



Germanic *ga(-) revisited.

Some thoughts on etymology, phonology and inherited word formations.

Introduction, Definitions

After about two centuries of extensive discussion on the etymology of PGmc. *ga-, concentrating mostly on preverbal *ga- (cf. Streitberg 1891, Herbers 2002), I will have a look at denominative nominal *ga-composites in the Germanic languages and the literature so far published on that topic.

The term '*denominative*' means 'word formation with nominal base' and not 'word formation with nominal result', i.e. [X + NOMINAL] rather than [X + Y]_{NOMINAL}.

The term '*nominal*' refers to either substantives or adjectives.

Bearing in mind that PGmc. *ga- is referred to either as 'prefix' or 'proclitic' but is not attested as a simplex, I use the term 'composite' rather than 'compound' for the type [*ga- + NOMINAL], because 'compound' implies a formation of two (or more) independent 'words' (or word stems), but does not include affixes and enclitics.

Denominative Nominal Composites

There are a few denominative nominal *ga-composites in all of the old Germanic languages, although – due to sound loss and weakening – in Old Frisian and Old Norse only very few are evident. For example:

Goth.	OHG	OE
<i>gaskôhi n.</i> 'pair of shoes' <i>gasiŋþa m.</i> 'companion' <i>gaarbja m.</i> 'co-heir' <i>gaskôhs adj.</i> 'shod, having shoes' <i>galeiks adj.</i> 'of the same shape' <i>gamains adj.</i> 'common' etc.	<i>giskuohi n.</i> 'pair of shoes' <i>gisindo m.</i> 'companion' <i>gisindi n.</i> 'company' <i>gierbo m.</i> 'co-heir' <i>gibart adj.</i> 'having a beard' <i>gilîh(i) adj.</i> 'of the same shape' <i>gimeini adj.</i> 'common' etc.	<i>gescý n.</i> 'pair of shoes' <i>gesíp m.</i> 'companion' <i>gesíp n.</i> 'company' <i>gelonda m.</i> 'compatriot' <i>gefole adj.</i> 'having a foal' <i>gelíc adj.</i> 'of the same shape' <i>gemæne adj.</i> 'common' etc.
OS	OFrs.	ON
<i>giskôhi n.</i> 'pair of shoes' <i>gisîth m.</i> 'companion' <i>gisîthi n.</i> 'company' <i>gilîk adj.</i> 'of the same shape' <i>gimêni adj.</i> 'common' etc.	<i>hus-gesin</i> 'house-company' <i>(ge)lîk adj.</i> 'of the same shape' <i>(ge)mên adj.</i> 'common' etc.	<i>granni m.</i> 'neighbour' <i>rúni m.</i> 'intimate friend' <i>gnógr adj.</i> 'enough' <i>glíkr adj.</i> 'common' etc.



From these examples, the function of denominative nominal *ga-composites can be deduced as follows:

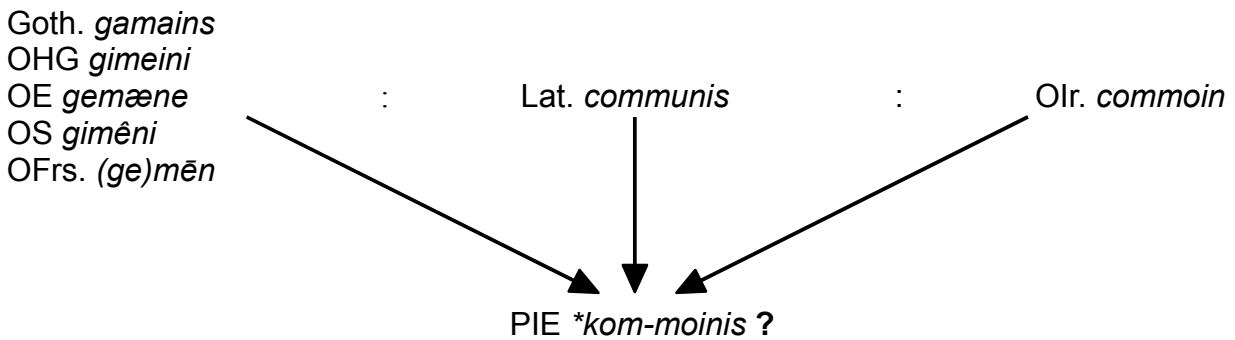
- composite adjectives with prenominal *ga- => 'being with something, some quality'
 composite nouns with prenominal *ga- => a) 'person sharing something, some function, quality with others'
 b) 'person, thing being together with others of the same kind'

In other words, composites of the type [**ga-* + NOMINAL (+ SUFF)]_{NOMINAL} mean 'being with something, some function, quality (together with others)'.

Thus, *ga- originally meant '(together) with' and can therefore (at least semantically) be compared to Lat. *co(m/n)-* (*coniux f.*, *cognomen n.*, *compotor m.*, *concolor adj.* etc.) or OIr. *com-*, *coⁿ* (e.g. *com-arbe m.*).

A 'common' Problem

The following composites consisting of either PGmc. *ga- or Lat. *co(m/n)-*, OIr. *com-*, respectively, are strikingly similar, as if going back to a shared Proto-Indo-European origin:



Why not PIE **kom* > Germ. **ham-* ?



There has been discussion on that topic for more than 120 years, now, the question being:

Lat. *cum*, *co(m/n)-* = Germ. *ga- < PIE *kom ?

pro:

(Adelung 1775 : 437)
Bugge 1887, 1888
Wood 1910
Schmidt 1962
Walde/Hofmann 1965 : 251
Bennett 1968a,b, 1970
Giacalone Ramat 1976
Bammesberger 1981
Lühr 1982 : 381 FN 5, 386 esp. FN 4
Collinge 1985 : 207
Lehmann 1986 : 133
(Pfeifer 1989 : 511)
(Dunkel 1990 : 119f.)
Quinlin 1991
Davis 2000
Boutkan/Siebinga 2005 :81f.
Ringe 2008 (2006) : 165
Lloyd et al. 2009 : 202-204
etc.

contra:

Bezzenberger 1873 : 70-72
Meillet 1896/97
Wiedemann 1906 : 215f.
Brugmann : 1911
Kluge/Mitzka 1957 : 236f.
etc.

Common opinion is, that indeed PGmc. *ga- equals Lat. *cum*, *co(m/n)-*, OIr. *coⁿ*, *com-* etc. and thus can be traced back to PIE *kom. But there is still no consensus on why, in this morpheme, PIE *k is represented by PGmc. *g in (almost) all cases.

Accordingly, Goth. *gamains*, OHG *gimeini*, OE *gemæne*, OS *gimēni*, OFrs. *(ge)mēn*, Lat. *communis* and OIr. *commoin* are likely to go back to PIE *kom-moinis. Which implies the existence of **PIE composites of the type [ADV / PREP + NOMINAL]_{NOMINAL}** (cf. Meier-Brügger 2000 : 274, Fortson 2004 : 123, Ringe 2008 (2006) : 59 Lindner 2011 : 33f.).



Nominal P/N-Composites in the IE languages

And indeed we find nominal P/N-composites in other old Indo-European languages, as well, e.g.:

Gr. *σύν-δουλος, συμ-πολίτης, ὑπερ-θύριον, μετ-αίτιος*

Lat. *con-iux, con-color, in-certus, sub-urbānus*

OI. *a-rútra-, ánti-mitra-, sam-yuj-*

OIr. *com-arbe, Gaul. exs-ops*

Abbreviations

Gaul.	:	Gaulish
Goth.	:	Gothic
Lat.	:	Latin
OE	:	Old English
OFrs.	:	Old Frisian
OHG	:	Old High German
OI.	:	Old Indic
OIr.	:	Old Irish
ON	:	Old Norse
OS	:	Old Saxon
P/N-composite	:	[PREP / ADV + NOMINAL]-composite
PGmc.	:	Proto-Germanic
PIE	:	Proto-Indo-European



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