

Back to the root — and away again!
Götz Keydana, Göttingen university

The root as understood in Indo-European linguistics is a concept developed by the ancient Indian grammarians (cf. Pāṇini's *dhāturpāṭha*); it is strikingly absent from the ancient western tradition. With the reception of the Indian grammatical tradition in the late 18th century western scholarship soon adapted this idea which had a formative influence on morphological thinking in Indo-European linguistics. But why did this concept never emerge in the West? Is this simply due to a lack of analytical reasoning (Renou 1953)? What premises lie behind the idea of the root? Are they viable?

In this talk I intend to demonstrate that phenomena or processes usually attributed to the root can actually be explained more adequately with reference to other domains such as the syllable, the phonological word, and the morphological word. Working with data from Vedic and — where possible — also from reconstructed PIE, I show that the root as a linguistic domain is actually dispensable.

In the first part of my talk, I deconstruct the notion of the root as a phonological domain. I show that phonological root constraints do not exist. Restrictions on possible roots are either constraints on prosodic structure (like the syllable or the phonological word, cf. Kobayashi 2004, Keydana 2004, Byrd 2015), or artifacts inferred incorrectly from chance distributions. I further demonstrate that phonological processes or alignment phenomena never target the root.

Turning to morphology, I draw on recent work in (probabilistic) network morphology (e.g. Baayen 2007) and word-and-paradigm morphology (Blevins 2003) to show that item and arrangement or similar concatenative models of morphology are inadequate when dealing with how humans handle relationships between words in their mental lexicon. I then go on to give evidence for word-and-paradigm morphology in Vedic.

Based again on Vedic data, I finally demonstrate that we are typically not able to define a common semantics for roots in the various derivations they are attested with (the same holds true, *mutatis mutandis*, for affixes).

I thus conclude that — though being a valuable descriptive tool — the root is hardly a realistic linguistic concept. Rather, root-based analyses of linguistic data tend to obfuscate important generalizations and may eventually lead to undue premises (mis-)guiding our understanding of the early attested languages and of PIE.

References

- Baayen, R. Harald (2007). Storage and computation in the mental lexicon. In Gonia Jarema and Gary Libben (eds.), *The mental lexicon: Core perspectives*. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Blevins, James P. (2003). Stems and paradigms. *Language* 79: 737–767.
- Byrd, Andrew Miles (2015). *The Indo-European Syllable*. Leiden: Brill.
- Keydana, Götz (2004). Silbenstruktur und Phonotaktik im Indogermanischen. In: Kozińska, Maria; Rosemarie Lühr; Susanne Zeilfelder (eds.): *Indogermanistik – Germanistik – Linguistik. Akten der Arbeitstagung der Indogermanischen Gesellschaft, Jena 18.-20.9.2002*. Hamburg: Kovač. 163-192.
- Kobayashi, Masato (2004). *Historical Phonology of Old Indo-Aryan consonants*. Tokyo: Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa. Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.
- Renou, Louis & Jean Filliozat (1953). *L'Inde classique*. Tome II. Paris: École Française d'extrême-orient.