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A Response to Campbell

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A RESPONSE TO CAMPBELL

I am grateful to Lyle Campbell for taking time to critique *The Dene–Yeniseian Connection* (DYC) and for sending me his review before publication, making this response possible.

The Dene–Yeniseian (DY) hypothesis argues that Athabaskan–Eyak–Tlingit (Na–Dene) is related to the Siberian family Yeniseian, which consists of Ket and several extinct relatives. The strongest evidence comes from the verb-internal tense–mood system, action nominal (gerund, infinitive) morphology, and sound correspondences based on cognates in basic vocabulary. Shared words for ‘conifer needles’, ‘conifer pitch’, ‘rump, leg’, ‘liver’, and others reveal that phonemic tones arose separately in Yeniseian and Athabaskan from an earlier distinction involving coda glottalization, the original glottal articulation surviving in Tlingit and Eyak. Proponents of the DY hypothesis regard such evidence as indicative of genealogical affinity.

Explaining these parallels as reflecting a shared origin, however, raises serious questions that so far have eluded satisfactory answers. Campbell's conclusion that the relationship remains insufficiently demonstrated is therefore an equally reasonable assessment. Leaving aside questions of distance, time depth, and homeland—issues sometimes unresolved decades after a language family has been accepted—there remain serious comparative challenges to overcome if the DY hypothesis is to progress further. The volume under review identifies most of these, and Campbell adds such additional insights as a consideration of sound symbolism.

Two glaring shortcomings of the current DY hypothesis are my incomplete explanations of the fate of certain classifier components in Yeniseian and the apparent incongruity among the first- and second-person markers. If the tense–mood affixes are cognate, then the morphemes among them must also be cognate, unless a convincing explanation shows otherwise. Also, key aspects of my comparison of the Proto-Yeniseian tense–mood system rely on my own analysis of Ket verb structure, which awaits critical judgment by other Yeniseianists. Most crucially needed are more cognates to test and expand the system of sound correspondences, since only part of the overall DY vocabulary has yet been compared. Doubts about borrowing or sound symbolism will then no longer encompass enough comparanda to be an issue. Unraveling loanword history will likely strengthen the hypothesis by demonstrating that certain Yeniseian words lack Na-Dene cognates because they are later replacements from other languages. Finally, as discussed in the volume, though not in Campbell's review, any conclusion about the position of Yeniseian among the world's language families must fully address previous hypotheses supporting a link between Yeniseian and other Old World families—a task left beyond the scope of *DYC*.

If further research on DY garners broader acceptance, then historiography should appreciate the contribution of linguists who criticized the earlier hypothesis in a principled yet open-minded way, as Campbell does when he states that he cannot accept the DY hypothesis “at present.” It remains incumbent upon the proponents of the DY hypothesis to provide solutions to at least some of the unresolved problems identified in Campbell's review or in *DYC* itself. My opinion is that every one of them requires a convincing solution before the relationship between Yeniseian and Na-Dene can be considered settled.

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NATIVE AMERICAN PLACE-NAMES OF INDIANA. By Michael McCafferty. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008. Pp. xxxi + 302. \$50.00.

Michael McCafferty produced a superior book here. With its index, it is not at all like those in the usual dictionary format, such as the similarly titled *Native American Placenames of the United States* (Bright 2004).