, preceded by n or when written double. Note that when ng is written the g should be pronounced as in finger. Otherwise /G/ (Greek lower case gamma) a sound we don't have in English. It's like a very light g, but more of a catch in the throat.

h /h/ either like English h in hot or /x/ like Scottish ch in loch - this is pronounced in all positions.

j /j/ this is like y in year.

k /k/ like English k.

l /l/ like English l.

m /m/ like English m.

n /n/ usually like n in now, but before g, k and h like ng in sing.

p /p/ like English p.

r /r/ tongue-tip rolled r.

s /s/ like s in sing, never like s in is.

t /t/ like English t.

þ /T/ (Greek lower case theta) like th in thing.

w /w/ like English w.

z /z/ very similar to English z, but not as much friction - probably not dissimilar to an English r.

If consonants are written double they should also be said longer, so dd should be said as in 'bad day'. It should also be noted that because Proto-Germanic was unwritten any punctuation or capitals are not original. I have written capital letters in convention with many modern languages to indicate the start of sentences and names. Adjectives derived from names shall be written in lower case. I shall try to avoid commas apart from if there is great difficulty in understanding a sentence without them.

Stress

Word stress generally falls on the first syllable. If the word however contains a prefix then the stress is on the main stem of the word.

Lesson 1

Frumôn Dailam - mînôn sebjū

Hêr grôtju þek. Haitu Halêpagulþin Staines duhter. Mînôn þurpam haitiþi þurisagardaz. Ist þurpam smalôn ake fagrôn. En mînin þurpê ezumes ne maizô swô swa ahtau hûsu ja sebjū andi sehs tegjuz aldîz.

Notes

Verbs

It should be noted that verbs conjugate. Just as English verbs need an s when following he/she or it, Proto-Germanic verbs change depending on the person doing the verb. Unlike English the verb is different for each person speaking. So in the text we have the verb 'to be called'. 'I am called' is 'haitu' (shown with 1s. to indicate it is the first person - so I - singular - not we), whereas '(it) is called' is 'haitiþi' (shown with 3s. to indicate third person - so he, she or it - singular). Because the ending tells us which person is speaking it's unnecessary to use the pronouns 'I' or 'it'. These are only used if they need to be stressed. The breakdown of verbs will be dealt with as they appear.

Nouns and pronouns

It should also be noted that nouns change depending on which part of speech they refer to, cf. village = þurpam and þurpê. These changes are called cases. The 'doer' of a sentence is usually in the 'nominative' case, as is anything that refers directly to them in a sentence. The word þurpam is in the nominative case. The word þurpê is however in the dative case (indicated with dat). This is a case used after many prepositions, so that 'in the village' follows the preposition 'in'. Nouns also have a grammatical gender. Nouns can be masculine (m.), feminine (f.) or neutral (n.). The word 'þurpam' is neutral. The name 'Staines' is in the genitive, or possessive case. In English we would write Stain's daughter. This apostrophe s is an indication of the genitive (gen). In the first sentence the word 'þek' is given for 'you'. This is given in the accusative (acc) case. This means that the person is directly affected by the action (the object) and not the doer (the subject), much in the same way as we differentiate I (subject) and me (object). If a noun is unmarked for case then it is given as nominative. Plurals will be shown with pl., whereas singulars will be unmarked.

Adjectives

Just as nouns change depending on their role in a sentence, the adjectives need to 'agree' with the nouns they refer to, and also change for case and gender. 'The small village' (in nom.) is therefore 'smalôn þurpam' - both words being nominative, whereas 'in the small village' is 'en smalin þurpê'. If adjectives are not given in their masculine singular nominative form then they will be marked for where they differ from this.

En mînin hûsê bûwandi mînôn môder andi mînôn fader. Hêr bûwiþi ja mînôn faderz môder. Habu twôz swesterunz ja þrin brôþarunz. Ainôn swester bûwiþi medi hizin sagjê. Ainôn brôþar habaiþi wenô ja sunu. Ja unserôn kôw andi unseranz hundôs bûwandi en hûsê.

Vocabulary

ahtau	eight
ake	but
aldiz m. aldîz (pl)	person
andi	and [en(de)]
dailam n.	part
duhter f.	daughter
en	in
fagraz fagrôn (n.) fagrê (pl)	beautiful
frumaz frumôn (n.)	first
grôtjan grôtju (1s)	to greet
haitan haitu (1s) haitiþi (3s)	to be called [heten]
Halêþagulþin f.	a name
hêr	here
hûsam n. hûsu (pl.)	house [huis]
ja	and / moreover
maizô	more

mînaz	my
mînin (n. dat)	
mînôn (n.)	
ne	not
sebjû f.	clan / family
sebun	seven
sehs	six
smalaz	small
smalôn (n.)	
Stainaz m.	a name
Staines (gen)	
swô swa	than
teguz m.	ten
tegjuz (pl.)	
þû	you [du, jou]
þek (acc)	
Þurisagardaz m.	a name
þurpam n.	village
þurpê n. (dat)	
wesan	to be [wezen = zijn]
ist (3s)	
ezumes (3p)	

Exercises

Translate

- 1 I have a brother and a sister.
- 2 In my village are eight houses.
- 3 Hello, I'm called Wulfaz Stainaz's son.
- 4 The people in my village are beautiful.
- 5 Our dogs don't live in the house.

Answers

- 1 Habu brôþar ja / andi swester.
- 2 En mînin þurpi ezumes ahtau hûsu.
- 3 Grôtju þek, haitu Wulfaz Staines sunuz.
- 4 Aldîz en mînin þurpê ezumes fagrê.
- 5 Unseranz hundôs ne búwandi en hûsê.

Lesson 2

Anþaratô Dailam – Arbaiþiz

En þurpê mînin eka andi mînôn swester helpôz unkerôn môdir. Mînôn môder wabjîpi ja eka liznôm. Þwahamz ja bakômz. Eka melku kôw andi fatôm wataru. Samnôm krûdu ja hrîsam fur fûiru.

Notes

Word Order

You've probably noticed by now that the word order is quite flexible. This is made possible by the highly inflected nature of Proto-Germanic. In English there is fairly rigid word order due to its lack of inflexions. The word order in Proto-Germanic is more dependent on which words are being stressed, with the most important parts moved to the front and rear of a sentence, less important aspects being left for the rest of the sentence.

Verbs

Verbs in the present tense, as mentioned in lesson one, change depending on who is doing the action. There are three different types of verbs, strong, weak and irregular. Weak verbs such as grōtjan keep the same root throughout - here grōtj-. Strong verbs change this although this is not usually very evident in the present tense. There are subdivisions within each category. Irregular verbs will be dealt with later. The root of a verb is found by missing off the last two letters (-an, -ænan, -ôn). The following is a list of endings added to the roots for verbs ending first in -an, then -ænan, then -ôn:

singular:

I	-u	-u	-ôm
you	-izi	-aizi	-ôzi
he/she/it	-iþi	-aiþi	-ôþi
dual:			
we two	-ôz	-ôz	-ôz
you two	-aþz	-aþz	-ôþz
plural:			
we	-amz	-amz	-ômz
you	-iþi	-aiþi	-ôþi
they	-andi	-andi	-ôndi

It should be noted that there is an extra form for 'we two' and 'you two'. From now on the inflected forms of the verbs will only be shown if they differ from this pattern.

Nouns

The nouns also change depending on what role they play in the sentence. The possible cases are nominative (to describe the subject or doer of the action), the accusative (to describe the object or what the action is done to), the genitive (to describe possessions), the dative (to describe the indirect object or what is indirectly affected by the action), the locative (to describe place or location), the instrumental (to describe what the action is done with) and the vocative (in addressing). The locative, instrumental and vocative were all in the process of dying out, the former two in favour of the dative, and the latter in favour of the nominative, they are also not present in all nouns. The first noun group we will look at is the masculine nouns ending in -az, and the neutral nouns ending in -am and -az. These are referred to as a-class nouns.

hundaz m. hûsam n. kalbaz n.

singular:

nom	hundaz	hûsam	kalbaz
acc	hunda	hûsam	kalbazam
gen	hundes	hûses	kalbazes
dat	hundê	hûsê	kalbazê
loc	hundi	as dative	as dative
instr	hunde	as dative	as dative
voc	hund	as nominative	as nominative

plural:

nom	hundôs	hûsu	kalbazu
acc	hundanz	hûsu	kalbazu

gen	hundôm	hûsôm	kalbazôm
dat	hundamz	hûsamz	kalbazamz

From now on nouns of these classes will not show inflections.

Fader mînôn ist fiskarjaz. Gangipi medi brôþrumz mînnumz allanu murgana lagu. Managu mælu jagôndi efþan dreugandi medi næhwistin þurpê. Ainanô daga allanu mænôþu gangipi þengazê.

Vocabulary

anþaraz	second
anþaratô (n.)	
arbaiþiz f.	work [arbeiden]
bakôn	to cook
eka	I [ik]
fatôn	to fetch
fûir n.	fire [vuur]
fur	for
helpan	to help
hrîsam n.	twigs
kalbaz n.	calf
krûdam n.	herb [kruid]
liznôn	to learn
melkan	to milk [melken]
môder f.	mother
môdir (dat)	
samnôn	to gather [(ver)zamelen]
þwahan	to wash (something)
unkeraz	our (two people)
unkerôn (f)	
wabjan	to weave
watar n.	water
wataru (acc)	
ainanô (m strong)	one (strong used when indefinite - see later lessons)
allaz	every [alle]
allanu (acc)	
dreugan	trade / work with / serve with
efþan	or
fiskarjaz m.	fisherman
gangan	to go [gaan]
jagôn	to hunt [jagen]
laguz m.	waters / lake / stream
lagu (dat)	
managaz	some
managu (n pl)	
mælam n.	time / period
mænôþ m.	month
mînnumz (dat pl)	my
murganaz m.	morning [morgen]
næhwistaz	next
næhwistin (n dat)	

þengaz n. assembly /
 local parliament [ding]

Exercises

- 1 Hwar (where) gangipi fader allanu murgana?
 - 2 Hwat (what) wurkjipi (do / work) Halêþagulþin?
 - 3 Andi hwat wurkjipi môder?
- (For answers compare the texts)

Translate

- 1 I go to the local parliament with my brothers.
- 2 My sister and I weave every day.
- 3 My (paternal) grandmother milks the cow.

Answers

- 1 Gangu þengazê medi mînumz brôþrumz.
- 2 Mînôn swester andi eka wabjôz allanu daga.
- 3 Mînôn faderz môder milkipi kôw. (melkan is a strong verb and sometimes changes the vowel to i)

Lesson 3a

Þridjôn Dailam - mînôn þurpam

Mînôn þurpam ist en dalê rîþes Græwaferþôz. Umbi þurpê sind managanz bergôs. Ja ezumes ne weidanz til marê. Þengahûsam ist uber þurpê en widê. Weitagôn bûwiþi auk en þammu widê. Under þurpê bi lagu bûwiþi smiþaz medi hîwê sînin.

Notes

Verbs

It was mentioned in the last lesson that melkan 'to milk' was a strong verb. There are three different types of verb in Proto-Germanic. There are weak verbs which never change their root, strong verbs like melkan where the root vowel sometimes changes, and irregular verbs like wesán 'to be'. At this stage it's important to notice that strong verbs like melkan which have an e in the root change this to i in the 2nd and 3rd persons singular, so you (sing) milk is milkizi and he / she milks is milkipi, otherwise in the present the root is melk-. From now on strong verbs will be shown with (str.). The verb 'to be' wesán is irregular and conjugates as follows:

sing.	
I am	im
you are	is
he / she / it is	ist
dual	
we are	ezu
you are	estz
plur.	
we are	ezumes
you are	ezuþ

they are sind

Nouns

The next noun class to be looked at is the -ô class. These nouns are always feminine. In the first lesson we learnt the word sebjū meaning clan. This word was given in the nominative case. It is customary in literature about Proto-Germanic to show these nouns in the accusative form sebjô. This practise will be used here too.

sing.

nom	sebjū
acc	sebjô
gen	sebjôz
dat	sebjū

plur.

nom	sebjôz
acc	sebjônz
gen	sebjôm
dat	sebjômz

Adjectives

It has also been mentioned that adjectives change to agree with the noun that they refer to. There are also two different ways of saying the adjectives depending on if the noun is known to us, or if it is unimportant or unknown, in much the same way as we now use the definite (the) or indefinite (a) articles. This is best shown with an example. 'The boy went shopping' - it's assumed we know who we're talking about, so we use 'the'. 'There's a boy outside' - here we don't know him. In the first case, when we would now usually use 'the', the declension of adjectives used is called the weak declension. This is given below for the adjective smalaz:

weak	masc	fem	neut
sing			
nom	smalôn	smalôn	smalôn
acc	smalanu	smalônu	smalô
gen	smalinz	smalônz	smalinz
dat	smalin	smalôn	smalin
plu			
nom	smalanz	smalônz	smalônu
acc	smalanunz	smalônunz	smalônu
gen	smalanôm	smalônôm	smalônôm
dat	smalnumz	smalumz	smalumz

Vocabulary

auk	also [ook]
bergaz m.	mountain [berg]
bi	at / by
dalam n.	valley [dal]
Græwaferþuz m.	a name
Græwaferþôz (gen)	
hîwaz m.	family
lagu m. (dat)	lake
mariz m.	sea [meer]

marê (dat)	
rîpaz m.	stream
sa	this
pammu (m. dat)	
sînaz	his / her [zijn]
smîpaz m.	blacksmith
til	from / to
þengahûsam n.	assembly house
þridjaz	third
uber	over / above
under	under / beneath
weidaz	far [weid]
weitagôn f.	seeress
widuz m.	forest [wold, woud]