

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE RELATIVE CHRONOLOGY OF THE CHADIC VOCABULARY

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SUMMARY

It is impossible to settle linguistic phenomena within the framework of an exact historical dating. This task may be only approximately carried out for languages with written sources from the past. For the Chadic languages these phenomena may be determined according to the presumed sequence of their appearance in time. The paper deals with some general linguistic assumptions which are often not obvious for specialists from other disciplines.

KEY-WORDS

Chadic languages, vocabulary, phonology, linguistic history, relative, absolute chronology

A natural language exists only in human society, in which it functions primarily as a means of communication. The history of a language is closely connected with the history of the society which it serves. The language development is a historical process and like all historical processes is time dimensional.

The history of each language includes two sides of its development : external and internal. The external history deals with the circumstances in which a language community has been existing - its territorial changes, contacts with the other communities and therefore language expansion or disappearance, mutual linguistic influences (e.g. loans), etc. Together with the development of a language in time, changes may appear in its own system, changes which take place gradually and unconsciously on the one hand, but on the other hand changes which the community gets used to and accepts. These changes create the internal history of a language.

When we examine a set of languages with numeral resemblances both in lexicon and grammatical structures, the reason for these resemblances is explained by language history. Exceptionally (unfortunately), there is only one case in linguistics, where the explanation is doubtless - the Romance languages all of which are modern forms of Latin, their ancestor well-known from written sources. Usually in all other cases we assume that the examined languages are genetically related, i.e. that they stem from primarily one ancestral language and that they now appear as its modern forms. "In the history of each language family three basic periods may be distinguished. The first one covers a relatively uniform development of a proto-language on a small area which is its proto-cradle. In the course of the second period the area of the proto-language quickly enlarges due to territorial expansion and at the same time begins to differentiate into dialects. During the third period the communicative unity of the proto-language disappears and the separate dialects, existing already in the second period, become separate languages, which form in the course of time their own literary forms" MILEWSKI (1968). This scheme of development may be reliably followed when we have linguistic sources of greater time depth, like e.g. Old-Church-Slavonic or Old English ("old" means the oldest written form of a language). But if we deal with languages recorded only in their modern shapes, an extremely important problem should be kept in mind : "A la longue cependant, des langues parentes finissent par différer tant que leur communauté d'origine devient impossible à reconnaître. Si par exemple on n'avait que le français, le bulgare et l'arménien modernes pour représenter le groupe indo-européen, il ne serait pas aisé d'établir la parenté de ces trois langues, et l'on ne pourrait songer à en poser la grammaire comparée. Il suffit d'opérer avec ces mêmes langues, mais considérées sous des formes de quelques centaines d'années plus anciennes, à savoir le latin, le vieux slave des premières traductions et l'arménien classique, pour la parenté devienne évidente et pour qu'on puisse poser les principes essentiels d'une grammaire comparée de ces trois langues. La parenté de deux langues peut

donc être, et est souvent, indémontrable, même alors qu'elle est réelle. On n'est jamais en droit d'affirmer que deux langues ne sont pas parentes au moins de loin : une parenté se découvrirait peut-être si l'on avait des formes plus anciennes de ces mêmes langues" MEILLET (1948:93-94).

For languages which have no attested ancient (or at least any earlier in terms of history) form(s), other methods have to be applied like the ones of mass comparisons or lexicostatistics. These methods have proved as a fruitful means for establishing the existence of genetic relations among languages. "In genealogical classification the evidence is often probabilistic (strictly speaking it is always so) and at a certain point becomes indeterminate and unreliable, but the question of relationship remains a Yes or No one..." ROBINS (1973:30).

As the answer for the Chadic languages is already without any doubt Yes, one should turn to the next crucial problem of *how* they are related, i.e. how their development has been running in time. There are two types of chronology based on linguistic evidence - when some linguistic facts may be connected with historical events, we speak of absolute chronology. *Terminus a quo* shows the earliest possible border-line in time for the appearance of a given phenomenon - e.g. *terminus a quo* for some of the Arabic loan-words in Hausa would be the historical fact of spreading of Islam in that area; SKINNER (1977:179-180) dates one of the forms for 'camel' in Chadic as 1000 years old, connecting it with the first ruler of Kano to own camels; GREGERSEN (1967:106) connects the Hausa word *góóròò* 'kola nut' with Songhai *goro* - this borrowing from the latter language could have taken place together with the introduction of kola nuts into Hausaland, according to the Kano chronicle by the beginning of the fifteenth century. Of course the determining of the exact date in absolute chronology is usually impossible - one may expect only the general chronological framework. But if there are no historical documents available for a given period, a thorough observation of the changes taking place in a language may reveal their succession in time i.e. their relative chronology. In such a case one may operate only in terms of a linguistic phenomenon being "later" or "earlier" than another one. When there are no historical written sources, the relative chronology has to be based on the fact that languages develop at a different rate, in different directions, preserving and changing different features of the ancestral language. Therefore every word of the vocabulary having its own history as well as the whole system of grammatical phenomena of the individual languages preserve a meaningful information about the ancestral language and its development. The analysis of the information gives us the hypothetical shape of this ancestral language, i.e. of the proto-language.

Chadic is a branch of the Hamito-Semitic stock whose oldest representative is Ancient Egyptian dated from the 3rd millenium B.C. On the basis of lexical and grammatical comparisons and resemblances, it is supposed that Proto-Chadic may be dated somewhere before that date : DIAKONOFF (1988:23) holds his earlier theory that the speakers of

Egyptian were the first to break away from the basic Proto-Hamito-Semitic nucleus not later than the 8th millennium B.C., and "roughly at the same time - a bit earlier, a bit later" also the speakers of Proto-Chadic. This would therefore give us a history of some ten thousand years.

Turning to the problem of the lexical evidence, I think that four features of the vocabulary relevant to the relative chronology may be distinguished: changes in form, changes in meaning, loan-words and distribution. These features are interwoven with each other and cannot be treated separately.

The main evidence for the language history are the changes in form. The first step after identifying the proper resemblances is to establish regular sound correspondences among the examined languages which consequently form the basis for establishing sound laws. The sound law is a sound correspondence between the reconstructed phoneme and its present-day realization. For the last 25 years the Chadicists have been working on establishing regular sound correspondences and sound laws. Thus e.g. there exist sound laws connected with the lateral fricatives and sibilants in Chadic. NEWMAN (1977) dealt at length with this problem showing among others, how in Buduma (Central Chadic, Kotoko group) Proto-Chadic *ʃ and *s have developed into present-day *h*. Similar change appears also with other languages of the Central Chadic group: according to KRAFT's (1981) materials one may observe the correspondence ʃ (in Central Chadic, e.g. Higi group): Kilba *h*, Hildi, Wamdiu *x* (Central Chadic, Bura-Margi group); e.g. Kapsiki *ʃine*: Kilba *hir*, Hildi *xiru*, Wamdiu *xyiuru* 'tooth' or Kapsiki *ʃute*: Hildi *xixi*, Wamdiu *xixi* 'egg', etc. On the other hand, according to JUNGRAITHMAYR & SHIMIZU (1981) there are some items for which the authors assume a possibility of a development voiceless lateral fricative / sibilant: voiceless velar plosive (e.g. 'ear' root A *s₃m-, A₁*ʃm, A₂*km (*k < *ʃ < *s₃?), this applies also for the same root with the meaning 'to hear'; 'hare' root B *s₃^mbr, B₁*ʃ₂^mbr, B₂*k^mbr (*k < *ʃ₂ < *s?); 'suck' root A *s^mb, A₂*km (*k- < *ʃ < *s?); to this group of examples one may probably also consider 'moon' root A *tr(a), A₁*kʳ (< *tr(i)?). If these suggestions are correct, one has to assume that after the change of *ʃ, *s > *h*, *x*, further under a yet unknown influence (the following back vowel *o*, *u* as in 'ear'?) the velar spirant has changed into velar plosive (i.e. *ʃ > *x > *k*), e.g. Laamang (Central Chadic) *ʃim-*: Kilba *himi*, Lame (Central Chadic, Masa group) *hum*: Pero (West Chadic, Bole-Tangale group) *kumo* all meaning 'ear'. If this scheme is to be accepted, the forms with the velar plosive would be "later" ones in terms of relative chronology. Another explanation of the forms with the velar plosive may be to assume them as not related to the ones with the lateral fricative - thus they would have replaced ("later") the common Chadic form with the lateral.

Beside the regular sound correspondences "exceptions" may also appear, for which an explanation should be searched for. If we consider the items 'three' and 'head', both reconstructed with initial *k, it will

appear that (IBRISZIMOW, 1986) in 'three' we have *k*, *h* as modern reflexes of this phoneme and in 'head' *k*, *h*, *g*, *gh* (e.g. Tangale *kwi* 'head' and *gwunuj* 'three'). It will mean that for some reason the Proto-Chadic **k* underwent (in some languages) further development into voiced plosive and spirant. Another example may be the lack of the already mentioned correspondence between Central Chadic *ʃ* and Kilba *h*, and Hildi, Wamdiu *x* in the item 'name' (e.g. Kapsiki *ʃi*, kilba *ʃem*, Hildi *ʃimu*, Wamdiu *ʃimo*). This fact may be explained in two ways : either the forms for 'name' in these languages come from the time before the change of *ʃ* into *h*, *x* (therefore this word has been kept intact during the change *ʃ* > *h*, *x*) or these forms are in Kilba, Hidi and Wandiu loans from the neighbouring languages. The problem of loan-words in Chadic, especially the ancient ones from the basic vocabulary which is much more complicated than the cultural loans, was examined by HOFFMANN (1970) and recently JUNGRAITHMAYR (1988). Both authors draw the attention to the distribution of the borrowed forms mainly in West and Central Chadic and the Eastern forms being rather of Hamito-Semitic origin. This is an extremely important criterion which of course cannot be generally utilized. The problem of what is an ancient loan-word and what a common heritage appears to be an extremely difficult one : cf. e.g. Kofyar (West Chadic, Sura-Gerka group) *agas* 'tooth' and Cushitic Somali *goos* 'tooth' DOLGOPOLSKY (1973:70-71). This comparison concerns, of course, not only the above mentioned languages, but also the whole respective groups.

The semantic changes in the vocabulary are also very important, especially for establishing the regularity of sound correspondences. One cannot limit oneself to comparing only the same sememes - e.g. in Ngizim (West Chadic) a cognate form for Chadic 'hair' may be found with the meaning of 'pubic hair', e.g. Tera (Central Chadic) *ghos* 'hair' : Ngizim *gùzái* 'pubic hair'. Therefore in Ngizim the form would be of Chadic (Proto-Chadic) origin, but the meaning would be a "later" innovation due to specification. For this reason semantically different lexemes but with cognate forms should be considered, searching for their underlying semantic field - this may lead to a semantic "paradox", i.e. to reconstructing of proto-forms with highly abstract meaning : e.g. I compared 'hand, arm', 'leg, foot' under one entry 'limb' and 'knife', 'spear', 'sickle' under 'sharp tool' finding for both entries one common Chadic form, cf. Bole (West Chadic, Bole-Tangale group) *sàrá* 'hand' and Tera *sara* 'leg' or Ron-Sha (West Chadic) *suk* 'knife' and Gabin (Tera group) *suk-* 'spear' (IBRISZIMOW, op. cit.). This "paradox" may sound strange, but I wonder how an Indo-Europeanist, being in the situation of a Chadicist, would semantically reconstruct the related forms meaning in Slavonic 'tooth', in Greek 'nail' and in Germanic 'comb'?

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