Phonological Change in the Austronesian Language Family: an Overview

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【Abstract】

With nearly one-fifth of the world’s languages, and a large corpus of reconstructions going back five and one half to six millennia, the Austronesian language family is a vast natural laboratory for documenting change paths and for testing general theories of sound change. This paper surveys some of the more important features of sound change in Austronesian, dividing the material into two broad categories: normal sound change and bizarre sound change. Time permitting, topics that will be discussed under the first rubric include lenition and fortition, assimilation and dissimilation, the voiced coda quandary, erosion from the right, left, and center, epenthesis, metathesis, preglottalization and implosion, gemination, innovations affecting nasals, vocalic change, monophthongization, tonogenesis and the relation of sound change to migration distance. Topics that will be discussed under the second rubric include bizarre transitions, bizarre conditions, and bizarre results. The talk will conclude with a few comments on quantitative aspects of sound change, the problem of pandemic irregularity, and drift.