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"UNITY IN APPARENT DIVERSITY":
ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR
HISTORICAL/COMPARATIVE LINGUISTICS

At the heart of historical linguistic analysis is the comparative method, which utilizes correspondence sets consisting of cognate items whose formal properties are systematically observed in order to reconstruct the original etyma from which the cognates evolve. The key concept underlying the method is that of "formal correspondence," or the etymological parallelism of the overt historical manifestations of the original etymon (see, e.g., Fox 1995: 57-91). However, in a number of recent publications (e.g., Shields 1999, 2000), I have pointed out that historical linguists need to take note of another type of comparative analysis – which I have termed "unity in apparent diversity" – involving "the existence of a common underlying process with different overt [formal] results" in related languages (Shields 1999: 29). That is, related lects may show different formal manifestations of a morpho-syntactic process which they have inherited from their common proto-language. The identification of such a process through systematic comparison can result in insights into the structure of the proto-language which are as significant as information derived through the classic comparative method. In this brief paper I wish to discuss further the implications of "unity in apparent diversity" for historical/comparative linguistic theory.

I shall begin my remarks by pointing out a few examples of such processes within the Indo-European language family. First of all, I have argued that "the appearance of specifically non-singular constructions was rather late in the evolution of the Indo-European language" (1982a: 63; cf. Shields 1992: 13-16) and that the bifurcation of the non-singular category into dual and plural is later still (cf. Shields 2004). In regard to verb conjugation, Lehmann (1974: 201-202) "also suggests that the appearance of a special inflectional non-singular was a late development, principally dating from the time when the various dialects had begun to emerge as autonomous entities. He says: 'The system of verb endings clearly points to an earlier period in which there was no verbal inflection for number …. For the dual and the plural endings are obviously defective. We cannot reconstruct endings in these two numbers which are as well supported as are

those of the singular, except for the third plural'" (Shields 1992: 13-14). Lehmann (1993: 174-175) reiterates this point when he emphasizes that "the differences among dialects in the endings for the first and second plural indicate … that each of the first and second plural forms was independently developed in the dialects" (cf. also Adrados 1985: 31-32, 36-37). However, I have maintained that despite the formal differences in attested dialectal non-singular verbal suffixes, a common derivational process is at work in them all, which is probably inherited from late Indo-European when the non-singular category was being extended consistently in conjugation. In short, "it seems to me that the non-singular verbal suffixes are merely the singular ones with non-singular markers attached. For example, the first person plural suffix *-mes (Skt. -mas, Dor. -mes) can be interpreted as first person (singular) *-m plus the non-singular suffix *-(e/o)s (cf. Gk. pód-es 'feet'), while *-men (Gk. -men, Hitt. -men) shows *-m plus the non-singular marker *-(e/o)n (cf. Toch AB riñ 'cities'), about which I have written extensively (cf., e.g., Shields 1982a: 63-70, 1985: 190-191, 1991/2: 76-77, 1992: 65-67). Even Skt. -ma may be analyzed as *-m plus the non-singular ending *-e (cf. Gk. mētér-e 'two mothers,' OIr. rig < *rēg-e 'two kings'; cf. Shields 1982b, 1992: 66)" (Shields 1997a: 108). The original lack of contrast between dual and plural – a lack most obviously attested in Hittite – explains how the suffix *-e is manifested with both dual and plural signification in the dialects (cf. Shields 1997a: 107-108). The central point here is that a systematic comparison of the non-singular verbal suffixes of the early Indo-European dialects reveals a common process in their derivation – the affixation of an emerging non-singular marker to the appropriate singular personal suffix. The striking formal differences among the dialects – emphasized so strongly by Lehmann – are muted to a large degree by the existence of the common means of derivation apparently available in the proto-language itself.

As a second example of "unity in apparent diversity," I wish to cite the formation of the nominal o-stem genitive. Once again, there is great variation in attested dialectal forms. For example, in the singular number, the suffix *-ī is found in Italic (Lat. -ī) and Celtic (OIr. -i), although Faliscan and Oscan-Umbrian show the same *-osyo which is characteristic of Sanskrit and Greek (Falisc. -osio, Osc.-Umb. -eis, Ved. -a-sya, Hom. -o-io) and Celtiberian preserves a form in -o (< *-o-o, cf. Shields 2005: 236-238) . In Germanic *-e-so (Go. -is) has currency. In the plural a form in *-on or *-ōn (< *-o-on) is widely distributed (Lat. -um, Gk. -ōn, Skt. -ām, OE -a), but Baltic and Slavic utilize *-ād (Lith. -o, OCS -a, cf. Shields 2001) in the same function, while within Germanic, Gothic employs *-ē (Go. -ē) as the o-stem genitive plural desinence. In a series of articles (Shields 1991, 1997b, 2000, 2001, 2005), I have pointed out that each of these variant endings can be derived from a corresponding deictic particle easily reconstructed for Indo-European on an independent basis or from a contamination of

these deictic particles. Among the relevant deictics are *(e/o)s, *(e/o)n, *(e/o)t, *ē, *ā, *ī, *i, and *e/o. In short, then, comparative data would indicate that late Indo-European utilized a process of affixing deictic particles to *o*-stem nominal forms as a means of creating genitive constructions, with the dialects themselves manifesting different deictic elements in this process. This derivational process is consistent with Lyons' (1968: 550, 1971: 388-395) and Clark's (1978: 117-118) acknowledgment of an etymological connection between possessive and locative formations in many languages. Since, as I indicated earlier, the inflectional expression of number was not consistently applied in late Indo-European, as the interchangeable number value of the Hittite genitive suffixes in -*aš* and -*an* clearly indicates, the deictics which came to mark the genitive case function were originally indifferent to number specification (cf. Shields 1997b: 240-241).

As a final example of the "unity in apparent diversity" phenomenon, I would like to refer to Lehmann's analysis (1998) of the origin of the relative pronouns in *k^we/i*- and *yo-*. As Szemerényi (1996: 210) notes, "to the group which uses *k^wi-/*k^wo-* as a relative belong Anatolian, Tocharian, Italic, later also Celtic and Germanic [e.g., Hitt. *kwiš*, Lat. *quis*]. Another group comprising Aryan, Greek, Phrygian, and Slavic uses *yo-* … as the relative [e.g., Skt. *yás*, Gk. *hós*]." Acknowledging his scholarly debt to Justus (1976), Lehmann (1998: 399-400) describes the common process which underlies the formal differences evident in the dialects: "Sketching the development of relative clauses from the OV stage of Indo-European, we assume for the oldest period the particles *k^we* and *yo* that were suffixed to the preceding word in order to single it out. In this sense they were used to conjoin words, indicating that the suffixed word was to be interpreted together with the word or words preceding it. This is the use that was maintained with the meaning 'and, also'. They were then used to highlight focal elements. This use survived in Baltic and Slavic, where it led to the definite form of the adjective …. When used in the first of two successive clauses, forms of the particles indicated that the second clause included a semantic item that was modified by an element in the first. Such first clauses correspond to the subordinate clauses that are referred to as relative. Nouns as focussed elements in the first or relative clause could be repeated or referred to in the second by an anaphor. When the early dialects were modified to VO structure, the clause with the focussing element was placed after the noun that was modified in the principal clause. The focussing element singled out the item referred to and became a relative pronoun." Lehmann (1998: 400) admits that one can only speculate about why one group of dialects attests one original particle in relative pronoun function while another group attests a different one in this capacity, but he remains confident that the common evolutionary process in which these particles

participated potentially explains a great deal about the morpho-syntax of the proto-language itself.[1]

So, then, what are the implications of "unity in apparent diversity" for historical linguistic analysis? Most obviously, the recognition of the phenomenon has the potential of identifying categories or constructions in a proto-language which had begun to emerge at the time of the divergence of the original speech community since it implies that the proto-language had developed the means but not the precise forms for expression of those categories or constructions. Thus, just as the classic comparative method utilizes correspondence sets of genetically equivalent forms as the basis for postulating etyma in the proto-language at the time when these etyma began to undergo divergent development, so the comparison of parallel morpho-syntactic constructions in related languages in order to identify common processes in their derivation leads to insights into the structure of the proto-language just prior to its dialectalization. The primary difference between the approaches is that the first is form-based and the second is process-based. However, I must admit that it can be difficult to assess whether the common processes manifested by related languages are the result of inheritance or independent but parallel development because many developmental processes which languages undergo constitute what Fox (1995: 194-195) calls "'laws' of language development," or "general principles of change" which have a basis in language typology rather than genetic relationship. Among the examples cited above, the development of possessive constructions from "locational" deictics has been identified as such a general typological principle of language evolution.[2] Thus, in order to maximize the utility of process-based comparison, it becomes necessary to differentiate more precisely between genuinely universal evolutionary processes and those which are more restricted in applicability. In essence, what I am advocating here is a distinction along the lines of what Dressler (2003) calls "universal, system-independent" naturalness/markedness and "system-dependent" naturalness/markedness. Such a distinction "establishes deductively degrees of universal preferences" in the context of linguistic structure and change (Dressler 2003: 463). Of course, the less universal

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[1] The number of different forms participating in this process may have actually been larger. Lehmann (1998: 400) explains: "The proto-language, then, included at least two particles with the meaning 'and, also' that were used to focus elements, and thereupon as relative markers. Watkins has identified a third that came to be so used in one of the Old Irish relative patterns: *de (1963: 26-28). Another that might have been developed as relative marker was *u (Pokorny 1959: 74); maintained in Skt. u, it has among other uses a focussing function, as Klein notes in probably the most extensive study of any of the particles (Klein 1978)."

[2] In the third example, the reinterpretation of the particle as a relative pronoun would not seem to be a necessary development, although universals of word order typology are likely responsible for making the reinterpretation a possibility.

the process, the less likely it can be associated with independent but parallel development in related lects. Until typological theory establishes more definitively the universal nature of various "'laws' of language development," some caution must be exercised in drawing definitive conclusions from "unity in apparent diversity."

A second but less significant qualification of the utility of process-based comparison involves the fact that a number of related languages can simply substitute new forms for an original proto-form, giving the impression that the related lects originally shared only process, not form. Such a problem is inherent, too, in the classic comparative method itself when innovation has taken place in all or nearly all of the languages being compared; in such a situation "reconstruction of the original state of affairs in the proto-language is therefore not possible" (Fox 1995: 73).

In the final analysis, linguistic reconstruction always remains a highly speculative enterprise (cf. Shields 1992: 1-3) despite many valuable refinements in its methodology since its inception in the nineteenth century. It is within the context of offering another methodological refinement that I submit for consideration the principle of "unity in apparent diversity."

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