

Preface

When I was younger, I always wanted to be a poet. During my time at the university in Würzburg and Cologne, I wrote a lot of poems, many of which were published in magazines and anthologies. Poems express something that is beyond words, something that cannot be said but only felt and imagined. Now, I am writing books about historical phonology, and in some way this science has become my poetry. To me, the chains of derivations, which lead from unattested reconstructed word forms to the oldest languages of the world, express more than just language change.

Language is a ford through the river of time
It leads us to the dwelling of those gone ahead
But he does not arrive there
Who is afraid of deep water

Wladislaw Markowitsch Illitsch-Switytsch (1934–1966)

I am deeply thankful to Gwain Hamilton (Montreal) who proofread parts of the English version amidst a busy work and family life and helped me with any questions I had concerning style and grammar. Thank you, Gwain! I know what it's like to raise children and support a family these days. Furthermore, the comments from Michiel de Vaan (Leiden) and Tiziana Quadrio (Würzburg), who both read the German version after its publication, helped a lot to improve the text. In this English edition, I have also corrected all the errors mentioned in the reviews by Todd Clary (Montreal), Matthew Scarborough (Cambridge), Harald Bichlmeier (Jena) and Nicholas Zair (Cambridge), who also helped me with questions regarding chapter 38. Finally, Michael Weiss (Cornell) kindly answered all my questions about the translation of technical terms.

One of my teachers at the university in Würzburg once said that Indo-European linguistics has already seen its greatest days. All of the major sound laws have been found and what is left is to refine them. I strongly believe that the greatest days of Indo-European linguistics are still to come. When data from all the world's languages will have been unified enough to prove the existence of macrofamilies, it will be crystal clear that we all come from a common source, that we all have a common origin, and that we humans are one and share the same past as we will share our future on this planet together.

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