

## Etymology

One way to start thinking about how German has developed over time is to look at the histories of words, what we call 'etymologies'. The goal isn't just to learn the story of two words, but to start to see something about how words, sounds and meanings change. This is an open-ended assignment, giving you opportunity to go in various directions.

**Assignment:** Select two (or more) Modern German words that are related in form and/or meaning, and find out the following about them:

1. **Attested forms** in the Germanic languages (German, English, Dutch, Norwegian, Yiddish, etc.) and beyond (usually Indo-European languages, like French, Russian, Irish, Greek). Which languages have which words will vary for each word. If you choose something found very widely, like across all of Indo-European, you don't have to give all variants, but be careful to show the range of attestation.
2. **For native words:** Reconstructed forms for Proto-Germanic and Proto-Indo-European, if they have been reconstructed. (If not, what's the speculation about why not?)
3. **For borrowed words:** If the word is borrowed from another language, note the source language form and meaning. Was the word borrowed directly or did it pass through other languages along the way to German?
4. **Sounds:** Do you see SYSTEMATIC differences in the sounds across languages or over time?
5. **Semantic** developments: Have meanings changed? If so, in any ways that you can identify?
6. **Connection:** What connections between the words emerge from their histories? Describe how sounds, word forms, meanings are connected over time.

**Examples.** Here are few examples of items that you might choose to look into, but the language is filled with remarkable word histories and surprising connections if you spend a little time with etymological dictionaries. The ones below vary greatly in how they are related and what connections they show.

*(be-)deuten, deutsch*  
*bleiben, leben*  
*Brot, brauen*  
*Dach, decken, Engl. thatch*  
*etlich, etwa, etwas*  
*geben, Gift*  
*gestern, heute*  
*Haupt, Kopf, Chef*  
*heilen, weihen*  
*Hügel, hocken*  
*Knoblauch, Zwiebel*

*Laib, Engl. lord, lady*  
*Laus, Floh*  
*Messer, Sachs (the weapon)*  
*Metzger, Mettwurst, Wurst (,das ist mir ...')*  
*Ohr, hören*  
*Pfalz, Palast*  
*Rad, gerade, rasch*  
*Stadt, anstatt (Stätte, erstatten)*  
*Tag, heute*  
*Welt, Wer 'man' (cf. Werwolf)*  
*Ziffer, Zucker, Alkohol*

**Tools:** Below are some print works, but also check the ‘links’ area of our course website for important electronic resources. You’ll want to use Kluge, Grimm and Watkins at least, and for many of these words other works will be useful, depending on the particular word histories.

- The standard etymological dictionary for German is:  
Kluge, Friedrich. 2002. *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter. 24. Aufl. [There have been several recent editions, earlier editions often include useful things, like a subject index in the 21st ed.]

The most amazing dictionary in the German language, with detailed etymological commentary is Grimm.<sup>1</sup> Use this for detailed history of attested forms and meanings.

Grimm, Jakob & Wilhelm Grimm. 1845-1971. *Deutsches Wörterbuch*. Leipzig: Hirzel. 16 vols. [On-line version available.]

- Key etymological dictionaries for other Germanic languages include:  
Lehmann, Winfred P. 1986. *A Gothic Etymological Dictionary*. Leiden: E.J. Brill. [The most important and best source on Germanic etymology, whenever you have a related Gothic word.]  
*Oxford English Dictionary*. [For English words and general use, a good source of data and dates of early attestation. Available on-line through university libraries.]  
Vries, Jan de. 1962. *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. 2. Aufl. Leiden: Brill.  
Vries, Jan de. 1971. *Nederlands etymologisch woordenboek*. Leiden: Brill.
- Some Indo-European works:  
Watkins, Calvert. 1985. *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. [Limited and not technical but pretty reliable.]  
Mallory, J.P. & Douglas Q. Adams. 1997. *Encyclopedia of Indo-European Culture*. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn.  
Rix, Helmut et al., eds. 2001. *Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben*. 2nd ed. Wiesbaden: Reichert. [If you do words connected to an IE verb, this is useful, but highly technical.]

Other commonly used works outside of Germanic include: Ernout & Meillet for Latin, Chantraine for Greek, Vasmer for Russian (an old edition is in German, recent ones are better but in Russian), Fraenkel for Lithuanian, Vendryes for Old Irish and Mayrhofer for Indic (Sanskrit and some related languages). Full references are easily found with an online search.

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<sup>1</sup> We have learned tremendous amounts about the history of German words since Grimm and the etymological information in Grimm is often seriously outdated, but it’s really valuable for the basic factual information, like old quotes with the word.