BURUSHASKI --*SKIR* 'FATHER-IN-LAW' AND --*SKUS* 'MOTHER-IN-LAW'

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The Burushaski[1] nominal stems --*skir* 'father-in-law; wife's father's brother'[2] and --*skus* 'mother-in-law' have been suggested to be based on the nouns *hír* 'man; male' and *gús* 'woman (married); female', respectively (Lorimer 1935–38, III: 26–27; Berger 1998: III: 381). The latter words seem to reoccur also in Hunza -*síldir* 'father of a spouse with reference to the father of the other spouse' and Hunza -*sílgus* 'mother of a spouse with reference to the mother of the other spouse' (Berger 1998, III: 79).

These identifications are natural enough and phonologically fairly sound: $g > k$ after *s* is normal in Burushaski, cf. Hunza *gées-kus* = Hunza/Nager *gées-gus* 'widow', *gáarcs*- 'to run' > --*s-karcs*- (Yasin -·*s-karcs*-)[3] 'to cause to run' (Berger 1998, I: 24). However, $h > k$ after *s* is not (otherwise) attested, cf. Hunza *gús-huk* 'bitch [female dog]' (Berger 1998, I: 219). Nor are there any indications that *hír* 'man' once commenced with a velar obstruent. Possibly there is analogy with --*skus*.

However, even if we accept *kir* < **hir* (which seems to be the only option), we are still left with the opaque element -*s*- coming between the pronominal prefix and the stem-final elements. So far there have been no suggestions in the literature as to the provenance of this 'intrusive *s*'.

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[1] Burushaski has three dialects, Hunza, Nager and Yasin. So far no one has been able to prove that it is related to any other language or phylum. If not otherwise stated, the quoted words and morphemes apply to all dialects. My transcription differs slightly from the traditional ones. I write *cs* for *č/c*, *ch* for *ć/č*, *sh* for *ś/š*, *ng* for *ṅ*.

[2] The double hyphens indicate the lengthened strong grade of the pronominal possessive prefix, e.g. *móo-skir* 'her father-in-law'.

[3] The dot after the hyphen indicates strong grade of the pronominal prefix, e.g. Yasin *gó-s-karcs*- 'to make you run'.

A semi-productive derivational morpheme *-s-* with causativizing or 'agent-ivizing' meaning is found in verbs, cf. *--s-karcs-* (*-·s-karcs-*) mentioned above (Berger 1998, I: 125–126). It is quite obvious that this is not the morpheme we are dealing with here. Yet this 'intrusive *s*' cannot be just an empty morpheme, since it adds something essential to the meaning of the stem-final elements (assuming we have identified them correctly). It is also unlikely on semantic grounds that it has anything to do with the x-class demonstrative base *s-*, with which Berger identifies the said verbal morpheme *-s-*. The only possibility is that it derives from a noun. In other words, the said stems are actually nominal compounds.

The first noun which comes to mind then is *-·s* 'heart, mind' (Nager also: 'core of apple or pear'), but that does not make good sense. A semantically more satis-fying etymology is *gús* 'woman (married); female', which reappears at the end of the terms *--skus* and Hunza *-sílgus* (see above). The forms would thus originally have been: **--gus-hir* '[man's] woman's [old] man' = 'man's father-in-law' and **--gus-gus* '[man's] woman's [old] woman' = 'man's mother-in-law', respectively. Determinative compounds of this type are not common in Burushaski, but do exist, cf. *phú-dan* 'fire-stone, flint' (Berger 1998, I: 218). (Compare also the above-mentioned terms *-síldir < *-síl?-hir* and *-síl-gus*, where the first element might have something to do with Hunza/Nager *silajín* 'female relative', Yasin *salén, selén* 'man's sisters and daughters' and *-sálgin-* 'to betroth a girl to a man or [Hunza/ Nager] vice versa'[4] (Berger 1974: 174).

So how was the proposed first nominal member *gús* (< ?**kús*) truncated to *s* in these compounds? The following scenario can be envisaged: initial *g-* was lost after the pronominal prefix in just the same way as in *-ús* 'wife' < **-gús* '[own] wo-man', e.g. *gu-ús* 'your (sg.) wife'.[5] But in distinction from *-ús* 'wife', which takes the common weak grade of the prefix, the said in-law terms take the lengthened strong grade of the prefix, found only with five nominal stems, e.g. *góo-skir* 'your (sg.) father-in-law' (Berger 1998, I: 44).[6] The prefix-final long accented vowel then absorbed the following *u* in order to avoid a three-vowel sequence, cf. *góo-t-* 'to make for you' < **góor ét-* > Nager also *gó-et-* (Berger 1998, I: 123). Thus only *s* survived. Disregarding the possibility of the changes *g > k* and *h > k* after *s*

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[4]   In Yasin *-salgin-* is used only in the case of a father betrothing his son to a girl (Morin & Tiffou 1989: 48).

[5]   Lenition or deletion of initial *g-* after a prefixal vowel is common in verbal paradigms, e.g. *d-us-* 'to take out' < **d-gus-*, cf. *d--gus-* 'to take out from s.o.' (Berger 1998, III: 458).

[6]   Parkin (1987: 326) suggests that the lengthened strong grade of the pronominal prefix in *--skir* and *--skus* is due to the prefixation of the Tibeto-Burman honorific prefix *a-* to the stems. Contrary to what Parkin says, however, the Yasin dialect also displays the (length-ened) strong grade of the pronominal prefix in these stems. On the other hand, Lorimer's practice (adopted by Parkin) of writing an *a-* before every stem or root taking a (lengthened) strong grade prefix is questionable.

having occurred already in the initial stage, the full development could be sum-marized as follows (using the prefix for 2sg. as an example):

góo-gus-hir > *góo-us-hir* > *góo-s-hir* > *góo-skir*

 'your father-in-law; your wife's father's brother'

 (lit. *'your woman's [old] man')

góo-gus-gus > *góo-us-gus* > *góo-s-gus* > *góo-skus*

 'your mother-in-law' (lit. *'your woman's [old] woman')

Semantically there is one problem: If the derivations are correct, these terms should only refer to the parents in-law of the husband. As it is, the terms are the same also for the wife's corresponding in-laws (except for the meaning 'wife's father's brother' of --*skir*, a restriction which tallies with the proposed etymology). In other words, a wife, too, would be saying *'my woman's [old] man' = 'my father-in-law'. The generalization of the 'male-centred' terms could yet be under-stood in terms of markedness theory (the masculine/male being unmarked with reference to the feminine/female). It is also possible that the terms were generalized for both spouses only after they had become opaque through the proposed trunca-tion of the first nominal member (*gus* > *s*) of the compounds.

The plural endings of these stems also point to their opacity and reveal that they have been dissociated from the nouns *hír* and *gús* and aligned with other kinship terms. Thus the plural absolutive forms of --*skir* 'father-in-law' are: Hunza --*ski-ndaro* (cf. Hunza/Nager -*rík-indaro*, Yasin -*rék-endaru* 'brothers/sisters-in-law'), Nager --*skir-isho* (-*isho* is a common plural ending), Yasin --*skir-staru*[7], --*skir-ishu* (cf. Yasin -*húles-taru* 'brothers-in-law'). Contrast the plural absolutive forms of *hír* 'man': Hunza *hir-í*, Nager *hir-íkancs*, Yasin *hur-í*, *hur-íkia*. Probably owing to its greater transparency --*skus* 'mother-in-law' uses, at least in Hunza, the same plural endings as its base *gús* 'woman': Hunza --*skush-ingancs* (cf. Hunza *gush-íngancs*, Nager *gush-íancs*, Yasin *gush-ínga* 'women'), Nager --*skush-o* (-*o* is a common plural ending), Yasin --*skush-indaru*, --*skush-u*.[8]

An alternative etymology for -*s*- could be *sís* 'people, folks, person'. Accord-ingly, a form like *áa-s(*is)-kus* would mean 'my folk's [old] woman', which could be used by a married woman referring to her mother-in-law. However, a man would hardly refer to the folks of his wife as 'his folks' (since it is the wife who moves in with the husband), so if this etymology is correct, it is the men who

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7   In his Yasin grammar Berger (1974: 16) gives the odd forms --*skir* 'Schwiegervater', pl. --*skir-taru*, but in the vocabulary (Berger 1974: 175) the forms are given as --*skir* and --*skir-staru*, respectively (my notation).

8   Cf. also -*ús* → -*úsh-incs*, Nager -*úsh-indaro*, Yasin -*úshi-ndaru* 'wives'; Hunza -*síl-gus* → -*síl-gush-o*, -*síl-gush-incs* '[the two] mothers of a married couple'.

would have taken over the female terms. A more serious problem is the inexplicable curtailment of *-sis- > -s-*.

A final theoretical possibility could be Hunza/Nager *-sk* (pl. Hunza *-sk-umucs*, Nager *-sk-indaro* [cf. Hunza *--ski-ndaro* 'fathers-in-law']*)*, Yasin *-ís* (pl. *-ís-mu*) 'young (of animal); child (in Hunza/Nager only jokingly); stamper (Yasin)' < ? *-isk*. This nominal stem could perhaps explain the first two segments of *--skir* and *--skus*, if the latter are reconstructed as *--sk-hir* (with irregular loss of *h* after *k*) and *--sk-gus*[9], respectively. The semantics, however, would be inappropriate: a person's child's father or mother can never be that person's father-in-law or mother-in-law, unless that person marries her/his own father/mother-in-law and begets a child with him/her. Moreover, the terms 'father-in-law' and 'mother-in-law' are normally assigned before you beget any children. For the etymology to be acceptable, it would require that Hunza/Nager *-sk* (Yasin *-ís*) once also meant 'spouse', cf. English 'baby' → 'beloved'.

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9 In general geminates are avoided even across morpheme boundaries.