

Second Swiss Workshop on Sociolinguistics, Language Contacts and Historical Linguistics in the Ancient World

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PROGRAM – 13th-14th February 2025 (last update: 5th February 2025)

Where: Rosshofgasse (Schnitz), Seminarraum S 02 - Rosshofgasse 2, 4051 Basel

Map: <https://www.google.com/maps/place/47.55744,7.58534>

Zoom

The Workshop can be attended online using the following link:

<https://unibas.zoom.us/j/64898099611>

DAY 1 - 13 of February (Thursday)

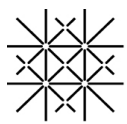
KEYNOTE

9.30-10.30 : **Dr. Martine Robeets** (MPI Jena)

The hot potato of the Transeurasian controversy: borrowing vs. inheritance

The origin and dispersal of the Transeurasian — i.e. Japonic, Koreanic, Tungusic, Mongolic and Turkic— languages is one of the most disputed issues in historical comparative linguistics. Although opponents and supporters agree that these languages have a substantial amount of lexical and morphological material in common and that this must be due to some historical connection between the languages concerned, the hot potato of the controversy is whether all similarities are due to borrowing or whether some are residue of inheritance from a common ancestor.

In this talk, I will apply a number of formal and semantic guidelines to distinguish borrowing from inheritance in the agropastoral vocabulary shared between the Transeurasian languages. Examining the cultural, temporal and spatial patterns that characterize these two sets, I will infer two major phases in the origin and spread of Transeurasian subsistence vocabulary, mirroring prehistoric population and cultural dynamics in Northeast Asia. These phases, which roughly correspond to the Neolithic and Bronze Age, led to a prehistorical layering of borrowed upon inherited words. This tension in the reconstructed vocabulary makes it difficult for historical linguists to distinguish between both transmission modes and is therefore at the base of the Transeurasian controversy.



SESSION 1: NORTHERN EURASIA AND AMERICA (11.00-12.30)

11.00-11.30 : **Sampsa Holopainen (Helsingin yliopisto)**

Early Indo-European Loanwords in Uralic: Etymology and Sociolinguistics

Although there has been much research on the various prehistoric loanwords from Indo-European to Uralic languages, many details concerning the earliest contact episodes between the two families have been debated in recent research. While the existence of early Indo-Iranian loanwords in the Uralic languages is commonly accepted, the idea of possible contacts between Proto-Indo-European and Proto-Uralic has been recently disputed, as most of the suggested loan etymologies involve various problems (see especially the criticism by Simon 2020, *Indogermanische Forschungen* 125). Recently it has also been noted by De Heer et al. (2023, *Journal of Language Contact* 16) that among the possible Proto-Indo-European loans, items of basic vocabulary are overrepresented (compared to later loanword layers). While De Heer et al. do not refute the existence of Proto-Indo-European loans based on this criterion, this is a valid point that can cast doubt on the existence of a given loanword layer.

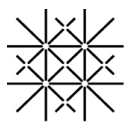
In this presentation I will critically discuss some alleged early Indo-European loanwords in Proto-Uralic: I will analyze etymologies for which an early Indo-European etymology remains a possibility, even if a Proto-Indo-European source is unlikely. These include the well-known etymologies of Proto-Uralic **weti* 'water' (possibly borrowed from some reflex of Proto-Indo-European **u̯d-ōr* 'water') and **nimi* 'name' (possibly from some reflex of Proto-Indo-European **h₁/₃néh₃mn* 'name'). Based on the discussion of such etymologies I aim to shed more light on the possible early Indo-European contact languages of Uralic and also to discuss the sociolinguistic setting of the contacts, especially the problem of the borrowing of basic vocabulary. The early contacts between these two families are an interesting case study of prehistoric language contact, as the prehistory of both families is quite well-known but the study of the contact situations still present us with many uncertainties.

11.30-12.00 : **Bingcong Deng (MPI Jena)**

Prehistoric textile borrowings in Northern China

Textile production in Northern China and Northeast Asia dates to the early Neolithic. Spindle whorls were excavated at the Xinglongwa culture (6400-5200 BC) in the West Liao River region (Nelson et al. 2020), Peiligang culture (6000-5400 BC) and Yangshao culture (4000-3000 BC) in the Yellow River Region (Rao 2019: 49). Linguistically, the Transeurasian speakers were likely associated with the Xinglongwa Culture (Robbeets et al. 2021) and the Sino-Tibetan speech community with the Yangshao culture (M. Zhang et al. 2019; Sagart et al. 2019; H. Zhang et al. 2020). Although the vocabularies related to textile production had been reconstructed in Transeurasian and Sino-Tibetan (cf. Nelson et al. 2020; Jacques n.d.), the early lexical borrowings in relevant semantic fields had not been thoroughly investigated previously. This current research aims to evaluate the potential textile loanwords between Sino-Tibetan and Transeurasian, as well as to draw cultural inferences from the accepted borrowings.

Methodologically, a database of textile borrowings were collected from both previous proposals and my own dictionary search. The entire dataset comprises of eighteen lexical items related to



sericulture, clothing items, and textile production and technology. These items are evaluated based on their semantic and phonetic compatibility, cultural background (multidisciplinary information) and clusterability.

The preliminary results suggest that three lexical borrowings could be attributed to prehistoric period, namely the borrowings for 'hemp shoes', 'silk' and 'silk band'. Seven later borrowings are identified in this research, likely dating to the Chinese Táng dynasty (618-907) based on phonological evidence. It is also worth mentioning that items related to sericulture and footwear were more frequently borrowed. This linguistic evidence supports early silk-related exports from China, as well as possible leather import into the Yellow River region. It also shows that the Sinitic speakers provided connection between the Central Asian and East Asian technology innovations at a very early stage.

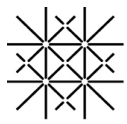
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12.00-12.30 : Anna Berge (University of Alaska)

The Genesis of Unangam Tunuu (Aleut): Ancient Language Contact with Dene

Until 2024, grammatical similarities between Unangam Tunuu (an Eskaleut language) and Northern Dene languages (both groups spoken in Alaska) were noted, but they remained speculative without any known time or mechanism of language contact. Interdisciplinary collaborative work (Berge et al. 2024a, 2024b) has now established the plausibility, timing, and location of prehistoric language contact to ca. 4000 BP. Language contact lasted several hundred years, a short time in historical terms, but long in sociolinguistic terms, and the amount and nature of the contact effects suggest extensive bilingualism. Shared features are found in all levels of grammar. For example, unlike other Eskaleut languages, Unangam Tunuu shares vowel harmony (1), stem=stem structures (2), and paired simple/causative active/passive alternations highlighting different types of argument suppression (3) with Dene.

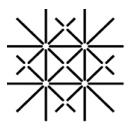


To a great extent, these features define UnangaX (non-lexical) differentiation from other Eskaleut languages. In this presentation, for the first time, I give the currently known set of shared Unangan and Northern Dene grammatical features and discuss implications for the reconstruction of Unangam Tunuu.

		Unangam Tunuu		Dene (Eyak, Krauss 2017, except 2)	
(1)		<i>itxajyiχ</i> → <i>itxiŋyiχ</i> 'caribou' (Berge 2016)		<i>q'e? t̥astilid̥t</i> → <i>q'e? t̥istilid̥t</i> 'I said again'	
(2)		<i>aan=mik-l=a-ada-lix</i> lake=play-conj=aux-dim-conj 'to play or float around in water, go swimming in a lake'		<i>k'e=ke=e-h-dzoh</i> preverb=foot=asp-1sg.subj-cl/stem 'I slid on feet' (Slave, Rice 2000)	
		active	passive/middle	active	passive/middle
(3a)	simple	<i>ŋχuuχ-six</i> wash-conj 'to wash'	<i>ŋχuu-lya-lix</i> 'to be washed'	<i>kʷu-x-kus</i> ind-1-wash 'I am washing something'	<i>xu-da-kus</i> 1obj-cl-wash 'I am being washed'
					<i>də-ku?</i> cl-warm 'to be warm'
(3b)	causative	<i>ŋχuuχ-ŋχi-lix</i> wash-caus-conj = <i>ŋχuu-χ-t=a-lix</i> wash-prf-caus=aux-conj 'to have obj washed (caus)'	<i>ŋχuu-Ɂ=a-lix</i> wash-prf=aux-conj 'to be made to be washed'	<i>obj-d̥t-ku?</i> 'to warm obj'	<i>əd-d̥tə-ku?</i> self-cl-warm 'to warm self'
					<i>obj-d̥tə-ku?</i> obj-cl-warm 'for obj to be warmed'

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SESSION 2: HISTORICAL MORPHOLOGY AND LEXICOGRAPHY (14.00-15.30)

14.00-14.30 : **Florian Wandl (Universität Zürich) Alexander Robert Herren (University of Basel)**

Eerie fish: Shells in two Tocharian B medicinal prescriptions

Two Tocharian B medicinal text discovered in Dunhuang, PK AS 3B and IOL Toch 306, contain an unusual ingredient listed alongside components derived from plants and cow dung, applied by means of a poultice, i.e., *läksaṇa klautso*, lit. 'fish ear'. In earlier editions and translations, this term has been interpreted as '(fish) gill' (Sieg 1954: 69 f. Carling 2003: 83, 91; CEToM).

However, these editions do not provide factual evidence for interpreting a 'fish ear' as equivalent to gills. Neither do they give any parallel examples that would support the assumption that a word for 'gill' could be formed from the words for 'fish' and 'ear', nor do they offer any evidence for the use of 'gills' in ancient medicine.

This paper intends to provide an alternative interpretation of *läksaṇa klautso*. By referring to the word for 'shell' in Nakh-Dagestanian languages, cf., e.g. Avar *ччыллулун* /č:uŋiŋin/ 'shell', lit. 'fish ear' (Alekseev et al. 2014: 110), and pointing out specific metaphorical associations of the involved words, such as German *Ohrmuschel* 'auricle' and English *elephant-ear* 'elliptio crassidens', we argue that the meaning of *läksaṇa klautso* is not '(fish) gill' but rather 'shell'. Accordingly, we suggest that the medical prescription refers to a 'ground shell poultice' used to treat the ailments described in PK AS 3B and in IOL Toch 306.

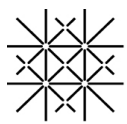
To further substantiate our claim, we provide evidence showing that ground shells had several different applications in Ayurvedic (e.g. Sudarshan 2005: 117) and ancient Chinese (e.g. Yang 1998: 124f.) medicine.

Abbreviations

CEToM Melanie Malzahn et al. (2011–). *CEToM. A Comprehensive Edition of Tocharian Manuscripts*. url: <http://www.univie.ac.at/tocharian>.

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14.30-15.00 : Ellora Hänni (Universität Bern)

Stem alternations in Spiti

Most modern Tibeto-Burman languages exhibit stem alternations in their verbal morphology, a phenomenon which can confidently be reconstructed for the proto-language (see e.g. Benedict, 1972: 124). These alternations, however, have been shown to differ in both form and function across the language family. While there seems to be a tendency for a difference in valency, the precise operations which were at work in Proto-Tibeto-Burman remain unclear due to a lack of data. In order to get a better picture, it is therefore crucial to describe the system of verbal stem alternations in as many modern TB languages as possible. The project to be presented aims at contributing to this endeavor by examining the alternations found in Spiti, a previously undescribed Tibetic language currently assigned to the Bodish subbranch of the TB family.

In Spiti, two paradigms of verbal stem alternation can be found: Firstly, an alternation with functions associated with tense, aspect, and modality. Secondly, we can see an alternation in forms which can differ in five ways (six if zero alternation is included), all concerning the initial consonant or the tone. This alternation is concerned with transitivity and usually occurs between pairs of verbs, which is typical for the Tibetic languages and can be traced back to their common ancestor, Old Tibetan. However, the Spiti data reveals that some verbs exhibit up to five different stems, the functions of which are still to be determined. Therefore, an analysis of Spiti stem alternations and their comparison to the Old Tibetan forms (via the written Old Tibetan variety, Classical Tibetan) does not only allow a diachronic view on the modern Tibetic varieties, including the emergence of a tonal system, but also shows that the functions of these alternations are more complex than a difference in transitivity.

References:

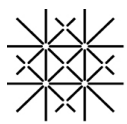
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SESSION 3: CONTACTS IN EUROPE (16.00-17.30)

15.30-16.00 : Jadranka Gvozdanović (Universität Heidelberg)

Methodological considerations about combining linguistic and archeological evidence

Most extensive evidence on past cultures can be obtained through language and archaeology. Linguistics has well-established methods of internal and comparative reconstruction, but can detect effects of past language contacts either by indirect evidence or by typological divergence provided there is a clear and non-circular notion of language type. At the same time, some variation remains unaccounted for or even not noticed by the linguistic methods, as survival of varieties may be conditioned by structural, communicative, sociocultural or external factors. It is there that archeology might give us some clues. Archeology, on the other hand, deals with the problem of assignment of artefacts and their functionality; also here a comparative method combined with distributional properties has the capacity of yielding significant results if not contradicted by linguistic data evaluated by historical-linguistic methods.



This paper focuses on quantitative and qualitative aspects of distributions of linguistic features and properties of archeological artefacts, proposing a method to combine both kinds of data and their distributions. The concrete data derives from a research project funded jointly by the German and Czech Research Councils (led from Heidelberg and Prague) on northeastern Bavaria and western Bohemia in the early Middle Ages, a period with shifting populations and cultures that left traces in onomastics, types of archeological finds, and ultimately the surviving language forms. The presentation will outline methods for combining these different types of evidence.

16.00-16.30 : Bridget Drinka (University of Texas at San Antonio)

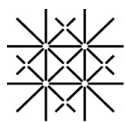
*Interdisciplinary Approaches to Ancient Indo-European Contact and Migration:
Linguistic, Archaeological, and Genomic Evidence*

This paper assesses findings from three disciplines—genomic research, archaeology, and, especially, linguistics—concerning the origin and spread of the Indo-European languages, in an attempt to assess the validity of the Anatolian and Steppe Hypotheses. Research on ancient DNA reveals a massive migration off the steppe in c. 2,500 BCE, providing remarkably strong support for the Steppe Hypothesis. However, intriguing questions remain, such as why ancient Greek and Indo-Iranian populations had a decidedly smaller proportion of steppe ancestry, and Anatolian apparently had none at all. Lexical and archaeological evidence for wheels and looms provides essential clues about the early separation of Anatolian from the Indo-European community, as well as the late entrance of Greek into the Aegean area. Evidence from the morphologies of the IE languages support these findings: the morphological patterns of the Anatolian languages show remarkable archaism, implying earlier separation, while the morphologies of Indo-Iranian and Greek display an array of similarities pointing to fairly late areal contact. Both the lexical and the morphological evidence, then, alongside the genomic and archaeological evidence, suggests that the Steppe Hypothesis more successfully accounts for the data, and presents a preferable solution.

16.30-17.00 : Michiel de Vaan (Universität Basel)

Alpine toponymy and the Gaulish-Latin language contact situation

Gallo-Romance toponymy, in particular in mountainous regions, abounds with terms of certain or reputed Gaulish origin. Famous cases are *jour* 'mountain forest' and *nant* 'brook', but there are many more, especially referring to landscape elements, local flora, and small fauna. These words were obviously borrowed into Latin before Gaulish went extinct, but how exactly did the borrowing take place? According to the different geographic regions and the various semantic fields, different processes may have played a role. This talk provides a first, tentative analysis, focusing on the western Alpine arc (mainly the Rhône basin) and its microtoponyms.



DAY 2 - 14 of February (Friday)

KEYNOTE

9.00-10.00 : **Dr. Ilya Yakubovich** (Philipps-Universität Marburg)

Why did the Anatolian hieroglyphic script die out?

In the early first millennium BCE, the Anatolian hieroglyphic script was used in a variety of polities, variously known as Neo-Hittite, Syro-Hittite, and Syro-Anatolian states, and served as a medium for recording Late Luwian texts. Then, around 700 BCE, its use suddenly disappears. Judging by the onomastic data, this was not caused by the extinction of the Luwian language: Luwian names are vigorously attested up to the Roman period and display structural innovations that bear witness to its ongoing native transmission. The Assyrian conquest and annexation of several “Neo-Hittite” states, which occurred around that period, provides only a partial explanation, since in the northeastern part of the area associated with hieroglyphic literacy (Tabal, Tuwana, and Que) this annexation was fairly short-lived. In my presentation, I intend to argue that certain peculiarities of Luwian historical orthography shed light on the nature of scribal education in the Anatolian hieroglyphic community, which in turn accounts for its inherent vulnerability in the face of political upheavals.

SESSION 1: ANCIENT NEAR EAST AND EGYPT (10.30-12.30)

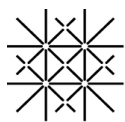
10.30-11.00 : **Robin Meyer (Univerité de Lausanne)**

Linguistic identity politics in West Middle Iranian

The West Middle Iranian branch of the Iranian languages consists of two or three languages (cf. e.g. Korn & Olsen 2012), attested by numerous early documents (coin legends, ostraca) and later literary and religious texts (Manichaean, Zoroastrian), as well as a small corpus of multilingual monumental inscriptions in Parthian, Middle Persian, and sometimes Greek. These date back to the time of the late Arsacid and early Sasanian empires (Durkin-Meisterernst 2014: 2–25). The royal inscriptions of Ardashir I (r. 224–239/40; Naqsh-e Rostam), Shapur I (r. 240–270; Ka'ba-ye Zartosht, Naqsh-e Rostam, Hajiabad), and Narseh (r. 293–302; Paikuli) represent about half of the extant Sasanian inscriptions, while the other half are monolingual Middle Persian; next to them stand two earlier monolingual Parthian inscriptions (in Kal-e Jangal and Susa).

Given that Middle Persian and Parthian exhibit phonological and morphological differences, but were in all likelihood mutually intelligible, the question arises as to why both languages were sometimes used in monumental epigraphy and sometimes only one. Based on the above-mentioned corpus, this paper examines this question, taking into account metalinguistic (geographical position; historical integration) and linguistic factors (relative sociolinguistic status of both languages; linguistic differences in lexis; omissions and additions in both versions).

Preliminary analysis suggests that this particular multilingualism was the result of temporary linguistic identity politics, beginning with the Sasanian takeover from the Arsacids and ending at the close of the third century with the socio-political decline of the Arsacids (cf. Daryaee 2009: 99–101; Meyer 2022). To illustrate that this is an indication of gesture politics and not of a communicatively controlled action, a comparison with another multilingual or



multilectal inscription corpus, that of the Greek-speaking world, is undertaken (cf. Bodel 2001; Filos 2016; Krantz 2017).

References

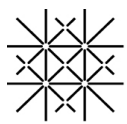
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11.00-11.30 : **Seraina Nett (Københavns Universitet)**

Language Contact and Domains of Language Use in the Western Mesopotamian Periphery in the Late Second Millennium BCE

Multilingualism has been a defining feature of the written culture in Ancient West Asia since its inception. This paper explores the interaction of languages in the western Mesopotamian periphery through a sociolinguistic lens. It begins by outlining what is known about the linguistic landscape of this region during the 3rd and 2nd millennia BCE, providing an overview of the available evidence. The paper then focuses on an analysis of several case studies, providing the functional distribution of languages and their specific domains of use in the latter half of the second millennium BCE.

Evidence from the peripheral sites, where documents in multiple languages have been found, offers valuable insights into the functional distribution between Akkadian and other languages used simultaneously in the written corpus. Interestingly, different mechanisms of language use appear to operate in these cases, which will be explored in detail. One clear pattern is the use of Akkadian in international correspondence across the entire region, fulfilling the primary role of a lingua franca for communication between speakers of various linguistic groups. However, the situation is more complex when looking at other genres, such as legal texts and royal inscriptions. This paper ultimately proposes a model where Akkadian, initially adopted for a range of functions during the Late Old Babylonian period—especially in northern.



11.30-12.00 : Lauren Dogaer (Universität Basel)

Language Contacts between Demotic and Greek: A Case Study on Priestly Title Equations from Ptolemaic Thebes

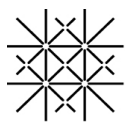
The multicultural and multilingual society of Ptolemaic Thebes (332-30 BCE) provides an excellent case study for investigating linguistic interactions between Egyptian, particularly Demotic, and Greek. In this regard, the bilingual (Demotic-Greek) archives of the priests who worked on the west bank of Thebes are of particular interest. These priests were engaged in either the funerary business, specifically the mummification process or the maintenance of the cult of the dead, or in the daily rituals of small temples or sanctuaries, in charge of the cult of the god or one of the sacred animal cults. In order to ascertain the precise functions performed by these priests, it is necessary to examine their titles, which are often preserved in both Demotic and Greek, due to the bilingual archives. In some instances, the Greek titles even clarify the Egyptian ones, thereby offering a greater understanding of the specific functions attributed to the priests in question. While numerous title equations between the two scripts/languages have been previously identified and examined by PESTMAN, MARTIN and BAETENS, the socio-cultural context in which these equations were established, as well as the potential role of linguistics, remain understudied. This paper will therefore analyse the complex issue of priestly title equations from Demotic into Greek by distinguishing between (1) cultural and loan translations; (2) transcriptions, including foreignisms and loan words; and (3) descriptions, focusing on how certain functions can be described in Greek. An examination of the aforementioned three categories will assist in determining the extent of familiarity of the scribes writing in Greek with the functions of the priests, as well as the degree to which a Greek perspective influenced the perception of the titles by the multilingual population of Thebes and by modern scholars.

12.00-12.30 : Victoria Fendel (University of Oxford) Alexandre Loktionov (University of Cambridge)

Import and transformation: Dislocation and re(al)location of lexemes in Egypt from the New Kingdom to the Coptic period

Import from a source into a target language can happen for a variety of reasons (for an extreme view, see Thomason 2001). Import always goes hand in hand with transformation – of the target system and the item imported. Nothing ever stays the same! Transformation can relate to the linguistic embedding or the ideational integration into the target system. We are interested in the causes and consequences of transformations relating to technical registers: What are technical registers? How are items transformed when imported into technical registers (not necessarily from technical registers in the source language)? Why do items enact proximity and distance at the same time while indexing emic identity representations? We approach these questions with two case studies.

Egyptian legal vocabulary of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period (c.1550- 664BCE) presents an interesting case of terminological uptake from Semitic languages in the Levant into Middle and especially Late Egyptian (Helck 1971; Hoch 1994). Following the Hyksos presence in the Egyptian delta during the mid-second Millennium BCE and ever increasing contacts with the cuneiform world during the subsequent New Kingdom, both the substance and the language of Egyptian law began to change (Loktionov 2017; 2023). On the substance level, changes included



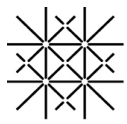
a greater reliance on codification and the introduction of a range of harsh corporal punishments. On the linguistic level, a plethora of previously unattested Semitic loanwords entered the linguistic inventory. Some of these catered to the need to express new legal realities in written form, denoting new types of official or institution. Others were synonyms of existing Egyptian terms, whose presence indicates that the Semitic influence went beyond a purely utilitarian level of labelling novelties for which no native words existed. Indeed, it is likely that - in a society where some knowledge of Akkadian and/or other Semitic languages may have been increasingly widespread - the boundaries between the native and imported legal terminology were becoming blurred. This process went hand in hand with the integration of Egypt into the overarching legal tradition of the Semitic world, from which the country had been largely isolated over the first two millennia of its existence.

Fast forward about a millennium, the village of Kellis in the Western desert is multilingual (Greek, Coptic, Syriac), non-mainstream (as regards their Manichaeistic belief), and home to a roaring wool trading industry in the 4th / 5th c. AD (Fendel 2023). This is reflected in the distribution of and adoption strategies for Greek loan verbs. Loan verbs are semantically divorced from the source context and reconceptualised (and/or reallocated) in the target context, often to refer to domain-specific aspects regarding religion, trade, or oasis life – this indexes distance from the outside world. Loan verbs are integrated into the predicate frame of the target language (Coptic) in an area-specific way – this indexes proximity with other in-group members (Egedi 2017, Funk 2017). As with other multi-word expressions (Krstev and Savary 2017), structures can be modified individually for a range of effects including comic ones, e.g. what do you think does *to nudge the bucket* or *to kick the academic bucket* mean? The verbal multi-word expressions from Kellis are the ideal context to uncover the simultaneous indexing of proximity and distance by the villagers, thus taking an emic perspective.

Through the lens of dislocated and re(al)located lexemes, we change the perspective on dislocation, relocation, and integration of language users from etic to emic and thus from imposing an externally-generated stereotype to celebrating diversity on the terms of the culture(s) being studied. This has implications not only for the study of ancient societies like the ones presented here, but also for modern multicultural environments currently being reshaped by populational and linguistic flux.

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