



BOOK REVIEW: JOHN U. WOLFF, *PROTO-AUSTRONESIAN PHONOLOGY WITH GLOSSARY*, VOLS. I-II. ITHACA, SOUTHEAST ASIA PROGRAM PUBLICATIONS, CORNELL UNIVERSITY, 2010, XIX + 1146 PP.

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John Wolff's *Proto-Austronesian Phonology with Glossary (PAPWG)* is a daunting 1146 pages, spread across two large paperback volumes. The stated intention was originally to update Dempwolff's *Vergleichende Lautlehre des austronesischen Wortschatzes* (1934-38), along the way evaluating the additions and modifications proposed by Dyen and others. However, Wolff states that research from the 1970s and 80s, particularly from R. Blust and S. Tsuchida, meant that basic assumptions made by Dempwolff and Dyen could no longer be supported and therefore "it would be necessary to rethink each and every reconstruction" (xi). He therefore uses detailed data from 37 "reference" languages along with other available lexical data from numerous dictionaries and the online Austronesian Comparative Dictionary (Blust & Trussel in progress) to propose an inventory for PAN of 19 consonants, 4 vowels and 4 diphthongs. It contains 292 pages of reconstructed etyma (pp. 737-1029),¹ along with historical/phonological sketches of the 37 reference languages (pp.69-736), and numerous finder-lists ("registers") including English (1031-1043), Blust's ACD (pp.1043-1049), Dempwolff's original list (pp.1049-1053), and each of the 37 reference languages (pp.1053-1119).

Not being a historical linguist, I have elected to review this work from the standpoint of a Austronesianist with a particular areal interest (in my case Sulawesi) who wants to learn more about Austronesian historical phonology and Austronesian history in general. It is obvious from reading this work (and the reactions to it) that Wolff is arguing against 'the field' to some extent, rejecting several key distinctions made by Dempwolff and those who followed him (characterised by Blust in his review (2010:562) as the "standard view"). While a fresh start and critical re-evaluation of a field are often valuable, it must be said that the reviews by Blust (2010), Adelaar (2012), and Mahdi (to appear) have argued rather persuasively against aspects of Wolff's analysis. In particular, Adelaar pointed out errors in Wolff's analysis of Malagasy, Mahdi concentrated on the inadequate treatment of loanwords and inconsistent correspondences generally, and Blust had criticisms that can only be described as 'wide-ranging'. Since I do not really have a horse in this race, I will simply attempt to evaluate the book at face value inasmuch as that is possible.

One of the first impressions is unfortunately a negative one. I can only conclude that the work was not proofread, as typographical errors, idiosyncratic misspellings, unnecessary archaisms, and plain errors of fact abound, beginning in the first paragraph of the acknowledgements which refers to "S. Tuschida" (p.xi). Shortly thereafter are some references to the "Australian subcontinent" (p.3). Simply looking at the Sulawesi sections, we have the following odd versions of language names: "Tombolu" (Tombulu), "Macassarese" (Makassar or Makassarese), "Salayar" (usually spelled Selayarese or Selayar, ethnonym Silajara).² We also find the linguist "Hassan (Hasan) Basri" from "Hassanuddin (Hasanuddin) University"³ (p.359), as well as F.S Watuseke "who compiled a manuscript dictionary" of Tondano (p.299). While many of the mistakes are trivial, they combine to give an unprofessional impression and I think it fair to say that for a work whose usefulness depends on the accuracy of the etyma, it is alarmingly full of errors.

Another criticism concerns the structure of the work. Nearly half of the work (667 pages) is devoted to chapters in which sound changes are tracked from pAN into 37 "reference" languages, these being sub-grouped rather erratically into 6 sections as "Formosan", "Philippine", "Kalimantan Malagasy and Malay", "Old Javanese Toba Batak and Moken", "Eastern Indonesia", and "Oceanic". In general these chapters make

¹ The exact number of etyma does not appear to be given in the work. Sagart in his foreword (p.xv) gives "c. 2000", Blust in his review (2010:560) gives it as "around 1,760".

² To be fair the ACD also has the unexplained variant 'Salayar'.

³ Actually to the best of my knowledge Hasan Basri is at Tadulako University and has been for some time.

interesting reading and it is obvious that a huge amount of effort and scholarship have gone into them. However, as has been noted by Mahdi (to appear), the section which is labelled ‘Development of the Philippine languages’ only discusses one actual language of the Philippines (Tagalog), with Chamorro and six languages of Sulawesi filling the rest of the section. While Ratahan, Tondano and probably Chamorro fit within the category of Philippine-**type** languages, this is much less arguable for Pamona, Muna, and (particularly) Bugis and Selayarese. And while this is primarily an error of nomenclature, it does raise a more serious problem concerning the choice of the 37 “reference” languages, for which the primary consideration appears to have been whether or not the author had “some connection with the speech community” (p.19). While I am always happy to see Sulawesi made prominent, the over-representation of Sulawesi in the reference languages is simply an accident of the author’s personal history rather than the result of a principled selection. Borneo and Sumatra are hardly represented (two and one languages respectively), while only six Oceanic languages are discussed, of which two (Tongan and Samoa) seem similar enough not to justify separate inclusion in a work of this nature – at least not at the expense of languages of Vanuatu, New Caledonia, etc.

More particular criticisms relate to the discussion of the South Sulawesi languages. For Selayarese (‘Salayar’, pp.359-382) Wolff had only a partial lexicon and thus he filled in missing lexical items with Makassarese (‘Macassarese’) words from Cense’s dictionary (1979, though he has cited it as Cense 1994).⁴ This may have seemed reasonable as Selayarese is often considered a dialect of Makassarese, but actually the two languages are rather divergent lexically – so this is a bit like reaching for a Romanian dictionary to fill in missing Spanish words. Without (I might add) giving any indication precisely which words come from which language.

A further criticism can be levelled at his discussion of Bugis (pp.335-358). Wolff claims that Bugis ‘spread widely from its original homeland in central Sulawesi and has been adopted by populations speaking other languages, many of which are now lost’ (p.335). He repeats the claim on the following page, where he also rejects the existence of a South Sulawesi subgroup (because Bugis “originated in central Sulawesi and spread south”, and he ascribes changes and irregularities to substratal influences and borrowings (p.336). However there is little detail as to what these influences and borrowings might have been, other than rather vague speculations such as “The /u/ [in *uttu* ‘knee’] probably developed through contact with a language or dialect that assimilated *e to /u/ in the following syllable” (p.341). While the idea of a central Sulawesi homeland for Bugis (and presumably the other South Sulawesi languages) requires consideration, seeing as this analysis has rejected a well-established SS subgroup, simple assertion without evidence simply cannot be considered sufficient as there are other plausible scenarios.

Another indication of Wolff’s perhaps low bar for evidence is given in the discussion of Pamona *qagan ‘name’ > ngaya ‘kind’, where he notes that they do not seem to have a semantic connection, but gives the curious comment that Adriani proposed the connection and “since he was a solid scholar with a deep knowledge of the languages of the area, we have to take seriously his view that there is a connection in the meanings” (p.330).

All in all PAPWG is a rather mixed bag. The reconstructions are welcome as an alternative view to those presented in the ACD, and the finder lists are very useful (though in my opinion they would be even more useful as an online resource with relevant hyperlinks rather than a cumbersome two-volume printed book). The sketches of the reference languages at their best capture the excitement of the detective work that goes into comparative linguistics, and manage to make it seem real in a way that is all too rare in the field. And yet, the sloppiness of the editing and the patchiness of the argumentation let it down and it is hard to unreservedly recommend it.

References

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- Mahdi, Waruno. Forthcoming. Review of J. U. Wolff, Proto-Austronesian phonology with glossary, vols I and II, 2010. To appear in *Archipel*.

⁴ In the bibliography it can be found in the dictionary section under “Macassarese”, with the correct year of publication, but with the place of publication given the strange hybrid Anglo-Dutch form “s’ Gravehague”.