
Amerind MALIQ’A ‘Swallow, Throat’ and Its Origin in the Old World

*For Joseph H. Greenberg,
on the occasion
of his 75th birthday,
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Probably the central myth of twentieth-century historical linguistics has been the belief that the comparative method is limited to a relatively short time depth—usually put at 5,000–10,000 years—beyond which all trace of genetic affinity has been erased by unrelenting waves of semantic and phonological change.* According to R. M. W. Dixon (1980: 237), “Generally, languages change at such a rate that after more than about three or four thousand years of separation genetic links are no longer recognizable.” James Matisoff puts the boundary at 6,000 years (Matisoff 1990: 108), Hans Hock (1986: 566) opts for 7,000 years, and Terrence Kaufman (1990: 23) would extend the limits to around 8,000 years: “A temporal ceiling of 7,000 to 8,000 years is inherent in the methods of comparative linguistic reconstruction. We can recover genetic relationships that are that old, but probably no earlier than that.” Finally, according to Sarah Thomason (to appear), “10,000 years is the standard guess about the outer limits of the applicability of the Comparative Method.” Although one can only admire the precision these scholars have brought to determining the limits of comparative linguistics, one may legitimately ask what is the basis for this dating, whichever figure one chooses. Though I be-

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lieve Thomason is correct—the figures are all just guesses—what exactly are these guesses based on? And why do such “guesses” range from 3,000–10,000 years, and not, say 40,000–50,000 years?

The main reason, I believe, is the *presumed* age of the Indo-European family itself, which has traditionally been put very close to these stated limits of the validity of comparative linguistics. Thus the fact that Indo-European cannot be shown to be related to any other family—yet another cherished myth—both establishes, and is “explained” by, the known limits of the comparative method in linguistics. This same (transparently circular) reasoning has been used by Americanists to argue that Joseph Greenberg’s proposal of an Amerind family cannot be valid, because archaeologists agree that the Americas have been inhabited for more than 10,000 years, and the comparative method is valid only up to about 10,000 years, or, as Kaufman (1990: 26) puts it, “the proof of a common origin for the indigenous languages of this hemisphere is not accessible to the comparative method as we know it.” All of these arguments, it must be stressed, are based on appeals to *archaeology*; no *linguistic* evidence points to *any* particular limits on the comparative method.

There is yet another “archaeological” argument for the limits of comparative linguistics, namely, the fact that there are no perceived connections between Old World languages and New World languages. Since the Americas are known through archaeological evidence to have been initially inhabited at least 12,000 years ago—and some anthropologists today would say 18,000 years or more—clearly no similarities between Old World languages and New World languages *could* survive after all this time, given what is “known” of the limits of the comparative method. In sum, the postulated “limits” of the comparative method have been determined by the “special status” of Indo-European, a family supposedly with no known relatives, and by the “archaeological evidence” showing that the peopling of the Americas occurred at too early a date for comparative linguistics to be of any value.

Such a tight fit between the archaeological evidence and the linguistic evidence could hardly have been anticipated. But *is* it really a tight fit, or just a gentleman’s agreement? With regard to the age of Indo-European, the archaeologist Colin Renfrew (1987: 166) has recently written that “the dispersal [of Indo-European-speaking people] is thus set around 2500 B.C. This date is not based on any clear linguistic argument; it is not really a linguistic argument at all. It is a conclusion based upon consensus. Yet it is taken by archaeologists as linguistic evidence, and is used by them to support that very consensus. There is therefore a complete circularity. And in this case it would appear that the consensus may be in error.” But if the age of Indo-European is in error, then the perceived limitations of the comparative method may also be in error.

In fact, the idea that Indo-European is unrelated to any other family has been demonstrated to be false by the Russian Nostraticists (Illich-Svitych 1971–84, Dolgopolsky 1984), by Greenberg (to appear), and by numerous precursors, and such an extreme position has in recent years been declining in acceptance. Of course the finding that Indo-European is related to other families is scarcely a new discovery. At the beginning of this century Henry Sweet (quoted at length in Chapter 6 herein) ridiculed the narrow-mindedness of Indo-Europeanists in doubting these relationships, in terms that, regrettably, are as apt today as they were then.

And around that same time Alfredo Trombetti (1905: 44) criticized the methodological inconsistency of the Indo-Europeanists in equally stark terms: "It is clear that in and of itself the comparison of Finno-Ugric *me* 'I,' *te* 'you' with Indo-European *me-* and *te-* [with the same meaning] is worth just as much as any comparison one might make between the corresponding pronominal forms in the Indo-European languages. The only difference is that the common origin of the Indo-European languages is accepted, while the connection between Indo-European and Finno-Ugric is denied."

In what follows I will argue that all of these notions—that Indo-European is not known to be related to any other language family, that Amerind languages cannot be shown to derive from a common source, and that there are no recognizable genetic connections between language families of the Old and New Worlds—are false. By examining a single etymology in some detail I will attempt to show that it is indeed possible to trace the evolution of a single root from North Africa, through Europe and Asia, and across the Americas. Let us begin by considering the following Amerind etymology for the root *MALIQ'A 'swallow, throat':

AN AMERIND ETYMOLOGY

ALMOSAN: Salish: Proto-Salish **məq*' 'eat one's fill,' Chehalis *mq*'^w 'swallow,' Lower Fraser *məlq*'^w 'throat,' Pentlach *məkwəm* 'swallow,' Nisqualli *omikalekw* 'swallow,' Columbian *məlq* ~ *enmellik* 'tongue'; Wakashan: Nootka *muk*'^w 'swallow,' Kwakwaka *m̓l̓χ^w-ʔid* 'chew food for the baby,' *m̓l̓q^wa* 'moisten the fingers with the tongue,' Heiltsuk *m̓elqva* 'chew food for baby,' *m̓elχv-baút* 'lick the end of something,,' Algic: Yurok *mik'olum* 'swallow'; Kutenai *uʔmqoʔ* 'swallow.'

PENUTIAN: Chinook: Chinook *-mókū-* 'throat,' *mlq^w-tan* 'cheek,' Wishram *ō-mēqλ* 'lick'; Oregon: Takelma *mūlk*' 'swallow,' Proto-Kalapuya **mīlk* 'swallow' (v.), Tualatin *mīlk* ~ *mīlq* 'swallow,' *mīlk'-wan* 'swallow,' Santiam *mīlk* 'swallow,' Yonkala *k'andít-mīlik* 'I swallowed it'; Plateau: North Sahaptin

malqmat 'lick,' Molala *mil* 'throat'; California: Yokuts *mōk'i* 'swallow,' *mik'*-*is* 'throat,' Yaudanchi *mōk* 'swallow,' *müküs* 'throat'; Gulf: Proto-Muskogean **mil* 'swallow,' Tunica *milu* 'choke,' *miru* 'swallow,' Atakapa *mol* 'gargle,' Wappo *malék'e?* 'swallow it,' Coast Yuki *mekup* 'throat,' Huchnom *meka* 'drink,' Yuki *mi* 'drink'; Mexican: Mixe *amu?ul* 'suck,' Zoque *mu?k* 'suck.'

HOKAN: Chumash: Santa Ynez *aqmil* 'drink' (? = *aq-mil* 'water-swallow'), Santa Cruz *akmil* 'drink'; Yuman: Yuma *mal'jaqé* 'neck,' Walapai *malqi'* 'throat, neck,' Havasupai *milqé* 'throat,' Yavapai *melqí* 'neck,' Mohave *mal'jaqé* 'throat,' Akwa'ala *milqí* 'neck,' Paipai *milqí* 'neck' (cf. also the obviously related Yuman forms where the initial nasal has assimilated the palatal nature of the following lateral: Yuma *an^hil'iq* 'swallow,' Walapai *mi-n'jalq* 'swallow,' Diegueño *we-n^halq* 'swallow,' Havasupai *k^we-n^halqika* 'swallow,' Akwa'ala *n^helq* 'swallow,' etc.); ?Tlappanec *māga'ηqɔ* 'swallow.'

CHIBCHAN: Cuitlatec *e?meli* 'eat,' Cuna *murki-makka* 'swallow,' *murgi murgi sae* 'swallow food.'

ANDEAN: Quechuan: Cochabamba *malq'a* 'throat,' Huaraz *mallaqa* 'be hungry'; Aymara *malq'a* 'swallow, throat' (probably a borrowing from Quechua); ? Cholon *amok* 'eat.'

MACRO-TUCANOAN: Curetu *mouku* 'drink,' Ticuna *mi* 'drink,' Iranshe *moke?i* 'neck.'

EQUATORIAL: Guamo *mirko* 'drink,' Arawak *amüküddun* 'swallow,' Callahuaya *mal'k'a* 'throat' (almost certainly a loan from Quechua or Aymara).

MACRO-CARIB: Surinam *e?mōkí* 'swallow,' Faaí *mekeli* 'nape of the neck,' Kaliana *imukulali* 'throat.'

One of the Penutian etymologies proposed by Greenberg (1987: 159) connected the Oregon and Gulf (excluding Yuki-Wappo) forms listed above in an etymology glossed 'swallow.' If the triconsonantal root of the Northwest Coast Penutian languages is archaic, then the original form might be reconstructed as *M-L-K' (or *M-L-Q', if the uvular consonant is original). Furthermore, one of the Amerind etymologies proposed by Greenberg (No. 252), also glossed 'swallow,' connected some of the Almosan forms shown above (Pentlach, Nisqualli, Yurok, and Kutenai) with certain Penutian forms (Chinook, Yokuts, Coast Yuki, Huchnom). Some of the Almosan forms (Kutenai, Yurok, Nisqualli) also suggest a triconsonantal root that might be reconstructed as *M-K'-L or *M-Q'-L, while the Wakashan forms retain the original order of the consonants, also preserved in Penutian. Given the virtual semantic identity of all these forms—and the fact that they appear to be based on a triconsonantal root that has metathesized the final two consonants in some Amerind subgroups—it seems more than likely that all these forms are historically related and should be joined in a single etymology.

Additional material taken from Greenberg's unpublished Amerindian notebooks (Greenberg 1981) provides further support for the Amerind nature of the root in question. Of prime importance is the existence of the root in the Yuman branch of Hokan (Arizona) and the Quechuan (and perhaps Aymara¹) branch of Andean (Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia). In Yuman the root is *M-L-K or *M-L-Q, whereas in Quechuan it is *M-L-Q' or *M-L-Q. Moreover, Cuna (a Chibchan language spoken in Panama) and Guamo (an Equatorial language of Venezuela) both exhibit the form *M-R-K. In the broader Amerind context we can see clearly that metathesis has occurred sporadically in Almosan and Macro-Carib, but the original order, *M-L-K', is too widely attested within Amerind to be doubted.

THE ORIGIN OF THE AMERIND ROOT

There are, moreover, indications that this particular root is not restricted to the Americas, but exists in Eurasia and perhaps North Africa as well. Illich-Svitych (1976: 57) reconstructed Proto-Nostratic **mälgi* 'chest, udder' on the basis of Afro-Asiatic, Indo-European, and Uralic evidence. For Afro-Asiatic he posited **mlg* 'breast, udder, suck' to account for Arabic *mlġ* 'to suck the breast' and Old Egyptian *mnd* (< **mlg*) 'woman's breast, udder.' Illich-Svitych compared these forms with Proto-Indo-European **melġ-* 'to milk' and Proto-Uralic **mälγe* 'breast, thorax.' Rédei (1986: 267) suggests a slightly different reconstruction, Proto-Finno-Ugric **mälke* 'breast,' representing forms like Saami *miełgâ* 'breast, chest,' Mordvin *mälhkä* 'breast,' Vogul *mägl* 'breast' (with metathesis), and Hungarian *mell* 'breast.' Collinder (1977: 14) and Rédei (1986: 267) consider all these (and other) forms to be related. Furthermore, both Collinder and Rédei suggest that Yukaghir *melu(t)* 'chest' may be related to the Uralic forms.

The Indo-European root is particularly interesting, for it illustrates how the failure of Indo-Europeanists to consider the extra-Indo-European context has led them to erroneous conclusions concerning both the semantic development and the phonological structure of Indo-European itself. The traditional reconstruction by Pokorny (1959: 722), **melġ-* 'to milk, milk' reflects forms such as Greek *ἀμέλω* 'to milk,' Latin *mulg-ēre* 'to milk,' Irish *bligim* 'to milk,' *mlicht* 'milk,' Gothic *miluks* 'milk,' Old Norse *mjolka* 'to milk,' English 'to milk, milk,' Lithuanian *milžti* 'to milk,' Old Church Slavic *mlěsti* 'to milk,' *mlěko* 'milk,' Albanian *mjellë* 'to milk,' Tocharian A *mälk-lune* 'milk-ing,' *malke* 'milk,' and Tocharian B *malk-wer* 'milk,' as well as Sanskrit *mṛj-* 'wipe, stroke,' and Avestan *marəz-* 'touch.'

¹ The difficulties of distinguishing loanwords from common inheritance (or determining even the direction of loans) with regard to Quechua and Aymara are notorious.

The traditional explanation for the semantic development of this root has been that the Indo-Iranian meaning—'to wipe, stroke, rub'—was the original one, and that the development of RUB > MILK was an innovation characterizing European languages (Walde and Pokorny 1930, 2: 298). The extra-Indo-European context shows quite clearly that this semantic development—if it took place at all—worked in the opposite direction, since it is now clear that the Indo-European notion of 'milking' derives from the general Eurasiatic/Nostratic word for nursing, suckling, and the female breast. Any connection with rubbing and wiping must be thoroughly secondary. In fact, I am inclined to doubt, as did Illich-Svitych (1976: 58) and Gamkrelidze and Ivanov (1984: 569), that the Indo-Iranian root **marž-* 'to rub, wipe' has anything at all to do with Proto-Indo-European **melĝ-* 'to milk.'

In his discussion of this etymology Illich-Svitych (1976) notes that "Proto-Indo-European \hat{g} in place of the expected \hat{gh} is unclear" (p. 58). The reason \hat{gh} is expected, rather than \hat{g} , is that, according to Nostratic sound correspondences, Proto-Indo-European \hat{g} derives from Proto-Nostratic k , not from Proto-Nostratic g , which Illich-Svitych reconstructs for this root. It has long been known that the traditional reconstruction of the Proto-Indo-European stop system—with the three series k , g , and gh —is typologically implausible; such systems are not found in any existing languages. In order to remedy this (and other) problems with the traditional reconstruction, Thomas Gamkrelidze and Vyacheslav Ivanov (1972) and Paul Hopper (1973) independently arrived at the same solution to these problems. They proposed that the three series of Proto-Indo-European stops be reinterpreted as k , k' , and g . Recently Allan Bomhard (1984, 1991) has begun investigating Nostratic using the glottalic interpretation of the Proto-Indo-European consonantism. According to the glottalic theory the Proto-Indo-European root under discussion should be reconstructed as **mel \hat{k}' -* (Gamkrelidze and Ivanov 1984: 569), whose velar ejective perfectly matches that of the Amerind forms enumerated above. When considered in the wider context—and in the light of the glottalic theory of Proto-Indo-European consonantism—the "unexpected" \hat{g} of **melĝ-* becomes the expected \hat{k}' of *mel \hat{k}' -*.

There is additional evidence in Dravidian for the root in question. Burrow and Emeneau (1984: 459) group all of the following forms under etymology No. 5077: Tamil *melku* 'to chew, masticate,' Malayalam *melluka* 'to chew, champ,' Toda *melk* 'mouthful,' Kannada *mellu* 'to chew, masticate, eat with a muttering sound,' *melaku* 'bringing up again for rumination,' Telugu *mekku* 'to eat, gobble,' Gadba *mekkap-* 'to eat like a glutton.' The original meaning of 'nurse, suckle' appears lurking just below the surface in all these forms. Conspicuously absent from this etymology are any reflexes in the Kurux-Malto subgroup, generally regarded as the most divergent branch of Dravidian after

the Brahui language of Pakistan. Yet there is another etymology in Burrow and Emeneau's dictionary, No. 5080, that I believe should be combined with the forms cited above: Kurux *melkhā* 'throat, neck' and Malto *melqe* 'throat.' It would appear that the Kurux-Malto branch has undergone a semantic shift typologically parallel to that which took place in Amerind.

There are also reflexes of this root in the Eskimo-Aleut family, which some Nostraticists include in Nostratic (Dolgopolsky 1984) and which Greenberg includes in his similar, but not identical, Eurasiatic family.² For example, in the Kuskokwim dialect of Central Yupik we find forms such as *milugâ* 'sucks it out,' *milûgarâ* 'licks (or sucks) it; kisses it (a child),' and *mulik* 'nipple'; similar forms may be found in the various Inupiaq dialects scattered from northern Alaska to Greenland. Aleut *umlix* 'chest, groin' probably also belongs with the Eskimo forms given above. As with the Dravidian forms, the notion of nursing a child is but a step away from the common Eskimo meanings.

On the other side of Bering Strait the Chukchi-Kamchatkan family has a root that might belong with the etymology under discussion in Proto-Chukchi-Kamchatkan **pilxə-* 'throat, food' (Mudrak 1989: 104), though the change *m > p* is for the moment unexplained.

Finally, we should note that in their reconstruction of Proto-Caucasian, Nikolaev and Starostin (1992: 142) posit a root **mVq'VIV* 'throat, larynx' to account for forms such as Tindi *maq'ala* 'throat' and Bezhta *ris-muq* 'throat.' Since Caucasian is a family renowned for metathesis, it seems likely that the Proto-Caucasian form represents a metathesized form of the root discussed here.

CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing has traced the evolution of a single verbal root through a large number of supposedly "unrelated" families. We might reconstruct the original form and meaning of this root as **M-L-K* 'nurse, suckle, female breast.' Phonologically, the triconsonantal nature of the root is preserved in Afro-Asiatic, Caucasian, Indo-European, Uralic, Dravidian, Eskimo-Aleut, and Amerind. Afro-Asiatic preserves the original meaning, which has taken on slightly different connotations elsewhere. In Indo-European the meaning shifted from 'nursing' to 'milking' and, finally, in only a few branches, the product itself, 'milk.' In Uralic the meaning of 'breast' persists, but the verbal notion of 'nursing' has been lost. Both Dravidian and Eskimo-Aleut present

² For the differences between Nostratic and Eurasiatic—and the origin of these differences—see Chapter 1 and Chapter 10. Greenberg (to appear) posits a root under BREAST that encompasses the Indo-European, Uralic, and Eskimo-Aleut forms discussed here.

meanings only a shade different from nursing. In Dravidian the meaning is basically 'chew, eat (like a baby),' while in Eskimo-Aleut it is 'suck, lick, kiss, nipple.' A semantic innovation in Amerind characterizes the entire family, and at the same time distinguishes it from Eurasiatic/Nostratic: in Amerind the root lost all connotation of nursing (except in Wakashan?), becoming instead the general Amerind word for 'swallow' and 'throat.' A typologically similar development also occurred in Caucasian, if the root discussed above is truly cognate with the other forms.

As is well known, similarities in sound and meaning may have one of four explanations: onomatopoeia, chance, borrowing, or common origin (Greenberg 1957). I am aware of no suggestions in the linguistic literature that there is any intrinsic connection between the sounds and meanings discussed here. Furthermore, the fact that the root is found only in Amerind and Eurasiatic/Nostratic (and perhaps Caucasian) argues against an onomatopoeic explanation, as does the fact that the meaning varies slightly from family to family in semantically natural ways.

The role that chance resemblance plays in causing such similarities has been much bandied about by Greenberg's critics, who greatly exaggerate the frequency of this phenomenon. Many have offered their favorite chance resemblance, but all are invariably *binary* comparisons of *biconsonantal* roots. I have chosen to investigate a triconsonantal root that is found in no less than six "unrelated" families from Africa to the Americas for the simple reason that an explanation of chance is virtually ruled out from the start. (For more on the notion of chance resemblance, see Chapter 14 herein.)

As early as 1957 Greenberg emphasized that "while in particular and infrequent instances the question of borrowing may be doubtful, it is always possible to tell whether a mass of resemblances between two languages is the result of borrowing" (Greenberg 1957: 39), the two most important factors being outgroup comparison and the semantic nature of the borrowed items. In the present case the vast distribution of the root—which is also a part of the fundamental vocabulary, not a culture item easily borrowed—precludes any serious consideration of borrowing.

With all other possible explanations eliminated, we may conclude that we are here dealing with a case of common origin. There is no other sensible explanation for the facts outlined. Nor should one imagine that the lexical item discussed above is an isolated example. Recent work has shown, contrary to the cherished myths of many twentieth-century linguists, that there are *numerous* genetic connections between supposedly unrelated language families, if one is willing to take off the blinders (a summary of this work is given in Chapter 1). In particular, the resemblances between Amerind and Eurasiatic/Nostratic, above and beyond the etymology discussed in this paper, are

abundant (see Chapters 10 and 14), and the linguistic family thus defined corresponds very closely to the vast North African–North Eurasian–Amerind population defined by Cavalli-Sforza et al. (1988) on the basis of the distribution of human genes.

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