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Abstract

[Philology]
The Tree Model and the Study of Dialects of a Language that is No Longer Spoken: A Case of the Eastern Group of Middle Iranian Languages (in Japanese)

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In his book entitled *The rise and fall of languages* (CUP 1997, p. 46), R. M. W. Dixon remarks as follows:

"We have just a few scenarios with lengthy records — involving Greek, Indo-Aryan, Hebrew and Egyptian — and these extend 3,000 or at most 4,000 years, . . ."

This seems to represent a general view shared by most linguists concerning the traceability of language history among written texts. Although there is not much problem about this statement, the Iranian or Irano-Aryan sub-branch of the Indo-Iranian languages has not been paid the attention it deserves in the field of historical linguistics, always being placed behind the more conspicuous Indo-Aryan group. Nevertheless, the Iranian branch preserves a documented history of no less than 3,000 years, and numerous different modern languages are spoken in the vast area extending from Anatolia to China's western border. Thus, among the Indo-European languages, Iranian can serve as a model case for diachronic studies not inferior to Italic or other Indo-Aryan branches.

In my paper I will select a few topics from the so-far neglected history of the Iranian languages, in particular from the East Middle Iranian dialects of the Pre-Islamic period, which have some bearing on drawing a family tree model. The topics to be discussed are as follows:

1) Linguistic varieties attested among various manuscripts of one language: how can one decide between chronology and dialect? In other words, how can one trace dialect divergence among ancient texts?
2) Innovations shared by a dialect of one language and a neighboring language but not another dialect of the former: cases where the tree model fails.

3) Divergence of Eastern Iranian and Western Iranian: the relative chronology of the sound changes and language divergence.

4) Basic vocabulary and linguistic anomalies as criteria for identifying linguistic unity after divergence.