

Strata in South Arabian and Arabic loanwords in Somali

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Coastal Somalia had contacts with seafaring traders from the Arab Peninsula from antiquity, that are mentioned already in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*. A small group of Ancient South Arabian words entered Somali in this manner, such as *addoon* 'slave' (< 'dm), already identified by Enrico Cerulli.

Later on the spread of Islam to the Horn of Africa, and of Arabic in many areas of the Arab Peninsula where South Arabian was spoken, as well as along the trade routes of the western Indian Ocean, caused a massive influx of Arabic loanwords to most varieties of Somali.

This paper will focus on Northern Somali, whose lexicon is better described than the lexicon of other Somali varieties. The issue of Arabic loanwords in Somali has been addressed by several authors, with different methodologies, e.g., Zaborski (1967, 2009), Callegari (1988), Cardona (1988), Soravia (1994), etc. They have never been studied by taking in consideration also the history of East Cushitic and the possible intermediary role of other languages of the Horn such as Harari. Yet the differential treatment of several Arabic sounds and sound patterns, makes it possible to identify different sets of loanwords, and it will be attempted in this paper to organize them into separate strata, that entered Northern Somali through different paths and at different times.

For instance, words like *mundul* 'round dwelling with a thatched roof' (< منزل) and *musqul* (< مغسل) 'bathroom, toilet' are likely to be old loanwords because of:

- a.) the development $z > d$, that also occurs in inherited East Cushitic words of Northern Somali like *saddex* 'three' and *toddoba* 'seven' (both with *-dd-* < *-zz-), whereas more recent Arabic loans have $z > s$ like وزارة > *wasaarad* 'ministry';
- b.) the metathesis $gs > qs > sq$;
- c.) the change of the vocalic pattern *a-i* into *u-u*;
- d.) the semantic field of traditional dwellings.

Even *digri* 'dhikr' (Ar. ذكر) is not a recent loanword because of its postvocalic $k > g$ that also characterises Northern Somali inherited East Cushitic words. Yet it is likely to have been mediated through Harari *zikri* 'dhikr' because of the final *-i*, that is a typical Harari strategy for avoiding final consonant clusters. Somali also has echo-vowel epenthesis, e.g., *kidib* 'lie' < كذب, a strategy that also occurs in Northern Somali noun and verb morphology, and that can be taken for this reason as an indicator for loanwords that entered directly from Arabic.

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