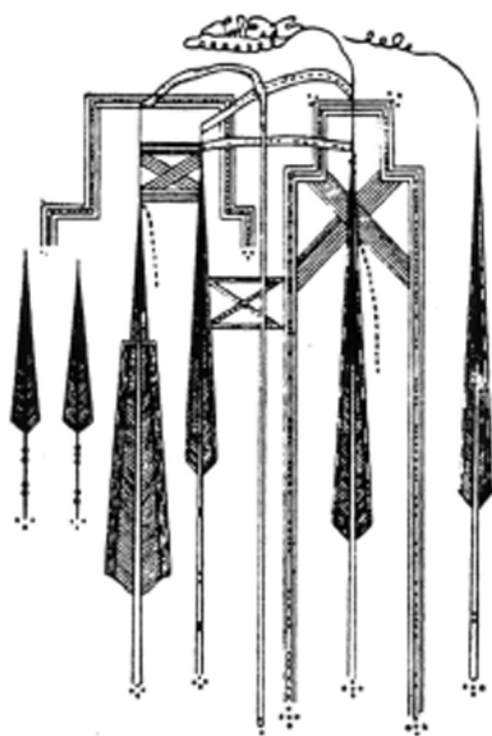


Archaeology and Language IV

Language Change and Cultural Transformation



Edited by Roger Blench and Matthew Spriggs

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London and New York

First published 1999
by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE
Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group
This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge's collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested.

ISBN 0-203-20879-X Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-26711-7 (Adobe e-Reader Format)
ISBN 0-415-11786-0 (Print Edition)

Cum remotae gentium origines historiam transcendunt, linguae nobis praestant veterum monumentorum vicem.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *De originibus gentium*

There is no tracing the connection of ancient nations but by language; and therefore I am always sorry when any language is lost, because languages are the pedigree of nations. If you find the same language in distant countries, you may be sure that the inhabitants of each have been the same people; that is to say, if you find the languages are a good deal the same; for a word here and there the same will not do.

Samuel Johnson, quoted in Boswell

1785

If we possessed a perfect pedigree of mankind, a genealogical arrangement of the races of man would afford the best classification of the various languages now spoken throughout the world; and if all the extinct languages, and all intermediate and slowly changing dialects had to be included, such an arrangement would, I think, be the only possible one...this would be strictly natural, as it would connect together all languages extinct and modern, by the closest affinities, and would give the filiation and origin of each tongue.

Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*

To seek, by the multiple routes of anatomy, physiology, history, archaeology, linguistics and even palaeontology, what have been in historic times and in the ages which preceded the most ancient remains of humanity, the origins, the affiliations, the migrations, the mixtures of the numerous and diverse groups which make up the human species.

Paul Broca, 'La linguistique et l'anthropologie'

Für mich ist jedes Wort ein sprechendes Lebewesen, das seine Geschichte erzählt, sobald ich es kennen gelernt habe. Ich sehe die Zeit kommen, wo man von einer etymologischen Biologie sprechen wird.

Gottlieb Adolf Krause

'Die Stellung des Temne innerhalb der Bantu-Sprachen', 1895

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Preface

The relation between the present volumes and the Third World Archaeological Congress held in New Delhi in December, 1994, is complex. Events at the Congress have been described in some detail (e.g. Bernbeck and Pollock 1995; Colley 1995; Golson 1995; Hassan 1995) and need not be further touched upon. Some chapters were presented as papers in the Congress, as part of a five-day session containing some eighty papers on Language and Archaeology, whilst others were commissioned for the present volumes. In some cases, scholars who presented papers at the Conference have substantially revised their work or even divided it into several chapters. The object has been to develop as comprehensive a coverage as is practical of the issues raised in this area, both geographically and methodologically. These books should therefore be regarded not as proceedings, but as ideas stimulated following that meeting.

Issues of nomenclature, style of data presentation and editorial principles are dealt with below. The introduction is divided into two parts: a generic introduction, dealing with the broad issues raised by the interface of archaeology and language, and an introduction specific to the volume in hand.

TERMINOLOGY AND METHOD: SOME EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

Terminology

An issue thrown into sharp relief by pulling together chapters that in principle undertake the same enterprise in very different intellectual traditions is the wide variety of terminology used to describe the same phenomena. This is nowhere more apparent than in the case of language subgrouping. The terms 'phylum', 'stock', 'family', 'branch', 'section', 'group', 'subgroup', 'language', 'lect', 'communalect' and 'dialect' are thrown freely around without any clear definition that could assist someone in another region to apply them consistently. This is not to say that the literature is not well endowed with

Table 1 Definitions of language groupings

<i>Term</i>	<i>Percentage range</i>
Phylum	5–12
Stock	13–28

Family	29–45
Subfamily	46–69
Language	70–81
Dialect	above 81

Source: adapted from Wurm and McElhanon (1975:152)

attempts to define these categories. The most common of these are in terms of lexicostatistics. Lexicostatistics provides mathematical definitions of the relations between one language and another, and therefore would seem very suitable for concrete definitions. For example, one well-known use of this system was applied to the languages of Papua New Guinea (Table 1).

The use of such a table depends heavily on the faith of individual linguists in lexicostatistics. If it is possible for languages to be ‘mixed’, i.e. to draw a significant proportion of basic vocabulary from two or more unrelated languages, then lexicostatistics will give contradictory results. It used to be denied that mixed languages existed; then, when this view became untenable, it was said that they were very rare. Mbugu (Ma’a) in Tanzania appears frequently in the literature exemplifying this sort of rarity (Mous 1994). However, Oceania has supplied some of the most striking examples of ‘mixed’ languages, such as Maisin or Magori (Dutton 1976; Ross 1984), which create problems in applying the lexicostatistic method. Since the work of Thomason and Kaufman (1988), it is increasingly accepted that this type of language mixing may in fact be quite common. The effect of a synchronic perspective on language description is that extraneous elements in the lexicon have been assimilated and are no longer evident. If we identify a mixed language in the present, it is because we can still identify its components. Assuming that these types of language mixture occurred in the past (and probably did with greater frequency), it may well be that many languages today are ‘mixed’ but that their elements are no longer so easily discerned.

As more syntheses of world languages appear (notably Ruhlen 1991), a consensus on terminology is slowly emerging. The most important of these is the use of ‘phylum’, now applied to the large, well-known and reasonably established families of languages such as Indo-European or Uralic, but more controversially extended to any language grouping whose external affiliations are not well established or remain highly controversial. This can mean that an individual language may represent a phylum; thus Japanese/Ryukyuan is generally considered an isolate and is usually referred to as ‘Japonic’. Indeed, Northeast Asia represents an intriguing cluster of either very small language groups or individual isolates; these are generally considered to be phyla (see Janhunen, Volume II).

The term ‘stock’ has remained in discussions of Pacific, especially Papuan, languages but has not been widely adopted outside; most linguists probably use ‘family’ as the next level of relationship below phylum. Indeed, Indo-European scholars, the most conservative subgroup of historical linguists, remain unused to referring to Indo-European as a phylum. Between stock and language something of a free-for-all obtains; branch, section, group, subgroup are used quite freely, and no fiat from individual scholars is likely to change this situation. ‘Language’ is generally considered to be a

group of speech-forms whose speakers can all understand one another without considerable effort. Below ‘language’ in the hierarchy of classification either dialect or communalect are commonly used. However, recently, the term ‘lect’ has been adopted to capture the ambiguity between language and dialect and in part also to avoid the pejorative overtones of dialect.

Reconstructions and conventions

Reconstructions form a particular focus of historical linguistics, usually denoted by an asterisk * and often referred to as ‘starred forms’. These are abstract forms, derived from attested languages, supposedly part of a hypothetical proto-language. Thus an author citing * plus a formula for a word is implying that it was part of the proto-language spoken by the particular reconstructed group. Terms such as ‘proto-Indo-European’ are common enough to be standard terminology. However, not all authors use the same standards of evidence to derive these proto-forms. Problems arise

- 1 when the data set is defective, i.e. lexical attestations are known only from some languages in the proposed subgroup;
- 2 when a reconstruction is built indirectly, i.e. on the back of other reconstructed forms whose status is doubtful.

Proto-forms can be cited for defective data sets; this is an inevitable part of hypothesis building. Problems arise when speculative reconstructions of this type are quoted as solid results by specialists from another area.

In some domains of African language research a distinction has been adopted between a ‘quasi-reconstruction’ or ‘pseudo-reconstruction’ and a ‘regular reconstruction’ (e.g. in Bendor-Samuel 1989). Quasi-reconstructions are essentially well-informed guesses based on partial data sets, as opposed to regular reconstructions which are based on a thorough analysis of historical sound correspondences. Quasi-reconstructions are marked ‘#’ in contrast to regular reconstructions which retain the asterisk *. This distinction is difficult to enforce as authors are inevitably touchy about the reality of their reconstructions. This is particularly true of deep-level macrophylum reconstructions such as the hypothetical Nostratic; the claim by Hegedüs (Ch. 4, Volume I) that it is based on regular sound correspondences would be disputed by many historical linguists. However, as variations arise in the reconstruction and subgrouping of the language phyla of the world, historical linguists will gradually be compelled to become more critical of proposed reconstructions.

Phonetic characters and orthographic conventions

These books make no apology for making use of the technical conventions of linguistics; unless authors can back up their results in a way credible to linguists, their assertions will remain speculative. As far as possible, authors have been encouraged to shift their data tables to an appendix and to establish a clear flow of argument independent of these. The

tables have been left in place, however, where argument and data are inextricably intertwined.

In an ideal world, all linguists would switch to a standard set of conventions for representing phonetic characters and these would be internationally agreed upon and developed or expanded as research continues. The conventions of the IPA (International Phonetic Association) largely serve this function in the case of basic phonetic research and often in the description of undescribed languages. However, where an old-established research tradition exists, as in Indo-European, Kartvelian or Sino-Tibetan, phylum-specific conventions have been established and writers are often loath to break away from these and shift their whole data set to IPA. In addition, orthographies that have been developed in this century for mission or other literacy purposes often reflect the technology of the period. Where authors were expecting to produce primers or Bible translations, they developed conventions that were effective on typewriters. In some cases, these have become well established, and now that printed materials are produced by computer, word-processors have to mimic these conventions.

In the chapters that follow, most authors use IPA phonetic symbols, but in the case of well-established traditions, they follow disciplinary orthographic conventions. Where these might be obscure they are explained in endnotes.

Editorial policy

Approximately half the contributions in these volumes were written by scholars whose first language is not English. These books are not intended to present a façade of ideological homogeneity; indeed, as an overview of the field, they include many contradictory points of view. A particular effort has been made to include research by Russian and East European scholars, the importance of whose work is only gradually being recognized. This has involved the editors in very extensive rewriting in places and it is not always easy to ensure that the full meaning of the original has been retained. An endnote following relevant chapters indicates the extent of the changes that have been made. Some of the flavour of Russians writing in English has been maintained, partly because it is also important to understand the parameters of their strikingly different style of argumentation.

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General acknowledgements

To avoid repetition these have not been included in previous volumes and so should be taken to refer here to all four volumes of *Archaeology and Language*. First of all we would like to thank the authors of the papers included for their contributions and assistance in the production of the four volumes. Almost without exception we have found them professional, tolerant, fair-minded in response to the editorial process and ready to reply in a timely manner to deadlines, requests for information and correction of page proofs. The volumes resulted from the World Archaeological Congress held in New Delhi, India, in December 1994, although, as noted in the Preface, the relation between the Congress and the publication is a complex one. In the somewhat difficult conditions of the Congress, Professor Colin Renfrew, a co-organiser in the Language, Anthropology and Archaeology Theme, made a critical contribution by mobilising the resources of the British High Commission to provide much-needed material assistance at a critical stage of the programme.

Chairs and secretaries of our sessions at the Congress were John Hines, Jean-Marie Hombert, Lis Hudson, Jim Mallory (another co-organiser), S.S. Misra, Chinyere Ohiri-Aniche, Colin Renfrew, Malcolm Ross, Margaret Sharpe, Victor Shnirelman, Darrell Tryon and Kay Williamson. The Australia-India Council of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra through its Executive Officer, Ian Black, provided financial assistance for Australian National University participants including one of the editors, and the World Archaeological Congress itself provided financial assistance for several of the participants in the Language, Anthropology and Archaeology Theme of the Congress. Dr Makkham Lal did his best in stressful circumstances to assist at the New Delhi end in facilitating the attendance of participants and making them welcome. WAC President Jack Golson was also most helpful both before and during the Congress. Jerry Taki's attendance was facilitated by Prof. John Lynch of the Emalus Campus of the University of the South Pacific in Vanuatu and Dr Lissant Bolton of ANU. Professor Peter Ucko introduced the editors to each other prior to the Congress.

On occasion we sought editorial opinion from specialists in particular fields beyond our own expertise and would like to acknowledge here especially the assistance of Peter Bellwood, Geoff Hope, Mark Hudson, Jim Mallory, Jeff Marck, Andy Pawley and Malcolm Ross. Several of the figures in these volumes were re-drawn for publication by Ian Faulkner of the Cartography Unit, RSPAS at the Australian National University. Other material assistance was given by Terry Crowley, Jim Fox and Glenn Summerhayes. Finally we would like to acknowledge the institutional support provided to the editors by the Overseas Development Institute, London, where Roger Blench has been since 1996, and the Australian National University, specifically the Department of Prehistory of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, which subsequently became the Division of Archaeology and Natural History, where Matthew Spriggs was

based from 1987 until the end of 1996, and its sister Department of Archaeology and Anthropology in the Faculty of Arts, where he has been since the beginning of 1997.

General introduction

ROGER BLENCH AND MATTHEW SPRIGGS

PRINCIPAL THEMES IN ARCHAEOLOGY AND LANGUAGE

The relationship between linguistics and archaeology has been affected by both the internal dynamic of the disciplines in question and external political and social trends. Many archaeologists still feel that archaeology and linguistics do not share much common ground; some of the reasons for that are internal to archaeology, whilst others can be traced to the sometimes startling misuse of these linkages by earlier scholars.

The idea of a relationship between a linguistic prehistory and an archaeological prehistory is a seductive one, but in the past it has often led to dangerous liaisons. The data from both disciplines are open to constant reinterpretation as new evidence comes in and new models are adopted. Linguists or archaeologists who interpret their data by tying it to a particular statement of 'fact' for another discipline in one year may well find that 'fact' discredited the next and the interpretation of their evidence undermined. If circularity of argument is to be avoided, these two databases for constructing prehistory must be assembled quite separately, and compared only at a subsequent stage of synthesis.

For many areas of the world, such as the Pacific and Africa, it is common for an overview of linguistic prehistory to be available before an equivalent archaeological picture has been produced. The newly arrived archaeologist should not completely ignore hypotheses of culture history derived from linguistic data, but should treat them as just that, hypotheses that may or may not provide a realistic model for a region's prehistory. An explanation derived solely from archaeological data may turn out to have greater explanatory power, or the original linguistic model may provide a plausible narrative that adequately encompasses the evidence of both disciplines. In this latter case, the archaeological data is not so much explained by the linguistic as consonant with it, as both are linked to the same broad social processes. They may, of course, not be in any particular case.

The comparison of archaeological and linguistic evidence has not proved very popular in the post-1945 era, partly because of the stigma derived from the misuse of both disciplines by the Nazis to construct their 'master race' ideology, but also because of flaws in the method of comparison. Theories of language affiliation were often developed without the use of a critical or orthodox methodology to reconstruct human history. Isolated archaeological observations were being explained by equally isolated linguistic ones.

Another reason that archaeology and linguistics have been kept apart has been because of internal developments in archaeological theory, particularly the trend of the discipline towards a sort of 'archaeology is archaeology is archaeology' position. This has acted to

exclude data from multiple sources:

Yet there is little general awareness of the value of combining the study of archaeological data with that of historical linguistics, oral traditions, historical ethnography and historical records although it is clear that many archaeological problems can be resolved in this way...the resistance seems to come from the view, widely held by processual archaeologists, that their discipline must be based as exclusively as possible on the study of material culture.

(Trigger 1989:356)

Partly in response to earlier theoretical excesses, the 'sceptical' generation of post-war western archaeologists was extremely aware of the limitations of their discipline for reconstructing a rounded prehistory. In 1956–7, Glyn Daniel could write:

We must alas, for the most part, keep the builders and bearers of our prehistoric cultures speechless and physically neutral. This may seem to you an unsatisfying conclusion. And so it is but then much of our prehistory is unsatisfying and difficult, tantalisingly meagre and sketchy. We can appreciate this and accept the limitations of prehistory along with its excitements.

(Daniel 1962:114–115)

Hawke's 1954 'ladder of inference' was climbed by archaeologists with increasing fear of heights. Details of prehistoric technology could be learned, economy could be investigated with some success, but the higher rungs of prehistoric socio-political organisation would always remain shaky, and an understanding of prehistoric ideology remained forever beyond the reach of a sensible archaeologist (Hawkes 1954). Trigger (1989:327, 392) notes that despite the optimistic assertions of the 'new archaeologists' of the 1960s such as Binford (1962), the processualist agenda, as it developed in subsequent decades, has remained firmly on the lower rungs.

From the early 1980s onwards, increasing concern was expressed by archaeologists over the seemingly limited goals of processual archaeology. A variety of approaches, often lumped together as 'contextual archaeology', have returned again to the optimistic aim of earlier generations to construct a more rounded prehistory. Attempting to identify past social and linguistic groupings is part of this project. As is perhaps the case with all such developments in social and historical disciplines, this is reflective of broader changes in contemporary society rather than being internal to archaeology.

We are in a period of growing interest in 'roots'. When personal identities are under a bewildering array of pressures, the certainties of the past are combed for answers to the question 'Who am I?' In justifying his interest in the old question of the origins of the Indo-Europeans, Colin Renfrew (1987) did not claim purely disinterested motives for wishing to know 'What songs the sirens sang':

You may ask, who cares? What on earth does it matter what language was spoken by long-dead people? ... But language and identity are closely linked and there are few things more personal than the language one speaks. Indeed language and national identity are today very widely equated. One's 'ethnic'

affinity is often determined much more by language than by any identifiable physical characteristics, and elections are won or lost by Flemish or Walloons, bombs detonated by Welsh nationalists and Basque separatists, and massacres perpetrated in many parts of the world—most recently in Sri Lanka—on the basis of distinctions which are linguistic and cultural more than anything else.

(Renfrew 1987:2)

And so he feels it must have been in the past: ‘if we are interested in the origins of the modern world, we must understand the nature of past societies; this includes the social organisation of these ancient peoples and their sense of self-identity, which brings us to the questions of ethnicity and language’ (ibid.:3).

Trigger (1989:376) sees this interest in the past of specific groups of people as part of a growing humanist trend in archaeology, in opposition to the goals of neo-evolutionist processual archaeology which saw case studies of particular regions as merely testing grounds for general theories of human behaviour and cultural change. When carried out in the developing world and/or with native peoples, such archaeology can be seen as both neo-colonialist and insulting. As archaeologists have become more sensitized to the needs and aspirations of the peoples among whom they work, and whose ancestors they may be studying, they have responded by providing histories that are relevant to the lives of local populations and that seek to answer the ‘where do we come from?’ questions that help to anchor identity in a world in flux.

STREAMS IN LINGUISTIC PREHISTORY

Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius: fringe theories of linguistic affiliation

As the epigraphs on p. v indicate, the view that historical linguistics has something to contribute to the history of peoples has existed for more than two centuries. Indeed, Johnson appears to be already reacting to an aspect of historical linguistics that has often caused it to be regarded with the gravest suspicion by other disciplines: the tendency for some of its practitioners to develop unusual models of world prehistory based on apparent links between geographically remote languages.

One of the earliest theories to develop along these lines was the version of Amerindian history that claimed that the inhabitants of the New World were the Lost Tribes of Israel. This interpretation was advanced as early as 1650, when Menasseh ben Israel published his account of the traveller Aaron Levi who reported that he had encountered Hebrew-speaking Amerindians in the mountains near Quito. This type of linguistics is often broadly referred to as Voltairean linguistics, from his famous characterization ‘Etymology is a science in which the vowels count for nothing and the consonants for very little.’¹

This type of theorizing, usually the province of amateurs, is often linked with bolder cultural hypotheses that usually involve long-distance migration, and often have a religious or political agenda. It is easily caricatured and may often provide a well-founded excuse for archaeologists and prehistorians to avoid this type of excursus. Such theories are, of course, not exclusively based on linguistic evidence, but lexical connections are

generally claimed to support the comparison of material culture. Two key themes of this body of scholarship relate to specific regions of the world: Ancient Egypt and the Pacific.

The notion that civilization was somehow invented in Ancient Egypt and spread out through the remarkable navigations of its inhabitants has a pedigree as far back as Classical Greece (Bernal 1987), and the ascription of Egyptian origins to African peoples was well under way by the beginning of the twentieth century. Johnson (1921 but manuscript prepared in 1897) wrote an influential history of the Yoruba, arguing against an Arabian origin for the Yoruba and promoting their migration from Egypt. Such theorizing continues today in the works of the followers of Cheikh Anta Diop and is often promulgated in luxuriously produced handbooks of hieroglyphics. However, claims for such land migrations were relatively restrained compared with the deepwater navigation proposed in classics such as Perry's (1923) 'Children of the Sun'. Elliot Smith and later Thor Heyerdahl were eloquent proponents of long-distance migrations, and much curious scholarship was adduced in support of such hypotheses.

The substantial literature on pre-Portuguese Trans-Pacific contacts originated as early as the seventeenth century (Wauchope 1962:83 ff.). Although recent DNA research may be taken to suggest that such contacts did indeed occur at least sporadically, this is far from accepting that some of Kublai Khan's ships, still carrying elephants, were driven eastwards to the New World after a failed invasion of Japan (Ranking 1827), or that fragments of the fleet of Alexander the Great reached the Americas in 323 BC (Gladwin 1947).

Exponents of such ideas are typically aggrieved when the predictably cautious academic establishment fails to take on board their ideas. One of the advocates of trans-Pacific contact took a robust view of their caution:

All the lights in the House of the High Priests of American Anthropology are out, all the doors and windows are shut and securely fastened (they do not sleep with their windows open for fear that a new idea might fly in); we have rung the bell of Reason, we have banged on the door with Logic, we have thrown the gravel of evidence against their windows; but the only sign of life in the house is an occasional snore of dogma.

(Gladwin 1947)

There is probably a useful distinction to be drawn between fringe ideas that draw the attention of more cautious scholars to possible, previously unsuspected, connections and similarities (Heyerdahl, for example) and those that are nothing more than an encumbrance to scholarship (Atlantis, Von Daniken, Velikovsky). The moral is that we should keep Gladwin's windows open but look out through them rather than simply sleeping by them.

Links with nationalist ideologies

One of the more troubling aspects of the history of this discipline has been its links with nationalist ideologies. Linguistic nationalism still engenders a rich emotional harvest at present, often for good reason, since the suppression of minority languages is commonly a prominent feature of totalitarian governments. Democracies sometimes encourage