

Laterals fricatives/affricates and their relevance for the classification of South Cushitic

Abstract—This paper investigates sound correspondences between South Cushitic lateral fricatives/affricates and East Cushitic phonemes, and explores the implications these hold for the subclassification of Cushitic.

The precise position of South Cushitic in the Cushitic branch of Afroasiatic is a matter of controversy. Previous proposals include (a) a primary branch of Cushitic, (b) a coordinate branch of East Cushitic under a South Cushitic–East Cushitic node, (c) a sub-branch of East Cushitic, and (d) a sub-branch of Lowland East Cushitic.

South Cushitic is also unique in Cushitic for having lateral fricatives and affricates (**ɬ** and **ɬʰ**), which have been reconstructed to *three* lateral fricatives/affricates (also known as “hlaterals”) in Proto-Cushitic and Proto-Afroasiatic. As a retention, they do not *a priori* contribute to the discussion of subclassification. However, different mergers of the originally three hlaterals in the various branches of Cushitic shed light on the issue by excluding certain scenarios. Conflicting sound correspondences stated in the literature for South Cushitic hlaterals are examined and implications demonstrated for the classification of South Cushitic.

Keywords—cross-linguistically rare phonemes, language classification, retention, sound change.