HITTITE *NEKA*– AND THE ORIGIN OF THE INDO-EUROPEAN DIMINUTIVE SUFFIX *-KO-

by Kenneth Shields, Jr.

In the last three decades, the methodology of linguistic reconstruction has been greatly influenced by the substantial body of research into the identification of linguistic universals. Although the status of many of these universals is subject to considerable debate (cf. Dunkel 1981, Hock 1986:626, Collinge 1986), it is nevertheless certain that large numbers of historical/ comparative linguists today fully endorse the principle that their reconstructions must be consistent with general theories of linguistic structure (cf. Anderson 1988:324). Such general theories of linguistic structure include those "which favour a timeless, and therefore static, approach to the nature and structure of language" and those which embrace a "more dynamic approach, in which [linguistic] states are a reflection of constraints on transitions" (Fox 1995:251). The first kind of universal is the typological universal, which, when applied to a linguistic reconstruction, "ensures that the [reconstructed] language does not have an inadmissible combination of values", or features (Fox 1995:250). The second kind has been termed the "panchronic law" (Kuryłowicz 1973) or "law of language development" (Fox 1995:194), and it provides a means of evaluating a series of reconstructed stages of a language by "determining the overall direction of linguistic change" (Fox 1995:194). Word order typology is among the most widely recognized (and most controversial) typological universals, while panchronic laws include such developments as the evolution of future constructions from desiderative constructions and the origin of plural structures from collectives (cf. Kuryłowicz 1973). In a recent important article, Jurafsky (1996) provides significant linguistic and cognitive arguments for a panchronic law regarding the derivation of diminutive markers and their subsequent evolution. Specifically, he argues that "the origin of the morphological diminutive is the sense 'child'", that is, "the source was either semantically related to 'child' (e.g. a word meaning 'child'

or 'son'), or pragmatically related to 'child' (e.g. a hypocoristic suffix on names)" (1996:562). A good deal of his discussion pertains to the Indo-European diminutive suffix *-ko- (cf. Skt. áśva-s 'horse', aśva-ká-s 'little horse'; Lith. paŕša-s 'pig', paršùka-s 'little suckling pig'; Lat. homō 'man', homunculus 'little man') and its subsequent developments (e.g. 'approximation': Skt. babhru-ká-s 'brownish'; 'pet name': Skt. vásu-ka-s [cf. vásu-s 'good']; 'member': Go. mahteig-s 'mighty' [cf. mahts 'might'])[1]; however, he attempts no explanation of the ultimate etymological source of this Indo-European morpheme. In this brief paper, I wish to use Jurafsky's panchronic law in conjunction with specific linguistic evidence to propose such an etymological explanation. In short, I shall raise the distinct possibility that the source of the suffix may lie in the grammaticalization of the Indo-European etymon of the Hittite kinship term neka-, a lexical archaism.

neka- itself is a rather obscure word since "voll phonetisch geschriebene Belege sind vergleichsweise selten", the item being usually represented by way of an Akkadogram (Tischler 1991:297). It is generally agreed, however, that /nega-/ constitutes its phonological realization (cf. Friedrich 1952:150, Kronasser 1962:165, Neumann 1974, Güterbock & Hoffner 1989:425, Tischler 1991:297). The exact meaning of neka- (nega-) is the subject of debate, although I follow Gamkrelidze & Ivanov (1995:667) in positing "'sister' (also 'daughter', 'female consanguine')" (cf. Otten [1973:35-6], who maintains "dass neka- allgemein 'junge weibliche Verwandte' [d.h. 'Mädchen/ Tochter/ Schwester'] bezeichnet")[2]. No cognates for this word exist in any Indo-European group outside of Anatolian. The traditional explanation of nega- is that it constitutes an innovation which replaces the original Indo-European root *swesor- 'sister' (cf. Skt. svásar-, Lat. soror, Go. swistar) (Gamkrelidze & Ivanov 1995:667). However, careful analysis leads to the conclusion that the word may actually constitute an archaism. Thus, Ivanov (1986:10) argues for the antiquity of this lexical item because "the term reveals a clear trace of a classification based on age and unites different

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[1] As Jurafsky (1996:565) notes, the suffix *-ko- "appears in modern IE languages with a great number of senses, including diminutives, hypocorism, patronymics, names of tribes, countries, and languages, various kinds of nominalizations and assorted metaphorical formations, words of approximation, and often as a general method of producing new adjectives or nouns" (cf. Brugmann 1891:252-74). Traditional Indo-Europeanists incorrectly reconstruct "the protosemantics of this suffix as an abstraction over each of these relations, as 'something "tantamount to" or something which is merely "like" the original'", with the diminutive deriving from this abstract sense (Jurafsky 1996:565).

[2] These conclusions are contested by Güterbock & Hoffner (1989:426), who gloss the item simply as 'sister'. A useful overview of glosses and etymologies for neka- appears in Tischler (1991:298-301).

generations (daughter – sister, both heterostathmique and homostathmique), an especially significant feature for kinship systems of the Omaha type, and this kinship is indicated for Indo-European by virtue of several semantic facts". Indeed, **swe–sor–*, a compound of the reflexive pronoun **swe–* and **sor–* 'woman', i.e. 'one's own woman' (Buck 1949:108), is best considered the replacement term, reflecting a restructuring of the original kinship system[3]. Equally significant for the archaic nature of *nega–* is the existence of apparently parallel forms in Uralic. Čop (1979:21) thus says: "...dann steht sehr nahe ein ural. Wort, dessen Urform auf ein **ńiŋā* 'Weib, Frau; Weibchen' festgelegt werden darf: lapp. *njiŋŋa–lâs* 'Weibchen, weibliches Tier', mordw. *ńi* 'Frau, Gemahlin', tscher. *–nō* 'Weib', wog. *nī* 'Frau, Gemahlin', ostj. *nèŋ* usw. 'Weib, Ehefrau', ung. *nö* 'Gemahlin; weibliche erwachsene Person; Weibchen'; sam. jur. *ńē* 'Weib, junge Frau' usw."[4]. He points out that his proposed Indo-Uralic root in **neg–* "steht in vollem Einklang mit den betreffenden phonetischen und morphologischen Gesetzen, die für die indo-uralischen Wortgleichungen festgestellt worden sind" (1979:21). One should take special note that the meaning component 'young' is attested in both Hittite and Uralic reflexes of **neg–*, especially in the former. Moreover, there exists evidence which lends support to the idea that the word may not have originally differentiated between female and male genders. This original lack of gender specificity is implied by the fact that the Hittite word for 'brother' *negna–* "has been built from the word *nega–* 'sister' by the addition of *–na–*. This may indicate that at an earlier stage *nega–* meant 'sibling' and that *negna–* was the form specialized ('marked') for masculinity" (Güterbock & Hoffner 1989:431). Hittite *nega–*, then, could ultimately reflect a development similar to that of English *girl*, with original reference to young people of either sex and later specialization in reference to females. The

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[3] In regard to dialectal changes in the archaic Indo-European kinship system, Gamkrelidze & Ivanov (1995:676) assert: "Disruption of the patrilocal principle, whereby women entered the family and descent was preserved within it along the male line, would obviously have led to radical changes in the inherited affinal kinship relations and destruction of the original conceptions of family and class. This is precisely what took place in the individual Indo-European traditions, particularly in Anatolian".

[4] Ivanov (1986:10-1) overtly endorses a Nostratic origin for *nega–* on the basis of parallels in geographically remote Altaic languages: "Tungusian, cf. Manchu *non* (pl. *nota* with the ending *–ta* characteristic for kinship terms), Churchun *nièh–hûn–wēn* 'younger sister', Negidal *nehu* 'younger sister/brother', Evenki *neku* 'younger sister/brother, younger relative', a Common Tungusian word which might also correspond to Yakut *noko, noho* (form of address by elders to younger relatives)". However, aside from the questionable validity of the Nostratic Hypothesis (cf. Ringe 1995), adherents generally acknowledge a sound correspondence between medial Indo-European **–g⁽ʰ⁾–* and Altaic **–g–*, not **–k–* (cf. Bomhard 1995:85). Ivanov erroneously seems to assume /–k–/ in *nega–*.

meaning component 'young' together with an earlier lack of gender specificity leads to the plausible conclusion that the original sense of the etymon of *nega–* was simply 'child' (or 'young person'). More significantly, if the etymon of *nega–* is an ancient word for 'child', then, I believe, the source of the diminutive suffix **–ko–* may have been identified.

It remains, of course, to explain how **nego–* yields the diminutive suffix **–ko–*. I would argue that this development can be ascribed to classic grammaticalization. As Hopper & Traugott (1993:145-6) indicate, in the process of grammaticalization, forms are subject to two tendencies: (1) "a quantitative ('syntagmatic') reduction: forms become shorter as the phonemes that comprise them erode"; (2) "a qualitative ('paradigmatic') reduction: the remaining phonological segments in the form are drawn from a progressively shrinking set. This smaller set of phonemes tends to reflect the universal set of unmarked segments". In regard to the first tendency, they explain further: "The fusion of a lexical item and a clitic as stem and affix that typifies morphologization is accompanied by phonological changes of various sorts. Most often these changes are characterizable as reductions: vowels and consonants are dropped, a stress or tone accent is lost causing an accentual readjustment over the newly formed word, and adjacent phonological segments are assimilated to one another" (1993:145). In the case under consideration, the first possibility was realized. More specifically, when **nego–* 'child' became subject to grammaticalization as a diminutive suffix, it underwent what Heine & Reh (1984:21) term "syllabic erosion", that is, "after having undergone Clitization and/or Affixation, polysyllabic morphemes tend to be reduced to monosyllabes". To illustrate, they cite an "example from Kituba, a pidginized variety of Kikongo", in which "bi– and trisyllabic pronouns and aspect markers have turned into monosyllablic affixes within two generations":
munu ikele kwenda ku–sosa > *mu–ke–kwa–sosa* 'I am going about searching'
    I   PROG   go   INF-search   (1984:21-22).
Similarly, Hopper & Traugott (1993:135-6) demonstrate this evolutionary principle of phonological reduction by means of the development of the Old Polish copula (e.g., 1st sg. *jeśm*) into a clitic after it came "to be suffixed to a participial verb stem to form an inflected past tense" (e.g., *–(e)śm* > Modern Polish *–(e)m*). Indeed, Jurafsky (1996:562) cites an example of phonological reduction in the derivation of a diminutive suffix in Gbeya (Niger-Congo), where *béem* 'child' was reduced to *bé*. As this latter example illustrates, both word-final and word-initial reductions are possible following grammaticalization (Heine & Reh 1984:23). In regard to the second tendency, it must be emphasized that, in contemporary phonological theory, "voiceless stops, as suggested by the implicational universal of Jakobson

(1968), are *universally* less marked than voiced stops..." (Hyman 1975:147). Therefore, it is not unlikely that original *–go–* became *–ko–* in the process of grammaticalization. In light of the current popularity of explanations involving multiple causality, I would emphasize that, in part, *–ko–* may have evolved from the imitation of children's pronunciation of *neko–*. In child language, phonological reductions of this type are also common, as are phonological neutralizations in favor of unmarked segments. Jurafsky (1996:569-70) points out, in passing, that such child language features as high pitch and reduplication seem also to play a role in the origin of diminutive markers because of their pragmatic associations with the notion 'child'. Therefore, it would not be unreasonable to ascribe some secondary influence to these features of child language.

I want to conclude my comments by noting that my proposal implies a very early appearance of the diminutive suffix in *–ko–*. To be sure, the linguistic data again support this supposition. Shevoroshkin & Manaster Ramer (1991:181) cite the existence of a similar diminutive suffix in Proto-Uralic, i.e., "P[roto]U[ralic] *–kka/*–kkä*", and in a variety of other so-called Nostratic languages. Although I draw no conclusions from these other purported correspondences, I feel that the genetic affiliation of Indo-European and Uralic is uncontroversial enough to establish the antiquity of the forms under consideration here[5]. As Anttila (1989:320) observes: "The Indo-Uralic hypothesis looks particularly strong, because the agreement is very good in pronouns and verbal endings, as well as in some basic vocabulary" (cf. Beekes 1995:32).

Beginning with Jurafsky's research (1996), my argument has led to the assertion that an ancient lexical item *nego–* (or **nega–*) 'child' (> Hitt. *nega–*) may underlie the Indo-European diminutive suffix *–ko–*. Admittedly, the reconstruction of this etymon for *–ko–* is speculative; but when this reconstruction is viewed in the context of universal tendencies of linguistic change and the extant linguistic data, it does represent a reasonable etymological explanation.

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[5] If *neg–* is indeed Indo-Uralic, the final vowel would have been *–a–*, which passed to *–o–* in Indo-European (cf. Bomhard 1995:87-8). Likewise, IE *–ko–* would have derived from IU *–ka–*.

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