Comparative Dravidian linguistics: Current perspectives

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Comparative Dravidian Linguistics by Bhadriraju Krishnamurti, one of the most eminent Dravidianists of our time, is a collection of twenty-one important articles, twenty of which have been published during the period 1955–1998 either in professional journals or as book chapters, including some festschrifts. All these papers, most of which are devoted to central problems of phonology and morphology/syntax of Dravidian, surely contribute to advancing our knowledge of comparative and historical Dravidian in the second half of the Twentieth Century. This volume is of greatest value and significance to students of the comparative study of Dravidian languages. Anyone with a serious interest in this very line of inquiry would certainly find this volume an invaluable reference.

Chapter 1 presents certain historical data concerning vowel length in Telugu with reference to the structure of verbal bases, showing that “more than 98 percent of Telugu verbs were secondary formations on Proto-Dravidian or Common Dravidian stems and that two main structural types of stem-suffix composition prevailed at the earliest known period in Telugu, to which the historically derived patterns had adjusted themselves” (p. 18). This now-classic paper has been the most frequently cited one in subsequent Dravidian studies.

Chapter 2 shows that the sound change in the southern languages involved three stages and that the sound change took place only in one direction each time. It was the high vowels that merged with mid-vowels (and not vice versa) before a low vowel in the next syllable in Proto-South Dravidian. Chapter 12, which can be read with chapter 2, demonstrates that the vowel-lowering rule which merged Proto-Dravidian *i* *u* with *e* *o* in Proto-South Dravidian included not only the Southern group (Tamil, Malayalam, Toda, Kota, Kannada, Kodagu) but also the South-Central group (Telugu, Gondi, Konda, Kui, Kuvi, Pendo, Manda).

Chapter 3 gives a comprehensive account of the reflexes of Proto-Dravidian *z* in different Dravidian languages. Chapter 6 discusses Dravidian nasals in Brahui, suggesting that there is a strong parallel between *n* > Brahui n-/d- and *m* > Brahui b-/m-. Chapter 7 analyzes a Tamil text occurring in Panditaradhyacaritra, a Telugu literary work of the Twelfth Century written by Palkuriki Somanatha, providing evidence for the conclusion that intervocalic and post-nasal
stops were completely voiced in Tamil even by the time of the branching off of Malayalam from Tamil.

Chapter 19 tackles evidence for a laryngeal *H in Proto-Dravidian. After analyzing the phonological behavior of the aytam (a) in lengthening the preceding vowel, (b) in geminating the following stop, (c) in its loss before certain voiced consonants, and (d) in its alternation with semivowels, BK concludes that Tamil aytam was a relic reflex of this Proto-Dravidian phoneme.

There are several chapters in this volume focusing on Dravidian morphology (also naturally involving phonology). Specifically, these chapters deal with Dravidian personal pronouns (chapter 4), gender and number in Proto-Dravidian (chapter 8), diachronic and synchronic rules in Parji phonology (chapter 11), the problem of reconstruction of Pro-Gondi forms of the third person masculine singular and plural (chapter 15), phonological processes favoring the emergence of the syllable types with a long vowel followed by a single consonant or a short vowel followed by two consonants in Dravidian and Indo-Aryan (chapter 16), and the origin and evolution of primary derivative suffixes in Dravidian (chapter 17). All these papers have, apart from providing neat solutions to many an unresolved problem in the southern languages, shed light on the nature of sound change, analogy, interplay between synchrony and diachrony, and grammatical constraints on sound change (cf. p. xv).

There are several articles (chapters 9, 10, 13, 18, 20) in this volume devoted to the theory of the nature of sound change within the framework of lexical diffusion. Chapter 9 proposes criteria for distinguishing a shared innovation from the phenomena of diffusion and drift. Chapter 10 supports the hypothesis that sound changes spread lexically and that one group of exceptions to sound change represents items which are not yet affected by change at a given point of time (p. 180). Chapter 13, drawing on data from six languages belonging to the South-Central subfamily of Dravidian, proposes a new model of subgrouping within the framework of the theory of lexical diffusion. Chapter 18 sums up the major sound change in Dravidian and notices that typologically motivated sound changes tend to be more regular than simple historical changes (cf. p. 376). Chapter 20 further shows that lexical change can lead to regular sound change, when all relevant lexical items are affected by the sound change.

Also included in this volume are three survey articles (chapters 5, 14, 21) which make critical evaluations on the contributions to Dravidian studies from the beginning through the end of the Twentieth century.

These papers in this volume are arranged in the order they appeared, and postscripts are added to some of the papers (chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 8) to bring the studies concerned up to date. These papers, providing outstanding solutions to outstanding problems in Dravidian phonology and morphology, are significant landmarks in comparative Dravidian studies.