

Indic Loanwords in Tocharian B, Local Markedness, and the Animacy Hierarchy

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A question that is rarely addressed in the literature devoted to Language Contact is: how are nominal forms borrowed when the donor and the recipient language both possess rich inflectional morphology? Can nominal forms be borrowed from and in different cases? What are the decisive factors shaping the borrowing scenario? In this paper, we frame this question from the angle of a case study involving two ancient Indo-European languages: Tocharian and Indic (Sanskrit, Prakrit(s)).

Most studies dedicated to the topic of loanwords in Tocharian B (henceforth TB) have focused on borrowings from Iranian (e.g. Tremblay 2005), but little attention has been so far devoted to forms borrowed from Indic, perhaps because they are considered uninteresting. We argue that such forms, however, are of interest for the study of Language Contact. A remarkable feature of Indic borrowings into TB is that *a*-stems are borrowed in TB as *e*-stems when denoting animate referents, but as consonant (C-)stems when denoting inanimate referents, a distribution that was noticed long ago by Mironov (1928, following Staël-Holstein 1910:117 on Uyghur). In the literature, however, one finds no reaction to Mironov's idea. By means of a systematic study of all the *a*-stems borrowed from Indic into TB, we argue that the trait [+/- animate] of the referent is, in fact, a very good predictor of the TB shape of the borrowing, e.g. male personal names from Skt. *a*-stems almost always end in *-e*, never in *-Cø*; *upādhāye* 'master' ← Skt. *upādhāya-* vs. *abhiprāy* 'intention' ← Skt. *abhiprāya-*. In view of the essential correctness of Mironov's claim, the question then becomes why Indic *a*-stems would be reflected as *e*-stems when animate, but consonant stems when inanimate. We present evidence in favor of the idea that TB animate borrowings in *-e* continue Indic nominative forms, while TB inanimate borrowings in *-Cø* continue accusative forms. We also argue that the TB *-e* ending is the unchanged TB reflex of a nominative ending in *-e* that can be observed, not in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, but in Gāndhārī, where *-e* alternates with *-o* in the nom. sg. of *a*-stems and may represent a front rounded vowel or a back unrounded vowel, e.g. [ø] or [ʁ] (see Brough 1962: 115). We will also draw attention to the fact that such a pattern is strongly favored (and extended) because of system-internal patterns typical of TB morphology. Pinpointing the exact rationale behind the TB *C-ø* realization of inanimate forms is more difficult: it is possible that a BHS or Prakrit acc.sg. *-Cam* [-Cəm] was borrowed in Tocharian as [-Cəm], with consequent loss of the final *-m* and deletion of the final unaccented schwa leading to [-C]. This hypothesis is confirmed by the accentuation of disyllabic forms that have stress on the final syllable, an irregular pattern that can be explained in TB only by assuming the presence of an underling schwa. Thus, inanimate forms really have a shape UR /-Cə/ → SR [-C].

The findings of this talk are, thus, twofold. On the one hand, the "split-borrowing" scenario presented here shows that borrowings of nouns in highly inflected languages conforms to robust cross-linguistic tendencies (e.g. ergative alignments, differential object marking etc.) whereby the unmarked "position" for animates is that of subject/agents, while for inanimate the unmarked "position" is that of object/patients. Further, a new piece of evidence regarding possible and long-suspected contacts between Tocharian and Gāndhārī can now be added to the complex puzzle of language and cultural contacts in the Tarim Basin of the 1st millennium CE

References

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