

Austronesian for ordinary speakers of Austronesian languages

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1. Background

People who live in areas where a number of languages are spoken often have a curiosity about languages. This is true of the students in the translation courses at Bishop Patteson Theological on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands where I sometimes have seventy or more students representing half as many languages. Most of these languages are Austronesian with the speakers being primarily from the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Even the few non-Austronesian languages represented have a high number of loans from their neighboring Austronesian languages.

As part of the course, I introduce them to the Austronesian family of languages pointing out their probable origin in Southeast Asia and their dispersal throughout much of the insular world. In order to enable them to see how their languages fit into the picture, I help them compare some of their words with words from Roglai, the Chamic language of Vietnam which I learned between 1960 and 1971, and to a lesser extent with words from Maguindanao, a Philippine language, on which I did some research in 1958.

It is unlikely that any of the students who are training to be village priests will become Austronesianists, but they do develop a greater appreciation of their Austronesian roots, how languages change, and the importance of language change to translation.

2. Pedagogical Steps

2.1 Discovering cognates of Roglai and Maguindanao words

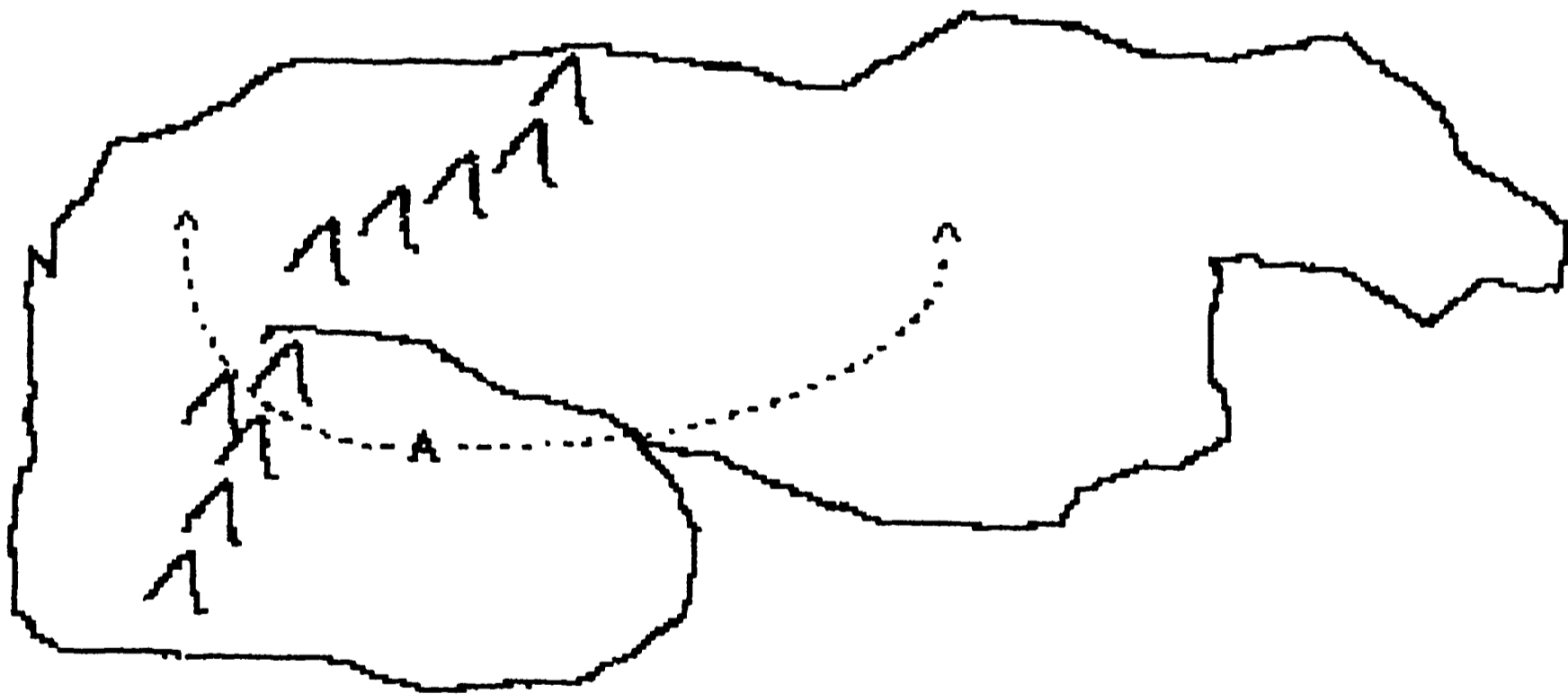
The initial step is listing words from Roglai (ROG) and Maguindanao (MAG) which have obvious cognates in many of the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu languages. I do this by giving the ROG and MAG words and then have the students try to figure out what the words mean. Usually someone in the class will have a word close enough that they can guess the meaning and even when they can't, most of them quickly perceive the similarity when given the meaning. For example:

	ROG	MAG	
(1)	dua	dua	'two'
(2)	limā	lima	'five, hand'
(3)	hudàc	hudang	'prawn'
(4)	tasiq	tasik	'ocean, sea'
(5)	patóu	watu	'stone'

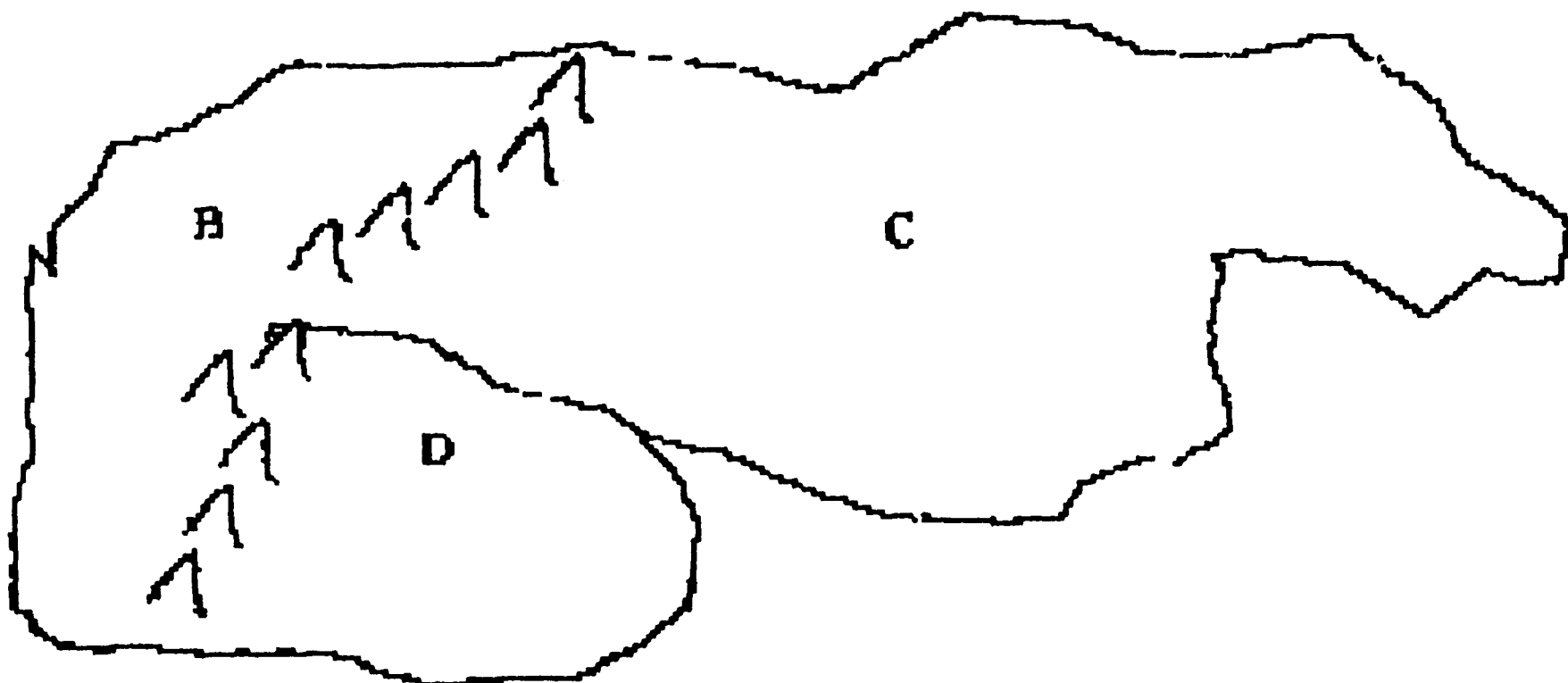
Then I have them give some of their own words which are cognate. Some of these are words which show up in names of places and ships, and even the Solomon Islands Pidgin word for prawn is *ura*. A well known village on Guadalcanal is *Rua Vatu* 'Two Stones'.

2.2 Introducing the notion of a proto-language and daughter languages

For this I use an illustration from Crowley (1987.15f.). He imagines an island with a chain of mountains across it in one direction and a river dividing it in another direction and language A spoken in an area bounded by the mountains on one side and the river on the other side:



Then over a period of time the speakers of language A for one reason or another expand into the areas beyond the mountain and beyond the river and eventually the three speech varieties change enough that B, C, and D become distinct languages:



Language A as such has ceased to exist and has been replaced by B, C, and D. Language A is the proto-language and the others are related daughter languages. One of the daughter languages may be more like the proto-language in some respects and another in other respects.

2.3 Seeing Indo-European as an example of a language family stemming from a proto-language

Because much of the development of the Indo-European family can be demonstrated from written records and because the school language of the students is English, Proto-Indo-European provides a good example of how a family of languages has evolved. For this I use the large chart of Indo-European in the front of my copy of the American Heritage Dictionary along with a world map but restrict discussion only to the main high level divisions of Indo-European and then how English has developed from Germanic in a way very similar in some respects to the insular situation above except, of course, that the precursor of English was supplanting languages already spoken in the British Isles.

2.4 Seeing the geographical distribution and basic classification of Austronesian

Armed with the notion of a proto-language and daughter languages and an example of how English along with some other well-known languages have evolved from Proto-Indo-European, we observe on a world map how the Austronesian speaking peoples over the centuries have moved out from Southeast Asia across various expanses of water to the far corners of the earth with each language changing in its new location. Only the most basic classification of the languages (Ross 1988:20) is looked at until we reach Proto-Oceanic and from there we look in a little more detail at the parts of Oceanic relevant to the students at the college. A very basic point I try to get across, following the classification of

Oceanic in Pawley and Ross (1995), is for each student to be able to recognize whether his/her own language is: a) Western Oceanic (WOC), b) Southeast Solomonic (SES), or c) North-central Vanatuan (NCV), d) Central Pacific (CP), or e) not Austronesian at all (usually classified as Papuan). The languages of all of the students represent one of these five categories, with the majority being Southeast Solomonic. There are always a few students from each of the other groups with the speakers of Central Pacific languages representing Polynesian outliers in the Solomon Islands.

The line dividing Western Oceanic from the groups further east is near the east end of Isabel Island in the Solomon Islands. (The line would have been between Santa Isabel and Gela except for the relatively recent migration of the Bugoto people from Gela.) Students from Santa Isabel and students from Gela and Guadalcanal quickly recognize the sharp break, but students from Malaita, Makira and the smaller islands in their area do not easily recognize the break since they can see the break between themselves on the one hand and Gela and Guadalcanal on the other hand. Polynesian students quickly recognize their subgroup, as do students from Vanuatu, none of whom are from the southern part of Vanuatu. The students from Savosavo, the Reef Islands, and Santa Cruz who speak non-Austronesian languages are fully aware that their languages differ from those of their neighbors. I do not focus so much on the differences among the subgroups, however, as looking at how they all come from a common origin (except, of course, for the few non-Austronesian languages).

2.5 Tracing sound changes

Here I give only a limited number of examples to show what we actually do in the class. In each case I give them the ROG form which provides a constant reminder that we are talking about a grouping much larger than Oceanic. The examples of specific languages below are primarily from words provided by the students. Proto-Austronesian (PAN) and Proto-Oceanic (POC) forms are from Ross (1988). For the most part the reflexes are listed with traditional spellings except that *ng* is used for the velar nasal and *ɣ* is used for the voiced velar fricative because these two sounds are written in various ways in the traditional spellings.

PAN **t* > POC **t*. The primary example used for this is PAN **tasik*, POC **tasik* 'sea'. The ROG reflex is *tasiq* 'sea' in which the *q* represents glottal stop. In most of the Oceanic languages the **t* is retained as a *t* as in *tahi* (Cheke Holo and Zabana [WOC]), Raga (NCV); *tasi* (Kasi and Poleo [SES]); *tathi* [tadi] (Vaturanga [SES]); *rotai* (Tikopian [CP]); *lokai* Lord Howe (CP); and *asi* (To'aba'ita [SES]). Only the languages of Malaita and Makira and smaller islands close to them show the loss of **t*. Another example is PAN **batu* > POC **patu* 'stone' (ROG *patou*) and in which the **t* is similarly reflected in the languages of the students as can be noted in the reflexes listed in the next point.

PAN **b* > POC **p*. For this the primary example used is PAN **batu* > POC **patu* 'stone' (ROG *patou*). The reflexes of **b* are more varied in the languages represented by the students and range from *vatu* (Polea, Vaturanga, and Kasi (SES), Raga and Ambae [NCV]) to *fatu* (Tikopean [CP]) to *fau* (To'aba'ita (SES) to *hau* (Sa'a and Arosi [SES]). It is at this stage the students get their first

picture of how words that look and sound quite different in a range of languages can still be from the same source as they see the **patu, vatu, fatu, fau, and hau* lined up together. The relatedness of *f-* and *h-* is further demonstrated by noting that Kwara'ae (SES) which lies between the area with *f-* and the area with *h-* has the two sounds in variation both in their own language and frequently also in their dialect of Solomon Islands Pijin as in *fea, hea* 'hair'.

In addition to the reflexes of PAN **b*, I also give them the reflexes of PAN **p* which falls together with PAN **b* in POC **p*. An example I use for this is PAN **panaq* 'to shoot' > POC *panaq* 'bow' (cf ROG *panāh* 'to shoot'). Since PAN **b* and PAN **p* have fallen together, the reflexes **p* in the Oceanic languages are identical with those of **b* and are not listed here.

PAN **k* > POC **k*. A primary example used here is PAN **kuCu* > POC **kutu* 'louse' (ROG *cutou* [kutəu]). Since PAN **C* and PAN **t* fall together in POC, the reflexes are the same in the Oceanic languages. Some of the reflexes of POC **kutu* are *gutu* (Blablanga (WOC) and Raga and Ambae [NCV]); *γutu* (Roviana and Zabana (WOC), Gela and Lengo (SES); *ngutu* (Poleo and Kasi [SES]); *kutu* (Tikopean [CP]); *'uku* (Ontong Java [CP]); *γuu* (Santa Ana and Santa Catalina (SES); and *'uu* (To 'aba'ita [SES]). A comparison of these reflexes with those of PAN **ikan* 'fish' and **kayu* 'tree' helps the students to see that the reflex of **k* is actually reflected by glottal stop in some of the languages such as Kwaio and To'aba'ita (SES) *i'a* 'fish' and *'ai* 'tree' as compared to Lengo and Bauro (both also SES) *iya* and *yai*.

The reflexes for 'louse' are another good example for the students to see how words that appear unrelated between two languages can be demonstrated to be from the same source when they can see **kutu, kutu, ngutu, γutu, γuu, 'uu*, and even *'uku* with *k* reflecting **t*.

PAN **l* > POC **l*. This reconstructed sound is included because it shows considerable variety even in closely related SES and CP languages. PAN **lima* > POC **lima* 'five' (ROG *limā*) is the primary example used here. The most common reflex is *lima* as in Poleo, Kasi, Vaturanga, To'aba'ita, 'Are'are, and Ulawa (all SES); in Raga (NCV); and in Roviana (WOC). Other reflexes are *glima* (Blablanga and Cheke Holo (WOC); *lime* (Sa'a (SES) and Ambae (NCV); *rima* (Tikopian), *nima* (Kwaio, 'Are'are and Oroha (SES) and Anuta (CP); *ngima* (Bellonese [CP]); and *nggima* (Rennellese [CP]). Rennellese and Bellonese are dialects of the same language.

2.6 Understanding the relevance of language change to translation

After the students have seen how languages change over time, it is an appropriate time to bring them back from the fascinating study of how their languages are related to the realities of how they are different, how they are continuing to change and the relevance of this to the translation process. There is a tendency among most of us to resist change and especially to language, even when we are helping to unwittingly perpetrate the changes ourselves. My students and other speakers of their languages are not exceptions. They want to preserve the "old" language. But in translation, the "old" language, whether it be lexical items

that are being lost or have been lost, or sounds that are changing or have changed, the younger generation will find a translation incomprehensible if “old” forms are used when not understood. It is easy to see the absurdity of trying to write in Proto-Oceanic or Proto-Austronesian, but it is much harder to see the need for writing for today’s generation. I continually remind my students with, “Language changes and you can’t stop it.”

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