

2.16.2. POSSIBLE WIDER CONNECTIONS OF PAPUAN LANGUAGES: TORRES STRAIT AND NORTH AUSTRALIA

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2.16.2.1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

It had been long believed that Torres Strait constituted a clear linguistic boundary between the Australian and Papuan language areas, with the western islands of Torres Strait containing an Australian language, Mabuig, and the eastern ones a Papuan language, Miriam (Ray 1907). Only towards the mid-sixties, attention was beginning to be drawn to the somewhat un-Australian phonology of Mabuig, and to the fact that a portion of its basic vocabulary was clearly of Miriam origin and therefore Papuan (O'Grady, Voegelin and Voegelin 1966). Earlier, Capell (1956) had pointed out the un-Australian features of the phonologies of some Cape York Peninsula languages, implying the possibility of un-Australian influence on these languages. Hale (1964, 1966) could demonstrate that the un-Australian characteristics of these languages were due to their phonologies undergoing strong changes from a normal Australian sound system which he reconstructed. However, he did not discuss the possible causes of these sound changes.

No attempt had been made until recently (Wurm 1972a) to study the possible influence of Australian languages upon Papuan languages of the south coast of the New Guinea mainland.

In Wurm 1972a, the author investigated possible mutual influences and connections of Papuan and Australian languages.

2.16.2.2. THE LANGUAGES OF TORRES STRAIT

Of the two languages mentioned above in 2.16.2.1., Mabuig is unquestionably basically Australian in much of its structure and a part of its basic vocabulary, and has been classified as constituting a

separate group within the extensive Pama-Nyungan Family of the Australian Phylum (O'Grady, Voegelin and Voegelin 1966; Wurm 1972b).

However, some features of its phonology are un-Australian: all Australian languages have at least four, but more frequently five or six, linear distinctions with stops and nasals, with the number of the (oral) linear distinctions with stops and nasals identical in a given language. At the same time, in the great majority of Australian languages, only one series of stop phonemes is present. Many of them have two or several linear distinctions with l-sounds, only three vowel phonemes and almost all of them at least two distinct r-phonemes (O'Grady, Voegelin and Voegelin 1966; Wurm 1972b).

However, the phonemic inventory of Mabuag is as follows:

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|-----|---|--|---|---|
| p | ɟ | (t) | k | | i | u |
| b | ɟ | (d) | g | | e | o |
| m | | n | ŋ | | | a |
| | | s | | | | |
| | | z | | | | |
| | | l | | | | |
| | | r | | | | |
| w | | | y | | | |

The phonemic contrast between the interdental and dental stops was only discovered in 1970 by T.J. Klokeid (Bani and Klokeid 1971). The phonemes t and d are statistically very rare and the nature of the phoneme inventory is indicative of the possibility of the incomplete adoption of an Australian phonological system by speakers of a non-Australian, presumably Papuan, language.

The most striking feature differentiating the Mabuag phoneme inventory from the usual Australian ones is the difference in the number of linear distinctions of stops and nasals, with the number of linear distinctions observable with nasals in Mabuag being below the Australian minimum. From a statistical point of view, it shows a tendency towards only three linear distinctions, with the presence of four with stops constituting a very rare phenomenon. This picture, together with the appearance of two series of stop phonemes, of a phonemic contrast between voiced and voiceless fricative phonemes at the same point of articulation (a feature absent from Australian languages in which even the presence of fricative phonemes as such is quite rare), of only one l and one r phoneme and of five vowel phonemes, makes the Mabuag phoneme inventory look quite similar to that of a phonologically simple Papuan language -

in fact, it is very close to that of the neighbouring Papuan Miriam language which has the following phoneme inventory:

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| p | t | k | i | u |
| b | d | g | e | o |
| m | n | | a | |
| | s | | | |
| | z | | | |
| | ɻ | | | |
| | r | | | |
| w | | y | | |

Apart from the statistically rare and low-productive phonological contrast between t and t , and g and d in Mabuiag, the only difference between the two inventories is the presence of η in Mabuiag which is absent from Miriam. The presence of an η phoneme is, at the same time, a universal feature of Australian languages. However, the appearance of an η phoneme and of three or even four linear distinctions with both stops and nasals is not unknown in Papuan languages: in fact, it is a characteristic of the majority of the languages of the (sub-phylum-level) Trans-Fly Stock of the Trans-New Guinea Phylum (see Wurm 1971; also 2.6.1. in this volume) which occupies the part of the New Guinea mainland closest to Torres Strait and Cape York Peninsula, and to which Miriam also belongs. It is of course, conceivable that this characteristic of these Papuan languages may be due to Australian influence: some Trans-Fly Stock languages, e.g. Gidra of the Eastern Trans-Fly Family in it, have phoneme inventories which show some Australian characteristics along with un-Australian features. The absence of such Australian-type features from Miriam which is also a member of the Eastern Trans-Fly Family, is notable and its phonology is quite simple in contrast to that of Gidra and other members of the Family. This may well have resulted from Miriam having been exposed to the influence of the phonologically quite simple Southern Kivai language, its geographical neighbour, which has influenced it very strongly on the lexical level. This Kivai influence appears to have led to a partial breakdown and simplification of its phonological system, resulting in one which is largely shared by the structurally and lexically predominantly Australian Mabuiag whose phonology may well have been originally that of Miriam.

In general, the Mabuiag phoneme inventory seems to be more un-Australian in its basic characteristics than those of the phonologically

highly aberrant Cape York Peninsula languages. In spite of differences in detail and on the surface, the phoneme inventories of the latter show all the basic features of Australian phonologies, such as identity of the number of linear distinctions with stops and nasals, and the presence of at least two distinct r-phonemes. However, the Mabuag differences are fundamental and deep-going, and this and the Papuan nature of some of its basic vocabulary makes it less Australian, and more Papuan, than the Cape York Peninsula languages which look quite un-Australian at first glance, but whose phonological aberrations can be explained in terms of regular changes from a standard Australian phonology, and in which these changes do not affect the basic principles of Australian phonologies. At the same time, their basic vocabularies are largely Australian.

The Papuan basic vocabulary items in Mabuag pose some problems. Much of them are clearly Miriam, but the close relationship of that language to one other member of the Eastern Trans-Fly Family to which it belongs may perhaps obscure the possibly more immediate connection of some Mabuag lexical elements with those of other member languages of that family. Connections of some Mabuag words with lexical elements of languages of other families of the Trans-Fly Stock such as the Kiwai and Pahoturi River Families (Wurm 1971; see also 2.6.1. in this volume) are also possible. However, the largely Miriam-type nature of Mabuag phonology makes it seem likely that the major source of the Papuan element in it is Miriam.

Regarding Miriam itself, it appears to be structurally a typical Papuan language and, as has recently been established by the present writer, a member of the Eastern Trans-Fly Family (of the sub-phylum-level Trans-Fly Stock of the Trans-New Guinea Phylum) to which, in addition to Miriam, also Bine, Gidra and Gizra belong (Wurm 1971; see also 2.6.1. in this volume). Structurally and lexically, Gizra is the closest relative of Miriam. The simplified nature of Miriam phonology when compared with the other members of the Eastern Trans-Fly Family, and which is most probably attributable to Southern Kiwai influence, has already been mentioned above.

Apart from some Mabuag loan-words of Australian origin, Australian influence in Miriam is negligible in contrast to the quite strong Papuan influence in Mabuag.

2.16.2.3. POSSIBLE PAPUAN LINGUISTIC INFLUENCE ON CAPE YORK PENINSULA LANGUAGES

In 2.16.2.2. above, mention was made of the seemingly quite extensive, but in reality not deep-going, nature of the deviations from the

Australian standard, of phonologically aberrant Australian languages of Cape York Peninsula. The languages of four groups in the Cape York Peninsula area are especially involved in this, i.e. those of the Northern Pama and Central Pama Subgroups of the Pama-Maric Group and those of the Lamalamic and Mbabaramic Groups (Wurm 1972b).

The question may be raised as to what may have caused the strong phonological changes in these languages. In the light of the very high level of phonological uniformity observable in Australian languages (O'Grady, Voegelin and Voegelin 1966, Wurm 1972b) which may well be attributable to the fact that most Australian languages have apparently been free from outside linguistic influence for thousands of years, it seems plausible to suggest that the far-reaching phonological changes in the Cape York Peninsula languages referred to are due to outside linguistic influence and contact, and it seems logical to look to New Guinea and Papuan linguistic influence as the source of this. That influence from New Guinea has been prevalent in the Cape York Peninsula area seems evident from the racial appearance of Cape York Peninsula Aborigines, and linguistic influence may well have come the same way.

In trying to look for the exact origin of Papuan linguistic influence in Cape York Peninsula, Miriam and the languages of the Trans-Fly area of New Guinea appear to be obvious sources. However, very few of the phonological features of present-day Cape York Peninsula languages show any evident similarity to those of these Papuan languages, except for the appearance of fricative and aspirated stop allophones. At the same time, the un-Australian syllable patterns observable in present-day Cape York Peninsula languages are not directly comparable to those of the Papuan languages mentioned. When taking all this into account, and remembering the fact that the assumed outside, and probably Papuan, linguistic influence has not destroyed the fundamental Australian nature of the Cape York Peninsula languages, it may be proposed that this influence has been relatively superficial despite its pronounced surface effects, and the precise point or points of origin of it in New Guinea cannot, at this juncture, be even suggested. It may well be that this influence has been brought about by very small groups of, perhaps refugee, Papuan speakers - or even only a few individuals - from diverse regions in or near the Trans-Fly area who got into lasting contact with small groups of speakers of various Australian languages in Cape York Peninsula in comparatively recent times.

2.16.2.4. AUSTRALIAN LINGUISTIC INFLUENCE IN NEW GUINEA

The possibility of influence of Cape York Peninsula languages on languages in the adjacent parts of southern New Guinea had not been

investigated until 1972, though the question of the possibility of linguistic and cultural connections or similarities between Cape York Peninsula or Australia as a whole and parts of New Guinea has been raised, but not looked into in detail (see 2.16.3.1.).

The present writer (Wurm 1972a) was the first to investigate whether or not evidence of Australian linguistic influence from Cape York Peninsula could be found in Papuan languages of the Trans-Fly region. The interesting result of this was the discovery of a number of similarities between forms reconstructed by Hale (as listed in Sommer 1969) for a number of Cape York Peninsula languages and referred to by him as proto-Paman, and lexical items in languages of the Eastern Trans-Fly Family, especially the Gizra language. Some of these items in the Eastern Trans-Fly Family languages are obviously Australian loans which have entered these languages at a point of time antedating the phonological changes mentioned above in 2.16.2.3. as suffered by Cape York Peninsula languages as a result of probably Papuan linguistic influence. In the case of other items, the situation is not so clear. One of the most striking cases of proto-Paman loanwords in languages of the Eastern Trans-Fly Family is the Gizra word for *man, person* which is pa:m. This is clearly proto-Paman *pama = *person*. The other three languages of the Eastern Trans-Fly Family have different, but interrelated, words for *man, person*, i.e. Gizra rēga, Bine rorie, and Miriam le.

Other apparent proto-Paman loanwords of the Eastern Trans-Fly Family are:

Proto-Paman *kuman = *thigh*, Gizra and Gizra gɔm-kak, whereas Bine has waw and Miriam wakel.

Proto-Paman *tʷulpi = *belly*, Gizra dupi-war. Gizra has kɔ:m; Miriam kem and Bine amuge which appear to be derived from Proto-Paman *kampu = *stomach*.

Proto-Paman *muyu = *husband*, Gizra myære, Miriam ki-miar, whereas Gizra has rivi and Bine rorie (= *man*).

Proto-Paman *ŋaRa = *enter*, Gizra tubə-ŋeri, whereas Miriam has bodari.

Proto-Paman *pura = *pull*, Gizra a-mura, Miriam -muda and Bine sugre-mali-ti.

Proto-Paman *yaŋan = *hair of head*, Gizra ar-ŋajɲ, whereas Gizra has məkŋez, Bine edingali and Miriam mus or ed.

Less obvious Proto-Paman loanwords may be:

Proto-Paman *ka:pa = *flood, heavy rain*, Gizra ŋu:pa, Bine ŋu:pe, whereas Gizra has piro and Miriam imer, all meaning *rain*.

Proto-Paman *tʷa:ra or *tʷa:wa = *mouth*, Gizra ta:l, Miriam te, Gizra tu:mor and Bine tage.

Proto-Paman *ma = *take* - also Common Australian **ma - Gizra pa, whereas Gidra has eət, Bine eate and Miriam ais.

A few Common Australian proto-forms which are not found in Proto-Paman seem to be present as loanwords in Trans-Fly languages, e.g.

Common Australian **kuli = *hear* (proto-Paman *ŋami), Gizra ar-kuru, Gidra ut-kun, Bine ati-ize and Miriam asoli. It is however conceivable that Gizra ar-kuru is derived from proto-Paman *kuRu = *eye* rather than from Common Australian **kuli.

Common Australian **kampu = *egg*, Gizra ur-gu:p, Gidra kœp, Bine ku, whereas Miriam has wer. The proto-Kiwai form (Wurm 1951) is *kikopu, Agöb (Pahoturi River Family, Trans-Fly Stock) has kœp and Aturu (Tirio Family, Trans-Fly Stock) has lo-kumo. (There is a difference in the traditions of Common Australian **kampu = *egg* and proto-Paman *kampu = *stomach* mentioned above.) At the same time, similar and probably connected, forms are found in other parts of New Guinea, mostly meaning *fruit*. In many parts of New Guinea, either one lexeme means both *egg* and *fruit* or items meaning *egg* in one language are cognate with items meaning *fruit* in other languages. So, for instance, in Huli (West Central Family, East New Guinea Highlands Stock, Trans-New Guinea Phylum (see 2.7.2.2. in this volume)) haba(na) is *fruit*, in Kamano (East Central Family, same stock) əmu = *egg*, in Kuman (Chimbu proper) (Central Family, same stock) koamuglo = *egg*.

This raises the problem of the presence, in a number of widely scattered Papuan languages, of lexical items which look like (loan?) cognates of Common Australian or proto-Paman items. One of these is Common Australian **ŋamaŋ = *breast* (proto-Paman *ŋama/ŋamu = *mother, breast*) which has apparent cognates in many Papuan languages, e.g. Trans-Fly Stock: Gizra ŋyœm, Gidra ŋo:m, Bine ŋame, Miriam nem (ŋ is absent from Miriam), Coastal Kiwai amo; East New Guinea Highlands Stock: Kuman (Chimbu proper) əmu, Kamano ami; Central and South New Guinea Stock: Duna amu, Kaeti am, Syiagha ome; Suki-Gogodala Stock: Gogodala omo; Finisterre Stock: Rawa nomo, Gusan nom; Huon Peninsula Stock: Ono ŋamu, Dedua namu; Binandere Stock: Binandere ami; Sentani Stock: Sentani nim; etc. All these languages are members of the very large Trans-New Guinea Phylum (see 2.5. in this volume). However, probable cognates are also encountered in languages not related to this phylum, e.g. Monumbo (Torricelli Phylum, see 2.12. in this volume) nimaŋ. The fact that, as may not be clear from the few selected examples given above, diachronically later forms such as forms without initial nasal predominate in areas which are geographically more distant from Cape York Peninsula than others, may suggest that these forms are in fact Australian loanwords which have entered New Guinea from Cape York Peninsula and spread widely through New Guinea.

In addition to the lexical phenomena discussed above, the appearance of an ŋ phoneme in the majority of the languages of the Trans-Fly Stock (it is absent from Miriam and the languages of the Kiwai Family which are the geographical neighbours of Miriam) may perhaps be the result of Australian influence: it is not a common phoneme in Papuan languages. The same may apply to the comparatively frequent presence of palatal stop and palatal nasal phonemes in Trans-Fly Stock languages: these are also rather rare in Papuan languages in general. Also, the identity of the number of linear distinctions with stop and nasal phonemes in some of these languages which results from the presence of ŋ and palatalized stop and palatalized nasal phonemes in them, gives a part of their phoneme inventories an Australian appearance.

2.16.2.5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

From what has been stated above in 2.16.2.1.-4., it appears that, apart from a few tenuous lexical and other links which remain unexplained at this stage, connections between Papuan and Australian languages across Torres Strait can be attributed to mutual linguistic influence and the adoption of loanwords. It seems that the influences have gone in both directions, with a northward Australian linguistic influence antedating a scattered southward Papuan linguistic influence. At the same time, speakers of a Papuan language migrating to the western islands of Torres Strait seem to have adopted an Australian language while maintaining much of their Papuan phonological habits and some of their Papuan basic vocabulary.

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