

RACE, LANGUAGE, AND THE HISTORY OF PEOPLES

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TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY DONALD A. SWAN

Since a clean cut distinction has generally been made between race and language, at least during the last two generations, it might appear that there would be little more to say about the subject. But one often goes too far in denying any relation at all between race and language—whether direct or indirect. It is the principal purpose of this article to examine these questions and to clear them up with some concrete examples.

In so doing we shall not concern ourselves with the more precise definitions of the concepts of race and language, but consider them only as conventional forms of classifying humanity with respect to physical origin or linguistic nature. It is, however, self-evident that within all regions of the world that are fairly stable with respect to people and culture, there arises, gradually if not originally, a certain parallelism between race and language as a result of geographic-historical factors. This also takes place with the remaining cultural and ethno-social groupings into "nations," etc. Thus, every fairly large geographical barrier which substantially hinders intercourse and marriage also corresponds with a racial and linguistic boundary, although naturally no complete parallel can then be expected in the strength of the commercial, racial, and linguistic boundaries. This results in some of the rougher classifications of races and languages more or less coinciding. This is the case, for example, on the southern slope of the Himalayas with groups of Mongoloid racial stock speaking Tibeto-Burman languages in the north and groups of Europid racial stock speaking Indo-European languages in the south. A similar relation exists between Chinese and Koreans of Southeast-Mongoloid racial type and the Tungusic and (linguistically) "Mongolian" tribes of North-Mongoloid racial type to the north of them.

But today the process generally occurs in such a way that peoples and cultural movements in geographic border zones spread *one* language into the region of the other through conquest or even through cultural expansion. In the former case, as a rule, the ruling class is gradually almost or wholly absorbed anthropo-

logically by the conquered class, who in the end more or less predominate in the upper class. In this manner, for example, the Mongol racial type in Turkey has almost completely disappeared.

In respect of language the final result is more subject to change during this process. Often the language of the conqueror gains the final victory, as, for example, the language of the Romans in almost all south-western Europe and that of the Indo-Europeans in the greater part of India. But it also happens that the language of the conquered in time wins the upper hand: such as the Slavic dialect in the case of Bulgaria, which was conquered by the Turkish Bulgars; or the Anglo-Saxon language over the French of the victorious Normans. (We cannot here enter into the more precise linguistic-cultural-historical reasons for these different end results).

These examples are at least theoretically quite simple and clear. But there are also many more complicated relationships between race and language, where the parallelism is highly uncertain or completely absent.

All human races are known to be completely fertile with one another, and—apart from the few individual exceptions in the case of the mixture of widely diverse races—the offspring are (on the average) just as vigorous as the parent races. On the other hand a mixture between different languages proves to be more difficult when the parent languages are not very closely related to one another. In other words the mixed-language individuals for the most part cannot easily convert the sounds, words, etc. of the one language into those of the other. Then a more or less complete language chaos threatens which can end in a secondary primitive language, such as pidgin-English. Usually, however, *one* language triumphs, although it may be severely weakened by the struggle. (Its sound system is frequently deranged, the accidence highly simplified, and masses of new loan words are received). But when finally the initial national and racial constituents gradually attain complete fusion, a new and apparently uniform language can result, in which only experts can observe the disparate prime constituent elements.

Hence, it follows that family trees can in general be drawn up more easily for languages than for physical human groups. Consequently, ethnologists usually make use of language in their (more practical-pedagogical) surveys of human classification and not the actually more important racial affinities.

Now what does this enormous expansion of an extremely small number of linguistic families signify? It is understood at once that in general this is made possible only by a fairly high level of cultural development, except in the case of pioneer settlement of hitherto rejected and uninhabited border regions of the inhabited

world, such as by the Samoyeds, for example, who spread out over some 2500 kilometers and the Eskimos over almost 4000 kilometers. The initial result is not always dependent upon the absolute superiority of a once smaller original tribe over their formerly more restricted environment. For as a rule its neighboring peoples were (apart from significant exceptions) racially akin to them. Let us take one example, even if it is not perfect. Were the other Italic tribes—Umbrians, Sabines, etc.—*racially* inferior to the Romans who were gradually rising to world dominion? (We shall not speak here of the Etruscans, whose migration from distant regions is obvious also in their manifest psychological racial differences). They apparently were not—at least not until later times, when almost all capable, aspiring young men of the other tribes went to Rome—for at that time Roman superiority had been understood or recognized for some time. This was mostly caused by complicated geographic-economic factors and social traditions related to them (even if they were not brought forth wholly mechanically from them).

On the other hand no actual tribe of an existing human race had command of such powers of development as the Roman people. Or to use an example: individual giant trees can actually occur in a forest of oaks (in favorable places for their growth), but not in a forest of willows.

Still some investigators—especially American and Russian—ask if these above-named classical viewpoints relating to linguistic genealogy are really tenable with regard to the lower stages of human cultural development. According to the view of competent specialists, at least, it seems to appear as if in certain ancient regions (California, New Guinea, and in part also the Sudan) there is a multitude of what can not only be classified as exclusively different dialects (an obvious fact in the case of cultural conditions, where the ethnic units are small throughout), but also as markedly diverse languages. But these latter, however, are related to one another in a greater or a lesser degree through similarities—that appear simultaneously, in several directions! Even in the case of greater future knowledge of all these languages, they will perhaps resist all possibilities of drawing up phylogenetic trees. (We omit here all those questions that could follow from this: that this predominantly “prelogical” mentality of the speakers of the language and the like could depend on the more primitive structure of the language; for the most part I consider this scarcely possible). On the other hand we propose the hypothesis that it appears more fitting to prepare language genealogies for human groups with greater organization and more rapid expansion. To be sure there occurs a certain, although naturally unclear, line of

separation between the language evolution within such regions where no single tribe has expanded any further than the others (other than by chance) and that where one or more expansive tribal groups have imposed their language on the others. In the first case the tribes and their languages in time fused together over a period of several millennia. They have then separated without showing a strong, perceptible tendency to a definite preponderance in any one specific direction. For the second case we have world historical examples at our disposal. The expansion of the Latin language and its later degeneration into the Romance languages of today can be mentioned. It is surprising how small is the number of language groups that prevail today in the greatest part of the Old World: while, in order to complete the picture, it may be mentioned how small also in number and extent are the remnants of the old, more primitive language-thicket which, at least in the early populated warmer regions of the world, must have concealed a thick maze of the most diverse types. (We have some knowledge of these languages in the Near East from the earliest historical times, even if this knowledge is more or less obscure and insufficient).

The significance of geographic environment has been noted in the case of the expansion of the nomadic peoples in the steppe zones of the Old World (from Manchuria through all central and south-west Asia and further through Africa to Cape Verde and the Cape of Good Hope). This has favored a very high degree of linguistic leveling, but not until satisfactory, highly mobile and durable riding and pack animals had been obtained, such as camels, horses, donkeys, oxen, etc. The entire nomadic life has accustomed these tribes to an expansive, spatial mentality and a higher degree of organization. It is evident that the hereditary characteristics of these tribes were gradually strengthened in this direction through selection, so that these qualities were later also noticeable beyond the nomadic zones. The enormous expansion attained by this means of the Semitic and Turko-Mongol peoples is generally known. The still more important expansion of the Indo-Europeans is similarly related, since a great part of them were once horse-riding nomads. But a farming people of excellent racial stock, like the Teutons, with only a more distant cultural affinity to them, can also possess a significant power of expansion. And in the long run their cultural ability appears to have been greater. The great nomads easily become over-specialized with less ability to adjust to a calm sedentary life—like certain Hamitic tribes in East Africa.

The rapid expansion of the Bantu peoples in relatively recent times (according to the ethnographers not much before the birth

of Christ) has given a still very uniform type to almost all the languages of southern and central Africa. The "proto-people," who diffused the Bantu languages, were no doubt cattle-raising nomads, although lacking equine animals (horses, donkeys, etc.). They were also originally people of semi-Europid steppe type. The powerful expansionary drive in the 19th Century of the rarely capable Zulus, who belonged to this group (but who are for all that predominantly Negrid), is also connected with a more highly evolved type. (They often have almost as large a brain as the Europeans, while the remaining Negroes for the most part have on the average smaller brains).

Another highly expansive language family, the Austronesian (Malayo-Polynesian), has conquered the South Seas—with sailing feats that surpass those of the Vikings. The boldest of them, the Polynesians ("the Greeks among the South Sea Peoples"), also have a more or less predominant Europid strain, which is also noticeable in their entire mental disposition and culture.

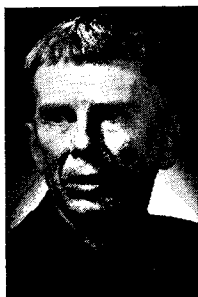
Thus we see that the large, more clearly defined language families are in general a relatively late phenomenon and are always diffused by psychically and physically progressive groups. However, not all of the more progressive, energetic races of the world take part in this development to the same degree. This shows how complicated the entire subject is, and how many other important factors are involved: a geographic environment, which promotes expansive culture-forms; and also, as already mentioned, probably the hereditary abilities of the race. Just as a plant needs certain minimum quantities of different elements for its growth, whereby one element can be substituted for another only with difficulty, so the great "language-trees" of the world had certain minimum demands for expansion. These include, above all, psychical and physical racial ability; an expansionist educational environment; and (probably to a certain extent originating as one amongst these prerequisites, but not necessarily a mechanical result of it) an appropriate form of culture. In so doing an excess of one factor can often compensate in some degree, but never completely, for a certain deficiency in another.

Naturally these expansionist conditions have not lasted indefinitely. The conquering race has gradually become mixed, although often at first very slowly, with the mass of the enslaved tribes and peoples. The expansive cultural tradition has usually lived on for a fairly long time, partly through the alluring prospects of power, though finally being exhausted in a natural manner. This takes place not only through the dying out of the conquering race but, partly dependently and partly independently, there occurs unfortunately an almost inevitable, gradual effeminization of the

ruling people. Nevertheless, where the goddesses of destiny have been favorable, both have lived on long enough to give certain national and linguistic groups a far and lasting expansion over the earth. The feeling of responsibility toward race and society which always rests upon a strong patriarchal foundation has certainly contributed to it. This has characterized these groups even if, as in the case of all earthly matters, not permanently, and, in spite of all blood and tears which they call forth, has given them the name of the "great of the earth"¹ ["Grossen auf der Erde"].

¹ In the pursuit of these final ethno-sociological thoughts, it has hardly been necessary for me to go into the direct influence of race upon language. This would involve possible influences of the different average palatal forms upon the sounds of the language and of the average psychical heredity of syntax and language structure in general. (Both, however, are also environmentally influenced—the palatal form less, the form of thinking naturally very strongly; but, on the other hand, the mentality of the different human groups is influenced by effective, psychical hereditary factors). Here, however, little is known and as regards much, but not all of the hitherto groping research, it must be said: "Vestigia terrent." By striving for a modern and organic conception of man and his different types and groups, some correlations must still in time be discovered.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE



Bertil I. Lundman, B.Sc., B.Div., Ph.D. Born in Sweden 1899, he was educated at Uppsala University, taking botany and geography in his B.Sc., 1925. He then embraced archæology, geology, old languages and theology, took B.Div. 1935, and did research into Swedish religious geography. In 1957 he was appointed Assistant Professor of Physical Anthropology at the same University.