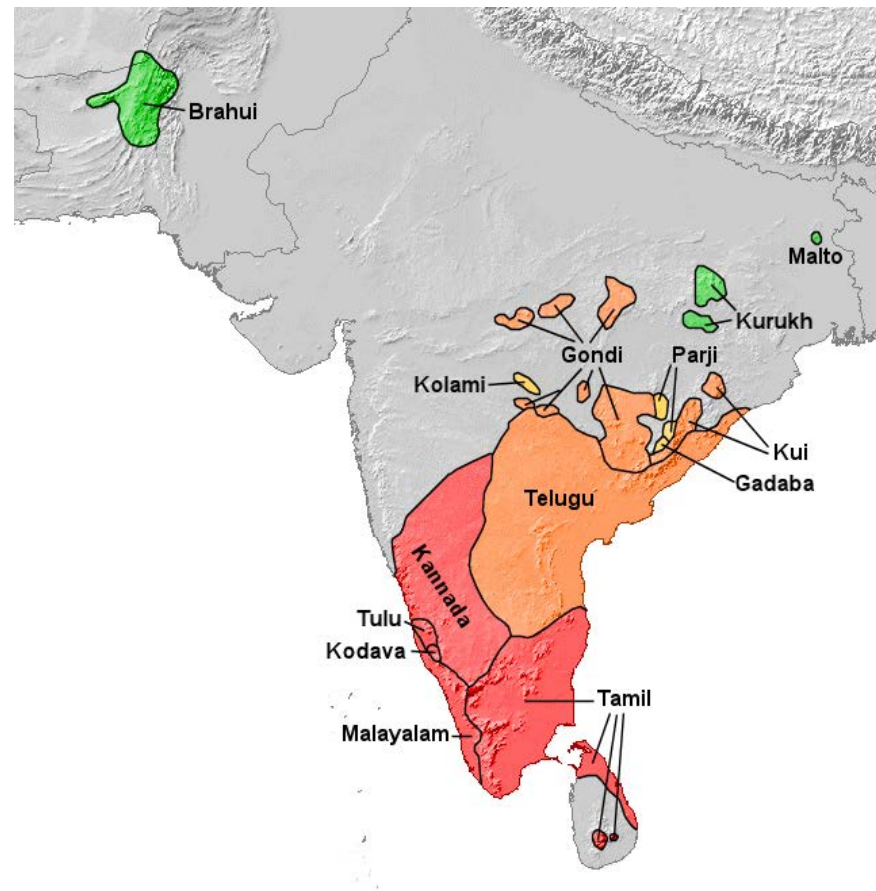**George Starostin**

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Once again on the genesis of the Dravidian language family

Dravidian as Nostratic: the original hypothesis and its problems

Early history:
— Dravidian–Uralic relationship (Schrader 1924, Burrow 1946 etc.)
— Dravidian–Altaic relationship (Bouda 1956, Menges 1964)

Dravidian as Nostratic: V. Illich-Svitych, A. Dolgopolsky, A. Bomhard, etc. (1960s — present time)
Dravidian as an outlier branch of «Eurasiatic» (along with Kartvelian): J. Greenberg

Nostratic Etymological Database (available at http://starling.rinet.ru, *Tower of Babel* project):

　　— compiled by Sergei Starostin
　　— incorporates most of the previously proposed etymologies along with some original comparanda
　　— 1114 lexical comparisons of Dravidian material with parallels in other Nostratic languages (out of 2077 overall)
　　— (cf. 1259 for Indo-European, 1215 for Uralic, 1664 for Altaic)

Grammatical evidence from Illich-Svitych's tables (1971: 6–37):

　　— best parallels found in the nominal declension system (case endings, etc.)
　　— generally poor quality comparanda in the pronominal and verbal systems

Lexicostatistical problems with the Nostratic origin of Dravidian

Sergei Starostin 2003:
Statistical Evaluation of the Lexical Proximity between the Main Linguistic Families of the Old World

— a preliminary lexicostatistical comparison between the main linguistic families of Eurasia
— source material: intermediate reconstructions of Swadesh items for Proto-Indo-European, Proto-Uralic etc.
— comparison based on the «relaxed phonetic correspondences» principle

Table of percentage matches between the compared families:

	Uralic	Kartv.	Altaic	Drav.	Sem.	NC	ST	Yeniseian
Indo-European	.26	.19	.35	.16	.10	.16	.14	.09
Uralic		.17	.41	.18	.09	.08	.08	.05
Kartvelian			.20	.14	.10	.10	.07	.05
Altaic				.28	.13	.10	.15	.06
Dravidian					.11	.08	.10	.03
Semitic						.16	.12	.07
North Caucasian							.54	.42
Sino-Tibetan								.36

Calculation results:
    — suggest a Proto-Nostratic affiliation for Dravidian;
    — show particularly close affinity with Altaic (or, possibly, additional lexical contacts with Altaic).

The pronominal system

Form	Krishnamurti 2003	Starostin 2007
1 sg	*yaː-n (~ *ɲaː-n)	*nyaː-n
1 pl (excl.)	*yaː-m	*nyaː-m
1 pl (incl.)	*naː-m	*naː-m
2 sg	*niː-n	*nyuː [rev. back to *nyiː]
2 pl	*niː-m	*nyuː-m (~ *nyuːv-ir)

— main feature of the system: contrast between root vowel *a* (1 sg) and root vowel *i* (2 sg)
— all other components analyzable as fossilized prefixal or suffixal components
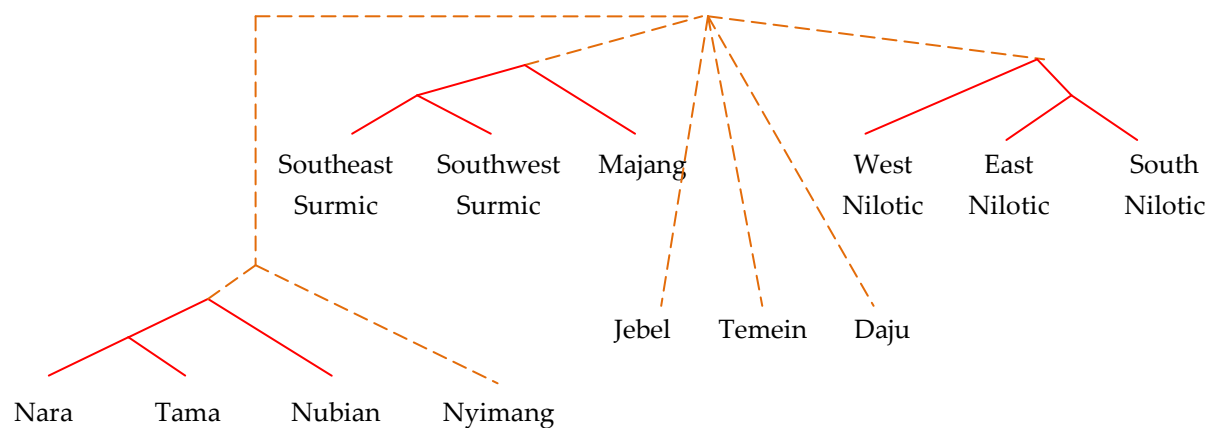
Some comparable pronominal systems:

	Australian (Dixon 1979)	African, e.g.:	
		Kordofanian	East Sudanic
1 sg	*ŋa-	*ŋa-	*(n=)a-
2 sg	*nʸun- / *nʸin-	*ɲi-	*(n=)i-

However: despite some additional typological parallels, absolutely no correlations between Dravidian and Australian in remaining stable Swadesh items.

East Sudanic — a well-established language family among the several «blocks» that constitute Greenberg's debatable «Nilo-Sudanic»:

— 9 identifiable non-controversial branches
— probably classifiable into «Southeast» and «Northeast» subfamilies
— relationship strongly supported by lexicostatistics / shared isoglosses
— outliers may include Fur and Berta (Starostin 2017)
— further relationship to Central Sudanic possible, but not clearly demonstrated (ibid.)

Lexicostatistical tree for East Sudanic (based on 50-item wordlists):

Parallels between the East Sudanic and Dravidian families on the 50-item wordlist

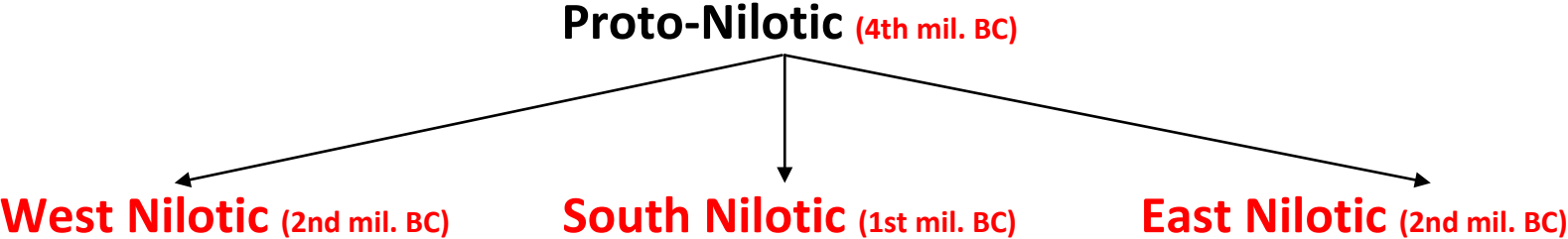|				
ashes	eat	horn	new	tail
bird	egg	**I**	night	**thou**
black	**eye**	kill	**nose**	**tongue**
blood	fire	leaf	not	tooth
bone	**foot**	louse	one	tree
die	hair	meat	rain	**two**
dog	**hand**	**moon**	smoke	water
drink	head	mouth	star	we
dry	**hear**	nail	stone	what
ear	heart	**name**	sun	**who**

Legend:

red: precise phonetic and semantic matches, assuredly reconstructible for both proto-levels.

brown: same, but with the assumption of fossilized morphology in Dravidian.

green: perfect semantics and distribution, but with individual scenarios of phonetic development.

blue: solid phonetics and semantics, poor distribution in East Sudanic (usually found represented in only one branch) or in Dravidian.

Nilotic: the best studied and (arguably) most archaic branch of East Sudanic

Proto-Nilotic (4th mil. BC)

West Nilotic (2nd mil. BC)   **South Nilotic** (1st mil. BC)   **East Nilotic** (2nd mil. BC)

Nilotic Languages and Peoples

1 Sapiny
2 Pok
3 Kony

Non–Nilotic languages and peoples
are underlined

An experiment:
Finding "Nostratic-style" parallels
between Proto-Dravidian and Nilotic

1. Comparanda with Dimmendaal 1988 ("The Lexical Reconstruction of Proto-Nilotic" — for now, the most comprehensive attempt at finding etymological parallels with reflexes in at least two out of three branches of Nilotic).
Altogether: approximately 30 possible parallels out of 200 roots.

Nilotic	Meaning	Source	Dravidian	Meaning	Source	Q
*aRyew	'two'	C: Dim 189	*ir-	'two'	#474	
*bV- / *pɔ-	'come'	C: Dim 32[1]	*vaː- / *poː	'come' / 'go'	#5270 / #4572	
*dịŋ	'narrow'	C: Dim 116[2]	*tiɳ	'compact, crowded'	#3222	
*kɛlɪ	'leg'	C: Dim 100	*kaːl	'leg'	#1479 (Common)	
*[k=]ɔŋ	'eye'	C: Dim 61	*kaɳ	'eye'	#1159	
*[k=]ɔɲ	'eyes'					
*kɔl	'steal'	C: Dim 161	*kaḷ	'to steal'	#1372 (Common)	
*kʊt̪	'blow'	C: Dim 17	*uːd-	'blow'	#741 (Common)	?[3]
*ma-	'fire'	C: Dim 66	*maː-	'black, dark'	#4781 (Common)	
*mamaɪ	'uncle'	C: Dim 191	*maːma	'maternal uncle'	#4813	
*maɲ	'(have) intercourse'	C: Dim 95	*maɲ-	'to marry, unite'	#4667 (Common)	

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[1] Dimmendaal reconstructs *ɓun sg., *pɔ sg. based on Turkana bun, WNil *bEn, but the real WNil paradigm is more complex and the nasal element is clearly suffixal in origin (cf. Dinka morphophonological variants ba ~ bɔʰ ~ bɛʰn, etc.).
[2] Actual meanings are: 'narrow', 'crowded together'.
[3] Only if *k= in Nilotic (fossilized prefixation in verbs?).

*maṯ	'drink'	C: Dim 52	*mad-	'to be intoxicated'	#4687 (Common)	?[4]
*mar	'desire'	C: Dim 47	*mar-	'to be attracted to'	#4722 (Common)	
*mɛlɪ	'lick'	C: Dim 101	*mel-	'to chew'	#5077 (Common)	
*mɪŋ	'deaf, dumb'	C: Dim 45	*muːŋ	'dumb'	#5026 (SDr+Tel)	
*muk	'cover'	C: Dim 36	*mUg-	'to fold, shut'[5]	#4893 (Common)	
*mʊr	'cut (body)'	C: Dim 28	*mur-	'to break off, cut up'	#4975 (Common)	
*nʌk	'suck'	C: Dim 167	*nak-	'to lick, lap'	#3570 (Common)	
*ŋɪṯ	'brain'	C: Dim 20	*med-	'brain'	#5062 (Common)	
*ŋu	'stink, smell'	C: Dim 162	*muː-	'smell'	#4886 (Common)	
*ŋwal	'lame'	C: Dim 38	*mal-	'to twist, turn, bend'	#4734 (Common)	?[6]
*ŋwan	'four'	C: Dim 76	*muː-	'three'	#5052 (Common)	?[7]
*pʌr	'fly'	C: Dim 72	*paːr-	'fly'	#4020 (Common)	
*pɛr-ta	'bark of tree, peel'	C: Dim 11	*paṭṭay	'bark of tree'	#3876 (SDr+Tel)	?[8]
*pɛRat	'day, morning'	C: Dim 44	*poṟud-	'sun, day, time'	#4559 (Common)	
*piR	'water'	C: Dim 196	*pir-	'rain'	#4199 (Common)	
*pɪr	'rotate, stir'	C: Dim 138	*pir-	'twist'	#4177 (Common)	
*pʊk	'foam'	C: Dim 73	*pUg-	'smoke, steam'	#4240 (Common)	
*pʊṯ	'fall'	C: Dim 62	*pUd-	'to be buried, sink in'	#4509 (SDr+Tel)	
*[k=]ɔːr	'road, path'	C: Dim 134	*aːr	'path, way'	#405 (SDr)	
*tiR	'adjust, put in order'	C: Dim 2	*tir-nd-	'correct, mend'	#3251 (SDr+Tel)	+
*tɪ	'wear down'	C: Dim 4	*teːy-	'wear away'	#3458 (Common)	
*tɔ	'die'	C: Dim 48	*tav-	'fade, perish, die'	#3068 (SDr)	
*[k=]umɛ	'nose'	C: Dim 120	*muː-	'nose'	#5024 (Common)	

[4] This root typically indicates an elevated emotional state, often sexual in nature ('to be furious as by must', etc.), with 'intoxication' occasionally indicated as an accompanying shade of meaning. Possible semantic shift: 'drink' > 'be drunk, intoxicated', etc.

[5] As a flower or open mouth, etc.

[6] Meanings in Dravidian range from 'twist, bend' to 'wander' to 'return', etc., indicating 'crooked movement' as base semantics.

[7] Only under the assumption of 'many' as the original meaning.

[8] Cf. Bari *pɛr* 'peel' and Dimmendaal's note (may have been derived from a verb) vs. Kannada-Tulu *peray* 'to peel, scrape; skin or slough of serpent' (#4417).

*[k]=wI-	'head'	C: Dim 85	*koː-	'great man, king'	#2177 (SDr)	
*[k]=wıɲɔ	'bird'	C: Dim 14	Cf. *viː-	'to flap wings'	#5450	?[9]

2. Additionally: comparanda with Heusing 2004 ("Die südlichen Lwoo-Sprachen") — approximately 100 reconstructions for the Southern Lwoo subgroup of West Nilotic (with parallels from other Nilotic branches adduced where possible).

*kaj-	'bite'	W: Heu 292	*kac-	'bite'	#1097 (Common)	
*tıɛl	'leg'	L: Heu 208	*taːl̪	'stalk, leg'	#3185 (SDr)	
*cIN-	'hand' (< *[k=]ay-n-)	W: Heu 312	*kay	'hand'	#2023 (Common)	
*pwoɲj-	'teach'	L: Heu 344	*pun-	'understand, know'	#4344 (Common)	
*wiɲj-	'hear'	L: Heu 314	*vin-	'hear'	#5516 (Common)	
*nɛn-	'see'	W: Heu 336	*ninay-	'to think'	#3683 (SDr + Tel)	
*t̪ıːn-	'small'	W: Heu 339	*cin-	'small'	#2594 (Common)	

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[9] The full semantics of this verb is 'to swing /arm/, fling, flap /as wings/'. Comparison is acceptable only if it might somehow be shown that *-ɲ- in Nilotic is a historical suffix.