Hittite and Indo-European: Revolution and Counterrevolution

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Abstract: Hrozný's identification of Hittite as an Indo-European language challenged nearly every major tenet of the widespread, though by no means universal, consensus regarding Proto-Indo-European as reconstructed in 1915. Two broad approaches to the problem had appeared by the 1930s: one saw Hittite as descended from an archaic proto-language radically different from PIE: "Proto-Indo-Hittite". The other claimed that Hittite was effectively derivable from PIE as reconstructed. These opposing conceptions were challenged in the 1960s by a third: PIE itself required radical revision, especially in the reconstruction of the verbal system—a veritable "revolution". By the early 1990s there was a new broad consensus that some significant revisions to PIE were required, with lingering disagreement about just how many and how radical. While this debate continues, the *general* tendency over the past two decades has been one of retrenchment, with Hittite appearing ever less radically different from the rest of Indo-European (a partial "counterrevolution").

Bedřich Hrozný in 1915 identified Hittite, a language attested in cuneiform documents from Central Anatolia from the middle of the second millennium BCE, as a member of the Indo-European family. He fully elaborated the demonstration in his 1917 book, *Die Sprache der Hethiter*. In order to appreciate fully just how strong the impact of his identification has been on Indo-European studies, we must remind ourselves of the state of the reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European in 1915.

Contrary to a widespread myth (see e.g. Nichols apud Gamkrelidze and Ivanov 1995: xi), there has always been in Indo-European studies vigorous dissent from the majority or "standard" view, and controversies regarding virtually every aspect of reconstructed PIE grammar. I cite among many examples only three, two involving phonology, the third morphosyntax. There has been fierce debate since the late nineteenth century whether Proto-Indo-European had two or three contrastive sets of dorsal stops and whether there was in PIE a fourth series of voiceless aspirated stops contrasting with the voiceless, voiced, and voiced aspirated sets. Furthermore, the typological problem that arises if one reconstructs only the last three was already recognized and discussed by Prokosch (1918–1919). There has been an even longer running dispute about the function of the PIE verbal category traditionally labeled the "perfect": against the dominant view that it expresses an "attained state" (see among many Delbrück 1897: 177ff., with references to Buttmann and Kohlmann) there have been repeated claims for an

"intensive" value (e.g., Bréal 1899–1900: 277 and Hirt 1928: 279–280, citing Curtius and Bopp!).

Nevertheless, by the early twentieth century, there had developed a broad consensus on the major features of Proto-Indo-European. I may cite the following points as common to the otherwise often strikingly different conceptions of Brugmann (1897–1916) and Meillet (1912)—they are mostly also shared by the famously idiosyncratic grammar of Hirt (1927–1937). In terms of phonology, none of them reconstructs "laryngeals" or "sonants coefficients" for PIE. They also largely agree on the distinctive features of the stop series: $*T$, $*T^h$, $*D$, $*D^h$ (but Hirt does not reconstruct $*T^h$). In the nominal system all assume three genders, three numbers (singular, dual, and plural), and eight cases in the singular (and there is broad agreement on the formal exponents of these functional categories). For the verbal system all reconstruct an aspectual contrast of "present"/"aorist" (really imperfective/perfective), an opposition in diathesis between active and medio-passive, and four moods (indicative, imperative, subjunctive, and optative). Brugmann and Meillet also follow the standard view of the "perfect" as expressing "an attained state" and of the "pluperfect" as its preterite (but for Hirt see above). Finally, all three scholars posit a contrast of athematic versus thematic inflection in both the nominal and verbal systems.

The wholly unexpected demonstration by Hrozný in 1915 that Hittite was an Indo-European language immediately made it the most ancient directly attested

member of the entire family. The fact that despite its antiquity it showed striking discrepancies (especially missing categories) vis-à-vis the other most ancient representatives (most notably Indo-Iranian and Greek) along with the undeniable commonalities eventually came to cast doubt on virtually every point of the above consensus (except for the indicative and imperative moods).

This "special status" of Hittite also seriously affected the reception of the contemporaneously discovered Tocharian in Central Asia. I personally am firmly convinced that, had Hittite never been discovered, the current widespread judgment that Tocharian also preserves some archaic features versus "Core Indo-European" would hardly exist. Although the impact of the other languages on the reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European would remain negligible for many decades, one should also not overlook that several scholars soon confirmed that Hittite was not alone in Asia Minor, but was part of an entire new subfamily of Indo-European that has subsequently come to be labeled "Anatolian". See especially Forrer 1919, Hrozný 1920, and Meriggi 1936ab.

External events, above all World Wars I and II, seriously delayed the full impact of Hittite on the reconstruction of Indo-European. Although there were some isolated early responses, such as those by Marstrander (1919), Kellogg (1925), and Kuryłowicz (1927), Hittite textual material only became available in significant quantity and in philologically reliable editions in the 1930s (due to the

efforts of the Hittitologists Johannes Friedrich and Albrecht Götze and to a lesser extent of the Indo-Europeanist Ferdinand Sommer).

The creation of a genuine Hittite philology led to the first major pre-World War II assessments of the meaning of Hittite for the reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European, those of Edgar Sturtevant (1933) and Holger Pedersen (1938). These studies largely set the agenda on the topic for the next three decades, and the very wide divergence in their findings led to two radically opposing viewpoints that dominated the field (though in a quite unequal fashion).

Sturtevant concluded that the generally less elaborate Hittite grammatical system (with only two grammatical genders in the nominal system and a monothematic verb that had only indicative and imperative moods and no category matching the "perfect") largely represents an archaic state inherited from a proto-language radically different from the Proto-Indo-European reconstructed principally on the basis of Indo-Iranian and Greek. In Stammbaum terms Hittite is thus a "sister" of PIE, both reflecting a very archaic parent "Proto-Indo-Hittite" (thus the shorthand label "Indo-Hittite" for this model). While one should not understate the degree of archaicity that Sturtevant assumed is preserved in Hittite, one should also avoid attributing to him the simplistic notion that Hittite is almost unchanged Proto-Indo-Hittite. He certainly acknowledged that Hittite had made some innovations of its own. What was crucial to his thesis was the claim that the

rest of the Indo-European languages had undergone massive *shared* innovations that included the creation of some major grammatical categories.

Pedersen argued in response that Hittite is effectively derivable from Proto-Indo-European as it had already been reconstructed, displaying the usual mixture of archaisms and innovations found in any language. Since for Pedersen (and others who share his fundamental view) many of the Hittite innovations consist in the loss of major grammatical categories, this approach is widely referred to in the field as the "Schwundhypothese". While it is a convenient enough label, one should again not be misled into attributing to Pedersen or any other serious proponent of this model the simplistic claim that *all* Hittite innovations involve losses from the proto-language.

The "Indo-Hittite" and "Schwundhypothese" models dominated Indo-European studies for three decades, with the latter by far the more prevalent view, especially in Europe (though one should note the early works of Francisco Adrados 1961 and 1963).[1] The 1960s and 1970s saw the appearance of a new third approach: according to its proponents the facts of Hittite (and Tocharian)

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[1] That Adrados casts his views in a model very different from the Stammbaum in no way alters the fact that his overall picture of Proto-Indo-European is fully as radical and archaic as Sturtevant's Proto-Indo-Hittite. Naturally, their conceptions of the archaic nature of the earliest reconstructable stage differ markedly.

required a radical revision of Proto-Indo-European itself, and they thus rejected both "Indo-Hittite" and the "Schwundhypothese". They advocated especially for the verb a new model with a focus on Anatolian and Italo-Celtic against the standard model based chiefly on Indo-Iranian and Greek (see in particular Wolfgang Meid 1963 and 1975 and Calvert Watkins 1969). One should also acknowledge the entirely independent but equally radical new reconstruction of the medio-passive by Erich Neu (1968). Having entered the field during this period of ferment at one of the centers promoting the new, more radical conception, I believe it is fully justified to characterize these developments as a "revolution".

All three viewpoints just described were well represented by multiple and vigorous advocates at the VIIIth Fachtagung of the Indogermanische Gesellschaft held in Leiden in 1987, and the profound differences in some of the premises of the respective models seemed to leave little room for compromise. However, only five years later at the IXth Fachtagung in Zürich in 1992, the first two approaches had clearly lost ground. Most participants in the concluding round-table discussion of plenary speakers appeared to take for granted that some serious revisions in the reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European were necessary, wishing to begin the debate about just what these should be.

Since Zürich there does appear to exist a broad consensus for the need for serious revision of Proto-Indo-European, but I must stress that this "consensus"

consists of a very wide continuum of opinion from conservative to radical on just how many revisions need to be made and just which ones those are! One must also acknowledge that the so-called "Schwundhypothese" and "Indo-Hittite" models remain as minority views (see e.g. respectively Eichner 2015 and Adrados 2007).

While not wishing to deny the broad spectrum of opinion just cited regarding the degree to which Hittite requires revision of the received model of Proto-Indo-European, I must call attention to the fact that the last two decades have seen a significant retrenchment among some specialists in Hittite (respectively Anatolian) on this issue. If one reads the recent survey articles by Rieken (2009) and Oettinger (2013-14) on the "position of Hittite/Anatolian", one finds a characterization of Anatolian that is far less different from the rest of Indo-European than one typically met with in works of the early 1980s. Similar remarks apply to the picture I present in Melchert forthcoming.[2] I have dared to refer to this development in my title as a "counterrevolution", on the grounds that the conception of Proto-Indo-European found in these works is far removed from some of the more radical models of the 1960s and 1970s.

Counterrevolutions typically do not succeed in entirely turning back the clock and in undoing all of the changes wrought by preceding revolutions, and that is

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[2] I must emphasize that the version currently available was last revised in 2012!

also the case here. First of all, the three works cited in the preceding paragraph tend to fall at the conservative end of the spectrum of opinion described earlier. I do not wish to downplay that there are other conceptions to be found farther towards the radical end: see among others Jasanoff forthcoming and in this volume and Kloekhorst 2008: 13–155 and passim. Furthermore, some very recent research argues for *new* differences in morphosyntax between Anatolian and "Core Indo-European": see Goedegebuure 2000 and Huggard 2011 and 2015. Hrozný's groundbreaking achievement thus retains its full innovative impact on Indo-European linguistics unabated after a full century.

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