

GENERAL LINGUISTICSDOI <https://doi.org/10.30525/978-9934-26-348-4-36>**WORDS AND WORLDVIEWS:
ON THE ISSUE OF ETYMOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION****СЛОВА І КАРТИНИ СВІТУ:
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This paper works with the semantic aspects of word reconstruction in etymological research, continuing our interest in the topic [1; 5; 6; 7; 8].

An etymologist invariably finds themselves in the formal and semantic circle(s) drawn around them by the language(s) that they research. It is out of this **language circle** [9] that the etymologist compares and contrasts the (variants of) words, tracing these to a shared **archetype**, or the hypothetical form to which all the known word forms could plausibly be reduced [2]. In Historical Linguistics that has Comparative Linguistics as its subfield, an archetype is taken as the **original form** of the word, and is marked by the asterisks sign [*]. As etymologists start with words of one language, comparing these with the related words of other languages of this or another language family based on the words' formal features, their reconstruction proceeds along the **semasiological** line, i.e. from the word form to the word meaning. The **onomasiological** line is taken next, when one proceeds from the word meaning as a concept to the word form(s) that came to capture this concept in the compared languages, even if these languages are unrelated genetically. One thus draws formal and semantic parallels between the genetically (un)related languages, which requires that one follow the rules, or 'laws,' valid in Historical Linguistics, but also rely on **intuition**, combining insight with the accumulated experience of research.

The original form must necessarily be coupled with the **original meaning**. This meaning is reconstructed, too; it must be captured by all the word forms

that one compares, which usually is accomplished either (1) by giving a list of meanings of the forms under comparison or (2) by construing a generalized meaning that will be the invariant to which the other meanings will relate as its variants. The generalized meaning is reconstructed, too; its reconstruction often requires that one work across the chain of semantic transformations, supplying its missing links; cf. Indo-European **bhā-* ‘to move’ > ‘movement’ > ‘intermittent movement’ > ‘to emit light’ > ‘light;’ > ‘to make sounds’ > ‘sound;’ ‘to fume’ > ‘smell’ > ‘taste;’ ‘fire’ > ‘soul.’ The primary meaning of a word can also be considered (3) as the original meaning since it generates the set of other meanings organized around it into a network of polysemy.

One should in principle distinguish the original meaning from the **etymological meaning**. The etymological meaning is reconstructed, too; this meaning is a certain motif that was hypothetically the basis for linguistic semiosis. Etymological meaning does not necessarily coincide with original meaning (or even with at least one of the known meanings within the word group). Yet, it does correlate with the original meaning, either continuing or restoring its chain of transformations, e.g. the original meaning ‘a bear’ reconstructed for Germanic **beran-/ *bernu-* must be distinguished from ‘brown’ (< Indo-European **bher-* ‘shiny’) as the etymological meaning; ‘a bear’ is the **meaning**, whereas ‘brown’ is the **sense**, in Frege’s parlance.

Etymological meaning precedes original meaning for any word. I believe that reconstructing the original meaning of a word is yet not an interpretation proper as one operates the sign(s) of the language: the **sign** is known and communal, i.e. this knowledge is shared by those engaged in historical linguistic research and is obvious to them; cf. axioms in mathematics. By contrast, reconstructing the etymological meaning is an interpretation proper as one operates the symbol(s) that once stood in human consciousness for the referent of this word: the **symbol** is untrodden and individual, i.e. there is no knowing it in technical terms as it must instead be ‘seen’ in one’s mind; cf. theorems in mathematics. Etymological meaning gives a pictorial representation of the referent, and is a word inner form, or an archaic image.

Etymons of words are words, too; they are unities of original forms and original meanings. Fragments of these meanings that came to motivate the emergence of these particular forms in the language are **word inner forms** [10]. To reconstruct a word’s etymological meaning is to supply this word’s inner form: an inner form must invariably be ‘seen’ in each particular word and made sense of, i.e. interpreted. Word inner forms are inherently **multimodal** as they are mental construals showcasing the syncretism of an image and of a sound: linguistic semiosis rests on visual perception, i.e. images one ‘sees’ with the mind’s eye, and on auditory perception, i.e. words one hears or reads as a string of phonemes or graphemes. Inner form as a mental image is inherently **transmedial** as it occurs not only in words but also

across different media in human communication, e.g. visual arts, music [1]. An inner form is the property of any sign, regardless of the type of the sign system that this sign belongs to.

One understands that a meaning lends itself to a number of alternative interpretations, just as it did when the word was created: people(s) saw the world differently, and continue to do so. One and the same meaning can have several senses that ‘show’ it differently. This understanding makes the distinction towards **multiple etymologies** that accommodate many interpretations for one meaning, making the **matrix of etymological relativity** [cited from 2]. This is a matrix, since there is no (need of) specifying connections between the interpretations that just overlap. This is a relativity, since (1) the matrix shows to what etymon particular meanings relate, and also to what meaning particular etymons relate; (2) interpretations are nothing but relative as one’s more or less informed guesses made from one’s point of view: etymological interpretation is a convenient abstraction as long as it fits into, i.e. does not contradict, a particular matrix; (3) the matrix shows the transformations of a word meaning, making sense – in the relation to a particular culture – of the links that this and other word meanings have between themselves. Etymological interpretation is the case of **non-monotonic reasoning** as it is continuously revised. A particular etymological interpretation is the motif that holds the matrix together.

We believe that what an etymologist does in order to interpret the meaning of a word is similar in nature to what a psychotherapist does in order to interpret the meaning of a dream [8]: their interpretations are driven by mental images deriving from the representational content of their mind, and take the crucial role in their profession as communicative mediation between myths and words. **Myths** as ‘first and foremost psychic phenomena that reveal the nature of the soul’ [4, p. 6] share with dreams their preconditions in the unconscious. In a talking cure, a psychotherapist uses words to bring a patient back to the root of the problem and forward to a new reference point in life, restoring the patient’s psyche to its original wholeness; cf. Ukrainian *цiлитель* ‘a healer; literally, a person who makes somebody whole.’ An etymologist with their interpretation brings a speaker back to the origin of the word and forward to a bigger amount of understanding, restoring the worldview this word is part of to its original wholeness. ‘Seeing’ the **world**, one understands it.

We in this paper want to emphasize the reference to the pictorial representation of the world from a particular point of view that the theoretical concept of a **worldview** makes: this is a view, i.e. an instance of seeing in the range of one’s sight or vision, not an instance of hearing, smelling, tasting, or touching. Language does not reflect the world but ‘sees’ it, interpreting and even constructing the world as the **symbolic space** within which speakers live, make sense of the world, and communicate this sense to others [3]. Word meanings are colors and paints with which worldviews are drawn as pictures;

cf. Indo-European **uer-* ‘to burn, to shine; fire’ > ‘color, paint;’ > ‘a word.’ The archaic symbol of the sacred fire, a word lights up the world, spotlighting in it those fragments that it shines on. What one ‘sees’ in this light makes one’s worldview.

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