THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 7:
MORE INDO-EUROPEAN WORDS

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Welcome to the History of English podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. In the last episode, we began to look at the some of the specific words used by the original Indo-Europeans – many of which are still found in various forms in Modern English

In this episode, I want to continue looking at some of the original Indo-European words. Many of the words in this episode relate to the society and culture of the Indo-Europeans. So these words will begin to reveal more about who these people were. Remember that as linguists began to reconstruct these words, they were not really sure who these people were. They had some guesses and made certain assumptions, but they didn't really know when or where these people lived. So the language helps to narrow the range of possibilities. In the last episode, I pointed out a few clues – like the existence of honey bees and beech trees. And we will look at all of these clues in an upcoming episode of the podcast. But for now, let's look at some more words which the Indo-Europeans used to learn a bit more about these ancient people.

Let's start with some with some kinship and family terms. The Indo-European language contained the original version of the words *father* and *mother*. We have talked about the word *father* quite a few times in this podcast. Remember that the word in Latin was *pater* and the word in Old English was *fæder*. Both words originated in the original Indo-European language, as did the word for *mother*.

We also find the original version of the words *brother* and *sister* which were pronounced something like /bra-ter/ and /swe-sor/. So these words have not changed very much in Modern English.

And speaking of brother and sister, we also find the root of the word *sibling*. The original Indo-European root produced the Old English word *sibb* meaning 'kinsman' in a more generic sense. And that Old English word *sibb* later produced *sibling* in Modern English meaning a brother or sister specifically. *Sibb* is also the original suffix of the word *gossip*, which was *godsib* originally, meaning the offspring of one's godmother or godfather. A *godsib* was someone who was like an immediate member, but wasn't actually related, and thus someone with whom you might share secrets about others. Thus, the word *gossip*. The same Indo-European root word also produced the word *self* and even the 'sui' in *suicide*.

We also find the original version of the word *nephew*. But in the original Indo-European language, the term was ***nepot**, and it meant any male descendant other than a son. So it was a very general term which included a grandson, a step-son, as well as a sibling's son in the sense that it is used today. And it continued to be used in this general sense in both Old English and Middle English before the English word *nefa* died out. As has happened with so many modern English words, the Modern English word *nephew* comes from the same original Indo-European word, but it comes in through French and ultimately through Latin. The original Indo-European word ***nepot** evolved into *nepotem* in Latin where it was also used in the same general sense of a male descendant other than a son. And it is from this same Latin word used in this general sense that we get the modern English word *nepotism*. But the word found its way into French and

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eventually into English as after the Norman Invasion in a male and female form. The male form eventually becoming Anglicized as *nephew* and the female form came from French as *niece* in almost the same form which we have today. But again, both *niece* and *nephew* were used in a more general sense in Middle English. *Niece* could refer to a granddaughter and *nephew* could refer to a grandson. It wasn't until the 1600s that the terms became restricted to their current meanings as a sibling's daughter or son.   But also note one other somewhat subtle point. The words *niece* and *nephew* come from an original Indo-European word meaning male descendant. There is no reconstructed Indo-European word for a female descendant in this same sense.

And in fact, linguists have noted this fact about the original Indo-European language.   There are lots of roots for male kin terms, but much fewer for female terms.

In the same sense that there was a word which meant male descendants other than a son, there was also a word which meant adult male relatives or ancestors other than a father. This word could refer to a grandfather or an uncle or other adult male relative. This word has been reconstructed as something like **awo*.   This original word found its way into both the Germanic languages and Latin. And very early on came it's meaning to be limited to a parent's brother in both language families. The Old English version of the word has died out, but the Latin version was borrowed into English from French after the Norman invasion as *oncle* – which eventually became the word *uncle*.   But again, the term *aunt* doesn't have any known Indo-European roots.

So we have this phenomenon where terms related to male kin survive in nearly all Indo-European languages. But similar terms for the wife or wife's family are rare, and they're variable in Indo-European languages. This has led linguists and language historians to conclude that Indo-European speakers inherited their possessions, their rights and their duties from their father's bloodline. And these kinship terms, when viewed in the way they were originally used, they suggest that brides lived with their husband's family after marriage. So, in short, the original Indo-Europeans were probably a patriarchal society where male authority and male bloodlines controlled.

So now let's look at some religious terms. As you may recall from an earlier episode, the Indo-Europeans had a word for *God* which was a combination of *sky* and *father*. In Sanskrit, it was *Dyauspita*. In Latin, it was *Iupeter* (which later became *Jupiter*). In Greek, it was *Zeu(s) pater* (which was later shortened to *Zeus*). So all of these terms were connected and originally meant 'sky father' in the original Indo-European language. Historians have concluded from the use of 'sky father' that the original Indo-Europeans believed in a male sky god.

So let's turn our attention to the political structure of these people. What kind of political structure did they have? Well, there is a reconstructed Indo-European word which means 'tribal or clan chieftain.' So historians have concluded from this that they were organized into small groups or clans rather than large more-organized kingdoms.

In an upcoming episode, we are going to put all of these pieces together and try to determine exactly who these original Indo-Europeans were. And based on this evidence, given the time and location where these people would have lived, the archaeological evidence provides more

information about these people. As we will see, the evidence reveals that these people adopted a herding economy based around cattle, sheep, and goats around 5200 BC. And the burial evidence indicates that the first appearance of tribal chiefs or village chiefs a short time later based upon burial customs and artifacts which have been uncovered at burial sites. So we start to see a convergence of linguistic evidence and archaeological evidence as we put these pieces together. But again, more on all of this in an upcoming episode.

Now the burial evidence also reveals that a few burials were more lavish than those of the typical tribal chief. This suggests that a more prominent leader existed as well. And as we look at the words of the original Indo-Europeans, we find a word which has been reconstructed as *reg*, which meant 'to lead or set things straight.' This word also apparently referred to another kind of powerful leader or officer other than a tribal chief. And we know this in part because that same original Indo-European word *reg* can be found in lots of words in modern English as well as other Indo-European languages.

It is the root of the words *regulate* and *regulator* which reflect the original meaning of the word in the sense of setting things right or one who sets thing right. And in fact it is the root of the word *right* as well   We also find it on the word *correct* where it is reflected in the '-rect' part, and again it's used in the sense of setting things right. So we have *regulate*, *right*, and *correct*. But what is really interesting is the appearance of this same root in many words for kings or other prominent leaders in Modern English and other Indo-European languages as well.

So, for example, in Latin we have the word *rex* which meant 'king' in Latin. And we see that word occasionally in English. We even see it in the word *T-Rex* for a dinosaur meaning literally 'king of the dinosaurs.' It is also the root of the word *rix* which meant 'king' in Celtic and *raj* which was 'king' in the Old Indic language in India. It also is the root of the word *regal* and *royal* in Modern English – both of those terms coming from French and ultimately from Latin. And it's also the root of the word *reich* in German as in the 'Third Reich.'

So the connection of this root word meaning 'to regulate or set things right' with the many words we have for kings or royalty suggests that there was a prominent leader whose job was to regulate certain matters or set things right.

So let's turn our attention to certain terms that the Indo-Europeans had to reflect relationships – specifically relationships between people. So let's break down the Indo-European society a bit more down to this personal level and see how Indo-Europeans interacted with each other.

In Modern English we have the words *donate* and *give*. And in modern usage, we consider these word synonym. In other words, they mean basically the same thing. Both of these words – *give* and *donate* – come from separate Indo-European root words. But here's what is interesting.

The Indo-European root for *donate* produced words meaning 'to give' in most dialects, but it also produced a word meaning 'to take' in the ancient Hittite language.

The Indo-European root for *give* produced words meaning 'to give or donate' in most dialects, but it led to the word for 'take' in Irish.

And there are other examples of this 'give-take' phenomenon in other Indo-European languages. The same root words produces words meaning 'give' in many dialects, but 'take' in other dialects. This suggests that the Indo-European people believed in reciprocal gift-giving. The presentation of a gift required a counter-gift. In other words, the acts of giving and receiving were part of a single process of exchange. So the root word for this process passes on as *give* in some languages and *take* in other languages. A similar phenomenon occurs with the guest-host relationship.

In Modern English the words *guest* and *host* are two distinct roles. The host owns or possesses a certain piece of property, and the guest is the person who is invited or welcomed by the host as a visitor. But interestingly, both of these words – *guest* and *host* – derive from the same Indo-European root word which was **ghosti*. **Ghosti* eventually produced the Modern English word *guest*, and the G became silent in another variation of the word and became *host*.

The fact that *guest* and *host* came from the same word suggests a specific set of cultural rules in which 'guest-host' relationships were intertwined. There were mutual obligations of hospitality. As we will see in an upcoming episode, the original Indo-Europeans were a nomadic people with a culture built around cattle raising, as well as sheep, goat and horse domestication. They were always on the move looking for new pastures and lands. As a result, these tribes often came into contact with each other and passed though each other's territories. So today's 'host' might be tomorrow 'guest.' So this word originally had a reciprocal or dual meaning.

But the 'guest' was also a stranger which meant there was always a degree of uncertainty and possible hostility. That is why this original Indo-European word **ghosti* is also the root of the *hostile* in Modern English.

We also get the word *ghost* from this original word. A ghost being a form of a house guest.

And we also get the word *hospital* from this same root word. And interestingly, the Latin noun *hospes* also meant both host and guest, so it was a direct descendant of the original Indo-European word, and it carried the same dual meaning that the original Indo-Europeans had. According to the Romans, every *hospes* (meaning host or guest) should be friendly or *hospitalis*. The term eventually became *hospitum* to mean a place where people were welcomed by a friendly host in exchange for payment of a specific price. This is the root of *hospice*, *hospitality* and *hotel*. In the Middle Ages, pilgrims from Europe began to travel to the holy land. And a military order of monks established a place in Jerusalem to welcome and treat sick and injured pilgrims. This order was called the 'Knights of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem.' And this was the root of the use of the word *hospital* as a term to refer to a place for treating sick people.

So from this single Indo-European word we get *guest*, *host*, *ghost*, *hostile*, *hospice*, *hotel* and *hospital*.

So if this word is the root of *hostile* because a guest or host could be unfriendly, what about actual conflict between people or groups. It is also interesting to note that the words for 'war' in the original Indo-European languages are not cognate with each other. In other words, the word came into the respective languages later and does not appear to be in the original Indo-European vocabulary. This indicates that the term is associated with long-term armed conflict between two or more political units, city-states or nation-states. But it did not exist during the Indo-European era.   Historians now know that raiding did occur between the various Indo-European clans or tribes – and that it was quite common – even a ritual or rite of passage for certain young men. But this was not the same as war in the sense that we would later know it.

Now let's turn our attention to numbers because all of our basic numbers come from the original Indo-Europeans. Numbers like *one*, *two*, *three*, *four*, *five*, *six*, *seven*, *eight*, *nine*, *ten* and *hundred* which we've talked about quite a bit in this podcast series

One thing that is really interesting about these numbers is they suggest that the original Indo-Europeans tended to count by 10s – basically the same as we do today with the metric system. For example, the word *hundred* literally meant a sum of ten 10s. All modern English numbers are based on repeating increments of 10. 10 tens in a hundred. 10 hundreds is thousand, etc. And of course even when we count basic numbers we do so in 10s. So after 20, we go to 21, 22 ,23 all the way to 29, then start with a new set of 10 with 30, 31 , 32 all the way to 39, and so on. The point here is that we still count in 10s. And when we look at the language of the original Indo-Europeans, we see that the original Indo-Europeans also counted in 10s. And this may seem obvious today, but it's important to keep in mind that not all ancient cultures counted by 10s. Even today, we count by 12s for certain things – a dozen eggs, 12 inches in a foot, 12 months in a year. Each day is divided into two 12 hour increments. Even 360 degrees in a circle is based on increments of 12. The ancient Babylonians used a base system of 60 in counting, so we may get the tendency to count certain measurements in increments of 12 either directly or indirectly from the Baylonians. And I say 'may' because frankly I haven't researched it thoroughly, and I can't say that definitively. But Indo-European cultures – like the ancient Greeks and Romans – used a base system of 10 just as we do. So some of our tendency to measure certain things in increments of 10 come from those Indo-European sources. But the point here is how a small and seemingly unimportant fact like the numbers used by these ancient people can have such a significant impact on the way do things and the way we think about things today.

The Indo-Europeans also had words for colors, and some of these words are the roots of the words we have today. In modern English we have the words *black* and *white*. These colors may seem like polar opposites. But the original Indo-European word for 'black' is also the root of the word for 'white' in many Indo-European languages. Once again, just like with *guest* and *host*, we have one of those Indo-European root words that produces two seemingly contradictory words.

The original Indo-European word **bhel* originally meant 'burn, flash, and/or shine.' As a result, it is the root of 'black' which refers to something burnt and blackened. But that same original Indo-European word is also the root of the Latin word *blancus* which meant 'white' as in something bright which is in the process of burning. And it's still found in may Latin-dervied

word for 'white' like the French word *blanc* and the Spanish word *blanco*. That's why those Latin-derived words for 'white' resemble the English word for 'black' – *black*, *blanc*, *blanco*. But in English, *black* means black. But French *blanc* and Spanish *blanco* both mean white.

The point here is that the French and Spanish version of the words come from the same original Indo-European root word, but they changed to reflect the brightness produced by a fire that is burning. But English did not borrow that same word for 'white.' The English word *white* comes from the Old English word *hwit* which comes from Old Germanic. The Old English word derives from a different Indo-European root word (**kwintos*), but that root word meant 'bright' in the original Indo-European language. So it was just a different word that the Indo-Europeans had – not the same root that we have for the word *black*.

You might also note the similarity of the word *white* with the Modern English word *what*. Remember in the Grimm's Law episode I talked about the origin of the word *what*. It was originally **kwot* in the Indo-European language and became *que* in Spanish and *que* in French. In Old English, the 'k' sound shifted to an 'h' sound under Grimm's Law and became /hwat/. The 'h' sound at the beginning was dropped over time and we end up with the modern English word *what*. The same thing happened with *white*. It begins as **kwintos* in the original Indo-European language, and the 'k' sound had shifted to an 'h' sound under Grimm's Law in the Germanic languages, and it became /hwintos/. And again the 'h' sound dropped off at the beginning and the first two letters – H and W – were shifted to W-H to reflect that the 'w' sound was the primary consonant at the beginning. So *white*, *what*, *when* – all of these words went through this same general process. And that is why all of those words begin with a 'W-H' spelling even though the 'H' is basically silent today.

The Indo-Europeans also had a root word for the Modern English word *red*, and this root word is found throughout the Indo-European languages. The English word *red* is cognate with the French word *rouge* and the Spanish *rojo*. It also appears in the Modern English word *rust* which comes from Old English. Again, all of those words came from the original Indo-European root word meaning 'red.'

The Indo-Europeans also had a word which was pronounced something like **spek* which meant 'to look.' And that word is the ultimate ancestor of the Modern English word *spectate* and *spectator* and lots of other words as we will see in a second. But I should not that the word *look* is an Old English word of unknown origin. It is not related to this ancient Indo-European word, even though it has essentially the same meaning in modern English.

Like the modern English word *look* the ancient Indo-European word **spek* could mean the act of looking at something or it could mean how something looked as in "He looks at the sunset" and "He looks very sick." The word **spek* could also be used both ways.

*Spek is also the root of the Latin word *specere* which is actually the source of the words *spectate* and *spectator* which I mentioned earlier. But it is also the source of words like *spectacle*, *speculate*, *inspect*, *aspect*, *suspect,* and *conspicuous* – all having to do with the way something looks or an aspect of something which can be observed or discerned. That same

Indo-European word *spek also produced the words spy and espionage when the French borrowed the terms from the Franks who were another Germanic tribe who, despite their Germanic origins, are ultimately responsible for the founding of the modern French state.

The work *spek evolved into early Greek as well. Remember the Greek language is also an Indo-European language. But the Greeks reversed the P and the K in the Indo-European root word *spek, and they came up with the Greek verb skopeîn which eventually finds its way into English as scope (as in telescope, microscope and periscope – again all having to do with the process of looking at something). The Greek version also found its way into the English word skeptic (as in to see through something or look at something critically). And, it may be harder to see it, but the Greek verison of the word also finds its way into certain early religious terms like Episcopalian and bishop. In these words the term is being used in its sense as an 'overseer.'

Let's turn now to a word which the Indo-Europeans had for man. In fact, the Indo-Europeans had two words for man. They had the word *man, and they had a separate word *wiro which meant 'man' as well. Both of those words came into Old English.

From the Indo-European root word *man, Old English had the word man, but it was used in a much more general sense at the time meaning a 'person,' as in 'mankind,' like 'all men are created equal.' It could be used in reference to both males and females – men and women – collectively.

But the other Indo-European root word *wiro specifically meant 'males.' In other words, it had basically the same meaning as the Modern English word man. It strictly referred to males – adult males really. So in Old English man meant 'person.' And wer meant 'man.' And Old English also had the word wif which meant woman.

We rarely see the use of the word wer as 'man' in Modern English, but there are a couple of examples. The best example is probably werewolf which literally means 'man wolf.' We also see it a word from the period of the Germanic tribes – before the Anglo-Saxons became the English. The term was wergeld which literally meant 'man money.' Amongst the Germanic tribes, if a member of one family killed a member of another family, the dispute could be resolved with the payment of money from the murderer's family to the victim's family to compensate for the killing. There were very specific rules to determine the rate of compensation. This was the 'wergeld.' And we see the use of wer as 'man' in that word. That same Indo-European root word which produced the Old English word wer is also the source of the word world which basically meant the home of man.

During the Middle English period, wer (meaning 'man') started to disappear, and the word man began to be used in its place to mean an adult male. But man also continued to be used in a more generic sense to refer to 'people'. This dual usage stills exists in Modern English, and it creates problems where we don't want to be sexist. So we often have to modify the word man when it is used in its original sense as persons or humans. So we take a word like mankind, and we have to make a new word to accompany it like womankind. Or we have to change a word like chairman, which initially used the word man in its generic Old English sense, and we now have

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to create a more gender-neutral term like *chairperson*. So, this is the challenge we have in a modern society using words that have changed their meaning over time.

I mentioned that Old English used *wer* to refer to a man and *wif* to refer to a woman. Of course, we still have *wif* in Modern English as the word *wife*, but again the sense has changed from a generic term for an adult woman in its original usage to its modern usage as the word *wife* meaning a term for a married woman. We still see the initial generic use of the term in a few older words which still linger into Modern English like *midwife* and even the phrase *old wive's tale* where the sense is just a woman, not necessarily a married woman. Some people believe *wif* also goes back to Indo-European roots, but outside of the Germanic languages the only possible cognates appear to be in the Tocharian language discovered in China, and even then the reconstructed roots don't directly relate to women or females. So the Indo-European roots of *wif* are uncertain at best. It is probably best to just say that its roots are unknown.

There's one final aspect of Indo-European vocabulary which I want to point out. The linguistic evidence suggests that the original Indo-European-speaking people practiced epic poetry – a form that used stock phrases, some of which show up in poetry preserved to the present day in works like The Iliad and other ancient texts. These include terms like *driving cattle*, and the phrase *undying fame*, as well as the stock phrase *immortal gods*. These stock phrases can be traced back to the original Indo-European language, and they've been used ever since in epic poetry and other writings and texts throughout the Indo-European languages.

That concludes my look at specific Indo-European words, many of which have come down to us in Modern English. But just as importantly, these words help to paint a picture of who these original Indo-Europeans were and how they lived.   And we're going to put all of those pieces together very shortly to try to determine exactly when and where they lived. And based on archaeological evidence and other historical records, we will try to identify exactly who these people were. But before we do that. I want to turn away from the vocabulary – or words – which these Indo-Europeans used, and I want to spend a few minutes on how they used those words, specifically their grammar. This may seem a bit boring, but it is actually very important as it helps to introduce some concepts which are essential to understanding Old English.

So in the next episode, which may be a short episode, I am going to look at the original Indo-European grammar. And then we will put all of the pieces of evidence together to determine exactly who these Indo-Europeans were.

So until next time, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.