Etymology Tools Cheatsheet

A quick reference guide to etymology tools and resources for tracing word origins and meanings. This cheatsheet covers online dictionaries, databases, and linguistic resources useful for etymological research.

Online Etymology Dictionaries

General Etymology Resources

Online Etymology Dictionary
Comprehensive resource for tracing the origins of English words. Provides detailed etymological information, including root words and historical usage.

Wiktionary
A collaborative, multilingual dictionary that includes etymological information for words in various languages.

The American Heritage Dictionary
Features a usage panel and detailed etymologies, providing insights into word histories and related terms.

Specialized Etymology Resources

Middle English Dictionary
Focuses on the etymology and usage of words during the Middle English period (1150-1500).

Oxford English Dictionary (OED)
(Subscription required) Offers extensive etymological data and historical usage examples for a wide range of words.

Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE)
Documents regional variations in American English, including etymologies and historical contexts.

Linguistic Databases & Tools

Proto-Language Databases

Indo-European Etymological Dictionary (IEED)
A database of Proto-Indo-European roots and their descendants in various Indo-European languages.

Austronesian Basic Vocabulary Database (ABVD)
Comparative database of basic vocabulary in Austronesian languages, useful for tracing word origins within the family.

Comparative Linguistics Tools

ASJP Database
Automated Similarity Judgment Program database for comparing basic vocabulary across languages.

Glottolog
A comprehensive catalog of the world's languages, providing information on language families and related languages.

Etymological Analysis Techniques

Sound Correspondences

Definition: Systematic relationships between sounds in related languages that indicate common ancestry.

Example: Grimm's Law, which describes sound shifts in Germanic languages compared to Proto-Indo-European.

Application: Identifying cognates (words with a common origin) by observing regular sound changes.

Semantic Change

Definition: The evolution of a word's meaning over time.

Types: Broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, metaphor, metonymy.

Example: 'Nice' originally meant 'foolish' but now means 'pleasant'.

Reconstruction

Definition: The process of inferring the form of an ancestral word or language based on its descendants.

Method: Comparing cognates in related languages and applying sound correspondences to reconstruct the proto-form.

Additional Resources

Academic Journals

Journals specializing in linguistics and etymology often contain in-depth research and analysis. Examples include *Diachronica*, *Journal of Historical Linguistics*, and *Transactions of the Philological Society*.

Online Communities

Platforms like Stack Exchange (Linguistics) and Reddit (r/etymology, r/linguistics) can provide valuable insights and discussions.

Linguistics Stack Exchange
r/etymology
r/linguistics

Books

An Introduction to English Etymology by Gerald L. Cohen
Words and Their Stories by Anne Rooney
The Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-European and the Proto-Indo-European World by J.P. Mallory and D.Q. Adams