

### Gene Gragg

**Gene Gragg** presented a paper, “Phonology, Comparative Method, and Etymological Databases,” at the Third International Symposium on Cushitic and Omotic Languages held in Berlin March 17–19. He was able to bring along for demonstration purposes a “traveling edition” of the Cushitic-Omotic Etymological Database CUSHLEX, a computerized tool for investigation into the historical relationships of the vocabulary of the Cushitic and Omotic branches of the Afroasiatic superfamily of languages—implemented now for a Windows environment with the widely-used database managing system Foxpro. Work this year has centered on using the database’s cognate sets to infer and register the correspondence sets and sound changes (“sound laws”), which recapitulate the historical evolution of the language family.

Individuals from a number of institutions in the United States and Europe have expressed interest in using the system both as a reference tool and in the context of on-going linguistic fieldwork (specifically the southern-most extension of Cushitic in Tanzania). A project of similar nature in Berkeley and Lyons, covering the hundreds of Bantu languages in Africa, had independently set similar goals

(updatable multi-user, multi-platform electronic etymological database) and means (commercially available micro-computer-accessible database managing system), and are investigating how much of the architecture and programs of CUSHLEX can be adapted to their situation. A “user’s manual” for the CUSHLEX has been available on the Internet for most of this year via the Oriental Institute’s new file transfer (FTP) site (see *Computer Laboratory* report, below), and recently instructions have been posted on how to obtain the source code, data, and executable file for the most recent version.

---