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The West Germanic **hlūd(V)*- ‘sound; loud’: Why Long Vowel?

(Abstract)

The early Germanic words for ‘sound’, ‘loud’ (paradoxically, also ‘silent, silence’), and their verbal derivatives apparently share the same Indo-European verbal root **k̑leu-* ‘hear, listen’, cf. OIc. *hljóð* ‘sound; silence’, *hljómr* ‘sound’, Go. *hliuma* ‘hearing’, OE/OS/OFr. *hlūd*, OHG *hlūt* ‘loud’, OE *hlēoðor*, *hlȳd*, OHG *hliodar*, *hlūt* ‘sound’, verbal OE *hlȳdan*, OS *hlūdōn*, OHG *hlūtēn* ‘(make) sound’, OIc. *hlýða* ‘listen, obey’ etc. The forms with the vowel *ū/ȳ* in the root (most of them are West Germanic) may imply an underlying zero grade; however, the outcome is, surprisingly, a long vowel, and not the expected *ũ*. Why is the vowel long?

This issue has been completely neglected in historical linguistics, and the only comment these abnormal forms receive in A. Bammesberger’s *Die Morphologie des urgermanischen Nomens* is “...der Langvokal *ū* ist [...] unerwartet” (p. 252).

Before seeking the lengthening assistance of laryngeals, it may be worthwhile trying to derive this long vowel in some other way. The long vowel *ȳ* in the Old Icelandic form *hlýða* has simply developed out of the diphthong **eu* by regular sound changes, cf. PGmc. **hleuđijan-* > PScand. **hliuđijan* > *hlýða*. However, the same cannot be said of the West Germanic languages. Their vowels *ū* resp. *ȳ* in most cases – and this case, too – require a Proto-Germanic vowel **ū*. Therefore, in the case of the West Germanic languages, it may be necessary to turn to the laryngeals, and reconstruct something like **k̑leuH-* or perhaps **k̑leu-H-* (i.e., a root with a laryngeal “enlargement”). The zero grade would be **k̑lu-H-*, whence late *centum*-IE **klū-*, and in further derivation PGmc. **χlūd(V)*- > WGmc. **hlūd(V)*-.

Of the two roots shown above, it is the reconstruction of an indivisible root **k̑leuH-* that is problematic for the protolanguage, because there is plenty of evidence for the *aniṭ*-root **k̑leu-* (see

IEW. 605ff.). Several non-Germanic forms exhibiting \bar{u} are unlikely to contain an old inherited long vowel, cf. Gk. $\kappa\lambda\tilde{\upsilon}\theta\epsilon$ ‘hear!’ (ipv.), Av. $sr\check{u}ta-$ ‘famous’ (ptc.; may well be / $sr\check{u}ta-$ /, cf. Ved. $srut\acute{a}-$), Av. $s\bar{u}-sr\bar{u}ma$ (pf.), Ved. $\acute{s}u-\acute{s}r\bar{u}-y\acute{a}s$ (pf. opt.; $\sqrt{sr\bar{u}}$ -; cf. also other instances of secondary length in such forms like $st\bar{u}y\acute{a}te$ from $\sqrt{st\check{u}}$ - ‘praise’, $-y\acute{u}ya$ from $\sqrt{y\check{u}}$ - ‘join’, etc.).

The reconstruction of an extended root $*\hat{k}leu-H-$ beside an $ani\check{t}$ $*\hat{k}leu-$ is quite plausible, and such extended roots appear to have been quite common in the prehistoric stages (although their distribution throughout the Indo-European language area is not yet clear). A root with a corresponding structure could be $*\hat{k}leu-s-$ ‘listen’ (reconstructed as indivisible $*\hat{k}leus-$ in LIV.336, but see note 1) and further $*teu-h_2-$ ‘swell’, the latter being an attractive ancestor of $*teuh_2-$ from my point of view, since also $*teuk-$ exists with the same meaning, and both can simply be extensions of the same root $**teu-$ (furthermore, also $*teu-g-$ must have existed, cf. OIc. $poka$ ‘fog’ < $*tu-g-$). Another root that may contain an old “enlargement” is $*bhreuH-$ ‘aufbrechen’ (LIV.96), which may reflect an earlier $**bhreu-H-$, cf. such $ani\check{t}$ -reflexes as OIc. $brot$ ‘broken piece’ (< $*\check{b}rut-a-$ < $*bhrud-o-$ ← $**bhru-d-$), $brytja$ ‘chop’ (< $*\check{b}rutj\bar{o}n-$), OE $brytta$ ‘dispenser’ and OIc. $bryti$ ‘cook’ (< $*\check{b}rutjan-$); cf. further the root $*bhreus-$ ‘zerbrechen’ (LIV.97), which may well reflect $**bhreus-$. A further example may be the root $*kreuH-$ ‘aufdecken’ (LIV.371), which may be an extended $**kreu-H-$, cf. OE $hyrst$ ‘adornment’, OHG $hrust$ ‘armament’ (< $*hr\check{u}st-$), OIc. $gull-(h)ro\check{d}inn$ ‘gilded’ (← $*-hrud\acute{a}na-$), all pointing to an $ani\check{t}$ -root $*kreu-$ resp. $*kreus-$ (< $**kreu-s-$).

To conclude, I would like to suggest that the Indo-European root $*\hat{k}leu-$ could take the “enlargement” H , and that in its zero grade $*\hat{k}luH-$ this root is attested in several West Germanic forms. After a preliminary study of the data, a fair number of such “enlarged” roots can be indicated. As to what these “enlargements” exactly were, at this point is still difficult to say, but further research (perhaps of the Indo-European verbal system) may be able to provide certain answers to their original function, meaning, and their development.