

INTRODUCTION

by

NORMAN H. ZIDE

The Austroasiatic-Vietnamese-Muong (AVM)¹ family of languages is of considerable interest both to the comparative linguist and to the culture historian of the Southeastern Asian region and those regions adjacent to it, and has been the subject of large but largely unproven hypotheses. The great majority of the AVM languages are – or have been until recently – unwritten, and are spoken in regions difficult of access. The linguistic information we have on the many² languages of this family is not extensive, and much of what there is is inadequate for any sort of linguistic analysis. Nor has much comparative linguistic work been done where usable data have been available until recently. In the past ten years, our synchronic and diachronic knowledge of these languages has increased at a more rapid rate. A number of previously poorly known AVM languages have been or are being studied by competent linguists, and these languages include several of crucial interest in the reconstruction of proto-AVM, such as Nicobarese and Muong. Comparative work, too, is being carried on by a number of scholars.³ It is hoped that within ten years much of the comparative phonology and substantial portions of *the comparative morphology and syntax of most of the AVM sub-families* will have been worked out, and the various problems in reconstructing the history of the notably divergent syntactic systems within AVM can be properly resolved. At that time we shall also be in a position to propose more precise areal hypotheses about Southeast Asian linguistic history and, more generally, about linguistic change.

This volume collects a number of linguistic papers on historical and

¹ This awkward neologism is used to accord with Pinnow's preempting of the term 'Austroasiatisch' for AVM minus Vietnamese-Muong (Pinnow, H.-J., *Versuch einer Historischen Lautlehre der Kharia-Sprache*, Wiesbaden, 1959).

² A listing of the languages is to be found in Pinnow (*op. cit.*, pp. 1-6).

³ *Most of the few linguists working on comparative problems of AVM subgroups or on AVM as a whole* are represented in this volume; important exceptions are H. L. Shorto and Robert Shafer.

comparative problems of AVM, both those within AVM and those concerned with the relationships of AVM with other language families. It reinforces the recognition that the languages are, in fact, genetically interrelated, and indicates what some of the relationships are. These papers – most of them making use of newly collected data – vary in diachronic focus from Noss' study of *r in two Cambodian dialects to Haudricourt's paper, which examines the proposed connections of the Austroasiatic languages with Cham, Vietnamese, Tai and the Miao languages. Professor Li's paper on "The Relationship Between Tones and Initials in Tai" is included not because we presume Tai to be Austroasiatic, but because of the interesting typological similarities between his Tai data and certain AVM (i.e. Vietnamese) developments. Most of these papers are concerned with phonological problems, the notable exception being Pinnow's long study of comparative Munda verb morphology, the first detailed systematic treatment of comparative verb morphology in any of the AVM subfamilies that I know of. The papers on phonology range in content from the reconstruction of proto-language sound systems to the ordering of more or less phonetically transcribed cognates and the deduction of subfamily classifications from their correspondence sets.

Although both explicit (e.g. Thomas') and implicit (e.g. Bhattacharya's)⁴ revisions of the standard classification⁵ – Pinnow's is now generally accepted as such – are made in this volume, no new overall classification is offered. Various contributors have given their opinions but these are not simply unifiable into one consistent and comprehensive system.

The contributions to this volume give a fairly accurate picture of the current state of our knowledge of the comparative linguistics of AVM. Studies now in progress lead us to expect that we shall be able to say much more about this subject before too long, particularly about morphology and syntax, which we have only just begun to be able to study comparatively.

⁴ A close analysis of Bhattacharya's data (which recent field data of my own and of various colleagues supplement) would align Gorum with Sora. Sora-Gorum is one branch of Southern Munda; the other branch being Proto-Gutob-Remo-Geta? which splits into two branches: Geta? and Gutob-Remo. I use here the language names used by the speakers of the language; Gutob is also known as Gadba, Remo as Boṅḍa, Geta? as Ḍiḍey and Gorum as Parengi or Pareng.

⁵ No history of the linguistic classifications of and around AVM is given here; Pinnow does provide one. The status of Schmidt's 'Austriac', i.e., the relationship of AVM to Austronesian (Proto-Malayo-Polynesian) is still to be supported by a body of evidence.