

Linguistic aspects of Hadza interactions with animals

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1. Introduction

The Hadza people, who live in north-central Tanzania SE of Lake Eyasi, are one of the few remaining hunter-gatherer peoples in Africa. Although now enclaved between pastoral peoples and expanding agriculturalists, until recently they lived almost entirely by hunting and trading bush products (Obst 1912; Woodburn 1962, 1988). Land encroachment and hunting regulation have seriously impacted on traditional subsistence patterns and attempts by the government to settle the Hadza have generally been disastrous, leading to significant population decline and community fragmentation (Woodburn 1979, 2001). More recently, with outside assistance from IWGIA and other NGOs combined with a much greater awareness of the wider world, the Hadza have been able to parlay their status both as unrepresented peoples and as a local focus of eco-tourism. They recently fought off an attempt by the Tanzanian government to hand over their land in its entirety to wealthy Arab hunters. This has been at some cost, since in the 1950s, few Hadza spoke any Swahili, and now almost all are fluent in the language. This is likely to have a significant impact on the Hadza lexicon, and may well lead to a loss of specialised vocabulary.

Due to considerable external interest, there is an extensive bibliography, mostly of an anthropological or bio-anthropological character. The Hadza language itself is unique; although it is a 'click' language, it is not now considered to be related to the Khoisan languages of Southern Africa, unlike the neighbouring Sandawe which is increasingly thought to be affiliated to the Central Khoisan group (Sand et al. 1993; Güldemann & Elderkin in press). Earlier authors, for example, Bleek (1956) and Greenberg (1963) wished to gather all click languages into a single phylum, now usually known as Macro-Khoisan. Following the work of Sands (1998) few now accept the membership of Hadza, Ehret (1986) (not a Khoisanist) probably being the only major exception. However, it is also the case that geneticists, who have taken considerable interest in the Hadza, tend to reproduce the Macro-Khoisan hypothesis (e.g. Tishkoff et al 2007). The paper by Tishkoff estimates the time of divergence between Hadza and Sandawe as 15,000 years, although how such dates can be calibrated remains a mystery to non-geneticists.

This raises a problem that is not easily resolved; given that clicks are unique to this part of Africa, it seems difficult to accept that there is no historical relationship. Clicks in Southern African Bantu or Yeyi certainly originate from fairly direct contact with Khoisan (Seidel 2008). However, the Dahalo language, a Cushitic language spoken near Mombasa also has clicks and it is generally assumed that these must reflect ancient contact with click-speaking foragers, although no correspondences between Dahalo clicks and those of either Hadza or Sandawe have ever been demonstrated (Tosco 1992).

Lake Eyasi is the site of one of the most important Pleistocene sites in East Africa, and has recently been re-excavated (Domingues-Rodrigo et al 2007). The archaeozoological materials suggest a remarkable historical continuity of hunting and foraging over more than 40,000 years. Almost all the fauna hunted by Hadza today are also recorded archaeologically although there are also some species are now extinct. It is therefore generally assumed that this whole region was occupied by click-speaking hunter-gatherers prior to the expansion of Cushitic peoples (Blench in press). Indeed it has been argued that the Central Khoisan peoples were originally located much further north and only migrated to their present home within recent millennia (Güldemann & Stoneking 2008). Whatever the case, click languages probably became so diverse that little or no lexical trace of their affinities remains. In many ways this parallels the situation in Australia, where a settlement time-depth of 55 kya has been proposed (O'Connor & Chappell 2003). 'Australian' consists of numerous language phyla with extremely similar phonology and grammar but virtually no lexicon in common.

Hunter-gatherers inevitably pay considerable attention to the natural environment and are usually well-informed about the behaviour and characteristics of the animals they hunt. By the same token, animals play an important role in their symbolic life and thus may also acquire fantastical elements that do not reflect their zoology. This paper¹ looks at two aspects of Hadza interaction with the fauna of the region, the names

¹ This paper was primarily stimulated by Bonny Sands' unpublished field notes, listing most of the names given here and by discussions with James Woodburn and Kirk Miller concerning the functions of the names. Martin Walsh supplied useful background information on ideas about animal in Tanzania. I was able to spend some time in

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used to announce the killing of an animal and the intriguing relationship between the Hadza seeking honey, the honey-guide and the honey-badger.

2. Triumphal animal names among the Hadza

African hunters, even in agricultural societies, often have a rich and complex vocabulary of names for animals. Male and female animals may have different lexemes, and solitary males or young animals have their distinctive terms. Animals can have circumlocutions only applied to them after dark, or praise-names used by hunters (Blench 2006). Hadza are no exception, apparently having numerous names for major species, used in a variety of contexts. Hadza animal names are often ramified, with special names for large males, and ‘hunting’ names, i.e. names used when an animal is seen. The earliest extensive record of Hadza animal names is Swynnerton (1946) who records them in the column under ‘Kindiga’. The comparative vocabulary in Swynnerton shows quite clearly that few Hadza names bear any relation to those in other languages spoken in the immediate area.

One of the particularly unusual features of Hadza zoonymy is the use of contrastive lexemes for certain species of live and dead animals, especially for large species. The ‘dead animal’ terms are not in direct opposition to live animals, but are something like triumphal exclamations made when the animal is killed. It is possible to refer to dead animal in other contexts with their usual name. Surprisingly, these terms are verb forms, and as such can take suffixes denoting number and gender of the speakers as well as possessive suffixes.

Some thirteen terms have been recorded, all applied to medium to large in size and all mammals except for the ostrich. Some refer to individual species, but others gather different species in groups. For example, the large antelopes are classified together and so are predatory cats and smaller antelopes. Table 1 shows the triumphal names for dead animals in the first column with the species that are grouped together. Masculine and feminine forms are given where these exist. Column four gives the names for live animals by species, disaggregating those grouped by triumphal name to pair them with the names for live animals. These names are also sorted by gender, with the primary form given. Where the primary term is feminine a masculine is formed by deleting the affix. Some animals have multiple names when they are masculine, and these are given in the columns following the species of live animal. The usual name is emboldened and secondary names left in plain type.

Cambridge interviewing Hadza visiting James Woodburn, and I am particularly grateful for their comments and illustrations.

Table 1. Hadza triumphal names

Triumphal name referent	M	F	Usual term	Scientific name	M	M	M	F
lion, eland	hùbù-ʔé	-ʔi	lion eland	<i>Panthera leo</i> <i>Taurotragus oryx</i>	sésèmé k ^h ómâtî	ljalupa	mó:ndò	
giraffe	hawa-ʔe	-ʔi	giraffe	<i>Giraffa camelopardis</i>				ts'ókwanà-ko
leopard, cheetah, caracal, serval	hè!ŋé		leopard cheetah caracal serval	<i>Panthera pardus</i> <i>Acinonyx jubatus</i> <i>Felis caracal</i> <i>Felis serval</i>	dzándzài hùlùlú ásàkálà	!ŋé:		!ŋá!ŋàdé-kò
elephant, hippo	k ^h ap ^h ula-ʔe	-ʔi	elephant hippo	<i>Loxodonta africana</i> <i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>				bèk'áù-kò wéts'áí-kò
zebra	hanta-ʔe	-ʔi	zebra	<i>Equus quagga</i>				dóngò-ko
rhino	hùk ^h ù-ʔé	-ʔi	black rhino	<i>Diceros bicornis</i>	tl ^h ák ^h át ^h è			
buffalo	tele	tíí	buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>				nák'ómá-kò
kudu, bushbuck, waterbuck, reedbuck, or oryx/roan/sable antelope	hèpéʔ	hipiʔ	greater kudu lesser kudu bushbuck oryx/roan/sable waterbuck	<i>Tragelaphus strepsiceros</i> <i>Tragelaphus imberbis</i> <i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i> <i>Hippotragus spp.</i> <i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus</i>	tsîŋgàʔú !ŋánà tsímángánà	útumbé:dà	ndòfê:dà	
impala	tl'ũŋku-ʔi	-ʔe	Bohor reedbuck impala	<i>Redunca redunca</i> <i>Aepyceros melampus</i>	ŋgúnílálô			p ^h óp ^h ò-kò
wildebeest, hartebeest	ts'ono-we	-wi	wildebeest hartebeest	<i>Connochaetes taurinus</i> <i>Alcephalus busephalus</i>				bísò-kò ŋ'èlè-kò
gazelle, dikdik, klipspringer, duiker	hīl'i		red-fronted (Thomson's) gazelle dikdik	<i>Gazella rufifrons</i> <i>Madoqua spp.</i>				lálá-kò géwédà-kò

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Table 1. Hadza triumphal names

Triumphal name referent	M	F	Usual term	Scientific name	M	M	M	F
			klipspringer	<i>Oreotragus oreotragus</i>				ń'ámâ-kò
			duiker sp.	<i>Cephalophus sp.</i>				l'èmèts'é?é-kò
			duiker sp.	<i>Cephalophus sp.</i>				p ^h ù:ndú-kò
			duiker sp.	<i>Cephalophus sp.</i>				ts'ets'e?e-ko
			duiker sp.	<i>Cephalophus sp.</i>				fè:fé-kò
warthog, bushpig	hatfa-?e	-?i	warthog	<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>	kwá?í			
			bushpig	<i>Potamochoerus larvatus</i>	tí'áhà			
baboon	!ŋok ^h owe	!ŋok ^h owi- ?i	yellow baboon	<i>Papio cynocephalus</i>	né?è			né?è-kò
ostrich	hufu-we?		ostrich	<i>Struthio camelus</i>	kénàŋgù			

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This system is very remarkable, and is virtually without parallel in other known African languages. The Aasax, former foragers and speakers of a South Cushitic language in the same region have now lost their language, but it seems they retain a memory of similar triumph names (Mous p.c.). However, our imperfect knowledge of the ordinary language makes it difficult to perform any linguistic analysis on these terms.

There is virtually no relationship between the triumphal terms and the usual names for animals. ‘Leopard’ is the single exception, with *hè!ŋé* the triumphal name and *!ŋé*: a secondary ‘ordinary’ name. There is a very approximate correlation between gender and the size of the animal; almost all the smaller animals have the feminine gender as the marked term. More salient animals have several names, usually a basic term and other epithets that occur in specialised contexts such as folk-tales. Interestingly, these secondary names are not usually analysable. No etymologies are apparent for the triumphal names and they do not seem to be borrowed from neighbouring language or to resemble Khoisan or Sandawe. Miller (p.c.) proposes two possible etymologies for Hadza triumphal names (Table 2);

Table 2. Some etymologies of Hadza triumphal names

Species	Triumph name	Possible etymology
ostrich	hufufeʔe	? < hufu: ‘to swell up, puff up’
baboon	!ŋok ^h ŋeʔe	? < ! ŋok ^h o ‘thirst’ (refers to its concave stomach)

A common but not universal feature of triumphal names is an hV- prefix where V is a copy-vowel reflecting the stem. Thus *hùbù-ʔé* ‘lion’, *hè!ŋé* ‘leopard’, *hèpéʔ* ‘greater kudu’. This morpheme is also quite common in other Hadza vocabulary but its meaning is unclear.

The most puzzling aspect of this system is what determines whether animals have triumphal names at all and the reasons for grouping different species together under one name. Although Sands (p.c.) suggests that it is connected with the use of poison arrows, Hadza do not usually waste poison arrows on ‘small’ animals such as baboons and duikers or klipspringers. It is also striking that notable predatory species such as the hyenas and hunting-dog do not have triumphal names, perhaps because they would not normally be hunted for food.

The cultural salience of different species is clearly relevant; the three most important animals for the Hadza are the lion, eland and giraffe (in curious contrast to many other African cultures). Hadza consider the killing of an eland (*Taurotragus oryx*) highly prestigious and the eland has widespread cultural importance throughout the whole region². Among the Sangu in SW Tanzania, solitary eland males, *n’ongolo-mjelu*, are greatly respected by hunters, who need special protective medicine when hunting them. An interview with two old men in Mdonya (now part of Ruaha National Park) in 1994 recorded the following observation ‘The eland was not hunted much because it had magic powers. If it looked at you while you were preparing to shoot you would feel pain in your eyes or your head so that you could not fire. When you next looked the animal would be gone.’ Still, this does explain grouping the eland with the lion. Rather uncommonly in Africa, lions and leopards are eaten by the Hadza which may explain their presence on this list. The conjunction of elephant and hippo is a common idea in Africa; the hippo is often the ‘elephant of the water’ in Niger-Congo languages (Blench 2007). It is harder to explain why the impala is in a category of its own distinct from the other antelopes.

Conversely, there are absences that are at first sight surprising, but which may be explained by food taboos. The larger spotted hyena (*Crocuta crocuta*) was formerly considered to eat corpses, and its meat is not eaten. The monitor lizard (very unusually in Africa) is not used for food, but Hadza do not eat snakes, amphibians, fish and crustaceans either, so this lacuna is explicable. The term for ostrich (the marked meaning) can be extended to other large standing birds such as the secretary bird and the large bustards, indicating their importance as hunted species.

3. The honey-guide and the honey-badger

The greater honey-guide (*Indicator indicator*) is widely believed in Africa to point both humans and animals, particularly the honey-badger (*Mellivora capensis*), in the direction of bees’ nests. The advantage

² I am indebted to Martin Walsh for this information concerning the eland.

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of this is that honey-guides can digest beeswax, but they are unable break open bees' nests to get it. It has long been argued that this is an example of a very ancient man-animal co-adaptation, perhaps dating back to early *Homo sapiens*. Hadza take advantage of this to seek out honey, but their beliefs about the interaction have taken on a ritualised character. Hadza say that the honey-guide 'talks' to the honey-badger and shows the way to the nest. The language of the honey-guide is now used to engage in a dialogue with the bird. These dialogues are conducted in whistles but no one-to-one translation is possible, as the whistle partly imitates the singing of the honey-guide. This is acted out in a sort of traditional drama, with two performers whistling the dialogue³. Hadza also have a ritual whistle-speech, imitating tonal contours of ordinary speech, but this is not the same as that used in the dialogue with the honey-guide.

The Hadza names for the honey-guide and the honey-badger are;

Greater honey-guide	<i>Indicator indicator</i>	tʰikʰilí-ko
Honey badger, ratel	<i>Mellivora capensis</i>	kiripʰá-kò

which appear to have an etymological relationship although not a transparent one.

4. Conclusion

African zoonymy remains an under-researched topic, in part because the linguists who work on African languages are often either uninterested in the natural world or poorly-informed. At the same time, the sort of semi-urban informants who supply the bulk of information to researchers are often themselves not very knowledgeable in natural history. The importance of hunting until recently mean this was an area of great complexity and subtlety and much of this information is being lost, even in languages which are themselves still vibrant. Hadza animal names display intriguing features that seem to be quite distinctive, appropriately so, given the isolate status of the language. Still, it is likely that if we were better informed about animal names and ideas about animals in surrounding languages we would also be better able to interpret the situation in Hadza.

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³ A short film of this whistled dialogue was made in Cambridge in 2006 and is available on request

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