

On Some Questions of Areal Linguistics
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There are three great categories of linguistic study practised which rely on the comparison of linguistic features and grammars. Typology consists in the achronic equation of features or relations within grammars; such an activity is clearly a first step in the exploration of human linguistic universals. By definition, then, typology can play only a limiting, but not an initiating or central, rôle in the idiosyncratic specifics of language history. The well known so-called comparative method establishes the descent and genetic (sub)classification of languages and families, and the same method may yield in part important aspects of the classification of dialects; no one will dispute that the results of the comparative method are diachronic or historical in the most obvious sense of these terms. There is then the type of study which has been called areal. Such phenomena were certainly noticed by 19th century scholars at least intuitively, but it was one of the several systematizing merits of the Pragueans to expound in an orderly and principled way the features, the affinités, characterizing a Sprachbund. Sapir insightfully concerned himself with such matters, but characteristically he treated these questions with deep erudition, with perceptive sensitivity, with the lucid logic of common-sense, and with his clear and graceful rhetoric, but never with closely definitional precision and inclusiveness. As he did with so many things, Sapir obviously perceived the essentials on an intuitive and cumulative basis drawn from his vast experience, much as did his learned contemporary Kristian Sandfeld, the classic codifier of linguistique balkanique. While the term diffusional is sometimes useful in this connexion, especially as being suggestive and informative to anthropologists, it is less distinctive within linguistics since it fails to exclude clearly borrowing or loans, which in principle we employ when we attribute the non-genetic feature to a unique source; the treatment of borrowing forms an essential and integral part of the reasoning called the comparative method. Yet while the comparative method is unquestionably an historical study, the field of areal linguistics is no less so; for it too is occupied with analyzing the result of specific, if multiple, linguistic events of the past. Both the comparative method and areal linguistics are historical disciplines--twin faces of diachronic linguistics, if you will.

It can easily be maintained, and I have made this claim in the past, that neither of these two can be properly pursued without the other. It is obvious that areal study requires the results of genetic comparison simply to remove the trivia of inheritance (e.g. the noun inflexions of Russian, Polish and Lithuanian, of French and Spanish, of Great Lakes Algonquian). It is not so obvious that a like prerequisite applies in order to account for the convergence founded on inheritance in the fact that Georgian and Armenian share stop systems distinguishing three orders, but for convergence arising from acculturation in the case of Ossetic, whose three orders must be derived from an older Iranian interstage with but two orders. Conversely, it is areal criteria that rescue us from improperly reconstruct-

ing (or being perplexed by) the European etyma for 'apple', the post-positional noun inflexions of Old Lithuanian or Tocharian, the syntax of Sanskrit *iti*, the vigesimal system of Western Europe, or the voiceless aspirates of Greek, for that matter. It is clear, for example, that we shall never make important progress with any variant of the genetic notion "Mosan" unless we take carefully into consideration at every step the intricate set of areal features that vex the Northwest region.

It is possible, of course, to conduct all three types of study on more or less the same body of material. Such a procedure is not easy and requires favourable circumstances and considerable prior knowledge, but can be highly instructive in pointing up the differences in the aims, scope, and results of the three methods. As a brief example we may consider the Western Romance languages. The shared detail which they display in their dichotomy of morphological form between present and preterite stems of verbs may be confidently credited to their genetic inheritance from Latin present and perfect stem formations. However the morphological dichotomy between present and past stems which Romance shares with Germanic, Baltic, Albanian, and Greek is a more complex issue; although these structures are inherited in the gross from common Indo-European, one suspects that in their survival in this configuration we are confronted here with an areal feature which may be crudely labelled Post-Roman European. The fact that Celtic, which has lived in some senses apart from the mainstream of Western Europe and which today largely lacks this morphological dichotomy, falls outside this areal isogloss tends to confirm this suspicion. Now the Western Romance languages also share the perfect with 'have'; but we know that this is not the inherited Latin of the beginnings of the Roman Empire. Moreover, it is shared with all Western Europe and the Balkans, but --a highly interesting detail--only with Breton within Celtic. Here is an areal feature of indubitable character, yet one which matches closely what was just adduced from the interestingly and differentially conserved patrimony of IE. It will be seen that all our statements up to this point reflect historical configurations of at least potential significance for Western Romance; let us now make just one or two observations of a typological nature. French, Portuguese, and Italian show a certain exploitation of the correlation of voicing in their spirants and affricates. This is certainly not inherited from Latin, nor is it of notable areal purport; it may however ultimately say something for the phonological typology of Eurasia, or even of the Old World. Conversely, modern Greek is unusual in showing the opposition of voicing in its spirants, but not in the underlying matrix for its stops or affricate(s). I do not at present know too well what to do with this last fact, but it is certainly bizarre for Europe and deserves not to be lost sight of. Similarly, we might easily adduce other observations that have no demonstrable or even suspected connexion with history.

From the above remarks it will now be clear that I was somewhat surprised and puzzled upon reading the phrase "areal-typological study" in the title of Joel Sherzer's wide-ranging and enterprising recent book (1976). Although in his beginning chapter he draws some

distinctions partly corresponding to the issues we have just passed in review--this in the context of rehearsing past themes of scholarship pertaining to his topic--his methodology seems to make far too little provision for these distinctions that I consider essential. Indeed his last chapter (15) attempts to extract some conclusions for provisional universals observable in North America; this portion of his study would lie properly within the realm of typology, as I see it. But here the conditions for the attempted study are far from adequate and dependable: The relevance of the sample is by no means guaranteed since it suffers from the identical shortcomings that are claimed below to apply to the data for purposes of areal determinations; moreover, these potential universals are insufficiently protected against the biases of common historical source.

It is true that in any plan of work one must start somewhere, and we must therefore not be too adverse in our criticism of Sherzer but rather thank him for having undertaken the laborious and rather daunting task of bringing so much material together. It is further true that in assembling any large collection of data for which the total ultimate assignment of relevant facts cannot be seen clearly in advance one has need of a sort of filing and retrieval system. But at the same time one must recognize that the starting categories may well not ultimately survive. Unfortunately Sherzer's parameters remain constant throughout. This can be hobbling for the purposes of typology and universals, as I have indicated above; but for areal, i.e. ultimately specific historical, questions it may be damaging in two main ways. The conclusions may result in the listing of a catalogue of trivia; and the starting parameters may well have missed the most interesting and crucially telltale characteristics.

Let us consider a couple of cases in point. We shall not waste time dwelling on some nugatory or superficial or obvious criticisms that could be made: null cases, e.g. lists of rareish consonants that fail widely to appear; shortcomings in matching data which has been originally collected and analyzed under non-comparable theories (although this is a grave and besetting problem in the whole enterprise); possible error or inferior quality in the source data.

Sherzer presents a liberal and recurring category which shows the number and arrangements of vowels in the language; this is a largely taxonomic display, presumably charting mainly surface output. Anyone who has contemplated the vowel systems of Europe (some the product of repeated analyses over the past century or so) will realize immediately what a puzzling and frustrating game this can be; one can sometimes tell blind what part of Europe a vowel plot comes from, but the cues are subtle and multiple, like the Gestalt of a friend's face. Moreover, for a notable Sprachbund we have nearly come to grief in the Balkans. One of the earliest claimed traits for that region was the mid-central unrounded vowel, such as is striking in Bulgarian, in Romanian, and in Tosk Albanian. Yet while Makedonski, in some ways the most "Balkan" of languages, largely lacks it, it can be shown to have been there at an earlier historical date; moreover, Greek fails to show it. Finally, although Tosk Albanian is characterized by the stressed vowel ě, the

more conservative vocalism of Geg (and to some degree the intermediately underlying vowels of Tosk also) comprises i y u e o a (y is lacking in the Balkans outside Albanian) and the nasal vowels (not found elsewhere in the Balkans) î ŷ û ê â, yet excludes stressed ë. Pavle Ivić has pointed incisively to the difficulty in drawing compact borders to a Sprachbund; the configuration is much more that of a spectrum. Yet here we have a multiple offender in Albanian, which in other ways seems to lie near the heart of the Balkan Sprachbund. A gross inventorizing would never catch this important textural aspect.

Let us turn now to the Northwest Coast. It is by now well known that a limited area bridging Wakashan, Salishan and Chemakuan shows the remarkable trait of lacking nasals and instead surfaces voiced stops of the same articulatory point as the cognate nasals of related languages show; moreover, only a part of each of these three stocks is affected. This was first clarified in the literature by Mary Haas in a lucid and valuable footnote (1969:112, fn.16), and was later elaborated by Laurence and Terry Thompson. Sherzer is aware of this, as his side remark (1976:13) and his footnote (1976:263) make clear/imply. But his Procrustean set of parameters (68) forbid him from exploiting this valuable piece of knowledge, perhaps one of the most remarkable of its sort that can be marshalled. Worse than that, his preconceived plan and provision for stop series leads him to miscode this clearly asymmetric development as a three-stop series (59), with a consequent carry-over of this misanalysis in his conclusions (230). Besides this, the lack of depth shown by such an approach loses further important shadings: Quileute lacks nasals entirely, yet uses (or rather used) them as a speech style in the utterances of the witch Dask'iya; Twana lacks them for the most part, yet in reduplication they do actually surface (e.g. in diminutives). This is not idle detail; it lends essential focus. Finally, Quileute has an excessively rare lone g; this must be correlated with the fact that Clallam is practically unique in showing (68) a velar nasal.

These last issues discussed point clearly to a simple fact. Such areal questions can be approached meaningfully and fruitfully only if they are treated in specific terms for what they are--the results of developments with historical depth and specificity.

References

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- Sherzer, Joel. 1976. An areal-typological study of American Indian languages north of Mexico. Amsterdam: North-Holland.