Loanwords in Semitic

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This paper has five sections: 1. Introduction, 2. Work on loanwords, 3. Definitions, 4. Some illustrations and finally, 5. Future study.

1. *Introduction*

My own involvement with loanwords began when I was assigned the study of personal names for the Ugaritic Dictionary, at the University of Barcelona in 1989. It soon became evident that many names had non-Semitic elements, mostly Anatolian, that is to say Hurrian and Hittite. Of course, this was already well-known from the earliest studies and from the extensive survey provided by Frauke Grøndahl's book *Die Personennamen der Texte aus Ugarit*, published in 1969 (PTU). Inevitably, the study of non-Ugaritic elements in names soon led me to the study of loanwords in general. As a result I have written a series of articles on the topic,[1] and recently I have identified over sixty new words for trees, shrubs, flowers, etc. (Watson 2004b), many of which are loanwords, some discussed here. As yet there is no comprehensive study of loanwords in Ugaritic.[2]

2. *Work on loanwords*

Over the years there have been several books on loanwords in our field. There are, of course, Stephen Kaufman's *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic* (1974) and Stephen Lieberman's *The Sumerian Loanwords in Old Babylonian Akkadian*, of which only volume 1 appeared: *Prolegomena and Evidence* (1977), since he died before completing the project. More recently we have James Hoch's *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts* (1994), based on a thesis, Yoshiyuki Muchiki's *Egyptian Proper Names and Loanwords in North-West Semitic* (1999), based on a 1990 thesis, Paul Mankowski's, *Akkadian Loanwords in Biblical Hebrew* (2000), based on a 1997 thesis, and Eugene Pentiuc's *West Semitic Vocabulary in the Akkadian Texts from Emar* (2001), also based on a 1997 thesis. Finally, there is the work edited by Thomas Schneider, *Das Ägyptische und die Sprachen Vorderasiens, Nordafrikas und der Agäis* (2004).

In addition there are Harold (Chaim) Cohen's, *Biblical Hapax Legomena in the Light of Akkadian and Ugaritic* (1978) and Anson Rainey's *Canaanite in the Amarna Tablets* (1996). Of the many articles on

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1. Watson, 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000.
2. For a brief survey see Tropper, UG, 44-49.

loanwords, perhaps the most significant are Wolfram von Soden's series of articles in *Orientalia* on Aramaic loans in Akkadian,[3] and Wolf Leslau's many articles on Arabic loanwords in a range of languages (including Amharic, Argobba, Ge'ez, Gurage, Harari, Tigre and Tigrinya). More recently, Daniel Sivan and Zipora Cochavi-Rainey published *West Semitic Vocabulary in Egyptian Script of the 14th to the 10th Centuries BCE* (1992), much of which overlaps with Hoch's book.

It is significant that the conclusions of the four recent books (by Hoch, Mankowski, Muchiki and Pentiuc) all concern phonology and morphology rather than general trends or theoretical considerations. However, in addition, both Hoch and Mankowski provide distribution tables. Hoch refers to the use of loanwords in the various genres and it is interesting that he mentions Egyptian love poetry as having a relatively high frequency of loans since the same is true of the Hebrew Song of Songs.

Generally speaking, the drive to find loanwords comes from the need to resolve philological problems. If no meaning or derivation can be found for a particular word in one Semitic language, then one has to turn to other Semitic languages. So, for Hebrew, the scholar turns to Arabic, Syriac or Aramaic and if necessary, to Akkadian, Phoenician or Ugaritic. If this yields no results, then the lexica of non-Semitic languages are searched: Hittite, Egyptian, Hurrian, Greek. And similarly for other languages such as Ugaritic. Such an approach is considered by some scholars to be a desperate measure. In his two-volume work on the ritual texts, Dennis Pardee prefers to study Ugaritic vocabulary as Ugaritic, with some reference to other Semitic languages, hesitant to accept Akkadian loanwords and only resorting to non-Semitic languages in extreme cases. In principle the approach is correct, but considering the very mixed population of Ras Shamra, where Hurrian, Hittite, Egyptian and other languages including Akkadian were used and perhaps even spoken, it is not surprising that quite a few loanwords entered the native Ugaritic language.

The topic of loanwords is not considered at great length in textbooks on language and linguistics. The most comprehensive study was by Uriel Weinreich, *Languages in Contact*, especially the section on lexical interference. However, this work is now over half a century old. Note also the very short joint article "Borrowing" in the *International Encyclopedia of Linguistics* (1992), comprising "An Overview" by Einar Haugen and "Loanword Phonology" by Ellen Broselow. More relevant to our field, perhaps, is the section "Languages in Contact: The Contemporary Semitic World", Olga Kapeliuk's contribution to *Semitic Linguistics: The State of the Art at the Turn of the 21st Century* (2002). Kaufman (1974) and Lieberman (1977) discuss theoretical aspects of loanwords in the introductions to their respective volumes, and in the introduction to his own book, Mankowski rehearses much of this. In my opinion, this neglect of the topic of loanwords goes hand in hand with the general objection to etymology and the etymological approach shown by many scholars.[4]

Most recently, Stephen Kaufman contributed the section "Languages in Contact: The Ancient Near East" to the volume *Semitic Linguistics* just mentioned. He notes: "Long overdue is a new assessment of the phonology and typology of Ancient Near Eastern culture words of foreign origin in Late Bronze Age Semitic, and how the linguistic evidence all ties in with the textual and archaeological sources to extend our picture of the history of trade, culture, technology, and the like" (2002: 301). And he concludes by hoping to have shown "that the area of ancient Semitic languages in contact is a fertile one. It is a field not only worthy of cultivation, but one whose produce must be widely shared with students of general linguistics" (2002: 304).

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3. Von Soden, 1966, 1968 and 1977.
4. For possible loans from Elamite cf. Blažek, 1999.

3. *Definitions*

The very term "loanword" (or "loan word" or even "loan-word", with a hyphen), which is itself a loan from German "Lehnwort", is now considered a misnomer: loanwords remain in the language and are not given back, they are not borrowed.[5] Perhaps a better description would be "introduced words" or "absorbed words", possibly distinct from the "Fremdwort", which always remains foreign, for example, "Angst" in English. However, the term "loanword" is now accepted and is common parlance, so it is used here. Of course, a distinction has to be made between loanwords and isoglosses or cognates.

The "Kulturwort" or "culture word" (again, a loan translation in English) is defined by Mankowski (2000: 7) as "a class of words marked by a high degree of mobility (thus recognizable at the same period in more than one language family and in disparate geographical regions) for which no ultimate linguistic provenance can be assigned". Usually they are nouns and denote "plants and vegetable products, metals, minerals, wild animals, and utensils". Gonzalo Rubio (1999: 8) refers to such words as Kulturwörter, Wanderwörter, migratory words or simply as "words that travel", and as a prime example cites the various words for "wine". In a note on the etymology of Egyptian *trr*, John Greppin (1993) calls the word for "oven", which also occurs in Indo-European, Semitic (though he does not mention Ugaritic), Kartvelian, Daghestani, Berber and Turkic, "a world-champion loanword".[6]

In his book *Polygenesis, Convergence, and Entropy* (1998), Lutz Edzard discusses loanwords briefly and distinguishes several types. Based on his classification, which in turn is based on G. Endreß (1992), and with some adaptation, the following list can be drawn up:[7]

(1) Direct or straightforward loanwords ($L_A \rightarrow L_B$)

For example, the Ug. PN *bnn*, spelt *bunani* and corresponding to Akk. *b/punānu*, a medicinal plant of some kind.

(2) Transmitted loanwords ($L_A \rightarrow L_B \rightarrow L_C$) or trans-$L_B$ loans

For example, Ug. *pkly* (a PN) may be loan from Akk. *pukuli*, wood or a tree of some kind, which in turn has been borrowed from Hurrian. Another example is Ug. *prṭl*, borrowed from Akkadian *piriduluš*, denoting a plant of some kind, which in turn had been borrowed Kassite.

(3) Loanwords that are transcriptions (L_A in L_B orthography)

For example, Akk. *taškarinnu*, "box-tree", a Semitic spelling of Hurrian *taškarḫi*, also borrowed in Ugaritic as *tškrġ* with the same meaning.

(4) Calques or loan translations (L_A translated into L_B)

For example, Ug. *ᶜqrbn*, "scorpion-like plant", a straight translation of Akk. *zuqīqipānu*, also "scorpion-like plant".

(5) Secondary creation of new terms after earlier borrowing ($L_A \rightarrow L_B \rightarrow$ and back to L_A)

In essence these are re-borrowed words. Such re-borrowings are a feature of loanwords. For example, Ug. *kḫt*, "seat, throne" is generally considered to be borrowed from Hurrian *kešḫi*. However, the Hurrian word itself may have previously been borrowed from Semitic *ksu* or *kissu*.[8] Whether the same applies to Ugaritic and Hebrew *hkl* ("palace") in respect of Sumerian é.gal is uncertain but feasible.

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5. See Sebba, 1997: 11.

6. For discussion of another *Wanderwort* found in Akkadian, (as *kâtu(m)*, *gayyātu(m)*), Hittite (as [NINDA]*gatai*), Hattian (as *kait*) and Hurrian (as *kade*), cf. Rössle, 2004. To his list, perhaps, should be added Eg. *gt*, a term for "loaves" (DLE II, 195) or a type of bread (Hannig, GWHb, 909), which may also be a loanword in Egyptian.

7. See the similar symbolic notation in Mankowski, (2000: 11).

8. Note also "the Egyptian word [*kḫs*] appears in an 11th Dynasty inscription indicating an Egyptian loan into Semitic" (Ward, 1996: 29).

In Semitic, loanwords can be differentiated into the following two sets:

  (1) Semitic loanwords, i.e. from another Semitic language (or inner-Semitic loans)
  (2) non-Semitic loanwords, i.e. from a non-Semitic language

The problem in connection with Semitic loans is how to distinguish them from cognates. And in respect of non-Semitic loans, if they cannot be tracked, it is not always possible to determine whether they are Kulturwörter, Wanderwörter, cross-cultural loanwords or even isoglosses.

4. *Some illustrations*

In the rest of this paper examples are discussed that illustrate some of the features already mentioned as well as other problems in connection with loanwords.

4.1 *Loan translations*

First, loan translations again, also termed calques. In the famous episode from the Book of Jonah, a worm is described as attacking the castor-oil plant that had been providing shade, making it wither. The Hebrew term for the plant is *qîqāyôn*, and the Hebrew for the attacking worm is *tôlaᶜat*. It seems that Hebrew *qîqāyôn* corresponds to Akk. *kukkanītu* and denotes the castor-oil plant (cf. HALOT, 1099). Furthermore, one Akkadian term for an insect, probably a worm, is *qūqānu*, also *gūgānu* and *guqqānu* (cf. CAD Q, 312; AHw, 928 and CDA, 291). Is it feasible, then, that the Hebrew is a translation of word-play based on Akkadian: the *kukkanītu*-plant is attacked by the *quqānu*-insect?[9] It is significant that the setting is said to be Nineveh, where Assyrian terms would not be out of place.

4.2 *New meanings*

Occasionally, words with commonplace or accepted meanings can have a different explanation and may be loanwords. Two examples from Ugaritic can be given. The expression *kpr šbᶜ bnt* (KTU 1.3 ii 2-3) has been translated "henna (enough) for seven girls", but Nicolas Wyatt has proposed instead "perfume of seven tamarisks" (2002: 72 n.15). He takes *kpr* in a wider sense than "henna" as "aroma" or the like (parallel to *rḥ*, "scent" in the following line). And instead of "daughters", he explains Ug. *bnt* as a loan from Akk. *bīnu*, "tamarisk". The Ugaritic inscription *skn. d šᶜlyt ṯryl. l dgn. pgr w alp l akl* (KTU 6.13) has been translated "Stela offered by Thariyelli to Dagan: funerary offering and an ox for eating". Here the expression *alp l akl* has been understood as "an ox for eating" or the like. Instead, I propose that Ug. *akl* has no connection with the verb "to eat" but corresponds to Hittite *aggala* (or *akkala*) which means either "plough" or "furrow".[10] If this is correct, then *alp l akl* means "ox from the plough" or possibly "ox from the furrow".[11]

4.3 *Coincidence*

Yet another problem is the matter of coincidence, a topic briefly discussed by Edzard (1998: 29, 33-34). In 1951, in an article on Hittite lexicography, Albrecht Goetze discussed the Hittite term *mitgaimi*, "sweet, sweetened", and showed that in fact it was borrowed from Luwian. He also wondered whether it is related to Semitic *mtq*, "to be sweet": "The basic word *mitga-* which remains when *-imi-* is isolated as a suffix [denoting the passive participle in Luwian] is curiously similar in appearance to Akkadian *matqu(m)*

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9. Note that the word was also borrowed by Jewish Aramaic as *quqjānâ*.

10. Note also that Berber *akal* means "land, earth" and *agga/ullu* means "plough" (cf. van den Boogert, 1998: 61, 131, 352, 412-13). My thanks are due to Harry Stroomer (University of Leiden) for a copy of this book.

11. For a more detailed discussion see Watson, 2004c.

with which its ideogram is equated. The Semitic stem also exists in West Semitic and is represented in Hebrew, Aramaic and Ugaritic. However, the similarity between the presumably Luwian and the Semitic words may be due to a mere accident". Similarly, any connection between Semitic words for "potter" (*pḫr*, etc.) and Hittite *paḫḫur*, which means "fire", is probably accidental.

4.4 *Hybrids*

Hybrid forms also occur, especially in personal names. One example is Ug. *ᶜnil* (KTU 4.159:3), which Muchiki (1999: 219) explains as Eg. *ᶜn*, "beautiful", plus Semitic *il*, denoting the god Ilu or El, giving the meaning: "El is beautiful". Another example is *iytlm* (KTU 2.14:14, etc.) which is a combination of Semitic *iy*, "where?" + Hurrian *talmi*, "great".[12] Similarly, the PN *ḫdpršp* (KTU 4.760:3) may be Hittite (*ḫašp-*, "to destroy") plus Semitic (the god *ršp*).[13]

4.5 *Multiple explanations*

Some terms have a variety of possible explanations and with personal names it is often impossible to decide which is correct. For instance, the Ug. personal name *snb* (KTU 4.311:3) may mean "Healthy", Eg. *snb* (Muchiki 1999: 277), "An aromatic plant", also Eg. *snb* (a homograph) or even "Foundling", based on Akk. *sinbu*, which means "abandoned child" (CAD S, 283; cf. CDA, 324). Similarly, the difficult Ugaritic word *mkšr*, which is fed to sick horses, has been variously explained as "leek" (Akk. *karašu*), "forage", "saxifrage", the mustard plant or a foodstuff.[14] Instead, it may be connected with Hittite *karaš* (with metathesis). According to Hoffner, in his book *Alimenta hethaeorum*, Hitt. *karaš* is paired with "barley" and so may mean "wheat", possibly bread wheat, for example, club wheat, emmer or einkorn.

5. *Future study*

It is clear that in the literature the topic of loanwords is discussed only marginally. Also, generally speaking, the existence of loanwords is ignored or played down. But in fact, there are many more loanwords than commonly accepted by scholars and I am convinced that even more remain to be identified. We also need to determine the reasons for the use of loanwords, (for example, for the purposes of poetry) their distribution and frequency, and how they fit into general theories of Semitics and Linguistics.[15]

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12. See Grøndahl, PTU, 94 and 260; DUL, 135.
13. See Ribichini – Xella, 1987: 9-10.
14. For surveys see Watson, 2004a: 246-47 (with further references); DUL, 545.
15. There is not enough data to consider Semitic in terms of creoles and pidgins. See, in general, Sebba, 1997.

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7. *Abbreviations used*

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CAD =   *The Assyrian Dictionary of the University of Chicago* (Chicago).
CDA =   Black, J.-George, A.-Postgate, N., *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* (Wiesbaden 2000).
DLE =   Lesko, L., *A Dictionary of Late Egyptian*, 2 vols (Providence 2002, 2004).
GHWb   Hannig, R., *Die Sprache der Pharaonen. Großes Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch (2800-950 v. Chr.)* (Mainz 1997²).
HALOT = Koehler, L.-Baumgartner, W., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden 1994).
KTU =   Dietrich, M.-Loretz, O.-Sanmartín, J., *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places (KTU: second, enlarged edition)* (Münster 1995).
PN =   personal name.
PTU =   Gröndahl, F., *Die Personennamen der Texte aus Ugarit* (Roma 1967).
UG =   Tropper, J., *Ugaritische Grammatik*, Münster 2000.