

Voices from the North: Asian influences in Australian languages

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It has been known for quite some time that there have been linguistic connections between Asia and Aboriginal Australia (e.g. Urry & Walsh 1981). In some instances the recognition of such input is quite obvious e.g. a word from "Macassan" appearing in some of the Yolngu matha varieties of northeast Arnhem Land: *rrupiya* 'money'. But documenting the lexical input from Asian languages has often been difficult because of the need to know a range of languages from a particular region in Asia as well as a range of languages from a particular region in Aboriginal Australia. In combining knowledge of Austronesian as well as Yolngu matha varieties of northeast Arnhem Land Walker and Zorc (1981) extended our awareness of Asian influence while Hosokawa (1987) used his knowledge of languages of the Broome area and Japanese to provide a richer account of Asian contact in that area.

In this paper I want to explore the many other sites in Aboriginal Australia with potential for ingestion of Asian language material, for instance, Japanese at the northern tip of Cape York, and, so-called "Afghans" in remote parts of South Australia. In addition, I would like to suggest a method that would at least partially automate the process of recognizing cognates from Asian languages that have passed into Australian languages.

More broadly it is worth considering what cultural and discursive effects may have resulted from Asian influences. These have been underestimated despite Asian contact sometimes having started earlier and been more intense.

References

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