

# Two Uhlenbeck Memories

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I. NO DENE-CAUCASIAN TRACES IN THE WORK OF C. C.  
UHLENBECK.  
'PERFECTION IS NOT OF THIS POOR WORLD OF OURS'.  
C. C. UHLENBECK

Being a Bascologist and an Americanist, in addition to his contributions to Indo-European linguistics, C. C. (Christianus Cornelis) Uhlenbeck (1866-1951) might be supposed to have had the best equipment to make an early contribution to what today is called "Dene-Caucasian" (or "Dene-Basque") (also including Almosan-Keresiouan; cf. Schuhmacher & Seto 1993: 7), also taking into account his interest in "lumping" in other areas; cf. his Eskimo-Indo-European hypothesis or the relationships of Basque discussed by him. (I have benefited a lot from the obituaries by Hammerich, Bouda, and Thalbitzer in tracing the life and linguistics of Uhlenbeck, and have also taken his opera from there; Hammerich, Bouda & Thalbitzer 1953).

As pointed out by Bouda (op.cit., 75), "from his treatise 'Baskische Studien', which appeared in 1891, to the end of his life [Uhlenbeck] had followed, loved, and promoted the study of the Basque language". As an Americanist, Uhlenbeck started in 1905 with Eskimo to be followed by Algonquian, especially Blackfoot, due to his stay in Montana among the Piegans in 1910-11. Later, most interested in Algonquian (compare his short contributions in the *International Journal of American Linguistics*, *IJAL*, in the twenties), he also tried to acquire a general view of the North American Indian languages, which even is present as late as in a 1984 work. Despite all his knowledge, in his genealogical research concerning Basque he did not enter the American continent but stayed in Asia (Ural-Altaiic, Chukchee, Paleo-Caucasian). Thus, for instance, in dealing with the Basque words for

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“woman” (1930), Uhlenbeck does not see the matching Basque *a-tso* “old woman/anciana, vieja” - Na-Dene \**ču~\*ču-na*: ... Navaho -*čo* “mother’s mother”.

Also in his review of “Les langues du monde...” (1927), where space would have permitted it, no Dene-Basque “Anklänge” are mentioned. Time had not yet come, it seems... It was only a year after his death (1951) that the works of Karl Bouda, Robert Shafer, and Morris Swadesh appeared representing the first steps into today’s Dene-Caucasian.

## REFERENCES

- Hammerich, P., K. Bouda and W. Thalbitzer (1953) *C. C. Uhlenbeck October 18, 1866 - August 12, 1951*. International Journal of American Linguistics 19:74-77.  
 Schuhmacher, W. W. and F. Seto (1953) *Austronesian and Dene-Basque (Dene-Caucasian)*. FLV 62:7-42.

## II. THE DENE-CAUCASIAN RECONSTRUCTION FOR “MOON”

Following his countryman van Eys, C. C. Uhlenbeck (1903: 57) explains the Basque word for “moon”, *ilargi*, etc. as composed of (*b*)*il* and *argi* - an explanation which he later (in his “Corrections”, Uhlenbeck 1923:7) questions again when turning to the old etymology “light of the dead”. Bengtson (1991: 99) lists “Basque: *hil~hila* ‘moon, month’, *hil-(argi)* ‘moon, moonlight’...”, and compares it to Burushaski *hΛl-* “moon” and Sino-Tibetan forms (and even gives other, extra-Dene-Caucasian matchings by others).

Not mentioned by him is Proto-Polynesian (PPN) \**maa-sina* “moon”, where PPN \**sina* “grey, white (hair) <Proto-Austronesian \**t'inay* “light” which Benedict (1990:219) renders as \**t'itay* (<Proto-Austro-Kadai \**[ts,tʃ]ilaR* “light, shine, white, grey [hair]”). The Proto-Tai reflex is \**hlian*<sup>B</sup> “brilliant, dazzling” (Japanese has *sira* “white, grey”).

Whereas Bengtson (op. cit.) has \*\**h<sub>1</sub>ila-* as Dene-Caucasian reconstruction for “moon”, incorporating the Benedict material (cf. also Schuhmacher & Seto 1993 on Austronesian and Dene-Caucasian) \*\**[ts,tʃ]ila-* seems to be more convincing.

## REFERENCES

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 Bengtson, J. (1991) *Sino- Caucasian Etymologies*. In: V. Shevoroshkin (ed.) *Dene-Sino-Caucasian Languages*, 81-129. Bochum: Brockmeyer.  
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## LABURPENA I

Dene-Kaukasiari buruzko lehen ekarpen bat egiteko erarik onenenan bazegoen ere C. C. Uhlenbeck-ek ez zuen benetako aipamen bakar bat ere egin Euskal-Na-Dene (Basque-Na-Dene) loturari buruz.

## RESUMEN I

Aunque estuviera en la mejor disposición para realizar una primera contribución al Dene-Caucasiano (Dene-Basque) C. C. Uhlenbeck nunca sugirió realmente una relación Basque-Na-Dene.

## RÉSUMÉ I

Bien qu'il se trouve dans la meilleure disposition pour réaliser une première contribution au "Dene-Caucasian" (Dene Basque) C. C. Uhlenbeck n'a jamais vraiment suggéré une relation "Basque-Na-Dene".

## SUMMARY

Though being best equipped to make an early contribution to Dene-Caucasian (Dene-Basque), C. C. Uhlenbeck never made any real suggestion for a Basque-Na-Dene relationship.

## LABURPENA II

Bengtson-en Dene-Kaukasiar berreraiketa "ilargi" (moon) hitzari dagokionez zuzenduta dago.

## RESUMEN II

La reconstrucción Dene-Caucasiana con respecto a "luna" (moon) está corregida.

RÉSUMÉ II

La reconstruction “Dene-Caucasian” par rapport au mot “Lune” (moon) est corrigée.

SUMMARY

Bengtson’s Dene-Caucasian reconstruction for “moon” is corrected.