The Controversy About the Austronesian Homeland

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RÉSUMÉ

Les travaux de linguistique comparative ont donné corps à plusieurs hypothèses sur l'origine et la distribution des populations de l'Océanie. Les études récentes de Dyen exercent une grande influence sur les recherches actuelles en ce domaine.

During the past several years many articles have appeared investigating the languages of the Pacific, the relations among these languages, and the relations among the cultures of the area. Much of the research has been done in the hope that the linguistic data would clear up the matter of the homeland of the Austronesian speaking peoples of Oceania and give conclusive answers about the routes of migration along which these people traveled to their present homes. The time sequence involved in the peopling of the Pacific has also been of interest.

Data from the Austronesian languages have been used in two types of research. First, the methods of comparative and historical linguistics were employed in studies of the relations among the languages. Second, the languages have also been used to determine relations among the cultures whose participants speak particular languages. Into the latter fall the theories of migration routes and cultural relations that have been suggested on the basis of different types of linguistic studies. Most studies have not separated the comparisons of linguistic material and the conclusions about linguistic relations from comparisons of linguistic material that lead to conclusions about the relations among cultures. The relations between a language and the culture of the people who speak it have not been precisely determined. Many of those working on the problem of the Austronesian homeland

assume that there is a one to one correspondence between language and culture; that is, if languages are related to a particular degree, then the cultures are related to the same degree. When working with linguistic material from an area such as the Pacific, where the historical relations are not well known, it is necessary to separate the data of linguistics from the assumptions about cultures.

In "Oceanic linguistics today" Capell reviews the history of the study of Pacific languages and comments on the present state of the research (1962c). The Austronesian languages have been divided into four major groups by early scholars. Later studies have broken each of these four groups into several subgroups of more closely related languages. The Indonesian languages have been divided into three subgroups. Capell states that the Melanesian languages are the most diverse of the four major groups, having eight separate subgroups. Micronesian and Polynesian each have fewer subgroups. The difficulty with the breakdown of the four groups is that for Melanesian and Micronesian languages there are much less data available than for the other two groups and so the classification is much less certain.

Since the earliest comparative studies, it has been assumed that the inhabitants of the islands of the Pacific who speak Austronesian languages originally lived somewhere on the mainland of southern Asia. From this point all the Austronesian speaking peoples moved out into the ocean areas and into Indo-China.

There has been some discussion as to whether the four major groups of Austronesian languages (Indonesian, Melanesian, Micronesian and Polynesian) separated at a single point in time, each group going its separate way, or whether some of the groups were off-shoots of others, showing successive development and differentiation. For example, are Melanesian and Indonesian coordinate relatives of Micronesian and Polynesian, or did Melanesian separate from Indonesian after the Indonesian speakers had moved into the islands, and are Polynesian and Micronesian languages branches of an earlier Melanesian stock? Various sequences have been suggested to explain the present confused state of the linguistic relations. It has been generally accepted that the Indonesian languages are the "oldest" of the Austronesian languages in the island area, and that the Polynesian languages

are the most recent. This is attributed to the geographical placement of these languages with regard to their south Asia homeland, and is also suggested by the internal relations among the languages of the different groups.

Paul Benedict (1942), researching the languages of Indo-China, proposed that the Austronesian languages were coordinate with the Thai and Kadai languages of that area. He suggested that these languages derive from the same proto-language, Austric, and had undergone great changes in the time since they separated. This supports the theory of the Asian homeland, and even makes the point of origin more definite. Haudricourt places the homeland of the Austronesian speaking peoples on the coast of south China, between Hainan and Taiwan, on the basis of his studies of languages in the area (1954).

Most scholars who have considered the whole Austronesian language family have assumed that the people speaking these languages originally made their homes on the mainland of South East Asia. For various reasons they moved from the mainland into Oceania, leaving linguistic footprints of their travels. With this notion begins the controversy about the possible point or points of origin and the route of migration of the Austronesian speakers to their present places of residence.

C. E. Fox (1947) disagreed with the theory that the homeland of the Austronesian speakers was in Asia. He suggested instead, that the Melanesian languages were more basic in form, and that the Indonesian and Polynesian languages were branches of Melanesian. Capell had previously questioned this possibility, because the Melanesian languages do not have the word final consonants that appear in Indonesian languages, but Fox dismissed this problem as trivial. Capell (1962a) took the matter up again and pointed out that due to special cases of stem consonants, the Indonesian languages are probably not a branch of the Melanesian languages though the reverse might be true.

Several variations of the theory about the South East Asian homeland are offered in Capell's (1962c) article: (1) Different migrations account for the main language differences within Austronesian. (2) The Polynesian languages come from some part of Melanesia. (3) Melanesian is the most conservative branch

of the Austronesian family. Capell also gives a chart, showing the relations between the Austronesian languages and a possible migration route. In the comments following this article, Dyen (1962a:405) states:

> Is it, however, a necessary inference from the facts that the Malayo-polynesians stem from the mainland? Although man in the Pacific perhaps necessarily stems from the mainland, there is no reason at this time to conclude that the spread of Malayo-polynesian speakers in the islands was identical with the coming of man to the islands, even though this might be true for particular islands, as in Polynesia. In view of current evidence, it is not at all inconceivable that the Malayo-polynesians were in Melanesia before they reached Sumatra, i.e. if they originated in the Melanesian area.
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> A Melanesian origin of the Malayo-polynesians explains immediately the great diversity of languages in Melanesia, it agrees with the fact — well known — that the languages of Western Indonesia and most, if not all, of the languages in the Philippines constitute a single group.

In the same article Capell mentions the possibility of language mixing to account for the diversity among the Melanesian languages. The influence of non-Austronesian languages in Melanesia on the Melanesian stock may have been important in the past, for even now the speakers of Melanesian languages are in close association with speakers of Papuan languages in some parts of Melanesia.

Following this article, Grace (1962) comments on the physical differences among speakers of Austronesian languages in Melanesia, and suggests that some mixing, linguistic as well as physical, probably did take place. But Grace also points out that the so-called non-Austronesian elements in Melanesian languages are not related. If a Melanesian language were "crossed" with a non-Austronesian, the result would be different for every combination of two languages. However, even in the "non-Austronesian" elements in Melanesian languages, according to Grace, there is agreement among the various languages.

Grace subsequently published a paper on the linguistic evidence of the movements of the Malayo-Polynesians (1964). This paper is primarily an investigation of the lexicostatistical and glottochronological studies that have been done using Austronesian material. The specific problems of subgroupings and origins are also discussed. Grace (1964:365) states:

> While Dyen's [1962b] study indicates that Melanesia is the area of greatest linguistic diversity within Austronesian, and therefore includes the most probable homeland of Proto-Austronesian, Milke and I believe that all of the Austronesian languages of Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia — with the exception of Palauan and Chamorro — probably belong to a single subgroup of Austronesian.

Of Dyen's conclusions about the diversity of Melanesian languages on the basis of the lexicostatistical study, Grace (1964: 366) states:

> I suspect that these languages are characterized by either very low rates of retention (in the lexicostatistical sense), by complicated sound changes, or by both, and that lexicostatistical studies — at least under existing conditions — will of necessity tend to exaggerate their actual historical divergence from other language families.

Dyen's reply to Grace deals mainly with Grace's distrust of lexicostatistics as a method for comparative studies. Grace answers, commenting on Dyen's more complete classification (1963a and 1965) that had appeared since Grace's 1964 article had been written. Grace points out that genetic classifications should show genetic continuity rather than similarity between languages. He again states that the theory of mixed languages in Melanesia does not solve the problem of their diversity.

With Dyen's publication of *A lexicostatistical classification of the Austronesian languages,* the arguments about the homeland of the Austronesian speaking peoples became more heated. Dyen found, using lexicostatistics, that the Melanesian languages in his study were the least closely related to one another of all the languages used. He assumed, therefore, that Melanesia was the homeland of the Austronesian speaking peoples. This conclusion is an outgrowth of his theory of migrations (1956a). This states that of two or more possible routes of migration taken by a people, the route involving the least moves is the most likely to be the correct one.

Grace (1964:404) points out in his reply to Dyen's comment on the 1964 article that there are different types of linguistic diversity.

> If 'diversity' is understood as genetic diversity, I do follow Sapir in assuming that, of the territory occupied by a language family, that part in which the greatest diversity if found is most likely to be the original homeland (other things being equal). Roughly, the area of

> greatest diversity can be characterized as that area in which the largest number of main (i.e., earliest separated) branches are represented. This does not necessarily imply that it will be the area of greatest diversity from other points of view.

Applying this to the problem of diversity in Melanesia, it would follow that Grace does not consider the Melanesian languages to be an example of genetic diversity, and Dyen does. Grace does not agree with Dyen that the lexicostatistical percentages for the Melanesian languages show genetic diversity. This is a disagreement as to what constitutes a relevant basis on which genetic relations may be founded and what actually indicates these genetic relations. Grace rejects Dyen's answer, and yet he does not propose an alternate solution.

It is difficult to disprove Dyen's conclusions, if this is necessary, for he is most tentative about his classification and its implications. Murdock is not so prudent, and takes a step that Dyen chose to avoid to some extent (1964). Murdock apparently assumes that linguistic data, such as that used by lexicostatistics, is enough to ground a theory in fact. It must be made clear that linguistic evidence only speaks of languages until such time as assumptions concerning the relations of language to culture are concretely demonstrated. Murdock accepts the one to one relationship and considers Dyen's findings conclusive, despite the lack of data for Melanesian languages.

The lexicostatistical method used by Dyen, which he and Murdock both consider to be scientific and unbiased, is not accepted as such by all researches. Some believe that lists of two hundred words are very biased, and not at all scientific. Grace considers the "traditional" methods more sure. There is a general lack of enthusiasm for quantitave treatment on the part of many linguists. This may be due to their distrust of lexicostatistics and glottochronology.

In 1965 Anceaux published a paper in which he reviewed the various linguistic theories about the Austronesian homeland. He discusses many of the theories and outlines the linguistic evidence and methods that were brought forth in support of the theories. Anceaux mentions Dyen's classification, and also refers to Murdock's article on the implications of Dyen's proposal for Austronesian prehistory. He (1965:426) comments, "In his

[Dyen's] reasoning the most likely solution is the most simple". Anceaux points out that this is not necessarily true. Although a simple solution may seem more likely, there is also a certain probability, albeit smaller, that history or prehistory did not take the simplest path.

The diversity of the Melanesian languages is also discussed by Anceaux. He (1965:427) shows that the greatest diversity occurs where non-Austronesian languages are present and suggests that,

> It may well be that this great number of languages and their diversity are both due to special geographical, social, economical, or cultural circumstances. On the other hand it is quite possible that the existance of great linguistic homogeneity elsewhere must be ascribed to unifactory tendencies, to be accounted for by political and cultural backgrounds. In such cases apparency of dialect-borrowing may be a good index. All this makes it clear that comparative Austronesian linguistics can not be content with counting cognates in vocabularies.

Anceaux, along with Grace, is skeptical about Dyen's method and conclusions.

The latest exchange in the controversy is a review of Dyen's classification by Grace in Oceanic Linguistics (1967). Dyen and Dell Hymes have made comments which are appended to the review. First, Grace questions lexicostatistics as a valid method for comparative studies. Dyen has defended this so often, and others have attacked it so often, that there is little left to be said on the issue. Dyen points out, however, in his comment, that although Grace considers lexicostatistics unsound, he (Grace) prefers the mathematical manipulations of percentages suggested by Milke (1965) to those used by Dyen. Milke was specifically interested in applying his matrix reduction technique to the percentages Dyen found for relations among his Austronesian word lists. When and if this is done, it will be very interesting to see how the results of the two studies compare. Unfortunately, the mathematics in Milke's article and the reasoning behind the symbols are not as transparent as they might be, and it seems likely that the method will need further explication and testing before it will be useful in large scale studies.

Grace points out, again, the problems with the great diversity Dyen finds in Melanesian languages, and with the conclusions

Dyen draws from this diversity. He finds it difficult to believe that the Austronesian speaking peoples began speaking Austronesian languages in Melanesia and moved out to the west and east from there. One of the first questions about Dyen's theory is where did these people come from originally. Dyen has suggested (1964) that they came from the mainland before they were speaking Austronesian languages, but how, when, from where they came, and why they stopped in Melanesia he does not discuss. There is also the question of how and why these people spread from Melanesia to other areas. Murdock suggests that trade was the factor motivating the people to travel out from their Melanesian homeland. This is unlikely, as part of the area into which they moved, Polynesia, was not previously populated, and this would make trading difficult. Population pressure has also been suggested as an explanation for the emigration. This, too, seems unlikely, for it is doubtful that any island would support a population large enough to show significant differentiation in language before migration. It still remains unclear from what areas of Melanesia and to what areas of Indonesia, Micronesia and Polynesia these emigrants might have traveled.

Sapir, in his statement on linguistic diversity, apparently assumes that these populations (undergoing linguistic diversification) were not involved in great shifts and migrations. Then, if language 'A' separated into two languages, the peoples speaking these languages would live adjacent to one another. Further separations would take place through time, until the present diversity was reached. However, if this had taken place in Melanesia, and then, after the initial differentiation, the speakers of a descendent of language 'A' had migrated to Indonesia, then the Indonesian languages all would be most closely related to language 'A' of Melanesia. It is not clear from Dyen's classification whether or not this is the case.

Grace and Hymes bring up another problem that relates to Dyen's theory about the Austronesian homeland. The percentage that Dyen obtained in his lexicostatistical classification can be explained by more than the single 'family tree' diagram he presents. When there are several possible interpretations of data, Hymes suggests, one must check these interpretations and their

implications against other, in this case, non-linguistic data. Hymes also states that when there is more than lexical evidence available, the lexical evidence is not privileged, nor should any other particular type of linguistic data be privileged. All evidence should be used to develop a unified theory.

Dyen, in his comments following Grace's 1967 review, extols the scientific qualities of lexicostatistics, as compared with the non-quantitative approach of more traditional comparative and historical linguistic methods. This is a dispute about which much, perhaps too much, has already been written. Lexicostatistics is "scientific" in handling the data, using percentages, cut off points and chi-square to show relationships. However, the data themselves were not necessarily collected or chosen in a scientific manner, i.e., without bias. As the whole method is in large part dependent on the quality and quantity of the data, and as these are almost impossible to control in a study as large as Dyen's, some question remains about the scientific nature of this particular quantitative method.

Whether or not Dyen's method is unbiased, as he claims, does not change the fact that his percentages show lexical diversity in Melanesia, especially in the New Hebrides. Most of the controversy is about the validity of the method, and the probability of the conclusions that Dyen draws from the results. No one seems to doubt that the Melanesian languages in Dyen's study show diversity in percentages of shared cognates but explanations for this diversity vary greatly.

Dyen believes that the diversity is due to the fact that the Austronesian languages originated in Melanesia and branched out to the other areas, Indonesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. The diversity in Melanesia is then genetic, and should be borne out by other linguistic and cultural data. Dyen is not making any statement about the time involved, but he is using linguistic evidence in the form of lists of basic vocabulary as a basis for tentatively suggesting a point of origin and several paths of migration for the Austronesian speaking peoples.

Grace, while uncertain about lexicostatistics, accepts Dyen's statement that the Melanesian languages considered were diverse. Grace does not agree that this is a genetic diversity caused by

the fact that Melanesia was indeed the center from which the Austronesian speakers moved out. The diversity of Melanesian languages may be due to the fact that Dyen's sample did not include enough Melanesian languages. For example, in the *Linguistic survey of the Southwestern Pacific* (1962b), Capell lists over forty languages in the New Hebrides. Only six of these languages appear in Dyen's classification.

The diversity among the Melanesian languages may also be due to cultural factors, as Anceaux suggests. The Austronesian speakers, if they came from elsewhere, arrived in Melanesia to find a population of non-Austronesian speaking peoples already residing there. In several parts of Melanesia, the Austronesian speaking peoples of a single island are separated into enclaves by their non-Austronesian neighbors. The diversity may also be due, at least in part, to some mixing of languages. Not enough is yet known about the Papuan languages (Non-Austronesian) to rule this out completely. Melanesian speakers may have had less contact among their different groups during the development of their languages than did the peoples speaking different Polynesian languages. Grace suggests that the diversity in Indonesian languages may have been underestimated. If this were so, a case for the South Asian origin, or a Western Pacific origin, at least, could be put forth on the basis of possible lexicostatistical evidence. Dyen's study did not include the Thai and Kadai languages, and these groups may show even more diversity than the Melanesian languages, when tested. In his 1965 article, Dyen proposes that Formosa along with Melanesia is a likely candidate for the Austronesian homeland on the basis of lexico-statistical divergence within the group of languages in those areas.

A comparison of the diversity of Melanesian basic vocabulary with the homogeneity of Polynesian vocabulary indicates that the Polynesian languages separated from one another more recently than did those of Melanesia, and also that there was probably a great deal more contact among the Polynesian cultures from the time of separation than there was among the Melanesian cultures. Either this or the Melanesian area was subject to several migrations of Austronesian speakers, while Polynesia had only one migration. The Polynesian languages found in Melanesia are

evidence of a migration that took place from east to west, after the Polynesian languages had developed. Evidence on more than one migration from the west into Melanesia is sparse.

The linguistic data, Dyen's or traditional, do not give specific, unambiguous answers to questions about the Austronesian homeland and migration routes. Assumptions must be made about what linguistic materials and comparisons imply, and how these implications relate to prehistory and history in Oceania. Whether or not Melanesia is the homeland of the Austronesian speaking peoples will perhaps be determined by more research, especially on the the languages of Indo-China and Melanesia. The quality of the research and the meaning of the conclusions must be given careful attention before answers to the questions of homeland and migration routes are offered.

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