

COULD PRE-HEBREW BE THE SAFA AHAT OF GENESIS 11:1 ?

ISAAC ELCHANAN MOZESON

Modern linguists assume one original mother tongue – monogenesis of language – on probabilistic grounds.¹ Indeed, recent research involving intra-syllabic consonant-vowel² co-occurrence supports the theory that there was, in fact, one mother tongue.² Joseph Greenberg of Stanford University pioneered the technique of mass multilateral comparisons by examining hundreds of words from many languages and seeking similarities.³ Merritt Ruhlen showed that the striking similarities between words denoting a particular concept across language families proved a single origin for the world's languages.⁴ The Russians Illic-Svitych and Dolgopolsky reconstructed the superfamily to which Indo-European and other major language families belonged (Afro-Asiatic, Kartvelian, Uralic, Altaic, and Dravidian) and termed this proto language Nostratic.⁵ The geneticist Cavalli-Sforza compared genetic groupings of humans and Greenberg's linguistic classification and found a high degree of similarity.⁶

The Bible describes this scenario perfectly: *All the earth had the same language [safa ahath] and the same words* (Gen. 11:1).

Virtually all Jewish commentators (Rashi, Radak, Malbim) on the basis of a talmudic quote (JT Megillah 1:9) view this one language as Hebrew. The Torah was given in Hebrew [Bereshit Rabbah 18:4; 31:8]. All languages are incorporated [*nichlalin*] into Hebrew and all 70 languages have a source [*shoresh*] in *Leshon haKodesh* [Sfat Emet, Bamidbar Shevuot]. Since Abraham of the Late Bronze Age is the first Hebrew, calling this proto-Semitic mother tongue "Hebrew" is problematic. It is more logical to honor the first recorded homeland of speaking homo sapiens and to call this language Edenic. Indeed, Ramban, on a passage in Exodus 4, refers to it as "the language of the Canaanites." Nonetheless, it is biblical Hebrew and occasional words from other ancient Semitic tongues that appear to be the stock of the wide world's diverse vocabularies.

Isaac Mozeson has a BA in English from Yeshiva University and did MA and doctoral work in linguistics at New York University.

Those original 70 languages that seem somehow to be spun off of Edenic, giving rise to the 70 nations in Genesis 10, would continue naturally to break off into the 6,000 languages (more accurately, dialects) that we have today.

But how could a theoretical mother tongue, like the Pre-Hebrew or Edenic *safah ahat* of our focus, get diversified into such different languages? Even if neuro-linguists make breakthroughs in understanding glossolalia (where subjects under hypnosis were able to "speak in tongues" in languages they never knew), it is doubtful that we could ever fully understand what may have happened at the Tower of Babel. But the answer may be in the text:

*Let Us then go down and **confound** their speech there so that they shall not understand one other's speech That is why it was called Babel, because there the Lord **confounded** the speech of the whole earth (Gen. 11:6, 9).*

The Hebrew terms *v'navla* [confound] and *ballal* [confounded] have been explained (Midrash Tanchuma Noah Siman 28) as God literally mixing up language roots. I intend to show by use of classic linguistic rules (Grimm's Law) how this confounding of the Edenic roots could develop into such diverse tongues. Some of the patterns (for example, Hebrew to Japanese) even have set algorithms (in this case simple reversal of the letters).

Linguists have done centuries of exhaustive work in tracing how early Germanic became old, middle and low forms of modern Germanic languages, such as Dutch, English, German, the Scandinavian languages, and Yiddish. By applying these same patterns of language change to biblical Hebrew, we can discover much about how the "confounding" of languages came about.

The most basic aspect of language change involves letter shifts within the anatomical ranges of the parts of the mouth used to pronounce each letter/sound. Students of English are familiar with Grimm's Law, under which Dutch "*vader* [father]" and English "father" are cognates with shared ancestry. Both "v" and "f" are letters/sounds made by the lips, thus called (interchangeable) bilabials. The harsh "d" and the softer "th" are both letter/sounds made by the tongue at the teeth ridge, thus called dentals. Throw in the Latin "*pater* [father]" and now you can hear why linguists have designated an Indo-European family that includes the ancestors of Germanic and the Romance languages.

The Grimm brothers, of fairy-tale fame, popularized Grimm's Law of letter shifts but they were not the first to put the observation into print. Rashi, in his commentary on Leviticus 19:16, explains how the "kaf" of one word can be shifted to a "gimmel" to offer us an alternative word and a fuller reading of the biblical text. He writes that "all letters that begin from the same place [in the mouth] interchange."

There are seven sound-based letter shifts within seven anatomical groups:

1. Interchangeable voiceless vowels: "aleph/any vowel," "hey/h," "vav/oo or oa," "yod/y, j, y,gh or any vowel."
2. Interchangeable bilabial letters (formed on the lips): "bet/b," "bhet/bh or v," "vav/v or w," "pey/p, pheyl/ph or f."
3. Interchangeable guttural letters (formed in the throat): "hey/h," "gimel/g or j," "het/[k]h or k[h]," "kahf/k," "khaf/kh," "ayin/gh or vowel," "koof/q."
4. Interchangeable dental letters (formed on the tooth ridge): "dalet/d," "tet/dt," "tsadi/ts (always st in European)," "tahft or thaf/th."
5. Interchangeable nasal letters (formed in the nose): "mem/m," "noon/n."
6. Interchangeable liquid letters (formed with the rolling tongue) "lamed/l," "resh/r or wr."
7. Interchangeable fricative or sibilant letters (formed with whistling air): "zayin/z," "samekh/s," "tsadi/ts," "sin/s," "shin/sh," "sahf/(s)."

The vowels are too simple. In fact, ancient Semitic (like contemporary cell-phone texting) barely records vowels. So, let us look at examples of the six consonantal letter shifts. We begin with four examples from German, familiar to many speakers of English or Yiddish. We will add an example from a non-Indo-European language family, and conclude with an illustration of how Edenic, the *safa ahata*, demonstrates intimate design (with these letter shifts), in antonyms. (Like-sounding synonyms evolve naturally, often from the same source. But for antonyms to do so is counter-intuitive.)

Lips/Bilabial Shift:

(1) German *Feuer* means fire. It is from a bilabial shift of Edenic *boer* [to burn]. The noun for a fire is *hevher*.

(2) German *Löwe* means lion. *Lavie* means lion in the Hebrew Bible.

(3) *Über* means over. *Avar* means over.

(4) *Wetten* means vow (as in "wedding"). *Beteh* [bet-tet-het] means assurance.

(5) *Appa* means father in Eskimo-Aleutian languages. *Abba* means father in Aramaic, and is the root of papa and pope.

(6) Within Edenic, now considering the internal evidence for a primary language program that was designed, not evolved, *gever* is a powerful adult male (Job 38:3), while *gur* is the vulnerable young of animals (Gen. 49:9). This pair of antonyms works with the *bhet* shifting bilabials to a *vav*.

Throat/Guttural Shift:

(1) *Direkt* means direct. *Derekh* means a way.

(2) *Horn* means horn in German. *Keren* means horn in biblical Hebrew.

(3) *Milch* means milk. *Malak* means to wring (as in milking).

(4) *Sicher* means secure, safe from. *Sagur* means closed.

(5) *Ying* means baby in Chinese. *Yonek* means a suckling.

(6) *Tsahak* means to laugh (Gen. 17:17). *Tsa'ak* means to cry (Gen. 27:34).

Tooth ridge/dental shift:

(1) *Beute* means booty, spoil. *Betsa* means unjust gain.

(2) *Bade* means a hut, cabin or booth. *Bayit* means a house.

(3) *Milde* means smoothness, mildness. *Melet* means to smooth over with mortar.

(4) *Meter* means a measurement. *Method* means a technique. *Mida* means measure. *Mada* means science.

(5) *Kott* means a bag in Estonian (which is Uralic, like Finnish). *Kad* means a biblical pitcher, which was a leather bag.

(6) *Toar* [taf-vav-resh] means to go around (Num. 13:34). *Tur* [tet-vav-resh] means a straight row or tier (Ex. 28:17).

Nose/nasal shift:

(1) *Essenz* means essence. *Etsem* means bone (Gen. 2:23) and came to mean "the backbone of something," its essential substance.

(2) *Konto* means an account. *Kamats* means a measured handful (Lev. 2:2).

(3) *Nein* means no. *M'ain* means to refuse (Ex. 9:2).

- (4) *Unter* means below, under. *Mata* means below.
- (5) *Dene* means people in Navajo. *Adam* means man (Gen. 1:27)
- (6) *Moat* means tottering in place (Ps. 66:9). *Nadad* means wandering far (Ps. 55:9).

Rolling tongue/liquid shift:

- (1) *Aber* means the conjunction "but." *Aval* means but (Gen. 17:19).
- (2) *Adel* means nobility. *Adeer* means noble, glorious (Ezek. 17:23).
- (3) *Lust* means any pleasure and delight. *Ratsah* means desire, take pleasure in (Ps. 40:14).
- (4) *Platzen* means to burst, explode. *Plötzlich* means sudden. *Parats* means a sudden outburst, such as in the "breach" birth and naming of Perez in Genesis 38:29.
- (5) *Aruku* means to walk in Japanese. *Haloch* means to walk (Gen. 26:26).
- (6) *Balal* means mixed up, as the world languages were in Genesis 11:9. Near the end of the Prophets, the prophet Zephaniah predicts (3:9) that the emergence of a "pure speech" will unify world religions. "Pure" is *baroor*, that which is unmixed.

Whistling/fricative shift:

- (1) *Massage* and *massieren* mean to knead. *Mashash* means to grope (Deut. 8:29) and *meetsah* means to squeeze (Jud. 6:38).
- (2) *Masse* means mass. *Matsah* means lump (Ex. 12:15). *Amas* means to amass (Ps. 68:20). *Masa* means load, burden (II Kg. 5:17).
- (3) *Meister* means a master. *Mishtarah* means the authority (Job 38:33). The Shin-Tet-Resh root for officer, leader in Exodus 5:8 is the source of *sa-trap*.
- (4) *Missen* means to miss, do without. *Mis-* is a common prefix. *Moosh* means to be away or missing from (Num. 14:44), to depart or be removed from.
- (5) *Ziqui* means basket in Araona (Amazonian). *Sak* is a sack (Gen. 42:25). Linguists have long admitted that a fricative-guttural word for sack is somehow universal. A reversed synonym is the *kees* [pocket], an internal case.
- (6) Samech-Resh, *sur*, is to swerve to one side (Num. 12:10), as the *sorer* son who is perverted and rebellious in Deuteronomy 21:18. Meanwhile, only

a fricative shift away, there is a whole family of Shin-Resh "straight" words. *Yashar* means straight, sheer (I Sam. 6:12). *Yosher* means righteousness, law, taking the straight and narrow path (I Sam. 29:6). *Shoorah* is a straight row or line (Job 24:11), while *shoor* is a wall (Gen. 49:22). Such families of related synonyms and antonyms are not the exception, but the rule.

METATHESIS

The next important way with which the world's words were spun off from the *safa ahat* involves metathesis. With metathesis (root consonants switching order), we could see how German *wort*, later English "word," came from *davar* [word, thing]. Yes, there is also a dental shift (*dalet* to T) in there. *Wort* and "word" have taken the second, third, then first consonant letter from *davar*. Edenists then call this metathesis an M231.

The easiest metathesis to pick up is an M132, where the first letter of the Edenic word has not changed position. When considering that "degree" came from *darga* [gradation] or "market" from *mokher* [to sell], no advanced cryptanalysis or complex algorithms for computer software is needed. Such cryptanalysis by professional scholar-programmers who can account for all letter shifts will take the young science of Edenics to another level.

Finding "grade" in *darga* [gradation] is less intuitive. One could call this an M321, or a full reversal. Such reversals are unusual in Indo-European languages, but are common in Asian and Amerind languages. Here are ten examples of this M321 in Japanese, the best Asian language to work with because it does have most Western consonants:

1. akeru (to empty), kara (empty) from a reversal of *rek* (empty)
2. aratana (new, fresh) from a reversal of *tari* (fresh)
3. azukaru (receive in trust) from a reversal of *ahuza* (legal possession)
4. chokyori (long distance) from a reversal of *rahak* (far off)
5. dokuji no (personal, unique) from a reversal of *yahid* (singular, individual)
6. erabu (to choose) from a reversal of *berar* (to choose)
7. kabi (mildew, must) from a reversal of *avak* (dust, powder)
8. kaisei (clear weather) from a reversal of *zah* (clear)
9. kiroi (yellow) from a reversal of *yarok* (green)

10. kutsu (pain) from a reversal of *tsukah* (affliction)

Perhaps some of you feel that Asian words cannot possibly shed light on Biblical Hebrew. Consider the crucial phrase *in the etsem of the day* (Gen. 7:13, when Noah enters the ark; or when the Israelites leave Egypt (Ex. 12:41). Biblical translators render this "on that selfsame day." This is most unsatisfactory, but *ayin-tsadi-mem* means "bone," and the scholars do not know what to make of "the bone of a day." Now, consider the meanings of Chinese *zhong* (backbone, middle finger, noontime). These Chinese definitions show us that the bone is the middle and strength of the thing. And so, while the slaves might have slipped out in early morning, the text is making a point that they defiantly left in the backbone of the day. High noon, high drama.

To date a mere 30,000 words have been matched up with their ultimate etymons in Pre-Hebrew or ancient Semitic. Ten times this amount may have to be discovered before some orthodox Evolutionists can concede that Edenics is not a collection of coincidences and borrowings. Our small, global team of researchers welcomes any research that you might consider doing. *Ahat* means "one." We are striving to add the senses of "unique," "unified" and "premier" to the Genesis 11:1 phrase of *Safa Ahat*.

NOTES

1. F.C. Southworth, C.J. Daswani. *Foundations of Linguistics* (New York: Free Press, 1974).
2. P.F. MacNeilage, B.L. David, "On the origin of internal structure of word forms," *Science* (2000) 288:527-531.
3. J.H. Greenberg. *The Languages of Africa*. (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1963); *Language in the Americas* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1987).
4. M. Ruhlen (ed.) *On the Origin of Languages: Studies in Linguistic Taxonomy* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1994); *The Origin of Language: Tracing the Evolution of the Mother Tongue*. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1994).
5. R. Lewin, "Linguists search for the mother tongue," *Science* (1988) ;242:1128-1129.
6. L. Cavalli-Sforza, A. Piazza, P. Menozzi, J. Mountain, "Reconstruction of human evolution: bringing together genetic, archaeological and linguistic data," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (1988) 85:6002-6006.

One may access various language lists, many articles on Edenics, and slide shows in English, German, Spanish and French at www.edenics.org For an even more entertaining look at the new discipline that may reshape Bible studies and linguistics, see the new Tower of Babel web game at <http://www.edenics.net>