

Proto-core Cushitic

Ahmed Sosal (Leiden University) and Maarten Mous (Leiden University)

This presentation details the development of a comprehensive lexical database of the Core Cushitic languages. This Core Cushitic lexical database encompasses over 20 Cushitic languages and 12 (sub)groups in East and Tanzanian Cushitic.

The database integrates and significantly expands upon earlier low-level reconstructions for branches like (Lowland) East Cushitic by Sasse (1979), Black (1974), and Eastern Omo-Tana (Heine 1978 and 1981). Highland East Cushitic (Hudson 1989; Sasse 1982), and Tanzanian Cushitic (Kießling & Mous 2003). The database compiles around 1000 sets of cognates, with more than 300 having cognates attested across all major East Cushitic subgroups and some Dahalo and Tanzanian Cushitic parallels.

Systematic comparative analysis has been used to identify cognates, establish sound correspondences, and reconstruct proto-lexicon across subgroups like Highland-East-Cushitic, Omo-Tana, Oromoid, Yaaku-Dullay, Saho-Afar, and other smaller subgroups. The expanded cognate sets provide new data for evaluating the genealogical relationships, such as the validity of Lowland East Cushitic as a unit within East-Cushitic and the position of the Tanzanian Cushitic within Cushitic.

The database also includes number marking suffixes, capturing potential shared morphological innovations. As an open-access resource, this database will serve as a comprehensive reference for Cushitic historical linguistics and a valuable tool for research on language relationships and evolution across the Afroasiatic family. We will also discuss key challenges encountered in synthesizing the diverse data sources and potential future directions for this research.