

Phonological evidence and scenarios for the historical development of the Munda Branch

This talk presents the current state of historical phonology and comparative prosody of the Munda languages and evaluates different scenarios of the historical development of the Munda Branch. The place of Munda in the Austroasiatic family is still unresolved. While most scholars regard it as a primary branch (e.g. Pinnow 1963, Diffloth 2005), recent research suggests that Munda might be a branch on a par with several other branches of Austroasiatic (Sidwell 2008).

The reconstruction of Proto-Munda is crucial for our understanding of the Austroasiatic family. Munda is the western-most branch of Austroasiatic and Munda languages are fundamentally different in structure from languages of the other branches. The developments leading to this typological divergence are essential for any historical account of the family, especially since the characteristics of the Munda languages cannot be explained by contact with other South Asian languages (Donegan & Stampe 2002).

Donegan and Stampe (1983, 2002) have presented a tantalisingly comprehensive hypothesis to account for the divergent structure of the different branches of Austroasiatic. Phonology – and especially the development of the prosodic phonology – is at the centre of the proposed scenario, making this area a crucial part of any historical account of the Munda branch, including its historical morphology and syntax. However, while a historical phonology of the Munda languages was put on a strong footing by Pinnow (1959), it has received little attention in recent years.

I will present recent developments in the reconstruction of the Proto-Munda phonology as well as a comparative account of the prosodic patterns in Munda languages and discuss the hypothesis of Donegan and Stampe in view of these developments.

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