Phonosemantic variation and the STEDTische Dämmerung
James A. Matisoff
University of California, Berkeley

Abstract

Every spoken language is rife with variation on both the phonological and semantic planes, some of it rule-governed and some of it sporadic. Thus, despite the qualms of certain extreme neogrammarians, we must assume that this is true for proto-languages as well.

Phonosemantic variation in Tibeto-Burman vs. Indo-European
--Patterns of phonological variation in TB [JAM 2003 (491-534); 2008 (xxxv-xxxviii)].
--STEDT’s “pan-allofamic formulas” (PAF’s). Various notational devices.
--Clarification of STEDT’s reconstructions, especially with respect to prefixes.
--Striking examples: SUCK/BREAST; TONGUE/LICK; FIRE/BRIGHT.
--Language-internal morphological processes vs. borrowing between related languages.
--The concept of word family: blood relatives vs. adoptive ones.
--Variation vs. proto-form stuffing.

--The more structured morphophonological patterns of variation in Indo-European, and their unstructured outcomes in modern languages.
--Reflexes of *wed- x *wod- x *ud- WATER in Modern English.
--Reflexes of *stA- STAND in Modern English.
--Indo-European “root extensions” or “augments”.

--Semantic variation
--Much less structured than phonological variation, in all language families.
--Pioneering article by Benedict (1939).
--STEDT’s “metastatic flowcharts”.
--Eng. black and blank: from the same PIE root.

--We Tibeto-Burmanists need not apologize to Indo-Europeanists, or be envious of them.

The end/culmination of the STEDT project, 1987-2014.
--Thousands of reconstructed roots, both at PTB and subgroup levels, along with Chinese comparanda.
--The ongoing process of root rectification: acceptance vs. revision vs. rejection.
--Final product: a 3000 pp. printed volume (only a few copies for libraries!), to be made generally available electronically.
--As STEDT goes off into the twilight, there are hopes that it will continue in more 21st century way. Creation of an international consortium: the interactive “root canal”.

Philosophical ruminations
--Treatment of errors: the “gotcha attitude” vs. collegiality.

***