Historical origins of some features in the Tallic language family

Roman Rausch

last change: July 8, 2012

Contents

1 Signum

The signum markers in *Talmit*, **a-** and **i-**, were ultimately words meaning 'good' and 'bad' and belonged to the class of the so-called 'free morphemes', meaning that they could freely appear as prefixes and suffixes to both verbs and nouns, or as independent words. However, in contrast to other free morphemes (like **mi** 'many', **jo** 'few') they were adverbs when standing alone, and received the ancient adverbial suffix **-ru** (surviving in *Kymna* in the adverbs **koru** 'home(wards)', **vëyru** 'like this', **tëðru** 'like that' and *Talmit* sound-symbolic adverbs); thus **aru* 'well', **iru* 'badly'. Their most important role was in combination with the roots √PRU 'up' and √TRU 'inwards' (more than likely containing adverbial **-ru** themselves). The words **apru/*ipru* and **atru/*itru* were originally hunting terms, **apru* could be translated as something like 'it's good to get up', meaning that it's the right time to attack from a prepared ambush. It survives in the Kymna interjection **ouru!** 'come on! let's go!' Conversely, **ipru* meant something like 'it's bad to get up' or 'stay down'. Similarly, **atru* meant 'it's good to go in for the kill' and was used when a large animal was surrounded, while **itru* meant 'stay clear, stay outside'.
At some point, metathesis **apru* > **paru* was quite natural under the influence of **aru*, but further influence was needed to extend such an infix to other roots.

For one part, such influence came from the root √TLE which referred to the bodily well-being, especially regarding temperature, **atlə* meant both 'warm' and comfortable', **itlə* both 'cold' and 'uncomfortable'. But there was also an unrelated root √TAL referring to speech. Its simplest derivative was just **tal* meaning 'word, name, label' and gave the language *Talmit* its name. Another derivative was **talə* meaning 'answer, agreement' (it still survives in *Kymna* **tale** 'yes'). In the course of time, **atlə* and **talə* approached each other as 'I agree' started to mean 'I like it', so that **talə* was substituted for **atlə*, creating an infix; and **itlə*> **tile* then followed. Other roots referring to pleasure and comfort were √PLA and √KHLIS. The former originally described visually pleasing and beautiful things (**apla* 'it looks good, I like it'); the latter to what one could term 'mental comfort', involving joy and laughter (**akhlis* 'joy'). It seems that the root √TLE was drifting away to describe just temperature, while √KHLIS became adopted for general happiness, and √PLA for the liking of any particular thing. But there also was the root √KHAL meaning 'alive' and it influenced √KHLIS much in the same way as √TAL influenced √TLE. The fossilized expression **hélze-halís** 'alive and well' survives in *Talmit*, although the first word has no signum marker (the proper words are **aχál** 'alive', **iχál** 'dead'). It clearly goes back to Proto-Tallic **khal-sə a-khlis*, where **-sə* 'and' is a conjunctional suffix. Metathesis **akhlis* > **khalis* under such conditions was a natural development, and again the counterpart **ikhlis* > **khilis* 'unhappiness' soon followed.

This was the situation when the languages separated: The roots √PRU, √TRU, √TLE and √KHLIS had developed infixes **a/i** between the first consonant and the following sonorant. Their derivatives appear in *Kymna* as the preverbs **poru-** 'up', **pyru-** 'down', **toru-** 'inwards', **tyru-** 'outwards'; and as **talena** 'warm' and **salis** 'happiness'. But *Kymna* does not show other infixes, the main derivative of √PLA is **ālana** 'good' < **apla-na*, where *Talmit* has **palá**. The prefix **a-** became intensive in meaning (so that **atalena** 'very warm, hot' has the same marker twice), and **i-** began to express negation (e.g. **dessena** 'possible', **iðessena** 'impossible'). The two markers thus became detatched from each other. In *Talmit*, however, they just exploded, being applied to all kinds of roots by analogy. So for example, from **plezne* 'hand' were derived: **palezne* 'right hand' (originally probably 'good hand') and *pilezne* 'left hand' (originally probably 'bad hand')[1].
A major factor in this development must have been *Talmit*'s very conservative phonology. But although the phonology remained conservative, changes in grammar were very profound.

[1] I apologize to all the lefties in the name of the speakers of *Talmit* (the speakers of my language did it, not me — do not shoot the messenger!), but such an association is what happened in natural languages as well: English *sinister* comes from Latin 'left', while *dexterity* comes from 'right' and has positive connotations; also right as in 'the right to do something' or 'it is the right thing to do' is obviously the same word as in 'right side', just like German *Recht/rechts* or Russian право.

2 Agglutination of numerals in Talmit

When you are at an airport, 'gate 1', 'gate 2', 'gate 3' (and so on) are perfectly acceptable labels. In *Talmit*, word derivation sometimes functions just like that, by agglutinating a numeral.
In ancient times, the agglutination of **aQ* '1' yielded the singulative and the fusion of a numeral and **-ga* 'step' yielded the conjunctions **angá, ilgá, ezgá** 'step 1, step 2, step 3' etc. of conditional sentences: **S_1 angá, S_2 ilgá, S_2 ezgá...** 'if S_1, then S_2 and S_3'. Furthermore, the names of the five fingers from the thumb onwards were **púnat, púnil, púnes, púnor, púnun**, formed with **pun** 'finger' and a numeral. A rare word for 'hand' was the superposition of all the five: **puna(h)ilézrun**[2].
However, more such agglutination entered the language as an artificial feature when the Talmic people went through the phase of a centralized empire.

It was the time when a measuring system was introduced; scholarship, poetry and philosophy flourished which led to the fixation of a word-view and a world-description. This world-view was largely based on the concepts of duality and pentality which were already strongly present within the language itself. However, duality was limited to certain scales, like left-right or up-down. There are, however, more natural pairs in the world which cannot be described in quite the same way. The sun and moon, for example, form a pair and yet there is no underlying scale for them.

The new invention then was to assign numerals to them: From the word **ban** 'celestial body' were derived: **bánat** 'sun' and **bánil** 'moon' – lit. 'celestial body 1', 'celestial body 2'. There was also the dvandva superposition **bánahil** 'sun and moon'; and **bánes** 'star' was sometimes added to the list. This received acceptance, as the usual words for 'sun' and 'moon' up to that time were formed by the augmentative and diminutive suffixes **-men** and **-lin**: **bármen, bállin** which is not that much different.

Another natural pair without a scale is male and female. The original roots are √TAR 'male', √IN 'female', √ME or √DA 'human being', whence **tárme** 'man', **ímme, índa** 'woman'; or with the diminutive suffixes **-win, -lin**: **tárwin** 'boy', **íllin** 'girl'.
The numerals **at** '1' and **il** '2' were now agglutinated to the root √ME, yielding **méat** 'man' and **méhil** 'woman'; superposition **méahil** 'male and female, married couple'. This has in fact also found acceptance. The reason is probably the sound-symbolic association of the vowel **a** with large size and hence bulkiness and strength on the one hand; and of **i** with slenderness and gentleness on the other.
Similarly, √TE 'parent' yielded **téat** 'father', **téhil** 'mother', **téahil** 'both father and mother' beside the older **táte, máte**.

With the construction of monuments flourishing at the same time, the parts of a house were numbered in the same fashion: The root √PEL 'house' yielded **pélat, pélaχta** 'floor', **pélli, péllita** 'wall' and **péles, pélesta** 'roof', superposition **pelahílles** 'mansion, palace' (contrast: **pélwin** 'small cheap house'). The word for 'town', **pelestámi** (lit. 'many roofs') was introduced by the same time.

Finally, the root √KA 'earth, realm' yielded the cosmological terms **káhat** 'earth, land', **káhil** 'sky', **káhail** 'earth and sky' and sometimes **káes** 'sea', **káhailes** 'land, sky and sea, the whole world'.

All these words are very formal. For example, **méat, méhil** would correspond to English 'male, female', while **tárme, ímme** would correspond to the ordinary words 'man, woman'; ***Káhat** or ***Káhailes** would be used as the name of the planet 'Earth' by *Talmit* speakers in the present; ***káhat-teθébne** would probably be 'geology', ***ban-teθébne** 'astronomy' and so forth.

3 Development of colour terms in Talmit

The Proto-Tallic root for 'colour' was √KWA. Signum was applied to it whereby the signum-positive vowel **a** denoted a bright colour, the signum-negative vowel **ɪ** a dark colour. Hence T. **kawá** originally stood for anything from yellow to white and red, while **kɪwá** stood for anything from black to deep green and blue. This was later differentiated, so that **kawá** became 'red' (cf. the cognates K. **achva**, H. **hakua** 'red' < **akwa*), **kɪwá** became 'black'; and **mulkwá** was invented to mean 'colourless, white, pale' (but not 'shining white').
In fact, 'red' seems to have just been a synonym for 'colour' – compare also Spanish *colorado* 'coloured, red', or the Slavic languages where 'red' and 'beautiful' are almost the same. 'Red' was connected with the colour of ripe fruits (cf. **kwásta** 'fruit') and a vigorous, lively state.

More colours entered the language through the sound-symbolic root √N-KH (see sound-symbolism: `http://sindanoorie.net/glp/phonosymb.php`) which described the growing of plants. By regular vowel gradation,

[2]Superpositions of this kind may be compared to the Japanese *yojijukugo* (4-kanji-compound) *kidoairaku* 'human emotions' which combines the four kanji 'joy', 'anger', 'pathos' and 'humour'.

nek^{h}e denoted a small plant, and *nok^{h}o* a large one. The commonest derivatives were adverbial *enk^{h}e, *onk^{h}o* conveying the idea of a vigorous growth of small and large plants respectively.
In *Talmit*, however, these words shifted in meaning and were also applied to humans – the former describing a young child, the latter an old person. When applied to plants, *onk^{h}o* then shifted from 'grown tree' to 'bare tree in winter'. The idea was of course the analogy between a year's cycle and a human lifetime.
The regular reflex of *enk^{h}e* was T. **éχne** with metathesis of *ŋχ, and came to mean 'grellow' [sic], that is the range of colours between green and yellow (which is the colour of grass and leaves). It can still be used in the sense of 'leaves' (collective) in phrases like **kátu-mo éχne** 'a tree's green'. A very curious word is **aɸálχne**, meaning 'sunlight seen through the leaves of a tree', a compound with **afál** 'state of brightness'.
Instead of expected ***óχno** one finds the slightly irregular form **óχon** which came to mean 'white' by an association with aged hair and winter's snow.

The root √KUN originally denoted swampy ground or shallow water. It formed a pair with √KA denoting solid ground, so that the two often appeared together. Hence the dvandva compound **kássekun** 'ka and kun' appearing in the phrase **kássekun-nu prangánun** lit. 'to cross ka and kun' – meaning something like 'go at great lengths, achieve something through a lot of trouble'. √KUN also survives in **kúrmen** 'large swamp without trees' < *kun + augmentative *-men*.
Both roots yielded colour words and interacted along the way. First, *-ŋwa '-hued' was appended to *ka* and regularly yielded *kama* 'brorange' [sic], i.e. any shade between brown and orange (the colour of the soil and sand). The word *kun* was often expanded to *kunu* by analogy to *kama* and came to mean 'grue' [sic], i.e. any shade between green and blue (the colour of water). It remains with this meaning as **kún(u)** in Talmit. The nasal **n**, in its turn, influenced *kama* to change to **kána** (also aided by compounds like **kantwésta** 'rowan', lit. 'redberry', **kanθrébe** 'beet', lit. 'redheart', **kaχánta** 'gooseberry, strawberry'; where $m > n$ before t), making **†káma** an archaic variant. The latter remains fossilized in the poetic expression **kam-nóimo bállin** 'the earth-coloured moon' (cf. Ancient Greek γαιοφανής).
In recent times, **kána** seems rather to shift to a more reddish, brick-coloured type of brown by the influence of **kawá**. It is the colour of foxes and copper – the idiom **kanaχór** 'red-brown skin' describes a sneaky and insidious person. The 'brorange' shade is steadily being replaced by the a-grade **kéan**. Finally, the initial consonant is often altered to **h**: **hána, héan**.

Vowel superposition was applied to colour words in Talmit more than anywhere else in the language[2]:

As an originally sound-symbolic word, *onk^{h}o* had an intensive form by i-infixion: *onk^{h}oi* 'vigorous flourishing of a large plant'. However, since it left the class of sound-symbolic roots, the vowel **i** instead became associated with negative signum and the meaning 'black'. Although no separate form is recorded, the vowel-superposed form **oχóini** does appear; and means 'black and white', metaphorically 'good and evil' (as Jap. *kokubyaku, shirokuro, kuroshiro*).
The superposition of **éχne** 'grellow' and **kún(u)** 'grue' becomes **ukéone, uχéone** 'grullow = yellow∼green∼blue', elliptically 'nature'.
Adding **oχóini** into the mix, one gets **oiχáune** 'multi-coloured'.

All these words are of course very artificial elements within the language, first constructed by poets, then taken over into the living speech for the lack of other terms. This is not unheard of, compare the invented pseudo-Latin word *conundrum* in English.

Summarizing, the colour terms in Talmit are (5 basic ones out of possible 6, see `http://wals.info/chapter/133`):

1. **kawá** 'red'
2. **kɯwá** 'black'
3. **éχne** 'grellow' (**éχne-nóimo piruskáuta** 'grellow submarine'...)
4. **óχon** 'white'
5. **kun, kúnu** 'grue'
6. **kána, hána** 'red-brown'
7. **kéan, héan** 'brorange'

The obscure suffix *-ŋwa '-hued' becomes **-wa** after consonants and **-ma** after vowels in *Talmit*, and can be used to derive all sorts of additional non-basic hues and general apperances: **tóχorwa** 'snow-white', **tálzama** 'blood-red', **kérkama** 'wine-coloured', **bámnema** 'sky-blue', **bíkwa** 'glossy, looking like fat' and so on. As an

independent word **amá** < *ə-má* it has become the evidential particle of first-hand experience, not restricted to sight any longer. In *Kymna*, **-ŋwa* appears in the word **hengva** 'blue').

Regarding hair colour, **kɯwá** is used for black, and **kéan, héan** for blond, brown and ginger. Regarding eye colour, **kún(u)** is used for blue, green and grey; and **kéan, héan** for brown.

4 Hands, arms and legs

Proto-Tallic had no separate root for either 'hand' or 'arm'. The word for 'hand' was **unpun* lit. 'five-finger' and yielded *Talmit* **umpún** and *Kymna* **umun**.

The root √PLEZN described something like a node from where various joints branched off. In Talmit, **plézne** came to mean 'hand' or 'branch' (the latter usually compounded to **katuplézne** 'tree-hand'), but in Kymna **lindza** < **plenz(Q)a* came to mean 'net' or 'cobweb'.

Another path of development went from the sound-symbolic root √R-P 'take away, seize' (see sound-symbolism: `http://sindanoorie.net/glp/phonosymb.php`), whence Talmit **rápa** 'robbery, seizure', **rapárpa** 'thief, robber' and early adverbial **arpa* 'by taking, by seizing'. Sound-symbolic words had a regular way of forming the intensive by i-infixion. In the case of the adverbial form it led to **arpai*, and as *ai* incidentally was a sign of dual (T. **ai**, K. **ei**), it ironically came to mean 'grab something with both hands and stretching out the arms'.
As a kind of back-formation, early **arpa* became 'arm'. In *Kymna*, it regularly became **āra**. In *Talmit*, however, the word received a curious metathesis and voicing to **ábra** 'right arm'. It seems to have been influenced by the root √BRADN 'to fight', whence *Talmit* **bráznun**. In fact, the greater plural **ábrami** or the collective **ábramai** is regularly used in the sense 'army, force, troop' (lit. 'many right arms' or 'collection of right arms'). The word for 'left arm' became **íbri** by reanalysis (supplying the negative signum marker **i**), and its greater plural and collective **íbrimi, íbrimai** is used in the sense 'support, provisions'.

The Proto-Tallic word **pur* meant 'leg including foot' (cf. K. **purun** 'toe' (< **pur-pun* 'foot-finger')), but its e-grade synonym **póre** differentiated once more by the influence of signum to mean 'right leg', while **pur** correspodingly came to mean 'left leg'. The dual was **péor** 'both legs' < **pour*. A compound with **arpai* yielded **péorpai** 'body' where original *rp* of **arpai* has been fossilized.
Pentality plays an important role here, as the body is regarded as the collection of the five limbs in *Talmit*: two arms, two legs and the head. Incidentally, the original root for 'head' is √PER which looks suspiciously close to √PUR – the two might have had the general meanings 'upper part' and 'lower part' (cf. **dappúr** 'foot of the mountain'). √PER has been replaced in the literal sense 'head' by **paróxe, parúx** (from √PRUKS, a modified form of √PRUS 'vertical position') and is only used in the sense 'main, chief', as in **pérax** 'king, monarch', **perpélezmai, perpélmai** 'capital city'.

Another word for 'leg' excluding the foot, **ba**, is very versatile in *Talmit*. It can also mean 'pillar', especially in the compound **dambá** 'stone-pillar'. At one time, it also seems to have denoted buildings (as something solid and upright), but is in *Talmit* only used for the names of shops and institutions of all kind, e.g. **gamɸabá** 'fish-shop', **ɸoskabá** 'barber', **herkabá** 'bookshop', **pekworbá** 'florist', **aχagembá** 'restaurant' and so on. The root extension √PRUS 'vertical position' → √PRUBS 'tower', T. **parúzba**, K. **orudza** is perhaps not coincidental either.
Furthermore, **báhat** is a unit of length close to a metre, literally 'one leg' – or rather 'one step'. The corresponding unit of weight is **dákat** '(one) stone' and the dvandva-compound of both, **dáxeba**, means 'measurement'.
Finally, the dvandva compound of **ba** and **ka** 'flat solid surface' becomes **kásseba** 'foundation, fundament, grounds, reason'.

5 Affectedness marking in Kymna

[tentative explanation]

Proto-Tallic had a number of postpositions which were preserved in *Talmit* and further enlarged by compounding. The core case postpositions were

- nom. **ja*
- acc. **nu*
- dat. **ma*

For the nominative and accusative, there were corresponding modified forms **wa* and **nujə*. They were originally what one could call an ergative-like aspect marking system. In *Talmit* this has evolved into a noun/state system. In *Kymna*, however the modified postpositions came to mark affectedness.

To demonstrate this, let us take the example

(1) **Pan-ja kojəba-nu (a)khagun*
child=NOM apple=ACC eat
'The child eats an apple (habitually)'

The accusative marked by **nu* conveyed a punctual event. Marking the object by **nujə* instead gave durative

(1') **Pan-ja kojəba-*nujə (a)khagun*
child=NOM apple=ACC.DUR eat
'The child is eating an apple (durative)'

Literally: 'The apple is experiencing a prolonged influence by the child's eating'. If the predicate was an intransitive verb, the subject was marked by **ja* for punctual aspect, by **wa* for durative aspect.

Now let us take an abstract object, e.g.

(2) **Pan-ja khalis-nujə pwosun*
child=NOM happiness=ACC.DUR feel
'The child is happy (durative)'

Talmit took this pattern as basis, deleted the verb and interpreted **khalis* as 'state of happiness'. The postposition **nujə* > **nójo** thus came to indicate the state a subject marked by **ja*:

(2) **Pan-ja halís-nójo**
child=NOM.STAT happiness=STAT
'The child is in a state of happiness'

Real objects which can be manipulated then always became marked by *nu*. The intransitive pattern

(3) **Pan-wa (a)khagun*
child=NOM.DUR eat
'The child is eating (durative)'

was replaced by

(3) **Pan-ja aχagendé-nójo**
child=NOM.ACT eat-CMPD-action.state=STAT
'The child is in a state of eating'

with a participial form of 'to eat', and itself became habitual:

(3) **Pan-wa aχágun**
child=NOM.ACT eat
'The child eats (habitually)'

Kymna, on the other hand, took the pattern with real objects as basis.

(1') **Pan-ja kojəba-nujə (a)khagun* > **Pan kyvonas sohum** (with deletion of **ja*) was reinterpreted as 'The apple is affected by the child's eating'.

Instead of denoting aspect, **nujə* came to denote affectedness, while a new aspectual marking system on the verb arose. The second pattern was completely transformed into

(2) **Pan salydzumōn**
child happy-PRED
'The child is happy'

with the predicative form of **salydzuma** 'happy'. The intransitive pattern (3) **Pan-wa (a)khagun* 'The child is eating (durative)' was reinterpeted as

(3) **Panva sohum**
child-NOM.AFF eat
'The child is affected by eating'.