

Facets of Hebrew and Semitic linguistics

LING 214/614, JDST 215/675, Fall 2013

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Handout 2 (Sept. 03)

Theme: Semitic languages, the historical-comparative method, family trees

1. Key terms in Bennett, parts 1-3 (make sure you are familiar with them)

Descriptive linguistics (vs. prescriptive linguistics) vs. theoretical linguistics.

Comparative linguistics vs. contrastive linguistics.

Idiolect / dialect, sociolect, "ethnolect", "religiolect" / language / language family (group, cluster)

Synchronic linguistics vs. diachronic linguistics.

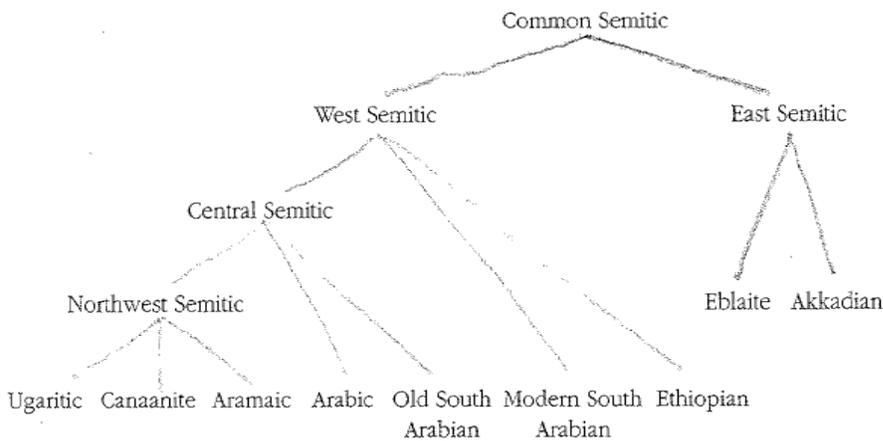
Subsystems of language: phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon (+ phonetics, semantics, pragmatics...)

What is a language?

What is a language family?

Descendants of a single proto-language? Shared features? Semitic as a *gestalt*.

2. An overview of the Semitic languages



A possible tree, from:
John Huehnergard:
'Introduction'.
In: John Kaltner and
Steven L. McKenzie
(eds.): *Beyond Babel: A
Handbook for BH and
Related Languages*.
SBL 2002. Pp. 1-18.

See slides.

3. Basics of the comparative-historical method

1. "We assume that patterned similarities between languages are not accidental. We assume three possible explanations, once chance is ruled out: mutual influence, parallel development from a similar base, or a common ancestor". (Bennett, p. 25) + typological similarity.

2. Cognate words: having a common origin (supposedly...).

Identity/similarity in form and meaning, no borrowing, and no onomatopoeia.

Can we reconstruct the original form in the **hypothetical proto-language*?

3. *Neogrammarians*: no unconditioned sound split

4. *Skewed reflexes* of the proto-form: irregular correspondences in form, morphology, semantics...

5. Voting: take many languages, and the most probable reconstruction is the one that fits the majority.

NB: No meeting on Thursday, September 5 (*Rosh Hashanah*)

Reading for next week: Bennett, Parts 4-5 (and eventually re-read Part 3).

Homework (to be submitted, preferably on paper, by Tuesday, September 10): Bennett, p. 30 and 33, *exercises 2 and 3*. Focus on a single language pair (either Ar-Eg, or Eg-Su, etc., as explained in exercise 2). It will be appreciated, however, if you also kept an eye on the rest of the languages, which may give you hints. You will submit an approximately 1-page-long report, 2/3 of which will answer exercise 2, and some additional remarks will reflect upon exercise 3.