The Wordspotter's Guide

Etymological Adventures Through the English Language

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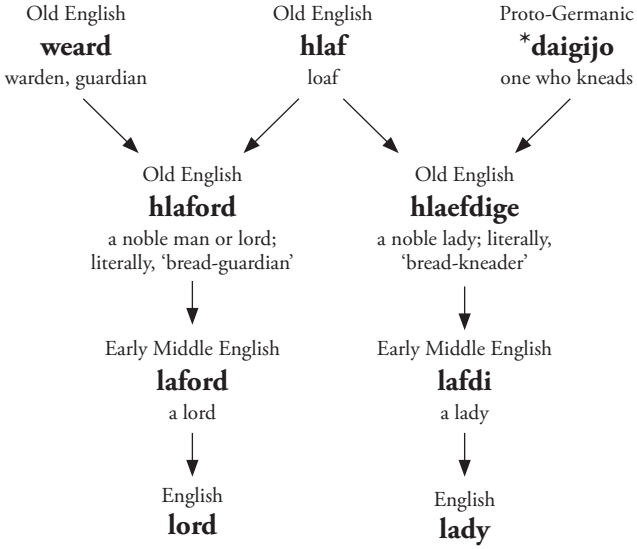


Introduction

What is wordspotting?

1.	the	21.	this	41.	so	61.	people	81.	back
2.	be	22.	but	42.	up	62.	into	82.	after
3.	to	23.	his	43.	out	63.	year	83.	use
4.	of	24.	by	44.	if	64.	your	84.	two
5.	and	25.	from	45.	about	65.	good	85.	how
6.	a	26.	they	46.	who	66.	some	86.	our
7.	in	27.	we	47.	get	67.	could	87.	work
8.	that	28.	say	48.	which	68.	them	88.	first
9.	have	29.	her	49.	go	69.	see	89.	well
10.	I	30.	she	50.	me	70.	other	90.	way
11.	it	31.	or	51.	when	71.	than	91.	even
12.	for	32.	an	52.	make	72.	then	92.	new
13.	not	33.	will	53.	can	73.	now	93.	want
14.	on	34.	my	54.	like	74.	look	94.	because
15.	with	35.	one	55.	time	75.	only	95.	any
16.	he	36.	all	56.	no	76.	come	96.	these
17.	as	37.	would	57.	just	77.	its	97.	give
18.	you	38.	there	58.	him	78.	over	98.	day
19.	do	39.	their	59.	know	79.	think	99.	most
20.	at	40.	what	60.	take	80.	also	100.	us

The hundred most common words that make up around half of all English speech and writing

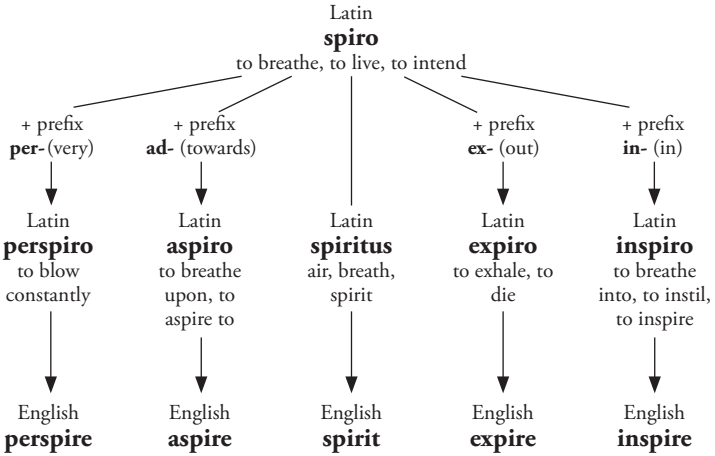

Old English
weard
warden, guardian
Old English
hlaf
loaf
Proto-Germanic
***daigijo**
one who kneads
Old English
hlaford
a noble man or lord; literally, 'bread-guardian'
Old English
hlaefdige
a noble lady; literally, 'bread-kneader'
Early Middle English
laford
a lord
Early Middle English
lafdi
a lady
English
lord
English
lady

The Self

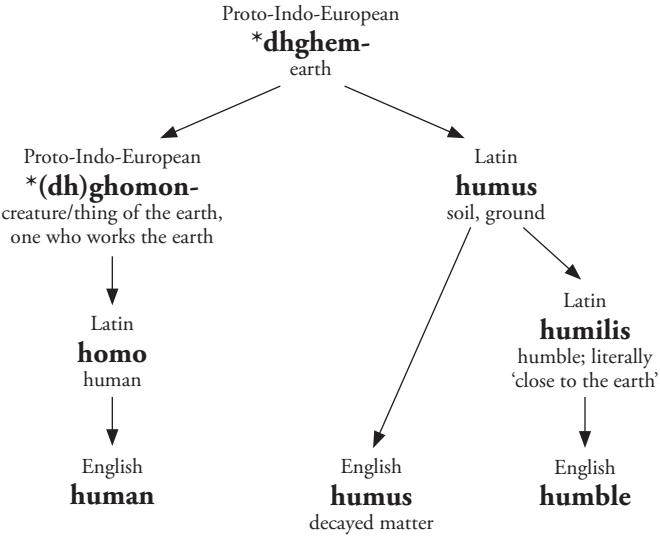
thou	what	to pull
I	man/male	black
not	ye	to flow
that	old	bark
we	mother	ashes
to give	to hear	to spit
who	hand	worm
this	fire	

Twenty-three words believed to be the oldest in existence

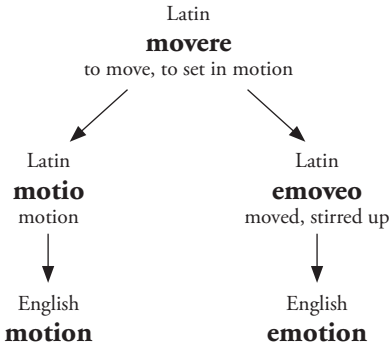
The soul

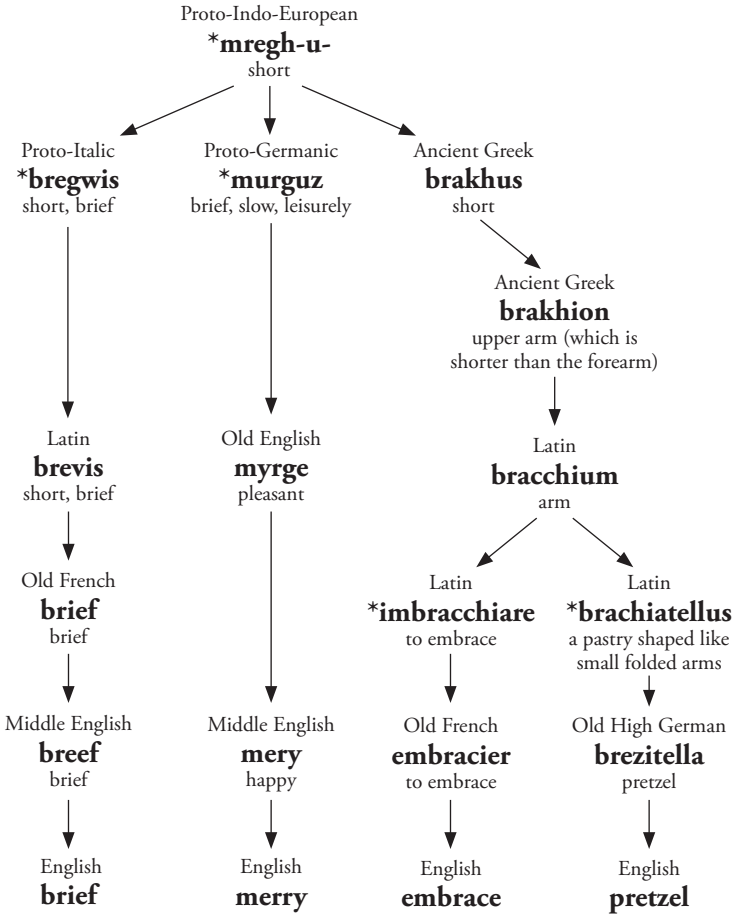

Latin
spiro
to breathe, to live, to intend
+ prefix
per- (very)
+ prefix
ad- (towards)
+ prefix
ex- (out)
+ prefix
in- (in)
Latin
perspiro
to blow constantly
Latin
aspiro
to breathe upon, to aspire to
Latin
spiritus
air, breath, spirit
Latin
expiro
to exhale, to die
Latin
inspiro
to breathe into, to instil, to inspire
English
perspire
English
aspire
English
spirit
English
expire
English
inspire

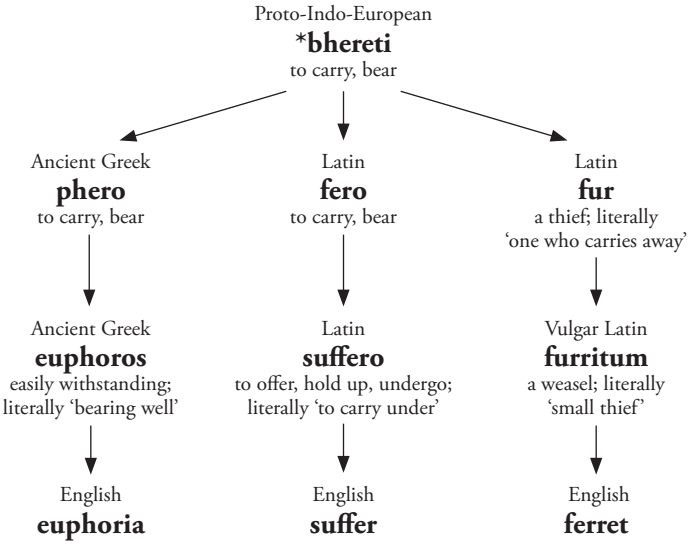
The body

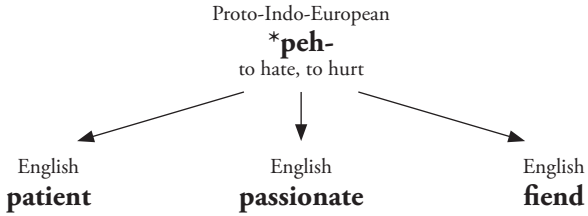

Proto-Indo-European
*dhghem-
earth
Proto-Indo-European
*(dh)ghomon-
creature/thing of the earth,
one who works the earth
Latin
homo
human
English
human
Latin
humus
soil, ground
English
humus
decayed matter
Latin
humilis
humble; literally
'close to the earth'
English
humble

Emotion


Latin
movere
to move, to set in motion
Latin
motio
motion
English
motion
Latin
emoveo
moved, stirred up
English
emotion


Proto-Indo-European
*mregh-u-
short
Proto-Italic
*bregwis
short, brief
Proto-Germanic
*murguz
brief, slow, leisurely
Ancient Greek
brakhus
short
Ancient Greek
brakhion
upper arm (which is shorter than the forearm)
Latin
brevis
short, brief
Old English
myrge
pleasant
Latin
bracchium
arm
Old French
brief
brief
Latin
*imbracchiare
to embrace
Latin
*brachiatellus
a pastry shaped like small folded arms
Middle English
breef
brief
Middle English
mery
happy
Old French
embracier
to embrace
Old High German
brezitella
pretzel
English
brief
English
merry
English
embrace
English
pretzel


Proto-Indo-European
*bhereti
to carry, bear
Ancient Greek
phero
to carry, bear
Latin
fero
to carry, bear
Latin
fur
a thief; literally
'one who carries away'
Ancient Greek
euphoros
easily withstanding;
literally 'bearing well'
Latin
suffero
to offer, hold up, undergo;
literally 'to carry under'
Vulgar Latin
furritum
a weasel; literally
'small thief'
English
euphoria
English
suffer
English
ferret


Proto-Indo-European
*peh-
to hate, to hurt
English
patient
English
passionate
English
fiend

Names

Name	Language of origin	Meaning
Philip	Greek	'Lover of horses'. Originally Philippos, from *philos* (lover) + *hippos* (horse)
Oscar	Irish	'Friend of deer', from *os* (deer) + *car* (friend)
George	Greek	'Farmer' from *ge* (earth) + *ergon* (work)
Eleanor	French	The earliest known bearer was Eleanor of Aquitaine (*c*.1124–1204), who was named Aenor after her mother and known as *alia* Aenor ('other Aenor') or Alienor to distinguish her from her namesake.
Thomas	Aramaic	Originally Toma, meaning 'twin'

Given names and the meanings behind them

Part	Language of origin	Seen in	Meaning
mar	Latin	Martin, Mark, Marcus, Marcel	Likely derived from Mars, the name of the Roman god of war
nic	Greek	Nicholas, Nicole, Nico, Nicola, Nick	Derived from Nike, the name of the Greek victory goddess
ger, gar	Germanic	Roger, Gerald, Edgar, Gerard	Spear
ed, ad, eth	Germanic	Edwin, Edward, Edgar, Ethel, Albert (derived from Adalbert)	Noble
dor	Greek	Theodore, Dorothy, Doreen, Dora, Dorian, Doris	Gift
fin, fion	Gaelic	Finley, Finnegan, Fiona, Fintan, Fionnuala	White, fair-haired
andr	Greek	Andrew, Andrea, Alexander and shortened forms such as Alex and Alexa	Man
ric	Germanic	Richard, Eric, Patrick, Frederick, Cedric	Wealth, riches

Common name roots and the meanings behind them

Identity

Latin

persona

character, mask, part in a play or theatrical production

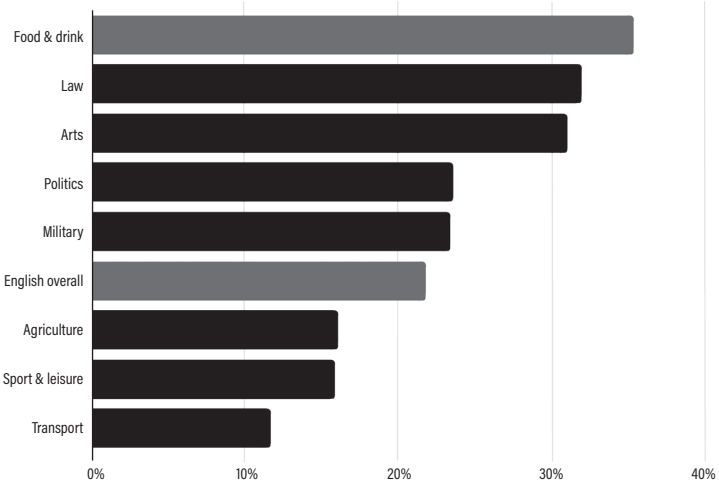


English

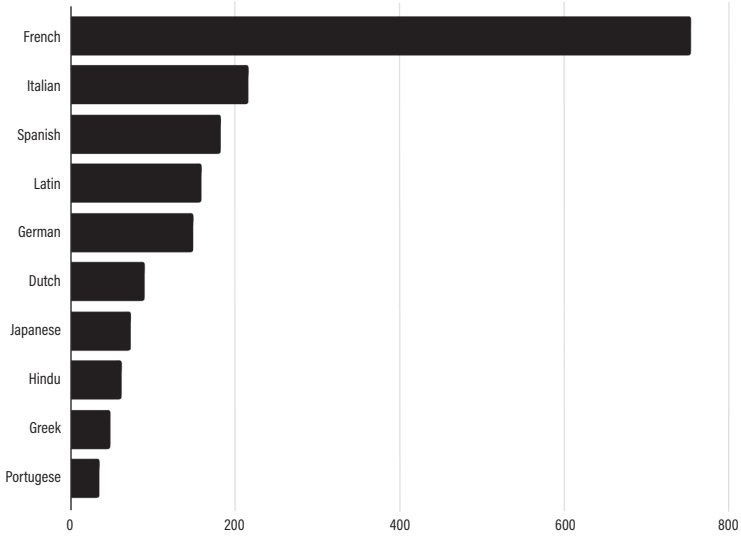
person

The Home

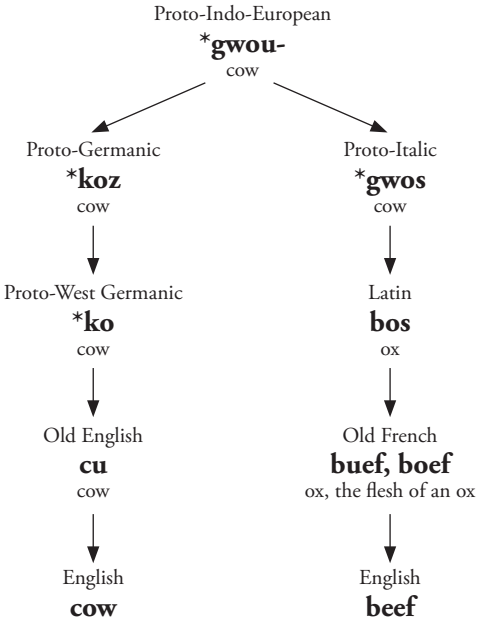
The kitchen

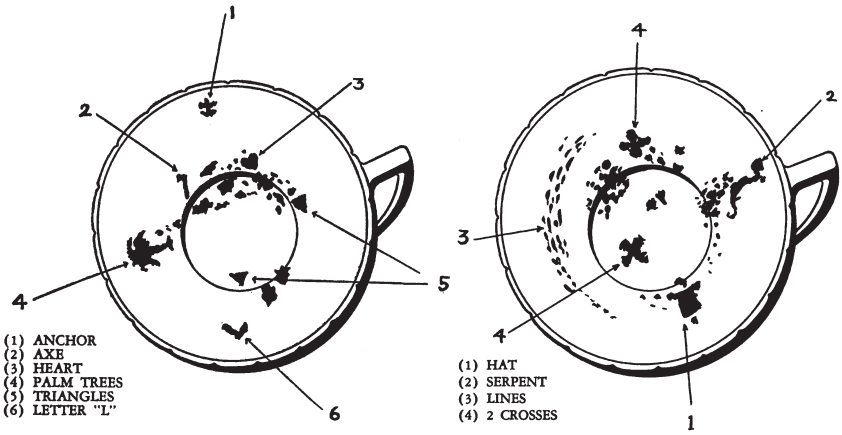


Per cent of words not of English origin
by Oxford English Dictionary category

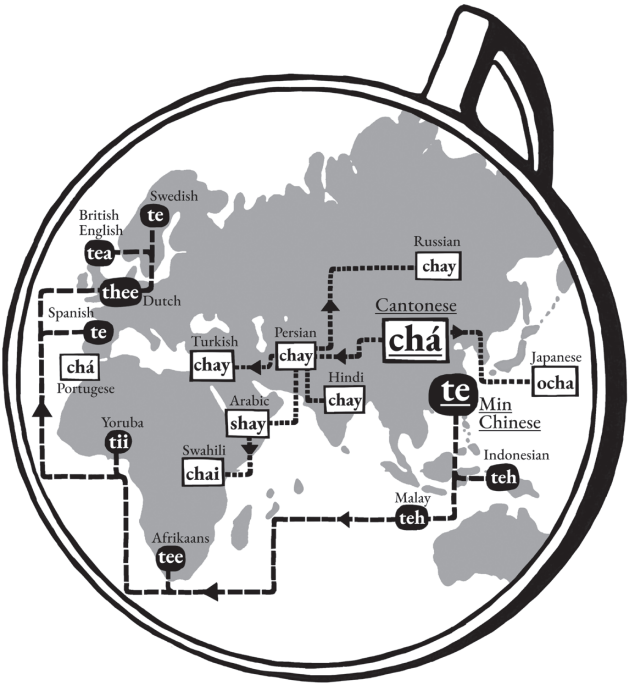


Top ten foreign language sources of English words for food and drink

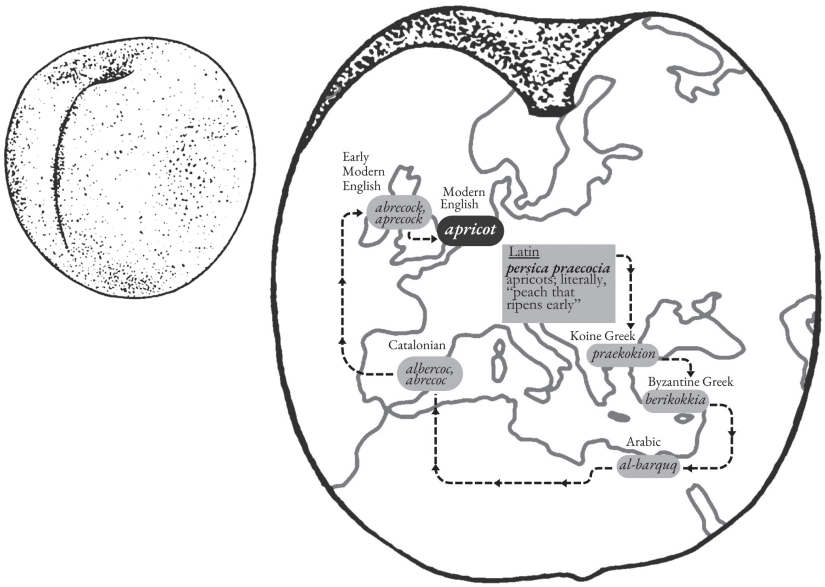




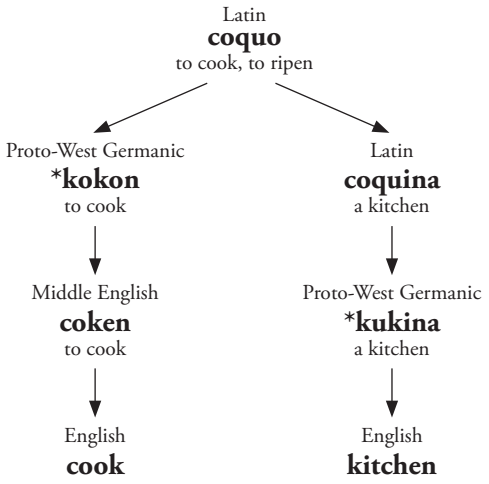
Some basic tasseomancy



The global spread of the words 'te' and 'chá'



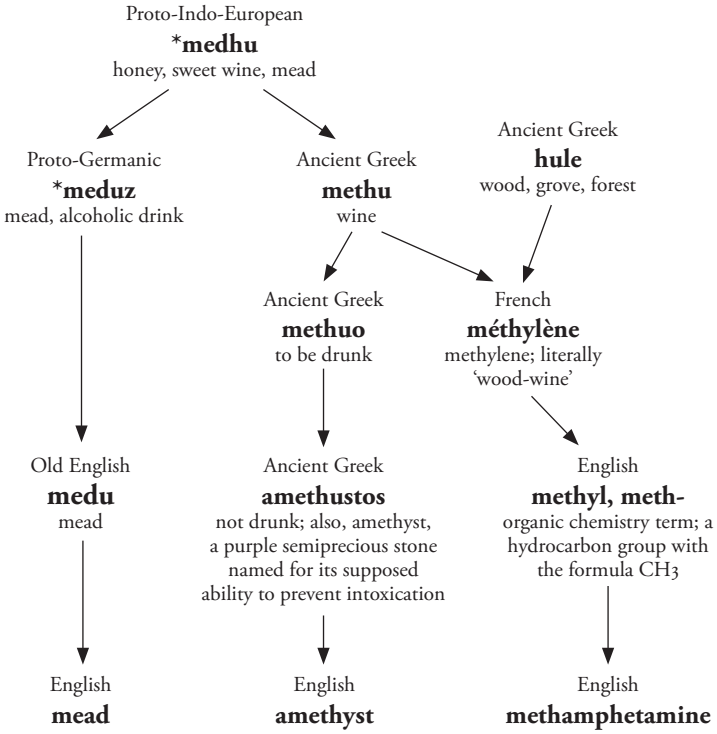
The etymological journey of the word 'apricot'



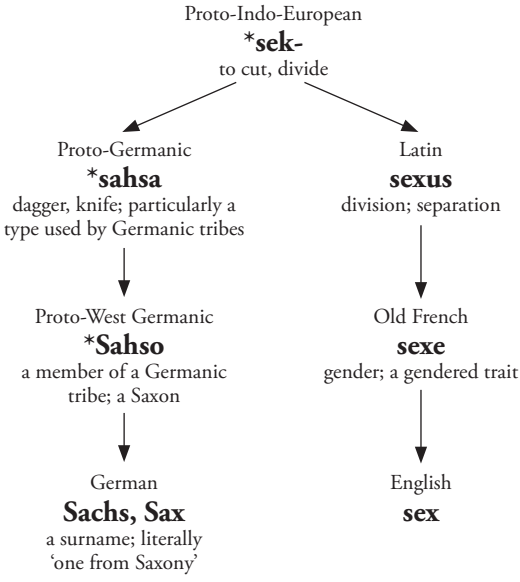
The living room

Drink	Word/phrase	Translation
any drink	*hlenni ennigeira uxa*	the resounding sea of the forehead-spears of oxen
mead	*heilsu mals*	the cure of speech
	fors horna	the waterfall of horns
	hunangsbára	the honey-wave
wine	*galli strugs*	the destruction of dignity
ale	*fen hrosta*	the swamp of malt
	hornflœðar	the horn-flood
drinking-horn	*bjorrann*	beer-mansion

Old Norse names for drink, and what they mean


Proto-Indo-European
*medhu
honey, sweet wine, mead
Proto-Germanic
*meduz
mead, alcoholic drink
Ancient Greek
methu
wine
Ancient Greek
hule
wood, grove, forest
Ancient Greek
methuo
to be drunk
French
méthylène
methylene; literally
'wood-wine'
Old English
medu
mead
Ancient Greek
amethustos
not drunk; also, amethyst,
a purple semiprecious stone
named for its supposed
ability to prevent intoxication
English
methyl, meth-
organic chemistry term; a
hydrocarbon group with
the formula CH3
English
mead
English
amethyst
English
methamphetamine

The bedroom


Proto-Indo-European
*sek-
to cut, divide
Proto-Germanic
*sahsa
dagger, knife; particularly a type used by Germanic tribes
Latin
sexus
division; separation
Proto-West Germanic
*Sahso
a member of a Germanic tribe; a Saxon
Old French
sexe
gender; a gendered trait
German
Sachs, Sax
a surname; literally 'one from Saxony'
English
sex

Word	% knowledge (men)	% knowledge (women)	Difference
bushido	59%	22%	38%
parsec	82%	44%	38%
strafe	83%	46%	37%
teraflop	58%	22%	36%
yakuza	68%	32%	36%
neodymium	56%	22%	35%
katana	80%	47%	33%
boson	76%	44%	32%
degauss	59%	27%	32%
servo	61%	29%	32%
howitzer	83%	53%	31%
halberd	56%	25%	30%
ohmmeter	74%	45%	30%

Words known by a substantially greater percentage of men vs women

Word	% knowledge (men)	% knowledge (women)	Difference
peplum	13%	64%	51%
tulle	27%	77%	50%
chignon	24%	72%	48%
bandeau	35%	81%	45%
freesia	28%	71%	44%
chenille	34%	76%	42%
kohl	36%	77%	41%
verbena	30%	69%	39%
doula	21%	59%	37%
ruche	18%	55%	37%
damask	43%	79%	36%
jacquard	39%	74%	35%
whipstitch	37%	71%	35%
culottes	34%	67%	33%
zinnia	25%	56%	31%

Words known by a substantially greater percentage of women vs men

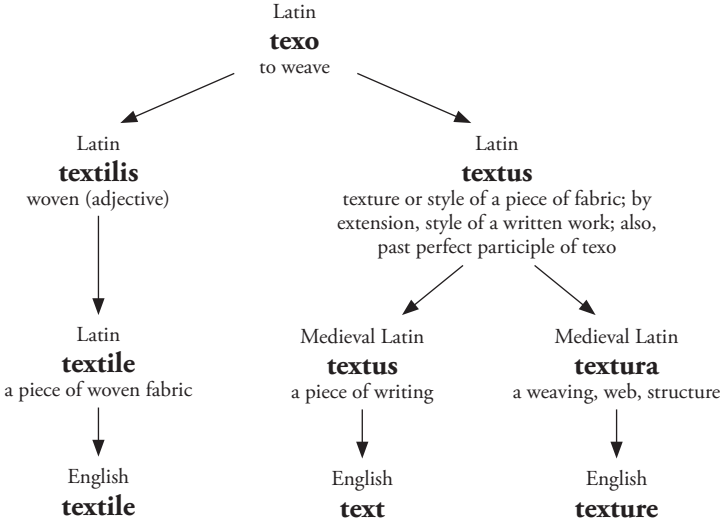
Word	% knowledge (both genders)
gorily	50%
canoeist	73%
monocot	34%
fogbound	62%
bogtrotter	34%
stevedore	42%
pinochle	53%
eke	64%
empurple	13%
cocainize	22%

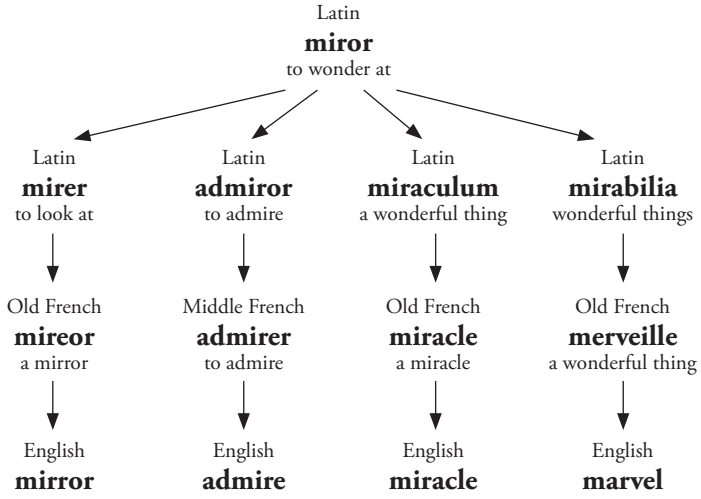
Words known equally well by both genders

Term	Era	Notes
Make the beast with two backs	17th century	First attested in Shakespeare's *Othello*: 'I am one, sir, that comes to tell you your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs'
(Give someone) a green gown	17th century	Refers specifically to the state of one's attire after a romp in the grass
Make feet for children's stockings	*c*.1785	Referring, of course, to the outcome of the deed
Chesterfield rugby	20th century	Originated in and mostly used in Canada
Give someone's arse a salad	17th–18th century	Another one referring specifically to outdoor acts
Play backgammon	17th century	A pun; often hyphenated as *back-gammon* to emphasise this. Gammon being a type of ham, *playing back-gammon* with someone is having anal sex with them.
The falling sickness	16th–17th century	A disease for which no cure is yet known
Speak French	18th–19th century	Oral sex

Historical euphemisms for sex

The wardrobe





sa	**kā**	**ra**	**nā**	**nā**	**ra**	**kā**	**sa**
kā	ya	sā	da	da	sā	ya	**kā**
ra	sā	ha	vā	vā	ha	sā	**ra**
nā	da	vā	da	da	vā	da	**nā**
(the same lines are repeated in reverse)							
nā	da	vā	da	da	vā	da	**nā**
ra	sā	ha	vā	vā	ha	sā	**ra**
kā	ya	sā	da	da	sā	ya	**kā**
sa	**kā**	**ra**	**nā**	**nā**	**ra**	**kā**	**sa**

The Sanskrit poem 'Shishupala Vadha' ('The Slaying of Shishupala')

S	A	T	O	R
A	R	E	P	O
T	E	N	E	T
O	P	E	R	A
R	O	T	A	S

The Roman 'Sator Square'

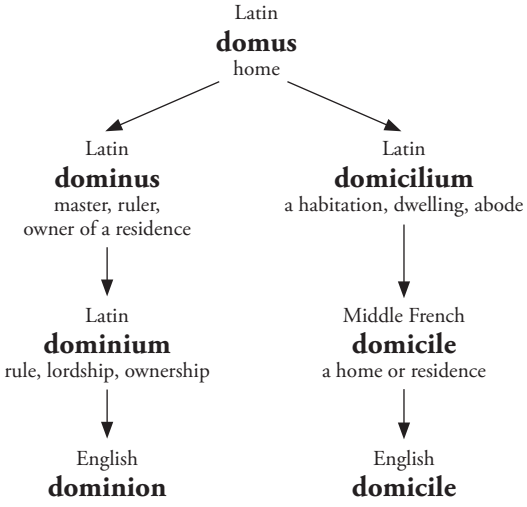
U	R	I	E	L
R	A	M	I	E
I	M	I	M	I
E	I	M	A	R
L	E	I	R	U

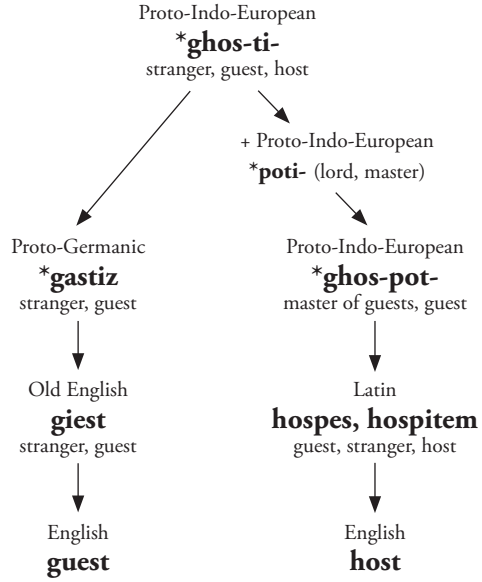
A spell for summoning a demon, from The Book of Abramelin

M	A	D	E
A	V	I	D
D	I	V	A
E	D	A	M

Author's charm to attract wealth and professional success

Other People

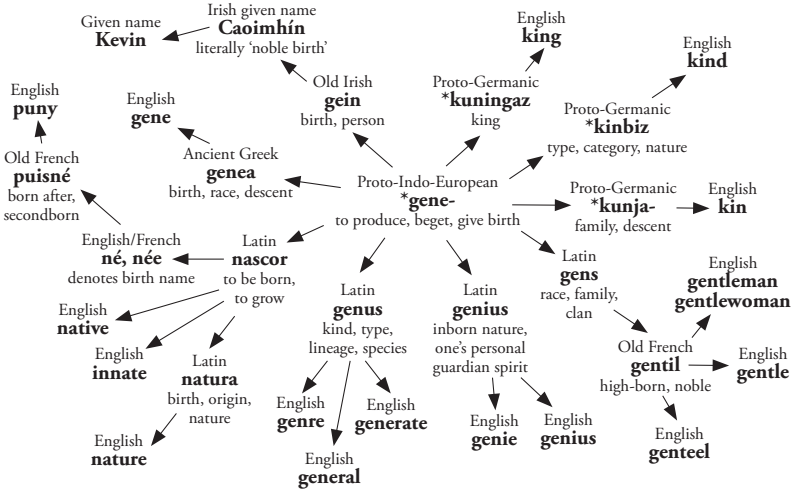




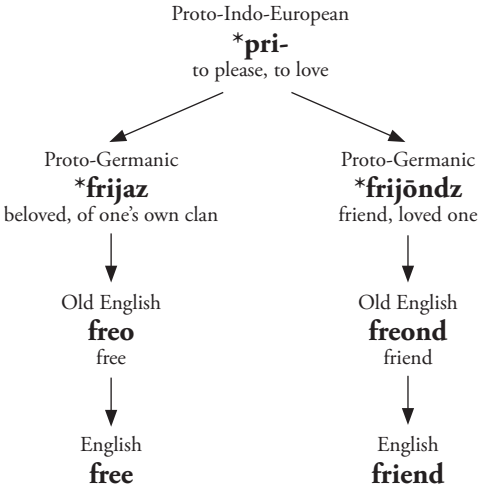
Family

English	Latin	Sanskrit	Persian	Greek	Irish
father	*pater*	*pita*	*pedar*	*pater*	*athair*
mother	*mater*	*mata*	*mâdar*	*meter*	*máthair*
brother	*frater*	*bhrata*	*barâdar*	*phreter*	*bráthair*
sister	*soror*	*svasā*	*khâhar*	*eor*	*siur*

Family words across Indo-European languages



Friends


Proto-Indo-European
*pri-
to please, to love
Proto-Germanic
*frijaz
beloved, of one's own clan
Proto-Germanic
*frijōndz
friend, loved one
Old English
freo
free
Old English
freond
friend
English
free
English
friend

Word or phrase	Meaning	Location and date
Absquatulate	To run away (from *ab-* + *squat*, meaning 'settle'). Popularised by the 1830s stage character Nimrod Wildfire – 'half horse, half alligator and a touch of airthquake' – a parody of the frontiersman stereotype embodied by Davy Crockett.	Maitland, 1891
Acknowledge the corn	To own up, confess	Maitland, 1891
Backtrack	To retreat (originally 'to take the back track' until backtrack became a standalone verb)	Maitland, 1891
Beeline	Usually 'to make a beeline', meaning 'to head directly for something', akin to how a honeybee laden with pollen returns directly to the hive	Hotten, 1859
Biggest toad in the puddle	The biggest fish in a small pond, to appropriate another euphemism	Maitland, 1891
Bouncer	One charged with ejecting troublesome customers from a saloon, theatre or other establishment	Maitland, 1891
Bulldoze	To beat, intimidate, threaten or terrify. Originally *bull-dose,* the implication being either a beating fit for a bull or a beating delivered with a bullwhip. Took on its current spelling in association with the beating and intimidation of black voters during the 1876 presidential election. The construction machine comes from this word, and the verb *to bulldoze* in the sense of flattening or demolishing comes from the machine.	Maitland, 1891
Essence peddler	Properly, a seller of perfumes and extracts; colloquially, a skunk	Maitland, 1891

Word or phrase	Meaning	Location and date
Good time	The vagueness of the phrase seems to have drawn the ire of British writers, who associated it with a sort of characteristic American over-exuberance. John Hotten said, 'An expressive phrase, which means all earthly bliss to the American mind. The finest reminiscence a Yankee can have is that of a good time, wherever it may have been spent. No moderate amount of happiness is ever recorded in the register which denotes how often its possessor has "had a good time".'	Hotten, 1874
Horse marine	An awkward person or one out of their element, as a horseback officer aboard a military ship	Hotten, 1874
Let her rip	To do something vigorously and without restraint is to *let it rip*, but the use of the female pronoun seems to be an even earlier version	Maitland, 1891
Root, hog or die	You are a hog and you must root around in the dirt to survive. A description or command issued regarding harsh situations in which one must hustle to get by; especially popular among soldiers, cattle-drivers and other rough lifestyles.	Bartlett, 1877
Small potatoes	Negligible, insignificant	Bartlett, 1877
Some punkins	Impressive, skilful, important; approximately the opposite of *small potatoes.* A colloquialised version of *some pumpkins;* occasionally also *big pumpkins.* A man might think some punkins of himself if he is very haughty; an attractive woman might be looking some punkins.	Bartlett, 1877

Word or phrase	Meaning	Location and date
Take the cake	Superlative; to be either the very best or the very worst at something. Other versions included *take the bun* and *take the bakery.* In the UK, *take the biscuit* is the preferred form.	Maitland, 1891
Thank-you-ma'am	A bump in the road. The earliest explanation for the name comes from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in 1847. He says that they are so called because driving over them causes one's head to jolt up and down in a mock nod. James Maitland has it that 'a young fellow driving a girl in a sleigh is permitted to kiss the girl at each of these, the same as taking toll at the bridges'.	Maitland, 1891

Americanisms originating in the 1800s

Original word	Rhyming phrase	Shortened rhyming phrase
Look	Butcher's hook	Butcher's
Head	Loaf of bread	Loaf
Suit	Whistle and flute	Whistle
Lie	Pork pie	Pork/porkie
Eye	Mince pie	Mince
On one's own	On one's Tod Sloan*	On one's Tod
Fart	Raspberry tart	Raspberry (as seen in the concept of 'blowing a raspberry')

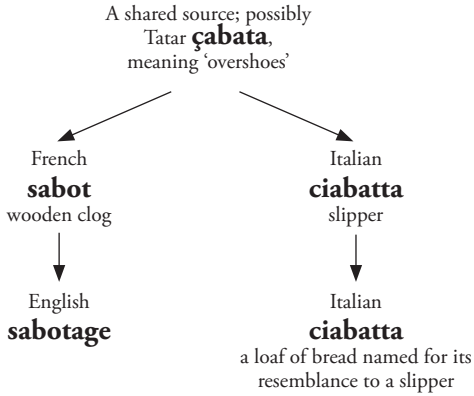
East London cockney rhyming slang

* Tod Sloan was an infamous American jockey who found great success in England, as well as controversy for betting scandals and his profligate lifestyle.

Original word	*Back-slang*
Penny	Yannep
Pound	Dunop
Good one	Doogheno
Look	Kool
No good	On doog
Trousers	Res-worts
Boy	Yob

London backslang and its original words

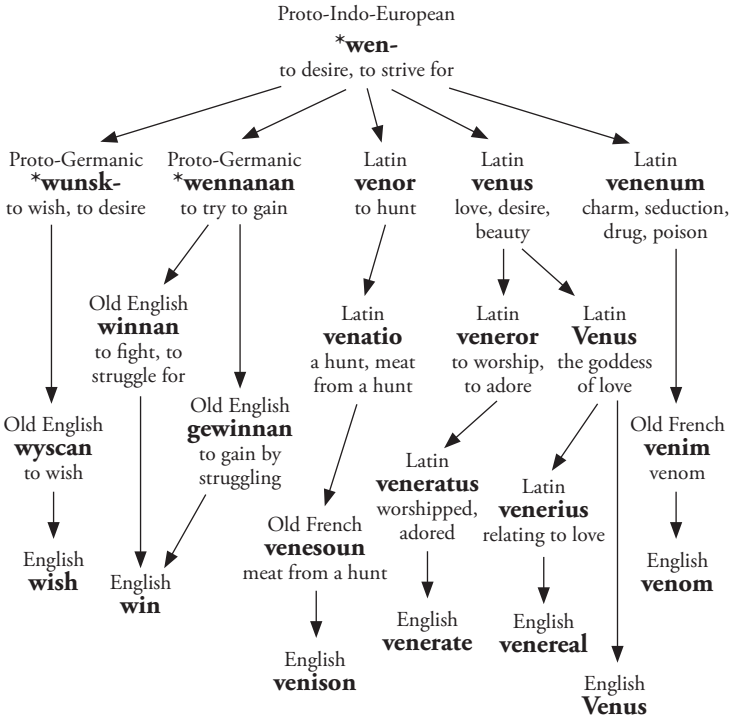
Enemies


A shared source; possibly
Tatar **çabata**,
meaning 'overshoes'
French
sabot
wooden clog
English
sabotage
Italian
ciabatta
slipper
Italian
ciabatta
a loaf of bread named for its
resemblance to a slipper

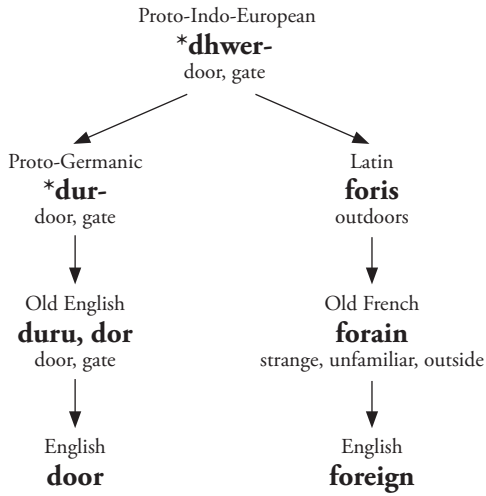
Original term	**Minced oath**
God damn it	confound it, dagnabbit, doggonit
God rot it	drat
God blind me	cor blimey
God's hooks (in reference to the nails of the cross)	gadzooks
Christ	cripes, criminy, crikey
Jesus Christ	jiminy cricket, jeepers creepers
by God	by gosh, by gum, by Jove, by golly, by jingo, by Joe, by George
damn	darn, dang
damnation	darnation, tarnation
shit	shoot, sugar, shucks
holy shit	holy smokes, holy cow, holy moley, holy mackerel
what the Devil	what the Dickens

Minced oaths and their original words/phrases

Romance


Proto-Indo-European
*wen-
to desire, to strive for
Proto-Germanic
*wunsk-
to wish, to desire
Proto-Germanic
*wennanan
to try to gain
Latin
venor
to hunt
Latin
venus
love, desire, beauty
Latin
venenum
charm, seduction, drug, poison
Old English
winnan
to fight, to struggle for
Latin
venatio
a hunt, meat from a hunt
Latin
veneror
to worship, to adore
Latin
Venus
the goddess of love
Old English
wyscan
to wish
Old English
gewinnan
to gain by struggling
Old French
venim
venom
Latin
veneratus
worshipped, adored
Latin
venerius
relating to love
English
wish
English
win
Old French
venesoun
meat from a hunt
English
venom
English
venerate
English
venereal
English
venison
English
Venus

Strangers


Proto-Indo-European
*dhwer-
door, gate
Proto-Germanic
*dur-
door, gate
Latin
foris
outdoors
Old English
duru, dor
door, gate
Old French
forain
strange, unfamiliar, outside
English
door
English
foreign

The Human World

Travel

Latin
tripalium
a device made of three stakes to which torture victims were tied



Latin
tripaliare
to torture, to suffer, to struggle



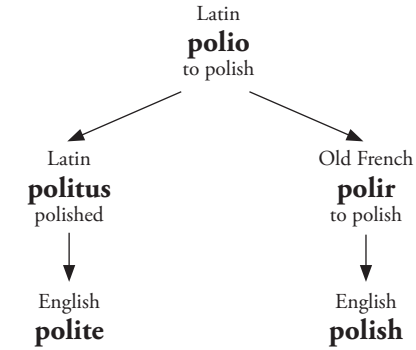
Old French
travailler
to torment oneself, to struggle

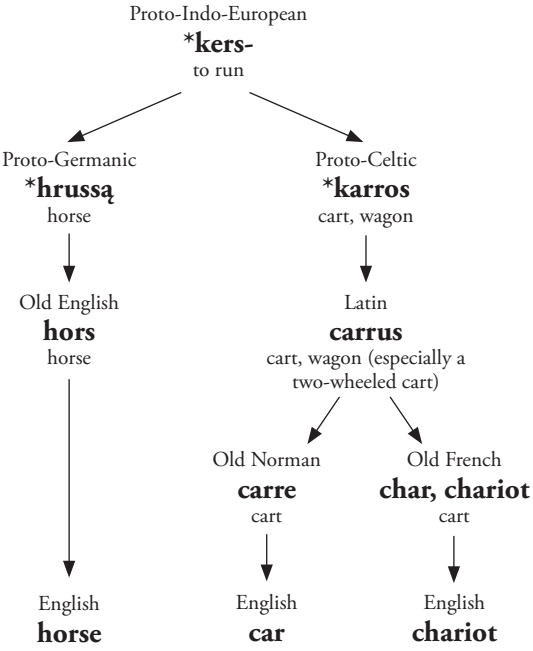


Middle English
travelen
to make a difficult journey, to travel



English
travel


Latin
polio
to polish
Latin
politus
polished
English
polite
Old French
polir
to polish
English
polish


Proto-Indo-European
***kers-**
to run
Proto-Germanic
***hrussą**
horse
Old English
hors
horse
English
horse
Proto-Celtic
***karros**
cart, wagon
Latin
carrus
cart, wagon (especially a two-wheeled cart)
Old Norman
carre
cart
English
car
Old French
char, chariot
cart
English
chariot

Cities

Anadromic place name	Original word	Word source
Amabala, Oklahoma	Alabama	Place name
Saxet, Texas	Texas	
Adaven, Nevada	Nevada	
Aksarben Village, Omaha, Nebraska*	Nebraska	
Nikep, Maryland	Pekin	
Reklaw, Texas	Walker	Person name
Maharg, Oklahoma	Graham	
Trevlac, Indiana	Calvert	
Lebam, Washington	Mabel	
Nolem, Florida	melon	Common noun
Egnar, Colorado	range	

US place names formed by reversing existing words

* The derivation here is slightly less direct. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, a group of businessmen from Omaha founded a club called 'The Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben' with the stated goal of keeping the Nebraska state fair in Omaha. At first, the name was simply a reversal of 'Nebraska', but they soon concluded that Ak-Sar-Ben translated roughly to 'The King, his Domain, and his Retainers' if the syllables were rendered in Syrian, Arabic and Hebrew respectively. They established a kingship, a hypothetical domain called Quivira, and a set of initiation rites that are still kept secret to this day. US president Theodore Roosevelt went through the initiation and reportedly said afterwards: 'Bully! That's the best time I've had in many months!'

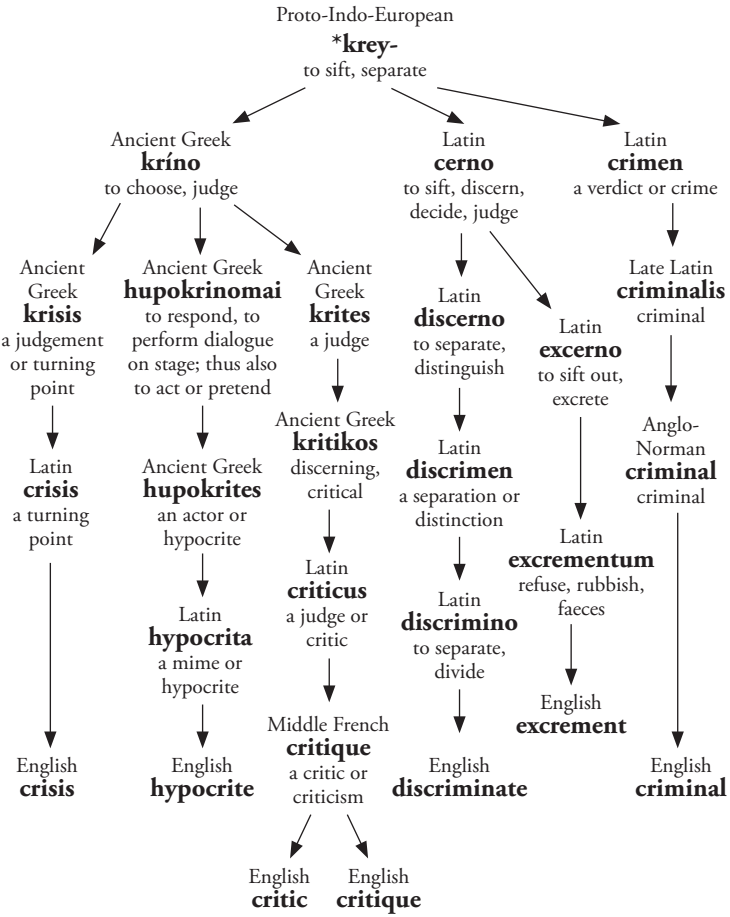
Anagrammatic place name	Original word	Word source
El Jobean, Florida	Joel Bean	Name of property developer
Boncar, West Virginia	Carbon	Referred to metal processing plant in town. Eventually renamed Alloy.
Nada, Kentucky	Dana	Dana Lumber Company, a local company
Malesus, Tennessee	Samuels	Surname of a prominent resident

US place names formed by rearranging letters of existing words

Place name formed by mistake	Original word	Word source
Dongola, Wisconsin	Gondola	Misspelled during post office approval
Tensed, Idaho	De Smet	Surname of local resident was reversed to yield 'Temsed' due to name conflict, which was then misspelled by the post office
Nome, Alaska	? Name	A British survey officer wrote '? Name' near an un-named cape on the maps in his report, which was misread by another officer as 'C. Name' (Cape Name), which was misread by another officer as 'Cape Nome'.

US place names formed due to errors and misspellings

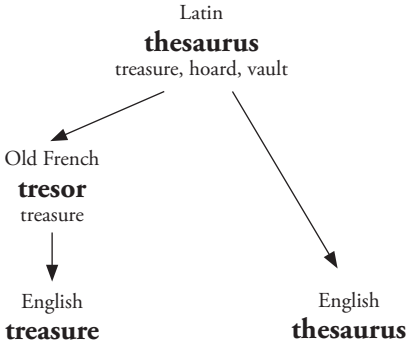
Crime and punishment

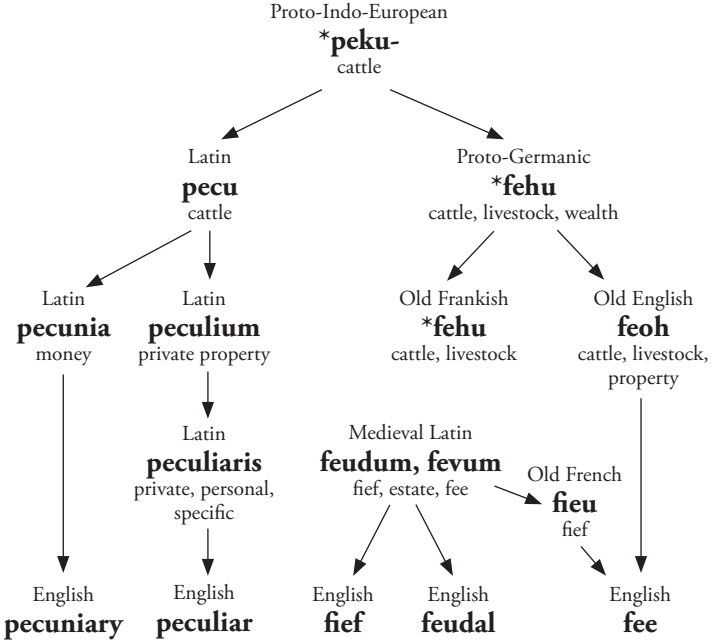


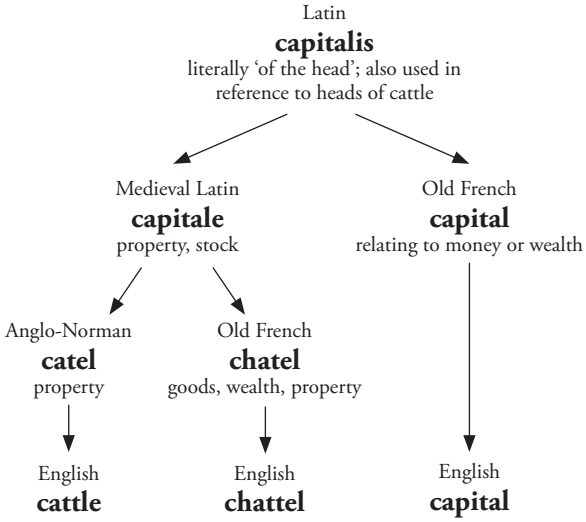
Original spelling	*Reformed spelling*
though	tho
jazz	jaz
through	thru
rhyme	rime
definitely	definitly
staff	staf
bailiwick	bailiwic
philosophy	philosofy
island	iland
hockey	hocky
phantom	fantom
lacquer	lacker
yearn	yern
leather	lether
bureaucrat	burocrat
freight	frate

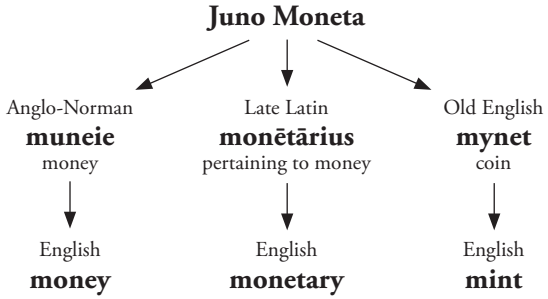
Chicago Tribune spelling reforms, 1934-1975

Money

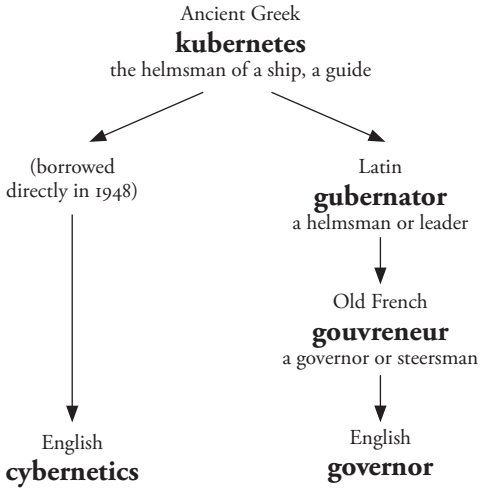

Latin
thesaurus
treasure, hoard, vault
Old French
tresor
treasure
English
treasure
English
thesaurus


Proto-Indo-European
*peku-
cattle
Latin
pecu
cattle
Proto-Germanic
*fehu
cattle, livestock, wealth
Latin
pecunia
money
Latin
peculium
private property
Old Frankish
*fehu
cattle, livestock
Old English
feoh
cattle, livestock, property
Latin
peculiaris
private, personal, specific
Medieval Latin
feudum, fevum
fief, estate, fee
Old French
fieu
fief
English
pecuniary
English
peculiar
English
fief
English
feudal
English
fee


Latin
capitalis
literally 'of the head'; also used in reference to heads of cattle
Medieval Latin
capitale
property, stock
Old French
capital
relating to money or wealth
Anglo-Norman
catel
property
Old French
chatel
goods, wealth, property
English
cattle
English
chattel
English
capital


Juno Moneta
Anglo-Norman
muneie
money
Late Latin
monētārius
pertaining to money
Old English
mynet
coin
English
money
English
monetary
English
mint

Technology


Ancient Greek
kubernetes
the helmsman of a ship, a guide
(borrowed directly in 1948)
English
cybernetics
Latin
gubernator
a helmsman or leader
Old French
gouvreneur
a governor or steersman
English
governor

The Wild

The lay of the land

Land feature name	Meaning	Language	Location
River Avon/ Avon River	River River	Brythonic	At least 19 in the UK, Canada, New Zealand and Australia
Mississippi River	Big River River	Algonquian	USA
Murderkill River	Mother River River	Dutch	Delaware, USA
Ohio River	Great River River	Iroquoian	USA
Ouseburn River	River River River	*Ouse*: Brythonic *Burn*: Old English	Newcastle upon Tyne, England
Ow River	River River	Ow from the Irish *abha*	
Waikato River	Strong River River	Maori	New Zealand
Withlacoochee River	Little River River	Muskogean	Florida, USA
Lake Chad	Lake Lake	Kanuri	Chad
Lake Michigan	Lake Large Lake	Ojibwe	USA

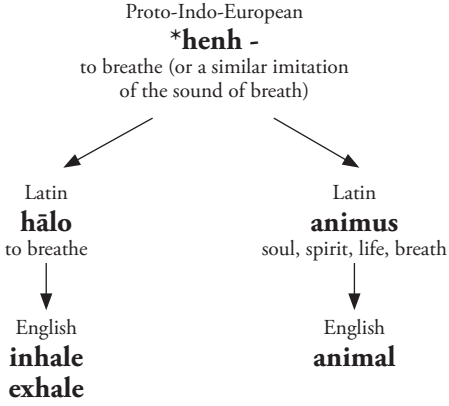
Land feature name	Meaning	Language	Location
Lake Ontario*	Lake Beautiful Lake	Iroquoian	North America
Lake Tahoe	Lake Lake	Washo	USA
Bredon Hill†	Hill Hill Hill	*Bre*: Brythonic *Don*: Old English	Worcestershire, England
Mount Kilimanjaro	Mount Mount Njaro	Swahili	Kenya
Pendle Hill	Hill Hill Hill	*Pen*: Cumbric *Hyll*: Old English	Lancashire, England
Pendleton Hill	Hill Hill Hill Hill or Hill Hill Town Hill	As above, with *–ton* from Old English *tun* (town) or *dun* (hill)	Connecticut, USA
Portsea Island	Port Island Island	*Portus*: Latin *Ea*: Old English	Hampshire, England
Gobi Desert	Desert Desert	Mongolian	Mongolia
Sahara Desert	Deserts Desert	Arabic	North Africa
The La Brea Tar Pits	The The Tar Tar Pits	Spanish	California, USA

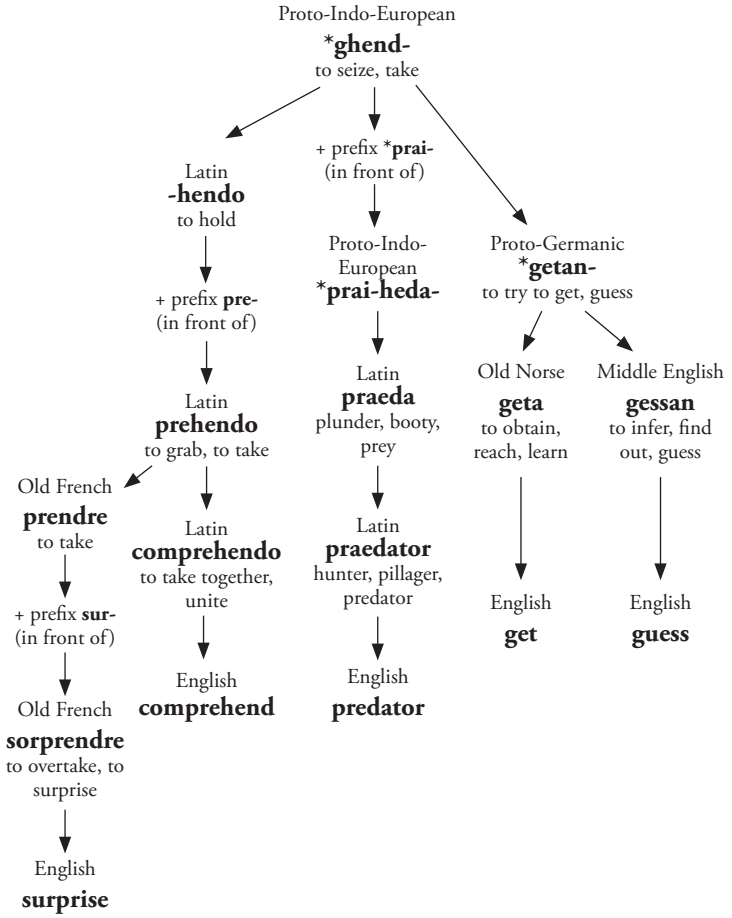
Tautological place names

* Ontario Lacus, a 15,000 km^2 (5,800 mi^2) lake of liquid methane, ethane, propane and butane on the icebound surface of Saturn's largest moon Titan, was named in honour of this Lake Ontario, not because Iroquoian speakers who saw it found it beautiful. The Latin *lacus* also means 'lake', making Ontario Lacus a tautological place name as well.

† The village of Breedon on the Hill in Leicestershire, England has the same etymology and thus could be translated as 'Hill Hill on the Hill'.

The beasts

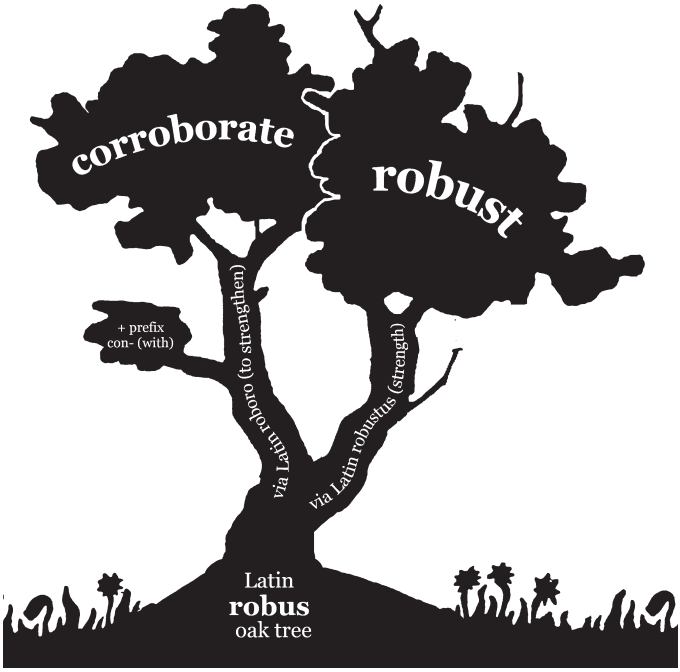

Proto-Indo-European
*henh -
to breathe (or a similar imitation
of the sound of breath)
Latin
hālo
to breathe
English
inhale
exhale
Latin
animus
soul, spirit, life, breath
English
animal


Proto-Indo-European
*ghend-
to seize, take
Latin
-hendo
to hold
+ prefix *prai-
(in front of)
Proto-Germanic
*getan-
to try to get, guess
+ prefix pre-
(in front of)
Proto-Indo-European
*prai-heda-
Old Norse
geta
to obtain, reach, learn
Middle English
gessan
to infer, find out, guess
Latin
prehendo
to grab, to take
Latin
praeda
plunder, booty, prey
Old French
prendre
to take
Latin
comprehendo
to take together, unite
Latin
praedator
hunter, pillager, predator
English
get
English
guess
+ prefix sur-
(in front of)
English
comprehend
English
predator
Old French
sorprendre
to overtake, to surprise
English
surprise

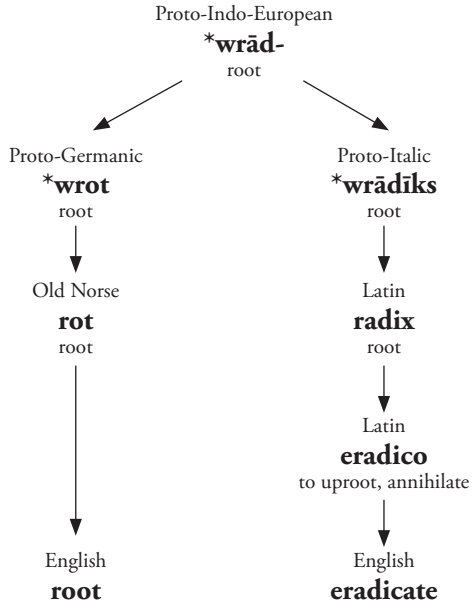
The forest



The etymological roots of 'druid' and related words



The etymological roots of 'robust' and 'corroborate'



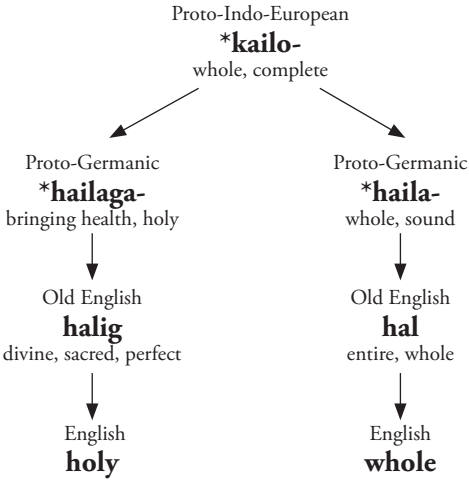
The waters





The course of the Maeander, c.1750 (left) and some decorative Greek patterns known as 'meanders' (right)

The bowels of the Earth



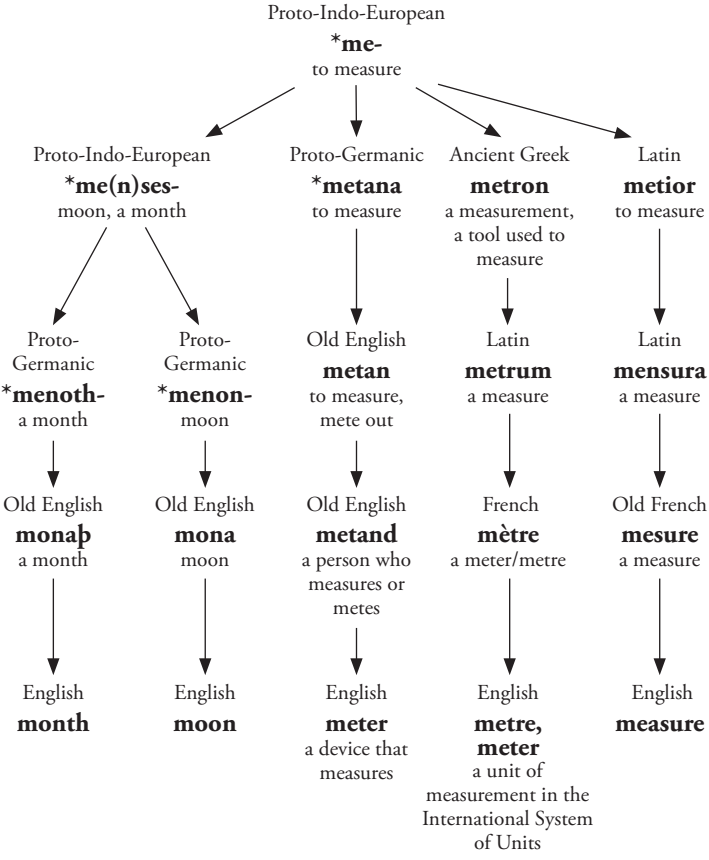
The Cosmos

The clock

English	Babylonian deity	Greek deity	Roman deity	Norse deity	Saxon deity	Day
Sun	Shamash	Helios	Sol	Sol	Sunne	Sunday
Moon	Sin	Selene	Luna	Mani	Monda	Monday
Mars	Nergal	Ares	Mars	Týr	Tiw	Tuesday
Mercury	Nabu	Hermes	Mercury	Odin	Woden/Wettin	Wednesday
Jupiter	Marduk	Zeus	Jupiter	Thor	Thunor	Thursday
Venus	Inanna	Aphrodite	Venus	Frigg	Frige	Friday
Saturn	Ninurta	Cronus	Saturn	Njörðr	Njord	Saturday

Days of the week and their namesake deities across multiple mythologies

The Moon


Proto-Indo-European
*me-
to measure
Proto-Indo-European
*me(n)ses-
moon, a month
Proto-Germanic
*metana
to measure
Ancient Greek
metron
a measurement, a tool used to measure
Latin
metior
to measure
Proto-Germanic
*menoth-
a month
Proto-Germanic
*menon-
moon
Old English
metan
to measure, mete out
Latin
metrum
a measure
Latin
mensura
a measure
Old English
monaþ
a month
Old English
mona
moon
Old English
metand
a person who measures or metes
French
mètre
a meter/metre
Old French
mesure
a measure
English
month
English
moon
English
meter
a device that measures
English
metre, meter
a unit of measurement in the International System of Units
English
measure

Annexe

A wordspotter's glossary

Aureation: Aureation literally means 'to make golden' and refers to the practice of adopting words from a supposedly more 'prestigious' language to lend credibility to one's speech or writing. Often, this involves borrowing from a classical language, especially Latin. Aureate words are perhaps a specific type of **loanword** or **inkhorn term** in that they can be one-off occurrences that don't become widespread in their host language.

Back-formation: A process of word formation that occurs when suffixes or prefixes are removed from an existing word, often to create a verb, noun or adjective form where one doesn't already exist.

Example: A normal (not back-formed) derivation is the creation of the noun *runner*, meaning 'one who runs' from the verb *run* by simply adding on the usual suffix *-er*. By contrast, the verb *edit* is a back-formation created by removing the suffix from the noun *editor*, which was loaned into English from Latin as an occupational noun with no verb form.

Calque: A calque is a **loanword** that is translated literally into its host language. For instance, Hippocrates referred to the teeth that grow in later in life as *sophronisteres*, literally 'prudent ones', which was calqued into Latin as *dens sapientiae*, 'wise teeth', which was then calqued into English as *wisdom teeth*. The Old Testament refers to a now-defunct Jewish ritual involving two goats. One would be sacrificed to God while the other was to be set free into the wilderness as a symbol of atonement. This second goat was designated as Azazel, a Hebrew word of uncertain meaning that early Bible translators interpreted as *ez ozel*, Hebrew for 'the goat that departs'. In English, this was rendered as 'escape goat' or 'scapegoat'.

Doublet: Two words are doublets when they share the same etymological root. They often arise when words enter the same language via different routes. They can sound and look very different because of this. Doublets may have essentially the same meaning, such as ward and guard; different but related meanings, such as gentle and kind; or entirely opposite meanings, such as host and guest.

Eggcorn: An eggcorn is a misinterpretation or mishearing of a word or phrase for something that sounds equally sensible. It is similar to a reanalysis but encompasses one-off alterations rather than the complete change of a word by all speakers.

Example: The use of *free reign* instead of *free rein* or *deep-seeded* instead of *deep-seated* would be considered eggcorns.

Etymological fallacy: The proper name for the logical error of equating a word's etymology with its meaning. This is still a fallacy when the correct etymology of a word is invoked, but it becomes all the more pernicious when a false or pop etymology is invoked.

Example: In 1875, Christian Science movement founder Mary Baker Eddy wrote: 'Divide the name Adam into two syllables, and it reads, *a dam*, or obstruction … it stands for obstruction, error, even the supposed separation of man from God.' This analysis of the name Adam is obviously false: it is widely accepted that it stems from the Hebrew *adama*, meaning soil. The word *etymology* itself is a bit of an etymological fallacy, since it derives from a Greek term meaning 'true sense', when in fact the etymology of a word is simply its history and origins, which can include many changes in meaning.

Fossil word: When a word goes extinct, it sometimes lingers in one or two particular phrases that are still widely understood, even if it has lost its meaning outside of those contexts. Because these words are dead and frozen in one particular position by the surrounding linguistic matrix, highly unlikely ever to move again, they are known as fossil words. They resemble the fossilised skeletons of extinct

organisms, held fast in their final pose by the minerals in which they died, often presenting a particular and somewhat altered view of the word in its former glory.

Example: The word *mow* is still widely understood in English as a verb meaning 'to cut grass', but it once had a now-extinct noun form, *math*, meaning 'the grass that has been mowed' or 'the mowing of grass'. However, *math* is preserved in the word *aftermath*, which once simply meant 'that which grows in the fields after the grass has been mowed', but now is taken more figuratively as 'events which follow after an event, especially a destructive or tragic event'.

Hapax legomenon: *Hapax legomenon* is Greek for 'said once' and describes a term that is used only once in a language, text or other body of work. Hapax legomena can be the result of an inventive author coining a new term: Charles Dickens described the 'sassigassity' of a dog in his short story *A Christmas Tree*, saying that it meant 'audacity with attitude', but the word seems never to have been used again. Ancient texts are often rife with *hapax legomena*, and in these cases they may be the only surviving uses of once-common words, posing a problem for today's translators. The Greek word *epiouson* is found only in the original text of the Lord's Prayer and is usually translated as 'daily', in the phrase 'give us this day our daily bread'. However,

this translation is now widely regarded as incorrect, with a meaning of 'super-substantial' or 'super-essential' considered more likely.

Inkhorn: Even as Latin lost its status as the international language of science, many English-speaking scholars continued to perceive words of Romance origin as more academic than native Germanic ones. In order to emphasise their learnedness, writers coined new terms from Latin and French, using *animate* rather than *alive*, *fatal* rather than *deadly*, *juvenile* rather than *young* and so on. The inkhorn, a symbol of scholasticism, became a pejorative term for those words considered to be excessively scholarly. Some writers even tried to fight back against these inkhorn terms by reviving archaic Germanic terms, albeit with little success. Dickens, for instance, never managed to replace *musician* with *gleeman* nor *conscience* with *inwit*.

Loanword: A loanword is a word from one language that is adopted by another language, generally to be used in a similar fashion to the original. In English, *cafe* is a loanword from French and *salami* is a loanword from Italian. However, loanwords do not necessarily stay close to their original sound, spelling or meaning. The Japanese word for *buffet* is *baikingu*, borrowed from the English *Viking*, because the buffet was popularised in

Japan by a Scandinavian-inspired hotel restaurant called Imperial Viking.

Neologism: A neologism is any word that is new on the scene, regardless of how it was formed. Neologisms are often the result of social or technological change.

Example: In 2025, the *Oxford English Dictionary* added the following entries to its ranks: *al desko* (describing meals taken at one's desk), *deplatform* (to prevent a person or group's participation by withholding their access to an online platform), *hype cycle* (the cyclical expression of excitement and disappointment about new products, events, etc.) and *guyliner* (eyeliner that is worn by men).

Phono-semantic matching (see also Reanalysis): A type of reanalysis whereby words change to better match their meaning. This generally occurs when the original word is borrowed from a foreign language but bears resemblance to a native word.

Example: Europeans in the New World saw a smelly rodent and adopted its name, *musquash*, from one of the indigenous tribes. Phono-semantic matching caused this word to be altered to better fit the animal, resulting in the name *muskrat*.

Pop etymology (sometimes conflated with folk etymology; see Reanalysis): A pop etymology, sometimes called a folk etymology, is a made-up etymology with no basis in reality. Akin to urban legends, many pop etymologies are lurid, fanciful tales with no real purpose other than to sound vaguely interesting and plausible. The word *fuck* is often claimed to be an acronym for Fornication Under Consent of King, relating the word to medieval monarchs' supposed authority over their subjects' conjugal affairs. In reality, of course, no such power ever existed.

Portmanteau: A word formed by blending multiple words together, such as the formation of *smog* from 'smoke' and 'fog' or *brunch* from 'breakfast' and 'lunch'. The term was coined by author Lewis Carroll, who took its name from a type of suitcase that opens into two equally sized halves. Carroll himself was an avid coiner of portmanteaus, including *mimsy* from 'miserable' and 'flimsy', *chortle* from 'chuckle' and 'snort', and *galumph* from 'gallup' and 'triumph'.

Reanalysis (also known as folk etymology): A process of word or phrase formation whereby archaic or rare words are replaced with more widely known ones. This generally occurs when large numbers of people interpret an unfamiliar term as a familiar one in speech or writing.

Example: The fourteenth-century French poem *Le Roman de Fauvel* tells the story of a hedonistic horse named Fauvel who tricks humans into providing him with a life of luxury, including a suite in the royal palace and a retinue of staff to constantly *curry* (groom) his coat. The phrase *currying Fauvel* entered common usage in English as a metaphor for flattery and remained popular even though the story itself did not. As the name Fauvel gradually lost any meaning, it was misheard as *favour*, giving rise to the modern term *currying favour*.

Reborrowing: Not only can one language adopt loanwords from another; it can also loan them back. This is particularly likely when the word changes meaning in one or both languages.

Example: Since at least the sixteenth century, the noun 'crack' has been used in Northern England and Scotland to mean a bit of fun, chat or news. This was loaned into Irish around the 1920s, though the Gaelicised spelling as *craic* has only become standard in the past twenty years. Nevertheless, *craic* has since come to be seen as a notion so characteristically Irish that in many places it has eclipsed the original. Modern English speakers often borrow it back to refer to fun of a particularly Irish nature.

Rebracketing: A process of word formation by which the boundaries are changed in a word or phrase.

Example: The word helicopter is composed of the Greek *helico-*, meaning 'spiral', and *-pter*, meaning 'wing'. However, rebracketing in English has led to the use of *heli-* and *-copter* as if they were valid word parts, despite the fact that they would sound nonsensical in Greek. Rebracketing is particularly common in English when the articles *a* and *an* are confused. Thus, the slimy amphibian once known as *an ewt* was gradually re-dubbed *a newt*, and cooks no longer don *a napron* but *an apron*.

Reconstructed language: Many extinct languages have left no written record behind, either because all materials written in them have been lost or simply because the people who spoke them never used a writing system in the first place. The only way we know they ever existed is through evidence left by languages that developed from the extinct ones. By looking at the similarities and differences between these child languages as well as by applying general rules for how languages change over time, linguists can make an educated guess at how their common ancestor language sounded. However, the accuracy of language reconstructions is impossible to verify. The most extensively reconstructed of these extinct languages is Proto-Indo-European, the theoretical common ancestor of a huge family of languages

that includes almost every European language as well as Sanskrit, Persian and their relatives.

Wanderwort: A wanderwort is a word that has spread to a large number of languages and cultures around the world. Often, wanderworts describe a food or other commodity that has spread around the world with it, giving us valuable information about how cultures came into contact with each other along the way. Almost every culture borrows their word for *tomato* from the Nahuatl word *tomatl*, for example.