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**Intensive word borrowing between Highland East Cushitic (HEC) and the Ometo group: Implications for the Spread of Concepts and Influences**

The interactions between Highland East Cushitic and Ometo communities were complex and extended over many centuries, and the history of these interactions is reflected in the different kinds of word borrowing have taken place between HEC and Ometo speakers as a result of these contacts. The Highland East Cushitic speech communities, the Sidama, Kembatta, Hadiya, Burji, and Gedeo, currently reside along the Rift Valley south of the Awash River, with their lands intersecting those of Ometo peoples and adjoining to the north those of the South Ethiosemitic group.

As it can be indicated by loanwords, the Highland East Cushitic societies came under strong influence from Omotic communities who expanded into the lands of Highland East Cushitic people. The Omotic loanwords borrowed into Highland East Cushitic core vocabulary clearly show the intensity of intrusion and the influence. Similarly intense influences flowed the other direction as well, indicative of the assimilation of many formerly Highland East Cushitic-speaking people into the proto-Ometo society. There was also a similar impact of Ometo communities on the Burji who moved to the south, although it is not clear how early this encounter took place.

One interesting semantic difference in the early contact periods is the borrowing of the core vocabulary words for ‘heart’ and ‘liver’ from the Highland East Cushitic into Proto-Ometo, but for ‘moon’ and ‘stars’ from Proto-Ometo into Proto-Highland East Cushitic (PHEC). A question for future research is whether these patterns might reflect the spread of concepts about being and existence one way, from PHEC to Proto-Ometo, and another set of ideas, perhaps having to do with celestial imagery of the spirit realm, going the other way, from Proto-Ometo to PHEC.