# THIESSEN, HENRY ARNOLD. 1981. Phonological reconstruction of Proto-Palawan. Anthropological Papers Number 10. Manila: National Museum. Pp. 44.

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This study is welcome in many ways, particularly because of its implications for the pre-history of the Philippines. The author has demonstrated beyond all reasonable doubt that the discovery of the 'Tau't Batu' people of Palawan (as was that of the Tasaday-Manobo of Mindanao) was really the finding of *isolated brothers*, and not of a pre-historic 'stone-age tribe', as the media portrayed the events on each occasion.

If historical linguistics seems esoteric to the common man, certainly one of its practical applications is to show the relationships of languages (and of the people who speak them), and to write their history based on the words and grammatical patterns passed on to them from generations before. The first steps in this painstaking procedure are subgrouping and reconstruction.

Thiessen sets out to reconstruct the sound system and a corpus of 165 etyma for the parent language of seven speech varieties spoken on Palawan. He also puts forward a subgrouping based on the evidence of phonological innovations, yielding a North Palawan (Batak and Aborlan Tagbanwa) and a South Palawan (Quezon, Brooke's Point, Canipaan, Tau't Batu, and Molbog). He has correctly excluded from this immediate subgroup Kalamian (a member of the Kalamian group to the north, which also includes Agutaynen and a different Tagbanwa) and Banggi (thus far considered a Dusunic language to the south).

The backbone of any comparative study is the data, and this has clearly been gathered with care, and united (for the most part) into reasonable cognate sets; 118 of his reconstructions are straightforward and absolutely solid. The choice of q (for glottal stop) has resulted in several misprints with g (voiced velar stop), and vice versa. The symbol ' or ? would have been preferable in order to avoid this. Accent is not marked because it is purportedly not phonemic, although the author's statement of this is somewhat confusing: 'Word accent in Q[uezon], B[rooke's] P[oint], C[anipaan], and M[olbog] falls on one of the last two syllables of a word, including both suffixed and unsuffixed forms. . . In none of the languages are words distinguished by accent alone so accent is not contrastive on this level and is not written' (10). I interpret this to mean that some of the dialects are oxytone (regular accent on the ultima) and some are paroxytone (regular accent on the penult), a situation not unusual in Austronesian languages that have lost accent (e.g. different Malay dialects); but it would have been preferable if he stated which dialects favored which pattern. The other 'reading' of his statement could mean that accent falls sporadically on different syllables, so that even if minimal pairs do not occur, accent is thus unpredictable and contrastive [a situation I observed for Busuanga-Kuyonon (Zorc 1977:217)]. Warren's vocabulary of Palawan-Batak (1959) is not cited (and is difficult to obtain), but lists a number of minimal pairs [dáto 'that': dató 'chief', dúdu? 'father's or mother's sister': dudú? 'breast, teat'], which contradict Thiessen's observations. However, my own data on Aborlan, Brooke's Point, and Batak indicate that accent differences are the result of Tagalog or Bisayan superstrata and often differ from one idiolect to another. Hence, Proto-Palawan probably had lost PPH accent (see Zorc 1977:50f, 216-19; 1978; and 1983 for the reconstruction of PPH accent) Contrasts that are now noted to occur are the result of mimicry of Tagalog or Bisayan forms known to and by individual speakers. Nevertheless, the accent situation on Palawan requires more detailed study, if only as a case for the re-introduction of a lost feature (se Zorc 1979 concerning Pangasinan).

I would sincerely like to encourage Thiessen to continue his research and publication on the Palawanic group, because he shows much promise and insight in this area. Some suggestions and caveats are in order, and I trust they will be taken in a positive light. There is no area of error that I could point out which I have not entered myself -- learning from one's own mistakes is a valid (if not unjustly maligned) area of pedagogy. The very nature of linguistic reconstruction makes errors unavoidable, and the only way

out is to keep in touch with other scholars for constant feedback. I would be pleased to correspond with researchers as a matter of mutual assistance and enlightenment.

In comparative work we are looking for similarities in four areas: sound, form, function, and meaning. These can further yield correspondences of four types: identical, regular, irregular, or false (i.e. borrowings rather than inheritances).

Thiessen is clearly aware of the importance of establishing regular phonological correspondences: 'one reason. . . is that accuracy in lexicostatistics. . ., in areas such as the Philippines where there is a proliferation of words with similar shapes and meanings... depends on accurate identification of cognates' (32). However, the unification of Aborlan *kukul* 'scratch' with *kutkut* in the other dialects, or of Batak *ʔ ilem* 'black' with *ʔ item* in the other dialects, is incorrect on both comparative and lexicostatistical grounds. In the latter case, one gets highly inflated scores, thereby obscuring the closeness or distance between respective languages. Based on different lists, he obtains scores between Molbog and Banggi of 52-62%, whereas I am hard-pressed to get a score above 40% based on the data I have and rigorously applied cognate decisions. Where 'irregular' correspondences occur, I would suggest counting forms as non-cognate. In a close-knit group (such as Palawan or Bisayan) this scoring procedure helps to differentiate speech varieties and clarify the resultant subgrouping theory. Hopefully data will be forthcoming to allow a lexicostatistical classification of these speech varieties, and to contrast or compare it with the subgrouping proposed on the basis of phonological shifts and changes. I would also recommend the Swadesh 100-item list (as opposed to the Swadesh 200 or SIL 372, see Zorc 1982:307-12).

While I have always appreciated the difficulty and the discipline involved in reconstructing 'from the bottom up' (that is, determining the shape of the parent language from the evidence of the daughter languages alone), so many higher level reconstructions have been made available by Dempwolff, Blust, Charles, and Zorc, that reconstruction 'from the top down' should be added as a check-and-balance procedure to insure optimum accuracy of interpretations and conclusions. The reconstruction of a Proto-Palawan *h is a case in point. The author correctly observes that 'one correspondence set (*tahiq) is scant evidence for reconstructing a proto-phoneme' (19) although he cites *luhaq 'tear' from outside his immediate corpus. However, comparison with Proto-Philippine reconstructions will offer further evidence that Proto-Palawan is all likelihood lost *h: PPH *hapuy 'fire' (PPL *qapuy), PPH *hajek 'kiss; smell' (PPL *qaRek), PPH *hiRedaq 'lie-down' (PPL *qigaq 'sleep'), PPH *hi:lut 'rub' (PPL *qilut). PPH *hu:Ras 'rinse' (PPL *qugas 'wash'), PPH *buhek 'head:hair' (PPL *buqek), PPH *da:hun 'leaf' (PPL *daqun), PPH *duha 'two' PPL *dua).

In the reconstruction of PPI *R (characterized simply as a 'voiced obstruent') the strict discipline imposed by the comparative method has been relaxed, and a number of otherwise irregular correspondences have been unified. The criterial features of this correspondence set appear to be [d] in Molbog and [r] in the other dialects. Although the choice of symbols should generally be an arbitrary one, in light of the status of PAN and PPH *R (re-assigned by Dyen for * ɤ ) and the general correspondence of the forms in question to [d] reflexes in other Philippine languages, I believe *D would have been more appropriate on the following: PPL *ngaDan 'name' (PPH8 ngajan), PPL *ma-Dayuʔ 'far' (PPH *Dayúq), PPI *ʔaDek 'smell' (PPH *hajek 'kiss'), PPI *siDa 'they' (PPH *sidá), PPL *taDem 'sharp' (PPH *tadêm). Irregular [y] reflexes appear on Brooke's Point, Canipaan me-yaʔat (probably under influence from Malay jahat), otherwise yielding a PPL *ma-Daʔet (PPH *ma-da:qet) 'bad, evil', and on Quezon ngi(y)an 'when?' otherwise yielding a PPL *ngiDan (PPH *kijan). In one of the reconstructions ambiguously assigned to *d or *R, the problem is with the appearance of [r] in Aborlan and Batak ʔurung 'nose' (probably from a doublet *qudung), alongside a regular PPI *ʔedung, with regular reflexes of *d in the other speech varieties -- given the separate status of Aborlan and Batak, recourse to subgrouping could have been made. One final correspondence is assigned to *R, which indeed relates to PPH *R, namely PPH *Ramút 'root', where [g] reflexes appear in all dialects except Molbog ramut, yielding a PPL *gamut (if Molbog

is taken to be a loan), or a unique PPL *Gamut/*Ramut (if Molbog is taken to reflect a genuine correspondence set). Appeal to outside languages and higher-level reconstructions will inevitably clarify the reconstruction of certain problamatic forms at the Proto-Palawan level.

There are many areas where Thiessen is to be commended on the excellence of his reasoning. Despite the bad lead concerning the Sanskrit origin of two forms (PPL *qasawa 'wife, spouse' and PPL *dilaq 'tongue'), he correctly establishes them as legitimate PPL reconstructions, disassociating them from Sanskrit sva 'one's own' and lidha 'licked' (5). The need to reconstruct vowel-initial sysllables within morphemes is also well-presented (13), as is the presence of the marker *si on the third person singular topic pronoun, PPL *si-ya (18).

Since his emphasis was on the reconstruction of phonology, failure to take morphology into consideration at this stage is understandable. The operation of different prefixes, such as *i-wanan versus *ka-wanan 'right side' or *?a-baba? 'short' and ?a-buat 'long', will ultimately improve our understanding of Proto Palawan and higher-level proto languages: what forms they occur on, and how they may have operated to influence sporadic phonological changes (yielding a unification of PPL *d and *D, which I discussed above, i.e. the distinction is probably morphophonemic rather than phonological).

The other area that needs further research, and not only for the Palawanic group, is the reconstruction of doublets, e.g., *deket vs *seket 'stick to', *heyep vs *tapiug 'blow', *kineg vs *dengeg 'hear'. *tindeg vs *teyeg 'stand', *?esa vs *?isa 'one'. Such a procedure appears more reasonable than the unification of forms that are phonologically diverse, and recourse to standard or recurring sound shifts or morphophonemic changes cannot readily be made.

The first major steps towards our understanding of the Palawanic languages have been made, including the establishment of the phonology of their proto-language (with only some mini refinements (necessary) and their internal interrelationships (although I am less than enthusiastic on the reliability of sound shifts and changes as definitive criteria for subgrouping, see Zorc 1977: 219-20). However, Thiessen's study is an important one for Philippine historical-comparative linguistics, and we can look foward to continued advances in this area by this promising scholar.

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