NOMINAL AGREEMENT IN PIE FROM THE AREAL AND TYPOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW

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Abstract: Proto-Indo-European (PIE) nominal agreement is typologically unusual when compared to systems of nominal agreement in other language families of Eurasia. Gender agreement in PIE was virtually limited to NPs and closely associated with case and number agreement, and there is evidence showing that this system is of recent origin. It is argued that a number of uninflected forms of adjectives and pronouns in early IE dialects, as well as certain types of relative clauses, may have been inherited from the period when these word classes did not agree with the head nouns within the NP.

1. Gender and Nominal Agreement

The remarkable cross-linguistic stability of gender has been noted by Johanna Nichols (1992, 1995, 2003). In Eurasia, there are several language families that are consistently genderless (e.g. the Sino-Tibetan,1 Miao-Yao, Tai-Kadai languages in SE Asia, the Turkic, Tungusic, and Mongolian languages, Kartvelian, Uralic, and Chukchi-Kamchadal languages, as well as the isolates such as Ainu, Japanese, Nivkh and Basque). On the other hand, there are language families in which the overwhelming majority of languages has gender, such as Afroasiatic, Dravidian, NE Caucasian, as well as the nearly extinct Yeniseian family in Siberia and the isolate Burushaski in Pakistan. It is fair to say that gender, as a category, characterizes whole language families rather than individual languages. Map 1 (adapted from Matasović 2004) shows the rough distribution of language families with and without gender in Eurasia, including some extinct languages for which data are available (Etruscan, Sumerian, Elamite, Hattic, and Hurrian).

1 Some languages, e.g. Newari, have agreement in animacy between nouns and adjectives (and/or demonstratives).

Map 1. Gendered and genderless families in Eurasia.