

Lexical Stability Across Deep Divides: Lessons from Austronesian-Ongan Comparisons

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Application of the comparative method suggests that Onge and Jarawa, two languages of the Andaman Islands, might be distantly related to Proto-Austronesian (Blevins 2007). A range of regular sound correspondences between Proto-Ongan and Proto-Austronesian are proposed, and a number of basic vocabulary items are reconstructed for Proto-Austronesian-Ongan. Reconstructable items are compared with the stability indices of Swadesh items proposed by Holman et al. (2008). If these languages are indeed related, significant meaning shifts have occurred among the most stable items. Semantic shifts include: Proto-Austronesian LIVER = Proto-Ongan BLOOD; Proto-Austronesian ARTERY/VEIN/MUSCLE/SINEW/TENDON = Proto-Ongan LIVER. Overall, findings suggest that when time depths are potentially deeper than those used to assess stability, some semantic leeway should be allowed when regular sound correspondences are in evidence.

Blevins, Juliette. 2007. A long lost sister of Proto-Austronesian? Proto-Ongan, mother of Jarawa and Onge of the Andaman Islands. *Oceanic Linguistics* 46:154-198.

Holman, Eric W., Søren Wichmann, Cecil H. Brown, Viveka Velupillai, André Müller, and Dik Bakker. 2008. Explorations in automated lexicostatistics. *Folia Linguistica* 42: 331-354