

Re: proof that most etymologies are only fairy-tales

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.lang/2008-08/msg00224.html>

- *From:* "John Atkinson" <johnacko@xxxxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Wed, 06 Aug 2008 04:50:58 GMT
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Ekkehard Dengler wrote:

John Atkinson wrote:

Peter T. Daniels wrote:

On Aug 3, 9:26 pm, analys...@xxxxxxxxxxxxx wrote:

On Aug 3, 6:32 pm, Harlan Messinger wrote:

Dusan Vukotic wrote:

On Aug 3,
6:42 pm,
Harlan
Messinger
wrote:

Dusan
Vukotic
wrote:

Is
there
anyone
who
is
able
to
explain
the
homonymy
of
English
bear
(carry,
cause

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to
be
born)
and
bear
(omnivorous
animal/mammal)?
Why
and
how
has
it
happened?

Because
there
isn't
any
reason
why
it
wouldn't
happen,
and
both
words
evolved
in
unsurprising
ways
to
become,
as
it
happens,
homonyms.

And how
that
"unsurprising
way"
looked like?
Could you
be more
specific?
What bear
(carry,

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cause to be
born, bring
forth) and
bear
(animal)
have in
common?

Why don't you LOOK
THEM UP and find out for
yourself if you want
to know what they are? If
you haven't bothered to look
up the
details, then you have no
basis for disputing them.

Maybe you
believe it
happened
by chance?

Yes.

But
what if
there is no
accidental
word-developing
within the
IE
vocabulary?

Who said anything about
"accidental
word-developing"? What
does
that even mean?

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In French, the words "ou"
("or"), "où" ("where"),
"houx"
("holly"), "houe" ("hoe"),
and "août" ("August") are
all
homonyms, derived,
respectively, from the
non-homonymic words
Latin "aut", Latin "ubi", Old
High German "hulis", Old
High
German "houwâ", and Latin
"Augustus".

thats very instructive. Thanks.

But of course I would use something like
this to poke holes in the
standard PIE model.

I am sure there are no homonyms in any PIE
reconstruction – since
the

Sheesh, you've never even opened a "dictionary of
Indo-European
roots" and noticed all the homophonous ones????

neogrammarian principles would prevent
two words that sound alike
in the parent language from evolving along
dfferent paths in the
daughter languages.

Very true.

But nothing prevents them from having taken on different
affixes,
surviving with different vowel grades, different accents, etc.

All of which seem to have occurred in the case of *bher–, which was
apparently four– or five–way homophonous in PIE:

*bher– [boil] > Latin fermentum, Greek porphu:ro:, Sanskrit bhurati

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*bher- [brown] > English brown, Greek phru:nos, (with suffix, via *bhruHnos); and Sanskrit babhru-, Gaulish beberu-, Latin fiber, English beaver, Lithuanian bebrus, Russian bobr, Avestan bawra (with reduplication, via *bhebhru-); and English bear, Lithuanian be:ras (via bhe:ro-)

*bher- [carry] > Old Irish beirid, Latin fero:, English bear, Albanian bie, Greek phero:, Armenian berem, Sanskrit bharati, Tocharian p&r, Russian beru, Lithuanian beriu; and OCS breme, Greek ferma, Sanskrit bharman (with suffix, via *bhermn-); and Latin fors, English birth, Sankrit bhrti- (with suffix, via *bhrtis)

*bher- [cure] > Lithuanian burti, Albanian bar, Greek pharmakon

*bher- [strike, bore] > Latin ferio:, English bore, Greek pharao:, Irish bern, Lithuanian bar(i)u, Russian borju, Armenian brem, Persian burrad, Sanskrit brna:ti; and Old Irish bruid, latin frustum, English bruise, Albanian bresh@r (with suffix, via *bhreus-)

*bher- [weave] > Lithuanian burvam, Greek pharos (with suffix via *bhrw-, bolt of cloth)

How does one decide that *bher-, *bher-, *bher-, *bher- and *bher- are separate roots, though, other than on the basis of perceived semantic plausibility? How does the fact that they've undergone different changes show that they were different to begin with? German "saugen, saugte, gesaugt" and "saugen, sog, gesogen" both mean "suck", for instance, and go back to the same root, as far as I know, but they're not always interchangeable. There must be better examples, but I can't think of any. Now supposing German were Proto-Indo-European and supposing the weak variant of the verb had changed its meaning to, say, "drink" or further to "get drunk", "be drunk", "talk indistinctly", "talk unintelligibly", "talk nonsense", "clown around" or "be a fool", how would one avoid concluding that they must be homonyms? I realise these are uninformed questions, but they're not rhetorical.

I have no answer to your specific question, other than what others have already said.

ISTM that in the case of *bher- [strike, bore] and *bher- [weave], it's just about plausible from the semantics that they're the same word (primitive weaving involves sticking something through something). My source, Mallory and Adams, lists them separately, but I said "four- or five-way homophonous" to allow for the possibility that these two were really the same. But in the case of *bher- [carry] and *bher- [brown], for them to have ever been the "same" root seems semantically impossible.

If you look at an alphabetical list of PIE roots, there really are an incredible number of apparent homophones. Lots more than just about any modern language I know of, except perhaps Mandarin. In the case of Mandarin we know that it's due to pretty extreme phonetic erosion over the previous millenium or so; but it seems unlikely that this is the case with PIE, which is phonetically pretty complex as languages go (more so than just

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about all the other "Nostratic" languages). Seems to me a perhaps more likely explanation is that lots of these roots were never really homophones, but differed in ways that can never be reconstructed via the comparative method, due to phonemes that merged or dropped in *all* the daughter languages (like the laryngeals, only more so, since they left no traces at all). Which I suppose leads back to the old question "Is the linguists' PIE intended to be an approximation to an actual past language, or is it simply the best set of abstract formulas that lead to the IE languages we know?"

John.

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