

The position of Tocharian in Indo-European: Evidence from nominal morphology

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In recent historical linguistics oriented scholarship on Tocharian the verbal system has been the focus of attention (e.g., Jasanoff 2003, Malzahn 2010, Peyrot 2013). From the perspective of modern Indo-European historical linguistics, most of the old handbooks on Tocharian are outdated regarding nominal morphology. The treatment of nominal morphology in the handbooks is also incoherent and non-exhaustive from a synchronic point of view – not least because of the difficulty of gaining access to Tocharian texts in former times. Thus, inquiries into the history of Tocharian nominal morphology have been scarce (e.g., Hackstein 2011, Kim 2009, Pinault 2011, Malzahn 2014) and there is no up-to-date monograph on this topic.

For the first time since the identification of Tocharian as an Indo-European language about 100 years ago the project CEToM (Comprehensive Edition of Tocharian Manuscripts – univie.ac.at/tocharian) housed at the Department of Linguistics at the University of Vienna gives open access to the entire Tocharian corpus (together with translations of the texts and philological, lexical, grammatical information and commentary). Especially in the sphere of nominal morphology this gradually leads to a better understanding of the synchronic grammar of the Tocharian languages, thus providing a more secure basis for the reconstruction of Proto-Tocharian, which in turn facilitates the investigation of the developments between Proto-Indo-European and the Tocharian branch.

Focusing on the change of important Indo-European nominal categories such as case endings, grammatical gender, ablaut classes and stem formation my talk aims at sketching the most important developments from Proto-Indo-European to the Tocharian languages. In doing so the investigation will contribute to a better understanding of the position of Tocharian among the other Indo-European languages, specifically to the question whether nominal morphology can be called to witness for Tocharian having been the second language to split off from Proto-Indo-European after the Anatolian branch, as has been argued by Ringe et al. (2002), Jasanoff (2003), and Anthony and Ringe (2015).

I will argue that the evidence from nominal morphology shows many shared innovations between Tocharian and the other non-Anatolian branches and that this evidence alone does not justify the hypothesis that Tocharian split off as the second branch of Indo-European.

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