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EXPRESSIVENESS AND VARIATION: THE ETYMOLOGY OF GERM. *KLADDER* ‘DIRT, MUD’¹

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Abstract

Although the Germanic dialects offer very ancient vocabulary, they have long been neglected from an etymological perspective. A very old word is e.g. Germ. *Kladder* ‘dirt, mud’. Because of its onomatopoeic nature this word shows a considerable diversification and expansion in the Germanic languages: *klatt*- and *klāt*- in Low German, Middle German, Upper German next to *kladd*- only in Low German. Those words ultimately go back to a Proto-Germanic substantive **kladdō* f. ‘clot, lump, mud, dirt’, leading to the well-known PIE root **gleh₁*- ‘to be greasy, to be dirty’.

(1) Modern German dialectology is mainly focused on the sociolinguistic aspects and language geography of the German dialects. Although these dialects offer very ancient vocabulary, they have long been neglected from an etymological perspective. In this article, I will demonstrate the considerable diversification and expansion of an onomatopoeic dialectal word.

(2) In many Western and Northern Germanic languages words belonging to the semantic field of “mud, dirt” show expressive variations, especially gemination and lenition, and are very often widely attested. In German those variations can most clearly be found in the dialects. One of these expressive words is *Kladder* ‘dirt, mud’, which appears in almost all German dialects, with most attestations and phonetic variations displayed in the Low German dialects. There we find the noun *Kladder*

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‘dirt, mud’, its denominal verb *kladdern* ‘to do something untidily and messily’ and the adjective *kladderig* ‘dirty’, which is derived from that noun. Besides those inherited formations with the suffix *-er*, the Low German dialects also have words with other suffixes: Holst. *Kladde* f. ‘mud’, *kladdig* ‘muddy’, Pruss., Westphal., Low Sax. *Kladde* f. ‘paper for exercise, notebook’, Westphal., Low Sax. *kladden* ‘to work untidily’. All suffixal derivations of the root *kladd-* also have version with the phonetic long vowel root *klât-* and the devoiced *klatt-*, but with similar semantics. By contrast, the Upper German dialects mainly show the root *klatt-* instead of *klât-* and *kladd-*: Bavar., Bad., Swab. *Klatter* f. ‘dirt, dung, mud’, Bad., Swab. *klattrig* ‘dirty’. Only Tyrol. *Klâte* f. ‘dirt, dung, mud’ has a long vowel variant. Although the Middle German dialects also exhibit a huge number of Low German items in the vocabulary, the presence of the words under discussion is very similar to their attestations in the Upper German dialects, except the fact that the long vowel root appears more often: Thur., Upper Sax., Siles. *Kläter* ‘dirt, mud’, *kläterig* ‘dirty’ vs. Rhin. *Klatter* ‘mud’, *Klatterich* ‘soft dung’, *klatterig* ‘dirty’. Only in the dialect of Luxembourg we find the root *Kladd-* with lenition (widespread in the Low German dialects): *Kladder* ‘mud at the back of a cow’s leg’, *kladdereg* ‘dirty’. But those Luxembourgian words only seem similar at first sight: the Low German attestations with geminate *-dd-* represent an inherited Westgermanic root, whereas the Luxembourgian words reflect the Middle German lenition which affects the the inherited Old High German *Tenues* from early Middle High German onwards (“binnendeutsche Konsonantenschwächung”, cf. Schirmunski 2010: 392). In some of these dialects, e.g. in Thuringian, the adjectival formations develop a secondary meaning ‘desperate, miserable, poor’. Such a semantic change is often found in adjectives meaning ‘mud’, e.g. Lat. *sordidus* ‘dirty, low, miserable’. *Kladd/tt/t/er* is also frequently attested in composition with the adjective Germ. *nass* ‘wet’ (i.e. *kladdernass*, *klatternat*), forming a determinative compound with a comparative meaning, like hg. *aalglatt* ‘sleak as an eel’.

To sum up, there are three root variants in the modern German dialects:

1. *Klatt-*: Low German, Middle German, Upper German.
2. *Klât-*: Low German, Middle German, Upper German.
3. *Kladd-*: only Low German.

The Low German dialects not only show all three roots but also most attestations of the words.

(3) This situation is also found in the older Low German languages. In Middle Low German only *klatt-* and *kladd-* exist, and while the root *kladd-* is only verbally represented (Mlg. *klad(d)eren* ‘to work untidy, to grease’, *kladden* ‘to besmear’, verb-initial compounds *Kladde-hans*, *Kladde-hack* ‘mucky pup’), the word *klatt-* appears in nominal as well as verbal guise (*klatte* f. ‘smudge’, *klatten* ‘to stick together, to felt’, *klattich* ‘stuck together, felted’). Like Middle Low German, Dutch only shows *klatt-* and *kladd-*: Mdu. *cladde* f. ‘mud, dirt’, *cladden* ‘to clean, to expurgate, to brush’, *cladder* ‘clothbrush’, *clatte* f. ‘mud, dirt, lump’, *clatten* ‘to besmear’, Ndu. *klad* n., *kladde* f. ‘scratchpaper’, *klad(de)* f. ‘lump, clot, dirt, mud’, *klat(te)* f. ‘id.’, *kla(t)ter* m., f. ‘id.’,

klat(t)eren 'to besmear'. Other than that, the only West Germanic correspondences are found in Nwstfris. *kladde* m., f. 'scratchpaper' and *kladderje* 'to besmear'. Nengl. *clat* 'lump, dirt, clot' is not inherited, but rather a Dutch loan. Likewise Nnorw., Nswed. *kladd* and Ndan. *kladde* 'scratchbook; lump' are borrowed from Dutch (cf. Lühr 1988: 280). Beyond the afore mentioned Dutch borrowings, the modern North Germanic languages only a scant few verbal representatives of the root: Nnorw. dial. *kladda* 'to stick together', Nswed. *kladda* 'to besmear, to blot, to scamp'.

(4) At the first sight it is quite striking that we do not have any older High German correspondences except the High German dialectal attestations. It underscores the vital importance of further etymological study of the German dialects – a field which for long has been underrepresented. Secondly, the distribution of the Germanic cognates exhibits the frequently encountered concentration of relevant items in the West Germanic branch. Beside these general considerations the West and North Germanic cognates show that the root contains geminate *dd*. Taking into account the nhg. *t*-words, a Proto-Germanic substantive **kladdō* f. 'clot, lump, mud, dirt' can be reconstructed, which is the derivational basis for the weak verb PG **kladdōn* 'to besmear, to smudge'. The Low German and Dutch words containing *tt* instead of *dd* clearly represent expressive devoicing, leading to **klattō* and **klattōn* (cf. Lühr 1988: 280). Such variations between *tt* and *dd* can also be found elsewhere in the West Germanic languages, especially in onomatopoeic words, e.g. Upper German *pflattern*, *pflättern* and *pfläddern*, all three mean 'to defecate' (cf. Neri, Ziegler 2012: 217). Even outside onomatopoeics such variations can be found. This is the case e.g. with Mlg. *pitte* 'kernel, core, strength' vs. Mlg. *peddik* 'id.' (cf. Lühr 1988: 283).

Much more difficult is the explanation of the Lg., Hg. and Du. root *klāt-*, whose *t* precludes common origin, since the High German dialects must have undergone the High German Consonant Shift. It is more probable that the Low German and Dutch words with that root have a different provenance than the High German cognates with the long root vowel. The Low German and Dutch examples might, for instance, be a result of the Low German and Dutch alternation between a syllable with the structure *VCC* and one with the syllable *V̄RC*, a pattern known in Latin as *littera*-rule and exemplified by e.g. Lat. *Iūpiter* next to *Iuppiter*, *littera* vs. *lītera* (cf. Meiser 1998/2010: § 57: 5). In Low German and Middle Dutch we find e.g. Mdu. *vergraamen* next to *vergrammen* 'to get angry' and Mlg. *doder*, *duder* next to *dodder* m. 'yolk' (cf. Franck 1910: § 93). Thus Lg., Du. *klāt-* might be merely an allophonic variant of *klatt-*. Since such phonetic alternations are not attested in High German, the only possible explanation of the High German root *klāt-* is the following: it reflects an inherited ablaut variant PG **klēd̥-*, which would thus be a part of an ablauting nominal paradigm **klēd̥-/klad̥-*. The phonetic variation gave rise to two different nouns with **klēd̥-* on the one hand and **klad̥-* on the other. Such a paradigmatic split frequently appears among the Proto-Germanic *n*-stems, where the genitive often served as basis for further derivation, e.g. Mhg. *vinc* m. 'spark' next to Mhg. *vunce* m. 'id.' (< **finkōlfunkaz*; cf. Kroonen 2011: 58ff., 159f.).

In light of an ablauting paradigm of this sort, the PG geminated noun **klāddō* f. ‘clot, lump, mud, dirt’ must be a Proto-Germanic expressive gemination of the weak stem **klād-*, which without germination is only attested in the verb Mlg. *kladeren* ‘to besmear’ (besides homonymous *kladderer*).²

(5) The diachronic development can be summarized as follows:

1. Proto-Germanic: inherited ablauting paradigm **klēd-ō/klād-*

2. Proto-Germanic: paradigm split

Paradigm 1: **klēd-ō* and **klēd-a-* (~ Tyrol. *Klāte*, Thur., Upper Sax., Siles. *Klāter*, *klāterig*, Lg. *klāt-*)

Paradigm 2: **klād-a-* (~ Mlg. *kladeren*) next to expressively geminated **klāddō* (~ Lg., Du., Swed., Nnorw. *kladd-*).

3. Old Low German: allophonic *klatt-* vs. *kladd-*

(6) The Proto-Germanic ablauting paradigm ultimately goes back to a Pre-Proto-Germanic proterodynamic stem with suffix *-eh₂*: PPG **gléh₁d^h-h₂/glā₁d^h-éh₂*. For this type of ablaut, cf., for example, PIE **g^uén-h₂/g^un-éh₂* ‘femininity’, cf. Beekes (1990: 225) and Harðarson (2014: 23). The root **gléh₁d^h-* shows a dental root enlargement, which commonly creates root doublets [e.g. Ohg. *glizzan* ‘shine’ vs. Ohg. *glīmo* ‘firefly’ ~ PG **glit-* vs. **glī-*; cf. Krisch (1990: 117f.)]. The inherited root, without enlargement, PIE **gléh₁-* might be connected with the Slavonic words: Russ. *želvák* m. ‘ulcer’, Cz. *žluva* ‘ulcer (with horses)’ and Sloven. *žēlva* f. ‘fistula’. The Slavonic nouns are all secondary derivatives of a Proto-Slavonic *u*-stem **gelh₁-u-*. They also presuppose schwebeablaut in the root (hence **gelh₁-*). In Latin there might be a cognate of the root in Lat. *galla* f. ‘gallnut’. This connection presupposes a laryngeal dissimilation in the *neh₂*-collective **g₃lh₁-neh₂* > **g₃l-neh₂* (a secondary collective to a *no*-adjective) because otherwise we would expect Lat. **galana* and not *galla*. Taken together, the Latin and Slavonic words point to a basic meaning ‘clot, agglomeration’ rather than ‘dirt, mud’. This semantic difference militates against an etymological connection with the Germanic paradigm. Semantically, the correlation is more likely with Gr. *γλάμων* ‘bleary-eyed’. The derived noun *γλάμη* ‘eyegum’ (only attested at Phot. *lex.* 121) appears as a loan also in Lat. *glamae* ‘id.’, which is also the derivational basis for the postclassical adjective *glarāns* ‘bleary-eyed’ [corrupted, instead of **glamāns* (only once attested at Garg. Mart. med. 15 p. 148, 10 im 3. Jh. n. Chr. = Plin. Val. 4, 4; W/H 605)]. The Greek noun continues a PIE amphidynamic *men*-stem **gléh₁-mon-/glā₁-mn-* ‘greasy, lubricious’ with generalization of the zero grade root and the *o*-grade suffix (Pre-Proto-Greek **glā₁-mon-*). From *men*-stem a secondary PIE abstract noun **gléh₁-mn-eh₂* ‘sliminess’ is derived similarly to Lith. *glēmės* pl. ‘slim’, Latv. *glēma* ‘id.’ [with simplification of the cluster *-mn-* to *-m-*; cf. Matasović (2004: 126)]. The coexistence of the Latvian *ā*-stem and the Lithuanian *ē*-stem proves the Lithuanian stem as secondary, since there is the tendency in Lithuanian to systematically replace with productive *ē*-stems the inherited *ā*-formations, e.g. Lith.

² Mhg. *bekletzen* ‘to besmear’ does not belong to the PG Paradigm, cf. Lühr (1988: 280).

garbē next to *garbà* 'honor', cf. Lühr (1999: 304). The short vowel of the Baltic root results from laryngeal deletion before a consonant cluster according to Schmidt's Law, cf. Hackstein (2002: 1ff.) and Neri (2011: 292f.). Finally, this *men*-stem is also attested in the Oengl. noun *clām* 'mud, dirt', which goes back to a secondary thematic PPG **gléh₁-mn-o-*. In conclusion, the Germanic and the other Indo-European words are ultimately continuants of the PIE root **gleh₁-* 'to be greasy, to be dirty', only attested in nominal form.

Abbreviations

Bad. = Badian	Nengl. = New English
Bavar. = Bavarian	Nhg. = New High German
Cz. = Czech	Nnorw. = New Norwegian
dial. = dialectal	Nswed. = New Swedish
Du. = Dutch	Ohg. = Old High German
Germ. = German	PG = Proto-Germanic
Gr. = Ancient Greek	PIE = Proto-Indo-European
Hg. = High German	PPG = Prae-Proto-Germanic
Holst. = Northern Low Saxon	Pruss. = Prussian
Lat. = Latin	Rhin. = Rhinelandic
Latv. = Latvian	Russ. = Russian
Lg. = Low German	Siles. = Silesian
Lith. = Lithuanian	Sloven. = Slovenian
Low Sax. = Low Saxon	Swab. = Swabian
Mdu. = Middle Dutch	Swed. = Swedish
Mhg. = Middle High German	Thur. = Thuringian
Mlg. = Middle Low German	Tyrol. = Tyrolian
Ndan. = New Danish	Upper Sax. = Upper Saxon
Ndu. = New Dutch	Westphal. = Westphalian

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