

1. Introduction

Dasenech or Geleb (Galab)² is spoken by a tribe of the same name which inhabits the northern shore of Lake Rudolf in southwestern Ethiopia and adjacent areas of Kenya and the Sudan. The Ethiopian section of the Dasenech numbers about 18,000 (Bender 1971:219); figures concerning Dasenech groups on Kenyan and Sudanese territories are not available.

It can be seen from the literature that confusion exists regarding nearly every aspect of this language. This begins with the designation itself, of which there are at least 20 variants in the literature: Galab, Geleb, Gelleb, Geleba, Gellaba, Gelubba, Galloppa, Marille, Merille, Marle, Reshiat, Rechiat, Rachiit, Rusia, Dasanek, Dathanik, Dathanaic, Dasenech, Daṭanič, Dama. The forms on the basis g-l-b (Galab, Geleba, etc.) are different types or orthographical variants of the name given to the people (and the language) by most of the neighboring peoples,³ e.g., by the Amhara, Galla, Konso, and Arbore. The Dasenech call themselves /Dáásanac/ [Da:sənac], and their language ?af Dáásanac/ 'mouth (= language) of the Dasenech'. The name Marille is said to be used by the Turkana. My informants stated that they used the term /marilli/ [mərille] to designate the Arbore. Contrary to this, Herbert Lewis's informants said that there is a dialectal variety of Dasenech called Marille which is not the same as Arbore and not simply a clan name (Harold Fleming, personal communication). My informants did not deny that there are variations of Dasenech although they were not able to locate dialect boundaries. Considerable divergence in some of the forms cited by the various sources -- even though they represent differing degrees of reliability -- also seem to support the assumption that Dasenech is internally differentiated.

Another point in question is the linguistic position of the language. Although Moreno, Cerulli, Greenberg, and Fleming, who built their classifications mainly on lexical evidence, have never raised any doubts about its being East Cushitic, it has recently been claimed by Tucker 1967 and Tucker and Bryan 1966 that there are not enough criteria available to classify the language as a member of any one of their proposed larger units. Consequently, they classify it as an 'isolated unit.' They were forced to do this partially by their one-sided classificatory scheme, and partially by the inadequate data available at that time. The two authors rely exclusively on Shackleton 1932 and Kelly 1942, who failed to describe some of the most important phenomena of Dasenech grammatical structure such as grammatical gender, prefix-conjugation, and verb-derivation, which clearly point in the direction of Cushitic

Thus, even if vocabulary resemblances were not taken

into account, there is such an overwhelming number of detailed morphological correspondences with Saho, Somali, and Oromoid that hardly any skepticism can arise about the close relationship between Dasenech and the other East Cushitic languages. Naturally, it is not Tucker's and Bryan's fault that they did not possess reliable data. Two of their major arguments, however, were the non-existence in Dasenech of the well-known Cushitic ani/ati pronoun pattern, and of the well-known Cushitic a/ta/a/ta/na/tan/an conjugation type. It was already clear from the material presented in Shackleton 1932 that the language simply generalized the oblique pronoun series (yú 'I', kúú-ni 'thou' etc.), and reduced the number of verb forms within one paradigm to two forms (retaining, however, the original 'interlocking pattern'). It is of theoretical interest to note that these two structural changes (both quite 'natural' from the viewpoint of general historical linguistics) were among the most important factors which led to the failure to recognize the Cushitic status of Dasenech. Thus, taking Dasenech as a test case for Tucker's and Bryan's classificatory criteria, we can see that they are too 'powerful' and too restrictive to yield satisfactory results.

The East Cushitic membership of Dasenech thus seems to be fairly clear; however, its exact position within this group still remains undetermined. In Bender 1971 it is classified together with Arbore as a separate sub-branch of the "Arbore-Dasenech-Oromoid" section of Nuclear Lowland East Cushitic. Vocabulary comparison suggests that Dasenech's closest kin are Arbore and the Elmolo of Heine 1973. Both are now known only from short word lists. Morphologically, on the other hand, Dasenech displays several structural elements hitherto found only in Somali, e.g., the genitive ending -iet (= Somali -eed), the negative imperative indicator ha (Dasenech ha fúriṅ 'do not open!' = Somali ha fúrin 'id.'). A negative marker ma used together with a suffix -ṅ ~ -iṅ is paralleled by a similar construction in Somali and Saho (Dasenech ma-fúriṅ = Somali ma furin 'not having opened'). These elements are either altogether absent or at least somewhat modified in Oromoid.

Only Somali, Dasenech, and Rendille share a special allomorphic distribution of the reflexive/subjective suffix /t/: -t- (or similar) before vowels, -at- before consonants, and zero before the imperative singular ending. The latter is Dasenech -u, Somali and Rendille -o in this special context versus zero in all other instances. Cf.

	Dasenech	Somali	Rendille
1s	zaan-z-a	fur-t-aa	er-d-a
2s	zaan-at-ta	fur-at-(t)aa	ir-at-(t)a
Imp	zán-u	fúr-o	ir-o

The allomorph -u ~ -o of the imperative ending is also a characteristic of the subjective conjugation in all Oromoid languages; however, the subjective marker -D- is always

retained in these languages: Oromo fur-aDD-u, Konso fur-áD-o. It should be noted that the t/at alternation -- which is paralleled in Dasenech by a similar alternation m/am of the imperfect marker of a specific verb class (cf. 2.7 below) -- does not fit into the general set of syllable structure rules but is idiosyncratic to these two morphemes.

Because of the danger of relying on lexical evidence alone for the purpose of classification, and because morphological data is still lacking for some of the languages concerned, I do not wish to go beyond these few remarks. Detailed morphological studies of the neighboring languages, especially Arbore, Elmolo, Baiso, and Rendille, will certainly have a bearing on these matters. Unless all these languages are sufficiently documented, solid subclassifications based on the study of the relative chronology of the development (i.e., on the traditional notions of 'retention' and 'innovation') cannot be arrived at.

Dasenech material has been collected, published, and analyzed several times in the past. Among others, Shackleton 1932, Kelly 1942, Haberland 1965, Tucker and Bryan 1966, and Bender 1971 are worth mentioning. During his various journeys, Harold Fleming collected a certain amount of Dasenech data which he used for comparative purposes in some of his publications. Other collections, such as those by Uri Almagor, David Turton, and Herbert Lewis are as yet unpublished. All the material used in this paper is drawn from field work done with the Ethiopian Dasenech informants in 1972 (see Sasse 1974). The Ethiopian Dasenech territory is divided into two sub-districts (weredas), called mí?irab gələb (West-Geleb), and mísrak' gələb (East-Geleb). All my informants were natives of Kelam (Dasenech kalaam, the main town of mí?irab gələb).

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