Aziz Tezel, *Comparative Etymological Studies in the Western Neo-Syriac (Turoyo) Lexicon.* With Special Reference to Homonyms, Related Words & Borrowings with Cultural Significance. Published in a Series of Language Studies, Studia Semitica Upsaliensia, No. 8, Uppsala University, August 2003, ISBN: 91-554-5555-7, 295 pages

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The doctoral dissertation by Aziz Tezel is an impressive result of several years of principal investigation into Western Neo-Syriac Lexicon by a native speaker. The goal of this comprehensive work was to study words presenting etymological problems in the Western Neo-Syriac (WNS, known as *Turoyo*[2]) lexicon and provide new etymological[3] suggestions along with the description (of the accounts) of the most common linguistic processes by which various changes were or are carried out for the words studied.

Besides the work's scholarly significance, the author's motivation for such an extensive study as a native speaker seems to be derived mainly from personal experience dealing with the language as a mother tongue and communicating with speakers of the language while often facing a dilemma (as a scholar, Tezel says pondering) of identifying the origin of certain words, which, because of changes of various kinds (e.g., influence from neighboring languages and dialects), are difficult to trace back etymologically.

In fact the influence from neighboring languages on *Turoyo* is more evident since the formation of new Western Assyrian communities in the Diaspora comprised of members of the community from two main settlement/geographical regions (*Tur ʿAbdin* in South-East Turkey and *Gozarto* in North-East Syria), with diverse dialectical spheres and different linguistic and cultural backgrounds

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[1] Editor's Note: Abdulmesih BarAbrahem is a native of Midyat, the main town of *Tur ʿAbdin*, where *Turoyo* was/is spoken. He emigrated to Germany in 1967 and lived in the U.S. from 1993 to 1999. He has an MSc degree from the University of Erlangen/Nürnberg in a technical discipline, where among other interests he updated his Classical Western Syriac knowledge auditing lectures given by Otto Jastrow in the early 1980s. BarAbrahem worked from 1979 until 1983 as the first officially certified German Government interpreter/translator for *Turoyo* at the Central Administration for Asylum/Migration in Zirndorf/Nürnberg where he dealt with more than 2,000 personal reports of Asylum seekers. He has published a number of articles in the English language in JAAS and numerous articles in Western Neo-Syriac on various Assyrian topics in other periodicals.

In his professional career, BarAbrahem worked from 1983 until 1993 in the research field of computer-based acoustic analysis, aimed at phoneme and automatic speech recognition.

[2] From the word *turo*, meaning 'mountain'; *Turoyo*'s original home is *Tur ʿAbdin* in South-East Turkey, with Mᵊ*dyad* (Turkish Midyat) as its central town.

[3] Etymology is the study of the origins of words/their linguistic history.

(Arabic, Kurdish, and Turkish). The complication of the study arises from the fact, that the influences along all dimensions are not homogenous within their own parameters. Of course, all *Turoyo* dialects are mutually intelligible. As Tezel states, the Diaspora *Turoyo* speakers in general speak mixed dialects where *Məḏyaḏ* dialect tends to supersede all others, especially the village dialects.

Structure and content of the study

The study is structured in eight major Chapters and concluded by a summary section. Besides a standard bibliographical section giving more than 130 principal entries into the topic, a notable index (pp. 260-289) of more than 3,400 words and forms is provided which is structured according to the languages relevant for the study at hand – WNS (pp. 260-271), Syriac (pp. 271-278), ENS, Mandaic, Arabic (pp. 279-284), Akkadian, Ethiopic, Hebrew, Greek, Kurdish, Persian, Turkish, and Ugaritic. The majority of entries are listed with respect to the verbal roots.

Chapter 1 (pp. 11-38) provides an introduction into the subject, especially describing the methods used in determining the likely origin of the words under investigation. While these methods are based on the interpretation of the phonological, morphological and semantic system of the language, they also take into account the influence of other languages. Hence the phonetic shape, form and meaning, taken together and attested with a given word studied are the most important criteria identified. Of course, special attention is given to root aspects of native words and words of Semitic origin. Also, in dealing with various changes carried out in native words, particular attention is paid to the changes brought by the so-called *bəġadkəfat* rules, such as the transition of *b* into *w*. Since these laws apply to many of the words under consideration, the author focuses on methodological problems arising from this. The fact that the *b g d k p t* were spirantized[4] in a post-vocalic position according to old laws are not at work any more. Instead, he finds out that the *b g d k p t* and their spirantized counterparts have acquire phonemic[5] status in WNS. In addition, the sounds *w g d x f t* resulting from the spirantization have merged with etymologically different consonant phonemes of the same phonetic value in borrowing of foreign origin.

Chapter 1 closes with a presentation of the relevant features (pp. 18-38) of *Turoyo*, including a brief overview of the genealogy of the language. Tezel states that many of the differences found between Classical Eastern Syriac (CES) and Classical Western Syriac (CWS) are phonetic in nature. Furthermore many of the

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[4]   Spirantization is the change from a stop consonant (e.g., b d g, k) to a fricative pronunciation (e.g. f).

[5]   According to Dictionary.com, a phoneme is "the smallest phonetic unit in a language that is capable of conveying a distinction in meaning, as the *m* of *mat* and the *b* of *bat* in English." Essentially, it's all the individual sounds that make a language. A phonetic sound could be a phoneme, but could also be several phonemes strung together.

differences found between CES and CWS are also reflected in Eastern Neo-Syriac (= ENS, known as Urmi, Modern Eastern Syriac, or Modern East Assyrian) and in WNS. However, the differences between ENS and WNS today are much larger than those found between CES and CWS, Tezel concludes.

Personally I tend to argue that this is a results of the fact, that CES and CWS were quite "shielded" from the influence of neighboring languages, and confined to the liturgical usage within the Eastern and/or Western communities. On the other hand ENS and WNS were much more exposed to the influence of the neighboring languages and strongly impacted by the major upheavals in history such as displacement, ethnocide and genocide of the community who for centuries have lived as a *Dhimmi* or *Millet* under Islamic rule.

With regards to the relation of the Neo-Syriac version to the Classical version Tezel states: *"Whether ENS and WNS are derived from CES and CWS, respectively, or are to be considered only as close congeners to the respective languages (or rather dialects), is a matter open for discussion."*

In addition, Chapter 1 elaborates on key language elements such as vowels, consonants, diphthongs, pronouns, prefixes, suffixes, and endings with some discussion on numerals, stems and preverbs.[6] Considered on its own, this sub-section is a valuable tutorial into *Turoyo* and recommended by the author along with the Introduction in the same chapter in order for a reader *"to get a tolerably comprehensive picture of the main observations made during the present study."*

Chapter 2 (pp. 39-90) examines a group of verbal roots, mostly homonymous. This term refers to verbal roots a) having the same radicals[7] but are of different origin, b) sharing the first and third radicals, but whose second radical does not always appear, and c) with the same radicals, of which one is known, the other is of obscure origin. In addition, the distinction is made between a "homonymous verbal root" and a "homonymous verbal stem," where the latter refers to the verbal stem with different meanings and also different origin, but pronounced and inflected in the same way. Cases dealt within this category are either native or borrowed. More than 50 roots are studied in detail.

Chapter 3 (pp. 91-123) deals with a group of homonymous nouns and some other words with the same radicals, where the term homonym here refers to words having the same pronunciation, but with different meanings and also different origins. Examples that can be given here are [1]*farmo* (censer) and [2]*farmo* (a baking oven; a cooker) or [1]*šuqo* (a market place) and [2]*šuqo* (linen fabric*)*. It refers also to related words whose forms have merged in the process of time,

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[6] Such as *ko, ka, kale* used manly in the village dialects and *kəlle* and *kəlli* used in Mədyad dialect.

[7] Syriac roots are typically formed by a sequence of three or more consonants, called *radicals.*

such as ¹*quflo* (a lock, padlock) and ²*quflo* (an armful). Nearly 30 words are studied in detail.

Chapter 4 (pp. 124-157) is regarded as a continuation of the previous two Chapters, with the difference that no homonymous nouns and homonymous verbal roots are considered. The focus of the analysis here is rather on a mixed group of words that have the same radicals, but are mostly of different origin. Approximately 30 words in this category are investigated.

Chapter 5 (pp. 158-201) deals with a group of related or cognate[8] words mostly with different radicals. The related words consist of three groups:

    a) doublets, such as *nahtor* and *noturo* etc. of which one has undergone change in relation to the other;
    b) group of nouns that have undergone change in relation to other derivatives of the same root;
    c) related verbal roots of which one has undergone change in relation to the other. Nearly 80 words including 16 word pairs are investigated closely.

Chapter 6 (pp. 202-219) studies group of compounds that have undergone change in their consonantal skeleton. Two groups of compounds are considered, native and foreign. Almost 20 words are investigated in detail.

Chapter 7 (pp. 220-241) treats a mixed group of words, mostly with cultural significance. As a rule, words that have undergone changes in their root consonants are taken into consideration. Approximately 35 words are investigated.

Chapter 8 (pp. 242-251) deals with adverbial formations, in particular those with prefix ᶜ*ad-* and some with the ending *–ad* and others with ending *–əl* and *-al*.

In Chapter 9 (pp. 252-259), the author summarizes important observations, among them such as:

- The WNS lexicon contains a relatively small number of homonymous whose use contextually differs depending on both the dialectical and geographical situation;
- As in the case of the homonymous nouns, homonymous verbal stems common to all the dialects are few;
- Dissimilation and assimilation are two linguistic phenomena that lie behind a good deal of the changes carried out in the words studied here; changes brought in by this way are the most important ones that must be taken into account;

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8   A cognate is a related word in another language.

- As in all other Semitic languages, metatheses[9] are involved in several changes found in the words studied here;
- Analogical formations also play a great role also in the language studied here; they occur with adjectives, native as well as foreign, with intensive signification;
- Semantic changes can be observed while dealing with etymologies;
- With regards to borrowing, Arabic has a considerable influence on the lexical stock of WNS;
- Despite a restricted original regional spread, WNS displays abundant dialectical differences in vocabulary.

Tezel's work can be regarded as fundamental for several reasons:
1) For the first time all of the important homonyms in WNS are investigated with regard to their origin and use.
2) Furthermore, numerous words with the same radicals but of different origin, such as Arabic cognates and other borrowings, influences from Kurdish, related words with different radicals, doublets, as well as words with cultural signification and compounds are examined.
3) In various cases and based on the changes occurred, Tezel has gone further in the identification of the original root of the words compared to what was formerly accomplished by Socin and others.

The study is also one that briefly alludes to the issue of neologisms[10] with the recommendation that this topic requires special investigation. Indeed plenty of neologisms and words from literary Syriac have been integrated into *Turoyo*. This development started in the context of the cultural and political awakening process pioneered by the Assyrian national movement and spearheaded by some key organizations[11] and *Malfone*[12] — its effects are observable not only in the Diaspora[13] but also in the home countries of the community.

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[9] Transposition of sounds in a word.

[10] According to Wikipedia.org, neologism is a word, term, or phrase which has been recently created ("coined") — often to apply to new concepts, or to reshape older terms in newer language form. Neologisms are especially useful in identifying inventions, new phenomena, or old ideas which have taken on a new cultural context.

[11] As the most important driver, the *Mtakasto (aka Assyrian Democratic Organization),* established mid 1950s as a cross-denominational, cultural and political organization in Syria should be mentioned. Since its inception, it has identified the development of the language as one of its main objectives. The cleansing of the *Turoyo* language from foreign influence and refreshing it by words of the CWS lexicon is one common approach observed. Examples here are: *Tawdi, šubqono, hu̱dro, tablito, bet muklo, noqazto, etc.* Another approach is the creation of new, modern words not present in

As Tezel states: *Turoyo* has been a spoken language without any considerable literary tradition to scoop from: Therefore it has been dependent on the neighboring languages (pp. 258). However in the Diaspora, where ethnic and political repression experienced in most homeland countries is non-existent, *Turoyo* as a spoken language is developing noticeably. Two different initiatives exist to write *Turoyo – Serto* and the Latin Alphabet. In Internet chat rooms, and in e-mail communication, *Turoyo* is becoming the mean for interaction, since for many of the speakers (spread across the globe) it remains the medium of understanding each other. Furthermore, several radio stations in Europe,[14] Australia,[15] the U.S. and Canada (most of them also available over the Internet)[16] use WNS and ENS as languages of communication. More recently, various Satellite TV stations broadcast using both Neo-Syriac dialects. In the long run this is bound to influence the overdue homogenization of an ethnic, cultural and language community. It is important that these new developments are at least noted by scholars, because language cannot be disconnected from political and social history. In the absence of such considerations, research would rather focus on a static space and lack authenticity.

With this fundamental work, Tezel has definitely derived substantial solutions to the homonymous problem and provided extensions to the WNS lexicon. Therefore, he deserves to be counted among the great scholars such as Ritter, Jastrow, Prym and Socin known for pioneering the study of the *Turoyo* language.

As a native speaker and non-specialist I found the book highly valuable in deepening my knowledge and understanding of the origin of many words. I am grateful to Aziz Tezel for this. Certainly, a simplified version for non-scholars would be helpful to attract the majority of the speakers.

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the classic language (neologisms), such as *sfar yawmo* (Newspaper), *radoyto* (Automobile), *sfar reğlo* (Football), *qtoro* (Train) etc.

[12] Among them Abdelmassih Qarabashi, Abrohom Nuro, the Assyrian Teachers Committee in Sweden and others.

[13] In fact Aziz Tezel himself headed the Assyrian Federation in Sweden between 1981-1985, where the language aspect was at the very focus.

[14] See http://www.sr.se/rs/qolo/, http://www.qolo-suryoyo.de, http://medias.aacf.asso.fr/radio/radio.mp3

[15] See http://www9.sbs.com.au/radio/language.php?language=Assyrian, http://www.3zzz.com.au/staging/default.aspx

[16] For a list of Assyrian Internet Radio & TV stations see: http://www.aina.org/aol/rtv.htm