



A subgrouping of the Austronesian languages (after Blust 1978, 1983/84, etc., summarized in Ruhlen 1987)

- F: Formosan (one or more primary subgroups in Taiwan);
- MP: Malayo-Polynesian (all non-Formosan AN languages);
- WMP: Western Malayo-Polynesian (the MP languages of western Indonesia and the Philippines, including Chamorro, Palauan, Chamic, and Malagasy);
- CEMP: Central-Eastern Malayo-Polynesian (all CMP and EMP languages);
- CMP: Central Malayo-Polynesian (the MP languages of the Lesser Sunda Islands beginning with Bimanes of eastern Sumbawa, and of the southern and central Moluccas, including the Sula Archipelago);
- EMP: Eastern Malayo-Polynesian (the languages of the SHWNG and OC groups);
- SHWNG: South Halmahera-West New Guinea (the MP languages of Halmahera, Cenderawasih [formerly Geelvink] Bay as far as the Mamberamo River, and of the Raja Ampat Islands);
- OC: Oceanic (the MP languages of Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, except as stated elsewhere).

western half of the island of Flores (Blust 1981: 304).

If for the moment we assume that the distribution of the thunder complex among Austronesian-speaking peoples is a product of common inheritance and divergent descent, rather than a product of borrowing after the major linguistic splits within the Austronesian family had already taken place, it follows that the thunder complex must have been part of the cultural repertoire of the speakers of Proto-Malayo-Polynesian (since otherwise we would have no plausible way to account for its presence in modern groups speaking both WMP and CMP languages). If the thunder complex was known to speakers of Proto-Malayo-Polynesian it could have been transmitted lineally (i.e., without borrowing) to any descendant of this prehistoric community, and hence could appear among modern speakers of WMP, CMP, SHWNG, or OC

languages. This is not to say, of course, that the hypothesis predicts the presence of the thunder complex among language groups that belong to each of these major linguistic divisions. Like any other feature of language or culture, the thunder complex could very well have been lost, e.g., by speakers of Proto-Eastern Malayo-Polynesian. What the hypothesis which is developed in Blust 1981 does predict explicitly is this: if new instances of the thunder complex are discovered outside their initially documented geographical range, they will be found among speakers of Austronesian (or, more particularly, Malayo-Polynesian) languages.

Finally, with reference to the above figure, it should be made clear that the explanation of the psychological or cultural dynamics of a coherent unit of culture such as the thunder complex is distinct from the explanation of its distribution across cultures. For convenience I will call the former type of explanation a "functional explanation" and the latter a "distributional explanation." Functional explanations are concerned with the *meaning* of cultural practices for those who practice them; distributional explanations are concerned with the evaluation of chance, borrowing, and common inheritance as causal factors in producing a trait distribution. The present discussion is concerned almost exclusively with distributional explanations, all of which are evaluated in terms of relative probability.

Forth's contribution, based on his recent fieldwork among the Nagé of central Flores, describes a variant of the thunder complex which differs in several important features from the "classical" version of the thunder complex reported by Needham 1967. His material is drawn from three short narratives (listed below) which can be decomposed into discrete elements as follows:

- 1)
 - a) man speaks to crayfish,
 - b) crayfish replies,
 - c) man passes out,
 - d) there is strong wind and heavy rain,
 - e) man becomes witch,
- 2)
 - a) man is introduced to cannibalism by his slaves who are witches,
 - b) man desires to become a witch himself and eat human flesh,
 - c) man's slaves instruct him how to do so,
 - d) following instructions, man greets large billy goat,
 - e) goat replies,
 - f) there is strong wind and rain,
 - g) man becomes a witch,