

THE POSITION OF THE MUNDA LANGUAGES WITHIN THE AUSTROASIATIC LANGUAGE FAMILY

By HEINZ-JÜRGEN PINNOW

1. The Austroasiatic controversy, which arose in 1930 when Wilhelm Hevesy¹ violently attacked Wilhelm Schmidt,² the real discoverer of the Austroasiatic family, still remains unsettled. Schmidt, it will be recalled, had grouped the Munda languages, Khasi, and the Nicobar, Palaung-Wa, Mon-Khmer, Malacca, and Cham languages together under the designation 'austroasiatischer Sprachstamm'. Some scholars, among them Sten Konow,³ C. O. Blagden,⁴ F. B. J. Kuiper,⁵ R. Shafer,⁶ J. H. Greenberg,⁷ and A. J. Shevelenko,⁸ in the main agreed with Schmidt and favoured the recognition of the existence of an Austroasiatic family including the Munda languages but excluding the Cham languages. Others, in particular Georges Maspero,⁹ and more recently also A. I. Blinov,¹⁰ rejected this contention. The majority of the critics, especially T. A. Sebeok¹¹ and M. B. Emeneau,¹² have deferred judgment in the belief that the problem could be solved only through further investigation.

How unsettled the classification of the languages of South East Asia still is can be seen in Richard Salzner's *Sprachenatlas des Indopazifischen Raumes*,¹³ in which the Munda and Malacca languages are excluded from the Austroasiatic family but which follows Schmidt in once again designating as Austroasiatic the Cham languages, which have long been recognized as Indonesian. The whole question becomes even more complicated by the fact that the linguistic relationships of Vietnamese and of Müöng are disputed.¹⁴ Vietnamese, Müöng, and Malacca and Cham languages are, however, all clearly mixed languages: they all reveal at least an Austroasiatic substratum, which, however, is so small

¹ *BSOS*, 6, 1930, pp. 187 ff.

² *Die Mon-Khmer-Völker*, Braunschweig, 1906.

³ *Gött. gel. Anz.*, 1906, pp. 228 ff.

⁴ W. W. Skeat and C. O. Blagden, *Pagan races of the Malay Peninsula*, London, 1906, Vol. II, Part IV, pp. 377 ff.

⁵ 'Munda and Indonesian', *Orientalica Neerlandica*, Leiden, 1948, pp. 372 ff.

⁶ 'Études sur l'austroasiatique', *BSL*, 48, 1952, pp. 111 ff.

⁷ 'Historical linguistics and unwritten languages', in *Anthropology today*, ed. A. L. Kroeber, Chicago, 1953, pp. 265 ff.

⁸ *Sov. V.*, 1958, pp. 101 ff.

⁹ *Grammaire de la langue khmère*, Paris, 1915.

¹⁰ *Sov. V.*, 1956, 153 ff.

¹¹ *Language*, 18, 1942, pp. 206 ff.

¹² *JAOS*, 75, 1955, pp. 145 ff.; *Language*, 32, 1956, pp. 3 ff.

¹³ Wiesbaden, 1960.

¹⁴ cf. H. Maspero, *BEFEO*, 12, p. 1; A.-G. Haudricourt, *BSL*, 49, 1953, pp. 122 ff.; R. Shafer, *BEFEO*, 40, 1940, pp. 439 ff., *HJAS*, 6, 1942, p. 399, *Dân Việt Nam*, No. 1, 1942, pp. 1 ff.

Vietnamese, Müöng, and the Cham languages that we may unhesitatingly regard Vietnamese and Müöng as Thai languages and the Cham languages as Indonesian. In the Malacca languages, on the other hand, the Austroasiatic elements are so numerous that the languages are still to be regarded as Austroasiatic, although all of them (particularly Jakud) are gradually being assimilated into the Indonesian group.

The Munda languages, which are undoubtedly not mixed languages, do indeed differ greatly from the pattern of the other Austroasiatic languages (for which the designation 'Khmer-Nicobar group' seems suitable), but the points of correspondence of the Munda languages with this group are so numerous that these similarities can by no means be coincidental. Borrowing may also be ruled out, for the common features lie especially in the basic vocabulary, in word-formation (where the infix-formation is particularly characteristic), and in certain morphological and syntactical peculiarities. The typological differences between the two groups can in large part be explained as the results of influence by the various neighbouring languages, with which individual Austroasiatic sub-families have formed so-called 'language leagues' (*Sprachbünde*). A further discussion of this subject is to be found in my *Versuch einer historischen Lautlehre der Kharia-Sprache*¹ and in an article in the *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 1960.²

2. Schmidt's view that the Munda languages form a sub-family of the Austroasiatic group proves to be well founded and correct, but it still remains to be ascertained exactly what the relationships of the various members of the family (Munda, Nicobar, Khasi, Palaung-Wa, Mon-Khmer, and the Malacca group) to one another are, and a suitable classification of the Austroasiatic family must be worked out. Furthermore, the classification of the Munda languages themselves must be established. The unity of all the Munda languages (not including Nahali, which is not Munda) is apparent not only from a comparison of the phonological systems in these languages but even more from their highly developed inflectional systems, in which they differ from all other Austroasiatic languages. Recent investigation³ has shown that the verbal inflection of all Munda languages is traceable to a Proto-Munda inflectional system, which was later expanded in the north and considerably reduced in the south. From this evidence and on the basis of lexical differences the Munda languages may be divided into a Northern group with the sub-groups Kurku and Kherwari (Santali, Mundari, Korwa, etc., belong to the latter branch), and a Southern group, which is further subdivided into a Central group (including Kharia and Juang), and a South-Eastern group (including Sora, Pareng, Gutob, and Remo). R. Shafer (in *Word*, 1960, p. 425)

¹ Wiesbaden, 1959.

² 'Über den Ursprung der voneinander abweichenden Strukturen der Munda- und Khmer-Nikobar-Sprachen', *IJJ*, 4, 1960, pp. 81 ff.

³ H. J. Pinnow, *Sprachvergleichende Studien zum Verbum in den Mundasprachen*, Berlin, 1960 (MS).

has also divided Munda into Northern and Southern groups. The relation of Kherwari and Kurku is much closer than that of Central and Southern Eastern Munda, which must have been separated much earlier than Kherwari and Kurku.

This classification, the reasons for which are given in more detail in the *investigation of the Munda verb mentioned above*, differs greatly from the classification of Schmidt, who grouped the languages solely on the distribution of *k* and *h* (from Proto-Munda **q*). He concluded that there is an Eastern group (= Kherwari; with *h*), a Western group (Kurku, Kharia, Juang; with *k*), and a supposedly 'mixed group' (= South-Eastern Munda; with a loss of Proto-Munda **q*). As this classification was based on a single argument, it could do justice to the facts.¹

3. W. Schmidt likewise attempted a general classification of the Austroasiatic languages,² and again on the basis of a single, if important, factor. On the basis of the comparison of numerals and some other important words he came to the conclusion not only that the Munda languages are Austroasiatic but that together with the Mon-Khmer languages (in the narrower sense of the term) they form one of four Austroasiatic sub-families,³ the others being the older Malacca group (including Semang and Sakai), the central group (including Khasi, Nicobar and Palaung-Wa), and a so-called south-east mixed group (i.e. the Cham languages). Schmidt classifies Bhesi and Jakud as a younger Malacca group within the Mon-Khmer languages. His classification of the 'South-East mixed group' is not appropriate, as these languages are clearly Indonesian. Because of its one-sidedness, Schmidt's classification is as a whole questionable and must be examined. However, in the following we will limit ourselves primarily to the reconsideration of the position of the Munda languages.

4. There are two ways of solving the problem of the classification of the Munda languages within the Austroasiatic family: first, according to structural synchronic considerations; secondly, according to the historical development of the languages. The latter classification is undoubtedly the more important one. Reliable information can be obtained only through such intensive historical-linguistic investigation of the various sub-groups as R. Shafer, for example, has done in the field of the Palaungic languages.⁴ The work of W. Schmidt, pioneering as it may be, does not suffice to clarify the complicated situation. As long as the eastern Austroasiatic languages have not been subjected to a comprehensive historical examination in which the history of the individual groups is established, the classification of these languages on the basis of their common and differing features will remain provisional. In the comparison of cer-

¹ *Die Sprachfamilien und Sprachenkreise der Erde*, Heidelberg, 1926, p. 140.

² *Grundzüge einer Lautlehre der Khasi-Sprache* (*Abh. d. K. Bayer. Ak. d. Wiss.*, 1 Kl., Bd. 3 Abt.), München, 1904, pp. 759, 804. Cf. p. 140, n. 2, and n. 1 above.

³ See n. 2 above.

⁴ See p. 140, n. 6.

individual correspondences in vocabulary, morphology, and phonology the greatest caution is necessary, for all too often one finds completely independent parallel developments that do not at all justify grouping the languages with such common features together. Reasonable assurance for the correctness of the provisional classification is offered only by a correspondence of several major factors, in which connection morphological features deserve particular attention.

5. Features particularly to be regarded in classification are the following :

5.1. The position of parts of the sentence, especially in the relationship of the determiner to the thing determined. From the structural viewpoint three groups can here be clearly distinguished : (a) the eastern languages (with the exception of Nicobar), in which the *determinans* consistently follows the *determinandum*; (b) the Nicobar group, in which this rule is only partially observed, in so far as the ' adjective ', without an affix, precedes the ' substantive ', e.g. Nancowry *ãã yuəŋ ləpaa kəliŋ* ' the two good foreigners ' (literally ' two persons good foreigners ') or *ãã yuəŋ kəliŋ tə-ləpaa*; in the latter case the adjective following the noun has the prefix *tə-*. In Car Nicobarese an adjective with the prefix *tö-* can also precede, and the practical result of this is that the whole *determinans* precedes the *determinandum*, e.g. *tö-tamüi cooŋ* ' steamer ' (literally ' with fire provided boat '); *tamüüi-yö* ' fire '). Lastly (c) the Munda languages, in which the *determinans* usually precedes, but in which the reverse holds true in a number of cases. Thus in compounds, especially in Sora, the ' genitive ' often follows, e.g. *ə-jeelu-booŋ-ən* ' buffalo meat ' (literally ' meat-buffalo-the '). The postposition of the personal pronoun as a possessive suffix is also frequently employed, e.g. Juang *bui-nəm* ' thy mother ' (literally ' mother-of-thou ').¹ Historical linguistic investigation shows the following : at the earliest period for which we can make any statements the order *determinans—determinandum* was predominant. Later began a period in which the *determinans* was in all Austroasiatic languages largely but not exclusively placed after the *determinandum*. The eastern languages with the exception of Nicobarese continued this tendency, so that there now exist only a few remnants of old ' preposition ', such as the ' preposition ' of the numerals and numeral classifiers in Khasi and Bahnar. The Munda languages returned to the customary ' preposition ' of the *determinans—presumably* under the influence of Dravidian and Aryan languages. Nicobarese took a similar course—perhaps influenced by Andamanese languages. The only difference from Munda is that in Nicobarese the number of formations with ' preposition ' of the *determinans* is comparatively small. There is no reason to assume that Munda and Nicobar in this case passed through a common stage of development; however, a common tendency may have been present.

5.2. The use of prefixes and suffixes is very closely connected with the position of the *determinans*. The classification given above is also applicable here, but

¹ *IJJ*, 4, 1960, pp. 97 ff.