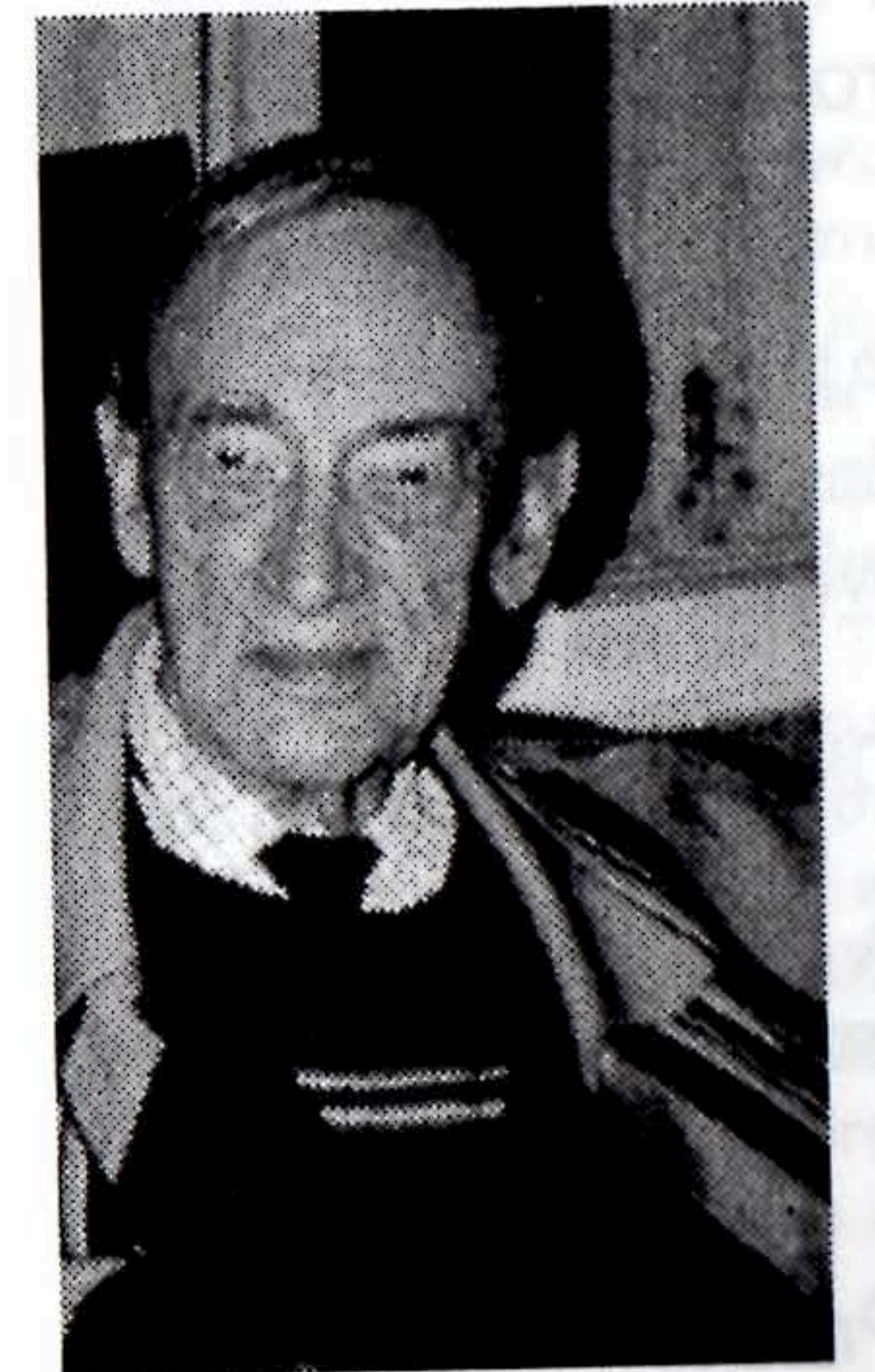


Selected Comparative- Historical Afrasian Linguistic Studies

in Memory of Igor M. Diakonoff

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2003
LINCOM EUROPA

AFRASIAN: SELECTED COMPARATIVE-HISTORICAL LINGUISTIC STUDIES IN
MEMORY OF IGOR M. DIAKONOFF

Ed. by M. Lionel Bender, David Appleyard, and Gábor Takács
Lincom Europa, 2003, München
Pp. 87-92

10. CUSHITIC AND OMOTIC OVERVIEW
MAURO TOSCO

1. Background

According to a generally-held, but not uncontroversial, view two separate indigenous Afrasian branches are spoken in East Africa: Cushitic and Omotic. As will become apparent below, there is no general consensus on their external limits nor on the internal composition of these branches, while the very status of Omotic as an independent branch is still disputed.

The Cushitic languages are spoken from the Egypt-Sudan border to the North, along the Sudanese coast, across most of Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa, and Northern Kenya. Pockets of Cushitic speakers are found further south in Tanzania. There are probably between 35 and 40 million speakers of Cushitic languages. The bulk of these live in Ethiopia, where, according to the most recent census, there were 26 million speakers of Cushitic languages out of a total population slightly exceeding 53 million: i.e., one half of the Ethiopians speak a Cushitic language. To this number one must add the much smaller populations of Somalia and Jibouti, as well as substantial minorities in Kenya and Eritrea and smaller portions of the populations of Sudan and Tanzania (as well as many expatriates). Oromo is the first language in terms of number of speakers, with almost 17 million in Ethiopia and a few hundred thousand in Kenya. Somali ranks second with at least nine million; lagging well behind, one finds Sidamo, 'Afar, Beja, &c. At the other extreme of the spectrum, apart from extinct Elmolo, Yaaku, and Asax, one can mention Dahalo in Kenya (probably 400 speakers) and Bayso in Ethiopia (500?). Several Agaw varieties are also endangered.

Omotic is much smaller and entirely contained within Southwest Ethiopia (a variety of Ganza once spoken in Sudan has apparently died out); there are approximately four million speakers of Omotic languages. The lion's share is taken by Wolaytta and the closely related Omoto languages (Gamo, Gofa, Basketo, Male, Chara, &c.) with a total of about three million.

2. Classification

a. Cushitic

Cushitic is generally divided into four coordinate branches: North, Central, East, and South. East Cushitic is the most complex branch and alone makes up the great majority of all the Cushitic languages.

North Cushitic is made up of a single language, Beja, whose membership in the Cushitic family has often been disputed, most notably by Hetzron (1980). Among others, Zaborski has addressed the question in a number of works (v., e.g., Zaborski [1997]), and most scholars agree that Beja is a bona fide, although probably the most divergent, Cushitic language, maybe representing the very first split off Common Cushitic. Along these lines, Voigt (1996) has proposed that the first division within Cushitic opposes a Northern (represented by Beja) and a Southern branch (all the other languages).

The status of Central Cushitic (made up of the several Agaw languages spoken in the Ethiopian Highlands: Bilin, Kemant, Kwara, Khamtanga, Awngi) as a major branching has also

been called into question, the alternative solution being to attach it to East Cushitic. After Hetzron's (1980) proposal of a Central Cushitic–Highland East Cushitic branch (which he called "Highland Cushitic"), Zaborski (2001) has recently supported a major "downgrading" of Central Cushitic into East Cushitic on the basis of evidence in the prefix verbs.

Finally, the very existence of a separate South Cushitic branch has been a bone of contention since its birth (Greenberg 1963). The flaws in Ehret's (1980) comparative reconstruction have often been pointed out. Of the allegedly South Cushitic languages, Asax and Kw'adza are practically unknown, another (Ma'a or Mbugu) has been at times regarded as a mixed language and presents in any case special problems to classification, and still another, Dahalo, is certainly peripheral to South Cushitic and possibly belongs to East Cushitic (v. Tosco 2000). What remains is a cluster of languages and dialects centered around Iraqw. Hetzron (1980) and Ehret (1995) have proposed dragging Iraqw and its "satellites" within the orbit of East Cushitic. Kießling (2001) has recently reviewed the evidence but has found it mostly based upon typological data and inconclusive.

Within East Cushitic, a major division (dating from Reinisch) is traditionally drawn between a Lowland and a Highland group. While the unitary status of the much smaller Highland East Cushitic (with such languages as Sidamo, Hadiyya, Kambata, Burji) is more or less clear, no coherent internal classification of Lowland East Cushitic has been reached so far. Moreover, this dichotomy leaves out a few languages whose position is unclear: the Dullay cluster and the now extinct Yaaku. In an alternative, "flatter" view, no mention of a unitary Lowland group is made and the whole of East Cushitic is divided into at least the following parallel groups: a. Highland East Cushitic; b. Saho–'Afar; c. Omo–Tana (Somali, Rendille, Bayso, Dhaasanac, Arbore, etc.); d. Oromoid (Oromo, Konso and various "Konsoid" varieties); e. Dullay; f. Yaaku (or, alternatively, e.+f. are grouped together in a Yaaku–Dullay group; e.g., Hayward [1978]). In Tosco (2000) I have proposed the following picture, in which each successive node branches off in a binary way: {a. Highland; b. Lowland {b.1. Saho–'Afar; b.2. Southern {b.2.α. Nuclear {b.2.α.I. Omo–Tana; b.2.α.II. Oromoid}; b.2.β. Transversal {b.2.β.I. Dullay; b.2.β.II. Yaaku}}}}.

b. Omotic

Moreno (1940) had already proposed to divide Cushitic into two basic groups according to the shape of the independent personal pronouns of 1st and 2nd Singular: while most languages keep the Afrasian–inherited **ani** (1st) and **ati** (2nd), the West Cushitic languages had apparently the reverse pattern, with **ta** (1st) and **ne** (2nd). In 1969 Harold Fleming first proposed detaching from the bulk of Cushitic the "**ta/ne**–languages" and attaching them directly under Afrasian. Fleming's view was backed up by Bender, and has become standard, although staunch criticism of the "Omotic Hypothesis" has been expressed several times, especially by Zaborski (1986) and by Lamberti (esp. 1987, 1993). The whole question of the **ani/ati** vs. **ta/ne** isogloss is probably overstated; Bender (2000) has proposed to derive the 1st Sg. **ta** from a former copula, while 2nd Sg. **ne** could well be a retention from Afrasian.

Bender (1986) put forward a bridging hypothesis under the label of "Cushomotic", within which the highest split would oppose Omotic and Cushitic. If, following recent attempts to lump together one or more of the four traditional Cushitic branches, Central Cushitic is downgraded to a branch of East Cushitic, and if South Cushitic suffers a similar fate, one will end up with two branches only: North (i.e., Beja), and all the rest (cf. also

Voigt's [1996] hypothesis mentioned above); Omotic would be either coordinate to Cushitic, or the first split within a "Southern Afrasian" family. On the other hand, Ehret (1995) and also Bender in his most recent studies, e.g., Bender (1997), have argued that Omotic is so poor in Afrasian features that it must be regarded as the first split within the phylum.

Within Omotic, even who denies its very existence as a separate branch of Afrasian is agreed that a major cleavage opposes a Northern and a smaller Southern group. South Omotic (or "Aroid") is made up of Dime, Aari, and Hamer (actually, a still essentially undescribed chain of dialects spoken by the Hamer, the Banna, the Bashada, the Karo, and possibly others). Overall, there are approximately 200,000 speakers of South Omotic varieties. Doubts have always been expressed about the Omotic (or Cushitic) status of South Omotic and even upon its Afrasian character. Lamberti (1993) has proposed considering it a major subdivision of Cushitic, which would consist of the following branches: {a. North (Beja); b. Central (Agaw); c. West (i.e., Omotic but without its Southern branch); d. Lowland; e. Burji–Sidamo (i.e., Highland East Cushitic); f. South; g. Ari–Banna (i.e., South Omotic); a. and g. would be the most conservative and peripheral Cushitic branches, against an innovative "central core". On the other hand, the genetic relationship of North and South Omotic has recently been defended and further supported by Hayward and Tsuge (1998).

Traditionally, all the other Omotic languages were grouped together as North Omotic. More recently, a more variegated picture has begun to emerge: Bender (2000) has proposed a "TN Family" (from the 1st and 2nd Singular personal pronouns **ta** and **ne**), made up of the Gonga languages (prominent among them Kefa, with well over half a million speakers), the Omoto languages, Yem (a single language, also called "Yemsa", and formerly "Janjero"), and Gimira (a collective term for Bench, She and possibly other varieties, with almost 200,000 speakers altogether). A rather divergent "Dizoid" group, made up of Dizi, Nayi, and Sheko (almost 50,000 speakers altogether) is also often included in North Omotic. On the other hand, morphologically these languages are more akin to South Omotic, and Bender (2000) has proposed a "DA Family" [: Dizoid+Aroid]).

Finally, a special problem is posed by the poorly-known Mao languages; according to Bender (2000) they represent the very first split within Omotic; certainly, they are the most deviant Omotic languages — possibly the result of language "hybridization" (Bender, p.c.).

3. Phonology

Typologically interesting among the consonants of Cushitic are the Afrasian–inherited pharyngeals /ʕ/ and /ħ/, preserved among others in East Cushitic Somali and 'Afar and in South Cushitic Iraqw. Most Cushitic languages have ejectives, many also have implosives; the phonemic inventory of Oromo (Welledda dialect; East Cushitic; data from Gragg [1976]; marginal/loan phonemes between parentheses) is:

/b/, (/p/), /p'/, (/v/), /f/, /m/, /w/, /d/, /t/, /d/, /t'/, (/z/), /s/, /n/, /l/, /r/, /j/, /j/, /c/, /c'/, /ʃ/, /ɲ/, /g/, /k/, /k'/, /ŋ/, /h/

Typical of South Cushitic are the laterals /t'/ and /l/ and the labio-velars; the inventory of Iraqw (Mous 1993) is:

/b/, /p/, /f/, /m/, /d/, /t/, /ts'/, /s/, /n/, /r/, /t'/, /l/, (/ɕ/), (/ʃ/), (/ʒ/), (/ɲ/), /j/, /g/, /k/, /q/, /x/, /ɲ/, /g^w/, /k^w/, /q^w/, /x^w/, /ŋ^w/, /w/, /ʕ/, /ħ/, /l/, /h/

A full series of labiovelars is also found in Central Cushitic languages, which have fairly rich inventories; Khamtanga (Appleyard 1987) is typical in this regard:

/b/, /f/, /m/, /w/, /d/, /t/, t'/, /z/, /s/, /s'/, /n/, /l/, /r/, /j/, /ɕ/, /ʃ/, /ʃ'/, /ʒ/, /g/, /k/, /q/, /x/, /ŋ/, /gʷ/, /kʷ/, /xʷ/, /ŋʷ/, /k'/, /k'ʷ/, /h/

The Proto-East-Cushitic consonant inventory has been reconstructed by Sasse (1979), while reconstructions at the family level (e.g., Dolgopol'skij' [1973] and Ehret [1995] are more tentative.

All in all, most Omotic languages have simpler inventories; typical is the presence of alveolar affricates, as in Zayse (Hayward 1990):

/b/, /p/, /β/, /m/, /w/, /d/, /t/, /d/, /z/, /s/, /dʒ/, /ts/, /ts'/, /n/, /l/, /r/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ɕ/, /ʃ/, /ʃ'/, /j/, /g/, /k/, /k'/, /ŋ/, /h/

Dahalo is the northernmost language in the world with a phonological click, the dental /l/, most probably preserved from a Khoisan substratum; the click is found in about fifty words (some of them belonging to the basic vocabulary), e.g., **ŋlaba** 'forest'.

The Agaw (Central Cushitic) languages have the "typical" Ethiopian seven-vowel system, with /i/, /e/, /a/, /æ/, /o/, /u/, plus a central vowel /ɨ/. Most other languages have a five-vowel system with phonological vowel length. Several Somali varieties also have distinctive [±ATR] vowels, for a total of twenty vocalic phonemes, cf. Somali **dúul** [+ATR] 'attack!' vs. **dúul** [-ATR] 'fly!'.

Most Cushitic languages are pitch-accent languages, in which accent is realized as high tone and is rarely used contrastively in the lexicon, but largely in morphology; cf. Dhaasanac **só** 'meat, flesh' vs. **sò** 'meats, pieces of meat' (Tosco 2001), and Somali **keenin** 'to take, Imperative Negative Singular' vs. **keenín** 'to take, Invariable (Past and Subordinate) Negative'. Bench (Omotic) has as many as six tones (Wedekind 1990).

4. Morphosyntax

Cushitic and Omotic languages are generally dependent-marking and verb-final at sentence level. The Agaw languages are quite strict in their OV syntax, while most East Cushitic languages (with the notable exception of Saho and 'Afar) generally place the modifiers after their head, often giving rise to typologically unusual word order patterns. Typical of East and South Cushitic is the development of complex mechanisms for focus marking, often supplemented by obligatory Subject Clitics.

Many languages oppose an Absolutive form of the noun and a Subject case, often marked only at the end of the relevant phrase and when not in focus. Traces of the Afrasian case marking are found in the (Unfocused) Subject Case *-i. Dropping of the final short vowels may result in tonal case-marking, as in Somali **nín** 'man (Absolutive Case)' vs. **nin** 'man (Unfocused Subject Case)'. The Genitive is often marked by *-Vt, as in Somali **-eed**. Gender is generally expressed by *-t for the Feminine and *-k for the Masculine. Number marking often has derivational character and may involve a Singulative and a Plural opposed to a number-indefinite form.

Traces of the old Afrasian prefix conjugation are found in each subgroup apart from South Cushitic, but, except in Beja and in Saho-'Afar, prefix-conjugated verbs are residual, being preserved in a handful of verbs only in many Omo-Tana languages (Dhaasanac, Rendille, Somali) and in Bilin (Agaw), and being completely absent in other groups (Oromoid, Dullay, etc.). The productive verbal conjugation avails itself of suffixes, which a time-honored tradition (the so-called "Pratorius-hypothesis") regards as the last trace of a prefix-conjugated auxiliary verb which was suffixed to a nominal form of the verb and later

underwent fusion with it. In many languages (e.g., in Highland East Cushitic) the same development has occurred more than once and has given rise to new suffix-conjugated paradigms. The basic paradigms consist of a Past, a Non-Past, and a Dependent or a Present Negative. These paradigms are generally characterized by the endings *-i, *-a, and *-u, respectively, which follow the subject-marking suffixes. Traces of a common Afrasian Stative conjugation are found in the Non-Past of the adjectival verbs in Saho and Somali, but also in the Affirmative Past in Burji and elsewhere (Banti 1987, forthcoming).

Cushitic and Omotic verbs have rich derivational systems, with at least a Causative (generally marked by *-s), a Reflexive-Middle (whose exponent is generally *-d or *-t), a Passive (marked by *-m, but lost or lexicalised in many languages), and various denominal extensions. Partial or total reduplication is common, generally with an iconic meaning: plural in nouns (e.g., Somali **dab** 'fire', **dabab** 'fires') and repetitive/iterative, or the like, in verbs.

5. Lexicon

The lexicon of Omotic is specifically discussed in this volume by Bender (v. Ch. 11; v. also Bender 2002). The percentages of lexical cognates between Cushitic languages are extremely low. As the four branches can be arranged on a North-South axis, cognates are generally higher between neighboring branches; according to Ehret (1976), they range from as low as 5-6% between North (Beja) and South Cushitic, and 8-14% between geographical neighboring groups (such as Central and East branches). It is therefore no surprise that attempts at lexical reconstruction have generally been limited to the single branches of Cushitic, with a particular emphasis on East Cushitic (v. Sasse [1982]).

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