The Proto-Isum Language

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Contents

1 Preface

Proto-Isum is a reconstructed historical language from which the Delta Languages, Plateau Languages, and Lowland Languages are known to descend from with the Askar Group being considered highly likely as well in addition to other smaller groupings. There is no known or expected direct evidence of this proto-language in any form aside from what was inherited in daughter languages and loanwords into other languages present during its lifetime. Current estimates place its existence and spread during the later portion of the neolithic after the development of fired pottery; contact with it and its daughter languages brought into other languages several concepts that seem to be novel innovations or cultural relics from its speakers such as certain forms of companion planting, particular forms of kaolin vessels, and some stories that become more interculturally common with their spread.

On the whole, Proto-Isum had a modest inflectional morphology that was augmented by its syntax. Currently a matter of dispute is whether the language marked four or five nominal cases via bound suffixes. Some seemed to have been optional with simple placement in a phrase or subphrase being sufficient; however the ergative argument was always strongly marked. The expansion of that case in some daughter languages causes some of the current confusion over the number of cases asserted in reconstruction.

At present, we present our work to the best of our skills and the materials available. Should further evidence or more convincing arguments be made, we may revise this future editions, but for now it is our earnest hope that this reconstruction of our history will provide insights to learners and researchers in other fields.

2 Phonology

The present reconstruction of Proto-Isum presents a phonology with a rather balanced and fairly full set of phonemes. There are few gaps within its patterns, and points that might otherwise seem unusual seem to fit some kind of internal pattern. The realizations in the daughter languages is quite varied. In the documentation provided below, the phonemic elements are presented plainly while the Romanization used widely is in angle brackets.

2.1 Vowels

Proto-Isum features at least 5 vowel qualities with three at two lengths with no quality differences between long and short. It is notable that in multi-syllabic words, at most one long vowel is present; unsurprisingly it is always realized as the stressed syllable. Long vowels seem to have been more resistant to synchronic changes. Some scholars contest the inclusion of /ɨ/ in the reconstruction, but we believe that this inclusion is sensible based on reflexes found in the Askar Group languages. When they are not considered in this equation, its exclusion seems sensible, but certain oddities in how the Askar Group presents vowel reflexes in stressed syllables demands its inclusion, in our opinion, for the most thorough analysis.

	Front	Central	Back
High	i, iː<i, ii>	ɨ* <y>	u, uː<u, uu>
Mid	ɛ<e>		ɔ<o>
Low		a, aː<a, aa>	

2.2 Consonants

	Labial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar - Uvular
Plain	p <p>	t, t͡s<t, c>	t͡ʃ<q>	k, kʷ<k, kw>
Voiced	b <b>	d, d͡z<d, z>		g, gʷ<g, gw>
Aspirate	pʰ<ph>	tʰ, t͡sʰ<th, ch>	t͡ʃʰ<qh>	kʰ, kʷʰ<kh, khw>
Nasal	m <m>	n <n>	ɲ<ny>	
Fricative		s <s>	ʃ<x>	x, xʷ<h, hw>
Approximant		l <l>	j, ʎ<j, ly>	w, ʁ, ʁʷ<w, r, rw>

Proto-Isum is reconstructred as having a three types of stops at four points of articulation using two methods of release (full stop and affricate). The velar and uvular consonants present with both rounded and unrounded versions. The single rhotic /ʁ/ follows this pattern as well. Notably not present in this reconstruction is both /f/ and /d͡ʒ/, which seem to be holes in the otherwise strongly filled consonant space. Some scholars squabble over the inclusion of /ʎ/ prefering instead to split it among /l/, /j/, and /ɲ/ under various conditions. We have chosen against that since we feel it distills into daughter languages neatly despite being a comparatively rare phoneme both within the lexicon and also within expected discourse usage.

2.3 Syllable Structre

Reconstructions consistently agree on the syllable structure being `(C)V(m/n/p/t/k)` where coda stops were unreleased. The nucleus may be either short or long, but not a diphthong. Various aspects of this structure and how it interacts with perceived stress and prosody led to the wide varying realizations found in daughter languages.

2.4 Allophony

Every language has some variety in how underlying phonemes are realized when placed in different environments, and Proto-Isum was surely no different from that. Some of the synchronic changes that are expected to have existed are evidenced in some way in daughter languages. Please note, this is restricted to expected changes triggered by environment by the speakers of Proto-Isum and not changes witnessed in its various daughter languages.

2.4.1 Velarizing /n/

/n/ almost definitely presented as [ŋ] before velar stops and fricatives and at the end of words. However, change to /n/ seems unlikely before the uvular rhotics.

2.4.2 Intervocalic /w/

/w/ became [v] in all intervocalic word medial positions. No daughter languages present any convincing evidence that it remained a semivowel in this position.

2.4.3 Intervocalic Fortified /j/

Based on reflexes in most daughter languages, it seems highly likely that when /j/ followed a stressed vowel in word medial intervocalic positions, it was realized as [zj].

2.4.4 Interruptive Glottal Stop

While not present as a distinct phoneme, it is expected that the glottal stop, [ʔ], was inserted to break vowel-vowel sequences across word boundaries.

2.5 Final Notes on Romanization

The above sections enumerate everything that is needed for the Romanization; however some digraphs like <kh> and even <khw> could be confusing without disambiiguation. Intervocalic aspirate stops could be confused with clusters of coda stops and the velar fricative. For this reason, when [kx] or other clusters like this occur, the coda stop will be separated with and apostrophe <'>. Thus <akha> is [ak^{h}a] but <ak'ha> is [akxa].

2.6 Stress

Proto-Isum did not make use of contrastive stress, that is stress patterns to distinguish morphemes, but for multisyllabic words in particular stress was present. Many frequently used syntactic particles that were not affixed to main words, and probably many common use words, often acted as unstressed when juxtaposed with more lexically prominent words. Stress within a word was governed seemingly by a few simple rules:

- Monosyllabic words, in isolation, have no stress pattern
- Long vowels in multisyllabic words are always stressed
- If there are no long vowels, the syllable closeset to the end of a word before a consonant cluster not including fricatives or approximnats had stress
  - [**Example**]: `saktu` will have stress on the first syllable
- If there are no clusters, and the final syllable is open, stress is penultimate
  - [**Example**]: `iwa` will have stress on the first syllable
- Finally, if there are no clusters, and the final syllable is closed, stress is ultimate
  - [**Example**]: `lyagwyn` has stress on the final syllable
  - [**Example**]: `khakpet` has stress on the penultimate syllable
  - [**Example**]: `iixyt` has stress on the penultimate syllable

3 Human Body Terms

This section provides reconstructions for various Proto-Isum anatomical terms. These terms were frequently utilized to describe other things in the language, so we're introducing them early in hopes of easing the reader into a gentler time understanding the language. Of note, Proto-Isum seems to have had a weak distinction between the hand-arm and foot-leg pairs, though it is thought terms like palm could be used to clarify hand or foot when needed explicitly; other evidence suggests a 'big'-'little' contrast for arm or leg and hand or foot respectively.

3.1 General Body Parts

This section will cover general body parts, looking at the whole body. Further sections will focus on terms specific to the face, hand, and others.

- **Head** – `Qhympu`
- **Neck** – `Unle`
- **Shoulder** – `Lekry`
- **Chest** – `Dirwak`
- **Belly** – `Khaama`
- **Back** – `Naga`
- **Arm / Hand** – `Thuu`
- **Leg / Foot** – `Beni`
- **Knee / Elbow** – `Sawak` (**N.B.:** also seems to mean a *bend, crook* in many cases)
- **Finger (Toe)** – `Zu`
- **Bum** – `Rop`

In the case of `Zu` meaning *toe* it seems that the term was more specific to fingers, and in context could be *toe*; however, in isolation it is expected that `Zu Benina`, that is exactly *finger of the foot*.

3.2 The Face

The terms for facial anatomy show some polysemy with non-anatomic elements, but there are not interesting collisions in meaning like seen in the more general anatomy such as 'hand-arm'.

- **Face** – `Hebu`
- **Ajo** – `Eye`
- **Lyek** – `Ear`
- **Nose** – `Nunu`
- **Mouth** – `Nyaam`
- **Lips** – `Marwa`
- **Chin** – `Ipu`
- **Cheek** – `Ek`
- **Hair** – `Xaa`

3.2.1 Inside the Mouth

Cover things like teeth, tongue, etc

3.2.2 The Eye in Focus

Cover things like white (kaolin), iris, pupil, eyelid...