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First- and Second-Person Pronouns in the World's Languages

It has long been known that first- and second-person singular pronouns are among the most stable meanings in language. Of the two, Aron Dolgopolsky (1986: 34) found that the first-person pronoun is the most stable meaning, and the second-person pronoun the third most stable. An immediate consequence of this stability has been the recognition by some linguists that pronouns are often indicative of deeper genetic connections. As we have seen elsewhere in this volume, both Henry Sweet and Alfredo Trombetti objected that the M/T 'I/you (sg.)' pronominal pattern, which is considered characteristic of Indo-European by all Indo-Europeanists, also occurs in neighboring families such as Uralic, Mongolian, Tungus, Gilyak, Chukchi-Kamchatkan, and Eskimo-Aleut. One (but not both) of these pronouns also occurs in Kartvelian, Turkic, Korean, and (Old) Japanese. This larger grouping, embracing all these groups and others, is defined essentially by the M/T pronominal pattern (though there is abundant additional evidence—grammatical and lexical—to confirm this initial conclusion), and it is the family called Eurasiatic by Joseph Greenberg and Nostratic by Russian scholars (and their non-Russian disciples). Pronouns have thus played a crucial role in debunking the myth of Indo-European's splendid isolation.

At the same time, pronouns have also been a central focus in the recent debate between Greenberg and his critics over the validity of Amerind (see Chapter 1). Greenberg (1987) claimed that the N/M 'I/you (sg.)' pronomi-

nal pattern—which had been previously noted by Trombetti, Edward Sapir, Morris Swadesh, and others—characterizes the Amerind family, and he presented evidence for this pattern from all eleven Amerind subgroups. In fact, a genetic explanation of this pattern was advocated as early as 1905, by Trombetti: "As can be seen, from the most northern regions of the Americas the pronouns NI 'I' and M 'thou' reach all the way to the southern tip of the New World, to Tierra del Fuego. Although this sketch is far from complete, due to the insufficient materials at our disposal, it is certainly sufficient to give an idea of the broad distribution of these most ancient and essential elements" (p. 208). A decade later Sapir too (1918; quoted in Darnell and Sherzer 1971: 27) was startled to find these two pronouns throughout the Americas, remarking, "Getting down to brass tacks, how in the Hell are you going to explain general American *n*- 'I' except genetically? It's disturbing, I know, but (more) non-committal conservatism is only dodging, after all, isn't it? Great simplifications are in store for us."

A genetic explanation of the N/M pronominal pattern was anathema to Sapir's mentor, Franz Boas, who favored diffusion of linguistic elements over common origin (see Chapter 6). The pronouns were, however, troublesome, since such grammatical elements are not known to diffuse, and Boas could do no better than to attribute them to "obscure psychological causes" (quoted in Haas 1966: 102). In the recent attack on *Language in the Americas* Greenberg's critics have offered even more fanciful explanations for the American pattern, attributing the N and M pronouns to the sucking reflex of nursing babies, or to an archaic residue of sounds that will quite naturally appear after long periods of time. Both putative "explanations" fail to come to grips with the fact that this particular pattern is characteristic of the Americas and rare or nonexistent elsewhere around the world. One can only wonder why the infant sucking sounds of African and Australian children have not produced the same pronouns found in the Americas.

What follows attempts to survey the first- and second-person pronouns in the world's languages. For each family I have consulted the basic sources in order to determine what pronouns have been posited for that family by specialists. Reconstructed pronouns are preceded by an asterisk; in families where reconstruction has not yet been carried out, pronouns that are widespread are cited without an asterisk. Roots presumed to be distinct are separated by ∥, and alternate forms of the same root are separated by ∼. First-person inclusive pronouns are indicated by [i]; exclusive pronouns, by [e]; and dual pronouns, by [d]. Lack of information following a language family indicates either that no such pronoun has been reconstructed for that family, or that no widespread pronoun has been identified for that family, or, in the case of extinct languages, that no such pronoun is attested.

THE PRONOUN "I"

KHOISAN: *tii ‖ ŋ ~ na ~ ni ‖ *mi ~ *ma
NILO-SAHARAN: *akʷai
KORDOFANIAN: *ŋi
NIGER-CONGO: i ~ (m)i ~ (n)i ‖ a ~ (n)a
AUSTRALIAN: *ŋay
INDO-PACIFIC: na ‖ ta ‖ ka ‖ ya ‖ bo ~ mo ‖ u ~ -w
MIAO-YAO: *ku(ŋ) ‖ *weŋ ‖ *ia
AUSTROASIATIC: *ǰoo ‖ *eŋ ‖ *i
DAIC: *ku ‖ *ʔi ~ *ya ~ *i
AUSTRONESIAN *aku ‖ *'a(ŋ)kən
    FORMOSAN: *aku
    MALAYO-POLYNESIAN: *aku ‖ *'a(ŋ)kən
BASQUE: ni ~ neu
CAUCASIAN: *ðɔ̄ ‖ *nĭ
    WEST: *se ~ *sa
    EAST: *swo ~ *zu(n) ‖ *di(n) ~ *du ~ *tu
†HURRIAN: se- ~ es- ‖ -iww
†URARTIAN: ješə ~ šo ‖ -u
†HATTI: se- ~ es-
BURUSHASKI: ǰɛ ~ ǰa ‖ mi ~ mo ‖ aiya
NAHALI: ǰuo ‖ eŋge
SINO-TIBETAN: *ŋa ‖ *-ka
    CHINESE: *ŋo
    KAREN: ja (< *ŋa)
    TIBETO-BURMAN: *ŋa ~ *ŋay ~ aŋ ~ aŋ-ka ~ ka-ŋa ‖ *-ka
YENISEIAN: *ʔaǰ
NA-DENE: *šwí
    HAIDA: tˡa ‖ tea ~ dia
    TLINGIT: khut ~ hutt
    EYAK: chuu ‖ hŭtak
    ATHABASKAN: *šwí
AFRO-ASIATIC: *an ~ *anāku ‖ ʔ ~ a ‖ u ‖ i
†ETRUSCAN: mi ~ mi-ni
†SUMERIAN: ma
KARTVELIAN: *me(n) ‖ *xw-
DRAVIDIAN: yan ‖ i ~ y- ‖ ka ~ kan ‖ ut
ELAMITE: u ~ un ~ u- ‖ -kə
INDO-EUROPEAN: *me ‖ *eg ‖ *k

URALIC-YUKAGHIR: *me ‖ *k
ALTAIC: *mi ~ *bi
KOREAN-JAPANESE-AINU: mi ‖ na
GILYAK ñi ~ ñ-
CHUKCHI-KAMCHATKAN: -m ‖ -ka
ESKIMO-ALEUT: -ma ‖ -ka
AMERIND: na(ʔ) ‖ ʔi
   ALMOSAN: *ne-
   KERESIOUAN: hinʊ ‖ iʔi
   PENUTIAN: nV ‖ ʔi ~ hi
   HOKAN: na
   CENTRAL AMERIND: nV
   CHIBCHAN: na ‖ hi ~ i
   PAEZAN: na ‖ i
   ANDEAN: na ‖ hi ~ i
   MACRO-TUCANOAN: hi ~ yi
   EQUATORIAL: nV ‖ hi ~ he ~ yi ~ e
   MACRO-CARIB: awe ~ owi
   MACRO-PANOAN: nV ‖ i ~ e ~ ye
   MACRO-GE: nV ‖ he ~ i

THE PRONOUN "WE"

KHOISAN: *ʔi ~ *ʔe [i] ‖ *si(i) [e] ‖ *m- [i]
NILO-SAHARAN:
KORDOFANIAN:
NIGER-CONGO:
AUSTRALIAN: *ña [d] ~ *ñi-rrə [e] ‖ *ŋa-rrə [i] ~ *ŋali [d] ~ *ŋana
INDO-PACIFIC: ni ~ na ‖ pi ~ me [i] ‖ ki ‖ ti
MIAO-YAO: pe ~ (m)pua
AUSTROASIATIC: *ai [d] ‖ *he(i) [i] ‖ *bɨ(n) [i] ‖ *ye(h) [e] ‖ *le ~ *ne [e]
DAIC: raw [i] ~ ra [d] ~ ta [e] ~ tau [i] ~ daw ‖ tu [e]
AUSTRONESIAN (k)ita [di] ~ ita [i] ~ -nta [i] ‖ (k)ami [e] ~ ami [e] ~ -mai
[e]
   FORMOSAN:
   MALAYO-POLYNESIAN:
BASQUE: gu ~ geu
CAUCASIAN: *ɟü [i] ‖ *ži [e]
   WEST: ħa ‖ š'ə ‖ te ~ de
   EAST: čun ~ uču ~ žu ~ tχuo [e] ‖ niž ~ nen ~ nuša ‖ ja ~ jin ~ jan [i]
‖ išši [e] ‖ waɟ [i] ‖ itˡi ~ iɬɬi ~ ile ~ tˡ'in [i]

†HURRIAN:

†URARTIAN:

†HATTI:

BURUSHASKI: *mi* ∼ *mīmo* ∼ *mī/ mɛ̄ltʌlik* [d]

NAHALI: *māney* ‖ *tyē-ko* [d]

SINO-TIBETAN:

   CHINESE:

   KAREN:

   TIBETO-BURMAN:

YENISEIAN:

NA-DENE:

   HAIDA: *ít^{l'}* ∼ *it^la* ‖ *t'alaŋ*

   TLINGIT: *iann* ∼ *ohann*

   EYAK: *kajuk* ‖ *khuinkhan*

   ATHABASKAN: *nakweni* ∼ *xweni* ∼ *naxeni* ∼ *nàhí* ∼ *náánī*

AFRO-ASIATIC: **m(n)* [i] ‖ **nahnu* ∼ *n-* [e]

†ETRUSCAN:

†SUMERIAN:

KARTVELIAN: **čwen* ‖ *m-* [i] ‖ *naj* ∼ *n-* [e]

DRAVIDIAN: **ma* ∼ *ām* [e] ∼ *em* ‖ **nām* ∼ *nam* [i] ‖ *-tat*

ELAMITE: *nikə* ‖ *-un(kə)*

INDO-EUROPEAN: **me-s-* ‖ **nō*

URALIC-YUKAGHIR: **mɛ* ∼ **me*

ALTAIC: **bɛ* ∼ **mɛ-n-* [e]‖ **(a)yɨn* [i] ‖ *mu-se* [i]

KOREAN-JAPANESE-AINU:

GILYAK *me-gi* [d] ∼ *me-r* ‖ *nɨ* ∼ *ńi* ∼ *ńəŋ* [e]

CHUKCHI-KAMCHATKAN: **mu-r* ∼ *mu-rx-*

ESKIMO-ALEUT:

AMERIND: *ma-k* [di] ‖ *ki* [di] ‖ *na* [e]

   ALMOSAN:

   KERESIOUAN:

   PENUTIAN: **mak*

   HOKAN: *magi* ‖ *ki* [d] ‖ *na*

   CENTRAL AMERIND: *nV*

   CHIBCHAN: *na*

   PAEZAN: *kV*

   ANDEAN: *moki* ∼ *moni*

   MACRO-TUCANOAN: *maha* ∼ *mani* ‖ *Vn*

   EQUATORIAL: *ki* ∼ *ku* [i]

   MACRO-CARIB: *kV* [d,i] ‖ *ana* [e]

   MACRO-PANOAN: *nV*

   MACRO-GE: *na*

THE PRONOUN "THOU"

KHOISAN: *saa-* ‖ *ʔa*
NILO-SAHARAN: *ini* ‖ *u*
KORDOFANIAN: *ŋa* ∼ *ŋɔ* ∼ *ŋo*
NIGER-CONGO: *u* ∼ *o*
AUSTRALIAN: *ŋiñ* ∼ *ŋin*
INDO-PACIFIC: *ka* ‖ *te* ‖ *ma* ‖ *na* ∼ *ni* ∼ *ŋi*
MIAO-YAO: *kɔn* ‖ *mwei*
AUSTROASIATIC: *me* ∼ *mo* ∼ *mu* ∼ *ma* ∼ *nee* ‖ *hai*
DAIC: *maɨ* ∼ *mɨŋ* ∼ *ma* ∼ *mɨ* ∼ *mu* ∼ *mi* ‖ *su* ‖ *lu*
AUSTRONESIAN *kaw* ‖ *-mu*
   FORMOSAN: *isu* ∼ *su* ∼ *kasu*
   MALAYO-POLYNESIAN: *kaw* ‖ *imu* ∼ *-mu*
BASQUE: *hi-* ∼ *heu-* ‖ *zu* ∼ *zeu*
CAUCASIAN: *ɢu* ‖ *wɔ*
   WEST: *wa* ∼ *we*
   EAST: *ħuo* ∼ *ħu* ∼ *wun* ∼ *vu* ‖ *mi(n)* ∼ *me(n)*
†HURRIAN: *we-* ∼ *-w* ∼ *-û* ∼ *-ô*
†URARTIAN: *-w* ∼ *-aw*
†HATTI: *we-*
BURUSHASKI: *ūŋ* ∼ *um* ‖ *go-* ∼ *gu-* ‖ *-ko-* ∼ *-ku-*
NAHALI: *nē-* (Dravidian borrowing?)
SINO-TIBETAN: *naŋ* ∼ *na* ∼ *njo* ∼ *nia*
   CHINESE: *njo* ∼ *nja* ‖ *kwə(j)*
   KAREN: *na*
   TIBETO-BURMAN: *naŋ* ∼ *na*
YENISEIAN: *ʔu* ∼ *ʔəw* ‖ *kə* ∼ *ʔək-*
NA-DENE: *wī*
   HAIDA: *tunga* ∼ *dunga*
   TLINGIT: *weh*
   EYAK: *i* ∼ *y*
   ATHABASKAN: *nani* ∼ *nine* ∼ *niŋ* ∼ *nì*
AFRO-ASIATIC: *'an-tə* ∼ *t-* ‖ *-ka* ∼ *-ku*
†ETRUSCAN:
†SUMERIAN:
KARTVELIAN: *sen-* ∼ *šwen* ‖ *x-*
DRAVIDIAN: *nī(n̪)* ∼ *nin̪* ∼ *ñ-* ‖ *-ti*
ELAMITE: *ni* ∼ *nin* ∼ *-ni* ‖ *-ti*
INDO-EUROPEAN: *tu* ∼ *te* ‖ *-is* ∼ *-si*

URALIC-YUKAGHIR: *ti ~ tet*
ALTAIC: **ti- ‖ *si ~ *sen*
KOREAN-JAPANESE-AINU: *na ~ nə ‖ si*
GILYAK *či*
CHUKCHI-KAMCHATKAN: *(i-)γə-t ‖ *xəš- ~ *xən-*
ESKIMO-ALEUT: *-t*
AMERIND: *ma ~ mi*
  ALMOSAN: **ke-*
  KERESIOUAN: *ʔīs ~ hísu*
  PENUTIAN: *ma ~ mi ‖ wiʔš*
  HOKAN: *ma ~ mi ‖ ika ~ hik ‖ p-*
  CENTRAL AMERIND: *ma ~ mu*
  CHIBCHAN: *ma ~ mo ‖ pe ~ pa ~ bo*
  PAEZAN: *paje ~ bü*
  ANDEAN: *ma ~ mi ‖ p- ~ bi*
  MACRO-TUCANOAN: *ma ~ mi*
  EQUATORIAL: *ma ~ mi ‖ pi ~ pa*
  MACRO-CARIB: *ama ~ amoro*
  MACRO-PANOAN: *mi ~ am*
  MACRO-GE: *ma ~ ama ‖ *ka ~ qa ~ aki*

THE PRONOUN "YOU"

KHOISAN: **ʔi- ‖ *ʔu*
NILO-SAHARAN:
KORDOFANIAN:
NIGER-CONGO:
AUSTRALIAN: **nu-rrə ~ *ñurra ~ *ñumpalə* [d] *‖ *ku-rrə*
INDO-PACIFIC: *ki ‖ te ‖ mi ~ pi ‖ nik*
MIAO-YAO: *ʔmne ‖ ńew*
AUSTROASIATIC: **be(n)* [d] *‖ *pe ~ pa ‖ *yi ‖ *inaa*
DAIC: *su ~ sɨ ~ si ~ sau ‖ mo ~ mu ~ maɨ*
AUSTRONESIAN
  FORMOSAN: *kamu ~ amu ~ imu*
  MALAYO-POLYNESIAN: *kamu ~ -miw*
BASQUE: *zuek ~ zeuek*
CAUCASIAN:
  WEST: *š′ʷa ~ s′ʷe ~ fe*
  EAST: *šu ~ zu(r) ‖ biti ~ bišti ~ bissi ‖ meži ~ miže ‖ kün*
†HURRIAN:
†URARTIAN:

†HATTI:

BURUSHASKI: *ma ~ maii ~ maimo*

NAHALI: *lā ~ lāla* ‖ *nēko ~ nāko* [d]

SINO-TIBETAN:

   CHINESE:

   KAREN:

   TIBETO-BURMAN:

YENISEIAN:

NA-DENE:

   HAIDA: *daleñ ~ dalunga*

   TLINGIT: *gigwann ~ yehwenn*

   EYAK: *liahshū* ‖ *kajuku*

   ATHABASKAN: *ɬan*

AFRO-ASIATIC: *t(ə)* ‖ *-kum ~ -kun ~ -kin*

†ETRUSCAN:

†SUMERIAN: *za*

KARTVELIAN: *(s₁)tkwen-*

DRAVIDIAN: **nīm ~ nim ~ num* ‖ *-tir*

ELAMITE:

INDO-EUROPEAN: *-te*

URALIC-YUKAGHIR: *tɛ ~ tit*

ALTAIC: *ta*

KOREAN-JAPANESE-AINU: *-s-i*

GILYAK

CHUKCHI-KAMCHATKAN: **tur ~ turx- ~ -tə-k*

ESKIMO-ALEUT: *-s-i* ‖ *-ti-k* [d] *~ -ti-t*

AMERIND: *mak ~ mik*

   ALMOSAN:

   KERESIOUAN:

   PENUTIAN: *makam*

   HOKAN: *mākaʔ ~ mal*

   CENTRAL AMERIND: *ʔima ~ yim*

   CHIBCHAN: *mi ~ mu*

   PAEZAN:

   ANDEAN: *mi ~ mai*

   MACRO-TUCANOAN: *mue ~ musa ~ mixsa*

   EQUATORIAL: *amos ~ mungui*

   MACRO-CARIB: *moki ~ amo*

   MACRO-PANOAN: *ami ~ mikuan ~ mil*

   MACRO-GE: *ma ~ makaija*

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