Cushitic Languages
Overview of the Afro-Asiatic Family

- Afro-Asiatic family of languages- approximately 175 million speakers of languages belonging to this family (parent language family to 250+ languages)
- ~30-50 Cushitic languages (daughter languages)
- Approximately 30 million people - Cushitic mother tongue
- One of the largest and most important language families of East Africa
Figure 1. The classification of Cushitic: the traditional view
Cushitic-Relevant History

- First studies - 1840s
- Attention was drawn to Oromo (3rd largest language in Africa ~30 million people speak it)
- Europeans came into contact with Oromo - 17th century
- First scientific works - appeared about 100 years ago
- Austrian Egyptologist - Leo Reinisch
Afro-Asiatic Phonemic Systems

- Speakers of Afro-Asiatic languages
  - Among the first to develop writing systems
- Most Afro-Asiatic languages
  - Tone languages
  - Share a set of consonants
    - Pharyngeal fricatives
    - Emphatic set
- Only few features can be expected to have survived in all divisions of the Afro-Asiatic language family
  - i.e. Feminine gender marker & the second-person marker
Cushitic Phonemic Systems

- Many Cushitic languages show parallels with other Afro-Asiatic (Semitic) languages in their phonemic & phonological systems
  - Presence of pharyngeals, laryngeals, voiced/voiceless stops
- Widespread absence of voiceless pair $p$ of the labial stop $b$
- Majority of Cushitic languages have a five-term vowel system $(i,e,a,o,u)$
Dialect Overview

- The majority of Cushitic languages have a variety of dialects
  - These dialects are mutually intelligible between speakers of each language
  - Likely a result of family or tribe influences
- The sheer number of languages coupled with the number of dialects makes for a very complex language tree
Naming Conventions

- Cushitic languages use a personal naming system
  - Some languages use a female personal name while others use a male personal name
  - Names are not primarily based on the family
- These conventions are reflected in Cushitic language speakers that move to other countries
Writing System Development

- Many Cushitic languages have their own alphabets
  - An example of this is the Borama alphabet (shown next slide)
- Many of these alphabets have English translations and can be written with English characters
Writing System Development

Vowels
T H I L C C C O
a e i ii u uu oo

Consonants
f j p o g y h T S z
b t j d g h kh d r s
6 7 1 1 I I N U O Y
sh c f q k l m n w y
Contact-Induced Change

- Cushitic languages have introduced new features to nearby Semitic languages
  - Whole words and morphological elements have been borrowed from Cushitic to Semitic
  - Specifically, the converb structure that appears in semitic languages does not naturally occur and was borrowed from Cushitic languages
Contact-Induced Change

- This contact has a geographical origin, given that both Semitic and Cushitic languages exist in Ethiopia.
  - It is possible that this change begin with code switching among Ethiopian people, which led to changes in the language.
**Additional Facts**

- The numbering system in Cushitic is rather complicated
  - It is difficult to point back to a singular numbering system used by the proto-language
- The majority of Cushitic languages mark plurals via suffixes
  - Some languages also make changes to the root word
- Cushitic languages have displayed 3 cases: nominative, absolutive, and possessive
- Although many Cushitic languages are still spoken, many have become very endangered overtime. The preservation of these languages is very important to some.
Ongota - A Dying Language

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dy8kfVR0rGo&feature=emb_logo
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