

**Greenberg and I:  
The case of Southeast Asian *vulva***

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In a recent (1990) note on megalocomparison James A. Matisoff (hereafter JAM) compared the approach of Joseph Greenberg (hereafter JG) to my own. I thought that I came out rather well, on the whole, but I also felt that the note failed to capture the essential difference between the two approaches. At times an example is worth a thousand words and this is one of those occasions. Robert Bauer (1991) has recently reviewed the Sino-Tibetan and other Southeast Asian terms for *vulva*, avowedly making use of the JG approach, 'I have combined Greenberg's multilateral comparison... "a method that looks at everything at once... at many languages across a few words" (Greenberg 1987:23), with Buck's technique of sorting modern forms by their Indo-European etyma...' (pp.147-48). He makes extensive use of my reconstructions in both the ST and AT fields, but ends up by setting up PST \**dzu(k) mat* > P-Chinese \**tsɿ mat* > Austro-Tai \**tupi*, the latter as the product of early diffusion in the region.

I point this out as an excellent example of what different results can be obtained from the JG approach. JG himself, it is true, might well have come up with rather different results here if he had conducted the search, but it should be noted that we know far more about the comparative phonology and the like of Southeast Asia<sup>1</sup> than of the Amerindian and other areas dealt with by JG. One can object to the idea of setting up a disyllabic root at the PST level; PST doesn't have disyllabic roots. Or didn't, before Bauer. The 'second syllable' appears to have been \**ba(-t)*, basically 'something concealed/hidden', whence 'pudenda'.<sup>2</sup> As indicated in *Japanese/Austro-Tai*, Japanese *tubi* 'vulva', from Old Japanese *tubi* (< \**tubui*), is from the widespread PAT \**tu(m)buŋ* 'opening' (> 'anus' ~ 'vulva'), hence it is only a "look-alike" of PAT \**tupi* 'vulva' (>

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<sup>1</sup> The comparative phonology of ST is in far better shape than suggested by the remarks by Bauer (p.158) re 'an early stage of development', etc.; see my handouts at the 1988 Lund Sino-Tibetan Conference, giving the detailed PTB/Han correspondences. ST is no IE, to be sure, but at the present time this field has achieved a much higher level of sophistication than the vast majority of those visited by JG in his linguistic peregrinations. Most of the forms cited by Bauer, for example, for AT as well as for ST, can be subjected to examination on the basis of established phonological rules.

<sup>2</sup> See Benedict 1991.

Hlai 'penis!'). Lisu tu<sup>1</sup>bi<sup>6</sup> 'vulva' is another "look-alike", making for a nice play on words (randy young Lisu males ponder: tu<sup>1</sup>bi<sup>6</sup> or not tu<sup>1</sup>bi<sup>6</sup>) but the -bi<sup>6</sup> is for PTB \*ba-t. And so on.

The point to be made here is not that I'm reluctant to put things together. Hardly anyone could think that of me. Rather, it's that my approach involves standard historical linguistics: phonological rules, cognates and the like. The JG approach, on the other hand, makes use of what Matisoff has called "comparabilia", for which I now suggest "comps"; PAT \*tupi, Japanese tubi and Lisu tu<sup>1</sup>bi<sup>6</sup> are "comps" but not, I believe, cognates nor even "fusionates" (words related by diffusion/borrowing). "Megalolinguistics" is one of JAM's better neologisms and I don't want to see it abandoned, but I do suggest that it be limited to the JG approach. My ST involves "megalolinguistics"; my AT, "expanded megalolinguistics"; JG's Amerind, "megalolinguistics". I leave it to JAM to come up with another neologism for the AT level, maybe also an improvement on my "fusionates", making us all happy. Me, anyway.

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#### REFERENCES

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