THE COMPARATIVE LINGUISTICS OF OCEANIC LANGUAGES:

A REVIEW OF WORK DONE

(Summary of a paper read to the Linguistic Society of New
Zealand on 4 May, 1959.)

M.E. Reizenstein

The purpose of this paper is to give a historical survey
of the work done on the genetic relationships of the Austronesian
Languages. As some of the most important works have been written
in German and are in some cases difficult of access, I have
devoted particular attention to them, without however neglecting
other contributions. For reasons of space, 19th century work
has been treated rather summarily.

This language family was first called Malayo-Polynesian by
W. von Humboldt, in 1836, when he discovered the relationship
between Old Javanese (Kawi) and Polynesian. Bopp tried to
establish its relationship with Indo-European. The first pioneer
investigators of the Indonesian languages were Dutch scholars:
van der Tuuk, Brandes, Kern, and later Adriani and Jonker.
These men laid the basis of the phonology and grammar of these
languages. The MN languages were first treated by Helmuth von
der Gabelentz from 1860 on, and he was followed by Codrington,
with his great work, "The Melanesian Languages". Gabelentz
held MN and PN to be two different members of Malay, but
Codrington, while including MN in the Malayo-Polynesian family,
did not commit himself clearly on any close distinctions
within the family.

As early as 1884, Brandes pointed out in his Comparative
Phonetics that there were significant differences between
Western and Eastern IN languages (e.g., in the genitive relation-
ship between nouns). The Brandes Line, which follows a
similar course to the Wallace Line, brings Eastern Indonesia
close to Melanesia: a point whose importance has never been
fully recognised.

By the beginning of this century, Kern had already succeeded
in a phonetic analysis of difficult MN languages such as Aneityum
(S. New Hebrides) and Mafoor (N.W. New Guinea).

By this time three main themes were evident in the work
being done: the internal relationships of MN and PN within the
Malayo-Polynesian family; the wanderings of both groups in the
Pacific; the relationship of the whole family with other (Asian)
groups and families. Bypassing the work of Schmidt, Fink and
Churchill, I must next mention the material gathered by Ray,
in particular the results of the Torres Straits expedition,

which enabled him to "discover" the MN languages of Papua. In his work on MCN pronouns (1907), Thalheimer proved the basic relationship of MN and MCN. The East Indonesia-Melanesia link appeared again in Friederici's work (1913), which traces some 180 words from Ceram, Buru, N.E. Celebes, etc., across Northern New Guinea to Melanesia.

As the most important of Brandstetter's essays on IN were translated by Blagden, I mention only here what I feel to be the most important achievements of his great work: firstly, the establishment of a system of phonetic laws covering all West IN languages; secondly, the resulting analysis of IN word structure; thirdly, the elaboration of a Common IN; and finally, his distinction of the root from the mainly dissyllabic word-base (e.g. word-bases pilih "choose", kulih "appropriate" olih "acquire", ulih "get": root lih). In this way Brandstetter was the first to give IN linguistics a proper foundation and form, but he did not go beyond IN.

This strictly IN outlook was continued by Ray in his "Melanesian Island Languages" (1926): the MN languages are regarded as a sort of IN pidgin, a very unsatisfactory theory from a man whose contribution was otherwise very great.

It was another twelve years before the nature of the original Austronesian language was established, by Otto Dempwolff in his Vergleichende Lautlehre des Austronesischen Wortschatzes (Hamburg 1934-38). This work was and remains the foundation of all further scientific study in the field (the term Austronesian actually goes back to a paper by Schmidt in 1899). Before discussing Dempwolff's reconstruction, however, it will be useful to review the work done on the external relationships of the whole Austronesian family.

Schmidt, who had worked extensively on both the Austronesian and the Austro-Asian families, had endeavoured to establish an Austric group covering these two. Similarity in word-structure helped Schmidt to show similarities in the roots, for example: AN kulit "skin"; Austro-Asian kalit (Munda), liet (Khmer), lit (Kasi), with rather diverse meanings, "smooth", "rubbing softly", "sharpen"; or again AN pitam, hitam, item, etc., "black"; AA gadam, kadam, hatam, dam, bta, "night", "dark". Schmidt compared about 220 words in this way, but his thesis has been only partially accepted.

Comparisons were made by Conrady between AN, Austro-Asian, Indo-Chinese, and Tibeto-Burman. His work was followed up by a well-known Sinologist, K. Wulff, in two books. Wulff's work is based on Karlgren's Analytical Dictionary of Chinese and his own work on Thai, and his comparisons drew the conclusion that the Austro-Asian languages are an intermediate member group between the AN and Chinese-Thai, while the Tibeto-Burman group stands further away. Wulff, unfortunately, could not use

Dempwolff's work for AN, but nevertheless he showed the sound-ness of working with whole families and with word groups. So to the kulit group of Schmidt he adds Siamese klet "scale, scurf", other Thai languages ket, kiat. The phonetic reduction of words is characteristic of Thai, but the process was more radical still in Chinese, and it was only Karlgren's ingenious reconstruction of Old Chinese which made comparison possible. It was thus possible to compare, for example, AN susuk, tusuk, djukdjuk, etc. "to sting", with Old Chinese ts'iak, tsiek "thorn, to sting". It remains to be seen of course whether this carefully reconstructed initial consonant and the following deceptive vowel cluster do not themselves represent a reduction of an originally dissylabic word which is still to be found in AN, but has in Indo-Chinese, Chinese and Tibeto-Burman been phonetically reduced to the appearance of a root.

Similar comparative work between AN, Austro-Asian and Old Japanese was carried out by Matsumoto, and revealed that certain strata of Japanese do justify comparison, e.g., AN puser, pusat (whence PN uho) "navel", and the following words for "navel" in AA: pchet (Khmer), puset, pusa (Negrito, Malay Peninsula), pusu, putsu, fusu (Ryukyu Is.); and Old Japanese *pozo, *poso (recon-structed from hozo, hoso).

Then there is Rivet's attempt to compare Sumerian with Austro-Asian, AN, Australian and Tasmanian. The work is done in such a loose and imprecise way that the few pearls are not easy to locate in the ocean of uncertainties. One such pearl, however, appears to be Sum. kuŝ "skin" which he compares (indirectly through variant IN forms) with AN kulit. The comparison is based on the principle that the predominantly disyllabic word-base of AN in fact represents root + root, only here the comparison is made with the first root, whereas most comparisons have been made with the second (e.g. the AA parallels of Schmidt). This second root is reduplicated in AN itself in lilit "to wrap round". But the first root ku(1) also appears in other word-bases: likup "surround", likol "encircle", bungkul "sphere, knob", bekung "to vault". There is therefore the likelihood that AN combined two roots from possibly quite different original sources.

Very different from Rivet's imprecise work is Benedict's Thai, Kadai and Indonesian (1942), based on Dempwolff's recon-structions. Here the linguistic connections established with some degree of credibility are not incidental but basic. The Kadai group is a stock of geographically unconnected pre-Chinese languages, including Li on Hainan, Lati, Kelao and Laqua on the mainland. Examples of the comparisons are: AN *matay, *patay "to die"; Thai t'ai, tai, hai; Kadai tie (Laqua); AN *(h)ipen "tooth"; Thai van; Kadai p'en(Li); AN *taRum "indigo"; Thai g'ram (borrowed from the next); OChinese glâm; Tibetan ram-s. In all these examples the sound correspondences were carefully checked, and provide therefore a firm basis.

Returning now to Dempwolff, the first point to be made is that while he recognised the importance of the root (as opposed to the word-base), he did not proceed on this basis in his reconstruction of AN. This was because his strictly inductive method of comparison did not allow him to depart from the actual words in the languages used as the foundation of his reconstruction. Such a restriction was of course essential from the point of view of reconstructing AN, which therefore consists mainly of dissyllabic word-bases. However, this does not mean that further comparative work with other language families may not in fact establish the root more firmly in AN than Schmidt and Brandstetter were able to do. Dempwolff's starting point was the observation that although the grammatical structure of the AN languages is not as uniform as that of say the Semitic or the Bantu languages, their vocabulary is. His purpose therefore was to work out the original word stock on the basis of strictly phonetic comparisons. Dempwolff therefore restricted himself to those languages which promised the best from this point of view: these were, he said, West-IN languages "owing to their differentiated sounds and the resulting clearer construction of the words". Six WIN languages were chosen: Malay, Javanese, Toba-Batak in Sumatra, Ngadju-Dayak in Borneo, Tagalog in the Philippines, and the more archaic Hova or Merina in Madagascar, and they were called Test Languages. Fijian and Sa'a for Melanesian, and Tongan, Samoa and Futunan (again all western) for PN, served as Criterion Languages against which the IN-based reconstructions were checked. Thus the original phonemes of IN included *t- because all the test languages have it, e.g. tanim, tanom, tanam, "bury". The PN languages confirm it: Tongan, Fut. tano. Sam. tanu. The word has not survived in Fijian, but the t- occurs in other words, while in Sa'a the *t- is lost: 'ano. It will be noted that the medial *-n- is retained everywhere, but that both MN and PN avoid final consonants. The original word is reconstructed as *tanem. If we check with languages not used by Dempwolff, we find that in East IN the languages of Ceram provide tahu, talu, tane, rale, where the partly aberrant features are in conformity with local sound shifts and are reconcilable with Proto-IN. Similarly, with MN we have Mota tanu, Malo tano(mia). Not all the phonemes were as simple as this of course, and more complex conditions were evident with the prenasalised and liquid consonants.

Further discussion of the AN phonemic system has naturally led to modifications. The most important work is that of Dyen on the laryngeals. While his main purpose was to check on the laryngeals as reconstructed by Dempwolff, Dyen reached a position of some doubt as to whether or not "some Proto-Malayo-Polynesian words ended in a vowel". Apart from Fox's revolutionary paper on the phonetic laws in MN, the postulated final consonant of AN has never been considered a problem. Dyen's doubt about some of the final laryngeals reconstructed is an indication that there is indeed a problem here. The fact remains, however, as Capell has said, that "no work on Oceanic linguistics which does not

take Dempwolff's findings into account can hope to claim serious attention in future studies of linguistics of this region."

Capell himself has exemplified this point in his work on SE Papuan languages. Though he is opposed to Dempwolff's postulation of a Proto-MN, he based his work phonetically on Dempwolff and provided an excellent foundation for further comparison in a vocabulary of 320 words. The three chief movements from Indonesia into Oceania which Capell infers (the second of them corresponds to Friederici's "sub-Philippine" migration) need not necessarily be interpreted as contrary to the theory of a Proto-MN. His first movement, starting from Borneo, brings the main word stock into Melanesia: it is therefore, according to Capell, "Indonesian". But it could equally well be interpreted as Proto-MN, or even -- to use Speiser's term -- "Austro-MN".

There have also been three important works in the PN field, all based on Dempwolff.

Burgmann in his work on "Syntactical Problems in PN" is concerned with clarifying the relationship between IN and PN by studying the phonetic correspondences between PN and the Philippine-Celebes group, where there is a close phonetic conformity not found elsewhere in IN. At the same time, he stresses the uniform linguistic character of PN among the AN languages, a character defined by the extensive unification (convergence might be a better historical term) of phonemes and by its syntax. Among the comparative features mentioned by Burgmann may be noted: the sporadic loss of l in PN and in the Central Celebes languages Tontoli and Bo(l)ano. Certain particles such as the locative ko, ka, still used syntactically as particles in PN and the Central Celebes, also appear in PN as part of the word base and are recognisable as particles only by comparison with AN, e.g. Maori kohu "steam" ko + ahu (AN * asu) "smoke". Another interesting feature is vowel assimilation, e.g. AN *kulit, PN kili, Loinan (Central Celebes) kilit; this form appears in NE Indonesian only in a few marginal points, e.g. Mysol kine, while it is usual in the Marshalls: gil, kil and Mortlock: kili, whereas the Gilberts have the original vowel: kun. The various divergencies from AN common to PN and the Central Celebes lead Burgmann to the conclusion that they were already in use before the emigration of the Polynesians from the Indonesian area. Actually the assimilated form of *kulit appears to be isolated in the Celebes, where the predominant form is with -u-, so that the relationship could well be the reverse of that deduced by Burgmann.

Kähler's "Studies in PN Morphology" may be regarded as an AN comparative grammar and syntax, despite the fact that it deals only with PN and IN, and that the Celebes languages predominate for IN. Two criteria -- the regular sound correspondences between IN and PN grammatical forms, and the agreement

in function of the main PN and IN grammatical features -- lead
Kähler to the conclusion that one cannot speak either of
different PN languages, or of a PN type or character. Even
to designate the PN languages as "particle languages", as
Burgmann does, is in his view a misinterpretation, as all the
particles, and their functions, can be paralleled in IN.
Kähler declares: "Even the name PN dialects is no longer,
linguistically speaking, justifiable. They must be classified
as IN, since they do not possess anything essential, in
structure or vocabulary, which cannot be proved to exist in
IN idioms." The term "PN dialects" is therefore for Kähler
purely a geographical one. The structural features which
characterise these languages today exist in IN not as characte-
ristic but as unusual traits, so he concludes that these
"normalised" features of PN were drawn from different IN regions.
As an example, we may quote the PN articles. AN *se, which is
the prototype of PN te and Central Celebes te, 'e, is also found
as a singular (rarely plural) article in Mentaway tay and
Pangasinan (Philippines) say. The Eastern PN ta is parallelled
by a Gorontalo (Central Celebes) form which follows the noun;
in Western PN, it is found in words such as ta/'ahine (Uvean),
ta/moti (Futunan: moti = "to drop", tamoti = "rain-water").
The Samoan le has an IN parallel in Hova (Madagascar) lai as
in ilai "a certain", "this one", e.g. ilai tukana "the only
child". The counterpart of West PN si is the widespread IN si
(Philippines, Mod.Javanese, Sunda), but the identity of function
occurs only in Tontemboan (Central Celebes). Finally, Gorontalo
has still in common use an article u which appears only in fossil
form in PN: e.g. Sam. u/tila, Tong. u/hila, Marq. u/i'a, "lightning".

Both Burgmann and Kähler therefore continue the old idea of
PN "dependence" on IN, which is phonetically based on West IN
as the fountainhead of all the AN languages. I cannot believe
that this is the last word of wisdom on the matter.

Elbert's paper on the "Internal Relationships of the PN
Languages" is based on the method of glottochronology developed
by Swadesh. As I have had no opportunity to study this method,
I must restrict myself to some of Elbert's conclusions. From a
comparison of 202 basic words in 20 PN languages, including the
outliers, Elbert and his collaborators worked out a table of
percentages of cognates which showed that the West PN languages
shared 86% of the list, the East 71%. Between East and West,
only 45% were cognate. Elbert's conclusion was that "West and
East became distinguished before the differences developed among
languages in either area." Other points are that the outliers
cannot be regarded as "colonies established by the original
migrants moving eastward"; that Dempwolff's view of Tonga as the
original PN home within Polynesia is confirmed, but the settlers
were forerunners, restricted to a small area: it is the archaic
phonology of Tongan which made possible the reconstruction of
Proto-PN.

If Swadesh's method is sound, then its application to IN, and to the relationships between IN and PN, may well throw a different light from that cast by the work of earlier scholars. This is perhaps a useful introduction to my conclusions which will no doubt have a somewhat heretical air. Dempwolff's Proto-AN is entirely based on West IN languages, which are commonly, but not invariably, characterised by word-bases ending with a consonant. The entire stock of languages east of the Brandes Line -- East IN, MN, MCN, PN -- have normally no final consonant. It is Fox's strong point that in many of the Eastern languages a grammatical suffix appears which corresponds to the apparent final consonant in the West IN languages: this suffix is in the form of consonant + vowel. I have myself worked through many examples, and found Fox's argument in the main confirmed. Dyen's work, as mentioned earlier, also supports this view. A problem of considerable significance for AN linguistics may be hidden here, for one may well ask: if the final consonant is not archetypal, then can the West IN languages, despite their more differentiated phonemes, be considered still as the only fundamental ones for reconstruction purposes? Or should we not then turn to the languages East of the Brandes Line for the original word-bases?

At the moment, there are two contrasting schools of thought. One which admits as the immediate descendant of Austronesian only West Indonesian, from which are descended all the other members of the AN group. The other sees as the descendants of Austronesian three languages: Proto-IN, Proto-MN, Proto-PN, and of these Proto-IN remained closest to AN. There is a third possibility, discussed above, that of the three intermediate-stage languages, the non-IN ones may in fact prove to be the more archaic. As yet this third possibility is little more than a suggestion for further study. But unless it is tested, the traditional view will continue to be not wholly satisfactory.

Discussion. Dr. Hollyman pointed out that one of the conclusions suggested by the work of Haudricourt and Lenormand on New Caledonian languages was that MN should be regarded as the most conservative member group of AN, a view tentatively put forward by Codrington and Schmidt. Dr. Biggs briefly indicated the results published to date of the comparative work undertaken by Grace.

Postscript. Wilhelm Milke, in Zeitschrift für Ethnologie 83 (1958), 58-62, has recently presented a promising classification of the Oceanic group of AN Languages. It is based on AN *l, *d, *R and their various convergent developments in the Oceanic languages, and contrasts with Grace's classification.

Bibliography.

Benedict, P.K. : "Thai, Kadai and Indonesian", in American Anthropologist n.s., 44 (1942), 576-602.

Bopp, F.: Ueber die Verwandschaft der Malayaisch-Polynesischen
    Sprachen mit den Indisch-Europäischen. Berlin,
    1841.

Brandes, J.L.A.: Bijdragen tot de vergelijkende Klandleer der
    westersche Afdeeling van de malaiisch-polynes.
    Taalfamilie. Utrecht, 1884.

Brandstetter, R.: An Introduction to Indonesian Linguistics.
    Four Essays, translated by C.O. Blagden. London,
    Royal Asiatic Society, 1916.

Burgmann, A.: "Syntaktische Probleme im Polynesischen, mit bes.
    Berücksichtigung des Tonganischen", in Zeitschrift
    für Eingeborenen Sprachen 32 (1942).

Capell, A.: The Linguistic Position of South-Eastern Papua.
    Sydney, Australian Medical Publishing Co., 1943.

Codrington, R.H.: The Melanesian Languages. Oxford, Clarendon
    Press, 1885.

Conrady, A.: "Eine merkwürdige Beziehung zwischen den austrischen
    und den indonesischen Sprachen", in Aufsätze zur
    Kultur- und Sprachgeschichte E. Kuhn... gewidmet
    (Munich 1916), 475-504.

    " : "Neue austrisch-indonesische Parallelen", in
    Hirth Anniversary Volume (London, 1922), 23-66.

Dempwolff, O.: Vergleichende Lautlehre des austronesischen
    Wortschatzes. Berlin, Reimer, 1934-38 (= Zeit-
    schrift für Eingeborenen Sprachen 15, 17, 19).

Dyen, I.: The Proto-Malayo-Polynesian Laryngeals. Baltimore,
    Linguistic Society of America, 1953.

Elbert, S.H.: "Internal Relationships of Polynesian Languages
    and Dialects", in Southwestern Journal of Anthropology
    9 (1953), 147-173.

Fox, C.E.: "Phonetic Laws in Melanesian Languages", in Journal
    of the Polynesian Society 56 (1947), 58-118.

Friederici, G.: Wissenschaftliche Ergebnisse einer amtlichen
    Forschungsreise nach dem Bismarck-Archipel in Jahre
    1908, vol. III: Untersuchungen über eine melanesische
    Wanderstrasse. Berlin, Mittler, 1913.

von der Gabelentz, H.C.: "Die melanesischen Sprachen nach ihrem
    Bau und ihrer Verwandschaft unter sich und mit den
    malaiisch-polynesischen Sprachen untersucht", in
    Abhandlungen der kgl. Sächs.Ges. f. Wissensch.,
    phil.-hist. Kl., 3 (1860) and 7 (1873).

von Humboldt, W.: "Ueber die Kawi-Sprache auf der Insel Java",
    in Abhandlungen der kgl.Akad. der Wissenschaften 2-4
    (1836-39).

Kähler, H.: "Untersuchungen zur Morphologie polynesischer
    Dialekte", in Afrika und Uebersee 36 (1953), 145-162;
    37 (1954), 35-48, 119-142; 38 (1955), 73-88, 165-186;
    39 (1956) 129-145.

    " : "Bemerkungen zu einigen 'polynesischen' Ausdrücken",
    in Tribus, n.F., 4-5 (1956), 114-121.

Kern, H.: "Over de verhouding van de Mafoorsche tot de Maleisch-
    Polynesische Talen", in Travaux de la 6e session du
    Congrès International des Orientalistes, Leiden, 1884.

Kern, H.: De Fidjitaal vergeleken met hare verwanten in Indonesië en Polynesië. Amsterdam, Müller, 1886.

" : Taalvergelijkende verhandeling over het Aneityumsch", in Verhandelingen d.k. Akad. van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam, Afd. Letterkunde, N.R. Deel, 8, 2 (1906).

Matsumoto, N.: Le Japonais et les langues austroasiatiques. Paris, Geuthner, 1928. (Austroasiatica, I).

Ray, S.H.: "The Polynesian Languages in Melanesia", in Anthropos 14-15 (1919-20), 46-96.

" : A Comparative Study of the Melanesian Island Languages. Cambridge, University Press, 1926.

Rivet, P.: Sumérien et Océanien. Paris, Champion, 1929.

Schmidt, W.: Ueber das Verhältnis der melanesischen Sprachen zu den polynesischen und untereinander. = Sitzungsberichte d. k. Akad. d. Wissenschaften, phil.-hist.Kl., 141,6 (1899).

" : Die Mon-Khmer-Völker, ein Bindeglied zwischen Völkern Zentralasiens und Austronesiens. Braunschweig, 1906.

Thalheimer, A.: Beiträge zur Kenntnis der Pronomina personalia und possessiva der Sprachen Mikronesiens. Stuttgart, 1908.

Wulff, K.: "Chinesisch und Tai: Sprachvergleichende Untersuchungen", in Det kgl. Videnskabernes Selskab., hist.-filol. Meddelelser, 20,3 (1934).

" "Ueber das Verhältnis des Malayo-Polynesischen zum Indochinesischen", in Ibid., 27,2 (1942).

Additional.

Haudricourt, A.G.: "Variations parallèles en mélanésien", in Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris 47 (1951), 140-153.

" : "Les Origines asiatiques des langues malayo-polynésiennes", in Journal de la Société des Océanistes 10 (1954) 180-183.

Lenormand, M.H.: "Correspondances phonétiques du malais et du mélanésien de Lifou", in Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris 47 (1951), 154-165.

" : "Correspondances phonétiques et variations parallèles dans les parlers de la famille austro-nésienne: mélanésien, indonésien, polynésien", in Bulletin de la Société des Etudes indochinoises, n.s., 27 (1952), 405-420.