

Uvularity in Kalahari Khoe - a case of contact-induced retention?

For the “Workshop on contact-induced non-change”

The Kalahari Basin linguistic area of southern Africa is characterized by languages of different families sharing cross-linguistically rare features, among them phonemic click consonants (Sands, ed. 2020). It is generally believed that the retention of clicks in this corner of the world is, in part, due to ongoing contact between languages with high frequencies of click use in the lexicon (Pakendorf et al. 2017, Sands & Güldemann 2009). In this framework, clicks are most salient in languages from the Central Kalahari where contact is most intense, but are more prone to loss in click languages from the northern and eastern fringes of the area (Fehn 2020a, b, Sands & Gunnink 2019).

In this talk, we focus on languages of the Khoe-Kwadi family, which are thought to be a relatively late arrival to the area and hence adopted a range of lexical and phonological features from autochthonous languages belonging to the Kx'a and Tuu families (Non-Khoe) (Güldemann 2008; Sands 2001). While clicks are an inherited feature of Khoe-Kwadi which may have been enhanced through contact, the origin of other phonological features attested in selected Khoe languages, such as uvularity expressed through uvular consonants or vowel pharyngealization, is less clear. Vossen (1992) considers *q in the Kalahari branch of Khoe an innovation, but cannot rule out inheritance (with subsequent loss in the Khoekhoe branch) or borrowing from Kx'a or Tuu. Here, we discuss two case studies of Kalahari Khoe languages displaying uvularity in contexts where closely related languages do not: Naro from the Central Kalahari area of western Botswana, and Ts'ixa from the Okavango River Delta of northern Botswana. Naro displays pharyngealized vowels which correspond regularly to *q in other Kalahari Khoe languages like Khwe. Ts'ixa displays both uvular stops and pre-nasalization of velar/uvular fricatives which has no counterpart in Khoe, but seems reminiscent of pre-voicing attested in Non-Khoe.

While Naro maintains contact with Southeastern dialects of Ju (Kx'a), no Kx'a or Tuu speakers inhabit the plains east of the Okavango Delta where Ts'ixa is spoken today. Yet, we argue that uvularity in both Naro and Ts'ixa was inherited from a shared proto-language and retained through contact. Ancient place names as well as other apparent Non-Khoe features in the morphology and syntax of Ts'ixa (Fehn 2016) suggest historical contact with Ju-speakers who can be expected to have employed both pharyngealization and pre-voicing. These features are, to varying degrees, still reflected in modern Ts'ixa, but absent in closely related dialects of the Kalahari Khoe language Shua spoken in regions to the immediate east.

In conclusion, we propose that uvularity was introduced into the Khoe language family at the proto-Khoe or proto-Kalahari Khoe stage, but got lost in many varieties who did not remain in contact with Non-Khoe languages making regular use of this feature. We thereby argue that retention of uvularity in modern Kalahari Khoe languages is an indicator of (comparatively recent) contact, even in cases where this contact has been terminated or is no longer overt.

References

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