Introduction to Hebrew linguistics
April 7, 2011
Assignment for week 10
Deadline: April 14

Next week we learn about phonology (*klankleer*). The history of the consonants in the Semitic languages is an extremely complex topic. Thus, the goal of this assignment is to prepare you for next week, and so it is important for you to do it before the next class. I also need to give you some preliminary explanations.

The assignment is based once again on Bennett's book (*Comparative Semitic Linguistics*). The book is being ordered by the library, but the relevant sections are also on the website. First read Part 1, if you haven't done it so earlier (you should), focusing especially on the summary of phonology. It may be very useful to also read the relevant parts in Appel et al.'s *Taal en Taalwetenschap* (if you haven't done it yet).

The Wordlist G (a.k.a. H and I) contains 200 items in eight different languages. (NB: The even and odd numbered pages of the pdf should be paired, put next to each other.) The first four of them, (Biblical) Hebrew, Syriac, (Classical) Arabic and Ge'ez are "classical" Semitic languages. Akkadian (Old Babylonian) and Ugaritic represent the earliest Semitic languages, whereas Maalula (a neo-Aramaic language) and Jibbali (a modern South Arabian language) belong to the contemporary spoken varieties.

Under *Paradigms A* you will find a sketch of comparative Semitic phonology, including most of the languages in the previous wordlist. Have a quick look at it (especially the description of Proto-Semitic), but don't be frightened. Next week we will discuss its details. Try to understand how to read it: which proto-Semitic consonant/vowel on page 68 has turned into what consonant/vowel in, for instance, (Biblical) Hebrew (page 71)?

This assignment focuses on the history of the Hebrew *sibilant consonants:* the [š] represented by the letter *šin*, the [ś] represented by the letter *śin*, the [s] represented by the letter *samex*, the [z] represented by the letter *zayin*, and the [ṣ] represented by the letter *ṣadi*. (Note the distinction I make between the sounds and the letters!)

These five sounds in Biblical Hebrew are pronounced nowadays only in four different ways, and four letters are used to represent them, although the four pronunciations do not correspond to the four letters… To make to story more complex, they originate in nine (!) different proto-Semitic sounds. For instance, what is nowadays a [š] was originally either a [š] or a [θ] (such as the *th* in the English word *thirty*). In Aramaic, [θ] has become [t], and [š] has remained [š]. Therefore, there are Hebrew words with a *šin* whose Aramaic (and Syriac) counterpart contains a [š] (if the proto-Semitic form also contained a [š]); and there are Hebrew words with a *šin* whose Aramaic (and Syriac) counterpart contains a [t] (if the proto-Semitic form contained a [θ]).

Thus:

Proto-Semitic	Hebrew	Aramaic/Syriac
[š], e.g. * *šantum*	[š], e.g. *šana*	[š] , e.g. *šatta*
[θ], e.g. * *θnaym*	[š], e.g., *šnayim*	[t] , e.g. *treyn*

Your assignment is the following: go through the Wordlist, and collect *all* the Hebrew words that contain at least one of these five sibilants. Then, check the other seven columns whether they contain *cognates*: a word that is similar to the Hebrew one. (Focus on Arabic and Syriac, if you have less time.) You can remove from your list the words that do not have cognates in other languages.

Now, group the words according to which Hebrew sibilant corresponds to what sound in other Semitic languages. For instance:

Group 1: Hebrew [š] corresponds to Syriac [š] and Arabic [s] in the word *šalom*.
Group 2: Hebrew [š] corresponds to Syriac [t] and Arabic [θ] in the word *šnayim*.

Find at least 5 groups, and discuss at least 15 items in the Wordlist G/H/I. (More is always welcome.) If you can, try to find out what could have been the original proto-Semitic sound in each group, using the tables in *Paradigms A*.

As usually, send your answers (less than 1 page) in an email to me (t.s.biro@uva.nl) by next Wednesday. If you find it more comfortable, send it as an attachment. Or, if you cannot reproduce all those funny symbols in your text editor, I also accept it on paper (in my postbox) this time.