

The position of Saaroa in the grammatical subgrouping of Formosan languages

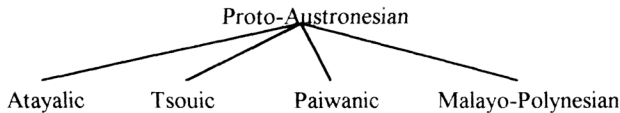
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1. Austronesian subgrouping

1.1 FOS vs. LOS

In his 1995 article, *Proto-Austronesian and the major Austronesian subgroups* (Tryon 1995), Darrell Tryon discusses two mutually exclusive views of higher-level subgrouping in the Austronesian language family. These two views differ especially in the position of whether the Malayo-Polynesian subgroup ('MP') is a first order subgroup of the family or whether it subgroups with one or more of the Formosan aboriginal languages and splits off much later. The first view, which I will refer to as the First Order Subgroup hypothesis ('FOS'), is the one put forward in a number of articles by Robert Blust. It is depicted by Darrell Tryon (Tryon 1995:20, citing Blust 1977) as Figure 1).

Figure 1)



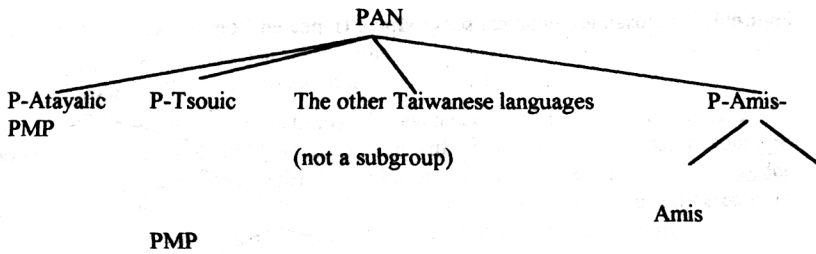
The first three primary subgroups, Atayalic, Tsouic and Paiwanic, include all and only the Austronesian languages spoken in Taiwan, while Malayo-Polynesian includes all the Austronesian languages outside of Taiwan.

Other scholars differ from this view in regarding the Formosan languages as a single primary subgroup (Dahl 1976:128, Ross 1992a, Ross 1992b:361, Ross 1994), though their support for this aspect of the subgrouping tends to be rather lukewarm.

This view of the position of Malayo-Polynesian within Austronesian subgrouping is the most widely accepted one, but not the only contender. An alternative view, which I will refer to as the Lower Order Subgroup hypothesis ('LOS'), was originally proposed by Mark Harvey (Harvey 1979:103-104/ Harvey 1982:92-93), and it embeds the MP languages farther down in the tree, as shown in figure 2).¹

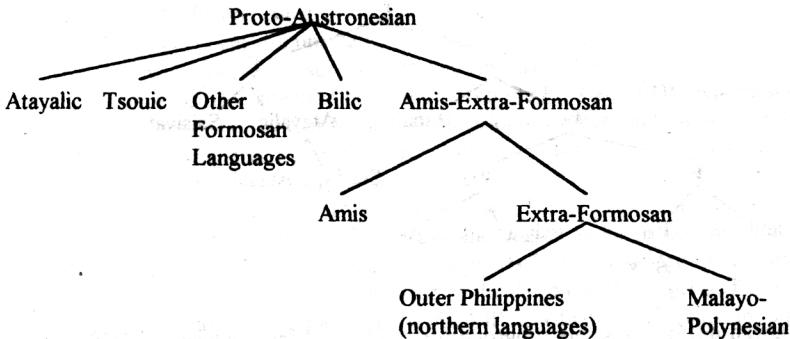
¹ Harvey refers to Formosan aboriginal languages as 'Taiwanese', a term used by all other scholars to refer to the South Min Chinese dialects spoken in Taiwan.

2)



A similar but more elaborated version of LOS, presented by Lawrence Reid in 1982, is depicted by Tryon (Tryon 1995:24) as Figure 3).

Figure 3)



My own work on the grammatical structure of Formosan languages over the last thirty years or so leads me to a grammar-based subgrouping view that is very close to Reid's LOS conception. This view is depicted in Figure 4).

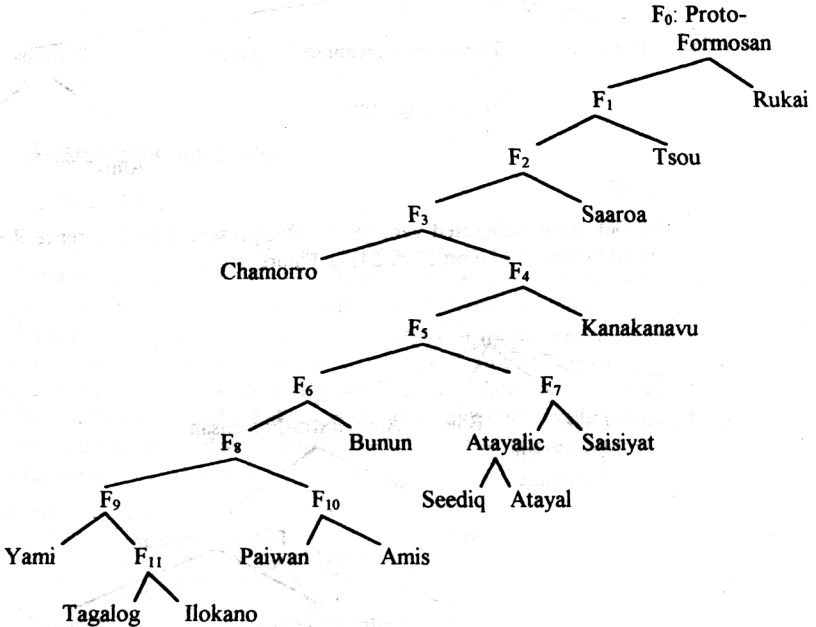
It needs to be emphasized at the outset that there are four separate issues involved in the subgrouping trees presented here:

- Do the Formosan languages form a subgroup?
- Do the Formosan languages constitute one or more first-order subgroups of Proto-Austronesian language family?
- Do the Austronesian languages outside Taiwan form a subgroup?
- Do the Austronesian languages outside Taiwan constitute one or more first-order subgroups of Proto-Austronesian language family?

1.2 The evidence for the FOS hypothesis

As I have indicated above, there is a general consensus regarding b) and c): the Formosan languages do constitute one or more first-order subgroups of the Proto-Austronesian language family (b), and the Austronesian languages outside

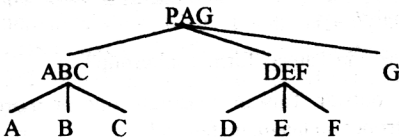
Figure 4) Formosan grammatical subgrouping (repeated from Starosta 1995, Fig. 2)



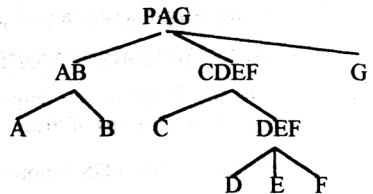
Taiwan do form a single subgroup (c), dubbed 'Malayo-Polynesian' (MP) by Blust (Blust 1977:10). Point a) is often assumed as a working assumption but rarely addressed in a serious way. However, while a considerable amount of evidence has been put forward in support of c) and d), every argument that I have seen in the literature for position d) has turned out to support not d) but rather c).

Schematically, we can distinguish two kinds of situation, as shown in figures 5) and 6).

5)



6)



The choice between these alternate conceptions makes a major difference regarding which languages provide valid evidence for reconstruction at the highest PAG level. Under the subgrouping configuration depicted in 5), any feature found in D, E, or F and also in A, B, C, or G is a strong candidate for reconstruction at the PAG level,

but under 6), a feature found in, say, D and C could not be reconstructed all the way up to the PAG level. Note that under either view, a feature found in A and G can be reconstructed even if it is not found at all in D, E, or F.

It is important to note here that any evidence put forward to show that D, E, and F form a subgroup would be compatible with either 5) or 6), so that it would be a logical error to infer that if DEF is a subgroup, it must necessarily be a first-order subgroup. I believe that exactly this error has been committed repeatedly in discussions of Austronesian subgrouping over the last twenty years or so.

Figure 5) is of course intended to represent the FOS hypothesis, by which the Malayo-Polynesian language family is a first-order subgroup of the Proto-Austronesian language family, and Figure 6) represents the LOS hypothesis, which positions MP much farther down the tree. Most scholars tend to accept the FOS hypothesis uncritically, citing Blust 1977 as their primary source, but after several re-readings of that paper, I am still unable to find support for it there. All the evidence Blust cites in that paper only supports the claim that Malayo-Polynesian is a subgroup, which is not in contention here, since both the FOS and LOS hypotheses assume its correctness. To say that Malayo-Polynesian is a subgroup however is not the same thing as saying that it is a first-order subgroup, which is in contention in this paper, and this point is hardly addressed in Blust 1977. Instead, the author simply assumes the correctness of his own FOS view. The single instance in which he does explicitly distinguish the two positions and claims to be presenting direct evidence in support of FOS in fact again only supports MP as a subgroup at some level, not necessarily at the top of the tree.² In Tryon's overview article, he summarizes what he takes to be the evidence for MP as a first-order subgroup, but again all his points, taken from Blust 1977 and Blust 1982, support only the MP-as-a-subgroup hypothesis, but not the more specific FOS hypothesis.

²11. There is, finally, one further piece of evidence from the reconstruction of the pronouns which supports the claim that all AN languages outside Formosa constitute a single first-order subgroup of the Austronesian family. As noted earlier, in addition to *aku, Dahl reconstructs *a(N)kən₁ '1st sg. Full form'. The descriptions of several languages suggest that this form contains the goal focus suffix *-en; however, to date the only meaning that can securely be attributed to *a(N)kən₁ on the Proto-Austronesian level is that of absolute possession ('mine'):

Pazeh	ni-aken	'mine'
Yami	y-aken	"
Tagalog	akin	"
Okolod Murut	r-akon	"
Merina	ahi	"

Leaving aside the question of how a goal focus morpheme could possibly get attached to a pronoun, I find this statement rather cryptic.