

Linguistically Motivated Sound Change

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Centuries of work in historical linguistics demonstrate that the great majority of regular sound changes in the world's languages have clear phonetic and/or structural motivations (e.g. Duan Yucai 1815; Osthoff and Brugman 1878; Grammont 1933; Ohala 1974, 1981, 1993; Blevins & Garrett 1998; Blevins 2004; Garrett 2015). Nevertheless, in light of ten unusual sound changes in Austronesian languages, listed in (1), Blust (2005) argues that sound change need not be linguistically motivated.

(1) Some bizarre sound changes in Austronesian languages (Blust 2005:221)

	<u>Sound change(s)</u>	<u>language(s)</u>
a.	*w/y > -p	Drehet, Levei
b.	*w/b > c-, -nc-	Sundanese
c.	intervocalic devoicing	Berawan, Kiput
d.	*dr > k ^h	Drehet
e.	*b/d/g > -m/n/ŋ	Berawan, Karo Batak
f.	C > C: / __ V#	Berawan
g.	*b > -k-	Berawan
h.	*g > p-, -j-, -p	Sa'ban
i.	*an/aŋ > -ay, *em/en/eŋ > -aw	Iban
j.	postnasal devoicing	Murik

This study, informed by research in phonetics, phonological typology, and contact phonology of the past several decades, carefully reviews the sound changes in (1), questioning each step of Blust's original argumentation: (i) Must the change be viewed as an instance of primary sound change in contrast to analogy? (ii) Is there evidence that the change is a single-step reflex, as opposed to a cumulative product of multiple innovations? and (iii) Is there really no evidence for articulatory, auditory, or structural motivation of the change? Since it has been shown that significant language contact can result in regular sound changes that mimic internal change, an additional question posed is: (iv) Could language contact have played a role in this specific change? Multiple innovations are suggested for several cases, and arguments are made for articulatory, perceptual, aerodynamic and structural motivation, including language contact. The general conclusion is that sound change is linguistically motivated.

Selected references

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