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Ivana Bojčić, senior lector
University of Split
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
ibojcic@ffst.hr
https://orcid.org/000-0001-7489-9256

Bernard Dukić, doctoral student
bernard.dukic@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-002-5313-6839

BLACK(N)ADDER – INDO – EUROPEAN ANCESTRY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE THROUGH WORDS

Abstract: *English language is a part of a wider, Indo-European, family of languages. It is a part of a Germanic group of languages that, alongside many other groups, originated from the reconstructed Proto – Indo – European language. English was the language of Germanic tribes of Angles and Saxons which inhabited Britain in the 5th century after the withdrawal of the Romans. The Germanic group of languages encompasses languages such as Dutch, German, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian and Icelandic and English. Germanic group of people was once in close contact with Celtic and Italic groups and earlier than that with all other Indo – European people, like Greek, Iranian, Armenian, Slavic, Baltic, etc. Via the analysis of the word* adder, *we present the evidence of a closer association of Germanic, Italic and Celtic groups of languages and their origin as Indo – European nations. Through this analysis we are able to present and teach students of the origin of the English language and its subsequent influence on the British culture.*

Keywords: *adder, British culture, correlation, English, Indo – European, influence, languages, origin*

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we will present and explain the common origin of the English language as an Indo – European language by examining a few words which will lead us far away into history, even beyond – to the Neolithic period of human existence. The paper will present how a specific word for 'snake' – adder – belongs not only to the Germanic group of languages, but also to Celtic and Italic groups of languages, all of them being part of a wider, Indo – European language community. The method of this research is historical linguistics – discovering the past by examining language through time.

HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS

In order for a historical theory to work, it should be backed up by archaeology and linguistics. Historical linguistics deals with, simply said, languages in the past which led to the situation today. The comparison of various languages led to the assumption that some languages are related, that they developed from a common source (Lehmann, 1992, pp. 6-7). For example, we can connect Spanish, French and Italian languages to their common ancestor which is the Latin language simply via examination of similarities of certain words. From it, we can conclude that they belong to the same language group due to their connection. Let's observe, for instance, words denoting 'son'.
Spanish 'hijo'
Italian 'figlio'

French 'fils'

The common ancestry of this word is obvious, and it stems from the Latin word *filius* (CLDG, 1997, p. 88). A very important aspect of this analysis is that we can prove that Latin, the language of the Roman Empire, was spoken in what is today France, Spain and Italy because these countries were important parts of the great Roman Empire. Taking these facts into consideration we can say that Spanish, French and Italian are members of one linguistic group or a language family. Moreover, we assume that they developed from an earlier language and classify them as belonging to a specific language family (Lehmann, 1992, p. 7). Another example, as far as English is concerned, can be a word for 'water'. It is quite a famous episode in the history of discovery of Indo – European languages and history of the Hittites.[3] In the discovery of an inscription which was written in the Hittite language, there was a word that denoted 'bread' and 'water'. Quite incredibly, considering the vastness of distance in space and time, it sounded almost identical to the English word for 'water': *watar* (Kapović, 2008, pp. 24-25). The inscription itself was translated as 'you eat bread and drink water' (*nu* NINDA-*an ezzatteni watar-ma ekutteni*). From the obvious similarity, as well as other examples, an Indo –European word for 'water' is derived: *wodr. How does a linguist explain this situation in which there are semantic and phonological similarities (even grammatical) in languages divided by hundreds of years and miles? The obvious explanation is that they developed from one common source and became different, albeit connected through vocabulary, by gradual separation and dispersal through ages.

Historical linguistics offers several methods for understanding the past of languages. One of them is the **comparative method** which we will examine briefly since it is used in this research. In linguistics, the comparative method refers to a procedure for determining earlier forms, generally of unattested languages. In using this method, linguists contrast forms of two or more related languages to determine the precise relationships between these forms. It usually takes a triangulation process which includes three or more words from different languages, but similar in phonology and semantics. Such reconstruction leads us to the root of the word and supposed Proto-Indo-European language. The example here includes the Latin, Greek, Sanskrit and English verb for 'carry' or 'bear':

PIE *bhero

Sanskrit *bhar-* Greek *phero-* English *bear-* Latin *fero-*

In this case, the predominance of *b-* suggests it should be a proto-sound. To this, *-h* is added to reach a reconstructed sound *-bh* which is the only one that makes sense because from it Germanic languages give a *-b* sound (as is also in Gothic *baira*, meaning the same as others - to carry) while other languages give a *-p* sound which, conflated with *-h* sound, gives *-f*, as in Latin *fero* and Greek *phero*.

Historical linguistics developed from philology – in the 19th century, there was huge interest and scientific development when, most notably German linguists, started to compare and study Ancient Greek, Latin and Germanic languages- German, an historical Gothic language etc. From that point to today, a significant development of much research of language families and Indo – European language has been made; from a morphological, syntactical, phonological, etymological, lexical, and semantic point of view. The comparative method is by far the strongest tool in this method of research, which is helped by some others, like the **internal method** which focuses on reconstruction of earlier forms in one language. Another important feature is **linguistic palaeontology** – it combines discoveries of historical linguistics with archaeology (Anderson, 1995, pp. 190-194, 209-211).

For example, since most Indo- European languages possess words for 'horse', 'chariots' and some form of 'metal', it is plausible to assume that our ancestors had the technology and means to tame horses and use them in civil or war purposes. It also means they had to live in places where horses had plenty of food. This method is also very useful in determining many other aspects of life of our ancestors; their deities, how they were socially organised and what they valued the most. An example of linguistic palaeontology which reflects their way of life and economy is a word that got through semantic change over time into English language – *fee*. Today it denotes an amount of money

[3] Hittites were a nation that formed a state which controled most of Anatolia in the Bronze Age. They managed a vast empire which collapsed around 1200 BC; see e.g. Matasović, 2000; Mallory, 2005;

paid for something (as in Oxford Learner's Dictionaries)[4], but it originally meant something else. It stems from the Proto-Indo-European word **peku* which is confirmed in three large dialectal areas, namely Indo-Iranian, Italic and Germanic. The root of this word denotes 'cattle' or, even more precisely, 'ram'. It is confirmed in Old High German (OHG) having the meaning 'cattle' as well as in Anglo-Saxon (*feoh*). Moreover, it developed a semantic change in Old English as well as, e.g., Latin where *pecunia* means simply 'money'. In Anglo-Saxon the word is also confirmed as 'money, portable goods' (Benveniste, 2005, p. 41, 47, 49-51). Via this analysis, it is plausible to say that Proto-Indo-European speakers valued cattle as a great wealth and were engaged in cattle-breeding. This interesting example shows that Old English reflected Grimm's Law (named after the famous linguist and one of the authors of Grimm's Fairy Tales, Jacob Grimm) where there is a change in consonants in Germanic languages such as *p* > *f*, so **peku* becomes *feoh*, *t* > *th* as in **trei* becomes *three* (McArthur, 1996, pp. 434-435).

INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES AND POSITION OF ENGLISH

The English language is a member of the Germanic group of languages which are in turn part of the wider Indo-European language family. The term 'English' is named after the Germanic tribe of Angles who inhabited the shores of what is today western Denmark and north-northeastern Germany. Old English, i.e., Anglo-Saxon English, was actually the language of three Germanic tribes; Angles, Saxons and Jutes. It developed when these tribes migrated to Britain in the 5th century after the Romans left the island. They started using the Latin alphabet after they became Christianized in the 7th century, and the most important monument of their language is the epic Beowulf (dated 7/8 century) which actually preserves their pagan and Germanic roots as the story is set in their ancient homeland, Denmark (Kapović, 2008, str. 78-79; McArthur, 1996, 434;).

The beginnings of the English language in Britain are traced back to the year 449 AD when, as a part of tradition, Celtic chieftain Vortigern in post-Roman Britain invited Germanic mercenaries to fight his battles. These people were led by semi-mythological leaders called Hengist and Horsa, meaning 'stallion' and 'horse' (Verba, 2004, pp. 13-14). This fact is important to stress as via this story it is clearly visible how the beginnings of English people and language are rooted in Indo-European history, language, and mythology because these characters were hero twins connected linguistically to horses. Any expert in Indo-European matters will instantly recognize that Hengist and Horsa were just another pair of twin horse-riders and demigods. Examples are abundant in other nations that descended from Indo-European group of people; Greeks have divine brothers, horsemen Castor and Pollux called Dioskuri (literally 'children of Zeus'), The Roman counterpart is the story of Romulus and Remus. The Indian Aryans had *Asvinas*, divine horsemen, Lithuanians *Ašvin*. They were all somehow connected to the dawn, that is, The Indo-European goddess of the dawn. Dioskuri are brothers of famous Helen. Hengist and Horsa are depicted as the descendants of Wotan (Germanic for Norse Odin, same as the supreme god Zeus, who is father of Castor and Pollux) while Germanic counterpart of goddess of dawn was a divine being named *Eostre* –the term for Easter arose from her name (Mallory, 2006, pp. 170-172; West, 2007, pp. 189-190, 234; Benveniste, 2005).

Looking back to the origin of these tribes, it can be said with certainty that for more than a century the new conqueror that came to Britain fought battles over the island which they eventually seized. These events are still wrapped in much obscurity. The first real evidence of the origin of these people comes from Bede and his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* completed in 731 where he tells us that Jutes, Angles and Saxons were Germanic tribes that conquered Britain and that they themselves came from Continental Europe; Jutes and Angles came from Danish peninsula while Saxons were settled between rivers Elbe and Ems (today Germany and Netherlands) (Baugh – Cable, 2002, pp. 47-48).

Germanic languages are divided into a larger, western group which includes English, German and Dutch languages. Others are a northern group consisting of Danish, Swedish, Norwegian and Icelandic languages, while we must also bear in mind the Gothic language, now extinct, from the east. The common form that Germanic languages had before is known as Proto – Germanic and it

[4] https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/fee?q=Fee

antedates as a written evidence. Germanic languages are geographically divided into: East Germanic (mainly Gothic), North Germanic (found in Scandinavia, Denmark, Iceland and Faroe Islands) and West Germanic (English, German and Dutch) (Baugh – Cable, 2002, pp. 32-33). Historical, epigraphic, and linguistic data drive historians and linguists to the conclusion that ancient Germanic tribes lived in the area of the northern Germany and south Scandinavia. There were Jastorf and Harpstedt cultures which flourished around 100 BC and are considered to be Proto-Germanic (Mallory, 2006, pp. 108-111). Germanic languages spread from the east alongside Italic and Celtic languages because these groups of languages are the representatives of Indo-European people who went further west than any others.

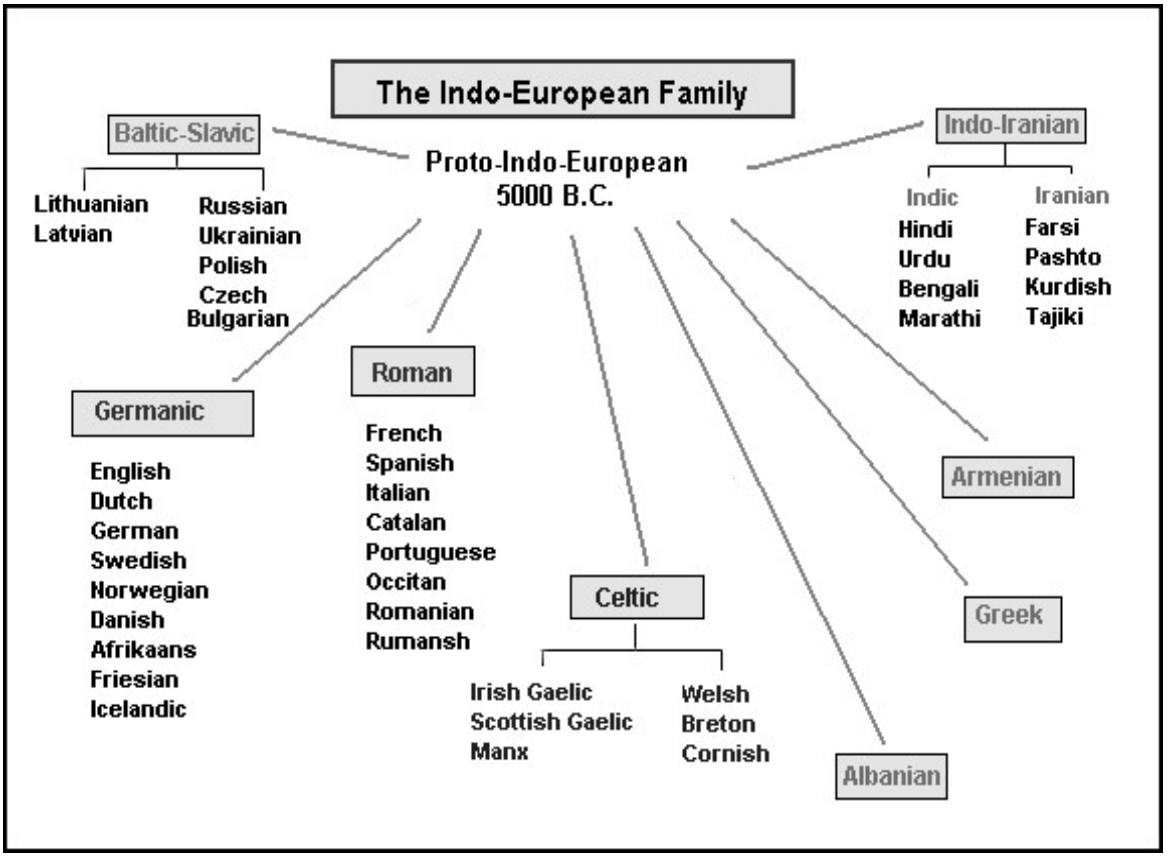
Indo – European languages tell their own story which must be briefly examined as English is a part of it and this paper does research between some words in English and other Indo – European languages. Up until the late 18th century nobody was aware that there even was an Indo – European family of languages. The discovery of Sanskrit, a language of ancient India, was paramount because it showed how languages spoken by people hundreds of miles away, Greek and Latin, are strikingly similar to Sanskrit in India up to the point that there was no room for doubt or coincidence. To illustrate this claim, it is more than enough to look at the word for 'brother'. In Sanskrit it corresponds to *bhratar*, Latin to *frater*, Greek to *phrater* or to take a glance on verb 'to be'.[5] Another important step was made by the discovery of aforementioned Gimm's Law when in 1822 Jacob Grimm proved that original consonants *p, t, k* changed to *f, th, h* in Germanic languages (e.g. *centum* in Latin became *hundred* in English etc.) (Baugh – Cable, 2002, pp. 19-21).

The Indo – European language family is a group of languages that are brought into relationship by descent or progressive differentiation from a parent speech as is any other family of languages. This family is the most widespread family of languages today in the world and is spoken on every continent on the planet. Its family tree is divided up to eleven subgroups (some name ten) which are in chronological order of appearance in recorded human history: Anatolian (Hittite, Luwian etc.), Indian, Iranian (or combined Indo-Iranian), Hellenic, Italic, Celtic, Germanic, Armenian, Tocharian, Balto-Slavic and Albanian. Differentiation should be made between group of languages such as Anatolian, Indo-Iranian, Italic, Celtic, Germanic, Tocharian and Balto-Slavic and essentially one language like Albanian, Hellenic, Armenian (Baugh – Cable, 2002, pp. 22-23; Kapović, 2008, pp. 15-16; Mallory, 2006; Anthony 2007).

Figure 1

Division of Indo – European Languages (taken from https://www.uottawa.ca/clmc/indo-european-family)

[5] *Latin*: sum, es, est, sumus, estis, sunt; *Greek* : eimi, ei, esti, esmen, este, eisi; *Sanskrit* : asmi, asi, asti, smas, stha, santi which all stand for: I am, you are, he/she/it is, we are, you are, they are.



A very important question regarding this family is the origin of Indo – European languages, namely, where did the people who spoke Proto – Indo – European language come from? This issue will also be stressed in our research regarding the word *adder*. Proto – Indo – European homeland (*Urheimat* in German) is still matter of the great debate. There are two major theories whose reconciliation is out of the question.

One is the Anatolian hypothesis where archaeologists and linguists pose a theory that early Indo – European speakers were the product of Neolithic Revolution which brought agriculture as the main human occupation. This theory suggests that in the time frame between 7th to 5th millennia BC ancestors of Indo – European people came from Near East bringing agriculture to Anatolian peninsula from where they settled Europe; first Greece, the Balkans and then the rest of continent including Northern and Eastern Europe. This was a theory proposed by Colin Renfrew, a British archaeologist, who equated the arrival of Neolithic population with the speakers of Proto – Indo – European (Heršak, 2005, pp. 123-125; Mallory 2006; Renfrew, 1998[a], pp. 146-152, 288). Today, despite some fervent supporters, this explanation is not satisfactory for a number of reasons, mainly because ancestors of Indo -European people had in their vocabulary words which were more recent than in the period of 7th-5th millennia BC.

The theory that is much more accepted and appreciated is the theory of Lithuanian – American scientist Marija Gimbutas who developed the 'Kurgan hypothesis'. She understood ancient burial mounds in the vast steppes of Southern Russia and Ukraine as tombs of Proto – Indo – European people. Graves in the steppe area between the river Don and the Urals yielded evidence of an Indo – European culture north of the Caspian Sea (Baugh – Cable 2002: 40). According to James Patrick Mallory, fishermen and hunters from the rivers of Russia developed pastoralism and learned to tame horses; this eventually gave them, with the development of metal and weapons, more mobility, especially in the steppes. He proposed an explanation which satisfied diversity in similarities between some languages. The Southern 'belt' of languages included Greek, Armenian, Thracian, Indo – Iranian core of languages, while northern included Slavic, Baltic, Italic and Germanic languages which spread to the west all the way up to the Netherlands (Heršak, 2005, pp. 127-128; Mallory, 2006, pp. 262, 264; Anthony, 2007). These people spread in groups in three migration waves which encompassed

quite a large time difference; they conquered Europe, Asia Minor, Middle East and India throughout the period of 2000 years, from around 4500 to 2500 BC (Heršak, 2005, p. 130).

Important information for our research is that Germanic languages belonged to the same group, at the very start, as did Italic and Celtic languages because there we find our interesting word *adder* attested.

(*N*)*ADDER* – ITS MEANING AND ORIGIN

According to the *Collins English Dictionary of the English Language*, word 'adder' refers to a common viper that goes by Latin name *Vipera berus* which is widely distributed in Europe including Britain and Asia and is typically dark greyish in colour with a black zigzag pattern along the back (CEDEL, 1987, p. 17, s.v. adder). *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* adds to this, that this viper is the only venomous snake in Britain (NODE, 1998, p. 20) while also explaining that in these modern days English word is derived from Old English *naedre* meaning serpent or adder and relating it to the Dutch *adder* and German *natter*.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology explains that the word 'adder' comes from OE *naed(d)re* corresponding to Old Saxon *natra*, Old High German *natara*, Old Norse *nadra*, Gothic *nadrs* and is in turn related to Latin word *natrix* meaning water-snake (CODEE, 1987, p. 5).

As is stated in *Collins Latin Dictionary and Grammar*, word *natrix*, *natricis*, *f.* denotes snake, but a water-snake (CLDG, 1997, p. 138). By this we have so far established the relationship between Old English *naed(d)re* and Latin *natrix*, both which refer to a kind of snake. This fact leads us to conclusion that Indo – European ancestors of ancient Romans and Anglo – Saxons lived together and developed this notation for a snake. We must still examine the Celtic connection.

Italic languages are quite complex subgroup of Indo – European languages. We must also point out that there were, now completely extinct, languages other than Indo – European spoken in Italy whose main representative is Etruscan (there is also Rhaetian and probably Sardinian). Archaeologically and linguistically, it seems very plausible that Indo – European branch of people that spoke Italic languages descended to the Italian Peninsula by north, across the Alps sometime at the start of the Iron Age (even though dating is much disputed). Italic languages are divided into two groups: Latino – Faliscan and Osco – Umbrian. Latin, of course, is the best known and most important Italic language as the language of Romans, the Roman Empire and an ancestor of French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Romanian. Latin is a language that is attested very early; earliest known inscription is probably from the 7th BC (Kapović, 2008, pp. 52-55; Mallory, 2006, pp. 112-115).

Celtic languages are divided into Continental and Insular Celtic languages. Insular Celtic languages encompass Goidelic – Irish, Manx and Scottish Gaelic and Brythonic languages – Breton, Cornish and Welsh which are still in existence. 'Dead' languages of Brythonic are Common Brittonic, Avernic, Pictish and Cumbric while all Continental Celtic languages are extinct (Celtiberan, Galatian, Gaulish, Lepontic and Noric). Here we will examine the Goidelic, that is, Gaelic languages. According to the *Gaelic Dictionary*, word *nathair*, *natrach*, *natraichean* (feminine form) signifies simply 'snake' or a 'serpent' (GD, 2004, p. 88).

What must be pointed out and is of outmost importance to this research is that there is a connection between Germanic, Italic and Celtic languages and Indo – European people who spoke those languages thousands of years ago. Connections between Italic and Celtic are well known, documented and described (e.g. Matasović, 2016.) Germanic languages come to this group to logically by simply looking at the map; if the Kurgan hypothesis of the origin of Indo – European people is correct, modified by Mallory, then Germanic, Italic and Celtic languages are the westernmost languages that had to be spread from the East, that is South Russia and Ukraine. They must have been in some contact – after all, their area of settlement is very close to each other and sometimes overlap; Germanic nations settled in what is today Germany, Netherlands, Denmark and Scandinavian Peninsula while Celtic people came originally to the Central Europe and British Islands where tribes of Angles and Saxons also came. Italic people come to that group, too. They had to reach Central Europe in order to come to the Italian Peninsula by north.

It is to be mentioned that these words, mentioned above, like all others, help students to understand English language more easily because there is always correlation among them. This way,

students are enabled to understand that every language, including English, has its roots and components. Through analysis of this type, we are introducing students to Anglo – Saxon heritage and Indo – European origin of English language via Germanic and Latin components of it.

CONCLUSION

What do all these facts tell us in the end? There is a reconstruction of this word as an Indo – European word which is: **neh₁tor* – snake. This word is not attested in any other Indo – European branch or language beside the aforementioned Celtic, Germanic and Italic group of languages (Mallory, 2006, p. 197). This is an undisputed fact that raises questions but also corresponds greatly to the archaeological findings. As it was mentioned, Indo – European people spread out from vast steppes north of the Black and the Caspian Sea to the west, south and ultimately east all the way to India. We are here interested in the westernmost group. Archaeology and linguistics confirm that Indo – European branch of people spread to Central Europe and they were formed by later three branches; Celtic, Italic and Germanic. They inhabited areas of what is today Germany, France, Italy, Denmark and Nordic countries. Research has shown that in order for those branches to settle those areas, they had to be in touch – much more as they were with ancestors of e.g. ancient Greeks or Hittites for purely geographical reasons.

J. P. Mallory introduced logical conclusion for this situation based on word *adder* and possibly similar words if they were found. Italic, Germanic and Celtic groups of languages either had to have this word inherited from the Proto – Indo – European language formed along the coasts of the Black Sea before the dissemination of nations and groups or this word, which is more likely, was developed after the Germanic, Italic and Celtic languages separated from the Proto – Indo – European group but before they had separated from each other, that is, Germanic from Italic, Celtic etc. (Mallory, 2006, p. 197).

It also must be pointed out that it is not actually that simple. There are words which Proto – Indo – Europeans must have known, but we are not able to extract and reconstruct those terms. How else can a linguist explain a situation where there exist reconstructed Proto – Indo – European words for 'eye', 'heart', but not for an 'eyelid'? They have surely known and named that part of the body, too. (Mallory, 2006, p. 207).

The reasons we assume that still there is the theory that Italic, Germanic and Celtic groups of people developed some words like 'adder' in their vocabulary after they moved away from Proto – Indo – European homeland but before they separated from each other are twofold: first, as we established, there is no such word for 'snake' in any other Indo – European languages. The other is the very nature of the word. Proto – Indo – Europeans must have known and had quite a few words for snake because that animal was very important to them in context of their mythology and religion. One of the basic myths reconstructed in Proto – Indo – European mythology is the myth of a sky god, a thunder deity – Slavic Perun, Nordic Thor, Greek Zeus, Latin Jupiter – who fights the 'snake from the abyss'. There is abundant body of evidence for this, mostly preserved in Slavic people in mythology of the struggle of Perun and Veles (Katičić, 2015.). Greeks, for example, diversified this myth into at least two gods and some heroes, too. God of light Apollo fought the terrible snake Pytho in the Delphi, killed it and established his sanctuary, while Zeus killed monster with snake legs Typhon. His son, demigod Heracles, fought and killed multi-headed dragon Hydra (comprehensive study is Watkins, 1996, also West, 2007). Point that is presented here is that it is not unusual that groups of Indo – European people who separated themselves from the main group developed their own word for a serpent. Second reason is the most plausible and it is purely geographic. We know that these languages, Celtic, Italic and Germanic are the westernmost of the Indo – European languages. That means they simply had to, after separation, spend some time together. Even after they themselves separated, they remained quite close to each other compared to Indo – Iranian group which came to India and Persia. Can we place formation of this word and Celtic- Germanic- Italic connection in time? Italic Indo – European languages are usually identified with the spread of Villanova culture on the Apennines which means that those tribes had to enter the Italian Peninsula around 10000 BC – broadly, Italy was settled by Indo – European tribes between years 3000 and 800 BC. Since Italic tribes are attested earlier than Celtic and Germanic, we can plausibly assume that words like 'adder'

were developed between the same years, that is between the time they separated from the main group of Indo – European people and the time they themselves dispersed.

It should be stated that the English language is spoken around the globe. By analysing and building our vocabulary in this way, we “enrich” our knowledge. Proper etymology and understanding of the origin of the English language discovers the root of English as a people and, consequently, their culture. Students might find it a lot easier to comprehend and learn many words and aspects of culture if they are taught to understand the roots of English.

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