

Words denoting pea (*Pisum sativum*) in European languages

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European linguistic families

Europe has always been extremely rich in languages. It is estimated that it has been home to at least three hundred living and extinct languages (1). The spoken languages of Europe basically belong to six great linguistic families: Indo-European, Uralic, Altaic, Caucasian, Kartvelian and Afro-Asiatic.

The most abundant linguistic family of Europe is Indo-European. It consists of Baltic, Celtic, Germanic, Indo-Iranian, Italic and Slavic branches, each comprising a large number of languages, as well as less rich groups, such as Albanian, Armenian and Greek. The languages of this family have been the majority of spoken tongues throughout European history for the last several millennia (Figure 1).

The Uralic linguistic family in Europe is represented by its extensive Finno-Ugric sub-family that has two main branches, namely Finno-Permic and Finno-Ugric, Finnish and Hungarian as its most known members. The great Altaic family in Europe is most widely represented by Turkish and other languages belonging to its Turkic branch, as well as a few languages belonging to the Mongolian branch.

Both Caucasian, also known as North Caucasian, and Kartvelian, also referred to as South Caucasian, languages are spoken in a relatively small area adjacent to the Caucasus with Georgian as the most famous representative of the latter. Comprising Arabic and Hebrew, a rather rich Afro-Asiatic linguistic family in Europe is represented only by the Maltese language.

The Basque language is regarded as a language isolate with no demonstrable relationship with other languages, although certain novel classifications include it in the Dene-Caucasian linguistic superfamily (2).

Pea in the Old World

Together with many of its more or less close botanical relatives and traditional European legume crops such as vetchlings (*Lathyrus* L.), vetches (*Vicia* spp.), lentils (*Lens* spp.) and chickpeas (*Cicer*



Figure 1. Modern languages of Europe

spp.), pea (*Pisum sativum* L.) originated from the Near Eastern and Mediterranean centers of diversity (3).

Rich archaeological evidence, mainly in Syria, witnesses that pea (*Pisum sativum* L.) was among the first domesticated crops in the world (4), along with bitter vetch (*Vicia ervilia* (L.) Willd.), chickpea (*Cicer arietinum* L.) and lentil (*Lens culinaris* Medik.). Together with emmer, einkorn, barley and flax, pea and these three legumes were grown nearly 10,000 years ago.

The Old World, especially Europe, Near East and Northern Africa, were home to various ethnic groups throughout their history. For this reason, common vocabularies of the words related to pea and other grain legumes to both languages within a linguistic family and between languages of different families prove that these crops were well known to the ancestors of nearly all modern European nations from time immemorial (5).

Pea in Indo-European languages

The majority of the words related to pea in modern European languages belonging to the Indo-European linguistic family originate from several Proto-Indo-European roots with a subsequent diversification within each of its branches (6).

The well-known Latin word, *pisum*, produced the words denoting pea in numerous modern European languages, such as Albanian, all Celtic languages and nearly all Italic languages, as well as English (Table 1). This word, denoting the same in Latin, has its origin in the Proto-Indo-European **pis-* (7), literally meaning *to thresh* and obviously describing one of the most obvious characteristics of pea and other grain legumes.

The Proto-Indo-European root **erǵ(h)-*, denoting a kernel of leguminous plant, resulted in numerous derivations (8). One of them is the Proto-Germanic **arwait*, denoting pea, and from it are derived

the words denoting the same in nearly all modern Germanic languages. Another derivation is the Latin *ervum*, denoting bitter vetch which gave rise to the words denoting pea in the majority of Iberian Romance languages, such as Portuguese.

The words denoting pea in all Slavic languages, including neighboring languages from other branches of the Indo-European family, such as Aromanian, have their origin in the Proto-Slavic **gorxu*,

Table 1. Words denoting pea in modern Indo-European languages

Branch	Language	Word	Branch	Language	Word
Albanian		bizele	Italic	Catalan	pesol
	Armenian	olor		Corsican	pisu
Baltic	Latvian	zirni		French	pois
	Lithuanian	zirnis		Galician	ervella
Celtic	Breton	piz		Italian	pisello
	Cornish	pysen		Occitan	pois
	Irish	pis		Portuguese	ervilha
	Manx	pishyr		Romanian	mazdre
	Scottish Gaelic	peasair		Sardinian	pisu
	Welsh	pysen		Spanish	guisante
	Danish	cert		Walloon	peu
Germanic	Dutch	erwt		Slavic	Belarusian
	English	pea	Bulgarian		grah
	Faroese	ertur	Croatian		grasak
	Flemish	erwt	Czech		hrdch
	Frisian	eart	Kashubian		groch
	German	erbse	Lower Sorbian		groch
	Icelandic	erta	Macedonian		grasok
	Norwegian	ert	Polish		groch
	Swedish	art	Russian		gorokh
	Yiddish	arbes	Russyn		hrascok
Greek		bizeli	Serbian		grasak
	Kurdish	polik	Slovak		hrach
	Ossetian	tymbylqcedur	Slovenian		grah
Indo-Iranian	Romani	boobi	Ukrainian		gorokh
	Aromanian	grashac	Upper Sorbian		hroch

denoting the same, and was itself derived from the Proto-Indo-European **ghArs-*, denoting a leguminous plant (9).

it is interesting that the modern Baltic languages did not preserve certain more ancient forms of the words that denoted pea. The extinct Old Prussian had the word *kekera* to denote pea, which is a derivation of the Proto-Indo-European **kek-*, denoting the same and being also responsible for the Latin *cicer*, denoting chickpea. The words denoting pea in modern Lithuanian and Latvian are derived through the Proto-Baltic **zirn-* *id*, with the same meaning, from the Proto-Indo-European **g^r(a)n-*, denoting grain and being the ultimate source of the Latin *granum*, denoting the same.

The Latin word *vulva*, denoting an envelope, gave the most commonly used word denoting pea in modern Spanish. The definite origin and the meaning of the modern Romanian word denoting pea is still unclear but is surely of Dacian origin, sharing its Pre-Roman Balkan roots with an alternative Albanian word denoting pea, *modhe* (10). The Romani word denoting pea is most likely from Slavic languages where it denotes faba bean (*Vicia faba* L.), being itself derived through the Proto-Slavic **bobu* and together with the Latin *faba* and the Proto-Germanic **bab-n-d* from the Proto-Indo-European **bhabh-*, all denoting faba bean.

Pea in Uralic languages

A large majority of modern languages of the Finno-Permic branch of the Finno-Ugric subfamily of the Uralic linguistic family borrowed their words denoting pea from neighboring non-Uralic languages. This may confirm the theory that these people have always lived too North (11) and thus unlikely had pea as a traditional crop, importing it from southern regions together with its original words.

The most widely used form of words denoting pea in European Uralic languages are modified from the words denoting pea in Baltic languages of the Indo-European linguistic family, such as Finnish or Estonian (Table 2).

Table 2. Words denoting pea in modern Uralic languages of Europe

Branch	Language	Word	Branch	Language	Word
Finno-Permic	Estonian	hernes	Finno-Permic	Moksha	snavnja
	Finnish	herne		Saami	earta; hearta
	Ingrian	herne		Udmurt	kozy
	Karelian	herneh		Veps	herneh
	Komi	anikytsch		Voro	herneh
	Livonian	jernod	Ugric	Hungarian	borso

It is notable that the Saami word denoting pea resembles the words with the same meaning in the Germanic languages of the Indo-European linguistic family, meaning that both the pea crop and its name could have been imported from the neighboring regions of Scandinavia.

Pea in Altaic languages

The Proto-Altaic word **bukrV*, denoting pea, nut and cone, gave the Proto-Mongolian **buyurCag*, denoting pea, and the Proto-Turkic **burCak*, denoting both faba bean and pea (12). In most cases, their modern descendants

retained a rather similar form with the same meaning (Table 3). As a consequence of living in the same region as the Altaic tribes at one point in their history, certain Uralic peoples borrowed their word denoting pea from them, as

Table 3. Words denoting pea in modern Altaic languages of Europe

Branch	Language	Word	Branch	Language	Word
Mongolian	Kalmyk	burceg	Turkic	Karaim	burchax
Turkic	Azeri	noxud		Kazakh	noqat; bur\$aq
	Bashkir	borsaqa		Kumyk	burchaq
	Chuvash	parca		Nogai	bur\$aq
	Gagauz	borchaq		Tatar	borchaq
	Karachay-Balkar	burchaq		Turkish	bezelye

witnessed by the modern Hungarian denoting the same.

In the modern Turkish language, the common Altaic ancestral word denoting pea shifted its meaning and today denotes bitter vetch, while an Italian word denoting pea was borrowed with the same meaning. At the same time, Azeri and Kazakh imported their present words denoting pea from the Persian language where modern and old forms, *nuxud* and *naxda*, denote chickpea.

Pea in Caucasian languages

One of the very rare Proto-caucasian words related to legumes, *q5r'a, denotes pea (13). Despite a rather small area of distribution in comparison to other linguistic families, this one has numerous descendants and all of them have retained both form and its meaning (Table 4).

Branch	Language	Word	Branch	Language	Word
East	Archi	caq	East	Rutul	xar
	Aghul	xur		Tabasaran	harar; xar
	Chechen	qoʃ		Tsakhur	xara
	Ingush	gerga qes	West	Abaza	k'yrk'yrlas
	Kryts	xarxar		Abkhaz	k'yrk'yrra
	Lak	qulru		Adyghe	nekhut
Lezgi	nahut; zar	Kabardian		cesh	

Table 4. Words denoting pea in modern Caucasian languages

As a consequence of cohabitation of peoples of other origin next to each other, certain Caucasian languages, such as *Lezgi* and *Adyghe*, adopted the above mentioned Persian words denoting pea and related species in a similar way as some of their Turkic neighbors. On the other hand, the Caucasian words denoting pea was transmitted into certain Indo-European languages such as Ossetian and perhaps some belonging to the Uralic family such as Komi or Udmurt.

Pea in other European languages

It is still very uncertain if there was a Proto-Kartvelian word denoting both pea and any other grain legume. The modern words denoting pea in Georgian, such as *mukhudo*, may derive from Persian, while the Svan *ghedar* and the Laz *parzuli* may be imported from their Caucasian and Turkic neighbors.

In a similar way to many other words in its vocabulary, the Maltese word denoting pea, *pizella*, was obviously borrowed from Italian. The modern Basque word denoting pea, *ilar*, was derived from the Proto-Basque, **ilhaf*, where it denoted pea, faba bean, vetch and heather (14).

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Inwitdri! O Pisum Queen!

Thy beloved crop pea's always been.

Thou made pea most precious food

And keep its yields both high and good.

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