

The Linguistic Reconstruction of the Gothic New Testament in the 21st Century

Authors: Isabelle Joyce, University of Manchester

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Presenter Name: Isabelle Joyce

Abstract

Gothic is the primary language from the extinct East-Germanic branch spoken in the third and fourth centuries and utilised to write the first Germanic Bible translation by Bishop Ulfilas (or Wulfila). While the language has been extinct for almost two thousand years, Gothic nonetheless has a significant impact on historical linguistics today in the 21st century. This impact has great emphasis in particular to the world of Bible translation; due to the fact that the remaining manuscripts of the Gothic language all contain verses from the New Testament and Old Testament. However, a significant portion of the Gothic Bible was destroyed or simply lost in the complex waves of history. Today in 2026, linguists and scholars from across the world are attempting to reconstruct the Gothic Bible and restore it to its entirety through the Gothic Bible Restoration Project. As a historical linguist myself, I have reconstructed the Epistles of First John and Second Peter from July 2025-April 2026. During this period, I researched and experienced the process of translation, its significance, and its difficulties. In this talk, I will discuss the translation procedure utilised for bringing the once-lost Gothic translations of the Epistles of First John and Second Peter back into the 21st Century.

First, I will discuss the research and analysis of the original Koine Greek translation of the New Testament from the organisation, Blue Letter Bible. I then will explain the research of the morphosyntax of each word and word phrase of the verse and the verse's Greek Translation, along with the reliance on the English King James translation of the New Testament. I then will discuss the research of the Gothic lexicon, its grammatical laws, and declension tables in order to research the correlating Gothic word or morphologically put a current nonexistent word or phrase together through synonyms and pre-existing words. Once each correlating Gothic word is researched, linguistically analysed, and confirmed through the existing Gothic lexicon, the translation procedure ends once the words are written as a translated verse according to Gothic grammatical laws. I will then demonstrate the final translation along with its Koine Greek, King James English, and Gothic counterparts.

While this translation procedure has proved to be successful in reconstructing the Epistles of First John and Second Peter, it is nonetheless experimental and is continuously revised in order to improve this translation research and future reconstructions of other books from the New Testament.