

W. W. SCHUHMACHER

AN AUSTRONESIAN-BANTU RELATIONSHIP?

At the First International Conference on Comparative Austronesian Linguistics (January 2—7, 1974, Honolulu, Hawaii)¹, one of the sessions was devoted to „External Relations”, investigating possible relationships of Austronesian (Malayo-Polynesian) to Thai, Mon Khmer, and Japanese respectively. (In the Abstracts, a paper on the Austronesian-Indoeuropean hypothesis was included, too). In all the discussions, the question of the homeland / center of dispersal of the Austronesian (AN) people played a dominant role. Should it have been, as proposed on the basis of linguistic (= lexicostatistic) evidence, Melanesia, New Guinea, or Formosa? At this Conference, William G. Solheim II (University of Hawaii) suggested in his contribution „Reflections on the New Data of South-East Asia Prehistory: Austronesian Origin and Consequence”, on the basis of evidence from pottery, to place the homeland of the AN people in the area of eastern Indonesia and the southern Philippine islands, having the consequence that the Cham people of Indo-China (speaking an AN language) should have moved to the mainland of Asia. However, as pointed out by Solheim, there is evidence for cultural relations between Formosa and South China for the period of 3,000—2,000 B. C., leading to the assumption that the AN people have moved from South China into the East Asiatic island area. This assumption is further supported by the non-Japanese skulls from Japan dated to 500 B. C.

As to the aborigines of Australia, this negroid population is assumed to have moved from today's Asiatic continent at a time

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when there still was a connection to today's islands world. One evidence of this movement dated to before 30,000 B. C. is the found of Java Man. At 7,000 B. C., the Papua people, too, moved from the mainland to New Guinea and parts of Melanesia. Thus, postulating an Asiatic origin of the negroid people², i.e. of today's Bantu too, the possibility should exist to find linguistic evidence for contact between the ancestors of today's Austronesian and Bantu speaking people.

The proto-Austronesian (PAN)³ word for „rain” has been reconstructed as **quZat* or **quZan* (Javanese *udan*, Malay *hud'an*). The respective proto-Bantu (PB)⁴ term is *(*m*)*bɔda*. However, postulating that the PB form originated from an earlier one with **q* before tense **ɔ* (causing labialization: *q* > *b*), and taking into account a shift such as *Z* > *d*, a relation of the two forms could be posited.

Another „equation” would be PAN **pasav* (Javanese, Malay *paśav*) „pair” : PB **paca* (ciLuba *dipasa*) „twins”, with nasal effacement in Bantu, as in the preceding example.

In the present state of our knowledge, in these two cases the assumption of borrowing (from Austronesian into Bantu?) would be the only valid explanation, pointing to a contact between both people somewhere on the Asiatic mainland^{5, 6}.

² Until Peking Man was discovered, most scholars assumed that the human family tree first took root in Africa. As his bones disappeared in 1941, this controversy probably never will be solved.

³ The PAN material is based on Otto Dempwolff's *Vergleichende Lautlehre des austronesischen Wortschatzes*, Berlin, Hamburg, 1934—38, taking into consideration the modifications introduced later by Isidore Dyen and Otto Chr. Dahl.

⁴ The PB material (with tones not marked) is taken from the notes given by Edgar C. Polomé (The University of Texas at Austin) during his course at the Linguistic Institute of the Societas Linguistica Europaea, Kiel, 1968.

⁵ *Prenasalization* is a striking parallel between Austronesian (especially Eastern Oceanic) and Bantu, where however as for the former no morphological connection has been discovered so far. As for PAN, prenasalization is supposed to have occurred only medially whereas in Eastern Oceanic an initial innovating prenasalization has taken place (due to a Melanesian = negroid substratum?).

⁶ Compare for another Asiatic connection of Bantu the attempt by Lilius Homburger in her *Les langues négro-africaines* (Paris, 1957)

to establish a phylum called „Sindo-Africain”, comprising Old Egypt, „Negro-African”, and Dravidian (of South India): „la colonisation de l'Afrique par des Noirs parlant des langues dravidiennes explique la présence d'éléments communs aux langues négro-africaines et à l'égyptien ancien” (328). On the other hand, the late Morris Swadesh — otherwise quite eager in proposing this or that phylum — lists in his *The Origin and Diversification of Language* (London, 1972; Joel Sherzer, editor), where he postulates a „tentative world linguistic net”, as one of his eleven component nets „Fula-Bantuan”, with no direct connections to nets other than „Hamito-Semitan”.