

8,000-year-old ancestor of English found

31st July 2023



Evolutionary linguists believe they have made a "significant breakthrough" regarding the origin of Indo-European languages, including English and Sanskrit. The linguists say an ancient predecessor may have

been spoken more than 8,100 years ago. The researchers are from the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Germany. Their study may resolve a 200-year-old dispute over where the ancestor of English came from. One school of thought posits English has its roots in the Pontic-Caspian Steppe on the northern shore of the Black Sea 6,000 years ago. A competing theory is that English originated from Anatolia (much of present-day Turkey) 9,000 years ago.

Indo-European languages are spoken by nearly half of the world's population. The most commonly-spoken members of this family are English, Hindi, Urdu, Spanish, Bengali, French, Russian, Portuguese and Punjabi. Each of these have over 100 million native speakers. More than 80 language specialists created a huge databank of core vocabulary from 161 Indo-European languages. The study included 52 ancient and historical languages. Study co-author and Associate-Professor Russell Gray said: "Ancient DNA and [evolutionary language analysis] combine to suggest that the resolution to the 200-year-old Indo-European enigma lies in a hybrid of the [Steppe and Anatolia] hypotheses ."

Sources: independent.com / elpais.com / newscientist.com

Writing

The world would be better if there was just one, global language. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

linguist / breakthrough / language / predecessor / dispute / ancestor / roots / theory / population / family / native speakers / specialists / vocabulary / ancient / enigma

True / False

- 1) Revolutionary lingerers have made an important discovery. T / F
- 2) English belongs to the same family of languages as Sanskrit. T / F
- 3) There has been a two-century debate over the origins of English. T / F
- 4) One theory is that English originated in what used to be Turkey. T / F
- 5) More than half of people in the world speak Indo-European languages. T / F
- 6) There are fewer than 100 million native Bengali speakers in the world. T / F
- 7) Linguists analyzed vocabulary from 80 ancient languages. T / F
- 8) Linguists believe English started only north of the Black Sea. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. breakthrough | a. experts |
| 2. resolve | b. postulates |
| 3. posits | c. emanated |
| 4. theory | d. mix |
| 5. originated | e. advance |
| 6. specialists | f. basic |
| 7. core | g. mystery |
| 8. ancient | h. settle |
| 9. enigma | i. very, very old |
| 10. hybrid | j. hypothesis |

Discussion – Student A

- a) What do you think about what you read?
- b) How did English get to be so important in the world?
- c) Would the world be more peaceful if we all spoke the same language?
- d) How does having thousands of languages make the world better?
- e) What new languages would you like to learn?
- f) Will AI mean we won't need to learn languages in the future?
- g) How many languages should people learn?
- h) What questions would you like to ask the linguists?

Phrase Match

- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| 1. linguists believe they have made a significant | a. 200-year-old dispute |
| 2. an ancient | b. enigma |
| 3. resolve a | c. day Turkey |
| 4. on the northern shore | d. native speakers |
| 5. much of present- | e. predecessor |
| 6. The most commonly- | f. breakthrough |
| 7. these have over 100 million | g. vocabulary |
| 8. a huge databank of core | h. hybrid |
| 9. the 200-year-old Indo-European | i. of the Black Sea |
| 10. lies in a | j. spoken members |

Discussion – Student B

- How important is English?
- What are your favourite languages?
- What do you know about the evolution and history of your language?
- How easy or difficult is your language to learn?
- How easy or difficult is English to learn?
- Should we all be learning Chinese now?
- What do you like and dislike about English?
- What are the best ways to learn languages?

Spelling

- ytaiouevnlo linguists
- an nacniet predecessor
- a 200-year-old isutepd
- where the tenscoar of English came from
- One school of thought itsspo English has...
- A competing etoyhr
- More than 80 language etspiaslsic
- created a huge aatbakdn of core vocabulary
- combine to suggest that the sooueltirn
- the 200-year-old Indo-European agenmi
- lies in a rbydih
- the Pontic-Caspian Steppe pteohsyhes

Answers – Synonym Match

1. e	2. h	3. b	4. j	5. c
6. a	7. f	8. i	9. g	10. d

Role Play

Role A – English

You think English is the most useful language. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their language isn't as important. Also, tell the others which is the least important of these (and why): Chinese, Arabic or Spanish.

Role B – Chinese

You think Chinese is the most useful language. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their language isn't as important. Also, tell the others which is the least important of these (and why): English, Arabic or Spanish.

Role C – Arabic

You think Arabic is the most useful language. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their language isn't as important. Also, tell the others which is the least important of these (and why): Chinese, English or Spanish.

Role D – Spanish

You think Spanish is the most useful language. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their language isn't as important. Also, tell the others which is the least important of these (and why): Chinese, Arabic or English.

Speaking – Language

Rank these with your partner. Put the most useful languages at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- | | |
|-----------|------------|
| • English | • French |
| • Chinese | • Japanese |
| • Arabic | • Hindi |
| • Spanish | • Bengali |

Answers – True False

1	F	2	T	3	T	4	T	5	F	6	F	7	F	8	F
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.