

Toward the reconstruction of Australian kinship systems: Philological and etymological issues from southeastern languages

Harold Koch

This paper will take a preliminary look at the comparative data available of kinship terminology for the languages of southeastern Australia. It will discuss the nature of the source materials (early wordlists, early anthropological essays, etc.), their limitations and problems with utilization for descriptive and comparative purposes. Issues to be discussed include: reconstituting the phonetic and phonemic form from imperfect orthographies; determining the exact denotation of terms given with general labels such as 'brother', 'uncle', 'grandmother'; assigning data sets to lects. Attempts will be made to identify terms whose distribution corresponds to putative genetic language groups, as well as terms which appear to have an areal distribution that cuts across genetic groupings. Observations will be made on the morphological structure of kin terms where these are analyzable. Potential semantic changes will be identified, and these will be used to enquire about possible changes in kinship organisation.