

PDF hosted at the Radboud Repository of the Radboud University Nijmegen

The following full text is a publisher's version.

For additional information about this publication click this link.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2066/86477>

Please be advised that this information was generated on 2020-10-29 and may be subject to change.



PROJECT MUSE®

The Austronesian languages (review)

Angela Terrill

Oceanic Linguistics, Volume 49, Number 1, June 2010, pp. 313-316 (Article)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press

DOI: 10.1353/ol.0.0061



Oceanic
Linguistics
VOLUME 49 NUMBER 1 JUNE 2010

➔ For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/ol/summary/v049/49.1.terrill.html>

Robert Blust. 2009. *The Austronesian languages*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics 602. xxviii + 824 pp. ISBN 978-0-85883-602-0. \$Aust. 198.00 (Australia), \$Aust. \$180.00 (elsewhere), paper.

This is a marvelous, dense, scholarly, detailed, exhaustive, and ambitious book. In 800-odd pages, it seeks to describe the whole huge majesty of the Austronesian language family, as well as the history of the family, the history of ideas relating to the family, and all the ramifications of such topics. Blust doesn't just describe, he goes into exhaustive detail, and not just over a few topics, but over every topic he covers. This is an incredible achievement, representing a lifetime of experience. This is not a book to be read from cover to cover—it is a book to be dipped into, pondered, and considered, slowly and carefully.

The book is not organized by area or subfamily; readers interested in one area or family can consult the authoritative work on Western Austronesian (Adelaar and Himmelmann 2005), or, for the Oceanic languages, Lynch, Ross, and Crowley (2002). Rather, Blust's stated aim "is to provide a comprehensive overview of Austronesian languages which integrates areal interests into a broader perspective" (xxiii). Thus the aim is more ambitious than just discussion of areal features or historical connections, but seeks to describe the interconnections between these.

The Austronesian language family is very large, second only in size to Niger-Congo (xxii). It encompasses over 1,000 members, and its protolanguage has been dated back to 6,000 years ago (xxii). The exact groupings of some Austronesian languages are still under discussion, but broadly, the family is divided into ten major subgroups, nine of which are spoken in Taiwan, the homeland of the Austronesian family. The tenth, Malayo-Polynesian, is itself divided into two major groups: Western Malayo-Polynesian, which is spread throughout the Philippines, Indonesia, and mainland Southeast Asia to Madagascar; and Central-Eastern Malayo-Polynesian, spoken from eastern Indonesia throughout the Pacific. The geographic, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the family make this an extremely ambitious book. The book is intended to provide an overview of the Austronesian family for the "general linguist" (xxii). The extent to which this has been achieved will be apparent during the course of this review.

The book is divided largely into three parts: background and sociolinguistic information; grammatical information; and the history of the Austronesian languages. The first section includes chapters or sections on the physical and social environment of the Austronesian speakers, the major divisions in the Austronesian family, national languages and lingua francas, and the geography of the family. There is a detailed description of sociolinguistic factors, including speech levels and respect languages, gender-based differences, profanity, secret languages, ritual languages, and, sitting rather oddly with the rest of this chapter, a section on contact-induced language change.

The next four chapters cover topics traditionally encountered in grammatical description: phonetics and phonology, the lexicon, morphology, and syntax. The final four chapters cover historical topics: reconstruction, sound change, classification, and, unusually, "The world of Austronesian scholarship," covering the size of the research

community, periodic meetings and publications, and other aspects of scholarly endeavor on the Austronesian languages.

The first of the three major sections will be very useful for scholars outside the Austronesian discipline, with information on geographic and cultural aspects of the languages, and the major divisions of the family. The chapter “A bird’s eye view of the Austronesian language family” is particularly useful in this respect, especially the discussion of languages by geographical region. Interesting tables in these sections list the ten largest and ten smallest languages by speaker population. This section contains a discussion of the geographical layout of the languages in the islands, history of research in the area, and a typological overview of the languages.

The second major part of the book, which will be very useful for typologists, is the description of grammatical topics: phonetics and phonology, the lexicon, morphology, and syntax. These are incredibly detailed and exhaustive. For example, in the chapter on sound systems, although “vowel harmony is rare in AN [i.e., Austronesian] languages,” Blust provides 4½ pages on the topic. There are 26 pages on reduplication. The topics selected for the chapter on the lexicon seem to be guided largely by Blust’s curiosity: numerals, color terms, demonstratives, locationals and directionals, pronouns, metaphor, language names and greetings, semantic change, doubling, lexical change, and linguistic paleontology. The following chapters on morphology and syntax are equally detailed and dense, and make few concessions to the reader.

The third major section begins with a dense and complex discussion of reconstruction, sound change, and classification. Chapter 8 on reconstruction covers the history of ideas on this topic, as well as a “critical assessment” of Proto-Austronesian phonology. The sound change chapter is also detailed and well worked through. Chapter 10 on classification is perhaps the most interesting for the general reader. It begins with a discussion of establishing genetic relationship, noting the need to take care to eliminate chance similarity, language universals, and borrowing from the data used to establish a genetic claim. A section on “Problems in the demarcation of the Austronesian language family” reviews some interesting cases of languages that have not been readily able to be assigned to the Austronesian family, largely due to extreme levels of lexical replacement: for instance, Kaulong (of New Britain) and Mailu (southeast coast of Papua New Guinea). Blust makes the important point that, in the case of Mailu, much foreign borrowing would make an Austronesian classification difficult, if not for the fact that Mailu has some close relatives that have not had so much lexical replacement, and with which Mailu can be readily identified. A further case in point is some of the Reefs-Santa Cruz languages, which have recently been convincingly shown to be related, by the establishing of regular sound changes as per the traditional Comparative Method (Ross and Naess 2007). Not mentioned by Blust, but also interesting in this context, is Kazukuru, an extinct language of the western Solomons, which has long been thought to be Papuan but which has recently been convincingly shown to be Austronesian by comparison of the pronoun paradigms and other cognate lexical items (Dunn and Ross 2007).

The section on external relations is typically thorough. Blust begins by outlining models and methods, and in this section and the next the true extent of the major contribution of Austronesian scholarship to the wider discipline of historical linguistics emerges. In section

10.3 on subgrouping. Geraghty (1983), working on subgrouping of Fijian languages, found that normal subgrouping methods could not be applied, and instead developed a model to encompass a language changing its subgrouping membership over time—a model called by Blust the shifting subgroup model. A further methodological innovation emerges from Ross's work (for example, Ross 1997). Ross makes a distinction between innovation-defined and innovation-linked subgroups, the former being the type of subgroups familiar from traditional historical linguistics, the latter being used for situations in which a series of linked dialects or languages don't all share certain features; rather, there are overlapping sets of features each shared by a subset of the languages or dialects in question, with no single feature shared by all languages or dialects. Later in the same chapter is a short discussion of quantitative methods and Bayesian inference; as Blust points out, most of the people working in this area are evolutionary biologists, but more and more historical linguists are turning to quantitative methods, and the discussion rightly suggests that the future of historical linguistics is set to change in this direction.

In sum, the book provides a detailed history of the discipline of Austronesian linguistics, a sense of the structure and variation in each major subgroup, and diachronic explanations of Proto-Austronesian structures as they are inherited in the daughter languages. This book will be the first port of call for scholars wanting to know anything about Austronesian syntax, morphology, or phonology.

The unrelenting nature of the exposition makes some sections difficult to read and digest. There are some strange typographical errors in chapter 5 (Lexicon), where the ends of some words have the sequence "orth" on them: for example, "cooperation" is "cooperationorth." The index is poor: there is an entry for 'liver' but not one for 'genetics'; there is an entry for 'Gestalt symbolism' but not one for 'assimilation'. An author index and language index would have also been valuable. For a large and wide-ranging book like this, which will not be read cover-to-cover, a poor index is a great shame. Also, in some sections there are no references given: in the section on population genetics, this is rather a problem, as there is so much controversy on linguistic/genetic relationships, and various studies tend to provide conflicting evidence (for example, Cox and Lahr 2006, Friedlaender 2007).

In line with Blust's background as a historical linguist there is a tendency, identified by Klamer (2009), to prefer diachronic accounts over synchronic description.

However, considering the scope of the project, these are minor points. Blust has succeeded at a complex integration of areal coverage, historical explanation, and synchronic description of the Austronesian language family. This book will find a place on every Austronesianist's shelf, as well as on the shelves of those who work alongside the Austronesian world. This book is not the last word on the topic, but it represents the most authoritative state of the art and it will retain its usefulness for a very long time to come.

ANGELA TERRILL
Radboud University Nijmegen

REFERENCES

- Adelaar, Alexander, and Nikolaus P. Himmelmann, eds. 2005. *The Austronesian languages of Asia and Madagascar*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Cox, Murray P., and Marta Mirazón Lahr. 2006. Y-chromosome diversity is inversely associated with language affiliation in paired Austronesian- and Papuan-speaking communities from Solomon Islands. *American Journal of Human Biology* 18:35–50.
- Dunn, Michael, and Malcolm Ross. 2007. Is Kazukuru really Austronesian? *Oceanic Linguistics* 46:210–31.
- Friedlaender, Jonathan Scott, ed. 2007. *Genes, language, and culture history in the Southwest Pacific*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Geraghty, Paul. 1983. *The history of the Fijian languages*. Oceanic Linguistics Special Publication 19. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Klamer, Marian. 2009. The use of language data in comparative research: A note on Blust (2008) and Onvlee (1984). *Oceanic Linguistics* 48:250–63.
- Lynch, John, Malcolm Ross, and Terry Crowley. 2002. *The Oceanic languages*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press.
- Ross, Malcolm. 1997. Social networks and kinds of speech-community event. In *Archaeology and language 1: Theoretical and methodological orientations*, ed. by Roger Blench and Matthew Spriggs, 209–61. London and New York: Routledge.

Neil Broad, with Eastern and Central Arrernte speakers (compilers). 2008. *Eastern and Central Arrernte picture dictionary*. Alice Springs: IAD Press. x + 179 pp. ISBN 978-186465-0709. \$Aust. 24.95.

This latest in a long list of picture dictionaries from the Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD) Press presents words arranged under fifty topics in Eastern and Central Arrernte (which is the name for a single variety of this Central Australian Pama-Nyungan language), with pictures representing those words, often together with an example sentence. The first 93 pages of the A4 format book display pictures and words with an example sentence (that attempts to “bring into focus some aspect of Arrernte cultural knowledge”) entirely in the language, with the next 40 or so pages providing translations of the same terms into English. There are two short texts (60, 68), a kinship diagram (12), and a map of local placenames (20–21). This is all followed by an Eastern and Central Arrernte-to-English wordlist, and then an English finderlist. The final seven pages provide a pronunciation guide. The book is wrapped with an attractive dot painting cover by Amunda Gorey.

While the language is identified with a geographic designation (“Eastern and Central”), it is a variety of Arrernte that has its own internal variation, indicated by cardinal directions—(E), (N), (W), (S)—appended to relevant words in the wordlist and finderlist. The idea for a picture dictionary appears to have come out of a meeting of speakers of Anmatyerr (another Arandic Central Australian language) in 2001, which identified the need to create language materials that would be useful for school children. The IAD pic-