

CONTRIBUTION TO A CONSIDERATION OF THE PRESENT STATE OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE FIELD OF AUSTRONESIAN LANGUAGES

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Studies concerning the Austronesian languages as a whole are still in an early stage ; they form a field of research which even now is full of gaps and problems. These concern our knowledge of the hundreds of separate languages and dialects as well as anthropological problems which are closely connected with linguistics such as the origin of the ' Polynesian outliers ' in Melanesia and their relationships and migrations from Indonesia to the Pacific. This deplorable situation is, in all, a consequence of the fact that there are only a very few linguists in the world who have made a special study of the many languages in this vast area. The few of the contributions to our knowledge of Austronesian languages are due to a missionary effort. Missionaries, it must be said, usually lack linguistic training and their linguistic work often has a particular practical bias. Every one who is in the field of Austronesian languages knows by experience how much comparative linguistics suffers from the lack of linguistic data which are sufficiently reliable and suitable for scientific work. The linguistic information available, therefore, is of very mixed quality and of very variable quantity. Thus, as A. Capelle in his book *A linguistic survey of the South-Western Pacific* (The South Pacific Commission Technical Paper No. 70, 1954, p. 126) : ' Approaching the problem from the basis of area study, it is seen immediately that a number of areas remain almost completely unknown. Some of these are as yet unexplored ; others, however, though known in the sense that they have been visited by various Europeans, have not been studied from the linguistic viewpoint. Others have been known, but no adequate linguistic survey has been made of them. In other words, again, much of the linguistic material is old, and no modern research has been carried out to provide wider material than the old grammars and dictionaries prepared mostly by missionaries '. That holds good of almost all parts of the territories where Austronesian languages are spoken. It is true, however, that linguistic experts such as R. H. Codrington, S. H. Ray, H. Kern or O. Dempwolff

¹ Though Professor Uhlenbeck in his paper in this volume (p. 24) expressly said that there existed ' an essential difference between the Proto-Indo-European language as it must have been spoken in a distant past and the reconstructed Proto-Indo-European of the comparative method, it seems useful to me to say that the Original Austronesian (UAN.) constructed by O. Dempwolff is merely a ' Bezugssystem ' (a system of reference) and no reconstruction in the sense of ' Original Austronesian ' was ever spoken in this form. Original Austronesian in this sense was never a linguistic reality ! Therefore, Dempwolff himself wrote in his ' Die l-, m- und d-Laute in austronesischen Sprachen ' (*Zeitschrift für Eingeborenensprachen*, 15, 1925, p. 10) : ' Das rein induktive Verfahren, das die zusammengehörenden Worte in oft sehr langen Reihen aufführt, beansprucht grossen Raum und belastet die Merkfähigkeit des Lesers '.

in their time, did excellent work in the field of comparative linguistics in spite of the existing gaps. Much has been achieved, but still more remains to be done.

The collection of new material is of the greatest interest not only in the Pacific area but also in Indonesia in general, where e.g. the propagation of Bahasa Indonesia, the national language in the Republic of Indonesia, exercises great influence on the vocabulary and the structure of regional languages and dialects, and vice versa. The recent efforts to assimilate Malacca Malay to Bahasa Indonesia are worthy of study too.

The *description* of Austronesian languages *according to modern methods* is another very urgent problem. Every specialist knows that as yet there exist only a very few grammars which try to describe the structure of the various Austronesian languages on modern lines, that is to say, free from the influence and distinct from the manner of description of Indo-Germanic languages, which does not do justice to the structure of Austronesian languages. Especially here much pioneer work has to be done in all respects: new frames for the description of the structure of the various languages have to be found; the classification of words (*morphemes*), the possibilities of transposition from one word class to another must be examined, etc.

It is a pity that nowadays comparative linguistics is by some linguists considered sceptically, or bluntly rejected. 'Diachronic' studies are considered of less value by those who exclusively adhere to 'synchronic' studies. I think that both kinds of studies are necessary and indispensable. Of course comparative linguistics is possible only after intensive synchronic studies of the separate languages which are to be compared. But synchronic description of a language can profit much from diachronic or comparative studies, too. In the field of Austronesian languages, the breadth of the studies (i.e. comparing the structure and the vocabulary of various languages) must compensate for their lack of chronological depth, that is for the absence of historical linguistic documents. (Javanese and, to a certain extent, Malay must be excepted.)

I am convinced that comparative linguistics is indispensable, above all, for the study of *Polynesian dialects*. (By the term 'dialect' I intend to indicate gradations in similarity as to vocabulary and structure.) It seems to me difficult and dangerous to give a description of a Polynesian dialect without comparing

Deshalb wird zur Darstellung der Wortgleichungen ein *Kunstgriff* angewendet: aus einer kleinen Anzahl indonesischer Sprachen mit möglichst geringem Lautverfall sind die induktiv gewonnenen Ergebnisse auf kurze Formeln gebracht (der L-Laut, der RL-Laut usw.), diese sind in Gestalt von Lautsymbolen (als Buchstaben l, ʃ usw.) in eine *Ursprache* projiziert, und dann ist *deduktiv* angegeben, welche Entsprechungen für die Lautsymbole der Ursprache in den weiteren austronesischen Einzelsprachen tatsächlich vorkommen'. As the Original Austronesian constructions are merely 'Formeln' (formulas), Dempwolff chose the symbols *l'*, *g'* and *ʃ* for 'rational' and phonetic reasons only, and he chose *k'* in place of *l'* because this sign was already used by him for *s*, and because *k'* would fit into the 'harmony' of his sound-system. (See also O. Dempwolff: 'Einige Probleme der vergleichenden Erforschung der Südseesprachen', *Anthropos*, 26, 1931, p. 158.)

it with Indonesian languages first. The units which are to be compared are Indonesian languages and the Polynesian dialects, the latter being comparatively uniform in vocabulary and structure. Only if we are able to give the Indonesian equivalent or etymon may we in general be fairly sure of standing on solid ground. For, as is generally known, the Polynesian dialects are extremely rich in homonymy in consequence of the unification of originally differentiated phonemes, and of the fact that they have lost all consonants in morpheme final position. The very close relations between Indonesian languages and Polynesian dialects—I should say, their far-reaching identity—could, without doubt, be still more intensively and exactly elucidated if there were more extensive and reliable material, above all on the Polynesian dialects.

Especially, I think it of great importance, as already mentioned, to make thorough studies of the languages of the 'Polynesian outliers'. The study of these languages, some of which, nowadays, are spoken by a few hundred people only, is a task which should not be further delayed.

To show an instance of the indispensability of comparative linguistics, I should like to call attention to the Palau language in Micronesia. Though it is known (by comparative methods) that Palau is an Indonesian language (along with Chamorro), I think it fairly difficult to give a mere synchronic description of this very complicated language without comparing it with Indonesian languages, especially those of the Philippines and those related to them. How would it be possible, without comparative studies, to find out that e.g. Palau *melalem* 'plant', *mellalem* 'planted' (past tense), and *delomel* 'the plant', which are derived from the root morpheme *dalem* (< Austronesian *tanəm*), correspond to the Indonesian forms *mənanəm*, **minananəm*, and *tanəmən*; or that Palau *kodall* 'death' and *mekoad* 'to kill' correspond to Indonesian *ka/pataj/an* and *maka/pataj*?

Thanks to the studies of Dutch, American, and British linguists there is fairly good and ample material (texts, grammars, and/or dictionaries) for a relatively great number of Indonesian languages. That is the case e.g. with the languages of the Celebes and the Philippines, which are of the greatest importance for an understanding of the structure of Polynesian dialects.

The problems and difficulties concerning the languages of Melanesia are of another kind. Here, in contrast to the Polynesian dialects, one must mostly speak of separate languages. In view of our present state of knowledge, linguistics must here be concentrated upon the study of the various languages. For many languages in Melanesia are of such diversity in their details, and most of them are so little known, that comparative studies are possible only on general lines. As is shown e.g. by S. H. Ray, Melanesian languages are only to a very small degree comparable with Indonesian languages. The percentage of Indonesian in Melanesian languages varies considerably, but it is, in general, very small. If certain of those languages are, sometimes, called 'Austronesian-Papu-

mixed languages,¹ this term already shows the deficiencies of our present knowledge. For, as far as I know, it has very seldom been shown that words or special constructions are really in accordance with those found in Papuan languages, the studies of which are still in their infancy, too. The term 'Papuan', therefore, is very general and vague, and is practically identical with 'non-Austronesian'. Scientific studies as to the real character of Melanesian languages will be possible only if we possess ample data concerning the various *Melanesian and the many* differentiated and very complicated Papuan languages. But that will be a task which takes many years of intensified special studies of hundreds of hitherto virtually unknown languages, and will necessitate international team-work.

Investigations in the Santa Cruz Islands and the neighbouring groups would be of great interest; for here both Melanesian and Polynesian languages are to be found. (See A. Capell, *op. cit.*, p. 127.)

At present, the following tasks seem to me most urgent:

Collection of oral literature of the Pacific area, especially that of the 'Polynesian outliers', in such a way that the data are also suitable and sufficient for comparative work. Modern research has, above all, to be carried out in Melanesia and Micronesia, where the gaps in the field of linguistics are by far the greatest.

Modern developments make investigations into the changes in Austronesian languages as a result of European and modern cultural influences desirable.

¹ The term 'mixed' language is rejected by many modern linguists. Of course, there are no mixed languages from the synchronic viewpoint. But if one uses comparative methods there are to be found in a number of language families idioms which possess foreign words and foreign structures which are taken obviously from cognate languages, and in such a *quantity* that it seems necessary to distinguish such deep-going influences from mere 'loans'. I myself used this term for the Sichule language (on the island of Simalur on the West Coast of Sumatra), because I was able to understand that language with a knowledge of Nias and Simalur. If one wishes to abandon this term, I think it will be necessary to find another one in order to be able to distinguish in such cases between mere loans and between *linguistic influences which go much deeper*. (As to the use of the term 'mixed' language see a forthcoming paper by Søren Egerod, 'Tai, Chinese and Indonesian', and the papers in this volume by Messrs. Honey and Simmonds (pp. 71-2), and Pinnow (pp. 140-1).