

# The History of South Cushitic

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# Preliminaries

My current state of thinking. Work = we – interpretation = me

No time for proof of all details

Most work with others; LHEAf [www.lheaf.org](http://www.lheaf.org)

# 1. South Cushitic is a primary branch of Cushitic

- presented at [ICHL](#) Heidelberg
- Contra suggestions and doubt after Hetzron 1980
- Following Kiessling 2001
- **Argument 1:** the retention of the lateral fricative and ejective affricates that have been reconstructed for proto Cushitic and shown to be retentions within Afroasiatic. The other Cushitic branches innovated resulting in loss of these sounds

Beer, Sam, Andrew Harvey, Maarten Mous, Christian J. Rapold, Terrill Schrock and Ahmed Sosal in press. Lateral obstruents in East Africa from an areal and historical perspective: A case for contact-induced non-change,

Hetzron, Robert 1980. The limits of Cushitic *SUGIA* 2:7-126

Kießling, Roland. 2001. South Cushitic links to East Cushitic. In Zaborski, Andrzej (ed.), *New data and new methods in Afroasiatic linguistics: Robert Hetzron in memoriam*, 95-102. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag.

Mous, Maarten 2023. The classification of South Cushitic. Paper at ICHL Heidelberg

# Lateral fricative retention

P-Tanzanian Cushitic	Afroasiatic links
ɫaaʔ 'want'	Chadic: Gwandara só ~ ʃó 'want', Goemay sa 'like', proto Semitic *ɫiiʔ- 'wish'
ɫaw 'get, find'	PChadic: *ɫəwə 'accept, answer' Newman (1977: 22 #1)
ɫuf 'swell'	Old-Egyptian ʃ-f 'swell'; West Chadic ɫafaf 'heat up, make hot' (Orel & Stolbova)
ɫi:mfa (f) 'lip'	PSemitic *ɫap-at- 'lip' (Kogan 2011:222)
<sup>ALBU</sup> niinga-ɫaaba 'monitor lizard'	PWestSemitic *ɫ'əbb- 'monitor lizard' (Kogan 2011:211).

# The lateral ejective affricate

- The reconstruction of **tɬ'** in this pronunciation for proto South Cushitic is straightforward.
- The phonetic value of **tɬ'** (and/or **tɬ**) for proto-Afroasiatic consonants is proposed on the basis of phonetic plausibility of correspondences and naturalness in loan adaptations.

Proto Tanzanian Cushitic	Cushitic	Remarks
*tɬ'aw (v) 'get up, rise, fly'	Oromo d'aab- 'upright, erect' (KM:280)	PAA âa' / âaw / âay move upwards (O&S 516)
*tɬ'eed (adj.sg) 'long'	PEC *d' <sub>1</sub> iir- 'male', Oromo d'eera 'long'	PAA âîhar- grow, be long (O&S: 555)
*ɣeetɬ' (v) 'be unripe'	Arbore heedd'í 'raw', Afar ɣeed' 'be raw', Somali ɣayd'iin 'unripe'.	This corresponds to ECush d' <sub>1</sub> '
*tɬ'apaa (n.sg.f) 'level ground, depression'	PEC *d' <sub>1</sub> aff- 'meadow'	
*tɬ'afiya (n.sgv.f) 'cloud'	Somali dhaaf- 'pass by, overtake'.	regular reflex of d' <sub>1</sub> ' in Somali is dh [d].
*tɬ'aɣaangw (n.sg.m) 'middle'	Somali dhehh 'waist, middle'	
*tɬ'aa/a (n.sg.f) 'rock'	Somali dhaɣa 'sound of a falling stone'	
*tɬ'eeqw (v) 'dam up'	PEC *d' <sub>1</sub> ak' / *d' <sub>1</sub> ik' 'wash'. (Sasse 1997)	
*tɬ'ibiɣ (v) 'push'	PEC *d' <sub>1</sub> iib- 'squeeze' (Borana Oromo d'iiba 'push')	
*tɬ'ub (v) 'rain'	PEC *d' <sub>1</sub> ub- 'dip in'	
*tɬ'ubaɣa (n.sg.m) 'upper arm'	Afar d'abɣe 'armpit'	This corresponds to ECush d' <sub>1</sub> '
ALBU *tɬ'uḥ-iya (n.sgv.f) 'elbow'	PEC *d' <sub>1</sub> ikl- 'elbow'	
*tɬ'uumfuqáa (n.sg.tant.f) 'mixture of mud and wet dung'	PEC *d' <sub>1</sub> ookk'- 'mud'	
*tɬ'up (v) 'smash'	PEC *d' <sub>1</sub> uf- 'close, shut'	
*qatɬ' (v) 'die, be finished'	Somali qadhid 'die out'; pCentralC	

# But

- pTanzanian Cush  $*t\ddot{t}'$  = pEastCush  $*d_1'$  but few cognates in the rest of Cushitic: Possibly Beja  $d$ , Central Cush  $t$
- Nowhere in East Cushitic is there a sound  $t\ddot{t}'$  but it cannot be excluded that Proto East Cushitic  $*d_1'$  was pronounced  $t\ddot{t}'$  with parallel loss in the EC branches

# Retention of rounded velars

- rounded velars of proto South Cushitic are shared with Central Cush
- for some in cognate lexical items, e.g. pTanzanian Cush **\*daqw-ay** (m) ‘donkey <> Bilin (Central Cush) **duqwara** ‘donkey’.
- hence, South Cushitic did not share the East Cushitic innovation of loss of rounding in velars

But

- amount of evidence is limited



# Lexical evidence

- Shared vocabulary and lexical meaning between Beja = commonly considered the first branch
- East Cushitic or Central Cushitic innovated,
- Either by replacement of the lexical item or developing a different lexical meaning
- unlikely that cognates in East Cushitic are simply not yet found because there the best dictionaries
- Using Václav Blažek's work on Beja etymology

## South not part of East Cushitic on weight of lexical innovations

Beja	East Cushitic	CentralCush	South Cushitic	Comments
ageriisó <sup>Rp</sup> apart, on one side	*gaar- edge; eyebrow		PIRQ*geeraa (m) 'front'	semantic innovation in EC not shared by SC
ála <sup>Rp</sup> neck	*ʔalʔal- 'back of the neck'		*ʔaluu-ngw (n) 'back side, rear'	Reduplication innovation in EC not shared by SC
daba <sup>Rp</sup> chest, breast	PEC *laʔb- 'breast-bone'	*dzab- front side	PNWR*daʕab a (n) 'chest'	d>l in EC not shared by SC (nor Beja)
gwáraar <sup>Rp</sup> large intestine, colon	*gurʔ- udder	Bilin gir & jir belly; Awngi guriŋya	*guraʔa (m) 'belly'	Semantic innovation in EC not shared by SC

Beja	East-Cushitic	Central Cush	p-Tz Cush
hami <sup>Rp</sup> hair, wool, hámo <sup>Re</sup> eyelash	-	-	PIRQ*ḥama-ḥam-imo (m) ‘eyebrow eyelid’
túmba <sup>Re</sup> hole, opening, anus	-	-	PNWR*tuumba (m) ‘pond, pool, puddle’
amas adv. at night <small>PSem *ams- ‘yesterday (night)’ ? Beja &lt; Arabic ʔamsi ‘yesterday’</small>	-	-	*ʔamasi (n) ‘night’
darák die kalte Jahreszeit (Re)	-	-	Iraqw daraqi ‘coolness’
haš m ground, earth (HuB)	-	-	*ḥas-aangw (m) ‘sand’
eelaat f ‘water hole’ (Wd)	-	-	PNWR*ḥaala (f) ‘well, waterhole’
amar m ‘cave’ (Wd)	-	-	*mara'-oo (f) ‘caves’
s'ai ‘mist’ (HuB) oos'aav	-	-	*tsa' (adj.sg) ‘cool’

# interim summary

- No arguments from morphology, except South Cush retention of **ku/ki** 2sg.m <> 2sg.f distinction. Versus loss of the *semantic* distinction in East C; with retention of both forms
- On the weight of arguments: South Cushitic is not part of East Cushitic and a major branch
- Later more of the apparent East Cush appeal of South Cushitic
- Early migration of South Cushitic, but where to?

## 2. proto Tanzanian South Cushitic is influenced by Oromo

- Kiessling-Mous-Rapold (about to be submitted)
- We propose **21 transfers** from (early) Oromo to proto TzCush; plus some derivational nominal derivations
- For some we can show they have undergone specific Oromo sound changes, e.g.  $s > f$ : hence Oromo and not a higher node
- Envisaging such contact is a challenge because of the huge distance between the language area and the relatively recent period when Oromo had evolved as a separate language

# Just a few examples

Or. **foo-ni** → PWR **fuʔun-ay**

PEC **soʔ-** ‘meat’

Oromo **foː-ni** ‘meat’ (-  
MASS)

pTzC **fuʔun-ay** ‘meat’ (-  
COLL)

Or. **ja:l** → PWR **ʔaʔ**

PEC **geʔl-** ‘to love’

Oromo **ja:l-** ‘to love’

pTzC **ʔaʔ** ‘to love, like,  
want’

Or. **jaba’a** ‘strong, healthy’ →

pTzC **ʔaf** ‘alive’

Or. **ijjeera** → PWR **ʔaaraḥí**

PEC **gerḥ-** / ‘carix grass’

**lerḥ-**

Oromo **ijjeer-a** ‘to thatch’

PTzC **ʔaaraḥi** ‘grain stalks’

Iraqw **ʔarḥi** ‘carix grass,  
papyrus’

(used for thatching)

Or **fintʔ-** ‘urine’ → pTzC **pits’-aḥ**

‘cow’s urine’

Or **gada** ‘age grade of elder

above 40’ → pTzC **gaduungw**

(n) ‘old people’

### 3. Proto Tanzanian South Cushitic has influenced proto South Nilotic and proto Kalenjin

- = presentation on last Cushitic conf in Paris
- The transfer of 11+ **core concepts (replacive)** and **verbs** shows that contact must have been **intense**. Possibly pK people being bilingual in pTzC.
- 14+ **Additive** borrowings: economic and cultural exchange
  - 4 Fauna terms suggest SN as new-comers
- only 1 pSN > pTzSC
- must have been east of Nyanza
- travel Datooga-TzSC in tandem to Kondoa

# pTzSC > pSN/pKaI

- AARA ‘goats/sheep’; ARAAR ‘see’; CAM ‘love, agree’; CAT ‘clip, cut’; †AKAAT ‘hunt’; OR ‘ashes’; TAKWEES ‘greeting’; TUP ‘bury, cover’; TEERIIT ‘dust’; TAA ‘guest’; WAAX ‘fear’;

- **Environment:**

KENEER ‘hyrax’; KUUTA ‘aardvark’; MAK ‘hippo’; SOORI ‘buffalo’; SUYE ‘wild dog’;

**Food production:**

CAR ‘bleed cow’; SOON ‘barren’; TOMPES ‘camel’; TUI ‘pound grain’;  
**Cultural artifacts and house**  
INKOR ‘apron’; SEPET ‘half-gourd’; TUKADUK ‘doorpost’; YAAMA ‘floor’;

**Social relations**

PANAN ‘pauper; orphan’





## 4. No East Rift

- Asá, once spoken in the Maasai plains, but earlier in Kilimanjaro, is more distantly related to the other Tanzanian (West-Rift) South Cushitic languages Based on:
- 1. the curious shift in numbers in which the original number for “two” comes to mean “three” is common to Iraqw, Gorwaa, Alagwa, Burunge, and Kw’adza but not Asá

●  
Mous, Maarten 2025 in Proceedings of ICHL 2022 Oxford

Iris Kruijsdijk. 2024. The position of Asá and Qwadza within Cushitic. In Yaqian Huang, Nina Hagen Kaldhol, Jun Jie Lim, Sharon Rose & Anthony Struthers-Young (eds.), ACAL in SoCAL: Selected papers from the 53rd Annual Conference on African Linguistics, 347–365. Berlin: Language Science Press. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.11210466

...

- 2. on sound correspondences, Asá is more different from West Rift than Qwadza.
- 3. Asá and Qwadza nouns correspond less to each other in terms of gender suffixes than Qwadza and Proto-West Rift do, and Asá and Proto-West Rift correspond less than Qwadza and Proto-West Rift.
- Asá stands further from Proto-West Rift than Qwadza does

## 5. There is heavy South Cushitic influence on EA Bantu

- About 150+ languages in Uganda-Kenya-Tanzania
- Arrival on northern coast Lake Victoria about 1500 BP (from 3000 BP pastoral presence there)
- Contact with the Cushitic + Nilotic societies in the Turkana corridor
- Considerable non-Bantu in Bantu:
- Dominique's database of proposed nonBantu loans in EA Bantu (725 entries)



# Transfer as window to history



- Transfer from Cushitic/Nilotic at some level of proto-EA Bantu (subsequent regular sound changes apply) provides some indication of place and time (only chronology) of contact, of people.
- [distinguish from transfer at low level, individual transfers Cushitic Bantu]
- Several areas of Non-Bantu – Bantu contact: East Nyanza filter, Taita+area, later Kalenjin-Luhya contact, (Sonjo), ..., challenge of southern distribution

# Male domestic animals

He-goat GULATA;

(Ram TULUME); (Ram KIRUK);

Bull JEKU/YAKAMBA/JAO all innovated in EA Bantu.

Trend in EA Bantu: male domestic animal term is innovated  
maybe because breeding became important

Mous, Maarten & Nina van der Vlugt. 2023. Presentation at LAEA Kampala and Bantu 10 in Dar es Salaam,

## 6. South Cushitic influence on the Bantu languages of Kenyan-Tanzanian mountains (TAITA-team)

- Taita team meeting fortnightly on zoom to look for the etymological sources of apparent non-Bantu vocabulary in the Bantu languages Saghala, Davida (in Taita), Chaga languages and Pare language.
- Building on previous proposals by Ehret and Nurse for Taita Cushitic languages on the sole basis of loans in Saghala, Davida
- Team: Derek Nurse, Bonny Sands, Mauro Tosco, Ed Elderkin, Ahmed Sosal, Christian Rapold, Sjef van Lier, Gérard Philippson, myself

# TAITA Cushitic preliminary results

- There is indeed a (or several) separate South Cushitic source(s) of loans into the Bantu languages of the Taita, Kilimanjaro, Pare and Usambara mountains.
- Into Saghala (+other): 20 potential transfers from Taita-Cush; 9 (12) from Dahalo, 14 from Coastal Bantu, ultimately Somali, 5 Maasai, 3 Oromo

...

- Hence: South Cushitic = Tanzanian Cushitic (Alagwa, Burunge, Gorwaa, Iraqw, Kw'adza) + *a cloud of shadows of Cushitic languages*: Those that influenced Saghala, Davida and the Chaga Bantu languages and the original Ma'á language)
- Possibly also Aasáx and Dahalo/Dahaloan
- difficult to impossible to determine the genealogical relationships of these shadows of languages



## 7. What is the relation between Dullay-Yaaku and South Cushitic?

- I have a number of lexical items in Tanzanian South Cushitic that could be Yaaku-Dullay transfers
- But also evidence that Tanzanian Cushitic and Yaaku-Dullay are separate branches

# recapitulation

- South Cushitic is an early branch of Cushitic
- They were relatively recent contacts with Oromo and Tanzanian South Cushitic and presumably in Kenya
- The entry of Tanzanian Cushitic into Tanzania must have been fairly recent
- The entry was from East of Lake Victoria into the Mara-Serengeti region

...

- Hence Cushitic influence on Bantu languages of Kenya and Tanzania is either very recent or the words travelled with the languages into Kenya and Tanzania
- There is a cloud of South Cushitic languages spoken roughly from Kilimanjaro to the coast of Kenya.
- Whether they form one branch is very difficult to establish; let alone how they relate to Tanzanian South Cushitic

# Thank you



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