HOW GERMANIC IS ENGLISH?

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Introduction

To begin with, let us consider this is a more or less competent phonemic transcript of a particular sequence of sounds:

[maɪ haʊs ɪz gr:n]

It sounds quite English, and it certainly is. On hearing it one is bound to connect it to envisage a dwelling in the said colour.

At the same time the literate member of the public may be tempted to imagine a set of alphabetical signs which, in the aggregate, will yield a meaningful array. It is the following sentence:

My house is green.

What is interesting about this particular sentence is entirely made of words of Germanic origin. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary[1]:

'My' originated in the Proto-Germanic *minaz.[2] The word 'house' has its roots in the Proto-Germanic *husan.[3] 'Is' can be traced back to the Germanic stem *es-.[4] And finally after centuries of

[1] http://www.etymonline.com/
[2] http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=house&allowed_in_frame=0
[3] http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=house&allowed_in_frame=0
[4] http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=is&allowed_in_frame=0

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alterations the Proto-Germanic *gronja- is to be represented by 'green'.[5]

But this is all scholarly and not very impressive. What is impressive is the fact that the very same sequence of sounds is to be heard uttered by people speaking a different Germanic language altogether. Some 500 miles, or 350 kilometres, SE of London is the German City of Saarbrucken. The local dialect of Saarbrucken is a form of German called Rhine Franconian. The awkward thing is that when the speakers of this variety of German want to say that their house is green, that's exactly what they say. However one must keep in mind that, when writing this sentence down, the locals feel bound to the standard German orthography. Thus, despite the similarity of pronunciation, this is how the sentence *'My house is green'* would actually look like when written in Rhine Franconian:

Mei Haus is grien.

This classic case of convergent evolution is quite tale telling. It inherently tells the tale of a language which has indeed retained its Germanic traits.

English and German

Scientifically speaking, in order to better understand just how Germanic English really is, a comparison is in order. The initial idea was a broad comparison with the other Germanic languages. However this would have required extensive research and it just wouldn't have been feasible with the given resources. So for the sake of feasibility, it is best to narrow the comparison to a single language level and to two languages at a time.

Choosing the language level was quite easy. It just had to be the lexicological level since it is the level which both laymen and specialists alike can easily understand. As for the Germanic language to compare English with, something truly iconic, something perceived today as the quintessence of being Germanic, namely German was required.

[5] http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=green&allowed_in_frame=0

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So, one will discuss English and German cognates. One must be aware, however, that the semantics of these parallel lexical materials has been subject to change, and as such these kindred words often mean different things.

This is how a quasi-scientific comparison between English and German cognates might look like:

English middle –ou–	German middle –u–
bound	Bund
ground	Grund
hound	Hund

English initial ch-	German initial K-
cheap	Kauf
cheese	Käse
church	Kirche

English initial d-	German initial T-
dale	Tal
day	Tag
driver	Treiber
dough	Teig

English initial f-	German initial F-
flow	Flut
foal	Fohlen
ford	Furt

English initial l-	German initial L-
liver	Leber
love	Liebe
lung	Lunge

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English initial s-	German initial Sch-
swallow	Schwalbe
swarthy	Schwarz

English initial y-	German initial J-
young	Jung

English initial t-	German initial Z-
tide	Zeit
timber	Zimmer
tinder	Zünder
toll	Zoll

English middle -t-	German middle –ss –
gate	Gasse

English middle –tt –	German middle –ss –
kettle	Kessel

English final –tt	German final –d
bed	Bett
god	Gott
stead	Statt

English final -ly	German final -lich
daily	Täglich
manly	Männlich
nightly	Nächtlich

English final -y	German final -g
day	Tag
way	Weg

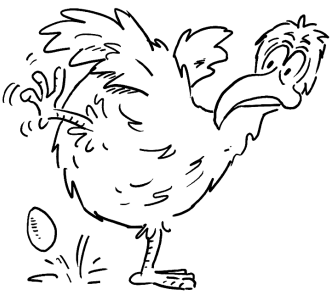
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English final -y	German final -ig
mighty	mächtig
thirty	Dreizig

NB: While easy to understand, the odd member of the public will probably not exhibit too much enthusiasm about such a scholarly perspective on this matter.

The Proto-Germanic farm

Another way of comprehending the "Germanity" of the English lexis is to use ones imagination. Using the imagination involves taking a trip in the past. Let us imagine a farmstead on a happy shiny day. But, for the sake of easing the understanding, let it be a Proto-Germanic farm.



Picture 1[6]: The Proto-Germanic *kiukinam[7] (chicken) lays the Proto-Germanic *ajja[8] (egg).



Picture 2[9]: The Proto-Germanic *kwon[10] (cow) gives the Proto-Germanic *meluks[11] (milk).

[6] http://www.supercoloring.com/image_print.php?img_src=http://www.supercoloring.com/wp-content/original/2009_01/chicken-have-an-egg-coloring-page.gif

[7] http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=chicken&allowed_in_frame=0

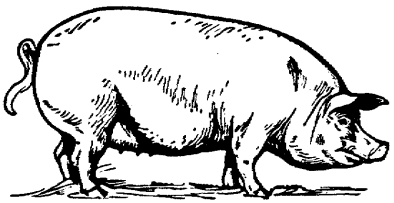
[8] http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=egg&allowed_in_frame=0

[9] http://www.supercoloring.com/image_print.php?img_src=http://www.supercoloring.com/wp-content/original/2009_01/cow-2-coloring-page.gif

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Picture 3[12]: The Proto-Germanic *stodo[13] (Stud) is engaged in his favourite pastime, the Proto-Germanic *rannjanan[14] (run).



Picture 4[15]: In the meantime the Proto-Germanic *swinan[16] (swine) is grazing on some Proto-Germanic *grasan[17] (grass).

In the end, this rather comic example, suited to the taste of the average bloke, does not actually answer the main question either.

-iskaz and -iscus

There seems to be a counter-argument to English being Germanic. It is based on the fact that English, over the ages, absorbed a huge number of words of foreign origin. This process is supposed to have transformed English into something radically

[10] http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=cow&allowed_in_frame=0
[11] http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=milk&allowed_in_frame=0
[12] http://www.supercoloring.com/image_print.php?img_src=http://www.supercoloring.com/wp-content/original/2009_01/horse-13-coloring-page.gif
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[15] http://www.supercoloring.com/image_print.php?img_src=http://www.supercoloring.com/wp-content/original/2009_01/pig-4-coloring-page.gif
[16] http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=swine&allowed_in_frame=0
[17] http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=grass&allowed_in_frame=0

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different. What's more there have been "theories" which see English as having taken one path or another.

This is a rather childish view for it tends to lose the bigger picture. Of course it would be nice to be able to speak about all of them in order to demote them. But that would be a huge amount of work covering many a hundred pages, and since this is, in fact, just a humble article, it is neither the time nor the place for such a serious undertaking. Yet one can take one of these misconceptions and deconstruct it.

The most popularised of the misconceptions regarding the essence of the English language is related to what is perceived to be the huge number of French loanwords. Indeed almost every schoolchild seems to be familiar with the 1066 Norman invasion of England which put an end to … well to not much really. The educated vocabulary was surely influenced first by Norman French and then by standard French. Estimates as to the percentage of French origin in the vocabulary of Modern English inherited from Middle English is of French origin vary between 28.3%[18] and 41%[19]. This was good enough a reason to come up with the French Creole "theory". According to this rather amalgamated thought, Old English was subjected to such a powerful French influence that it was turned into a heavily "Gallicised" or "Creolised" Middle English.[20]. Middle English, however, was by no means mutually comprehensible with French. Much like any loan words in any other historical language, the words originating in the French-speaking world have acquired in English a brand new live with new pronunciation, use and even meaning.

But the most important aspect of this oscillation between the thesaurus inherited from Old English and the newly acquired lexis is that it was bound to happen. In other words, every language borrows

[18] Finkenstaedt, Thomas; Dieter Wolff (1973).Ordered profusion; studies in dictionaries and the English lexicon. C. Winter

[19] Joseph M. Williams (1975,1986). Origins of the English Language. A social and linguistic history. Free Press.

[20] Richard Hogg, David Denison (2006). A History of the English Language. Cmbridge University Press.

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terms from other languages all the time, many times without an apparent need to do so. A larger percentage of loan words from a single language only denotes a specific historical connection.

To make this particular message clearer a look at other languages is in order. According to an indigenous source[21], Modern Romanian has only 20% of its vocabulary directly inherited from Vulgar Latin but 43.% percent from Modern Romance Languages, most notably, 38.40% of its words borrowed from French. But this happened in the 19th Century, for before that, Romanian was highly influenced by Slavic loanwords which even today, according to the same source account for 11.5% of its vocabulary. It is safe to say that the original influx of Slavic words did not make Romanian less Latin nor the later adoption of French words more Latin.

In the same way English did not become less Germanic with the adoption of any number of words whose origin can be traced back to the "Hexagon".

But in the end this whole discussion is ridiculous. The title of this section says it best. It was called *–iskaz*, the Proto-Germanic suffix meaning pertaining to the people and – *iscus*, the Latin suffix with the same meaning, both derived from the Proto-Indo-European – *iskos*, which meant, surprise, surprise, the very same thing[22]. In other words, whether one side or the other, we are left with the same content and a related, albeit not immediately obvious, form.

Conclusion

After much careful consideration of the facts, the answer to the question of how Germanic English is can only be a one-word sentence, namely: "Very!" And this is where this writing should have come to an end. But, since the unwritten rules of the trade require a lengthy discussion to end all discussions on the matter, there is just a bit more.

[21] Gabriela Pană Dindelegan, ed.,The Grammar of Romanian, Oxford University Press, 2013

[22] http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Proto-Indo-European/-iskos

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Apparently, the old obsessions rooted in the 19th Century nationalism with its fervour for the past die hard. If the reader has not noticed by now, this entire text has been an attempt to ridicule this formal search for paradigms which should prove something which is more or less well known.

The language most likely brought by Frisians merchants and soldiers of fortune to the partially Romanised inhabitants of the Isle of Britain caught on and developed. One should indeed be proud of its development rather than ask wholly unnecessary questions about its "true" identity.

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CÂT DE GERMANICĂ ESTE LIMBA ENGLEZĂ?
(Rezumat)

Cuvinte cheie: *Limba Engleză, Limbă Germanică, Limba Franceză.*

Se spune că limba engleză are unicitatea sa şi totuşi pot fi trasate multe paralele cu celelalte limbi germanice. Vocabularul acesteia poate fi comparat cu cel al oricărei alte limbi germanice, iar asemănările sunt evidente. Mai mult, deşi a suferit o influenţă Franceză considerabilă, şi-a păstrat caracterul germanic.

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