

**DRAVIDIAN AND ALTAIC 'TO BEND' – TA. KAVI- / KAVIḷ-,  
MO. KEBÜI KÖBÜRE-, MT. KAMPĪ- / KEBILE-**

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There are a number of lexical parallels to be found between Dravidian and Altaic, which have been described in my papers during the last more than twenty years (see select bibliography below, Vacek 2001a – 2010a). Besides a definable basic parallelism in the grammatical system (with some lacunae, however, the most significant being the absence of similarities in numerals and personal pronouns), the lexical parallels display a conspicuous formal and semantic closeness with a certain degree of variation and irregularities within a defined continuum of model structures (particularly consonants and vowels, but also semantic variation, cf. Vacek 2002a, pp. 27, 151ff.). These irregularities are typical of high contact languages as defined e.g. by Trudgill (1989) and can be 'read' as something like 'diagnostic' features pointing to the very specific character of the ancient linguistic history (or 'linguistic archaeology', cf. Southworth 2005). It is important to understand and interpret these 'diagnostic' features and take into account the role of language contact and of its operation in the development of language (Thomason, Kaufman 1988; Stadnik 2005), which most often takes place in a particular linguistic area (cf. e.g. Hook 1987).<sup>2</sup> For more information on the extent of the parallelism between Dravidian and Altaic the reader may refer to the latest summary of the results (Vacek 2004b; repr. 2006a). Some reflections on the historical background and external history of the presumed early contact in the case of Dravidian and Altaic (with presumed arrivals to South India from Central Asia in the early 1<sup>st</sup> Millennium B.C.) may be found particularly in recent papers (Vacek 2009; 2010a,b – in print). Important information on the possible similarities of Dravidian with other language families may be obtained from Zvelebil's publications (1990, 1991).

The general root structure of the lexemes discussed below can be defined as an *initial velar + medial labial*. One partly related set of verbs has already been mentioned in my earlier works (viz. its form having a stem extension in a liquid: *initial velar + medial labial + -l -r, -l*, and meaning 'to upset, overturn' etc., cf. below). However, the more 'elementary' or basic part of the etymological nest without the stem extension (meaning just 'to bend, bow') may be seen in the following more simply structured and differentiated set-up (though some of the language-specific forms also have variants with the stem extension preserving this basic

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<sup>2</sup> This approach may also facilitate the discussion on and understanding of the relations between the Altaic languages, in particular between Turkic and Mongolian, cf. Schöniig (2003).



meaning, e.g. Mo. *köbüre-*, MT. *KEBILE-* below). There are some more possible semantic extensions both in Dravidian and Altaic, which will be referred to below.

Note that there are also other Dravidian and Altaic parallels of synonymous verbs meaning 'to bend, bow' (Vacek 2006b, 2007b).<sup>3</sup> The existence of a great number of synonyms for many basic concepts appears to be a special feature of Dravidian. There are a whole range of synonyms referring to the material culture, the environment, the human body, as well as some basic social institutions (e.g. the king), and also activities described by verbs. This will also have to be taken into consideration in comparative studies, in particular the distribution of the synonyms in the individual languages as well as their distribution in time

<sup>3</sup> Further, in agreement with the formerly established formal variation of medial velars and labials in related roots (Vacek 2002a, pp. 66, 169f., 252f.; Vacek 2004b [repr. 2006a], Nos. 7a,b, 25a,b, 26a+27a, 26b+27b; also demonstrated in the etymon described in Vacek 2007b – the forms with medial velars are partly listed in Note 7 below), the above defined root structure *initial velar + medial labial* has a parallel etymological nest with the root structure *initial velar + medial velar* with the same basic meaning and some special semantic extensions. It should be considered as a closely related etymon, the variation of medial velars and labials being highly frequent. This etymon was noted earlier by me (cf. also Vacek 2002a, pp. 48–9):

Ta. *kokku* hook, etc.; Ko. *kok-* to become very bent with age; Ka. *kokki, kokke* crookedness, bend, hook; *koŕki* a hook, fish-hook; state of being bent etc.; Kođ. *kokk-* to be bent; Kol. *gog-* to bend over; Nk. *ghogg-* to bend; *koŕki* curved hoe; Pe. *goŕ(g)-* to be bent; *gok-* to bend, twist; etc. etc. (DEDR 2032).

Mo. *yoŕ-a* crook, hook; fishhook; *gögi* hook, fishhook; *geüge, geügi, gügegi* hook, fishhook; *xokiŕar* crooked, bent; winding

*ŕayui-* to lean forward, project; *xaxxul, xaxuuli* fishing rod; fishhook; bait; bribe

MT. *GOKO* hook (MTD I,158) 7 MT. languages with variations similar to the Dravidian above:

Evenk. *goko* hook; *goko-* to attach by a hook; Orok. *yoŕqo, yoŕqo* hook; *yoŕqola-, yoŕqola-* to attach by a hook; etc.

*KAKÖLI* little hook (Evenk. < Mo.) (MTD I,363)

*FAXU* inclined, protruding (MTD I,137)

There is a number of other lexemes, from which we can further add e.g.:

*GUGDUMIEN-* to bend, bend down (MTD I,166)

Nan. *gugdumien-* to bend, bend down (in order to discern something in a distance)

*gugdumieči-* to bend down

#### Turkic:

Kaz. *käkri, käkirä*, etc. 'krumm gebogen' (= bent in a crooked form)

Chuv. *kuGâr* 'krumm, schief' (= crooked, askew) (Räs. 248a-b)

Further cf. Starostin et alii (2003), who reconstruct four different etyma (with mutual references), some of which (in my point of view) constitute a single model within a continuum of forms. Some lexemes, however, appear to be already out of the actual semantic range of the basic meaning 'to bend' or extended meaning 'a hook' (particularly No. 4, but also some items in the other etyma):

1. Alt. *\*gék'á* 'hook, bend': PTung. *\*gek(u)-* 'to bow, bend'; PMong. *\*gek-* 'to bow, nod'; 'fish-hook, angle'; PTurk. *\*Kek- / Kak-* 'curved', 'stick with a hook', 'latch', 'to bend', 'to bend one's neck'; PJpn. *\*kánkám-* 'to bend' (2003, I, p. 536–7).
2. Alt. *\*gük'a* 'curve, hook; to cling to': PTung. *\*guk-* 'bent upwards', 'convex, hill', 'part of harness (a piece of iron with a ring)', '(plough) thills', 'ski straps'; PMong. *\*gok-* 'hook' (2003, I, p. 570).
3. Alt. *\*k'igu* 'to bend, bow': PTung. *\*xunŕke* 'to bow'; PMong. *\*kiji- / keje-* 'oblique, slanting'; PTurk. *\*Kij* 'bent, oblique' (2003, I, p. 822).
4. Alt. *\*k'öki* 'to bind, wrap': PTung. *\*xuku-* 'to wrap'; PMong. *\*kugu-s-* 'to fold'; PTurk. *\*kök* 'seam', 'thin straps for sewing', 'to sew, lace', 'to tack', 'tack, basting', 'needlework', 'to fasten'; PJpn. *\*kükúr-* 'to bind, tie' (2003, I, p. 833).



(particularly Old Tamil). In other words we will have to find out as much as possible about the history of the individual lexemes.<sup>4</sup>

## 1. Dravidian

Old Tamil Sangam literature<sup>5</sup> has preserved one lexeme which is not fully reflected in the relevant DEDR etymon:

*kavi-* bending (2x *Akanārṇūru*, cf. SVS s.v., e.g. *kavi ukir* bending nail, *Akanārṇūru* 229,4

7x in *Puṭanārṇūru*, cf. VIS s.v.; in *Puṭanārṇūru* 1x = 'overshading'; 1x = 'covering' + *kavikkum* 'which will cover')

In the *Tamil Lexicon* there are more meanings which are close to or identical with 'bending':

*kavi*<sup>-1</sup> 1. (to cover, overspread), bend in or over, overshadow (TL s.v.)

*kavi*<sup>-2</sup> 1. (to cover, as with an umbrella; to overshadow); to cover over, as an arch (TL s.v.)

*kavikai*<sup>1</sup> 1. bending, being concave; 2. umbrella

*kavi-kai*<sup>2</sup> Lit., 'inverted palm of the hand', transf., 'liberality, munificence, bounty

These meanings, however, are not recorded fully in DEDR 1221:

Ta. *kappu* to overspread /as a cloud/

*kavi* to cover, overspread, overshadow, surround; to cover (as with an umbrella), overshadow, cover over (as an arch)

The DEDR records particularly the meanings 'to cover, overspread', while 'bending' is partly reflected in some of the 'extended' meanings. It may be useful to take these cases as homophones, no matter how close the two meanings may appear to us. The only lexeme recorded in the DEDR reflecting the meaning 'to bend' is

Ta. *kavikai* bending, being concave, (umbrella).

The basic form *kavi-* is further recorded in a form with several stem extensions (a liquid, a nasal) and a partly extended meaning (Note 5) in DEDR 1335. This etymon combines several close meanings and no matter how close they are, they may perhaps be split into two distinct groups. However, it has to be repeated that the two parts of the etymon remain closely related and both have parallels in Altaic:

<sup>4</sup> In this respect I agree with the requirement set by Ts. Shagdarsürüng (2005), though it may not always be easily satisfied.

<sup>5</sup> The Sangam literature is the earliest Tamil literary creation from the beginning of the Christian Era. Some individual texts may be slightly earlier though not by much. Some texts (*Kalittokai*) are one or two centuries later. *Akanārṇūru* is one of the poetic collections dealing with *akam* (private life, love), *Puṭanārṇūru* is one of the poetic collections dealing with *puṭam* (public life, king, etc.).

- a. 'to bend, to bow'      b. 'to capsize, overturn'<sup>6</sup>

Ta. *kaviŋ* bow one's head from modesty, shame, or confusion, stoop, bend down

Koç. *kavi*<sup>n</sup>- (*kavi*<sup>n</sup>v-, *kavi*<sup>n</sup>ñj-) to bend or lie face downwards

(*kavi*<sup>n</sup>mp-, *kavi*<sup>n</sup>ñc-) to turn face downwards (tr.)

Tu. *kapparu* on the face

Go. *kapmuŋd*- (Ma.) to fall on face

*kapmuŋd* (Mu.), *kapmuŋdi* (Ko.) with face downwards

*gap murung*- (SR.) to fall back

*ghap muŋgānā* (Tr.) to sleep on one's face

<sup>6</sup> The Altaic parallel for this part of DEDR 1335 (more precisely DEDR 1335b – see Note 6 below) was recorded in my earlier papers (Vacek 1993, Section 2.2. E, p. 408; 1996, No. 15, p. 36), though at that time only with Mongolian:

Ta. *kaviŋ* to be capsized, turned bottom upwards; bend down, be overthrown; bow one's head from modesty, shame, or confusion; (Tinn.) *kavuru*- to capsize; (NTD) *kamur*- to be upside down; Ma. *kaviruka*, *kamiruka* to be overturned, upset, overwhelmed; To. *kof*- to be turned upside down; Ka. *kavicu*, *kavacu*, *kavucu* to be turned upside down, be overthrown or upset; turn upside down, etc.

\* \* \*

Mo. *kömüri*-, *kömeri*- to upset, overturn, capsize; to cover with a bowl or other concave object

Could the following variants with back vowels (cf. Mo. *xobulus*- below) and with some more extended meanings be added to this etymon? The semantic extension could be seen in MT. below, where the idea of an 'overturn' is clearly expressed:

Mo. *xubil*- to change, be transformed, take another form; to be reincarnated; to form an abscess, become infected; to deteriorate (cf. MT. below)

*xubilγan* transformation, metamorphosis; apparition, phantom; a person, esp. a high lama in whom a Buddha, Bodhisattva or some saintly person is believed to be incarnated; incarnation, often referred to as "living Buddha" by Western writers, after the Chinese *huo-fo*; transformed, incarnated

*xubilγan üzegülekü* to manifest or display supernatural power, practice sorcery or magic

*xubira*- to charge; to fade, wilt; to become exhausted

*xubis*- to change, metamorphose

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MT. *KEBILGET* a person able to turn into an animal or thing by way of a magic spell (in folklore) (Evenk. < Yak.; MTD I,442)

Sol. *xubil*-, *xubilī*- to transform (into) (< Ma.)

Ma. *ḡubuli*- to change; transform (into)

*ḡubulin* change; transformation; rebirth; magic; cf. also *xobilγun kutuktu* 'a holy reborn, incarnation' (cf. above Mongolian)

?*GUVELE*- to look round, back (MTD I,166)

Ma. *guvele*- to look round, back; to do s.th. stealthily

Could Evenk. *keve*- to go mad; *keveče* madman (MTD I,443) be a semantic extension of the same basic root?

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Yak. *kubului*- *kubulun*- to transform into s.th., to turn round, to change

*kubulγat* transformation; a person able to turn into an animal or thing by way of a magic spell, hypocrite (s.v. *KEBILGET*; MTD I,442)

? Osm. *kyvyr* drehen, aufwickeln, in Falten legen (= to turn, to roll up, to fold) (Räs. 269a)



Kuwi (T.) *kap-* to bend the head down (cf. 1344 Kur. *kab'ā-kub'urnā*)

(1335a s.v. Ta. *kaviḷ*)<sup>7</sup>

? Pe. *gomga-* (road) to go crookedly (Burrow, Bhattacharya 1970, p. 205)

The former (and basic?) meaning (to bow, bend) recorded in the above DEDR only in South and Central Dravidian, is actually to be found in Northern Dravidian as well:

Kur. *kab'ā-kub'urnā* to take short steps forward in a leaning position

*kabkuburnā* to curve the body forward, be bent in two

Malt. *kawge* to curve, bend

*kawgre* to be bent, stoop

*kawgro* beni, curved (Cf. 1335 Ta. *kaviḷ*) (DEDR 1344)

Kur. *kab-kubrnā* to bend under a weight (Bleses, s.v. 'bend')

*kabaḷkuburṇā, kubuḷkuburēknā* to walk with a stooping posture (Bleses, s.v. 'stoop')

To be considered for a complex etymological nest are also two forms with a 'shifted' meaning applied to a body part ('elbow' and possibly also 'armpit'):<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The remaining part of the etymon would be as follows (for the Altaic parallels cf. Note 5 above):

Ta. *kaviḷ* to be capsized, turned bottom upwards, be overthrown; (-pp-, -tt-) to turn over, capsize, overthrow, destroy, put a cover on

*kavuru* (Tinn.) to capsize

*kamur* (NTD) to be upside down

Ma. *kaviḷuka, kamiḷuka* to be overturned, upset, overwhelmed

*kaviḷtuka, kamiḷtuka, kamuttuka, kamikka* to upset, overthrow, lay flat

To. *kof-* to be turned upside down; to turn upside down (tr.)

Ka. *kavicu, kavacu, kavucu* to be turned upside down, be overthrown or upset; turn upside down, etc.

Tu. *kabbe, kabya* topsyturvy, upside down

*kauñca* topsyturvy, upside down

Go. (Ph.) *gam murahtānā* to turn upside down (for the verb forms, cf. DEDR 5123) (DEDR 1335b).

<sup>8</sup> This type of 'motivated' designation of a body part is not unusual. Cf. a similar case in a different etymological nest described by me (Vacek 2007b), e.g.:

Ka. *toriku* to stoop (etc. Te., Malt.; DEDR 3478b)

Ka. *ḍoriku* to bend, be crooked (etc. Tu., Te., Kuwi; DEDR 2054a)

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Mo. *tongyui-* to stoop, bend (etc.)

*doki-* (4) to nod

*dokii-* to become bent, crooked (etc.)

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MT. *TODKOJ-* to incline (MTD II,197)

*DUIKĀ-* to nod the head (MTD I,224)

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OT. *tōñit-* to bow down, bend down, move downwards (Cl. 517)

*yīkūn-* to bow, do obeisance to (someone); etc. (var. *yūgūn-*; Cl. 913)

Besides

Kol. *tonge* knee

Nk. (Ch.) *ḷongre* elbow, knee (etc. Go.; DEDR 2983)

Pa. *kuviṅgil* inside bend of elbow (Burrow, Bhattacharya 1953, p. 159)  
Pe. *kopra* elbow (Burrow, Bhattacharya 1970, p. 202)

Ta. *kamukkaṭṭu* armpit

Ka. *kavuṅkur*, (*kaṅkur*, *kaṅkar*, *kaṅkura*, *koṅkur*, *koṅkar*, *koṅkara*) id.

Koḍ. *kavṅki* vital spot

Pa. *kavkor*, *kavkoḍ* armpit  
*kavṅgil*, *kaṅgil* lap (DEDR 1234a)<sup>9</sup>

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Mo. *toxai*, *toxai* elbow, cubit (measure of length); [bend of a river, bay, port, harbour]  
*takilcaṅur* shin, shank; [Mo.] region back of the knee joint ham, hock

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MT. *TUGUNUKE* ankle (MTD II,153)  
Evenk. *tokonok* elbow (MTD II,190; s.v. *TOFOI* meander)  
*TAXĪ* II knee cap; knee (of cattle) (MTD II,153)

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Kaz., Oir., etc. *takym* (var. *tayym*) Kniekehle (Räs. 457a)  
Etc., etc.

There is also a parallel variant with initial dental nasal in Dravidian and also Altaic: e.g.

Kur. *nūxnā*, *nūkhnā* to bow (the head) (DEDR 3723)

Mo. *nuyul-*, *niyul-* to bend, fold; etc. (for more details including medial labials, cf. Vacek 2007b).

<sup>9</sup> The etymon may have to be split into a group with a medial labial (also with respect to the already described variation of [velar/labial] stops, fricatives and nasals [Vacek 2002a, 2004b – cf. above Note 2]; DEDR 1234a and above Pa., Pe.) and a **medial velar**. Note the possible relation with the medial velar forms mentioned above in Note 2:

Ko. *ganjguy*, *gānjgu* ly armpit

To. *komkwir* id.

Ka. (*kavuṅkur*), *kaṅkur*, *kaṅkar*, *kaṅkura*, *koṅkur*, *koṅkar*, *koṅkara* id.; *gaṅkəlu* (Hal.) id.; *kiṅkleḍe* (Hav.) id.

Tu. *kaṅkuḷa* armpit

Te. *kauṅgili* breast, bosom; an embrace

*kauṅgilincu* to embrace, hug, press to the bosom

*kauṅgilinta*, *kauṅgilimpu* an embrace

Go. *kākri* (Tr.), *kakri* (W.) armpit

*kākriṅ* (pl.) armpits (? < H., Mar. *kākh*). (DEDR 1234b)

There may also be forms with a **medial liquid**, unless they are a result of a metathesis:

Kor. (T.) *karkileḍi* armpit

Ga. (Oll.) *kalgi!* lap (DEDR 1234e)



## 2. Altaic

Mo. *kebüi-* to bend down, incline; to list, careen

*köbüre-* 1. to bend, bow down, incline; to go against the wind; to become loose or untied

*xobulus-* to bend down

?*kepte-* to lie down, recline<sup>10</sup>

The two following lexemes may represent a special semantic extension, which is perhaps close to the Turkic example above (Osm. *kyvyr*, Note 5).

?*xomui-* to shrivel, wrinkle, curl up, fold up

?*xomuri-* [(a). to shrink from drying; to dry up, of leaves, etc.];

(b). to contract; to curve

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MT. *KAMPĪ-* to fold, to bend (MTD I,371)

Neg. *kampī-* to fold, to bend (+ Ud., Olcha, Nan.)

*KEBILE-* to bend, bow (MTD I,442)

Olcha *kebile-* to bend, bow; to press to the ground, to hide; to lie face downwards<sup>11</sup>

Ma. *keb seme, keo seme, keo keo seme* iconop. thud! (falling in exhaustion)

*KEPČE* iconop. nodding the head (MTD I,452)

Olcha *kepče, kepče-kepče* id.

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## Turkic

Turkic may not have preserved extensively this basic form with medial labial and the basic meaning, though it is represented in the etymon with medial velar (cf. above Note 2) and possibly also in the etymon with the stem extension (cf. Osm. *kyvyr-* above Note 5).

<sup>10</sup> I put this word with a question-mark in this etymological context, though it is explicitly referred to by the MTD in connection with the etymon *KEBILE-* (see below).

<sup>11</sup> Note the extended meanings, which agree with some of the Dravidian semantic extensions above and also Mo. *kepte-* to which MTD refers in this context. Similarly MT. *KEPTU-KEPTU* 'sleepingly' (MTD I,452) may be another similar semantic extension based on the same original root.

These lexemes may have some relation with MT. *GE-* to fall on one's back (Evenk.; MTD I,176), for which cf. DEDR 1990:

Ta. *cē-* to dwell, lie, remain, sleep

Ka. *kē-* to lie down, repose, copulate with; *kēvu, kendu* copulation

But several items have medial dentals or liquids:

Tu. *kedoṛuni* to lie down, rest; *ketoṛu, katoṛu* to lie down; *kerapāvu* to cause to lie down

Kur. *kīdnā, kīd'ānā* to allow or invite one to lie down for rest or sleep, put to bed (a child, a sick person), lay in the grave

Malt. *kīde* to lay down

Except for a labial (!) in:

Kol. *ke·p- (ke·pt-)* to make (a child) sleep (cf. 1956 Kur. *xeppas*) (DEDR 1990)

The last Kolami example would agree with Mo. *kepte-*.

Starostin (et alii) propose a semantically complex etymon which, however, appears to combine two 'homophonic' stems. The etymon may have to be conveniently separated into two groups – 'bending' and 'elevation'/'hill' etc.<sup>12</sup> Turkic does not seem to be represented in the 'bending' section of this etymon. Starostin reconstructs as follows:

Alt. \**kōp'é* to bend; elevation, convexity:

Tung. \**kupe-* 1 to swell up 2 hill, mound 3 convex;

PMong. \**kōb-* / \**küb-* 1 to bend, incline 2 arch, convex, convexity 3 to swell 4 mountain ridge 5 bow-string

PTurk. \**gōpe(ne)* haystack

PKor. \**kōp-*, \**kup-* to be bent

The existence of a Korean parallel (judging from Starostin's data) suggests that this form and meaning may be an 'eastern areal isogloss', not including Turkic.

### Conclusion

This etymon is a typical example of a small etymological nest occupying a position in the multicoloured mosaic of the Dravidian and Altaic lexical parallels. Not only does it agree with the formerly established broadly variable continua of the phonetic models, it also fills a gap in that general picture of the parallels (cf. above the extension in liquids). It is also interesting that in Dravidian there are motivated designations of a body part possibly related to this etymon, which is analogical with other similar cases. To be noted is the fact that this etymon not only enriches the general picture of the Dravidian and Altaic etymology, but also adds to a number of other verbs with the same meaning, viz. 'to bend, bow', which can be found in both Dravidian and Altaic.

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<sup>12</sup> The 'elevation' section of the etymon may also have Dravidian parallels: OTa. *kuppai* mound, heap etc., cf. DEDR 1731a (with vowel variation within the established model of continuum of forms; to be elaborated later).

<sup>13</sup> The abbreviations of languages used in this paper are those used in the relevant comparative dictionaries. Some other abbreviations are used for references to the works listed below:

Cl. – Clauson 1972

DEDR – Burrow, Emeneau 1984

Räs. – Räsänen 1969

SVS – S.V. Subramanian 1972

VIS – V. I. Subramoniam 1962



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## SUMMARY

The paper deals with a small etymological nest of Dravidian and Altaic oscillating around the three pivoting terms, viz. Ta. *kavi-*, Mo. *kebüi-*, MT. *KEBILE-*. The findings represent linguistic material which is complementary to the other verbs constituting parallels in the two families. The phonetic correspondences agree with the previously established correspondences including some range of variation. The parallels are also viewed within the context of a presumed high language contact, which should have taken place in the past, as it was defined in the author's recent publications.