Gene Gragg

Work proceeds on the COMA (Cushitic-Omotic Morphological Archive) project, whose two goals have been:

- A compilation of all available morphological information on the Cushitic-Omotic languages in their Afroasiatic context.
- Development of a user interface to the archive which would be in effect a tool for the organization, manipulation, and contrastive and analytical display of paradigmatic data, both within and among these languages.

On the data-entry front all the Cushitic data which will be contained in the initial publication of the archive have been entered as of spring 2009: forty-plus languages with, at this point, more than 2,500 formatted paradigms — and more to come! At this stage the work of new data entry has been shifted to the Afroasiatic context of Cushitic and is being done by two advanced graduate students in NELC. Maegara Lorenz, a student in Egyptology, has finished entering the basic paradigmatic information from Sahidic Coptic; she will go on in the coming year to include the parallel information in Demotic, Middle Egyptian, and Old Egyptian. Sam Boyd, a student in comparative Semitic, will enter corresponding information in the major Semitic languages (Ethiopic is already in the archive; he will be doing Akkadian, Arabic, Syriac, Hebrew, Old South Arabian, and, time permitting, the best-attested varieties of Modern South Arabian).

Thanks to continued support from the Mellon Foundation, the project was able to engage a programmer from NORC. He has produced the initial version of a drag-and-drop, JavaScript-powered, tool for manipulation and combination of paradigms. We are now working on integrating this into the archive interface and elaborating procedures for making very general queries crossing divisions of language, language family, and morphological category (e.g., “How is the category ‘feminine’ marked in Afroasiatic?”). This latter aspect of the archive intersects with a number of converging projects on linguistic documentation and typology and the development of electronic tools to explore questions in this domain.

In the fall Gene Gragg gave a paper at the third meeting of the International Association of Comparative Semitic, held in Turin, Italy, October 2–5, 2008. The paper, “Morphological Expression of Verbal Negation in Cushitic,” uses data gathered for the COMA project to survey
INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH

the very complex integration of verbal negation into the verbal paradigm in all major branches of Cushitic. An earlier conference paper describing the linguistic bases of the morphology project appeared as an article, “An Approach to Describing Afroasiatic Templatic Morphologies” (Aula Orientalis 26 [2008]: 61–89). The paper from last year’s 5th International Conference on Cushitic and Omotic, in Paris, “Cushitic Verb Inflectional Classes Revisited,” is being prepared for publication in Proceedings of the 5th Conference on Cushitic and Omotic Languages, edited by Marie-Claude Simeone-Senelle and Martine Vanhove (Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2009).

--------------------

Rebecca Hasselbach

Rebecca Hasselbach was awarded the residential fellowship of the Franke Institute for the Humanities for the academic year 2008/2009, which allowed her to be on research leave during the winter and spring quarters. During this time, she worked on her current book project, Grammatical Roles and Relations in Semitic, which investigates the expression of grammatical case and related matters such as word order in the Semitic languages with the aim to reconstruct the original case system of Semitic and to compare the Semitic system to that of other languages and language families.

In addition, she wrote an article on Old South Arabian grammar for a volume edited by Holger Gzella (Leiden), which comprises descriptions of languages that have significance for the Hebrew Bible and its cultural and linguistic environment. She has also agreed to write various brief articles for the Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics, of which the first, “The Barth-Ginsberg Law,” was completed and submitted this spring.


In addition to her research, Rebecca Hasselbach co-organized the annual meeting of the North American Conference on Afroasiatic Linguistics that took place in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in March 2009 — a conference that attracts scholars working on all aspects of Afroasiatic languages from a wide variety of countries. She was also invited to participate in the third meeting of the International Workshop on Comparative Semitics, which met in Turin in October 2009, where she presented a paper on the grammaticalization of demonstratives in Semitic.

Rebecca Hasselbach further continued to work as a book review editor for the Ancient Near East for the departmental Journal of Near Eastern Studies.