

2014

Languages & Linguistics Abstracts

Seventh Annual International
Conference on
Languages & Linguistics
7-10 July 2014, Athens, Greece
Edited by Gregory T. Papanikos

THE ATHENS INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATION AND RESEARCH



Literature
7th Annual International
Conference on
Languages & Linguistics
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First Published in Athens, Greece by the Athens Institute for Education and Research.

ISBN: 978-618-5065-57-7

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Some Sociolinguistic Reflections on the Aegean-Anatolian Interference in the 2nd Millennium BC

The present speech aims at investigating how the ancient languages, particularly Greek and Anatolian languages of the 2nd millennium BC, can be analyzed in the light of the new acquisitions carried out by historical socio-linguistics. Since we are dealing with dead languages, we are obviously in a disadvantage in not having living informants, and instead in having only written documents (especially epigraphical texts). However, contact phenomena could represent an interpretative key for a possible application of the methodologies of micro-sociolinguistics, in that they shed light on a broader extra-linguistic scenario (i.e. trade, cultural exchanges, technical know-how etc.).

Particularly, the potential role played by Hittite as intermediary between the Semitic languages (mainly Akkadian, in the reason of its prestige, its official character and its wide diffusion) and Mycenaean Greek will be analyzed.

The interference phenomena (borrowings) seem to occur at a twofold level: on the one hand, we can analyze lexemes directly borrowed from Hittite into Mycenaean (e.g. Myc. ka-ko and di-pa); on the other hand, we can record terms with a Semitic derivation on which Hittite acts as an intermediary (e.g. Myc. ku-pe-ra, ku-wa-no, ke-ra-so, e-re-pa). In this context, it is also important to evaluate the importance of the category of "wandering words" (Wanderwörter): this class of words is spread among numerous languages and cultures, usually in connection with trade, and it reveals a wide range of difficulty in establishing the etymology of the terms, or even their original source language.

Although the geographical contiguity between Semitic and Anatolian languages and that between Anatolian and Mycenaean is already in itself a diatopic indicator, which allows us to evaluate the intermediary role played by Hittite between some Greek terms and their more distant Semitic antecedents, this hypothesis can also be corroborated by the linguistic analysis and by the recourse of such theoretical framework.