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AND CLASSICAL PHILOLOGY – XVII**

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A. Keidan

BRANCH-CROSSING INDO-EUROPEAN ISOGLOSSES: A CALL FOR INTEREST

Резюме: Статья посвящена описанию новой исследовательской программы, которую планирует начать группа специалистов по сравнительно-историческому языкознанию из университетов Рима, Гента, Тюбингена и Лейдена. Одна из основных идей исследования состоит в изменении направления анализа – движение от праязыка вперед, рассмотрение общих инновации, которые произошли в тех или иных языках после распада индоевропейской языковой семьи на группы. Основная цель работы – сбор, анализ и классификация изоглосс, проходящих по разным ветвям индоевропейского языкового древа.

Цель данной публикации – пробудить интерес широкого круга ученых и пригласить их принять участие в проекте. Степень участия в проекте может варьироваться от помощи в обработке данных до участия в конференции, которая состоится в Риме в мае 2014 г., где будут обсуждаться теоретические вопросы, имеющие отношение к проекту, а также возможно и некоторые предварительные результаты.

Ключевые слова: Branch-crossing isoglosses, Indo-European languages

Introduction

The present paper is devoted to the description of a new research program that a group of scholars of Historical linguistics, from the universities of Rome, Ghent, Tübingen and Leiden, are about to embark. The results of our research are, for now, only hypothetical. However, we wish to share with the audience of this conference our essential ideas and methodological criteria. Our desire is to elicit the interest of other scholars and to invite them to collaborate with the project. The possible contribution to the project range from the help with data analysis to the participation to a forthcoming conference (Rome, May 2014), where some theoretical questions related to the project and, hopefully, some early results will be presented to the scientific community and discussed.

Problem setting and methodology

Reversing the direction of analysis

As we all know, the historical-comparative method consists in the discovering the regular correspondences of linguistic elements (usually phonology and morphology) within a group of languages, and to reconstruct a hypothetic ancestor language, which does not counter some general principles governing the linguistic change (Martinet's principle of economy, *Systemzwang*, morphological "naturalness" and "iconicity", etc.), and possibly also goes along with the data from history and archaeology. The direction of the whole analysis goes — so to speak — from the data "downwards", i.e. into the prehistory, since the *Ursprache* is usually an unattested artefact, dating to a very ancient era.

One of the ground ideas of the present research consists in reversing the direction of analysis: we intend to depart from the *Ursprache* and go "onwards", analysing the common innovations that particular languages had undertaken after the split of the IE family into its sub-groups. This research will especially focus on the collection, analysis and classification of the post-unitarian isoglosses that have spread across the branches of the IE tree of languages.

By the term *isogloss* we mean here whatever linguistic feature common to two or more languages. In our approach the isoglosses can refer to all the levels of linguistic analysis: from phonology to morphology, from lexicon (including semantics) to syntax: we adopt a broader interpretation of this term, which some scholars would restrict to the lexical level.

It is worth noting, that initially the isoglosses were meant as geographical projections of the shared linguistic features. However, in our case, while studying the isoglosses of languages spoken by populations that underwent millennia of migrations, the "topological" individuation of the isoglosses is not always possible, and a sort of typological — or set-theoretical — approach can be more appropriate. In some cases it seems necessary to consider as "jeopardised" isoglosses also the features that are shared by languages that, in the historical period, were spoken in geographically disjointed regions. However, the geographic proximity will be privileged in the analysis.

Second generation IE languages

The isoglosses that differentiate the particular sub-groups of the IE family can be labelled “first generation” isoglosses. The historically attested languages, even the oldest ones (such as Hittite, Vedic, Homeric and Mycenaean varieties of Greek, etc.), only partly preserve the first generation isoglosses. They are rather an abstraction of the linguists, and correspond to the so-called “common” proto-languages (such as Common Indo-Aryan, Common Germanic etc.), that can be termed “first generation” IE languages.

In the present research we are especially interested in the “second generation” branch-crossing isoglosses, which would have been developed by what we call the “second generation” IE languages. From the viewpoint of genetic and chronological order the label “second generation” refers to those historically attested languages that, besides deriving from the Proto-IE, go back to different closest protolanguages, i.e. belong to different sub-groups of the IE family. Historically speaking, the second generation IE languages are (usually, but not necessarily) those specified as “Middle”, within each particular IE group. However, this does not apply to the IE languages that are attested in a more recent period: the *oldest* Germanic and Slavic languages share many features with the *Middle* Indian. Therefore, such varieties as Prakrits, Oldest Germanic and Slavonic languages, Classic and Late Latin, etc., all — roughly — belong to this second generation (regardless the chronological distance between some of them, e.g.: Prakrits vs. Slavonic languages).

For the sake of the present research goals — i.e. the analysis of the areal and contact phenomena — the second generation IE languages are to be considered genetically unrelated, which means that they do not come from the same closest branching node of the family tree. On the other hand, the isoglosses under consideration should not be considered only typological in nature, but are assumed to represent the results of a convergent diachronic development, and belong, therefore, to the field of historical analysis of languages.

Second generation IE Sprachbund

A possible circularity in the definition of the second generation IE languages must be avoided: these languages represent our main source of data, upon which we are attempting to make our generalisations. They are not the generalisations themselves. Our ultimate goal is, rather, to prove the existence of a good number of

branch-crossing isoglosses, shared by second generation IE languages, so that we can speak about a sort of “second generation IE *Sprachbund*” (or many such branch-crossing linguistic areas). This areal entity is more typological than genetic, not unlike the well known Standard Average European (see Haspelmath 2001 for a modern interpretation thereof).

The usefulness of a *Sprachbund* approach can be easily understood if we interpret it as an attempt to transform quantity into quality. Indeed, many linguists have been observing for a long time isolated instances of unexpected isoglosses that cross the branches of the IE tree of languages. However, only collecting all of such isoglosses into a database, analysing and classifying them, would allow us to make significant and not trivial generalisations explaining their origin. Therefore, what appears little more than a curious coincidence — such as the Old Russian/Avestan isoglosses discovered by Patri (2001, 2003), just to quote a recent case — acquires a new significance if compared to a bulk of similar evidence.

Our approach is ideally inspired to the tradition of the study of branch-crossing phenomena started already by Schmidt’s “Wave theory” (1872), Schuhardt’s (1884) study on the common features of Slavic, Germanic and Romance; moreover, we depend on the ideas by Trubeckoj (1923) and especially by Jakobson (1931, 1962), who was the first to generalise the notion of *Sprachbund* (cf. Schaller 1997)¹.

Possible sources of the isoglosses

In order to better define the distinctive features of this areal standard we must classify and analyse the isoglosses under consideration. First of all, we must rule out those that are purely genetic and those too accidental and sporadic to be really relevant. Otherwise, the isoglosses can arise from at least four diachronic sources, the individuation of which is among the task of this research: natural tendencies, substrate influence, drifts and contact phenomena. Especially the last one is of paramount importance for the definition of the *Sprachbund* we are concerned with. Moreover, the systematic isoglosses, especially the morphological and

¹ The notion of *Sprachbund* is taken for granted, and we are neither discussing, nor denying, the possible flows in its definition; cf. Édel’man (1978), Thomason (2000, 2001).

phonological ones, will be obviously privileged over the accidental phenomena or phenomena that do not affect the core structure of language (such as lexical borrowings).

Natural tendencies

Some general tendencies are, indeed, always present in the diachronic change of languages due to the principle of economy of muscular and mental energy in the production of speech (see Martinet 1955). There need not be any necessary relation between different instances of such developments in different languages. Some scholars speak about degree of markedness: the unmarked variants are naturally more widespread (see Nichols 1992, but cf. already Meillet 1922 and the discussion in Lazzeroni 1987). Good examples are the numerous instances of palatalisation (especially of velars stops, but not only them), that occurred, more or less independently, in many IE languages: from Indo-Aryan to Slavic, Germanic and Romance, among others. A more specific instance of a natural weakening of the articulation is the spirantisation of /g/ in Ukrainian and Dutch, which are clearly unrelated to each other.

An interesting issue with the natural developments is that not each feature is shared by *all* the languages, which would be the logical consequence of their being a natural phenomenon. Indeed, the principle of economy must be thought as the “engine” that moves the machinery of the linguistic change in general, but the selection of the specific innovation is possibly explainable as being contact-induced, see Thomason (1997).

Substrate influence

According to Kiparsky (2014) “substratum and superstratum hypotheses, long considered a somewhat disreputable last resort [...] are becoming empirically falsifiable and are being advanced more confidently”. Indeed, a common substrate (or typologically similar substrates) can lead to similar innovations in a group of genetically unrelated languages. Thus, as argued by Kulikov (2011), the increasing number of cases registered in Tocharian, but also in Middle and New Indo-Aryan languages (as opposed to the Iranian branch of the Indo-Iranian group), can be ascribed to typologically similar substrate varieties; a growth of case-forms number registered in Slavic and Baltic languages is also correlated with a common (Ugro-Finnic?) substrate.

Common drift

In our understanding, the drifts are processes that have a common genetic background but keep developing in a parallel way in two (or more) languages also after their genetic separation. The classic example of drift is the Umlaut phenomenon in German and English (with a very similar parallel evolution in French, see Belardi 1979), and especially its development into a morphological feature, namely the marker of the plural (this is, indeed, the original example of the drift phenomenon as proposed by Sapir 1921). Limitedly to phonology, drift phenomena can be interpreted as a later phonologisation occurred in each particular daughter-language of some allophones that were born already in the proto-language².

Cross-branch contacts

These are the isoglosses that the present research program is mostly focused on. A famous example, studied by Gusmani (1972), is the loss of /s/ (deletion or transformation into a /h/-like sound) in different positions in a series of languages — Greek, Indo-Iranian, Armenian and partly Slavic, Celtic and Anatolian languages — connected geographically but genetically unrelated (at least, not in an immediate way). This phenomenon is proven to be quite old, but is obviously more recent than the proto-IE stage.

A clear differentiation between drifts, contact phenomena and genetic relationships must be carefully outlined. The main criterion, in this respect, must be the detection (through the so-called internal reconstruction) of the divergent vs. convergent nature of the isogloss. If two languages can be proven to develop a common feature not originating from any kind of possible common genetic background in some preceding stages, then it must be considered a true contact-based branch-crossing innovation. Otherwise, if diachronically we observe a divergent development of the shared feature, the genetic origin is the default explanation (see Nichols 1992).

² I am indebted for this interpretation to a yet unpublished conference talk about the RUKI-law delivered by Alexander Lubotsky at the University of Pavia in May 2013. For a modern interpretation of Sapir's notion of drift, based upon some Tibeto-Burman data, see LaPolla (1994).

Examples of the isogloss

Many branch-crossing isoglosses are widely known nowadays. Here some of them are listed in order to exemplify the kind of data we are looking for.

Phonology

A very debated example of branch-crossing late IE isogloss is the so-called RUKI-law (/s/ > /š/ in proximity of /r, u, K, i/), attested in Indo-Iranian, Balto-Slavic and Armenian (Lubotsky 1999; Beguš 2012). We think that a contact-generated areal diffusion — therefore a Sprachbund-caused convergence — can be easily assumed as an explanation of otherwise obscure innovation, which occurred later than several specific Indo-Iranian innovations, but is attested also outside this branch of the IE family. A drift interpretation is also possible here, so that some very similar Germanic data (observed by Prescott 2012) can be explained as belonging to the same innovation.

Other isoglosses:

- Creation of the **back spirant /h/** (or the like), from different sources, lacking in Proto-IE,³ but attested in almost every second generation IE language.
- **/s/ > /h/ or zero**, in different positions, attested in a number of neighbouring IE languages: Indian and Iranian, Greek, Armenian, Luvian, see Gusmani (1972).
- **Neutralisation of /s/ and /r/** into [r] in the word-final position, attested in Sanskrit and in some Ancient Greek dialects (e.g. Elean and Laconic), see Buck (1955).
- **Rhotacism of /s/ in intervocalic** position, quite systematic in Latin and Germanic, but attested also in some Greek dialects (e.g. Eretrian), see Buck (1955).

Morphology

A very widespread second generation feature is the increasing productivity, and the following reanalysis, of the derivational suffix in velar (from IE *-ko-). This suffix, exhibiting many different and hardly clusterable functions (the most important of which seems to be the adjectival derivation), is very well attested in Classical Sanskrit, Middle Iranian, Slavic, Germanic, Latin and Greek, see

³ A possible exception are the so-called “laryngeals”, although their exact phonetic realisation is debatable, cf. Gusmani (1979), Di Giovine (2006).

Ciancaglini (2012). However, it is almost completely lacking in the oldest phases of the IE family: two examples are attested in Gathic Avestan and only one in Hittite; very few in Old Persian. Interestingly, when present, the forms in **-ko-* (with its various outcomes) are typically bound to the “low” sociolinguistic variety of the language. Thus, in Old Persian this derivational suffix is used only for the so-called “non-Aryan” ethnonyms (i.e., names of nomadic populations of different origin that inhabited the Central Asian steppes), while in Young Avestan the suffix in **-ko-* is attested in words that denote diseases, demons, sins and “Ahrimanic” creatures. Moreover, the way **-ko-* becomes more and more grammaticalised, and the type of morphological reanalysis it undergoes, is strikingly similar in the later IE languages. Thus very often this suffix agglutinates to the preceding thematic vowel, forming new outcomes according to the vowel quality (such as *-ik-*, *-uk-*).

Other isoglosses:

- Creation of “**augmented**” past forms of the verb, unknown to the IE, but attested in many singular IE languages (Indo-Iranian, Armenian, Greek).
- Creation of the **infinitive** form of the verb, which cannot be reconstructed for the proto-IE stage, usually from a dative form of the verbal noun.
- Creation of a new **adjectival declension** through adding pronominal endings, or whole pronouns, to the nominal stems (Prakrits, Slavic, Germanic).

Syntax

A typical, though unrecognized case of “second generation isogloss” concerns the modification of the IE parts-of-speech system. As already observed by Alfieri (2009; 2011), the Proto-IE parts-of-speech system is only preserved in Vedic and Avestan and differs from that found in Latin, Germanic and in all of the other Western IE languages. Thus, while Vedic displays two classes of simple items in the lexicon (verbal roots and primary nouns) and has only about a score of primary adjective stems, usually encoding the quality predicate through a verb-like strategy and the quality modifier through a nominalized form of a verbal root, Latin — as well as other second generation IE languages — shows three classes of primary lexemes (noun, verb and adjective), and typically encodes the quality predicate and the quality modifier through a primary

adjective stem. Therefore, one of the most typical hallmarks of the IE family, namely the “noun vs. verb vs. adjective” division, must be re-considered as a “second generation” isogloss only. Particularly, the birth of a brand-new adjectival class is supported by the already mentioned creation of a special adjectival declension in some of the languages under consideration.

Other isoglosses, strictly linked to each other:

- Evolution towards a **rigid word order** (from the almost completely free word order supposed for Proto-IE).
- Evolution towards the **generalization of the transitive construction**, with a strong **subjecthood** (see Bauer 2000, Kulikov 2012).
- Evolution from the existential possessive construction (such as Latin *mihi est liber* ‘I have a book’) towards the lexicalized transitive **possessive predicate** (such as English verb *to have*), possibly correlated with the rigid word order, see Keidan (2008), Baldi & Cuzzolin (2010).

Data collecting and presentation

The “Tree model” of linguistic change has been always predominant in the Indo-European linguistics from its initial formulation by A. Schleicher (1862) up to the present days. It constituted the framework for a number of larger systematic surveys of the IE family (from Delbrück & Brugmann’s *Grundriß* onwards). The “Wave model”, on the other hand, lacks a similar large compendium of data.⁴ One of our goals is precisely to provide a database of these data. It will contain as many branch-crossing isoglosses as possible, plus their detailed typological classification, relative chronology and geographical diffusion.

The isoglosses will be defined and presented either in terms of *modification* of the Proto-IE system (for the isoglosses that represent a common loss of some linguistic element), or as common *creations* (for the phenomena that cannot be reconstructed for the Proto-IE).

The most straightforward way to implement such kind of data collecting task is to count every innovation that is exhibited by the most important ancient IE languages, without postulating an *a priori*

⁴ The question whether the “Tree model” or the “Wave model” provide a better description of the linguistic change is intentionally left out of the debate.

distinction between first generation and second generation isoglosses. Only after having collected and analysed a good number of isoglosses we will be able to distinguish between the two generations, and eventually to individuate some contact-induced phenomena. This means that a sub-product of the present research will be a larger database of the IE isoglosses (including their geographical mapping), which will be available to the audience of historical linguists through an internet site, similarly to such other linguistic projects as:

- The Tower of Babel: An Etymological Database (<http://starling.rinet.ru>).
- The World Atlas of Language Structures (<http://www.wals.info>).
- The Universals Archive (<http://typo.uni-konstanz.de/archive>).

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РЕДКОЛЛЕГИЯ:

академик РАН Н. Н. Казанский (отв. редактор);
 Prof. Dr. G. Blažienė (Vilnius), Prof. Dr. V. Blažek (Brno),
 к. филол. н. Н. А. Бондарко, д. филол. н. А. В. Грошева,
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