

Abstract

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The Malagasy language is generally linked to the Barito languages of Borneo and recent research suggests that these languages are part of the Sama-Bajaw group. It is assumed the dispersal of the Sama-Bajaw occurred in the 7th century or thereabouts, impelled by the expansion of the Srivijaya Malay. This is in line with the current archaeological dates for settlement in Madagascar which fall within the period 5-7th centuries AD. The role of the Malay in this process, as the protagonists with experience of open ocean voyaging may well explain why Malagasy terms in this lexical field are all Malay borrowings. However, this does not fully explain the evidence for Austronesian presence on the East African coast, as textual and other evidence suggests that there were contacts around 0 AD.

Trying to develop a single model to account for the late dates of settlement on Madagascar, and the rather different nature of evidence for the East African coast has proven difficult, and it is here proposed that the reason is that the two migrations were essentially unrelated. Austronesian navigators were crossing the Indian Ocean prior to 0 AD, probably for trading reasons but may have come from a different region, perhaps the Philippines. There is no direct linguistic evidence for this, but cultural evidence is presented in Blench (1994).

The original settlers on Madagascar seem not to have transported domestic animals directly and therefore carried a memorised terminology to apply to animals they encountered on the island itself. Interactions between human populations has allowed the interchange and re-application of vocabulary, such that Bantu words have entered Malagasy and Austronesian terms have now spread into Bantu languages. Recent zoogeographic research suggests the translocation of domestic and wild species across the Mozambique Channel and between the islands. An intriguing example of this is the Malagasy name for the wild pig, *lambo*, which reflects Austronesian names for 'bovine'. Given the importance of pigs in Austronesian culture, such a replacement may seem surprising, but it seems that the ancestors of the Malagasy transported very large wild pigs from the African mainland as a food source, and these seemed more comparable to cattle than pigs. In the meantime, the importation of mainland cattle brought the Bantu name *nombe*, which replaced exist Austronesian terms. The term *lambo*, in turn spread to Shimaore, the Bantu language of Mayotte, where it is applied to the dugong.

The paper explores this and other Malagasy domestic animal terminology for indications of historical interactions between populations. Surprisingly, almost all names for domestic animals are borrowed from languages of the coastal Bantu and Austronesian traces are found only in fossil forms. This may reflect the nature of the voyage; if the navigators were using the Equatorial current to cross the Indian Ocean without staging points, then it may not have been possible to keep domestic animals on the journey.