

SEMANTIC RECONSTRUCTION IN AUSTRONESIAN LINGUISTICS

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The process of historical reconstruction involves the search for similarities in four areas: sound, form, function, and meaning. Further, there can be four degrees of resemblance: identical, regular, irregular, or false. The mere fact that two words are formally similar will not do. Yet the principles of semantic reconstruction in Austronesian have generally been unstated or ignored.

I will be discussing some of the reconstructions and the inherent methodology of Dempwolff and earlier work of Dyen, and will touch upon Dyen's later refinements (with Aberle). Blust's exemplary work is also examined. Illustrations and exemplifications also come from several original PAN, PMP, PPH, or lower order reconstructions where the semantic unification is particularly problematic. Relevant sections deal with the following points:

- *The past is relatively silent, but important steps have recently been made (especially by Blust) which should guide us in the art and science of assigning meanings to etyma.*
- *We should strive for a full citation of semantic information for each entry.*
- *We need a careful investigation of the breadth and meaning of cognates within any given set.*
- *We should compare and contrast all information with synchronic values within the semantic system of the languages presented.*
- *Having done 2, 3, and 4, we can only then successfully undertake the extrapolation of a common core, i.e., the assignment of semantic kernels to the etymon. While in many cases the results may be trivial, there are some which are no less than fascinating.*
- *We can evaluate our results by consulting current and past semantic theory. Semantic relationships such as synonymy, antonymy, metonymy, metaphor, synecdoche, taboo, etc. serve as a system of checks and balances for our method.*

- *We should appreciate the importance of semantic innovations. These can play as significant a role in subgrouping languages as do the phonological or lexical ones we have so comely to rely upon.*

1. Introduction

We learn by imitation and by doing on our own. Much of what I say here draws upon my daily research work at the Languages Research Center of MRM Inc. Either I am working on a newspaper reader, in which case I need to find out what a word means in the context of the article being glossed and translated, or on a dictionary, in which case I need to find out the entire range of meanings of a word, extrapolate the common core, and give a comprehensible gloss. In either case, if there are too many meaning candidates (e.g. 'good, fine, well, skilled, talented, wonderful, tasty, delicious'), the need arises to encapsulate those in a brief gloss that will aid the user.

The process of historical reconstruction involves the search for similarities in four areas: sound, form, function, and meaning. Further, there can be four degrees of resemblance: identical, regular (or derived), irregular, or false [see my review of Blust, 1980a (Zorc, 1984/1985)]. The mere fact that two words are formally similar will not do. Yet the principles of semantic reconstruction in Austronesian have either been unstated or ignored. Blust has emphasized "I have long considered semantic reconstruction one of the most important and neglected aspects of historical linguistics. Without careful attention to a principled basis for the reconstruction of meaning many proto-forms remain incompletely reconstructed" (Blust, personal communication, 4 Jun 1997).

2. The Silence of the Past

Until quite recently, Austronesianists have been quite silent on the problems and procedures of semantic reconstruction. This is not to imply that it was not done, only that there was no discussion of how one went about it, or how it should be done. Dempwolff, for example, did assign meanings to etyma, but nowhere did he discuss a methodological basis for his assignments. In some instances, it is clear that he sensed a problem, and tried to deal with an issue such as synonymy, as in **balay* 'Haus, Hütte, Halle' vs. **Rumaq* 'Behausung, Haus'.¹ He also demonstrated cultural awareness in cross-referencing PIN **Bantu* 'help, support' to PIN **b<in>antu* 'son-in-law,' the relationship of

¹ Here, as elsewhere throughout, I owe much to Bob Blust's guidance and comments in email correspondences on this topic.

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which is independently supported by Akl **paŋ-agád** 'help out, work for one's parents-in-law to be' and <**um**>**ágad** 'son-in-law.' But there were instances where any further specification was abandoned, such as when PMP? ***uRaŋ**, PHN? ***qulun**, PAN ***Cau** [reconstructions updated and revised] were all glossed 'person.'²

Dahl (1976) discussed the status (fiction vs. reality) and structure [CVC(N)VC] of Dempwolff's reconstructions and ran through his posited sound system, but gave no details of how one deals with the semantic properties of proposed cognates.

Dyen's Austronesian approach typically listed the meanings of attested forms, but did not assign a meaning to the reconstruction. The following three examples (using Dyen's citations, but my orthographic conventions and language abbreviations) come from Dyen (1965, pp. 295 and 299), but typify his methodology from 1947 onwards:

***baseq**, Tag **basá7**, Mal **basah**, NgD **bias** (M) 'wet,' TB **baso** 'watery,' Sai **bahi**, Ami **mi-vatsa7**, Puy **b<en>ase**, Pai **v<en>ata7** (sic) 'wash (clothes, utensils).'

***basuq**, Mal **basuh** 'wash (hands),' Aty **mahuq** (m/b), Paz **ba-batsu7**, Pai **v<en>atu7** (sic) 'wash (clothes).'

***Sinaw**, Tag **hinaw**, Hil **hinaw** 'wash,' SedK **s<im>inaw**, SedT **s<m>i:naw** 'wash (clothes),' Thao **Sinaw-an** 'wash (other than clothes),' Bun **ma-sinaw**, RukTn **ua-sinaw** 'wash (clothes).'

3. Movements in the Right Direction

However, in conjunction with David Aberle, Dyen did work out principles for LEXICAL RECONSTRUCTION. By this method, one reconstructs an etymon that most closely fits a given meaning. Question: what was the most probable Austronesian word for 'father'? Answer: ***ama**. When one encounters difficulties, such as competing etyma, Dyen and Aberle outline a series of scientific applications for this procedure, which neither space nor time allows reiteration here. For example, there is ample justification for the reconstruction of PAN ***tama[7]** 'father' on the basis of Sediq **táma7**, Ruk, Kav **ta:má7**, Bun **tama7** [TAG:177], Fj **tama-**, Sam **tamā**. However, there is a widespread occurrence of forms representing a straightforward ***ama** > Tag **amá**, Han **áma**, TB **áma**, Saa **ama**, Puy **ama** [Ref], **amaa** [Adr], Tso **amó**, Thao **7á:ma7**. Furthermore, there is sufficiently widespread evidence of morphological derivation, e.g., Jav **r/ama**, and plenty to assume that a ***t-** was some form of prefix associated with the kin class, e.g., ***t-ina** 'mother,' ***t-u-Saji** 'younger sibling,' ***t-umpu** 'ancestor; lord, master, owner.'

² Blust's ***qaRta** 'outsiders, alien people' can be added to this set and also an overlapping meaning and etymon, ***qudip-en** 'slave' (1972c and 1987, p. 80).

While this method may be less used than that discussed immediately below, it was one Blust also applied in the reconstruction of his Austronesian word list for lexicostatistical comparison of language retention rates (1981a). Its methodology can also offer a system of checks-and-balances for comparison and contrast (#4 below).

Blust's (1987) tour de force on the SEMANTIC RECONSTRUCTION of words for 'house' is probably the most thorough treatment to date for the Austronesian language family. In his summary report in the Baldi volume (1990, p. 144f), he cites the work of Capell, Lichtenberk, and Pawley, as well as a few of his earlier publications (e.g. 1972c).

We all owe Blust a great debt for the care he has taken with the semantics of his etymologies³ and for citing ALL the meanings of each cognate form. I must acknowledge that I had been quite sloppy in my earlier work, but now have vowed to be as comprehensive as possible. The inclusion of all (or at least the most relevant portions) of a gloss does take a great deal of time. However, there are a lot of rewards by being thorough, such as finding widespread secondary (or idiomatic) meanings that would be missed in a cursive single cite.

4. What is Wrong with this Picture? (Examining Breadth of Meaning)

One of the first steps in reconstruction is to locate phonologically-unifiable cognate sets. These then become ETYMOLOGICAL CANDIDATES. The importance, however, of matching up FORM, FUNCTION, and MEANING should be apparent from the following:

Tag **pintás** 'fault, defect; fault-finding;' I-**pintás** 'use (x: a fault) in finding faults'

Ilk **na-pintas** 'beautiful, handsome, good-looking, comely, pretty, attractive, lovely, fair, elegant, graceful, charming, exquisite'

Bon **pintas** 'be beautiful, as a woman or clothes'

Akl **pintas** 'treat cruelly, be brutal (with), brutalize, be mean;' **ma-pintas** 'cruel, savage, mean, brutal'

Ceb **pintas** [adj] 'ferocious, cruel and merciless;' [v] become cruel and ferocious;' [n] **ka-** 'ferocity, brutality'

Bik **pintás ma-** 'discourteous, ill-bred;' **mag-** 'to become...;' **-an** 'to be...'

³ One excellent example is from his yet unpublished paper at 3ICAL (1981a, pp. 23, 24, 32) where he draws a distinction between PMP ***tuqela[n,ng]** 'condylar bone' vs PMP ***ZuRi** 'fish bone'.

Han **pintas** {relig} 'any extremely powerful and evil force in the supernatural realm (**padáya**⁷, q.v.); specifically, either of the two worst types of **labán**, q.v.'

Mar **pintas** 'take away from, disturb as one does the luck of a gambler'

Mal **pintas** 'cutting across; taking a short cut'

I propose that these sets defy unification, especially if we consider only the Tagalog and Ilokano (which were the first two I looked at). Unification must be justified by appeal to independently-established cultural connections that lead to a semantically- and logically-satisfying conclusion. Perhaps the more adventurous would propose some unifying connections as follows: The religious connotation of the Hanunoo and the reference to luck in Maranao may indicate some common thread of {magic}, as does the sense of English 'charming' reflected in one of the Ilokano glosses. One might further contemplate if there is a root *+tas 'cut, sever' involved in this comparison, as reflected in the Malay. If, as it would appear to be in this case, all assignments cannot be reconciled and are therefore rejected, then the reconstruction is either invalidated, or reduced to a lower-order proto language, for which cognation of form and meaning can be established.⁴ Alternatively, one might consider if we are dealing with a series of homophones (semantic doublets).

The fact that a single etymon can have an enormous amount of polysemy was taken up in detail by Blust (1981b, pp. 73-77) and 1981c) in the case of PAN ***baliw**, which can have any of the following glosses:

1. 'transformation, metamorphosis, variation' = {physical change}
2. 'change, exchange, pay (back); buy, sell' = {business exchange}
3. 'repay, return in kind; retaliate, take revenge; equalize (a loss ~ debt)' = {social exchange}
4. 'substitute' = {temporary physical change}
5. 'oppose, opposite part ~ side; dual division, moiety' = {social structure}
6. 'friend, partner' = {social interaction}
7. 'answer; repeat' = {speech}
8. 'don mourning apparel; mourn for a deceased spouse' = {change by death}
9. 'ritual punishment; punitive storm, hail storm' = {spiritual change}

It is important to note that multiple reflexes of this often survive, such as: Akl **balíw** 'be bewitched, be stricken ill by an evil spirit,' **báliw- báliw** 'bridge of the nose; place between the eyes,' **báyluh** 'change, exchange, trade' or

⁴ Thus, perhaps, a PCP ***pintas** {culturally-inappropriate behavior} would somehow unify the Tagalog, Bikol, and Bisayan forms, whereas a PSP ***pintas** {bad magic} the Hanunoo and Maranao.

Tag **báliw** 'demented person' [n], **balíw** 'demented' [adj], **i-bayó** 'opposite side,' **máliw** 'loss of intensity, reduction of fervor; end, ending; disappearance' or SaiT **Si-baLiw** 'sell,' **ba-baliw** 'sale.'

5. Comparison and Contrast: The Case for 'wash'

There are numerous terms in any Austronesian language for {wash}, and lexical differentiation depends on what is being washed. Since I know Aklanon best, let us look at its system:

- Akl **bánlaw** 'wash off, rinse out (with water after soaping)'
 Akl **basá7** 'wet,' **ma-basá7** 'wet, moist,' **basá7-ún** ~ **bás7-un** 'wet, put water on'
 Akl **batíya7** ~ **bátya7** 'wooden wash basin' < Mex Sp (see below) [Syn: dúEaŋ 'large wooden bowl']
 Akl **bunák** 'wet, damp,' **bunak-ún** 'moisten, wet, dampen'
 Akl **Eabáh** 'laundry, wash (clothes)' < Sp **lavár** 'wash'
 Akl **gú7gu7** *Entada phaseoloides* ~ *Ganophyllum falcatum* (tree – bark used as shampoo); **mag-** 'shampoo, wash (the hair)'
 Akl **hilám7us** 'wash one's face (with one's hands ~ by splashing water on it)'
 Akl **húgas** 'rinse, wash (off)'
 Akl **kilís** ~ **kísl-i** 'rinse ~ wash (rice)'
 Akl **labakára** 'wash ~ face cloth' > Sp **lava** 'washing + **cara** 'face'
 Akl **lígus** ~ **pa-lígus** 'take a bath, bathe oneself; go swimming' [Contrast: **Eangúy** 'swim (after ~ the length of)']
 Akl **páhid** 'wipe;' **pamahirán** 'rag, wash rag ~ cloth'
 Akl **palibánaw** 'wash ~ (hands, feet)'
 Akl **palimúgmug** 'gargle, wash out the mouth'
 Akl **paŋ-labár** 'wash (one's face with washcloth)' < Sp **lavár** 'wash'
 Akl **pu7pu7** 'wash (anus and/or private parts by patting water on them)'
 Akl **trápuh** 'dush cloth, wiping cloth, cloth for cleanings, rag(s);' **trápuh** 'wipe up ~ off (wet table); sponge bath, wash a sick person (with a washcloth)' < Sp **trapo** 'rag; cloth'

A similar result may be achieved by looking at any reasonably thorough English to language index such as that for Tagalog (English 1977, p. 1173), Bikol (Mintz & Britanico, 1985, p. 207), Bontok (Reid, 1976, p. 494), Ilokano (Vanoverbergh, 1956b, p. 352), or Paiwan (Ferrell, 1982, p. 494f).

Above I cited three forms from Dyen, all containing some sense of {wash}. Can their glosses be more accurately defined? Throughout the literature, one can indeed find over 20 forms in this meaning. Although very few of them can be reconstructed at the PAN level, what is clear is that

historically and synchronically Austronesians are cleanliness-oriented people. Furthermore, many etyma appear to be founded on monosyllabic roots (*+**ñaw**, *+**puq**, *+**suq**; possibly *+**Ras**, *+**saw**, *+**seq**) which may help uncover their underlying semantic profiles. Forms that have acquired the meaning {laundry} can be assumed to be secondary in that both clothing and soap are relatively recent introductions. That is why so many languages have borrowed words for and relating to this process rather than extended the meaning of extant ones.

PAN ***ba+ñaw+ma-** 'wash, bathe' > Akl **pali-bánaw** (above), ltb **ma-vanaw** 'wash hands,' Ami **fanaw** 'lake, pond; wash articles of any kind (not cloth),' (Pai **ma-vanaw** 'take a bath,' **pa-pa-vanaw** 'bath someone'),⁵ Tae **bano** 'wash rinse,' Mok **mañau** 'wash (bottle); baptize (dip in water)' [AE1, p. 041] Dbl: PPH ***bal+naw**

PPH ***bal+naw** 'rinse ~ wash off' > Tag **banláv** (above), Bik **balnáv** **mag--on** 'rinse off (as soap, dirt),' **maghiŋ-hiŋ--an** 'rinse for a second time in a change of water,' Ceb **bánlaw** 'rinse, clean with water,' S-L **bánlaw** 'wash, rinse,' Kpm **banló** 'rinse off,' Ilk **balnáv** = **bugnáv** 'rinse' [PFL, p. 0809]

PAN? ***baséq** 'wet; wash with water' > Akl **basá7** (above), Tag, Ceb **basá7**, Sbl **bahá7**, Itg, Ilk **basá**, Itb **vasa** 'wet,' TB **baso** 'watery,' Iban, Mal **basah**, NgD bias (M) 'wet,' Ami **faca7**, Pai **v<n>ateq**, Sai **bæhi7** 'wash clothes' [Dahl, 1976, p. 28; PMJ, p. VL3] See: ***baseq** 'wet,' problematic final laryngeal in Iban.

PHF ***benatu** 'wash (clothes)' > Mal **benatu** 'laundryman, washerman,' Jav **penatu** 'laundryman,' Pai **v<n>ateq** 'wash clothes' [PAA, p. 046] I reject this on the grounds of the discrepancies of initial and final consonants; Pai is from an infixated form of ***baseq**

PMP ***buRiq** 'wash' > KB **burih** 'wash hands,' Ymd **buri** 'rinse (off/out),' Motu **huri-a** 'wash, scrub,' Ngg **vuli** 'pour water' [AE3, p. 057] Note widespread Australian Aboriginal Kriol **bogi** 'wash, bathe' which is probably a loan from some AN language with R > g.

PMP ***bulú** 'wash up (hands)' > Bon **bolo**, Ilt **muu**, Fj **vulu** 'wash one's hands,' Jav **wulu** 'wash oneself,' Tonga, Fut, Sam **fu/fulu** 'wash up' [PA1, p. 123, VL3]

PCP ***búnak** 'wet; wash' > Ceb, Snt **búnak** 'laundry,' Hil **búnak** 'wet,' Msk **bonak** 'wash (clothes),' (Ntg **bunak** 'wet') [PFL, p. 1147]

PPH ***da7Rup** 'wash face' > WBM **dapug** (M), Itg **agi-dálup**, Man **daL7op**, Luba **min-dá7up**, Isg **mahi-dárup**, Kla **ma-dE7op**, Inb **man-da7** [McF-NP, p. 338, Z-DS]

PPH ***da7mus** 'wash the face' > Tag **hi-lámos** 'washing of the face,' Akl **hi-lám7us** (above), Bik **ku-rá7mus**, **mu-rá7mus**, **pu-rá7mus** 'wash ~

⁵ Paiwan /ma-vanaw/ may be a loan, as the palatal nasal normally yields a voiceless lateral.

