

JAMES CLACKSON. *Indo-European linguistics: An introduction*. (Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics) Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. (xxii, 260).

The author, the well-known classicist in Jesus College at Cambridge, has produced here a text that offers an excellent survey of important questions in Indo-European studies. In some ways, as the title suggests, this is an introductory text, yet it requires postgraduate readers with good familiarity with the nuts and bolts of historical linguistics — attested sound changes, morphophonemics, the major sound laws, the comparative method, and the methods of internal reconstruction. One example of this is the discussion of Garrett’s case for local variation among dialects, diffusion, and convergence in place of a tree-model-like transmission of features from a parent language. Another is the elegant, concise relation of Saussure’s reconstruction of PIE vowels, its confirmation by Kurlyowicz with the Anatolian materials, and the contributions of Cuny and Möller to the construction of the vowels system, which in no way minimizes what remains uncertain. At the same time, specialists will appreciate the discussion of less settled questions.

Traditional transcriptions in the scholarly traditions for the languages from which data are cited in this text, which maintains the familiar and avoids the tedium of transliterating data to IPA; toward that end a set of conventions for each language discussed are provided. The text is also supplemented by a word index, in addition to the subject index. A glossary in which items are aptly chosen provides glosses appropriate for the main audience intended for this text. Particularly useful are the frequently interspersed practice exercises which consist of reconstruction problems, which are far from superficial.

The text, as the author warns in the “Forward,” does not cover the familiar ground of reconstructed declension and conjugation tables, nor does it concentrate on the transmission of

features from PIE to the daughter languages, but focuses on still-problematic issues at the seams of Indo-European research. Included among these are the problems of ablaut in reconstructed forms, questions surrounding accent in PIE, such categories as *dual* for objects in pairs, distribution of concord with collective and comprehensive nouns, middle voice endings, the rise of feminine gender, and problems in syntax reconstruction. Variation in concord with collective nouns is certainly attested in modern languages, witness the difference in their treatment in American and British English. Another fascinating question involves the observation that transitivity is seen to align with perfective aspect; if *-n-* marks the imperfective, and not the expected perfective (154), it appears that it is the imperfective that is the marked form.

Reconstructed negative sentence patterns pose problems, but a good picture develops for the emergence of negative markers in PIE (163). The question of reconstructed discourse formulae has strong appeal to many, but recent assertions about reconstructed discourse themes for PIE are less convincing, e.g., *protecting people and animals*, and their ilk. In the discussion here, both supporting arguments and weaknesses in the logic of their reconstructions are presented. One too often encounters literature in which items from this line of research are cherry-picked and repeated as settled fact. I agree with the author when he concludes, “the acceptance or rejection of each particular case will probably remain a matter of personal taste” (183).

One of the great pleasures in Indo-European studies is tracing reflexes of PIE roots across the dialects, e.g., *actor*, *agent*, *synagogue*, and *black*, *bleak*, *bleach*. Of course some such items are stems, others are derived from stem + affix, each with its own history. Nonetheless it is a very good suggestion that, as appealing as root + affix patterns as a pattern of derivation may be, derivation occurred lexeme-to-lexeme from PIE, as is seen in IE languages (190).

One exercise question exceeds the compass of CM and IR reconstruction, to inquire about the applicability of variationist sociolinguistic theory in reconstructing PIE (63). The appearance of this question is relevant to a comment in the text speculating on the possibility of sociolinguistic reasons for the loss of laryngeals in IE languages. Each generation has had its popular theory for language change — incomplete acquisition during second language acquisition, inaccurate (re)(per)ception of features among child acquirers, speakers in a community chasing features that are seen as prestigious — and these recycle. One reads collections of papers from conferences in which each attributes the processes it discusses to the cause *du jour*. The most likely account of language change I have encountered is offered in Jean Aitcheson (*Language change: Progress or decay?*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 2001), which states, “everything in the universe is perpetually in a state of change” (3), and thus, language change is “natural and inevitable” (259). But these questions may be debated *ad infinitum*. We need not think up sociolinguistic reasons for reconstructed language change.

Two minor *errata* to report for the next edition: “It is now clear that the *centum* languages share nothing other than a failure to participate in the palatalization of the palatal series” (51) should probably read “of the velar series.” And in the text of Exercise 5.5, reference is made to the Exercise 5.3 for the present paradigm of *h<sub>2</sub>eg’-* (144). Reference should be to Exercise 5.4 (on 127).

It is remarked that no advance on Sir William Jones’ criteria for relatedness has been made since his famous pronouncement in 1786. As a final note I would like to suggest an advance that is significant, although it has remained largely ignored. As has been known since the time of the neo-grammarians, convergence and borrowing render the mere existence of given

features less than reliable as a test of relatedness. Russian scholar Yuri Tambovtsev has developed methods based on mathematical statistics applied to carefully selected features to measure their frequency of occurrence in target languages or varieties compared to their compactness in others in suspected or assumed taxonomies to answer questions about the relatedness of languages and the naturalness of taxonomic grouping (see, *inter alia*, “Language Taxons and Naturalness of their Classification,” *California Linguistic Notes*, XXX, No. 2, Fall, 2005). Results have been startling and fascinating.

As one reads through this text one is frequently reminded that the body of reconstructions and theories that constitute the information of the field are hypotheses, even where the theories are plausible or the evidence compelling. This even-minded weighing of the evidence, as in the discussion of two theories for the middle endings (149), is a great virtue, in that no matter how convincing a proposal in historical linguistics and Indo-European philology seems to scholars at any given time, new information and new approaches may radically restructure our perspectives on any given topic, and it is thus important, while remaining certain of what we know, to be receptive to emerging evidence. This text succeeds admirably in assimilating the state of research today into some important questions that remain.

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