Current Developments in Comparative Austronesian Studies

James J. Fox
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
The Australian National University

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For speakers of Austronesian languages, there has been, for millennia, an intuitive recognition of the connections among related languages. These intuitions are a key part of the capacities that have allowed speakers of different Austronesian languages to communicate with one another, that have facilitated the migration of individuals and groups among different speech communities and that have fostered mutual interrelations among speech communities. All these factors now contribute to making the study of Austronesian languages a challenging comparative field of study.

Comparative Austronesian studies are comprised of a variety of disciplines: linguistics, archaeology, anthropology, history and, in recent years, biological and genetic research. Each of these disciplines contributes new perspectives to an understanding of the Austronesian-speaking world. The emergence of such comparative Austronesian research is a recent coalescence of a long development that began with an initial and partial recognition of relations among Austronesian languages.

While native speakers often intuitively recognize relations among the languages they use or encounter in their daily lives, no speaker of these languages can grasp the diversity of these thousands of languages nor trace the historical underpinnings of the great variety of speech communities that make up the Austronesian-speaking world. It is precisely because the Austronesian languages had spread so widely from Taiwan to Timor and

from Madagascar to Easter Island that comprehension of the relations among these languages came about in stages beginning with voyages in the 16th century.

It was a common practice among voyagers to gather lists of vocabulary from the areas they visited. The first of these lists for Austronesian were the vocabularies compiled by the Italian chronicler, Antonio Pigafetta, on the Magellan expedition of 1519-1522 that first sailed around the world. Dutch voyagers sailing to the East Indies via Madagascar also recorded vocabulary lists. As a result, it is not surprising that the first scholar credited with recognition of linguistic relations among distant Austronesian languages was the Dutch scholar, Hadrian Reland who in 1706 postulated a common 'Malayan' language stretching from Madagascar through Java, Borneo and Maluku and eastward. In 1777, Anderson, one of the chroniclers on Captain Cook's second voyage, noted the resemblance between numerals in Polynesian languages and those in Indonesia and Madagascar. In 1778, J. R. Foster using the same linguistic evidence from Cook's voyage made the claim about Austronesian migrations "that the Eastern South Sea Isles were originally peopled from the Indian or Asiatic Northern Isles…" (1778:283)

Credit for the systematic establishment of a 'Malayo-Polynesian' grouping of languages, however, must go to Lorenzo Hervas y Panduro who in 1787 included a catalogue of languages in his ambitious five volumes entitled, *The Idea of the Universe* (*Idea dell' Universo*). Based on a range of evidence available at the time, he concluded that languages of the Pacific as far as Easter Island were related to those of Madagascar, the Malay Peninsula, the Sunda Islands, Maluku and the Philippines.

Nineteenth century writers consolidated this view. In his *History of Java*, Stamford Raffles included vocabulary lists of Malay, Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese, Balinese and Lampung. According to Raffles, "the striking resemblance in person, feature, language and customs, which prevails throughout the whole Archipelago, justifies the conclusion, that its original population issued from the same source, and that the peculiarities which distinguish the different nations and communities into which it is at present distributed, are the result of a long separation, local circumstances, and the intercourse with foreign

traders, emigrants or settlers" (Raffles 1817: 56-57). In 1834, the British historian William Marsden wrote an essay on "Polynesian or East Insular languages" in which he created a two-fold division, calling the languages of the Indonesian Archipelago, "Hither Polynesian" and those of the Pacific, "Further Polynesian".

Wilhelm von Humboldt, in his *Über die Kawi-Sprache auf der Insel Java* (1836-39), considered detailed vocabulary lists from nine languages from the Malayan and Polynesian regions. These languages were Malagasy, Malay, Javanese, Bugis, Tagalog, Maori, Tongan, Tahitian and Hawaiian. Contrary to Marsden, von Humboldt reserved the term, "Polynesian" only for languages of the Pacific. Thus von Humboldt is generally credited with establishing the term, "Malayo-Polynesian" for these languages, although the term, Malayo-Polynesian, as such was first used as a linguistic grouping by a contemporary of Humboldt, the German linguist Franz Bopp.

Because most of the early scholars in the 19th century who theorized about language connections did so in relation to ideas of racial migration, there was, for a long time, a reluctance to recognize that some of the languages of New Guinea and a large number of the languages of Melanesia also belonged to the same language grouping. In 1884, Hendrik Kern was able to show that Nufor (Mafor) at the western end of Irian belonged within a Malayo-Polynesian group; in 1885, in his massive study, *The Melanesian Languages*, Robert Codrington demonstrated the clear connections of Malay, Malagasy and Maori with many of the Melanesian languages. At the same time, in 1885, W. G. Lawes, in his study of the grammar and vocabulary of Motu on the southeastern coast of New Guinea, noted the connection with Polynesian languages while in 1886, Kern produced a major study of Fijian as a Malayo-Polynesian language.

Kern's research was part of a new systematic approach to the study of the Austronesian languages based on the comparative method. Analysing the languages of Indonesia and the Philippines, the Dutch scholar H. N. van der Tuuk, had initiated the study of recurrent sound correspondences and had established his first 'law' in these correspondences – the 'RGH law' (that Malay /r/ as in *urat* corresponds with Tagalog /g/ as in *ugat* and Ngaju

Dayak /h/ as in *uhat*). Kern's work carried this study forward as did the Swiss, Renward Brandstetter, whose research between 1905 and 1915 involved the reconstruction of the sound system of a proto-language together with an extensive comparative dictionary.

It was, however, the German Otto Dempwolff whose three volume, *Comparative Phonology of Austronesian Word Lists (Vergleishende Lautlehre des austronesischen Wortschatzes)* published between 1934 and 1938 examined data from all major geographic regions of the Austronesian-speaking world to produce a more comprehensive sound system for proto-Austronesian. Dempwolff also reconstructed over 2000 proto-terms for Austronesian based on eleven languages which he divided into three categories: the 'Indonesian' languages: Toba Batak, Javanese, Ngaju Dayak, Malay, Malagasy and Tagalog; the 'Melanesian' languages: Sa'a, and Fijian, and the 'Polynesian' languages: Tongan, Futuan and Samoan. Although it has undergone – and continues to undergo – revision, Dempwolff's work is considered to this day as the foundation for linguistic research on Austronesian languages.

The Building on the Foundations of Comparative Austronesian Research

It is estimated that the Austronesian language family is comprised of some 1200 languages (Tryon 1995:17). It may therefore seem surprising that Dempwolff's comparative research, based – as it was – on just eleven languages of the Austronesian family was able to lay such secure foundations. Certainly compared to his predecessors, he was able to work systematically from a somewhat larger selection of languages distributed across a wide area of the Austronesian-speaking world. Yet, viewed from a present-day perspective, his selection consisted entirely of languages from only one branch – the Malayo-Polynesian branch – of the Austronesian family. The thrust of research since Dempwolff has been toward greater comprehension of the varieties of the Austronesian languages and toward better understanding of all the different branches of this family that are related. Much of this research is still in train.

Thus, for example, Dempwolff's research did not include any of the languages of Taiwan whereas Taiwan, which is now considered as the 'homeland' of what is defined linguistically as 'Austronesian', has most of the primary branches of the Austronesian language family. In a recent paper, Robert Blust (1999) has argued that there are no fewer than nine primary branches of Austronesian among the aboriginal languages of present-day Taiwan. (Previously he and others had argued for just three branches.) This argument for an expanded number of primary branches only reinforces, by contrast, the significance of what has long been recognized, namely that most of the world's Austronesian languages belong to the Malayo-Polynesian branch of the language family. This branch includes all of the languages outside of Taiwan and, in fact, one of the languages of Taiwan itself.

Malcolm Ross has written extensively and cogently on the assumptions underlying linguistic reconstruction and subgrouping (see in particular Ross 1995). In the comparative method, as he has noted, reconstruction and subgrouping are interdependent. How dialect chains extend themselves, divide and regroup over time has significant bearing on how reconstruction and subgrouping is worked out. As a consequence, even as comparative research progresses, it must rely on reasonable yet provisional hypotheses about subgrouping – and more broadly, about the relationships among any particular languages under study.

A number of subgrouping hypotheses have been put forward to explain relationships among Austronesian languages (see Tryon 1995 for a discussion of some of these hypotheses.) Among these various hypotheses, the subgrouping of Austronesian, put forward by Robert Blust in 1978, has continued to the present to set a framework for comparative research. Leaving aside Blust's new subgrouping arguments for Taiwan languages, his subgrouping of Malayo-Polynesian postulates a primary division between Western Malayo-Polynesian and Central Eastern Malayo-Polynesian. Within the Central Eastern subgrouping, he proposes another division between Central and Eastern Malayo-Polynesian. And, within this Eastern Malayo-Polynesian, he distinguishes between South

Halmahera-West New Guinea and Oceanic. Although this framework has been a boon for research it is virtually certain to be superseded.

Ross has examined some of the problematic issues involved in this subgrouping schema (Ross 1995:67-94). Of all the larger high order groupings, only Oceanic can be said to possess a reasonable 'coherence'. (South Halmahera-West New Guinea consists of far fewer languages than Oceanic and is distinctive in its bipartite coherence.) Certainly the internal relationships among languages within Oceanic are better understood than in any other of Blust's subgroupings. By contract, even Blust has noted that there is no evidence that the languages assigned to 'Western Malayo-Polynesian' form a single subgroup with a clear genetic unity (see Ross 1995: 72). If this observation is pertinent to western Malayo-Polynesian, it could be argued that the same observation would be equally pertinent to so-called Central Malayo-Polynesian, which comprises a large number of as yet unstudied languages of eastern Indonesia.

Ross (1995) has offered an alternative approach to foster comprehension without postulating, in advance, high-level subgroups. Pragmatically, on the basis of current research understandings of these languages, Ross has set out a long list of smaller groupings of languages in line with the maps and groupings in the Wurm-Hattori atlas (1981-83). For Western Malayo-Polynesian, he lists twenty-four such groups and for Central Malayo-Polynesian, he lists seven. As Ross emphasizes, "the comparative method has as yet been little applied to questions of subgrouping within the Central Malayo-Polynesian branch. This is an area in which there is enormous scope for research" (1995: 74).

A good example of this proposition is Ross's listing of a Bima-Sumba group based originally on work by J. C. G. Jonker at the beginning of the 20th century and reaffirmed by Esser in his 1938 classification of the languages of Indonesia. As Ross points out, "no work appears to have been done to establish its validity in terms of shared innovations" (1995:83). (Based on my own knowledge of some of these languages, there is good

reason to suspect that the languages of Sumba ought to be distinguished from those of Bima and Manggarai as well as Savu and Ndao.)

Ross goes on to divide the South Halmahera-West New Guinea subgroup into two groups (South Halmahera and West New Guinea) and Oceanic into twelve distinct groups. Thus for Malayo-Polynesian as a whole, Ross's list consists of 45 language groups which offers comprehensive coverage of the entire branch. This listing includes problematic languages such as Palau and Chamorro in Micronesia, which Ross places in a single group and lists, basically by default, with the Western Malayo-Polynesian languages, even though the connection of these languages to other Malayo-Polynesian languages is still problematic (Ross 95:75-76).

The Underpinnings of Comparative Austronesian Research

Implied in these discussions of subgrouping is a broad consensus that the homeland of the Austronesians was in Taiwan. This homeland area may have also included the P'eng-hu (Pescadores) islands between Taiwan and China and possibly even sites on the coast of mainland China, especially if one were to view the early Austronesians as a population of related dialect communities living in scattered coastal settlements. There is also general agreement that the differentiation of the Malayo-Polynesian branch of the Austronesian languages occurred when populations moved out of Taiwan. What kind of dialect linkages may have existed when this differentiation occurred is unknown nor is it clear whether this differentiation took place as a single migration or as a succession of migrations.

If one gives emphasis to the sailing capacities of the early Malayo-Polynesian speaking populations, their dialect community may have extended itself significantly through maritime migration without necessarily ceasing contact among distant coastal settlements. This model provides a particular cast to the way one considers the spread of early Austronesian settlement. It is possible for early migrating populations to have

turned to the cultivation of the land without abandoning extended maritime communication.

The Bajau Laut of eastern Indonesia provide an excellent model of this kind of dialect community. The Bajau Laut belong to the larger grouping of Sama-Bajau speakers whose settlements stretch from the southern Philippines and northwest Borneo to the south coast of the island of Rote near Timor. Ross, for one, lists Sama-Bajau as one of his distinct Malayo-Polynesian language groups made up of a "collection of dialects spoken by 'sea nomads' who live in symbiotic relationship with various more powerful land-based groups" (1995:76). In fact, a majority of the Sama-Bajau populations are land-based and only a minority remain boat-nomads (see Sather 1997: 2-6) and it is appropriate to distinguish a number of languages within this group. The eastern Indonesian Bajau Laut, whose settlements are found on many islands over a vast maritime area from Sulawesi and northern Maluku to both West and East Nusa Tenggara are the largest community of Bajau who have continued to be 'nomadic' by virtue of a regular movement among a large number of scattered settlements. The distance between many of these settlements is many hundreds of kilometres but communication is regularly maintained by a continuous movement of families among these settlements. Most adult Bajau will recount periods of extended residence in settlements extending from the Bay of Kupang to the Tukang Besi Islands and even to islands in northern Maluku and will acknowledge kinship relationships throughout settlements.

Given what we know of the possibilities of mobility and linguistic communication among maritime populations, it is reasonable to assume that the early migration of the first Malayo-Polynesian speakers was more than a simple migratory advance. One interesting idea concerns the origins of the Tai-Kadai (or Kra-Dai) language family. As early as 1901, the German linguist, G. Schlegel, proposed a connection between the Tai and Austronesian languages and this proposition was taken up, most notably, by Paul Benedict (1942; see also Benedict 1975). Recently, the linguists Weera Ostapirat and Laurent Sagart have advanced evidence that Tai-Kadai, rather than being a sister phylum of Austronesian, is a subgroup of Austronesian (see Ostapirat in press; Sagart in press). Sagart, for example, hypothesizes that the Austronesian ancestor language of Tai-Kadai

was a daughter language of Proto-Austronesian and a close relative of Proto-Malayo-Polynesian. Speakers of this language migrated to the Guandong coastal region where they came in contact with one or more local languages – one of which may have been an Austro-Asiatic language – and over time underwent substantial relexification (Sagart: in press).

Northern Luzon, in the Philippines directly to the south of Taiwan, was clearly an important strategic staging point in the migration of the earliest Malayo-Polynesian speaking populations. Questions have arisen in recent discussions on whether the Batanes Islands between Taiwan and Northern Luzon were stepping stones in the Malayo-Polynesian migration to the Philippines. At a recent "Asian Fore-Arch Project" Conference on the Batanes held at the ANU (August 2004), Bellwood and Dixon presented a paper that argued that the material excavated from the Batanes pointed to neolithic origins in eastern Taiwan and was linked to the establishment of proto-Malayo-Polynesians (Bellwood and Dixon: in press). Atholl Anderson at the same conference argued that it was more likely that the Batanes were settled at a later period after the Malayo-Polynesians had established themselves in Northern Luzon (Anderson: in press).

Anderson in his paper distinguishes two neolithic dispersals in Southeast Asia: 'Neolithic A' represented by basket or cord-marked ceramics and at least partially associated with early expansion of Austroasiatic language speakers and 'Neolithic B' represented by red-slipped pottery and associated with the expansion of Austronesian language speakers. In the paper, he asks whether Neolithic A could have extended into Borneo, the Philippines and even the Maluku Islands prior to the expansion of Neolithic B and thereby facilitated the expansion of Neolithic B groups.

Archaeological excavations give good indications that Northern Luzon, the Philippines and other islands of the archipelago were home to hunter-gatherer populations prior to the migration of the Austronesians whose incipient neolithic technologies gave them considerable competitive advantages for particular settlement niches. What languages these earlier inhabitants spoke is largely a matter of speculation. Lawrence Reid,

however, has indicated that remnants of the influence of earlier 'Negrito languages' can be detected in some Philippine languages (1990) and K. Alexander Adelaar has pointed to similarities between Land Dayak and various Orang Asli languages (1995), which could be the result of the adoption by Austro-Asiatic language speakers of an Austronesian language.

In 1906, Wilhelm Schmidt coined the terms, 'Austronesian' and 'Austro-Asiatic' in formulating an hypothesis that these two language families could be grouped in a larger 'Austric' family of languages. Although this hypothesis remains to be established, one might speculate that at the time of the initial migration of Austronesians, they may have encountered speakers of Austro-Asiatic whose languages were then far closer to their own than is the case among current speakers of such languages.

There is also the argument by Bernd Nothofer (1991) that there was a kind of two-stage migration of (Austronesian) speakers into the region. In his view, the first migration of 'Paleo-Hesperonesians' was later overwhelmed and displaced by a second wave of 'Hesperonesians', leaving remnants of language communities scattered in isolated areas. As Ross has remarked, this might "make sense of the chaos of western Malayo-Polynesian classification, and deserves careful investigation by the comparative method' (1995:79).

On Alor, Pantar, Timor and Kisar, there are Papuan languages that show affinities to the languages of the Bird's Head in Irian. The question is whether these are remnants of language communities that existed prior to the arrival of Austronesian-speakers, or whether these various groups represent a much later intrusion into an area already dominated by Austronesian-speaking populations.

The historical basis for the rapid spread of Austronesian-speakers was the development of a combination of improved maritime technologies and new agricultural capacities. Among others, these capacities included the cultivation of rice and millet, the domestication of pigs, dogs and possibly chicken along with techniques for spinning and

the making of bark-cloth. The early phase of this expansion appears to be associated with red-slipped pottery with dentate or circle-stamped designs. (Bellwood: 2004). The Austronesians carried the Neolithic revolution out of Asia, where it had been developing for several millennia, and into and through an island world, assimilating new tropical crops as the migration extended. The likely time framework for the spread of Austronesian speakers has been gradually established by archaeological research.

'Austronesian', as a defined construct, has an approximate time-depth of 5500 years (3500 BC). (By definition, populations prior to this time period would be 'pre-Austronesian' and would certainly have come from the Chinese mainland where there is good archaeological evidence of the development of agricultural capacities that contributed to later developments on Taiwan.) The migration of the first Malayo-Polynesians may have begun a thousand years later (2500 BC). This migration extended through most of the Indonesian archipelago over the next thousand years and, in a movement along the north coast of New Guinea, had reached the Melanesian islands – in particular, the Admiralty Islands off New Guinea's east coast. By separate migration, they had also reached the Mariana Islands. From about 1300 to 800 BC, a rapid 'Lapita' migration developed as far as Fiji with further migration to the distant islands of the Pacific between 700 and 1200 AD and to New Zealand by 1250 AD.   At about this same time, Austronesian-speakers from Borneo had sailed as far as Madagascar. As Peter Bellwood emphasizes, this Austronesian expansion covered over 7000 km, extending over nearly half of the globe – the largest dispersal of its kind prior to the explorations of Europeans beginning in the 15th century.

Challenges for the Comparative Study of the Austronesians in Anthropology

It is this expansion of the Austronesians that has created a diversity of linguistic communities in different settings. Many of these communities have had long interactions with one another, with some language communities – such as, for example, the Malayic (Malayo-Chamic) subgroup – expanding and providing a *lingua franca* for wider

communication while other communities have long contact with speakers of different language families.

In the late 1980s, the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies convened the Comparative Austronesian Project to initiate a more coordinated study of Austronesian languages. The idea behind the project was to bring together linguists, archaeologists, and anthropologists to discuss issues and attempt to develop better understandings of them. One of the most useful products of the Project was the publication of the volume, *The Austronesians: Historical and Comparative Perspectives,* which appeared in 1995 and was, at that time, a good introduction and stock-taking of what was known about the Austronesian-speaking populations.

Whereas linguists had a long tradition of comparative research on Austronesian languages and archaeologists were attempting to come to grips with the expansion of the Austronesian populations into the Pacific, particularly the Lapita peoples in Oceania, anthropologists, for the most part, were more interested in local or regional ethnographies than they were in adopting a broad comparative perspective. Regional specialists doing research on Melanesia or Micronesia were barely aware of the research of other specialists conducting research on the Philippines, Indonesia, or Madagascar. Publications by anthropologists in the project focused on specific themes. *Inside Austronesian Houses: Perspectives on Domestic Designs for Living* (Fox: 1993) examined the role of the house as a key Austronesian institution and the internal symbolism of houses in their representation of social life. *Origins, Ancestry and Alliance: Explorations in Austronesian Ethnography* (Fox and Sather: 1996) explored ideas of origin and precedence. Papers considered the way in which different Austronesian-speaking populations utilized a discourse on origins, often expressed in botanic metaphors, to trace ancestral connections and contemporary social relationships. Other papers extended these ideas to show how ideas of rank and status depend on contestation over precedence – differing claims to priority of time, place or person. Notions of origin and precedence were put forward as critical analytic devices for the examination of Austronesian social organization. *The Poetic Power of Place: Comparative Perspectives*

on Austronesian Ideas of Locality (Fox 1997) considered local conceptions of origin in relation to ideas of place and introduced the notion of 'topogeny', the ordered recitation of a sequence of place names as an equivalent notion to that of 'genealogy' in tracing origins and identifying social groups. It is intended that subsequent volumes, now in preparation, will continue these explorations. Ultimately, however, in anthropology there is a need for the development of further systematic comparison – rather than the continuing accumulation of case studies, however well crafted, through the use of similar analytic perspectives.

Another direction in the comparative study of the Austronesians, which combines both linguistics and anthropology, has been the study of so-called 'ritual language' or 'ritual speech'. This is a form of oral poetry based on varying degrees of canonical parallelism – the strict pairing of words and phrases in the formal expression of culturally significant knowledge. Examples of such parallelism have been noted by numerous researchers since the time of Hardeland who first commented its signficance among the Ngaju Dayak in 1858. Large corpuses of texts in ritual language have been recorded not just among the Ngaju Dayak but among the Kendayan and Mualang Dayak, the Iban, the Bolaang Mongondow, the Sa'dan Toraja as well as from the Rhade of Vietnam and from Nias. Important studies of such ritual languages have also been carried out on Murut, Berawan and a host of languages in eastern Indonesia from Sumba and Flores to Roti, Timor and the Maluku Islands. Major text collections have been gathered for the Puyuma of Taiwan. The existence of ritual language among these populations establishes the traditions of parallelism as part of an Austronesian heritage. (See Fox 1988 for a comparative study of ritual languages in eastern Indonesia and Fox, in press, for a recent comparative analysis of the significance of parallelism from an Austronesian perspective.)

Toward the Development of More Systematic Comparative Research

 In recent years, there has been more concerted effort to develop systematic comparisons across the language family. Robert Blust, in particular, has been the most prolific contributor to the study of Austronesian languages. Among his considerable output, he

has carried forward the work of Dempwolff in the production of a major *Austronesian Comparative Dictionary*. This Dictionary, which is a continuation of earlier work on reconstruction – "Austronesian etymologies" I (1980), II (1983-4), III (1986) and IV (1989) – has yet to be published but is accessible on line through the University of Hawaii.

Darrell Tryon has edited a five volume *Comparative Austronesian Dictionary.* This is a dictionary of a different kind and is subtitled: "An Introduction to Austronesian Studies". For the purpose of this dictionary, Tryon has identified 80 languages to represent all areas and subgroups of the Austronesian language family. In addition to introductory essays by Tryon, Ross and Grimes, these volumes consist of short outlines for each of these specimen languages together with the vocabulary in each of these languages for 1200 basic lexical items.   Barbara Grimes' essay in this *Dictionary* is an inventory of all identifiable Austronesian languages with information on each language's location, the alternative names by which it has been referred to, the number of its speakers, its dialects, and its classification according to present sub-grouping understandings. This "Listing of Austronesian Languages" is based on the 11th edition of *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (1988), itself a major compilation, in similar format, of all the languages of the world.

Yet another major systemic project has focused on the reconstruction of the lexicon of proto-oceanic by Malcolm Ross, Andrew Pawley and Meridith Osmond. This is a massive undertaking of which, so far, two volumes have appeared: *The Lexicon of Proto Oceanic: The Culture and Environment of Ancestral Oceanic Society, Vol 1: Material Culture* and *Vol 2: The Physical Environment.*   As the title of these publications indicates, these volumes – with two more to follow – represent a systematic attempt to reconstruct proto-oceanic society and culture in its physical setting. Evidence for each reconstructed term is provided in detail and consideration is given to what is distinctive to Oceanic as compared with higher level constructions for Malayo-Polynesian.

Perhaps in conclusion, I may allude to my own attempts to develop a broader basis for the comparison of the relationship terms among Austronesians. It should be emphasized, at the outset, that anthropologists are less interested in the reconstruction of proto-forms *per se* and more interested in recording the varieties of contemporary social formations that exist and continue to develop among Austronesian-speaking populations. Nonetheless it is possible to recognize in contemporary societies particular patterns that can be considered as distinctive Austronesian 'innovations'.

Thus, based on a modified and somewhat expanded version of Ross' 1995 list of Austronesian language groups, I have for some years been compiling a representative sample of complete terminologies for each of these groups. To date, the compilation consists of over 200 terminologies. The emphasis in the study is given to the analysis of complete relationship (kinship) terminologies with a focus on their relational structures rather than on the possible semantic history of their component terms.

As a simple (and indeed simplified) illustration of what may be gained from this kind of systematic study, I will cite various comparative insights that derive from a consideration of the distinction of relative age.

'Relative age' (i.e., elder/younger) is a distinguishing and virtually universal feature of all Austronesian relationship terminologies. It is principally a distinction that applies to siblings and cousins in Ego's Generation. It occurs in all Taiwan aboriginal languages except that of Paiwan and therefore it can be said to be 'Austronesian' and not just Malayo-Polynesian.

The most wide-spread pattern for this relative age distinction, especially among western Malayo-Polynesian languages, is one of elder sibling (eSb) [with elder cousins (PSbCe)] versus younger sibling (ySb) [and younger cousins (PSbCy)] without any distinction of gender. Thus 'elder' or 'younger' can be applied to both male and female siblings.The distinction (eSb)/(ySb) is the common pattern for most of the languages of Taiwan, the Philippines, Sulawesi and Borneo.

What is particularly interesting is that most of the languages that rely on this pattern also have another general term for sibling or cousin, which is unmarked by relative age or gender. As changes occur in the pattern of relative age terms, there are corresponding changes to this designation as well. There are also a number of terminologies from Borneo that do not make use of the relative age distinction. These include the Rungus Dusun, Melanau, Lun Dayek, Kereho Busang, Bukat, and Kayan, all of which belong to Ross' Northwest Borneo subgroup. These languages, like Paiwan, have just a single term for sibling and cousin.

There is also another pattern that combines relative age and gender. This pattern distinguishes elder siblings [and cousins] by gender but leaves the gender of younger siblings unmarked. This pattern is thus: eSb(m)-eSb(f)/ySb. It occurs in Malay, Selako Dayak, among the Jarai of Vietnam, but also in Aceh and among Gayo, the Sakai and Lom of Sumatra, as well as in Javanese and Balinese.

Another pattern of relative age develops when relative age is combined with determinations by sex of speaker. This pattern appears as a further development of eSb/ySb distinction except that relative age is marked only among same sex siblings. Thus brothers [and cousins] distinguish among themselves according to whether they are elder or younger as do sisters among themselves. Brothers have another separate term, without relative age, for their sisters and sisters also have a separate term for brothers. This pattern is common in Central Malayo-Polynesian languages – in Flores, Timor and the Maluku.

Interesting this pattern occurs in at least two Philippine languages (Kalagan and Marabo Atta). A close variation of this same pattern is to found in some of the languages of North-west Sumatra/Barrier Islands group such as Karo and Sakkudei. A pattern of separate terms for brother and sister was also reported for Ngaju in the 19th century but was not confirmed by later researchers. This pattern is associated, though not exclusively, with the development of features of linearity (as opposed to bilaterality).

The languages of Madagascar have developed yet another pattern. While preserving the elder/younger distinction, languages like Merina have four terms for siblings: brother (man-speaking), sister (man-speaking), brother (woman-speaking) and sister (woman-speaking).

As a final example, I would like to cite the remarkable pattern of relative-age that occurs among Austronesian-speakers living on the coast of the Huon Gulf in Papua New Guinea. These speakers of Bukawa combine relative age with sex of speaker. They have four terms: 1) elder brother [and parallel cousin] (man-speaking) or elder sister (woman-speaking, [i.e, same sex, elder] 2) younger brother [and parallel cousin] (man-speaking) or younger sister (woman-speaking)[i.e., same sex, younger]; 3) elder sister (man-speaking) or elder brother (woman-speaking) [i.e., opposite sex, elder] and 4) younger sister (man-speaking) or younger brother (woman-speaking) [i.e., opposite sex, younger]. It is likely that this pattern was influenced by contact with neighbouring Papuan languages. Nevertheless the pattern is a logical development of distinctions and categories within Austronesian and can therefore be considered an innovation in Austronesian.

This example provides a clear message for this conference. The study of any one Austronesian language has something to contribute to our understanding of the language family as a whole. But to recognize what that contribution might be, it is necessary to have some understanding of the features of the full range of Austronesian languages. Thus the larger picture of the whole may inform individual cases just as each case can contribute to a greater knowledge of the whole. The value of comparative Austronesian studies lies in this dialectic between whole and part. Comparative research on Austronesian languages and on the populations who speak these languages is still in its infancy. There is great deal of work to done.

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