

# Early East African and Cushitic: Contacts between foragers and pastoralists in early East Africa

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The languages of East African foragers preserve traces of contact between foragers and incoming pastoralists and agriculturalists. We label ‘Early East African’ the different and very possibly unrelated languages spoken by East African foragers. While some of the language contact patterns persist until the present-day and are well-known (e.g. Hadza with Southern Nilotic & Southern Cushitic), others are more difficult to verify due to a number of factors. First, the languages that were in contact may not have persisted as spoken languages to the present day. Second, the languages may not have continued to remain in contact and their present-day distributions may not have suggested to previous researchers that there was the potential of prior contact. Our two-pronged approach has enabled us to identify word pairs which suggest earlier contacts between foragers and pastoralists. First, we used our first-hand knowledge of Hadza, Dahalo and Ongota (languages spoken by foragers) to identify forms shared between these and various languages spoken by pastoralists. We identify forms suggestive of contact between Ongota(n) and Dahalo(an), and also between Hadza(n) and Peripheral East Cushitic (i.e., the Dullay languages of Southwest Ethiopia and the East Cushitic language spoken until recently by the Yaaku of Mount Kenya). Second, we compared basic vocabulary items in Shabo and Ik (languages spoken by foragers) with words in selected Ethiopian languages. In the case of Shabo, we confirm previous accounts of heavy influence from Surmic and Koman (Nilo-Saharan) languages, but also find word pairs suggestive of contact between Shabo and Highland East Cushitic languages. In contrast, we do not find forms in the Ik basic vocabulary pointing to earlier contact with Cushitic. These linguistic results point to geographically-specific patterns of forager-pastoralist contacts in the Pastoral Neolithic and beyond.