

THE SALISHAN LANGUAGE GROUP AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ARCHAIC LANGUAGE TYPE

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The notion of the archaic language type and the criteria of its definition – geographical isolation/social isolation of native speakers, mythological thinking, pre-grammatical mode of the language system, holophrases of concrete semantics – are introduced by the author. The material of the Salishan language group is analyzed in light of mentioned criteria. The author concludes that the Salishan language group is a representative of the archaic language type.

Keywords: archaic language, isolation, pre-grammatical mode of the language system, Salishan language group, mythological thinking, holophrase.

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The Salishan languages belong to the Indian language family located in the north-west of the USA, from eastern Montana to the Pacific coast, and from central British Columbia to the Columbia River. We consider these languages to be archaic according to our definition: 'Archaic languages – are the languages which due to the certain conditions of social development of their native speakers have in greater degree preserved ancient linguistic features'. Studying the archaic languages is very important as they can throw light on the ancient pre-grammatical language systems and diachrony of the language and its categories. We state that by the method of synchro-diachronic extrapolation using the material of the ancient languages one is able to reconstruct diachronic universalities.

So far we have elaborated the four main criteria due to which one is able to define the language as archaic. In this paper we are to present these criteria within the framework of the material of the Salishan language group as a typical representative of the archaic language type.

The first extra-linguistic criterion determining the archaic system of the language that we suggest is the *geographical isolation and / or the social isolation of the native speakers* of the language. In the case of the Salishan languages we are to comment on the social isolation of the Salishan tribes. The point is that the Salishans like other Indians of North America have had special war relations with the neighboring tribes that affected their living in isolation and prevented them from mixing with other tribes. At peace and at war they've had the only universal language – gestures. Evidently

under such conditions the Salishan languages haven't been influenced by the neighbouring languages, haven't mixed with them and as a result have preserved the original features in their systems.

The second criterion defining the archaic language type that we introduce is called *mythological thinking of the speakers*, i.e. irrational perception of the world. The point is that life of an Indian was not limited by the outer world: besides hunting, farming, wars, family there was a world of his beliefs, his internal spiritual ties with the other world. Each time of his everyday life was penetrated by the tangible invisible connection with supernatural power. Everything that the man saw around him, that he touched and what he used was an incarnation of the other world, a part of a divine entity.

Such a perception of the world is reflected in the Salishan language systems where the basic predicative force of all full words is a logical part of this organization. The simplest predications refer to events, situations, activities without reference to persons, places or things. When such entities are introduced, they are, unless there is specific evidence to the contrary, understood as involved in, affected by, or the result of the situation. The Salishan languages typically have a set of these transitivizers, used to mark differences in the degree of agentivity or volitionality assigned to the agent; this feature has traditionally been called the system of control or responsibility by Salishanists [see Thompson]. Cf.:

- a. $t'əm'-t-əŋəl = sx^w$
hit-TRAN-1pl.ACC = 2sg.NOM
'You hit us on purpose'.
b. $t'əm'-n-əŋəl = sx^w$
hit-NCT-1 pl.ACC = 2sg.NOM

'You hit us by accident/finally managed to hit us.' [Jelinek, Demers, p.703-704]

In the above given examples from Straits Salish TRAN identifies the control transitivizer expressed by the suffix **-t** and NCT identifies the noncontrol transitivizer expressed by the suffix **-n**. The noncontrol transitivizer can convey inefficiency as well as inadvertence [Jelinek, Demers, p.703-704].

We assume that the elaborate system of control / responsibility in the Salishan languages can be treated as a relic of the archaic language systems determined by the mythological consciousness and thinking of people of ancient times who believed that the events are not dependent on a person but are pre-determined by an external force and connected with it.

It's worth mentioning one more feature of the Salishan language as well as other languages of North America connected with the mythological thinking – the existence of the only *unwritten language form*. Unwritten languages are known to be archaic. Why is it so? One of the hypotheses is that it is the custom with nomadic people to keep mythological texts in the oral form by remembering them and passing them on from one generation to another, that was an acceptable alternative to the written language. As V.M. Pivoev emphasizes 'The point is that the written text rationalizes the message, decreases the possibility of transmitting irrational aspects of the myth' [Pivoev, p. 49].

The third criterion of the archaic language that we propose is the *pre-grammatical mode of the language system*. According to T. Givon, the pre-grammatical mode of the language is characterized by the absence of grammatical morphology and

pragmatical word order [Givon, p. 15]. Most Salishanists come to the conclusion that the Salishan languages lack a noun / verb contrast at the word level to say nothing of the other traditional parts of speech and grammatical morphology. Clauses consist of an initial predicate, minimally containing a lexical root, a functional head where valence is marked, and possibly a pronominal suffix marking an internal argument. The predicate is followed by a second position clitic string of inflectional elements, the subject pronoun and tense. In fact the Salishan word doesn't belong to a lexical category such as noun, verb or adjective: it is a predicate to which the inflectional clitics attach [see Jelinek, Demers p. 697-698, Thompson p. 260, Nater p. 33-34]. In the following examples the word 'hand' is rendered into Straits Salish by the lexical suffix *-sis*.

a. *lic* '-sis-t-Ø= *lə* = *sən*

cut-hand-TRAN-3ABS = PAST =
1 sg.NOM

'I cut his hand (on purpose).'

b. *ləŋ-sis-n-oŋət* = *sən*

cut.off-hand-NCT-REFL = 1 Sg.NOM

'I cut my hand off (accidentally) [I hand-cut-off myself].' [Jelinek, Demers, p. 716]

We suppose that the absence of traditional parts of speech in the Salishan languages is determined by the mythological thinking where the subject and object are not differentiated. The linguistic data of the Indian languages confirm the fact that subjects and objects are suffixes or adjuncts to the predicative stems.

The fourth criterion of the archaic language is *holophrases of concrete semantics*. Studying the vocabulary of the Kwakiutl language compiled by F. Boas [Boas p. 36-82] we have concluded that the distinctive semantic feature of the Kwakiutl vocabulary is concrete meanings. They discern subtle nuances of qualities in the objects of environment and have an elaborate vocabulary for defining the objects which differ from one another in irrelative undistinguished signs. The other important peculiarity of Kwakiutl

vocabulary is the tendency to express a complex notion by a single word – a holophrase. Among the holophrases we have singled out the concrete designations that lack corresponding generic notions in the vocabulary and which meanings are expressed in the holophrases (see below). The holophrases of concrete semantics are represented in the following lexico-semantic groups (LSG):

1) LSG – everyday activities:

to arrange bed – *heitta* 'lit;
to ascend a river in canoe – *sia* ';
to bend with hammer – *mokpta* 'ul;
to strike with hammer – *mukoa* ';
to carve meat – *k'c a'qit*;
to catch salmon in net – *tlakil*; to
roast salmon – *tl'o'pa*;
to make a dam across a river –
tsu'pa;
to peel off cedar bark – *si'nga*;
to sing for pleasure – *su'lala*; to sing
to dance – *dE'ngEla*;

to unload canoe – *mo'liola*;
to weave basket – *yi'p'a*;
to find something unexpectedly –
tlo'koala (this term is used especially for
meeting a supernatural being); *llo'k'oe*
– what is found unexpectedly; to find
while walking – *k'ak'askyina'la*;
to hang over rope – *kuq'uit*.

2) LSG – household, cult and
everyday objects:

armor made of wood or skin – *pa'k'aitEm*;
heavy beams supporting roof,
parallel to ridge of house – *ky'a'lc wan*;
belt of women – *wusi'kyanKui*;
bottle made of kelp – *wawate*;
bracelet of mountain goat horn
– *yo'kwekila*; bracelet of copper –
ko'eko'e;
juice of berries – *sau'k*;
monster in sea – *ia'knim* (= cause of
evil);

sacred object – *k'ii'mina*;

3) LSG – animals:

grizzly bear – *nan* ; skin of grizzly
bear – *pus'Kna'c*; black bear – *tl'e*;

4) LSG – magic actions, rituals:

to bewitch by putting clothing
of a person in contact with a corpse
– *lA'pEtante*; to bewitch by putting
clothing in a skull which is heated – *e'k-*

a; person who knows to do so, *t:'k'noq*;
to bring back novice from woods by
dancing – *wutla'qut*;
self-torture ceremonial – *hawina'tl*;
to tremble with hands, dancing
– *qo'lcqohi*.

5) LSG – ties of relationship:

brother (said by male) – *nE'mwiot*;
(collectively) *nEnE'inwiutlala*, brothers
and male cousins – *natlEmwi'ut*,
relatives – *mEnu'-ya* ; (said by female)
– *wa'k'oa*, younger brother – *ts'a'ja*;
parents with children – *gyinli'kyBle*;
parents of twins – *yikwi'tl*;
elder sister – *no'la*; younger sister
– *tsa'ya*;

Such holophrases of concrete semantics are determined by the peculiar thinking where classifying processes are carried out on the basis of sensory perception.

So we can conclude that the Salishan language group can be considered as a representative of the archaic language type according to the four criteria – social isolation of native speakers, mythological thinking, pre-grammatical mode of the language system, holophrases of concrete semantics. It should be noted that in the course of our further research we may add certain criteria of archaic languages to the presented ones or alter the terminology base.

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