

Cracking the code on the origins of a new European language

June 18 2012, By Lyn Danninger



About 90,000 people in a remote area of North West Pakistan speak Burushaski.

(Phys.org) -- There is strong evidence to support the discovery of a new European language.

Macquarie University historical linguistics researcher, Associate Professor Ilija Casule, discovered that the language, known as Burushaski, which is spoken by about 90,000 people who reside in a remote area of North West Pakistan, is Indo-European in origin, not Indo-Iranian.

Professor Casule's discovery, which has now been verified by a number of the world's top linguists, has excited linguistics experts around the world. An entire issue of the eminent international linguistics journal

The Journal of Indo-European Studies is devoted to a discussion of his findings later this month.

More than 50 eminent linguists have tried over many years to determine the genetic relationship of Burushaski. But it was Casule's painstaking research, based on a comprehensive grammatical, phonological, lexical and semantic analysis, which established that the Burushaski language is in fact an Indo-European language most likely descended from one of the ancient Balkan languages. Professor Casule believes that language is most probably ancient Phrygian.

The Phrygians migrated from Macedonia to Anatolia (today part of Turkey) and were famous for their legendary kings who figure prominently in Greek mythology such as King Midas who turned whatever he touched into gold. They later migrated further east, reaching India. Indeed, according to ancient legends of the Burushaski people, they are descendants of Alexander the Great.

Tracing the historical path of a language is no easy task. Professor Casule said he became interested in the origins of Burushaski more than 20 years ago.

“People knew of its existence but its Indo-European affiliation was overlooked and it was not analysed correctly. It is considered a language isolate – not related to any other language in the world in much the same way that the Basque language is classified as a language isolate,” he said.

The remoteness of the area that was independent until the early 1970s when it became part of [Pakistan](#), ensured Burushaski retained certain grammatical and lexical features that led Professor Casule to conclude it is a North-Western Indo-European language, specifically of the Paleobalkan language group and that it corresponds most closely with Phrygian.

Dr. Casule's work is groundbreaking, not only because it has implications for all the Indo-European language groups, but also provides a new model for figuring out the origins of isolate languages – where they reside in the linguistic family tree and how they developed and blended with other languages to form a new [language](#).

Provided by Macquarie University

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