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Etymology and Reconstruction in the Languages of Australia and the Pacific

Research in the history in the languages of Australia and the Pacific has been on the rise in recent years also as a result of increasingly reliable databases. In particular, for Australian languages it has become clear that the tools and methods of historical linguistics, in particular the comparative method, are far from useless, and that in fact great advances have been made in reconstructing and subgrouping Australian languages earlier (see e.g. Bowern and Koch 2004 and Evans 2003). The history of Austronesian and Oceanic languages has also made giant steps forward in etymological research (Ross, Pawley and Osmond 1998-). The comparative study of the Papuan languages has also begun in earnest in recent years (Pawley 2005a, 2005b). The result of this research has also cast more light on the cultural and linguistic prehistory of the languages of Australia of the Pacific (see e.g. Mailhammer forthc.a). At the same time, the paucity of data and the gigantic time depth (in the case of Australian languages) has continued to pose challenges for research.

This conference session will discuss papers addressing issues in etymology and reconstruction in the languages of Australia and the Pacific. Likely questions to be investigated are the following:

- classical etymological research, including toponyms in what way etymology can elucidate cultural history
- etymology/reconstruction and its particular significance to issues of subgrouping and *Urheimat*
- what the reconstruction of key elements can reveal about proto-phonology, morphology, or -semantics

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