



## Deseret Language and Linguistic Society Symposium

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Volume 19 | Issue 1

Article 15

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4-2-1993

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#### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Hallen, Cynthia (1993) "Philology and the Andean Highway," *Deseret Language and Linguistic Society Symposium*: Vol. 19 : Iss. 1 , Article 15.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/dlls/vol19/iss1/15>

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# Philology and the Andean Highway

Cynthia L. Hallen

The love of language is the beginning of light in the mind. One way to foster a love for language is to restore philology to the language arts curriculum in English studies. Philology is the history of change and continuity in the structure, sound, sense, and usage of words across time. In time, words build up powerful portfolios which can be a resource to contemporary writers and readers. The invention and interpretation of texts can be rooted in philology. Philology is the art of sorting out the full potential of a word in its contexts, an art of metaphor that helps us interpret discourses in various cultures.

The value of philology became apparent to me when I took a course in German reading at the University of Arizona in 1976. The reading teacher, Herr Oong, encouraged his students to figure out the meaning of new words by analyzing their roots and affixes, and he gave out vocabulary lists which were organized by word roots. Words like *heilen* ('to heal') and *heilig* ('holy') and *Heiland* ('Savior') were grouped together so that we could use the meaning of the Germanic root *heil* ('whole') as a mnemonic device. I learned that words containing the *heil* root had in common a sense of wholeness, and I saw that English cognates had a similar relationship. Words like 'heal' and 'health,' which suggest physical well-being, are related to words which imply spiritual perfection, such as 'holy' and 'hallowed.'

Meanwhile, I had discovered Calvert Watkins's Proto-Indo-European (PIE) Appendix in the back of the *American Heritage Dictionary*. I learned that philologists (or comparative historical linguists) had used phonological patterns and other linguistic rules to reconstruct the etymology of words like 'whole,' 'heal,' and 'holy,' tracing them back to an Indo-European root *\*kailo-*, meaning 'whole, uninjured, of good omen.' A new interest in words and language began to influence my foreign language

studies as well as my work in creative writing and English literature.

Herr Oong's philological approach paid off the following year when I was learning Spanish in Bolivia. Through Spanish, I learned that English had another set of Indo-European roots related to wholeness, holiness, and health. The English word 'sane' and the Spanish words *sanar* and *sano* have in common the reconstructed Indo-European root *\*sāno*, meaning 'healthy.' The words 'sacred,' 'saint,' and 'sanctify' are cognate with Spanish *santo* and *sanctificar* through the root *\*sak-*, meaning 'to sanctify.' And 'safety,' 'save,' and 'Savior' correspond to *salud*, *salvar*, and *Salvador* through the root *\*sol-*, meaning 'whole.' Even though the Germanic and Latinate words had come from two different Indo-European roots, their roots covered similar connotations of wholeness.

The ambidextrous nature of English in its Germanic and Latinate roots was intriguing, so then I started to look for word root connections in non-Indo-European languages, such as the Aymara language of Bolivia. One of the pre-Incan names of the Aymara people is the *Kollas* [kol yas], or 'holy ones,' and there is a philological connection between holiness and healing in the Aymara language: *kollaña* meaning 'to heal' and *kollanaptayasiña* meaning 'to hallow' or 'to sanctify.' Even though the parallels in sense and sound between words derived from Indo-European *\*kailo-* and Aymara *kolla* are probably coincidental, seeing the correspondences helped me remember the new language through metaphoric if not historic connections.

A philological perspective helps me not only as a student of other languages and cultures but also as a teacher. When I teach English as an alternate language or Freshman Composition courses, I incorporate the history of the English language and the Indo-European roots of English into my

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syllabus and ask the students to share their philological insights about word-building in various texts, languages, or cultures. I use several of the words listed in *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots* to illuminate my teaching and research.

For example, the reconstructed sense of the Indo-European root *\*ar-* is 'to fit together.' Words such as ART, ARTIST, ORDER, COORDINATE, EXORDIUM, ORNAMENT, and READ are derivatives of this root. The English word ORDER comes from the Latin word *ordō*, which originally referred to a row of threads in a loom. The rhetorical term EXORDIUM comes from Latin *ordīrī*, 'to begin to weave.' The connection between fitting things together, writing, reading, and weaving becomes a discussion question for my composition class: "What does writing an exordium (introduction) have to do with beginning to weave or fitting ideas together?" When I teach the history of the English language, I can show how the meaning of 'reading' has changed across time and how the epithet of the Anglo-Saxon king, Aethelred the Unready, works as a pun. Besides having the sense of 'comprehending a written text,' the Old English word *rædan* meant 'to explain,' 'to advise' or 'to counsel.' So *Aethelred* literally meant 'Noble-Counsel,' and *Unread* meant 'No-Counsel' (Blair 91). Through his ineptitude as a leader, Aethelred, who was supposed to be a person of wise counsel, earned the epithet of being uncounseled, unschooled, unwise, or unread.

Another rhetorical term with an interesting Indo-European root is ARGUMENT. The primary sense of the reconstructed root *\*arg-* means 'to shine; white; silver.' Our word ARGUE comes from Latin *arguere*, 'to make clear, demonstrate.' When my students and I discuss ways to increase understanding in spite of differences, we talk about argument as clarification, illumination, and enlightenment through debate, rather than the clever and vicious contention of intellectual warfare.

After a discussion of the derivation of literacy, letters, alliteration, and literature from the Indo-European root *\*deph-*, 'to stamp,' one of my students attended a lecture on graffiti that verified the philological connections between literacy and the technique of 'stamping' in contemporary inner-city culture. Students have also seen 'scratching' as a metaphor for writing in the root *\*gerbh-*, the ancestor of Old English *ceorfan*, 'to cut,' from which we get the word CARVE. IE *\*gerbh-* is also the ancestor of Greek *graphein*, 'to scratch, draw, write' (also *gramma* and *gramme*), from which we get several important writing words and suffixes: -GRAM, -GRAPH, GRAMMAR, and PARAGRAPH. In discussions and in free-writing, students see literal and figurative significance in acts of writing by which they can mark, stamp, or engrave a name and place for their unique existence in the universes of discourse.

Many students are concerned about getting good grades and about getting their college degree, so I like to introduce the IE root *\*ghredh-* and its Latin derivatives *gradī*, 'to walk, go' and *gradus*, 'step, stage, degree, rank.' These two Latin words gave us the English words CONGRESS, DIGRESS, PROGRESS, REGRESS, TRANSGRESS, GRADE, DEGREE, DEGRADE. Yes, good grades are related to graduating with a degree, but I advise students to enjoy each step of the educational process, to progress qualitatively and not just quantitatively as they go/walk through the system. And sometimes I tell students to run like a *chasqui* (messenger) on the Andean highway, because courses, discourses, curricula, cursors, cars, chariots, and careers all have running as their primary sense in the Indo-European root *\*kers-*,<sup>2</sup> 'to run.'

The most poetic root could be *\*deru*, with derivatives meaning 'to be firm, steadfast, solid': Old English *trēow*: TREE; Old English *trēow*, pledge: TRUCE; Old English *trēowe*, firm, true: TRUE; Old English *trēowth*, faith, loyalty, truth: TROTH, TRUTH, BETROTH; Old Norse *traust*, confidence, firmness: TRUST; Latin *dūrus*, hard: DURESS, ENDURE. I like to ask students what trees and truth have in common, what the relationship is between having trust and being betrothed or engaged. In Indo-European literatures and legends, trees have been enduring symbols of truth, starting perhaps with Siddhartha's experience under the BO tree, which has the same root as the word BUDHA, from Sanskrit *bodhati*, 'he awakes, is enlightened, becomes aware,' under the Indo-European root *\*bheudh-*, 'to become aware; to make aware.' Like a BO tree, philology has roots and branches that can lead us to enlightenment.

Much research remains to be done in other literatures and in other contexts. Although I am not advocating the "degrading vassalage" or "slavery" to philology which characterized English departments before the advent of late 19th century literature and linguistics programs (Kinneavy 11-13), there is something going on in philology that I want my students to know about. For a methodology, I ask them first to notice key words as they read or write or learn a language. Next, I have them search out the roots and derivatives of key words in a dictionary which provides etymologies to see if they notice any associations or connections. Then I ask them to discipline their responses using Louise Rosenblatt's scale: 1) Are the associations directly relevant? 2) Are they peripheral associations? 3) Are the associations irrelevant? (Rosenblatt 59). Finally, I ask them to consider whether the underlying association of words might help them retain vocabulary or complement their interpretation and creation of text.

Of course, in applying philology to texts, readers and writers may make mistakes. Fatuous etymologies are not uncommon; however, consistent reference to proper tools will eliminate most

unfounded speculations. The connections we see will be influenced by our motives for selecting and interpreting the data, so there are no grounds for insisting on some static, mandatory, fixed pattern. The etymology of the word *philology* is the 'love of words,' or of *logos*—which love requires effort, study, and discipline. In a reader's transaction with a text, says Louise Rosenblatt, "The various strands of response are often simultaneous, often interwoven, and often interacting" (Rosenblatt 69). Philologists see words as part of an interacting and resonating whole that they can be in touch with by respecting language enough to pay attention to it. Like Emerson's etymologist, we may find "the deadest word to have been once a brilliant picture" (Emerson 231), if we but open our eyes and a good dictionary. Words have long histories and many songs and stories to tell, if we but listen.

The inherent intelligence of human beings in the language process is more than a linguist's claim or a teacher's hope. It's a given in the network of philological associations which make up language. In his essay "The Poet," Emerson said that every word was once a poem (229). Vico speaks of philosophers and philologers, of poetic logic and poetic proto-languages in which all words are allegories, and "these allegories must be the etymologies of the poetic languages" (Vico 299). Such etymologies are a kind of philologic poetry underlying the languages we acquire at home, at school, or abroad. Perhaps philologic poetry is the deep structure of language, the underlying mental representation of language that theoretical linguists are looking for. At any rate, philology can give us energy as we run messages to each other in the course of our language and literature careers.

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