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The Malayo-Polynesian Origins of Malagasy

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Abstract:

In recent years an increasing number of English-speaking scholars have become interested in Malagasy as a language even though they may not always have access to previous scholarship mainly written in French relative in particular to arguments established by earlier researchers to prove the Malayo-Polynesian origins of Malagasy. The following is a summary of some of the major pieces of evidence pointing in that direction and covering specifically: (i) previous literature; (ii) lack of use of tones in Malagasy; (iii) Malagasy vocabulary; (iv) root words; (v) functional categories; (vi) the passive voice in Malagasy as well as a range of Malayo-Polynesian languages and (vii) functional uses of passive.

Introduction:

Malagasy is the westernmost branch of the Malayo-Polynesian family of languages. The linguistic evidence in favor of such a view is overwhelming. The purpose of this paper is to briefly review some of the major linguistic arguments supporting such a claim.

Previous Literature:

There exist a wide range of rich materials, both published and unpublished, which analyze linguistic evidence pointing to a Malayo-Polynesian origin for Malagasy.

Such materials go as far back as Renward Brandstetter in the nineteenth century, who wrote an article entitled 'Die Beziehungen des Malagasy zum Malaiischen.' Lucerne, Switzerland 1893. [English translation 'The relationship between the Malagasy and the Malayan languages.']. The same author devoted a monograph to *Tagalen und Madagassen*¹. Lucerne, Switzerland, 1902 outlining the relationship between Malagasy and Tagalog spoken in the Philippines. A few years earlier, Aristide

Marre gave a paper, 'Aperçu philologique sur les affinités de la langue malgache avec le javanais, le malais et les autres principaux idiomes de l'archipel Indien'² later published in *Actes du 6ème Congrès International des Orientalistes*³ held at Leyden, The Netherlands 1883.

This gave the impetus for further work by Gabriel Ferrand in his book, *Essai de phonétique comparée du malais et des dialectes malgaches*⁴. 1909 and Joseph Razafintsalama in a first manuscript, *La langue malgache, Volume I - Le fond initial du vocabulaire malgache (Etude de Vocabulaire)*⁵. 1928 to be followed by a second manuscript *La langue malgache et les origines malgaches. (Essai d'analyse linguistique)*⁶. 1929. Then in 1938 Otto Christian Dahl published his article 'Les convergences phonétiques entre le malgache et le maanjan de Bornéo'. Subsequently in 1951 his book *Malgache et Maanjan. Une comparaison linguistique*⁷ was released.

Tone Languages:

Malagasy is not a tone language, unlike many East African Bantu languages such as Haya, Luganda, Chichewa and so on. Specifically, tones are not part of the phonological system of Malagasy whereas they play a crucial role in the phonology of many if not most East African Bantu languages. Publications such as *Haya Grammatical Structure*, Byarushengo et al., editors providing a detailed description of the structure of Haya, for example, illustrate the crucial and pervasive role of tonal systems in the grammars of East African languages.

The Vocabulary:

The predominantly Malayo-Polynesian origins of Malagasy are quite apparent in the vocabulary of the language even though borrowings from other sources are also apparent. Thus, Fukazawa in his article entitled 'Madagascar: Its unity and diversity' *Madagascar: Perspectives from the Malay world* notes the Malagasy words *vary* 'rice' and *ovy* 'potatoe' are manifestly related respectively to the Javanese *pari* (*bahli* in other Indonesian languages) and *ubi*. On the other hand, the Malagasy word *omby* 'cattle' or its variant *aomby* comes from the Bantu *ngombe*,

whereas *amboa* 'dog' comes from Swahili *mbwa*. Finally, the writer notes that Malagasy *alika* 'dog' is related to Sanskrit *alaka*.

It is also worth noting from Dahl (1951) that it is not just the Merina dialect spoken in the central highlands which have words derived from Malayo-Polynesian; other dialects do also. Thus, Dahl (1951:102) notes that the Merina word *sandry* 'bras' (English 'arm'), which in

other dialects means 'le tronc du corps' (English 'trunk of a body'), in Old Tanosy, a coastal dialect of Malagasy, means 'articulation' and derives from the Sanskrit word *sandhi* 'articulation, liaison'. Likewise Maanjan, a Malayo-Polynesian language spoken on Borneo has a word, *kikit* 'mordre' (English 'to bite') which yielded in Merina *kaikitra* 'morsure' (English 'a bite') and in Sakalava, another coastal dialect of Malagasy, *hehetse* with exactly the same meaning. Maanjan has the word *ambah, amah* 'père' (English 'father') whereas Taisaka and Bara, two other coastal dialects of Malagasy, have *aba* with exactly the same meaning.

Key Aspects of Malagasy Vocabulary:

Dahl (1951: 299-355) analyzed and compared root words used to refer to the human body, bodily functions and family members in both Maanjan and Malagasy. The phonetic similarities between the terms used in the two languages are quite striking and in fact, there are phonetic laws which enable us to derive one form from the other following a limited number of historical phonetics principles, for instance the correspondance between the labials f in one language and p in the other --see below for illustrative examples.

Here are a few examples of genetically related words in Malagasy and Maanjan pertaining to designation of the human body. As a rule the first word in each pair is Maanjan whereas the second is Malagasy: *olon* 'human being' vs Merina *olona*; *olo* 'head' Proto-Indonesian *ulu *hulu 'head, beginning' vs derived Merina word *man-olo-ana* 'to be in front of', *an-olo-ana* 'in front of', *ny ntaolo* = *nta-olo* 'the ancient'; Maanjan *urong* 'nose' vs Merina *orona*; *wawa* 'mouth, opening' vs

Merina *vava* 'mouth'; *mulut* 'beak, lips' vs Merina *molotra* 'lips';
Maanjan *lela* 'tongue' vs Malagasy *lela* with exactly the same meaning;
Maanjan *watang* 'male body' vs Merina *vatana* with the same meaning;
Maanjan *kawi* 'left' vs Malagasy *havia* with the same meaning;
Maanjan *wulo* 'hair' vs Malagasy *volo* with the same meaning; Maanjan
ira 'blood' vs Malagasy *ra* with exactly the same meaning.

Coming now to bodily functions, Dahl (1951) provides examples such as the following. Maanjan *kuman* 'to eat, especially rice' vs Merina *homana* 'to eat'; Maanjan *telen* 'to swallow' vs Merina *telina* 'action of swallowing; Maanjan *mahamoi* 'drunk' vs Malagasy *mamo* with exactly the same meaning; Maanjan *m-anre* 'to sleep' vs Merina *m-andry* 'to be lying down, to spend the night'; Maanjan *aheng* 'soul, thought' vs Merina *aina* 'breath, life'; Maanjan *welom* 'living, alive' vs Merina *velona* with exactly the same meaning.

With regard to words referring to the family, Dahl (1951) cites examples such as the following. Maanjan *wawei* 'feminine, woman' vs Merina *vavy* 'feminine', *vehi-vavy* 'woman' vs Sakalava *vave* 'feminine'; Maanjan *anak* 'child' vs Sakalava *anake* with the same meaning and Merina *z-anaka* with the same meaning derived from Proto-Indonesian **anak* with the same meaning; Maanjan *andi* 'younger brother, younger sister' vs Merina *z-andry* with the same meaning descended from Proto-Indonesian **a(N)g'i* 'sibling, especially younger ones'; Maanjan *nanto* 'in-laws' vs Malagasy *vinanto* with exactly the same meaning from Proto-Indonesian **binantu* with the same meaning; Maanjan *mat-tueh* 'old' vs Merina *ma-toa* 'elder',

Sakalava *ma-toe* '(fruit) which has reached full maturity', *raza matoe* 'ancestor who has reached the state of becoming a member of the society of the dead' from Proto-Indonesian **tuha*, **tuva* 'old'.

Finally, the existence of names such as Maori *Rangitikei*, a place name found in Pamerston North, located in a remote area of central North Island in New Zealand and Malagasy *Rangitikely* suggests that there was a common trunk between Malayo-Polynesian and Polynesian before the time of separation of Malagasy from the entire family.

Word Roots:

In addition to isolated vocabulary items such as those described above, Dahl in his article, The fourth focus, lists the following Cotabato Manobo verb roots that can also be recognized in Malagasy (shortened Mlg.). Cotabato Manobo (shortened C.M.) is a Philippine language. C.M. *tagu* vs Mlg. *tao* 'place something in some place'; C.M. *tabel* vs Mlg. *vela* 'leave sth at some place'; C.M. *lebeng* vs Mlg. *levina* 'bury something in the ground'; C.M. *todo* vs Mlg. *toro* 'point, show something to so'.

It is important to note that whereas Bantu, Sanskrit and Swahili words found in Malagasy make up a finite list, in the case of SouthEast Asian language items, we have not only finite-list words but also items which make up an open-ended list, i.e. items which can combine with other functional words such as voice affixes and which are involved in very productive grammatical processes.

Comparative Grammatical Features:

Many other grammatical features have been noticed by Dahl (1951), which link Malagasy directly to Maanja. A brief description of each relevant phenomenon will be provided below with appropriate illustrative examples.

About null subjects, Dahl (1951:125) writes 'In the two languages the subject is often left out when it is evident from the context, for example, Maanja *Dami wising, hanje tolak* 'when full, he left' (DFE, p 175), Merina *Rehefa voky izy dia lasa* 'when full = he, left'. During the presentation by the author of this chapter of a paper entitled 'Null Subjects in Malagasy' given at the First International Symposium on Austronesian Studies at Udayana University, Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia, August 14-17, 1994 several native speakers of different Indonesian languages in the audience noted that in many of their languages the subject is often left out. One factor which was mentioned in this context was of a pragmatic nature, probably along lines envisaged by Dahl.

In addition, there seem to be other aspects to this complex phenomenon, which are noted in Randriamasimanana (1995b., 1998) 'Evidence for Null Subjects in Malagasy.'

The existence of so-called root verbs with a passive meaning in the grammars of the two languages was noted by Dahl (1951:145) who wrote 'The simplest verb form is one not comprising any affixes. Such a form can be used in different ways: Sometimes, it is an active verb, for instance Maanjan *hawi* 'to come' vs Malagasy *avy* with the same meaning. Most often, it is a verb with a passive meaning, for instance Maanjan *tampak* 'broken' vs Merina *tapaka* 'cut'. Consult Randriamasimanana (1986:680) *The Causatives of Malagasy*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu for additional examples of root verbs with a passive meaning. The true significance of this particular phenomenon will become clear later.

The form of the causative in Maanjan according to Dahl (1951:172-173) is *Nampi-* prefixed to the radical of the verb. In front of a vowel, the *i* of the prefix often disappears. For example, *ngampi-reket* 'cause to be tied', derived from *i-reket* 'to be tied'. In Malagasy, the form of one type of causative is *amp* with *n-* denoting the past tense while the final *i* is part of the prefix on the embedded verb, as explained in Randriamasimanana (1986:427-428). Thus, *n-amp-i-akatra ny seza i Paoly* (past-causative-prefix *i*-radical of verb 'go up' the chair article Paul) 'Paul brought the chair upstairs.'

The form of the reciprocal in Maanjan is *ipa-*, as for example in *ipa-ninong* 'to look at each other', based on the form *ninong* 'to look', itself derived from *dinong* 'be seen' 'be visible', as reported in Dahl (1951:173). In Malagasy the reciprocal is *-if(a)-*, as in *n-if-amono ny jiolahy* (past-reciprocal-kill the burglar(s)) 'The burglars killed each other.'

According to Dahl (1951:179-180) there exists an aspectual marker *tapa/tapo/tapi-* in Maanjan, which sometimes takes the short form *ta-*, as in *ta-paut* 'fallen into a quarrel', for instance. In Malagasy, the perfective aspect marker *tafa-* can denote an event which happens accidentally, as in *Tafa-petraka i Paoly* (perfective-sit article Paul) 'Paul (fell accidentally and) found himself sitting.' See Randriamasimanana (1986:449-451) for further elaboration.

According to Dahl (1951:199) in Maanjan the passive is formed with the prefix *na-* as can be seen for instance in *na-amoi* 'be given', derived from *ng-ami* 'give'; *na-sinta* 'be loved' from *sinta* 'love'. About the origin of the *a-* passive in Malagasy, Dahl (1951: 200; repeated on page 203) writes: 'The Maanjan passive prefix looks like the *a-* passive found in Malagasy.' (English translation) Indeed in Malagasy one can say *N-a-tsipi-n'i Paoly ny rano* (past-passive prefix *a-*throw-by article Paul the water) 'The water was thrown away by Paul.' Consult Tandriamasimanana (1986: 430) for the distribution of the Malagasy *a-* passive.

Concerning deverbal nouns and the so-called circumstantial passive in Maanjan Dahl (1951: 224) says that this form is rather rare although the language has a great number of deverbal nouns comprising the suffix *-an*, combining it with one of a number of prefixes such as *pa-*, *pa-* + nasalization and *pi-*. Such nominals designate a location, a time or an activity, for instance Maanjan *pa-anrä-an* 'place where to sleep', *pa-njauk-an* 'place where to fetch (water)' from *sauk* 'fetch (water)!'.

The relevant form alluded to above is the type found in Malagasy sentences like *N-an-didi-an'i Paoly ny mofo* (past-prefix-cut-suffix *an-* by article Paul the bread) 'Paul cut some of the bread', where the oblique argument of the active voice clause, here *t-amin'ny mofo* (perfective-preposition the bread) has been promoted to grammatical subject, triggering the use of the so-called circumstantial voice

comprising the suffix *an(a)* on the verb. The process of forming a deverbal noun along these lines is still very productive in contemporary Malagasy, where such nouns also denote a location, a time or an activity, just like in Maanjan.

According to Dahl (1951:229) a great number of adjectives have the prefix *ma-* as seen for instance in Maanjan *ma-ieng* 'dark' vs Merina *ma-izina* with the same meaning; Maanjan *ma-pait* 'sour' vs Merina *ma-faitra* with exactly the same meaning as in Maanjan. Other Malagasy examples include *ma-tavy* 'fat' derived from *tavy* 'fat', *ma-zoto* 'enthusiastic' from *zoto* 'enthusiasm'.

Concerning adjectives with suffixes, Dahl (1951:229) writes a small number of adjectives are formed with suffixes. For instance, Maanjan -*en*, Merina -*ina* or -*ana*, for instance Maanjan *kadan-en* from *kadan* 'leprosy'; Malagasy *volo-ina* 'hairy' from Merina *volo* 'hair'.

Additional Voice System Similarities:

Malagasy possesses one form of the circumstantial voice using the prefix *i-* along with the suffix *-an(a)*, as in for example *Ny toerana n-i-tsangan-an'i Paoly* (the place past-passive prefix *i-*stand-suffix *an(a)-* by article Paul) 'the place where Paul was standing'. For further explanation, see Randriamasimanana (1986:419). For present purposes, recall that in an utterance with the circumstantial voice, it is an oblique argument of the predicate which has been promoted to grammatical subject and not the agent of the activity described by the verb. This prefix *i-* is also found in Tagalog alongside precisely a suffix *-an*.

First, let us consider the prefix *i-* based on the following examples taken from Paul Schachter and Fe F. Otanes *Tagalog Reference Grammar*. With an actor focus type of utterance, we obtain *B-um-ili ako ng damit para sa bata* (*B-um* infix-buy I clothes for the child) 'I bought some clothes for the child' whereas with a benefactive focus, we have *I-b-in-ili ko ng damit ang bata* (Prefix *i-b-*passive infix *in-*buy I clothes the child) 'I bought some clothes for the child.' Recall that an actor focus structure is one where the agent carrying out the activity described by the predicate surfaces as the grammatical subject of the sentence. On the other hand, a benefactive structure is one where the beneficiary of the activity described by the predicate becomes the grammatical subject.

Note that the benefactive verb is *i-bili* 'buy for' with the prefix *i-* and that Tagalog has an infix *-um-* showing up inside the verb in the actor focus construction. Presumably in the utterance with *b-um-ili*, the actor or agent shows up as the grammatical subject, whereas in the other instance, it is the oblique argument *for the child*, which shows up as the grammatical subject of the sentence.

Furthermore, it turns out that Malagasy also has the infix *-um-* written *-om-* (although rarely used), as seen in the predicate *s-om-ary* 'look like' derived from the noun *sary* 'picture' In Malagasy, the equivalent of

benefactive focus construction is *N-i-vidi-ana-ko akanjo ilay ankizy* (past-passive *i-buy-ana-by* me clothes the child) ‘I bought some clothes for the child.’ In Randriamasimanana (1986: 420-421) the elements *i...an(a)* are labelled a circumfix. Both are necessary in the

same way as Tagalog prefix *i-* and the passive infix *-in-*, as shown in the benefactive focus example above.

Second, judging from examples given in Naylor Paz Buenaventura *Topic, Focus, and Emphasis in the Tagalog Verbal Clause*, the locative suffix *-an* is also found in the Tagalog verbal system and it appears that it co-occurs with the passive infix *-in-*, as can be seen in *T-in-ir-han ni Juan ang bahay* (T-passive infix *in-* radical live- suffix (*h*)*an* by John the house) ‘The house was-lived-in by John.’ Note the suffix *-(h)an* at the end of the verb in the above utterance, where the oblique constituent indicating location(*in*) *the house* occupies the grammatical subject position (*ang bahay*) in the clause. Of course, the infix *-in-* marking the passive is also present in the verbal complex. If on the other hand the actor occupies the subject position, then, we obtain *T-um-ira si Juan sa bahay* (lived the John to house) ‘John lived in the house.’ (Buenaventura 1973:52)

In connection with the Tagalog infix *-in-*, let us note that Malagasy also has a passive suffix *-in-*, which is presumably rare. Nevertheless it does exist and can be found in cases like *tapaka* 'cut' or alternatively *t-in-apaka* 'cut', as in *hevitra tinapaka* 'decisions reached'; or *vaky* 'broken' vs *v-in-aky* 'broken, as in placenames such as *Ambatovinaky*, a section of the capital city, literally 'the place where stones were broken' from a combination of the morphemes *an* 'at-location' + *vato* 'stone' + *v-in-aky* 'broken'.

Other Functional Word Similarities:

Clitic vs Nonclitic Form of the Personal Pronouns.

Suhandano in *Grammatical Relations in Javanese. A Short Description*. shows the following Javanese utterance *Kamar-ku di-turu-ni dening bocah cilik iku* (room-my sleep by the child small that) ‘My room was slept in by that small child.’ This sequence comprises the clitic form of

the first person singular pronoun for 'I'. Likewise, in Malagasy, there is a distinction between full and clitic forms of personal pronouns. Furthermore, the clitic form is the same in Malagasy, as can be seen in *trano-ko* (house-my, literally house of mine) 'my house', where the bound morpheme written *ko* is actually pronounced *ku*.

Similarity in the Forms of Definite Articles/Deictics.

Similarities involving functional words in the Indonesia-Philippine area no longer constitute a big surprise. Thus, Keenan in his article entitled 'The Syntax of Subject-Final Languages' quotes Silitonga (1973) on Toba Batak: *Mangalean poda guru i tu dakdanak I* (give advice teacher the to child the) 'The teacher gives advice to the child.' Note the discontinuous definite article *i...i* in Toba Batak (spoken in Northern Sumatra), which is rather similar to the initial syllable found in the Malagasy demonstrative *ity ... ity* 'this-near the speaker (emphasis)', as in *ity zaza ity* (this child this) 'this child (near the speaker)', which surrounds the head noun.

But the similarities are not confined to Indonesian languages like Toba Batak. It extends to Polynesian languages such as Western Samoan. Thus, the following examples from Ulrike Mosel & Even Hovdhaugen in *Samoan Reference Grammar* (Their 7.108) *Ua ma'i le fafina*. (Perf sick art woman) 'The woman is sick/pregnant.' (Their 6.276) *ni*

tagata tautala soo (article(nonspecific plural) person(specific plural) talk often) 'some talkative people'.

The form of the Samoan article *le* is reminiscent of Malagasy deictic *ilay* 'previous mention' pronounced [i.le] from which the initial syllable has been left out. Note that in Malagasy *ilay* can only refer to a singular entity and never to a plural. Furthermore the Samoan functional word *ni* refers to a nonspecific plural set in the same manner as the Malagasy definite article *ny* in *ny ankizy* 'the children' [Note the plural interpretation]--in an out-of-the-blue type of situation.

Finally, the Samoan perfective aspect marker *ua* has a Malagasy equivalent, i.e. *voa* as in *voa-jono ilay trondro* 'the fish has been caught', which can denote the present consequence of a past activity.

For further illustrative examples, consult Randriamasimanana (1986: 448). This appears to be the exact opposite of what is found in Samoan. See for example Mosel et al.(1992:351): (Their 7.106) *Ua timu*. It is raining now; it started to rain [it did not rain before]. So it seems that Malagasy concentrates on the outcome of the relevant event in cases where the predicate denotes a durative activity involving a time interval whereas contemporary Samoan appears to focus on the initial stage of the same.

Frequency Counts of Passive:

A criterion involving frequency counts of passives in different Malayo-Polynesia languages suggests that Malagasy is more like languages located between the Philippine area and the Indonesian area rather than those to be found in the Polynesia area. These were some of the

findings made in a unpublished manuscript written by the author in 1979 and entitled 'Passive and markedness in Austronesian languages.' We will discuss some evidence pointing in this direction below.

Table 1: European Languages and Frequency Counts of Passive

Language	Source	Frequency of Passive
French	Personal Letters from native speakers	4%
English	Personal Letters from native speakers	5.5%

On the whole, as is shown on Table 1 above, passive seems to be more marked in Indo-European languages than in Austronesian or Malayo-Polynesian languages --compare with Table 2 below-- if we use the criterium of frequency of occurrence. Thus, in English the percentage of passive sentences in written texts varies from 4 to 18 percent according to T. Givon in his book, *On Understanding Grammar*. This tallies with frequency counts the author of these lines made of personal letters from native speakers: From a small sample of five letters written in the late 1970s, the average was about 5.5 percent --4 out of 73 verbs-- for French; under 4 percent for English --4 out of 110 verbs.

Table 2: Polynesian and Frequency Counts of Passive

Language	Source	Frequency of Passive
Maori	Clark 1973	56.5%
Maori	Chung 1978	75-85%

Austronesian languages in general show much higher frequencies for passive although a subcategorization appears to be necessary. Languages in Polynesia by and large have the highest frequency counts followed by Philippine languages and last come the Indonesian languages including Malagasy. This clearly suggests that Malagasy is located somewhere between the Philippine type and the Indonesian type of languages since as we will see below passive occurs much more frequently in the Polynesian group than in the Indonesian group, where the average is around 30-35 percent as opposed to well above 50 percent for the Polynesian group.

Thus, as is indicated on Table 2 above, for Maori, a typical Polynesian language, Sandra Chung in her book *Case Marking and Grammatical Relations in Polynesia* reports that ‘in some fifty pages of Orbell (1968), the passive is used 56.5 percent of all occurrences of verbs.’ Ross Clark in his 1973 dissertation, *Aspects of Proto-Polynesian Syntax* confirms this: For some fifty pages of texts there were 244 items in the passive against only 188 in the active voice, thus yielding 56.5 percent also. Finally, Sandra Chung (1978) states that ‘according to Patrick Hohepa and Kenneth Hale, the passive is used 75-85 percent more often than the active’ in Maori. These counts seem to be corroborated by the findings of Coppenrath and Prévost, who remark in their 1975 *Grammaire Approfondie de la Langue Tahitienne (Ancienne et Moderne)*⁸ that there is a tendency to passivize even on utterances like *I was born: Ua fana-hia vau* (perfective-be born-passive I) as opposed to *Ua fanau vau* used previously.

Table 3: Indonesian Passive Frequency Counts

	Source of Letter	Occurrences of Passives	Percentage
Elder son	Parents	18 out of 61 verbs	29.5%
Younger son	Parents	8 out of 49 verbs	16.3%
Civil servant	Parents	32 out of 56 verbs	57.1%
Overall		58 out of 166	35%

Table 4: Malagasy Passive Frequency Counts

	Source	Occurrences of Passive	Percentage
Male student	Parents	43 out of 133 verbs	32.3%
Spouse	Husband		26%
Author	Parents	496 out of 1412 verbs	35.1%
Newspapers	Madagascar	94 out of 269 verbs	35%

For Tagalog, Naylor Buenaventura in his previously cited doctoral dissertation states that ‘in two of his material, i.e. comics magazines and daily newspapers, the goal focus (one form of passive) construction showed a higher frequency than the actor focus type (the equivalent of the active voice)’ although he does not provide any figure.

As for Bahasa Indonesia, as shown on Table 3, out of ten personal letters written by native speakers for other native speakers totalling some 166 verbs 58 were passives, which gives us an average of 35 percent. These letters were sent by parents of the recipient from Indonesia to their sons and daughter studying in the United States in the late 1970s. Concerning Malagasy, as is evident from Table 4, the overall percentage found in personal letters was slightly higher, i.e. about 35 percent in letters written in Malagasy in the late 1970s: In one count of some thirty-two personal letters from the author’s parents with a total of some 1412 verbs, there were 496 passives, i.e. 35.1 percent of the total

occurrences of verbs; during the same time period a friend found 43 passives out of 133 verbs in a small sample of three personal letters from her husband, i.e. 32.3 percent of the total, whereas a count based on newspaper items written in Malagasy gave 94 passives out of a total of 269 verbs, i.e. 35 percent.

Functional Uses of Passive:

This additional criterium is closely related to the previous one and was explored in the same paper as the one already mentioned. In general, the use of passive appears to be marked in Indonesian languages as well as in Malagasy but unmarked in Polynesian languages such as Samoan and Pukapukan. If both active and passive voice structures are equally available in a given language and if by unmarked one means ‘not involving psycho-social distancing’, i.e. politeness, for example, then passive seems to be marked in such Indonesian languages as Bahasa Indonesia and Malagasy as opposed to Pukapukan, a Samoic-Outlier language and Samoan, another Polynesian language.

According to S. Chung (1978) commenting on the use of register in Pukapukan ‘As far as register is concerned, the accusative system is identified as formal, polite and proper; the ergative informal, casual and slightly improper; and the passive is neutral.’ Recall that the so-called accusative system refers to a framework where the agent of an action denoted by the verb (in short A) surfaces as the grammatical subject (in short S) within the sentence, i.e. where in other words, S and A are treated alike while the semantic role of patient takes up the position of grammatical direct object in the sentence. This is the essence of the active voice in the accusative system. On the other hand, simplifying somewhat we can say that the so-called ergative system requires that the semantic role of patient (P) be encoded as subject (S), i.e. where in other words, S and P are treated alike-- which is somehow reminiscent of certain aspects of passive.

The above remarks regarding register use in Pukapukan taken from S. Chung (1978) appear to be confirmed in Samoan, as reported in Kenneth Cook (1988) *A Cognitive Analysis of Grammatical Relations, Case, and Transitivity in Samoan*.

If we now return to the data from Bahasa Indonesia displayed on Table 3 above, we see that the same parents writing to two different sons use their passives very differently: With the elder son, in three letters, they used passive 29.5 percent of the times -- i.e. 18 out of 61 verbs found in the letters-- as opposed to 16.3 percent --i.e. 8 out of a total of 49 verbs-- with the younger son. The first was a graduate student in a well-known university in Southern California, whereas the second was still an undergraduate. Furthermore one student, who was much older than the two brothers but attending the same school at the time of the enquiry and who had the prerogative of being a highly-salaried (by local standards) member of the Civil Service at home --a highly respected profession on the local scene-- had an average of 57.1 percent of passives in her three letters-- i.e. 32 out of 56 verbs. All of the above suggests that psychosocial distancing helps determine whether passive is perceived to be more appropriate than its active counterpart in Indonesian.

The same type of result was obtained for Malagasy from the data shown on Table 4 above. A male student received an average of 32.3 percent of passives in three of his letters written in Malagasy from home as opposed to only 26 percent for a female student, who received letters from her husband back home in Madagascar. If we assume that a wife is closer to her husband than an already married male student to his parents, then we have a plausible explanation for the difference in that in Malagasy the passive is used in a more formal type of situation. If so, then the four individual cases touched upon in this section illustrate the more formal use of the passive in Indonesian languages, including Malagasy.

Conclusions:

Four different types of linguistic evidence have been presented to substantiate the claim that Malagasy has its roots in the Malayo-Polynesian family of languages, probably from an area located between the Philippines and Indonesia.

The first type of proof involving tonal systems eliminates the geographically proximate Bantu languages of East Africa, which

extensively use tones since Malagasy phonology does not have recourse to tones. Indeed Malagasy is not a tone language at all.

The second type of evidence taken mainly from Dahl (1951) relates to different possible sources for Malagasy vocabulary: Malayo-Polynesian, Sanskrit, Bantu and Swahili, among other languages. However, a close inspection of lexical items referring to the human body, bodily functions and labels for family members indicates that Maanjaan, an Indonesian language spoken on Kalimantan (Borneo) shows very intimate affinities with Malagasy.

The third type of arguments based on Dahl's work has to do with the existence in both Maanjaan and Malagasy of almost identical predicate roots as well as similarities involving the causative, the reciprocal affix, the perfective aspect marker *tafa*, the form of the basic passive in both languages, the presence within the two linguistic systems of the so-called circumstantial passive using very similar forms, the existence in both languages of adjectives comprising the same prefix *ma-* or similar suffixes *-en* in Maanjaan and *i-na/ana* in Malagasy.

The above are by no means the only similarities between Malagasy and Malayo-Polynesian languages: Like Javanese, Malagasy distinguishes between bound morphemes/clitics denoting personal pronouns and independent morphemes; like Toba Batak definite article *i...i*, Malagasy has the demonstrative *ity...ity*; and like Samoan, Malagasy also displays a distinction between a singular definite article *ilay* and a plural definite article *ny*.

Last but not least, not only do lexical items and functional words found in Malagasy resemble very closely those found in many Malayo-Polynesian languages, a description of language use based on frequency counts as well as considerations of functional uses of passive in Malagasy suggests a similarity in patterns of use between Malagasy and Malayo-Polynesian languages found in the Philippine/Indonesia area more so than those in the Polynesian triangle, i.e. the geographical area stretching from Hawaii to the north, Easter Islands to the east and New Zealand to the south.

In fact, even a cursory comparison between passive in Philippine type languages and passive in Indonesian type languages leads to the conclusion that Malagasy has structurally a lot more in common with Philippine languages such as Tagalog and that as a direct consequence it would not be too far fetched to surmise that the original home of Malagasy must be somewhere to the north of Java, for instance, on Kalimantan, where as it turns out Maanjan is spoken. That is precisely the theme developed by Otto Christian Dahl in his book, *Migration from Kalimantan to Madagascar*.

It goes without saying that Malagasy is undergoing many changes and makes borrowings from many other languages including French especially since the colonization of Madagascar by the French in 1896. However, such borrowings seem to be generally confined to lexical items --as opposed to functional words-- and in no way disturb the overall Malayo-Polynesian backbone of its grammar. It is therefore not true and quite an exaggeration to claim as does Lee Haring in his book, *Verbal Arts in Madagacar. Performance in historical*

perspective that a process labelled 'creolization' is taking place in Malagasy. This is certainly not in keeping with the standard definition of 'creolization' and is simply misleading⁹.

It is hoped that the above illustrations will set the record straight once and for all with regard to the Malayo-Polynesian origins of Malagasy and that even English-speaking scholars who cannot read French --the late Otto Christian Dahl's work appeared mainly in French-- will be in a position to take the linguistic arguments presented above into consideration.

Footnotes

1. English translation: Tagalog and Malagasy.
2. English translation: Philological sketch of the affinities between the Malagasy language and Javanese, Malay and other main languages spoken on the Indian archipelago.
3. English translation: Proceedings of the Sixth International Meeting of Asian Studies specialists.

4. English translation: An essay on comparative phonetics of Malay and Malagasy dialects.
5. English translation: The Malagasy language, Volume I - The original layer of Malagasy vocabulary (A Vocabulary Study).
6. English translation: The Malagasy language and Malagasy origins (A linguistic analysis)
7. English translation: Malagasy and Maanja. A linguistic comparison.
8. English translation: In-depth Grammar of the Tahitian Language (Old and Modern).
9. Haring (1992: 26) gives one illustrative example of French-Malagasy code-mixing under the title 'Is Creolization Still Going On?' He simply ignores the fact that only about 1-5% of the total population of Madagascar speak French fluently and that even among this small percentage of the population, only a fraction will resort to code-mixing in a systematic manner. Surely a language should be described according to the usage by the vast majority of its speakers, i.e. 95 % and not following the characteristics of the speech of a tiny minority.

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