WHERE *BOYS*, *GIRLS* AND *CHILDREN* COME FROM

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ABSTRACT

The etymology of three very frequent English words *child*, *girl* and *boy* has been notoriously obscure because researchers have failed to pay attention to possible Slavic influence. This article is aimed at rectifying this major oversight by providing abundant evidence of both formal and semantic similarities between the English items and the corresponding Slavic ones and at establishing Scandinavian as an intermediary for *girl* and *boy*, no such connector being necessary for *child*.

1. *child*

In the Germanic sphere there are a number of cognates of ModE *child* (< OE *cild* /tʃild/ > /tʃiːld/ 'baby' > 'boy or girl, offspring') and *colt* 'young male of horse; inexperienced person'. The form *child* bears the greatest similarity to the Gothic noun *kilþei* 'uterus, womb', while *colt* is more like OSwed. *kulder/kolder* > Mod. Swed. *kult*, *kulting* 'half-grown animal; boy' and Dan. *kuld* 'children from the same marriage; litter of animals'. The Gothic nouns *kilþei* and *inkilþō* both meaning 'womb' are believed to come from *k^wel-* to which the dental suffix was added. The Swedish and Danish forms stem from the expanded IE apophonic variant *k^wol-* 'tribe', which also has a reflex in OGr. *k^holpos* 'womb, vagina' (*k^wol-* + -*p*). All these forms may claim affinity with *child* on the ground of both form and meaning.

Although the primary meaning 'baby; the unborn or newly born human being; foetus, infant' of OE *cild* shows its connection with Goth. *kilþei*, as OED states, *child* is peculiar to English. It is "[n]ot found elsewhere. In the other WGer. langs its place is taken by kind" (s.v. *child*). The actual development route and the immediate source of OE *cild* have not yet been established.

A direct semantic change from 'womb' to 'unborn child', although the two notions are metonymically connected, is questionable,[1] so we shall try a new tack.

The IE root *k^wel- expanded with *-d occurs also in Slavic languages. Thus, according to SJP and PSR: Pol. *czeladź* 1. 'servants' 2. (dated) 'journeymen'; *biała czeladź* 'maid-servants'; *czeladnik* 1. 'journeyman' 2. (dated) 'servant', *czeladzin* (dated) 'inmate; servant'; Kashubian (a remnant of Polabian, now a Polish dialect) has *čìęladńìḱ, čìęladńica, čìęladńička, čìęlóӡ* as variants of the same general meaning (SOB). Slovincian (an extinct variant of Kashubian) had *čìęladńĭḱ* 'servant' (LOR) and Russ. *челядь* ('young inmates' dated usage). In Czech *čeled'a* means 'young servant; journeyman' and *čeled'* is 'country servants' or (now obsolete) 'generation, lineage' (CSR). Upper Lusatian has *čélédź* and Lower Lusatian *célaź* 'servants' (VASM s.v. *челядь*). In Lithuanian, a Baltic language, the corresponding noun *keltis* (or *kiltis*) denotes generation. It is obvious that formal and semantic closeness to OE *cild* are greater with the Slavic lexemes than with the Germanic ones mentioned above.[2]

Curiously enough, even Serbian, which is a South Slavic language, bears a great, if not a most relevant, similarity to *child* both in its current meaning 'offspring' and its obsolete meaning 'young male servant, lad in service' (noted in ME for the first time in 1382, to become obsolete by the beginning of the 17th century). In this language *чељаде* (*čeljade*) means 'human creature' (usually 'young'), while the collective *чељад* (*čeljad*) shares the meaning 'house servants, inmates' or 'family' with the corresponding nouns in West Slavic languages.

The suffix *-jadь* had the meaning of collectiveness couched in the form of grammatical singular, which may have influenced the morphological behaviour of the OE noun *cild*. Namely, as every student of the English language history knows, *cild* referred to both one and more than one child.[3]

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[1] While sentences like *How many heads are there in your tribe?* or *We have to feed a lot of hungry mouths* are easily understood because the head and the mouth are permanent parts of the body, it is highly doubtful whether *There are a lot of wombs in our village* could be interpreted as 'There are a lot of children in our village'. A baby of a pregnant woman is only a temporary resident in her womb, and therefore the attested connection across languages between 'baby' and 'womb' must have been only indirect.

[2] Although the Polabian dictionary (LP), which, due to paucity of data contains a limited number of entries, notes only *dĕtę* for 'child' and *devă* or *defkă* for 'girl' (both common Slavic words), we may safely propose *cel'adь* 'young servants' for pre-Polabian, i.e. the same form as for Old Church Slavonic, since similar forms *cil'aust* 'chin' (Kortlandt 2007) and *cel'äust* 'doublechin' (VASM s.v. *челюсть*) have been attested in Polabian, and *čìęlĕsc* 'jaw' in Slovincian. In Polabian, according to LP, there also existed the nouns *celü* 'face, cheek' and *cilĕsaį* 'two cheeks'.

[3] The meaning 'baby; child' approximately equals the meanings of the following Slavic nouns: OCS *čędo*, Serb *чедо* (*čedo*), Russ. *чадо* (*čado*), OPol. *czędo*, which apparently

In conclusion, we may surmise a direct influence of **čel'ad'* meaning 'young human(s)' in one/some of old West Slavic dialects, on Anglo-Saxon *cild* at the time when the Angles, Saxons and Jutes were still on the continent, bordering with the Slavs, before their migration to the British Isles. No intermediary is necessary because *cild* was attested in the earliest OE texts. It has been accepted that Low German shares more features with Balto-Slavic languages than High German, palatalization being one of them (Stanišić 2006: 118), which dovetails into the present proposal.

2. *girl*

The noun *girl* had a variety of forms in ME: *gurle, gerl, gerle, girle, gyrle, guirle, gierle, gyrll, garle,* as well as dialectal *gal* and *gell,* which manifests a high instability of the quality of the medial vowel. It has been mentioned in OED that a conjecture favoured by many scholars is that the word represents OE **gyrela* masc., **gyrele* fem. from OTeut. **gurwilon* (a diminutive of **gurwjo-*), akin to Aryan *ghʷrghʷ* 'boy, girl'. "This involves some uncertain phonological assumptions, and the late appearance of the Teutonic words gives additional ground for doubt, the ME *gürle* being recorded only from the end of the 13th c., and the LG *gœre* from the 17th c. It may be noted that *boy, lad, lass,* and the numerous synonyms in the modern Scandinavian languages are all of difficult etymology; probably most of them arose as jocular transferred uses of words that had originally a different meaning." (OED s.v. *girl*)

According to MED (s.v. *girl*), the noun *girl* may be akin to OE *gierela* (< **garw-*) 'a garment'. According to KLEIN (s.v. *girl*), the *-l* in *girl* is identical with the diminutive suffix *-el,* but he also considers the word to be of uncertain origin.

The earliest meaning of *girl* was 'a child or young person of either sex, a youth or maiden', used chiefly in plural (OED s. v. *girl*). The current meaning 'a female child' appeared only in the middle of the 16th century. When Chaucer in his *General Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales* wrote about the *Reeve*: "In daunger hadde he at his owene gise / The yonge girles of the diocise", he used the noun *girles* ambiguously, as it can be interpreted either as 'girls' or 'young people'.

The shortest way to trace *girl* to its origin would be to propose an OE form descending from Anglo-Saxon. However, this speculation ought to be supported

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come from IE **ken-* 'beget, bear' > Proto-Slavic *čen-* 'begotten in the womb' + *dъ*. The modern German form *Kind* 'child' may be associated with the same root, and it had been claimed by some authors that the Slavic forms are loanwords from Germanic, which claim has been eventually rejected (SKOK s.v. *čedo,* VASM s.v. *чадо*). Although **kʷel-* and **ken-* are different roots, they are similar in form and meaning, so that some kind of mutual influence cannot be excluded (cf. a similar Sievers' opinion stated in OED s.v. *child*).

by an OE recorded form, which is missing. A less direct way would be to sur-
mise an OE uncharted form borrowed from an (also uncharted) Scandinavian
one in the 9th or 10th century. We are inclined to find the latter solution more
probable as it is well known that "[m]ost of the Scandinavian words in OE do
not actually occur in written records until the ME period, though there can of
course be no doubt of their currency long before the beginning of this period"
(Pyles 1964: 332). "As we examine the record of borrowing from Scandinavian
it is very important to remember that we come to know of it only when English
texts appear in Scandinavianised areas, or from place-names, which in these
areas are often recorded long after they must have come into use" (Strang 1970:
255). It was only when literacy developed in the northern and eastern parts of
England that the strong Scandinavian influence became obvious. As De
Caluwé-Dor has stated, "[i]t is common practice for historians of the English
language to stress the exceptional character of the Scandinavian borrowings in
English. [...] They lament the lack of documents and sources. They argue that
the first documents are evidently later than the first uses of the words. Then they
comment on the different strata of Scandinavian loan-words and the probability
that these loans might have been considered as colloquial or even vulgar long
before becoming standard English" (De Caluwé-Dor 1979: 680).

Along the same lines we are going to seek the origin of *girl* in a Scandina-
vian loan word coming ultimately from a West Slavic dialect. The word most
likely to have originated *girl* is *grъ(d)lo*.

Slavic and Baltic variants corresponding to *girl* also show a variety of forms
for the accented vowel: Ukr. and Bulg. *горло* (*gorlo)*, ORuss. and Bulg. *гърло*
(*gъrlo*), OCS *grъlo*, Serb *грло* (*grlo*), Slovene *grlo*, Ruthenian *horlo*, Lithua-
nian *gurklȳs* (all meaning 'throat' or 'larynx').

The etymon of these lexemes must have been Proto-Slavic *gъrdlo* because
some present-day variants of *grъlo* contain *d* of the morpheme *-dlo*, which is
definitely a Slavic suffix: Pol. *gardło*, Czech and Slovak. *hrdlo*, ULus. *hordło*,
LLus. *gjardło*. Slovincian, which is nearer to Germanic in space has *garlo*,
without *d* (LOR), while the Old-Polish Dictionary (SS) has *gardło* besides
garło, with an additional metaphoric meaning 'life'. Old Prussian, which is a
Baltic language, had *gurcle*. The by necessity limited Polabian dictionary (LP)
does not contain a correspondent of *gъrdlo*. However, after consulting it and
having found in it *saidlü* 'awl' for Pol. *szydło*, Czech *šídlo*, Slovak. *šidlo*, ULus.
šidło, LLus. *šydło*, Kash. *šëdło* and *rȧdlü* for Pol. and Lus. *radło* and Czech
radlo 'hookplough', all with *d*, where Russian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Ukrainian,
and Slovenian have *шило* (*šilo*) and *рало* (*ralo*） respectively, i.e. without *d*,
we are inclined to believe that (pre-)Polabian, like its historical neighbours, had
preserved *d* in the corresponding word. Thus it remains as a moot question
whether Old Norse, as a predecessor of modern Scandinavian languages,

adopted *gъrdlo* or *gъrlo*. If the Slavic donor contained *d*, which is more likely, this consonant must have been dropped somewhere during its subsequent history in Old Norse and OE. Phonotactic rules in English do not prohibit the -*rdl* sequence, as attested by words such as *girdle, curdle* and *hurdle.* It might be the case that the very existence of *girdle* 'belt' had brought about the loss of *d* in **girdle* 'girl' in order to avoid a homophonic clash. The loss could have also been brought about by the great frequency of its use, so that further reduction issued in some dialects, leading to *gal.*

   Now the question of meaning. The throat is a vital body part, since blocking the passage through the windpipe leads to death. Old Polish and Old Czech reflected this fact by the polysemy: *gardło* and *hrdlo* respectively for 1. 'throat' 2. 'life'. It is well known that parts of the body can stand metonymically for the person (cf. in English: *hand, head, heart. mouth*, as in *Shut up, you big mouth! All hands on board! lazy bones*). Thus Old Serbian established the polysemy *грьло* (*grьlo*) 1. 'throat' 2.'person' (RMS, ISJ s. v. *грло*). In present-day Serbian *грло* (*grlo*) is still currently used for an individual head of cattle, usually a horse, and occasionally for an individual fowl (RSKNJ). The meaning 'person' was especially frequent in the prepositional phrase *по герьлу* (*po gerьlu*) 'per head' (DAN s.v. *грьло*). The meaning 'a child of either sex' of ME *girl* (with its variants) and Low German *göre* comes as quite expected if we follow the proposed etymology from **grdlo* 'person; animal' in some West Slavic dialects in the past. Moreover, OED records the meaning of *girl* 'a roebuck in its second year' which has become obsolete by 1726, which closely parallels the use of *grlo* for animals in Serbian.

3. *boy*

About the etymology of *boy* imaginative tales have been told. According to KLEIN, *boy* is related to the OE personal name *Böfa*, OFris. *böfa* 'boy, a young gentleman', MDutch *boeve*, Mod. Dutch *boef* /buːf/ 'knave, villain', the Old High German personal name *Buobo*, MHG *bube* 'boy'. A similar account has been offered in OED, which underlines its obscure origin, adding EFris. *boi, boy* 'young gentleman' as the same word. When trying to clarify the etymological connection of *boy* with personal names, it should be mentioned that while it is not impossible for a common noun to originate from a personal name (cf. Pol. *król*, Russ. *король* (*korol'*), Serb *краљ* (*kralj*) 'king' < Kar(a)l; Pol. *cesarz*, Russ. *царь* (*car'*), Serb *цар* (*car*) 'emperor' < Cæsar), it is usually the name of an eminent person that is the source. Furthermore, the personal name itself is usually derived from another common noun. Therefore, it is more realistic to look for the origin of *Böfa* and *Buobo* in a common noun denoting a young man, than vice versa.

SOED tells an even more fanciful story proposing Latin *boia* 'fetter' as a possible origin of *boy*: "Early var[iant]s point to an AFr*abuié*, *embuié* [...] pa[st] p[artici]ple of OFr *embuier* fetter: - late L[atin] *imboiare* f[rom] *in* IM-[1]+ L *boia* pl[ural] *boiæ* fetters". The underlying reason for deriving *boy* from a word meaning 'fetter' probably lay in the secondary meaning of *boy*, which is 'servant, slave'.

In Slavic languages there are a lot of nouns derived from Common Slavic *bojъ* 'fight' with the meaning 'fighter': Serb *бојаник* (*bojanik*), *бојац* (*bojac*), *бојник* (*bojnik*), *бојанија* (*bojanija* dialectal), *бојанџија* (*bojandžija*, with the Turkish suffix *-џија*),[4] Russ. *боецъ*, OCS *bojъсь*, Czech *bojovník*, Pol. *bo-jowiec* and *bojownik* 'fighter', as well as *bojówka* 'group of fighters' and the adjective *bojowy* 'fighting'. SJP has only *boj* 'battle' and SLAW has *bajt* meaning 'beat', while there is no such a word as *boj* in SOB, but we can safely posit the existence of a similar corresponding noun with the meaning 'fighter' in West Slavic dialects in the past.

According to Vasmer, the male personal name *Bojan* probably comes from *bojь* (VASM s.v. *Боян*). *Bojan* was also a name of a place on the island of Fehmarn (nowadays lying in the German part of the Baltic Sea which borders with Denmark), inhabited by the Slavs till 12th c. Some other place names on the same island are also Slavic male proper names (*Dragan*, *Tešimir*, *Ratmir*, *Badimir*; cf. Vukcevich 2001: Ch. XXI, 2).

All Germanic variants mentioned in KLEIN (*Böfa*, *böfa*, *boeve*, *boef*, *Buobo*, *Bube*) contain a bilabial plosive followed by a rounded high vowel and a labial postvocalic consonant, which leads us back to a contracted form of an old variant of *bojowiec* and *bojownik* as the most probable source. Thus **bojow- > *bow*, **boi* might have produced both the proper names and the ME common noun *boi*.

The first group of words that entered OE from Scandinavian was connected with war, like *cnear* 'small warship', *scegþmann* 'pirate', *dreng* 'warrior', *orrest* 'battle', *ran* 'robbery'. This means that war was an early semantic 'centre of expansion' (Sperber's term in Ullmann 1964: 201). Therefore it is not surprising if we look for the origin of *boy* in the sphere of war, bearing in mind that warriors were mainly young men. It is also known that the OE noun *beorn* at first meant 'warrior' to become generalized as 'man' subsequently. OE nouns *hæleþ* and *rinc* shared the polysemy of 'man', 'hero' and 'fighter'. In fact, "[...]

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[4]   Admittedly, this is also the case with its near-synonym *offspring*. The suffix *-ru* was added later on analogy with *lambru* (= *lambs)* and *cealfru* (= *calves*), and subsequently even this was expanded by *-en* to produce the Mod.E *children*. The Serbian noun *boj* 'battle' has yielded Hungarian *baj* and Romanian *razboinic* 'warrior' comes from Serb *разбојник* (*raz-boj-nik*) 'plunderer'. The noun *bojan* mentioned in SJP meaning 'old Slavic poet and roaming singer' or 'Slavic fairy-tales teller' is of a different root.

a large number of panchronic near-synonyms of man [in OE] have been derived by interpreting mutual spaces from the conceptual domain WARRIOR|SOLDIER and the conceptual domain MAN|MALE HUMAN BEING" (Grygiel 2008: 130).

A similar semantic connection between 'fighter' and 'man', but in the opposite direction, is shown in the OE noun *guma*, whose meanings 'warrior' and 'hero' are secondary to the earlier sense 'man' (Grygiel 2008: 139). Likewise, the Serbian lexeme *јунак* (*junak*), which nowadays means 'hero', formerly referred to a young man (and is still used dialectally in that meaning), and in Russian, *молодец* (*molodec*) 'young man' has added the meaning 'hero'.

Another English word from this group, *lad*, is redolent of the Ukrainian noun *lado* 'husband', while its cognate *лада* (*lada*) in Old Russian meant 'husband', in Old Czech 'girl', in Ukranian and Serbian 'wife'. The Proto-Slavic goddess of love was named *Lada*, which is, according to Miklošič (quoted in SKOK s.v. *lado*) connected with *laska* ('love' in Czech). Now, the English noun *lass* 'girl; sweetheart' has been a product of *lask* (according to SOED s. v. *lass*), which gives support to the present etymological proposal. By all probability, *boy* and *girl*, like *lad* and *lass* nowadays, were dialectal forms existing in OE in parallel with *cnafa* 'boy', *magu* 'young man; son' and *mæg*(*e*)*þ*'girl'.

The secondary meaning of *boy* in English 'slave, servant' could be easily explained as derived from 'warrior' > 'captive', which indicates the same course of borrowing as mentioned here.

4. Conclusion

The general historical background to the phenomena proposed here can be easily established. At the time suspected for the language contacts as delineated here, the Danes and Saxons bordered with the Slavs, who dominated a vast territory. It was only natural that they influenced each other. For example, to mention only a random choice of quotations from history books, it is said that the Danish king Godfred destroyed the Obodrite[5] market at Reric and established a trading town at Hedeby c. 808 (Holman (2010: xi). "The German settlers were driven out of Denmark in 983 by an alliance consisting of Obodrite soldiers and troops loyal to Harald [I, the Danish king]" (Forte et al. 2005). Elsewhere it has been mentioned that Sven I, the Danish king lead the Danes and Slavs against the English and Norwegians in 1010. Danes fought against Polabian Slavs in the 1147 Wendish crusade. "The king of Denmark is well known as an ally especially of Polabian Slavs. [...] Danish policy towards the Slavs was probably more complex, and

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[5]   The Obodrites were a West Slavic tribe bordering with the Danes. They may have originated from the Balkans because there existed a tribe with the same name in the Balkans.

alongside temporary alignments, there were probably also times of conflict" (Morawiec 2006: 708). The name of *Berlin* comes from Polabian *berl* or *birl* 'bog' and quite many other names of places in Germany and Austria are of Slavic origin, like *Leipzig < Lipic, Leibnitz < lipьnica, Graz < Gradec, Dobritzschen < Dobricin, Ferschnitz < *berzьnica, Edlitz < jedlica, Fladnitz < *blatьnica, Pettog < potokъ, Dollnitz < dolinica* (cf. Popović 1960: Ch. 3)

The German expansion into the East happened only later. "Before the thirteenth century there were very few German towns beyond the Elbe, although German traders established themselves in the most important Slav centres. Later it was not uncommon for an old Slav centre to be refounded as a German city" (Angold – Dobson 1970: 20).

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