Book Reviews


The study of language contacts in the Ancient Near East is far from having drawn the attention of the scholarly world to the extent it could claim to deserve. The reason for this does not lie primarily in the fact that the available material is too scanty and often too controversial to make sociolinguistic studies in this area possible, but rather in the extreme specialization of scholars dealing with Ancient Near East on the one hand and in the various philological obstacles to the understanding of the linguistic documents, not to speak of the cultural context, on the other hand. But, as the author himself argues in the introduction of this pioneering study (p. 1), the cuneiform tablets, which form the bulk of our documentation, ‘provide us with abundant examples of structural interference, lexical borrowing, code-mixing and code alternation’. In this respect, the palatial archives of the Hittite empire (ca 1650-1200 BC) are especially interesting, because they depict a complex sociolinguistic picture of Bronze Age Anatolia with at least seven languages attested (Hittite, Akkadian, Sumerian, Hattic, Hurrian, Luvian and Palaic) and the indirect attestation of an eighth language (Mittanian Indian). Since the beginning of Hittitology in the first decades of the 20th century, it has been recognized that the relationships of Hittite and Luvian – both cognate, but distinct Anatolian (Indo-European) languages – must be explained in sociolinguistic rather than in geographical terms. Some scholars even consider the Luvian language to have been spoken all over the Hittite Empire, while Hittite would have been used only as a literary language; this seems to be an overly simplified picture of a more complex linguistic environment. One has perhaps to assume that both languages were, at least to some extent, in complementary distribution, although there are still many open questions. This is precisely why this new book devoted to the ‘sociolinguistics of the Luvian language’ must be welcomed by all scholars interested in the study of language contacts. Its aim is to discuss some of the major issues that can elucidate contact mechanisms between Hittite and Luvian.

Chapter I (p. 1-73) is conceived as a study of dialect geography. It is based mainly on textual evidence for linguistic variation within the Luvian language. Luvian documents coming from Hattusa, the capital of the Hittite Empire, sometimes diverge from documents reflecting the Luvian language of other areas, especially Kizzuwatna. For example, the merger of the common gender nominative and accusative plurals is attested in Hieroglyphic Luvian (−nzi), but not in Cuneiform Luvian (−nzi/−nz(a)); a similar confusion occurs in New Hittite, where it could be the result of Luvian influence. Another difference between variants of the Luvian language is the expression of possessive adjectives to the detriment of the genitive case in Cuneiform Luvian. Other isoglosses, such as the use of the sentence-initial particle pā- or of the pronominal clitics, are also examined. The author comes to the conclusion that the traditional distinction of Cuneiform and Hieroglyphic dialects must be replaced by a ‘threefold distinction between (Bronze Age) Kizzuwatna Luvian, Empire Luvian and Iron Age Luvian dialects’ (p. 68).
Chapter II (p. 75-160) deals with the diffusion of Luvian speakers in Western Anatolia. Our documentation on the Luvian dialects in Western Anatolia begins to emerge only by the mid-first millennium BC with Lydian and Carian inscriptions. In the Hittite sources, which are much older, the central part of Western Anatolia was usually called Arzawa (or Arzawija). Focusing on onomastic material in cuneiform documents and in Lydian inscriptions, the author endeavors to show that the claim of a Luvian substrate in Lydian is probably ill-founded; according to the author, the language of Arzawa was probably 'Proto-Carian'. It has been assumed by some scholars (e.g. Calvert Watkins and Frank Starke) that the Trojans, who have gained much publicity thanks to Homer's Iliad, spoke a Luvian dialect. The relevant material, however, is too scanty (there is little to conclude from the name of the city of Wilusa, often compared with the famous city of Ilion): the whole theory rests on a shaky foundation. The position of Lycian, another Anatolian language spoken in Western Anatolia during the first millennium BC, is also discussed; the name Lukka occurs in cuneiform sources. Finally, the author tackles the intricate problem of linguistic contacts between Luvian and Greek. The Anatolian environment of some Greek dialects is well-known, but is often overlooked by Hellenists. Only recent studies (particularly those of Calvert Watkins) have tried to identify contact-driven linguistic phenomena or structural similarities between Anatolian and Greek. Anatolian loanwords in Greek are rare and not always uncontroversial (perhaps Greek τύραννος ‘tyrant’ from Luv. tarwanaši- ‘justice, judge’, but another source is possible, cf. Ugaritic šru ‘prince’).

Chapter III (p. 161-205) deals with prehistoric contacts between Hittite and Luvian. The main assumption, already found in the previous literature, is that ‘the Hittite language of the Empire period underwent partial restructuring under the influence of the Luvian vernacular, and borrowed a large number of Luvian lexemes’ (p. 161). The author argues, for example, that the development of a reflexive particle -za in Hittite is due to interference with Luvian (-ti).

Chapter IV (p. 207-302) deals with the coexistence between Hittite and Luvian before the collapse of the Hittite Empire. Prosopographic data in the Old Assyrian sources show that Luvian speakers were already settled in Central and South Anatolia at an early date (20th-18th centuries BC). As to the status of Hittite at the same period, there is no consensus among the scholars. While some (e.g. Hans Güterbock) argue that ‘the distribution between Hittite and Luvian-speaking areas was mainly geographic’ (p. 223), others (e.g. Gerhardt Steiner) think that Hittite was only a written language in a predominantly Luvian, resp. Hattic-speaking environment. The mainstream Hittitological literature maintains that Hittite was a native language for at least some part of the population of the Hittite Empire. Its relationship to Luvian is complex. It is often assumed that the elites of the capital Hattusa spoke Hittite, whereas the lower classes of the population spoke Luvian, but this claim is based on limited evidence. Be that as it may, Luvian loanwords in Old Hittite witness the active coexistence of both languages already in the earliest periods. The idea, advocated by the author (p. 239), that ‘Luvians had exercised cultural or political dominance in Anatolia in the period before the formation of the Hittite state’, is a thought-provoking theory that still has to stand the test of time. A more consensual statement is that Luvians and Hittites were living in symbiosis in Central Anatolia, with Hittite as an official language. After the collapse of the Hittite Empire, Luvian became linguistically dominant.

Chapter V (p. 303-416) deals more in detail with the status of the Luvian language in the Hittite Empire. After 1350 BC, we observe in the Hittite documents significant linguistic changes. According to the author, some of them may be contact-induced changes. The main idea of the whole section is ‘a compromise solution that acknowledges the native transmission of New Hittite, stressing at the same time the widespread advances of Luvian as the second language in...
Hattusa’ (p. 307). The model reconstructed by the author is that of three groups of people: speakers of Hittite fully bilingual in Luvian, speakers of Luvian more or less bilingual in Hittite and speakers of Luvian that did not speak Hittite. To this asymmetrical bilingualism corresponds a social hierarchy based on the various degrees of competence in the languages in question: ‘better knowledge of Hittite corresponded to higher social standing in Hattusa, but the knowledge of Luvian was common even at the very top of the social hierarchy’ (p. 307). In New Hittite, interferences with Luvian affected the Hittite language much more than in the earlier periods. Since there is evidence for phonetic changes (e.g. i > e, or the formation of a nasal vowel), it is generally assumed that Hittite was still a spoken language during the period of the New Hittite Empire, basing on the obvious assumption that ‘dead languages cannot undergo phonetic changes’ (p. 321). But the author shows that even dead languages, when they are still used for official or liturgical recitations, may undergo phonetic changes, usually driven by the vernaculars spoken at the same time. Examples of hypercorrection (e.g. the problem of secondary a/i-mutation) could indeed provide a support for the claim that Hittite was no longer a spoken language at that time (or at least that the scribes were not native speakers of Hittite). Other facts seem to support this assumption. Finally, the author tackles the problem of the functions of the Glossenkeil, a cuneiform sign usually considered as marking Luvian words in Hittite texts. It can be shown that Glossenkeil is not only a marker of ‘foreignisms’, but can also be used to point out words that ‘deemed stylistically inappropriate in a given context’ (p. 370). The final point is a typological interpretation of the Anatolian data with the idea of fitting them into a more general sociolinguistic model: the traditional dichotomy between borrowing and imposition can be illustrated by the Anatolian languages, but they show that more complex modes of transfer are involved in language contact. At any case, paleo-sociolinguistics may produce results that may be of interest for the theory of language contact and deserve more attention than is usually done.

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