

THE PEOPLING OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

(1) THE EVIDENCE FROM LINGUISTIC CLASSIFICATION SOUTH OF THE ZAMBEZI

ALZ

(2) TRADITIONAL EVIDENCE IN THE S. RH. AREA AND THAT FROM EXTERNAL WRUTTEN SOURCES

PAPER 1: Evidence from ling. class. south of the Z.

(1) The nature of languages

(1) A note of warning

0. - Hat

Para.

Historians -- and laymen in the field of linguistics -- are sometimes inclined to think that languages are a kind of repository in which we may easily find historical evidence of the past. They, and perhaps the linguists too, do not realise that there is really no science of language history nor that such knowledge as there is of the development of languages has not as yet been satisfactorily related to the speech- or **meriat** culture-communities that **merkeximenx** speak or spoke them.

All histories of languages and language families in particular are histories of devolution -- and not of evolution. We start from the concept of a "proto-language" which then branched and flowered into many derivatives of the "proto-language". None of these studies in the devolution from a systematic and near-perfect original language to the present-day languages are really studies in linguistic adaptation and development for almost never are the contributing languages and the compromise made between the proto-language and the contributing languages EXER the subject of analysis. The concept of the develution of a proto-language does not tie in with the sometimes naive theories (often introduced by non-linguists) that primitive man made grunts, snorts, and gestures that gradually developed into speech and into language. If this is indeed what happened there is no evidence for it in the linguistic-historical material at the disposal of linguists. The belief that the pre-"proto-language" stage of speech and language development can be anhatantisted xfrom x shild inferred from child-psychology, animal studies (e.g. Köhler's logical apes), and the studies of primitive speech communities such as the Bushmen, is no more than a pious hope. Although the evolution of languages is not relevant to our purpose at this stage -because we have enough problems in trying to understand the devolution from various proto-languages in Africa -- it is a nagging thought which we should not entirely push aside.

Linguists do not really know what a "language" is. / They deal in terms of We the phonetics of a language, the grammar of a language, the vocabulary of a language but/they are just as little able to synthesise these into /linguistically the language itself as we are able to/compare language totalities. (To illustrate this point: Lozi is sometimes classified asxaxman apart from the Sotho-group of languages, but it does not take me a few moments of adjustment before I can converse, as a Sotho speaker, with a Lozi speaker. ic /linguist.class Thus even though Lozi and Sotho belong to two different kanguagexgrames / there is no question but that Lozi and Sotho are related languages.) ifications This is important from the point of view of language history although it may be bad linguistics. It means that there is asxet an as yet untapped range afxahaarxatkaar of facts which, if systematised, may have important results for language history.

> In speaking of language contacts and of languages and their aspects, linguists are not really concerned with the speech communities who spoke these languages. To illustrate: In studying Venda I am concerned with certain linguistic forms and shapes and my interestriscenteredrim interest as a comparativist is centered in the origins sfritered or occurrence of these forms elsewhere in Africa. It is no immediate concern of mine that the people who introduced some of this characteristic Venda no longer exists and is not represented as a samunait distinct community amongst the Venda. The conquerors have disappeared and some of their speech habits are now the property of the conquered with whom they mixed. Without evidence from elsewhere, from other languages, the linguist cannot reverse the processes of history and isolate the elements which constutute the conglomerate of modern spoken Venda. But there is no doubt that modern Venda is spoken by people from a great number of other language communities.



The historian (and the social anthropologist too) is interested in the speech-community itself in which language is the cohesive force. Is there therefore a way of assessing the contributions of the various speechcommunities at various times in the past? Two main ways have been suggested and tried up to the present:

(1) The first is based on the belief that languages are a kind of radio-active jelly which has a constant rate of transformation in from one kind of jelly to enother. Glotto-chronology is very similar in charcater to O-14 dating. There is no doubt that languages do transform themselves and multiply themselves into species and varieties. This is a common feature of languages, but whether it is unique to languages and whether it proceeds at a regular and predictable rate is a question so wide open to speculation that it cannot be glossed over by the Glotto-chronological claim that excellent results were obtained in such and such cases. At best glottochronological classifications are speculative and specialised deviations from an as yet only vaguely developed method of language comparison.

(2) The second method is that of comparing a fixed number of items over a number of languages and determining (a) which are common to all the languages compared (b) which are common to particular languages only (c) which, because of certain irregularities, must be described as sports, inventions, borrowings from related languages, and borrowings from foreign languages, and (d) what sequences can be developed from a) and b) on the assumption that it is possible to say something like Language A contains Language B but B cannot contain A.

Examining the actual methods employed it is obvious that they are both deal with the common language displaying certain regular and systemic features i.e. even where dealing with local variation they deal with fragments of the common language and not with irregular and non-systemic contributions such as might be made by foreign language groups. These foreign contributions can only be isolated where the contributing foreign language is known as was the case in Meinhof's study of Hottentot contributions to modern Xhoda. Where this knowledge is lacking we must revert to **ikexhisteriemxendxthextribet kisteriem** more complicated studies and to tribal history.

What is of particular interest to this seminar is, I think, the relative age of Bantu or of particular Bantu languages. The question is whether the Bantu linguist can raise valid objections to exchange signature aughxavidence various theories based on archeological exidence x fxxxie finds and sequences established for these, on O-14 dating, on bloodgroup classifications and distributions, on anthropological classifications, and on culture-province and culture-type groupings. Perhaps the nature of linguistic evidence has not been sufficiently clearly differentiated. There are two kinds of evidence that are usually included under the one umbrellaterm of linguistic evidence. These are (a) true linguistic evidence and (b) evidence from the myths and legends which the linguist has studied and which are often available to him alone as a fluent speaker of the language. It is relevant to mention that before I personally begin any study of a new language I ask the following questions: (a) what is the name of your language (b) what dialects do you include under this name (c) what languages are, in your opinion, related to your language, (d) what languages are spoken in areas adjacent to your language-area, (e) where do your people say they come from, etc. etc.

True linguistic evidence if historical must necessarily be as conjectural as history itself is. On the other hand traditional history is of the same kind as documentary evidence although, since the date of its authorship is not quite as easy to establish as that of a written document, it is not just as absolute chronologically speaking.