

# **The History of the Na-Dene Controversy: A Sketch**

**Michael Dürr**

**Egon Renner**

## **1. Introduction**

Research into the genetic relationships of the languages known under the name Na-Dene is almost 200 years of age and began at a time at which there was no methodologically founded strategy for empirical research. Only with the rise of linguistics as an academic discipline did the concern about cognate connections between languages become a matter of intensive and systematic research. The changes in analytical methods and in the perception of such connections which have occurred since then have been controlled by the discipline.

The first phase of systematic research into cognate connections falls within a period in which language was studied from a historical point of view. In this period, most of the ideas concerning the remote relationships of languages in North America were established. This was done using a method which was hampered by many empirical and theoretical insufficiencies. Nevertheless, in the case of Na-Dene and other groupings, this period marked the beginning of serious research into language phyla. Many of the pioneer studies were formulated by Edward Sapir, for whom the structural modification of the historical method provided the basis for the hypotheses.

When structurally-oriented linguists began in-depth fieldwork, many errors and various misunderstandings became evident. As a result, a climate of general skepticism towards larger linguistic groupings slowly arose which has dominated linguistics since the 1920s. The basis of this development is twofold; first, the influence of a restricted historical method for studying cognate connections on American linguistics, i.e., the phonological model of sound change created by the Neogrammarians; second, the radical change in linguistic research brought about by a policy of ignoring historical questions, a practice which later became known as American structuralism.

The seemingly endless prolongation of the Na-Dene controversy is an outgrowth of the methodological instability with which such problems have been handled. Most important for the course which the Na-Dene controversy has taken from its beginning is the repeated change in methods, from historical to structural methods and vice versa. Of equal importance is the fact that a real solution to the Na-Dene problem requires both types of methods. It is obvious that

the creation of the hypothesis and the achievements of Na-Dene research during any period of the controversy are the result of a compromise between a historical and a structural interpretation of data in one way or another. None of those who have argued against Na-Dene have been willing to seek such a compromise, whether from a historical or from a structural point of view. The Na-Dene controversy encompasses almost 80 years, reaching from Edward Sapir and Pliny E. Goddard in the first two decades to Heinz-Jürgen Pinnow and Michael E. Krauss in the last four decades, to mention just the leading protagonists. The content of the hypothesis and the phases of its development will be sketched in this article.

## **2. The Na-Dene hypothesis**

In a survey of recent Athapaskan studies, Eung-Do Cook and Keren Rice present a summary of the genetic relationship which, apart from the addition of formerly little-known Eyak, is identical with the taxonomic classification proposed by Sapir in 1915 (Cook and Rice 1989: 4):

1. Haida
2. Proto-Tlingit-Athapaskan-Eyak
  - 2.1 Tlingit
  - 2.2 Proto-Athapaskan-Eyak
    - 2.2.1 Eyak
    - 2.2.2 Proto-Athapaskan
      - 2.2.2.1 Northern (Koyukon, etc.)
      - 2.2.2.2 Pacific Coast (Hupa, etc.)
      - 2.2.2.3 Apachean (Navaho, etc.)

The grouping of Athapaskan-Eyak is supported beyond any doubt by the fact that a common proto-language could be partially reconstructed. Nevertheless, there are still several unsolved problems, especially the status of the proposed intermediate level, Pre-Proto-Athapaskan (Leer 1979; Krauss and Leer 1981). The higher strata of Na-Dene, that is those including Tlingit and Haida, are still controversial. Whereas the number of phonological, morphological, and lexical similarities among the Athapaskan languages as well as those between Athapaskan and Eyak are extremely high, Tlingit “bears a close resemblance to Athapaskan-Eyak in phonology and grammatical structure but shows little regular correspondence in vocabulary” (Krauss and Golla 1981: 67). The parallels to Haida are considered even less evident, although a substantial amount of shared grammatical features was taken for granted before new material on Haida collected by Robert Levine (1977) and by Erma Lawrence and Jeff Leer (1977) challenged this claim. Except for the works of Pinnow (1985 et seq.) and of Joseph Greenberg (1987a, b), the last decade can be characterized by a prevailing skepticism with regard to Na-Dene, particularly to the inclusion of Haida.

### **3. The history of the Na-Dene hypothesis**

The research on the genetic relationships of the languages subsumed under the heading Na-Dene has a long history, harking back to the end of the eighteenth century. But it was not until more than one hundred years later that Sapir (1915), who coined the label “Na-Dene”, formulated the first scientifically reliable hypothesis about the genetic relationship. From this date to the present, five successive phases can be distinguished, each with a different emphasis on the problem. Depending upon the thrust of a particular phase, and on the above-mentioned repeated shifts between historical and structural methods, the pendulum has swung back and forth between an emphasis on raw data and on more general considerations. Today, after various changes of focus and in spite of major achievements, the controversy appears as irreconcilable as at the time of Sapir and Goddard.

The history of Na-Dene research as a whole has been reviewed in some detail by Krauss (1973) and by Pinnow (1976). The more recent studies, mainly those of the current generation, have been outlined by Pinnow (1985a, 1990a) and by Cook and Rice (1989). The following sketch represents an attempt to provide an introduction to the controversy by referring to the main positions of the opposing camps and the major problems involved. Its emphasis is on the last two phases which have not previously been reviewed in English.

#### **Phase I – The formulation of the hypothesis and its rejection**

The controversy grew out of a hypothesis formulated by Sapir in 1915, namely, that the Athapaskan languages, together with Tlingit and Haida, form a language phylum labeled Na-Dene. At that time, Eyak was not an object of research and, therefore, it was not included. Sapir based his hypothesis upon structural similarities he found in several domains. He drew attention to many grammatical parallels between these languages and pointed out the resemblance of the phonological systems. Sapir also sketched out a comparative vocabulary which he, with greater or lesser probability, considered to be part of the inventory of the Na-Dene proto-language and presented a number of provisional sound correspondences. Since he was making a preliminary report on his research, a selection of less than one third of the etymologies – 98 in total – was included. Sapir suggested that the correspondences were so great that any possibility of two-way borrowing of words and morphological elements can be dismissed. His conclusions have retained their importance for an understanding of the basic issues of Na-Dene research (1915: 557–558):

Athabaskan, Haida, and Tlingit must be considered genetically related. The correspondences are of so intimate a character that mutual borrowing of words and morphological features seems out of the question. It is, however, no less obvious that each of these

languages is very distinctive and represents a highly differentiated form of the Na-dene prototype. [...] Each Na-dene language has evidently passed through a very long period of development in linguistic isolation from its sister languages.

Criticism of the hypothesis began with Sapir's contemporaries, mainly Goddard in 1920. Goddard pointed to the main weakness of the hypothesis, the impossibility of explaining the divergent vocabularies of the languages. He admitted the "striking likeness in morphology" (1920: 270) but, after checking word lists, he was unable to find cognates and regular sound correspondences. In his eyes, the failure of "the one recognized method of establishing genetic relationship" (1920: 271) was evidence enough to indicate that the existing similarities were not the result of genetic relationship (1920: 270):

The comparisons made of the lexical content, however, do not justify this conclusion. The similarities are few, forming but a slight percentage of the whole. They might all be attributed to accident were there not at hand a more acceptable solution. The few nouns that are common are probably due to borrowing. It would be a remarkable thing if fully the number noted had not been borrowed in the course of the generations that Tlingit and Athapascan peoples have been neighbors.

Goddard's conclusions show him to be a historical linguist in the strictest sense who denied the importance of structural similarities if the factual similarities did not go far enough (1920: 271):

When once we have concluded that Tlingit and Athapascan are either unrelated, or so remotely related as to have left no clearly perceptible evidence of the relationship, a new and interesting problem will present itself when two peoples either linguistically unrelated or very remotely related come into prolonged contact, to what extent do their languages become assimilated, phonetically, morphologically, and lexically? That the various correspondences pointed out in this paper and by Dr. Sapir are the result of such acculturating influences, I have little doubt.

While research into the languages subsumed under the heading Na-Dene began much earlier, it was Sapir who made the first serious attempt to cope with the problem on the basis of a scientifically testable hypothesis. Goddard's criticism never received an answer from Sapir, who was obviously under time constraints and, therefore, was unable to develop his hypothesis to the more mature state he had forecast in his first article. Nevertheless, his unchanged position is evident in later publications (e.g., 1921, 1929).

## **Phase II – Divergent theoretical reflections on the hypothesis**

Since data analysis did not pick up steam in the next 25 years, Sapir's and Goddard's arguments provided the main focus of the controversy. Much earlier, Franz Boas (1894) had entertained the idea of the connection between the languages,

but later (1920, 1929, 1940), in spite of Sapir's achievements, he classified them separately. Referring not only to Na-Dene but to Native American languages in general, he expressed his skeptical attitude towards such far-reaching genetic groupings, emphasizing instead the importance of acculturation and hybridization. At that time, he was clearly more interested in the distribution of typological characteristics than in diachronic and genetic reconstruction (1929 [1940]: 219):

I pointed out that morphological types are distributed over large areas and that in these morphological groups differences representing the character of the vocabulary occur which make it difficult to assume that the languages, as now spoken, are derived from the same 'Ursprache'. I pointed out that in the small linguistic units of early times, the conditions of mixture were quite different from those found in languages spoken over large areas and by many individuals. A further consideration of the problem led to the conclusion that an answer to the fundamental question must be sought through an investigation of mutual influences and the extent to which they may modify languages; particularly, in how far one linguistic type may influence the morphology of another.

Along with his interest in typological characteristics, he was quite pessimistic concerning any kind of cognate reconstruction (1929 [1940]: 225):

If the view expressed here is correct, then it is not possible to group American languages rigidly in a genealogical scheme in which each linguistic family is shown to have developed to modern forms, but we have to recognize that many languages have multiple roots.

When he republished this article in his personal reader, he underscored this view in a new introductory note (1940: 219).

While Boas did not appear to have even noticed the progress Sapir had achieved with his analysis, the latter remained adamant in his view of the genetic connections. In his book "*Language*", Sapir (1921) compared Na-Dene with Old World language phyla and spoke of similarly deep morphological structures in different language stocks (1921 [1949]: 205):

[...] many of the more significant distributions of morphological similarities are to be explained [...] as vestiges [...] the theory of 'borrowing' seems totally inadequate to explain those fundamental features of structure, hidden away in the very core of the linguistic complex, that have been pointed out as common, say, to Semitic and Hamitic, to the various Soudanese languages, to Malayo-Polynesian and Mon-Khmer and Munda, to Athabaskan and Tlingit and Haida.

In an article on Central and North American languages written in 1929 for the "*Encyclopædia Britannica*", he endorsed his view on Na-Dene by pointing to the genetic origin of the similarities. Notwithstanding speculations of Krauss (1973: 954–955), it is clear that even fourteen years after Sapir developed his hypothesis, he obviously had not changed his mind.

Others, students of Sapir who largely followed the line of his research, especially Harry Hoijer (1941, 1946) and Li Fang-kuei (1956), viewed the hypo-

thesis with reservation. Hoijer, for example, admitted that “the evidence at hand is sufficient [...] to justify an hypothesis of genetic relationship,” but added skeptically that “verification must await more detailed evidence” (1941: 6). Morris Swadesh, on the other hand, evaluating the data supplied by Sapir and Goddard, found a high percentage of phonetic correspondence and concluded: “Even allowing a liberal margin of errors in determining the correspondences and for chance resemblance, this figure is far too high to be explained by accumulation of borrowings” (Swadesh 1951: 14).

This phase was characterized by a stalemate in research. No progress was achieved, and Sapir merely reaffirmed his position. Boas, on the other hand, due to the hardening of his typologically-oriented anthropological view, changed his mind. Some looked on the hypothesis with skepticism, others with sympathy, but the situation remained basically unchanged. Thus Na-Dene was left an open question.

### **Phase III – The empirical reformulation of the hypothesis**

The first step towards a better empirical buttressing of arguments for the genetic affinity of the Na-Dene languages was made by Dell H. Hymes in 1956. Pointing to the significance of morphology and vocabulary for the solution of the problem, he presented a comparative positional analysis of verb categories of the languages under consideration. He was able to show that the position of these categories in modern Athapaskan languages is almost identical with their position in Tlingit and Haida and concluded that this is a most important prerequisite for the reconstruction of Proto-Na-Dene. The positional arrangement of these numerous categories supplies positive evidence for the genetic relationship of Na-Dene languages, since any chance resemblance or borrowing of such an elaborate system is statistically extremely improbable. Hymes summarizes the outcome of his typological comparison as follows (1956: 632):

The positional structure of the verb in any one of the present-day Athapaskan languages resembles that in Tlingit to a certain degree. The sequence reconstructed for Proto-Athapaskan, however, is closer to that of Tlingit than is the sequence in any one modern language such as Navaho or Chipewyan. In fact, the Tlingit sequence is as close to the Proto-Athapaskan sequence as is that in any single modern Athapaskan language. While modern structural analysis of some of the languages may modify the results [...], especially with regard to Haida, the genetic connection of Haida to Tlingit has not been disputed since Boas first proposed it sixty years ago, and it was later supported by Swanton. If Haida and Tlingit are related, and Tlingit and Athapaskan, then all three are related.

By means of his positional analysis, Hymes methodologically updated Na-Dene research, following on the path that Sapir had laid with his hypothesis. He

expressed his conviction that, in addition to the results he achieved with his own analysis, the study of Athapaskan and Tlingit in particular had uncovered more evidence for the existence of the Na-Dene phylum than was possible at the time the hypothesis was first advanced (1956: 632). But he was also aware of the problems which American linguists have when dealing with the genetic relationship of languages (1956: 624):

In American anthropology [...] there is still no agreement on the criteria for genetic classification. The validity of establishing major stocks on the basis, at least in part, of morphological correspondences has been hotly contested.

Pinnow (1958), believing that Hymes' analysis had at last provided a definitive answer to the problem, made the first attempt in comparative phonology since Sapir. He used data from various published sources on Tlingit and Athapaskan languages to analyze certain phonemic characteristics of the suggested proto-language, namely voice distinction and the secondary development of most labials. In a later publication, he summarized this study, at the same time underscoring its tentative character (1976: 49–50):

Das eine der behandelten Probleme, ob in Na-Dene eine alte Stimmton-Opposition [...] vorlag, wird (mit noch ungenügenden Belegen) bejaht und später von Pinnow 1966 bestätigt. [...] Ungleich wichtiger ist in dem zur Diskussion stehenden Aufsatz die Behandlung der Labiallaute. Hier wird aus verschiedenen Erwägungen heraus gefolgert, daß im Proto-Na-Dene keine labialen Konsonanten existiert haben, sondern nur ein labialer Vokal vorhanden war. [...] Von ausschlaggebender Bedeutung für die späteren Forschungen Pinnows erwies es sich, daß aus dieser Interpretation notwendigerweise das Vorhandensein alter DIPHTHONGE sich ergab. [...] In dem Aufsatz wird ausdrücklich darauf hingewiesen, daß die Lösung der aufgeworfenen Probleme nur versuchsweise geschehen sei.

While Li (1956) and others continued to have reservations (except with respect to Eyak, whose genetic connection to Athapaskan had been discovered in the meantime), George L. Trager (1958) and Swadesh (1959) made an effort to develop a new taxonomic classification of the Na-Dene languages. The latter also endeavored to derive a time schedule from the common proto-language to the present languages based on lexicostatistics.

This phase was characterized by attempts at analytically rearranging the known data in order to find a new synthesis to support the hypothesis. The contrast between Hymes' and Pinnow's endeavors to reaffirm Sapir's genetic scheme and the critical reception by fieldworkers on Athapaskan languages foreshadowed the misunderstandings that were to occur in the two following phases.

#### **Phase IV – The empirical condemnation of the hypothesis**

The leading figures in the ongoing debate were now Pinnow and Krauss. The former tried to verify the hypothesis while the latter attempted to falsify it. The controversy between the two revolved around differences in methods and the attitude towards empirical data, primarily with reference to the relationship of Tlingit to Athapaskan, since in that period lexical data for Haida were still insufficient to permit work on comprehensive genetic comparisons. The most important work at this phase was Krauss' detailed research on Eyak and the discovery of its genetic relationship to the Athapaskan languages (1964, 1965, 1968, 1969). For Krauss, the relationship of Eyak to Athapaskan should be judged independently of the position of Tlingit and Haida within Na-Dene. He concentrated on the step-by-step reconstruction of Athapaskan-Eyak and, in spite of his efforts at comparing Proto-Athapaskan-Eyak with Tlingit, he could only "express his stubborn skepticism concerning the genetic relationship of at least the great bulk of the Athapaskan-Eyak stem inventory to the Tlingit" (Krauss 1969: 77). The manner in which he sidestepped the implications of his own empirical findings for the Na-Dene hypothesis was astonishing. His arguments for the use of a hybridization model to explain away the genetic connections were poor and clearly demonstrate the sagacity of Hymes' statement (see previous page) concerning the absence of any agreement on the criteria for genetic classification in American linguistics (Krauss 1973: 960–961):

Krauss's work is perhaps less amenable to criticism [...] because his claims are less ambitious, at least in attempting to prove systematic relationship only between PAE and Tlingit, [...] In addition, however, Krauss makes the negative claim that Sapir and Hymes and Pinnow are wrong about the relationship of the lexica [...] of PAE and Tlingit (and Haida), that these are not (or at least not yet proven to be) genetically related. I.e. Krauss claims that the Na-Dene lexica are either not genetically related at all, or that if they are genetically related [...] the divergence is much greater than could possibly be congruent with the obvious and intimate relationship exhibited in the general morphological structure and in certain specific affixes, especially the 'classifiers'. Krauss is thus himself making a strong claim, that there is this incongruence and that such is not entirely 'normal' or 'ordinary' in relationships between (e.g. Indo-European) languages, and that some sort of historical explanation involving some kind of intimate borrowing, language-mixture, or creolization is required. Pinnow rejects the creolization theory, and minimizes the incongruence.

For Pinnow, the discovery of the Eyak-Athapaskan stratum was an important step towards the final reconstruction of the higher Na-Dene levels. In various articles (1964, 1968b, 1970) and a monograph (1966), he compiled a considerable number of mainly Tlingit-Athapaskan etymologies. Although he was not able to propose a systematic reconstruction of Proto-Na-Dene, he achieved important insights into the phonology and morphophonology of the proposed proto-



language. In particular, he reconstructed diphthongs, stem variations, and the system of classifiers. Pinnow summarized some results of his comprehensive analysis in a later publication (1976: 61–62):

(1) Es gab im Proto-Na-Dene ein reichhaltiges System von Diphthongen [...] die Diphthonge wurden in der Regel monophthongisiert. (2) Die Vokale übten einen starken Einfluß auf die Konsonanten aus [...] (3) Als weiterer Hauptpunkt wäre zu erwähnen, daß die glottalisierten Laute nicht alte einheitliche Phoneme waren, [...] (4) Diesen Ausführungen entsprechend konnte ein relativ an Phonemen armes Inventar für die ältest-erreichbare Stufe des Proto-Na-Dene angesetzt werden, [...]

In two other publications, Pinnow (1968a, 1969) discussed the problem of genetic relationship vs. borrowing, favoring the former in the case of Na-Dene.

A major bone of contention between Pinnow and Krauss concerned their methodology. While Krauss defended an empirical-inductive position which allowed only narrow genetic analyses, Pinnow used a less restricting method for historical comparison. In a summary of the research, Krauss (1973) was able to refute many of Pinnow's etymologies with the help of better and more accurate data, reaching the conclusion that "with the kind of machinery constructed by Pinnow [Pinnow 1966] virtually any language could as easily be included in Na-Dene" as Tlingit (Krauss 1973: 958). To be fair, however, it should be mentioned that, in his presentation of the data, Pinnow scrupulously distinguished between probable and less probable etymologies. He clearly stated that he preferred the accumulation of all possible evidence, thereby entailing the risk of a certain percentage of errors, to a more cautious presentation which confined itself to 'clear' evidence only. Pinnow felt that the number of cognates he had accumulated were sufficient to confirm the Na-Dene hypothesis, even after all the uncertain etymologies he was being criticized for were excluded.

The strongest attack on the Na-Dene hypothesis was yet to come. In an attempt to condemn the hypothesis, Levine (1979) proposed a series of restrictions for etymological comparisons. By means of these restrictions, he excluded several of Sapir's sound and word equations, in part referring to unacceptable "overresemblances" (words too similar phonetically). Levine made use of Hymes' technique of analyzing positional categories in order to demonstrate an alleged superficiality of resemblances between Haida, Tlingit and Athapaskan, mainly relying on his fieldwork on Skidegate Haida. To throw out Pinnow's etymologies, he restricted himself to discussing only a few word forms, and criticizing some aspects of their analysis. Although his discussion of the texts of Sapir, Hymes, and Pinnow was rather superficial, demonstrating little more than that each had made some mistakes, his article became quite influential: "We owe it to Levine in a recent paper for debunking once and for all the claim that Haida has been demonstrated to be genetically related to Tlingit" (Krauss 1979: 841).

From a more general point of view, Thomason (1980) objected to Hymes' conclusion that morphological similarities alone can prove a genetic relationship. In the light of the sweeping rejection of Pinnow's reconstructive efforts, the reservations of such fieldworkers on Athapaskan languages and Tlingit as Herbert Landar, Victor Golla, or Richard and Nora Dauenhauer can only be considered as of secondary relevance.

But the situation was not as clear-cut as this discussion might suggest, with Pinnow defending the hypothesis and American linguists rejecting it. Krauss in particular seemed to waver between the two positions. In an article written with Golla, he reiterated the "hybrid hypothesis" for Tlingit and the untenability of the Na-Dene hypothesis in the case of Haida (1981: 67). In the same year, and in the light of new evidence, especially from the Tongass dialect of Tlingit, Krauss himself, now with Leer, corroborated much of Pinnow's work on a most important part of the Na-Dene hypothesis: that reconstructed Proto-Athapaskan-Eyak and historical Tlingit share an almost identical phonemic and grammatical structure: "We presently believe that unlike Tlingit, and like Tsimshian, Haida has not proven genetically relatable to Athapaskan-Eyak" (Krauss and Leer 1981: 210). Seven years later, Krauss even came around to accepting Pinnow's thesis – without, however, mentioning him – that Eyak represented an intermediate point between Athapaskan and Tlingit, a conclusion ironically inspired by Krauss' work on Eyak: "Eyak proves to be an important link in showing the genetic relationship between Athapaskan and Tlingit" (Krauss 1988: 146).

This phase was dominated by the use of new empirical data, together with the above-mentioned inductive restrictions, in an attempt to dismiss all comparative efforts that followed the lines drawn by Sapir, and especially to negate Pinnow's endeavors. What in fact was achieved was not the refutation of the hypothesis, but merely of some details, which, in the case of Pinnow's etymologies, had been reconstructed with limited empirical data but often clearly labeled tentative by Pinnow. Furthermore, the inclusion of Haida into the stock was vehemently rejected. But the Americans, in spite of the initial skepticism of influential scholars, finally accepted the Na-Dene hypothesis with reference to Tlingit, providing overwhelming evidence to corroborate Pinnow's arguments. Unfortunately, this acceptance went hand in hand with Pinnow's complete exclusion from the discussion by his American colleagues.

### **Phase V – The revival of the hypothesis**

The current phase has been primarily characterized by Pinnow's etymological analysis of new data that had become available at the end of the seventies. Pinnow has been concentrating on the reconstruction of Haida etymologies, using empirical material collected by American researchers. Accepting in part the

criticism of his method, Pinnow has been working on overcoming the particularist etymological approach by turning his interest towards the systematic analysis of word families. In so doing, he has been following an approach which has proven helpful in comparative work on monosyllabic languages, such as Sino-Tibetan. He has been studying several domains, namely verbs, animal names, numerals, and kinship terms, combining lexical, morphological, and grammatical analysis (1985a, b, c, 1986a, b, 1988, 1990a, b). Thus, he has been able to demonstrate that Tlingit-Eyak-Athapaskan and Haida share an inventory of monosyllabic basic lexemes and grammatical morphemes which can be found in different combinations and with various phonological realizations in several lexical domains. The evidence accumulated in approximately 900 pages of etymological correspondences supplies sufficient proof that the similarities are neither casual nor the result of borrowing, but are founded in the cultural possession of a common ancestry (for details see Dürr and Whittaker this volume).

In his book *“Language in the Americas”*, Greenberg (1987a) attempts to use lexical data to demonstrate the genetic relationships shared by all Native American languages with the exception of Eskimo-Aleut and the Na-Dene phylum. In the chapter on Na-Dene, he seems to be unaware of Pinnow’s recent work and, therefore, only tries to debunk Levine’s criticism of Sapir’s hypothesis. He claims that there are still enough valid comparisons to support the Na-Dene hypothesis even if one fully accepts Levine’s restrictions. Greenberg’s conclusion justifies what Pinnow has been working for: “the two main branches of Na-Dene are no more distant from each other than the branches of Indo-European from one another” (1987a: 327–328).

Up till now, there has been no published reaction to Pinnow’s far-reaching reconstructive analysis of Haida as a Na-Dene language from his American colleagues. Significantly, all their criticism of his approach and results refer to his earlier works, and are hampered by the superficial knowledge – if not downright ignorance – of what their opponent has achieved. In recent years, the only American specialist on Athapaskan languages who has been willing to consider the Na-Dene hypothesis (including Haida) is Golla. Unfortunately, he only refers to Greenberg’s summary, surprisingly neglecting even to mention Pinnow’s name. A hypothesis that has been supposedly debunked “once and for all” now receives a more differentiated treatment (Golla 1987: 658):

Nor, to revert to the specific claims of Greenberg’s book, is the “Na-Dene problem” (chap. 6) solved by Greenberg’s showing us that the lexical similarities between Haida and its putative congenors, Tlingit and Athapaskan-Eyak, are sufficiently numerous (even accepting Levine’s strictures) to allow his methods to deem them genetically related. Those who have taken Sapir’s Na-Dene hypothesis seriously do not need Greenberg to tell them that genetic relationship is possible; the “problem” is to use this framework for a convincing explanation of the deep structural and lexical divergences among the languages of the group.

Nevertheless, ignoring the extensive and controversial discussion that he and his German rival had led, Krauss (1988: 146) chose to refer only to the very beginning of the controversy:

Sapir was the most influential of the linguists who have asserted that Haida in turn is genetically related to Athapaskan-Eyak-Tlingit, and he named the family Na-Dene to reflect this link. Franz Boas remained skeptical about this and Athapaskan-Tlingit ties, as many modern specialists dispute it.

The opposition of other American scholars to Pinnow's work has remained strong. Leer (1990) has definitively excluded Haida from Na-Dene, claiming that the residue of the lexical items is too small to be regarded as more than borrowings. In a note, Leer quotes Krauss' criticism (1973) of Pinnow's earlier works to support his point. In the case of Tlingit, he returns to the old hybridization theory, which he now elaborates for the first time in some detail. His assumption of hybridization permits him to accept facts in favor of genetic relationship he would otherwise not be able to cope with (Leer 1990: 74):

There are too many potential sound correspondences between Tlingit and Athapaskan-Eyak, and the number of lexical items adducible for many of these does not suffice to establish regular sound correspondences for Proto-Na-Dene.

From there he deduces the existence of a portmanteau language which is an endohybrid, that is, a language which has integrated and transformed borrowings from closely related varieties. As a result of this endohybridization or dialect mixture, he believes it is almost impossible to arrive at precise Na-Dene reconstructions because the chances of false matching between Tlingit and Athapaskan-Eyak are increased significantly. Thus, he returns in particular to the negative standpoint of Boas (1929). Nevertheless, Leer's approach implies and corroborates a genetic relationship between Tlingit and Athapaskan-Eyak.

A rare case which does refer to Pinnow's research is a publication by Cook and Rice (1989). They mention his work on Haida (1985c), making varying suggestions while briefly reformulating their reservations with reference to the old positions. In their eyes, besides the analysis of phonological and lexical correspondences, a more in-depth understanding of the morphosemantic system of the languages being compared is required in order to be able to demonstrate a distant relationship, if this is at all possible (Cook and Rice 1989: 5).

A recent example of the manner in which Pinnow has been ignored, even to the exclusion of his name, can be found in William H. Jacobsen Jr.'s paper on Sapir's evidence for the inclusion of Haida in Na-Dene, read at an LSA meeting in January 1993. He reexamines the Haida problem (Jacobsen 1993: 1):

in the light of recent contributions by Levine (1979) and Greenberg (1987), to illustrate the application of available probabilistic controls, while attempting to provide a much-needed sorting out of conflicting claims concerning this particular issue.

The negative attitude towards Na-Dene is mainly confined to American (and overwhelmingly Alaskan) specialists. Most European reference works include Haida in Na-Dene. Within the discussion of supergroupings, i.e., the efforts to connect phyla like Na-Dene with others, led by Joseph Greenberg, Merritt Ruhlen, and various European researchers, the validity of Na-Dene is now taken for granted. A discussion of the supergrouping controversy would exceed the bounds of this sketch and therefore is not treated here (see, however, the addendum to this article by Heinz-Jürgen Pinnow ).

The present phase is characterized by an astonishing discrepancy: on the one hand, Pinnow's success in proving in great detail the genetic relationship between Haida and Tlingit-Eyak-Athapaskan, thus restoring and reestablishing the original hypothesis; on the other hand, the stubborn disregard for Pinnow's major contributions by certain American colleagues. As this phase is clearly dominated by Pinnow's work, his opponents now have to respond. The exhaustive evidence he has presented requires at the least an equally exhaustive answer. Otherwise, the exclusion of Haida from Na-Dene and the classification of Haida as an isolate can no longer be maintained. If at present the Na-Dene hypothesis can not be regarded as proven along the lines pursued by Sapir and Pinnow, then at the very least it must continue to be considered an open issue.

## References

- Berman, Howard (1980). "Review of: The Languages of Native America ed. by Lyle Campbell and Marianne Mithun. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979." *International Journal of American Linguistics* 46: 248–262.
- Boas, Franz (1894). "Classification of the languages of the North Pacific Coast." *Memoirs of the International Congress of Anthropology* 1893: 339–346.
- (1920). "The classification of American languages." *American Anthropologist* 22: 367–376. [Reprinted in Boas 1940, pp. 211–218.]
- (1929). "Classification of American Indian languages." *Language* 5: 1–7. [Reprinted in Boas 1940, pp. 219–225.]
- (1940). *Race, Language, and Culture*. New York: Macmillan.
- Cook, Eung-Do, and Keren D. Rice (1989). "Introduction." In: Eung-Do Cook and Keren D. Rice (eds.), *Athapaskan Linguistics. Current Perspectives on a Language Family*, pp. 1–61. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Goddard, Pliny E. (1920). "Has Tlingit a genetic relation to Athapaskan?" *International Journal of American Linguistics* 1: 266–279.
- Golla, Victor (1987). "Review of: Language in the Americas by Joseph H. Greenberg." *Current Anthropology* 28: 657–659.
- Greenberg, Joseph H. (1987a). *Language in the Americas*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

- Greenberg, Joseph H. (1987b). "Author's Précis to: Language in the Americas by Joseph H. Greenberg." *Current Anthropology* 28: 647–652.
- Hoijer, Harry (1941). "Methods in the classification of American Indian languages." In: Leslie Spier et al. (eds.), *Language, Culture, and Personality. Essays in Memory of Edward Sapir*, pp. 3–14. Menasha: Sapir Memorial Publication Fund.
- (1946). "Introduction." In: Harry Hoijer et al., *Linguistic Structures of Native America*, pp. 9–29. New York: Viking Fund. (Publications in Anthropology, no. 6)
- Hymes, Dell H. (1956). "Na-Déné and positional analysis of categories." *American Anthropologist* 58: 624–638.
- (1959). "Genetic classification: Retrospect and prospect." *Anthropological Linguistics* 1, 2: 50–66.
- (1987). "Review of: Language in the Americas by Joseph H. Greenberg." *Current Anthropology* 28: 659–662.
- Jacobsen, William H., Jr. (ms. 1993). "Another look at Sapir's evidence for inclusion of Haida in Na-Dene." Read at an LSA meeting in January 1993.
- Krauss, Michael E. (1964). "Proto-Athapaskan-Eyak and the problem of Na-Dene I: The phonology." *International Journal of American Linguistics* 30: 118–131.
- (1965). "Proto-Athapaskan-Eyak and the problem of Na-Dene II: The morphology." *International Journal of American Linguistics* 31: 18–28.
- (1968). "Noun-classification systems in Athapaskan, Eyak, Tlingit, and Haida verbs." *International Journal of American Linguistics* 34: 194–203.
- (1969). "On the classifiers in the Athapaskan, Eyak, and Tlingit verb." *Indiana University Publications in Anthropology and Linguistics, Memoir* 24: 49–83. (Supplement to *International Journal of American Linguistics*, vol. 35)
- (1973). "Na-Dene." In: Thomas A. Sebeok (ed.), *Current Trends in Linguistics, vol. 10: Linguistics in North America II*, pp. 903–978. The Hague: Mouton. [reprinted 1976 in: Thomas A. Sebeok (ed.), *Native Languages of the Americas*, vol. 1, pp. 283–358. New York: Plenum Press.]
- (1979). "Na-Dene and Eskimo-Aleut." In: Lyle Campbell and Marianne Mithun (eds.), *The Languages of Native America: Historical and Comparative Assessment*, pp. 803–901. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- (1988). "Many tongues – ancient tales." In: William W. Fitzhugh and Aron Crowell (eds.), *Crossroads of Continents: Cultures of Siberia and Alaska*, pp. 144–150. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.

- Krauss, Michael E., and Victor Golla (1981). "Northern Athapaskan languages." In: William C. Sturtevant (ed.), *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 6: June Helm (ed.), *Subarctic*, pp. 67–85. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution.
- , and Jeff Leer (1981). *Athabaskan, Eyak, and Tlingit Sonorants*. Fairbanks: Alaska Native Language Center. (Research Paper 5)
- Lawrence, Erma, and Jeff Leer (1977). *Haida Dictionary*. Fairbanks: Alaska Native Language Center.
- Leer, Jeff (1979). *Proto-Athabaskan Verb Stem Variation, Part One: Phonology*. Fairbanks: Alaska Native Language Center. (Research Paper 1)
- (1989). "Directional systems in Athapaskan and Na-Dene." In: Eung-Do Cook and Keren D. Rice (eds.), *Athapaskan Linguistics. Current Perspectives on a Language Family*, pp. 575–622. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- (1990). "Tlingit: A portmanteau language family?" In: Philip Baldi (ed.), *Linguistic Change and Reconstruction Methodology*, pp. 73–98. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Levine, Robert D. (1977). *The Skidegate Dialect of Haida*. Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, New York.
- (1979). "Haida and Na-Dene: A new look at the evidence." *International Journal of American Linguistics* 45: 157–170.
- Li, Fang-kuei (1956). "A type of noun formation in Athapaskan and Eyak." *International Journal of American Linguistics* 22: 45–48.
- Pinnow, Heinz-Jürgen (1958). "Zwei Probleme der historischen Lautlehre der Na-Dene-Sprachen (Stimmton und Aspirationskorrelation – Labiallaute)." *Zeitschrift für Phonetik und Sprachwissenschaft* 11:128–159.
- (1964). "On the historical position of Tlingit." *International Journal of American Linguistics* 30: 155–168.
- (1966). *Grundzüge einer historischen Lautlehre des Tlingit, ein Versuch*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- (1968a). "Genetic relationship vs. borrowing in Na-Dene." *International Journal of American Linguistics* 34: 204–211.
- (1968b). "Sprachhistorische Studie zur Verbstammvariation im Tlingit." *Orbis* 17: 509–531.
- (1969). "Entlehnungen von Tiernamen im Tsimshian und Na-Dene sowie Grundsätzliches zur Entlehnungsfrage bei Indianersprachen." *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 94: 82–102.
- (1970). "Notes on the classifiers in the Na-Dene languages." *International Journal of American Linguistics* 36: 63–67.
- (1976). *Geschichte der Na-Dene-Forschung*. Berlin: Gebrüder Mann. (Indiana, Supplement 5)



- Pinnow, Heinz-Jürgen (1985a). "Sprachhistorische Untersuchung zur Stellung des Haida." *Indiana* 10 (Gedenkschrift Gerdt Kutscher, Teil 2): 25–76.
- (1985b). *Sprachhistorische Untersuchung einiger Tiernamen im Haida (Fische, Stachelhäuter, Weichtiere, Gliederfüßer, u.a.)*. Nortorf: Völkerkundliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft. (Abhandlungen, Heft 39)
- (1985c). *Das Haida als Na-Dene-Sprache*. In four parts. Nortorf: Völkerkundliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft. (Abhandlungen, Hefte 43–46)
- (1986a). *Die Zahlwörter des Haida in sprachvergleichender Sicht*. Nortorf: Völkerkundliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft. (Abhandlungen, Heft 47)
- (1986b). *Säugetiernamen des Haida und Tlingit: Materialien zu ihrer historischen Erforschung*. Nortorf: Völkerkundliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft. (Abhandlungen, Heft 50)
- (1988). *Verwandschafts- und andere Personenbezeichnungen im Tlingit und Haida: Versuch ihrer sprachhistorischen Deutung*. Nortorf: Völkerkundliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft. (Abhandlungen, Heft 62)
- (1990a). *Die Na-Dene-Sprachen im Lichte der Greenberg-Klassifikation*. Nortorf: Völkerkundliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft. (Abhandlungen, Heft 64)
- (1990b). *Vogelnamen des Tlingit und Haida. Materialien zu ihrer sprachhistorischen Erforschung sowie Auflistung der Vogelarten von Alaska*. In two parts. Nortorf: Völkerkundliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft. (Abhandlungen, Hefte 67–68)
- Sapir, Edward (1915). "The Na-Dene languages, a preliminary report." *American Anthropologist* (new series) 17: 534–558.
- (1921). *Language*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World.
- (1929). "Central and North American Indian languages." In: *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 14th ed., vol. 5, pp. 138–141.
- Swadesh, Morris (1951). "Diffusional cumulation and archaic residue as historical explanations." *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 7: 1–21.
- (1959). "The mesh principle in comparative linguistics." *Anthropological Linguistics* 1: 7–14.
- Trager, George L., and Felicia E. Harben (1958). *North American Indian Languages: Classification and Maps*. Buffalo, New York (Studies in Linguistics, Occasional papers, no. 5)
- Thomason, Sarah G. (1980). "Morphological instability, with and without language contact." In: Jacek Fisiak (ed.), *Historical Morphology*, pp. 359–372. The Hague: Mouton. (Trends in Linguistics, Studies and Monographs; 17)
- , and Terrence Kaufman (1988). *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.



Reprinted from:

*Language and Culture in Native North America – Studies in Honor of Heinz-Jürgen Pinnow*. Edited by Michael Dürr, Egon Renner, and Wolfgang Oleschinski, pp. 3–18. München and Newcastle: LINCOM 1995

## Contents of the volume:

### Part 1 – The Na-Dene Controversy

*Michael Dürr and Egon Renner*, The History of the Na-Dene Controversy: A Sketch

[With an Addendum by

Heinz-Jürgen Pinnow]

*Egon Renner*, The Structure of the Na-Dene Controversy: A Meta-theoretical Explanation

*Michael Dürr and Gordon Whittaker*, The Methodological Background to the Na-Dene Controversy

### Part 2 – Linguistic Studies

*Eung-Do Cook*, Syllable Structure and Sound Change in Athapaskan

*Karl-Heinz Gursky*, Some Grammatical Evidence for the Hokan Stock

*Jeff Leer*, The History of a Tlingit Name

*Stefan Liedtke*, The Etymology of Tlingit *tł'ukw̥x*

*Regina Pustet*, The Lakota Article

*Hans-Jürgen Sasse*, The Evolution of Person Prefixes in the Iroquoian Languages and its Functional Background

*Hansjakob Seiler*, Possession and Classifiers in Cahuilla

*Werner Winter*, Reduplicated Forms in Walapai

### Part 3 – Discourse Studies

*Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer*, A Tlingit Ceremonial Speech by Willie Marks

*Elizabeth A. Edwards*, “It’s an Ill Wind”

*Elizabeth A. Edwards and Carol M.*

*Eastman*, Fried Bread: A Recipe for the Structure of Haida Oral Narrative

*Dell Hymes*, Na-Dene Ethnopoetics. A

Preliminary Report: Haida and Tlingit

*Gillian L. Story*, An Analyzed Tlingit Procedural Text

### Part 4 – Anthropological Studies

*John R. Baker*, Disintegration and Reintegration: A Reexamination of the Transformation of Handsome Lake

*Erich Kasten*, Community Development in a Kwakiulth Indian Village

*Wilhelm Manig*, Continuity and Change in Western Apache Ceremonialism:

A Pictorial Record of Na’ííees (Girl’s Puberty Ceremony)

### Part 5 – Personal Reminiscences

*Egon Renner*, Homage to Heinz-Jürgen Pinnow: An Appreciation of His Life and His Work

*Heinz-Jürgen Pinnow*, Index Librorum et Commentationum

*Heinz-Jürgen Pinnow*, Curriculum Vitæ