In conclusion I thank you for the kind support you have given me in the Chair during the past year, and for the patience you have shewn in listening to this long and I fear, wearisome address. It is longer than I meant it to be, but not long enough I fear to include all the scientific work which has been done in the Colony during the past year. It now only remains for your President in vacating this chair to welcome heartily the incoming President Professor Warren, to ask for him a continuance of that kindly support which we have always given our Chairman in the past, and to express the hope that in the coming year our Society may be even more successful than it has been in the past.

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ON THE IMPORTANCE AND NATURE OF THE OCEANIC LANGUAGES.


[Read before the Royal Society of N.S. Wales, June 1, 1892.]

I.—The linguistic value of the Oceanic Languages.

The languages of Oceania afford material of much value to the Ethnologist in the discussion of some of the most interesting and intricate problems of comparative Philology. Whether we regard the number and variety of dialects, their mutual relationship, origin, or influence upon each other, we find in the island region an assemblage of facts to which no other family (or families) of speech can show an exact parallel.

In America or Africa, for example, the number of languages and dialects is perhaps fully as great as in Oceania, but the phenomena presented are of a different nature. We there find languages spoken in extensive regions by large communities.
Unlimited facilities for intercourse in war and peace exist, with consequent mingling of speech and customs. In Oceania, on the other hand, the languages are those of insular populations, separated, it is true, in many cases by narrow channels, but yet so separated as to be prevented from enjoying the close intercourse to which a stream or a range of hills would be no barrier. In the continental and insular regions the languages affect one another in different ways. "Languages of a continent touch each other at their circumferences and may or may not graduate into each other. Languages of an archipelago are definitely bounded. We always know where their circumference is limited. The limit is the sea and the sea is mute."* In America or Africa the contact of languages would thus affect only the outlying portions of a large territory. The inhabitants of the central region, surrounded on all sides by people akin to themselves in speech, race and religion, may be supposed to have retained in its purest form the characteristics of the original language and race. In Oceania the tendency is in a different direction. Except on the larger islands the territory occupied by kindred tribes is small, and we may conceive the original tongue broken up into distinct portions. If another race or language varying in any degree, nay, even another dialect of the same language be introduced, it affects the whole of the language spoken in a particular district and not merely a portion of it. This process being repeated ad infinitum, the result is a mixed language differing in many respects from its neighbours and often resembling that of distant islands. Hence arises the peculiar difficulty in ascertaining the origin of any particular language of Oceania. The continuous introduction of dialects from all parts renders it well-nigh impossible to discover the original speech, or even to determine whether the languages, as now found, are superposed upon older or more primitive forms of speech.

In another respect the languages of Oceania are of importance. They afford material by which the psychologist may study the

* R. G. Latham—Comparative Philology, p. 4.
working of the human mind in its early condition. In the eloquent
words of Farrar*—"It is these (uncultivated) languages more
than any others which are likely to throw a faint glimmer of light
over what may be called 'that Eocene period of the human mind
which precedes the dawn of all history'—for which, therefore,
indispensable as it is for our ethnic and zoological, nay, even for
our political and humanitarian speculations, all other lights are
wanting. In fact, the more bizarre the method of the language,
the more impoverished are its resources, the more miserable the
contrivances it adopts, the more nakedly it displays the crude
infantile expedients of a primitive speech, the more forcible the
contrast it presents to all the languages with which we are familiar,
the more entirely is it worthy of our philological examination. For
after all it is, and must necessarily be, an instrument, and an
adequate instrument, for the expression of human needs, even if
those needs are at their lowest; and a dim reflex of human intel-
ligence, even if that intelligence be of the meanest and least
developed type."

II.—The stage of development in which the Oceanic tongues are found.

A question of some interest in the discussion of the Oceanic
languages relates to the stage of development in which they are
now found. In most works on general philology, they are placed
among languages of the agglutinating type. But if we accept the
common definition of agglutination, as the placing of unaltered
roots side by side, the term will only partially apply. Many words
are no doubt formed in this way, but the method is not the most
prevalent one in the island languages, and therefore cannot be
regarded as determining the type. It would be better to adopt
the classification of Steinthal and describe them as uncultivated
languages of the inflectional type, expressing the modifications of
meaning by prefixed particles and suffixes.* In the Australian
tongues these are plainly apparent, but the practice of writing
the modifying particles apart from the root in many of the other
languages tends to obscure the fact of inflection, and makes the

* Farrar—Language and Languages, p. 391.
particle appear as a separate word. But when, as in Tanna and Eromanga, the formative particle is represented by a single letter and cannot be written otherwise than in combination with the root, the inflectional character of the language is apparent.

We may even compare the structure of a verbal form in Tanna with that found in the classical languages. Thus the singular imperfect indicative of the verb 'to say' is in Tanna:

1. yak-am-ani  
2. nuk-am-ani  
3. t-am-ani

and in Greek and Latin:

1. ε-φη-γ  
2. ε-φη-ς  
3. ε-φη-

1. dic-eba-m  
2. dic-eba-s  
3. dic-eba-t

Here the Tanna personal prefixes yak, nuk, t correspond to the Greek suffixes γ, ζ, ε and the Latin m, s, t. The Tanna tense sign am corresponds in meaning to the Greek augment ε and the Latin eba. The only difference in the three languages is in the position of the roots ani, φη and dic. The Tanna yak-am-ani, nuk-am-ani, t-am-ani are equivalent to 'I, thou or he said,' without the personal pronouns ian, ik, te (demonstrative) being expressed, just as in the classical tongues. In all three languages however the pronouns may be used to emphasize the person.

As also the Gaelic ba, 'he was' shows the Latin eba used as a separate word, so we find the Tanna am, represented by m (with varying vowel) used in more than one language of the New Hebrides as the sign of an action combined with a pronominal idea. In Malekula mi riy, and Espiritu Santo (Malo) mo viti are equivalent to "he speaks."

The descriptions of the highly inflected languages of the Aryan family given by Schlegel and Bopp are equally true of the Oceanic. Schlegel's words are:—"Le merveilleux artifice de ces langues (à inflexions) est, de former une immense variété de mots, et de marquer la liaison des idées que ces mots désignent, moyennant, un assez petit nombre de syllabes qui, considérées séparément, n'ont point de signification, mais qui déterminent avec précision le sens du mot auquel elles sont jointes."*

Bopp writes:—"There are in Sanskrit and the languages which are akin to it, two classes of roots: from the one, which is by far the more numerous, spring verbs, and nouns (substantive and adjective) which stand in fraternal connection with the verbs, not in the relation of descent from them, not begotten by them, but sprung from the same shoot with them. From the second class spring pronouns, all original prepositions, conjunctions and particles."

It will be noted that the characteristics of the Aryan languages as here stated may be collected as follows:—
1. Roots which may be either nouns or verbs.
2. Modifying particles or syllables which have no meaning apart from the principal word.
3. One class of roots signifying things (nouns), conditions (adjectives), or actions (verbs).
4. A second class of roots expressing relations of place (demonstrative pronouns and adverbs) and position (prepositions).

In summing up the characteristics of the Melanesian languages Dr. Codrington uses expressions almost identical with those of Schlegel and Bopp quoted above, and his remarks may be applied to all the Oceanic languages without exception.

"There is an absence of those variations in the form of words which may distinguish the parts of speech. . . . The use of the word not its form, commonly declares its character. . . . It is evidently wrong to speak of a noun as derived from a verb, while the form is unchanged."†

"It is highly probable that words generally are in the native mind names or nouns. The thing, the action or the state, receives its name. Words thus are nouns or verbs and they receive discriminating marks, articles or verbal particles in these languages according to their use; but there is no such distinction in the native mind between the visible object and the visible act, as to

* Bopp—Comparative Grammar, p. 96.
† Melanesian Languages, p. 102.
force them to think the name of an action a different sort of word from the name of a thing.”

“There is a class of vocables in the Melanesian languages which certainly are not now the names either of objects or actions. These are the particles which point in one direction or another, the demonstrative directive particles with which language itself gestures. These may be found separate as demonstrative particles, and probably as the simplest prepositions; but they are found combined in pronouns, in adverbs of place, and therefore of time, and in articles. If they are fragments of old nouns, they are now nothing but fragments of that which has been lost; they name nothing, they only point. These cannot like ordinary words, become, as the speaker is pleased to use them, nouns or verbs; they never can have an article or a verbal particle prefixed.”

In some of the Island languages, the tendency is towards analysis. This still further separates them from the agglutinate type, and confirms the analogy to the inflectional. It is mainly owing to the want of prepositions, for example, that such languages as the Fin or Turkish are denied a place with those of the inflectional type,† but in Oceania prepositions are commonly found. Yet, where the inflections are fullest as in Tanna and Eromanga, the prepositions are fewest. Like the Aryan prepositions, too, the Oceanic may be often shown to consist of a nominal or verbal combined with a pronominal or adverbial root. The Banks Island (Mota) ‘apena’ is analogous to the English ‘about it’ both in structure and signification, and literally means ‘at its side.’ § A is the locative particle, ‘at,’ pe is a noun, ‘side,’ na is a pronoun, ‘its.’ The English ‘about it’ may be resolved into:—a ‘at or on,’ be ‘by;’ ‘out,’ an adverb, and the pronoun it. By is explained as a noun meaning (a place) ‘around,’ the Greek ‘αποφοι,  

§ Melanesian Languages, p. 103.
* Melanesian Languages, p. 104.
† Farrar—Language and Languages, p. 391.
‡ Melanesian Languages, p. 209.
Latin *amb.* Many similar examples of Oceanic prepositions may be found in Dr. Codrington's work.

The proof of the nominal origin of *pe* is to be found in its use as an independent noun in other languages, *e.g.*, in Leper's Island, Arag.† In the same way the Sanskrit preposition *ava* 'from,' is in the Zend a perfect and declinable pronoun, while the Zend preposition *hacha* 'out of' is in Sanskrit found as a pronoun, 'isque.'‡

It appears from the foregoing, that we may regard the Oceanic languages as being in the inflectional stage with traces of analytic forms, the evidence being of similar character to that found for the European languages. Hence it is reasonable to suppose that we may apply to them the same methods of argument and analysis which have been applied to the elucidation of other inflectional tongues. The difficulty in so doing is no doubt great, owing to the want of a literature preserving ancient forms, but the peculiar dispersion of the original population may to some extent supply the want of a literature. Here and there among the islands, we may find a few isolated remnants of an ancient people, whose dialects, from some cause or other, have retained forms which other dialects have lost. From these we may gather the true meaning of many an obscure word or particle, and perhaps in time attain some knowledge of the primitive Oceanic speech.

A word of caution is necessary, lest what has been here written should be taken to imply that the writer finds any connection between the Aryan and Oceanic tongues. There is no evidence of any such connection. To affirm it, with our present imperfect knowledge of the Oceanic would be absurd and unsafe. The analogy is to be found in structure only. A similar argument may be, and has been applied to some of the American languages.§

† Melanesian Languages, p. 153.
‡ Bopp—Comparative Grammar, pp. 530. 1441.
§ Hale—The development of Language, Toronto, 1888, p. 29.
III.—A suggested Grouping of the Oceanic Languages.

In comparing the Oceanic languages, it has been the fashion to bring forward for comparison words from all parts of the region, without any very definite result being arrived at, except that they apparently belong to one family.* Their place in that family is not very definitely pointed out. It seems desirable that some attempt should be made to condense the multiplicity of languages into certain smaller groups, and to investigate each of these separately. An enquiry into the relationship of the members of each group to one another, and also as to the evidence which each may, or may not afford as to the existence of earlier languages occupying the same regions, is more likely to prove of value to the ethnologist than a discussion of the resemblances between the words of the whole region or of their supposed affinities with some other linguistic stock.†

The following table is put forward as suggestive of a convenient nomenclature and grouping of the whole of the languages of Oceania. It does not necessarily imply that all the languages therein mentioned are of the same stock. The Australian and Papuan, for instance, may, with fuller materials for study be shown to be quite distinct from the Indonesian or Melanesian. In fact the evidence possessed for the Papuan seems at present to indicate that it forms a group of several distinct languages.

The connection of the Andaman with the Australian is argued by Von Carolsfeld. The arrangement of the other groups is that of the writer based upon a careful comparison of the grammatical forms and vocabularies.

* This is denied, however, by many, who hold that the Australian languages are distinct from those of the Malay Archipelago, Melanesia and Polynesia. The same denial is also extended to the Andaman and Nicobar languages which are here called Oceanic.

† The Oceanic tongues have been connected with all the chief linguistic families of the Old World. Bopp sought to connect the Polynesian and Indo European. Macdonald has written to prove them Semitic. Others have connected them with Indo-Chinese. The discussion of all such questions must be regarded as premature until we are in a position to declare what are the roots of the primitive Oceanic speech.
I.—Principal Groups:

A. Australian...1. Languages of Australia
   2. Tasmanian

B. Papuan...1. Languages of the Black Frizzly-haired natives of New Guinea.

C. Melanesian...1. Southern—South New Hebrides, Loyalty Islands; New Caledonia.
   2. Central—Northern New Hebrides, Banks Islands, and Fiji.
   3. Northern—Languages of the Southern Solomons, Bismarck Archipelago, and South Eastern New Guinea (Port Moresby, South Cape etc.)

D. Indonesian...1. Madagascar.
   2. Languages of Sumatra, Java, and Malay.
   3. Languages of Borneo and Celebes, and islands to the south.
   4. The languages of the Philippine Islands and Formosa.

E. Polynesian...The languages of the Eastern Pacific—Samoan, Maori, Tonga, Hawaii, etc.

Resulting from the contact of these principal groups are found mixed languages. These may be arranged thus—

II.—Sub-Groups.

a. Indo-Australian (?)—The languages of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

b. Indo-Papuan—The languages of Ternate, Tidor, and islands and shores of Western New Guinea.

c. Papuo-Australian—The languages of Torres Straits.


e. Indo-Polynesian (or Micronesian)—Languages of the Caroline Islands, Marshall and Gilbert Islands.

f. Melano-Polynesian—Languages of Aniwa and Futuna, New Hebrides, and Rotuma.

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