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Some Cushitic Etymologies

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This article discusses the etymology of twelve lexical items that, to the best of my knowledge, have been lacking a diachronic explanation up to now¹. The focus will be on East Cushitic, in particular Somali.

Ir. **baaʕ** "to exceed, surpass, win over"

I have argued in Peust (2005) that South Cushitic ʕ regularly corresponds to *h* of East Cushitic. We gain another example for this equation by comparing *baaʕ* (proto-West-Rift reconstruction **baʕ* by Kießling & Mous 2003: 66) with the well-known East Cushitic root **baḥ*- "to go out, to go up" represented, among others, in Som. *bax* "to go out, exit, leave", Or. *baʔ* "to go out, appear, (of sun, moon:) to rise", and Burji *ba* "to go out, appear; to go up, climb, rise" (see Dolgopolskij 1973: 318f. for further cognates). The meaning in Ir. can easily have developed from an earlier *"to go up". A similar semantic extension in the direction of "to win" has taken place in the English verb "to overcome".

Som. **bojel** "young female goat"

A Southern dialect word recorded by Tosco (1997: 200). A similar word for "goat", but with initial *f*-, appears in Ethio-Semitic, e.g. Amh. *fəyyäl* "goat", and in Agaw, e.g. Awngi *fiyeli* "goat" (form from Hetzron 1978: 138). It is usually assumed (Appleyard 1977: 67; Leslau 1979, III: 252) that the word was borrowed from Agaw into Ethio-Semitic rather than vice versa. I have argued (Peust 2003a) that *f* > *b* is a regular sound change in the history of Somali. This makes a connection to *bojel* highly probable.

Similar words for "goat" are encountered also in Nubian languages where they might have been borrowed from Cushitic (Bechhaus-Gerst 1989: 32).

Som. **far** "to send, give a message"

In Reinisch 1902: 151 attested also as a noun "message". Cognates are only known from rather closely related Lowland Eastern Cushitic languages: Baiso *far* "to send", Afar *farrim* "to send, command, send a message". The comparison to a Southern Cushitic root **faad* "to count" by Kießling & Mous (2003: 102) is both semantically and phonologically unsatisfying.

¹ Unless indicated otherwise, word forms are cited from the following sources: Parker & Hayward (1985) for Afar; Kane (1990) for Amharic; Wehr (1985) for Arabic; Hayward (1979) for Baiso; Roper (1928) for Beja; Sasse (1982) for Burji; Tosco (2001) for Dhaasanač; Hannig (1995) for Egyptian; Leslau (1991) for Geʕez; Mous et al. (2002) for Iraqw; Cerulli (1951) for Kafa; Gragg (1982) and Tilahun (1989) for Oromo; Pillinger & Galboran (1999) for Rendille; Gasparini (1983) for Sidamo; Agostini et al. (1985) and Zorc & Osman (1993) for Somali; Lamberti & Sottile (1997) for Wolaytta.

The following language abbreviations are employed: Amh. = Amharic; Arab. = Arabic; Dha. = Dhaasanač; Egypt. = Egyptian; Hebr. = Hebrew; Ir. = Iraqw; Or. = Oromo; Rend. = Rendille; Sid. = Sidamo; Som. = Somali; Wol. = Wolaytta.

I use the common orientalist transcription symbols for most languages. Only Somali is cited in its official orthography (i.e.: c = /ʕ/; dh = /dʰ/; j = /j/; sh = /ʃ/; x = /x/).

I propose a connection to Som. *far* "script, handwriting" and Afar *feeris* "to write". Historical plausibility suggests that the Cushitic words for "script / to write" were borrowed from Old Nubian *par* "to write" (form from Browne 1996: 145f.), which means that the shift in meaning must have proceeded from "script / write" towards "send". The closeness of both semantic concepts is paralleled by the Egypt. verb *h3b* (the conventional transcription symbol 3 stands for /t/) "to send, to send a message, to write a letter", which after a proposal by Schneider (2003: 195) is the source of the Berber root *ʔb "to write" and, as I wish to add, for the terms for "to write" in several other African languages such as Kanuri *rwwo-* and Hausa *ribiùtáá*.

Som. *gefer* "to run loose (usually of a horse)"

Rendille has a verb *fir-d'* "to flee, run away" (*-d'* - medio-passive suffix) which can be combined with the ablative preverb *ka-*, productive in both Rendille and Somali, to result in *ka-fir-d'* "to flee from, run away from (some danger)". It appears that two comparable items once existed at an earlier stage of Som., but **ka-fir-* underwent a process of univertation which lead to phonetic developments obscuring the etymological relationship between both forms. The form **fir-d'* - may, as Heine (1981: 186) thinks, survive with some change in meaning in Som. *firdho* "to scatter, disperse (intr.)". On the other hand, I suggest that **ka-fir-* survives in Som. *gefer*.

The development *-a-i- > -e-e-* is in agreement with a general trend towards word-internal vowel levelling in Som. and can probably be regarded as the regular phonetic development; cf. Som. *leben* "bricks" < Arab. *labin* and Som. *meseggo* = Baiso *bašinqa* = Burji *ma(y)nqoo*, all "millet". This also explains why the initial velar failed to undergo a palatalization which would have been expected before an original front vowel (Lamberti 1986: 246). An analogous process *-a-u- > -o-o-* can be observed e.g. in Som. *dhogor* "animal's coat, pelt" = Ge'ez *s'ägwr* "hair, fur", to be reconstructed approximately as **č'agur*. Most Som. words that have one of the short vowel sequences *-a-i-* or *-a-u-* today are obvious borrowings or secondary formations.

The voicing of initial *k > g* is irregular by the present state of our knowledge but not unparalleled, consider Som. *gafiur* "area around the mouth, snout, muzzle" = Ge'ez *kānfār* "lip" and Som. *galoof* "animal giving no milk" (Agostini et al. 1985, Zorc & Osman 1993) ~ "a female not at the moment pregnant" (Abraham 1962) ~ "barren woman or animal" (Reinisch 1902) = saho *kuruuf* "impotent" (form and etymology from Reinisch 1890: 221). The presence of an *f* in all three examples may not be accidental.

Som. *geri* "giraffe"

Closely related Rendille also has *geri* "giraffe". The preservation of the initial velar points to an earlier **gari*. Other evident Cushitic cognates are lacking, but some Eastern Nilotic languages have a root **kr*, e.g. Turkana *e-kori*, Bari *kurit* (forms from Voßen 1982: 374). In Semitic, we find words evidencing a base **zr-*: Ge'ez *zārat*, Arab. *zurāfa(h)* "giraffe" (with a suffix *-f* of unknown origin). Already Reinisch (1896) suspected a connection at least between the Somali and the Ge'ez forms. The Semitic words appear to have been borrowed from a form such as **geri* or **keri* after it had been palatalized into something like **žeri* or **šeri* in the hypothetical African donor language.

Egyptian has a word *sr* written with a giraffe hieroglyph. Its usual meaning is "to predict, announce", but the word is also attested as "giraffe" proper (some occurrences are cited by Meeks 1981: 336). This probably derives from the same source.

The European words come from Arabic via Italian *giraffa* (/ʒ-/). It is curious that the stop pronunciation, which I consider original, has been restituted by misinterpretation of the Italian writing in some languages such as German *Giraffe* and Finnish *kirahvi*.

Som. **hoos** "bottom; down"

The only cognate known to me is *hussem* "to bend down, become low" in the closely related Baiso language, where *-(e)m* is a medio-passival verbal extension. This is another example of the Somali simplification of long consonants with compensatory lengthening of the preceding vowel as described by Ehret (1991: 271).

Or. **intala** "daughter, girl"

No etymology has so far been proposed for this item of the core vocabulary. Konso, the closest relative of Oromo, has a form *inanta* "girl, daughter" (Black 1974: 221), which does show some resemblance. In Somali, we have *inan* "boy; (with different accentuation:) girl"; *ilm-o* "children". This clearly points (with Lamberti 1986: 334) to a stem **il(a)m-*, from which *inan* resulted by nasal assimilation at a distance. The representation of *-m* as *-n* is trivial since *-m* is not tolerated as a word final consonant in Somali. This stem **il(a)m-* again seems (with Dolgopolskij 1973: 188f.) to be an extension with the medio-passival suffix *-m-* from the wide-spread Cushitic-Omotiic root **il ~ *yel* "to give birth" (e.g. Sid. *ila* "to beget, bear", Wol. *yel-* "to give birth"), which in its turn could be identical to Egypt. *jwr* "to be(come) pregnant" (on the correspondency Cushitic *l* = Egypt. *r* see Peust 2003b: 349). The designation of "child" as "born one" is obvious and found in many languages, e.g. Danish *barn*, Greek *τέκνον*, etc.

Returning now to *intala*, I suggest that it was derived by metathesis from a Proto-Oromoid form **ilanta*. Konso *inanta* developed from the same **ilanta* with a nasal assimilation like the one found in Somali. This **ilanta* appears to be an expansion with a suffix *-ta* from **ilam-*, which survives in Oromo as *ilma* "son". The suffix *-ta* must have been a feminine suffix, but it is no longer productive in the language (modern Oromo has a feminine suffix *-tii*).

Ir. **naaʿ** "to fear, be afraid"

It seems practically certain that this verb is related to East Cushitic words such as Som. *nax* "to be startled, frightened", Or. *naʿ* "to be excited, startled, frightened", and Burji *naʿ* "to fear". The sound correspondence for the second radical is the same as with Ir. *baaʿ* "to exceed" discussed above.

Som. **qoor** "neck"

This is the base entry given in all the dictionaries I consulted. No satisfactory etymology has been found. Leslau (1963: 128) compares hesitatingly Harari *qaru* "shoulder blade".

Zorc & Osman (1993: 332) cite *qoodh* as an alternative form of *qoor*. According to Lamberti (1986: 164), the noun *qoor* is predominantly used in the Benaadir dialects, where, according to a well-known rule (Lamberti 1986: 345f.), *dh* shifted to *r* in postvocalic position. This makes it probable that *qoodh* would be the etymologically expected form for standard Somali and the dominating realisation as *qoor* is due to a dialectal origin of the word. Departing from *qoodh*, it is easy to find further cognates such as Af-Jiddu *quj'* "back of the neck" (form from Lamberti 1986: 164), Or. *quč'ee* "nape, the back of the neck" (form from Stroomer 1995: 202), or Kafa *qett'oo* "neck". To be reconstructed approximately as **qučč'*. On the development of the vowel cf. *hoos* above.

Som. **shinni** "bee(s)"

It is a rule of thumb for Somali that most long consonants are the result of a comparatively recent assimilation of consonant clusters since the original geminates have largely been simplified in this

language (Ehret 1991: 271f.). The question therefore arises what the origin of *-nn-* is here. Cognates such as Rend. *ĕinni* "bee" and even more so Or. *kanniisa* "bee" make it clear in the first place that *sh-* is from **k-* by the well-known palatalization rule (Lamberti 1986: 246). There now happens to be a noun *kaneeco* "mosquito(es)" in Somali. I suggest that *shinni* and *kaneeco* are two different nominal formations from a single root **kn^ɕ* "insect that stings". *Shinni* therefore goes back to a form such as **kin^ɕi*. Other words which probably belong here as well are Elmolo *kenete* (form from Heine 1980: 206) and Kafa *šunoo*, both "mosquito".

In view of this, the connection of Som. *shinni* to Hebr. *kinnām* "gnats" envisaged by Militarev & Kogan (2005: No. 116) becomes somewhat less convincing, unless it could be shown that *-ɕ-* could be lost by assimilation also in Semitic. The Hebr. word is probably rather to be connected with Egypt. *fnms* "mosquito", as suggested already by Gesenius (1905: 317), and perhaps even with Greek *κόωνω* "mosquito".

Som. *tataji* "to push"

The ending *-i* is a causative suffix. There is also a verb *taqaantaqi* with the same meaning. Assuming that both words are related, it becomes plausible to reconstruct their original forms as **taq-taq-i* and **taq-aan-taq-i* respectively. The structure *X-aan-X* is otherwise attested as a word formation pattern in Som. and related languages, such as in Som. *buraanbur* "poem; to sing a poem", Som. *giraangir* "wheel", and Som. *culaacul* "leech" (< **cul-aan-cul*, cf. Or. *ulaanʔula* "worm in water that attacks cow's tongue" mentioned by Gragg 1982: 131).

In the former variety, the cluster **-qt-* was simplified to *-t-*. Some cluster must be reconstructed here in any case because an original **-t-* would have been voiced to *-d-* (Lamberti 1986: 280). The palatalization **qi > ji* is regular (Lamberti 1986: 252f.) but it was suppressed in *taqaantaqi* which is still synchronically recognizable as a reduplicated structure.

The presumed simplex **taq* survives in two languages of the greater Somaloid group, namely Rend. *taḥ* and Dha. *taʔ*, both "to push". Sasse (1982: 177) connects these latter words to Or. *tuq* "to touch", where, however, the different vowel remains without explanation.

Som. *tiraab* "to talk"

This is an obvious derivation from the same root **tir-* that also forms the base of Som. *tiri* "to count". The verbal extension *-aab* (*-aaw*) has been discussed by Hayward (1984: 99f.) and Saeed (1993: 67). The connection between both semantic concepts is otherwise known from Cushitic: Beja *ḍigwi* "to count, to inform" = Agaw *dəqaw* (and varieties) "to speak" (Agaw form by Appleyard 1984: 40; etymology by Ehret 1987: 95), and even from Germanic: English *tell* = German *zählen* "to count", *erzählen* "to tell".

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