

On Bella Coola diminutives

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The following remarks are offered to David Ingram's paper.

(In the discussion of reduplication I miss reference to Drachman's Twana.)

I must take issue with some of the suggestions put forward with regard to possible linguistic contacts. Apart from the geographic remove, the proposed (§3.1) borrowed Cree plural looks more like a guess from orthography than a reasoned hypothesis based on phonological fit. Sapir's genetic assertion, of course, remains as undemonstrated as it was when first made, and such an isolated agreement is most unlikely. Again (§3.3.2), the large family of Algonquian diminutives (which are well understood) cannot be relevant here.

Of the possibilities suggested for the -i diminutive, I am not persuaded by the claims advanced (p.20) on the basis of the order of sentence elements; such claims have as yet far too slender a base both in the range of languages adequately described and in our understanding of the sort of base component and permissible rules and constraints that languages offer.

It seems to me much more likely that we have here a Sprachbund phenomenon in the -i suffix. The vowel quality can scarcely be accident within the Salish context; the argument for its removal from the reduplicating syllable is persuasive. At the same time the parallel morphology with reduplication and suffixation in Kwakiutl for the same semantax seems particularly relevant. This is the sort of thing we see elsewhere (in the Balkans, the Baltic, Celtic, the Caucasus, Ainu--in my own experience) in a Sprachbund situation: home-grown morphology with imported surface syntax, and shared semantics.