

Akana

A long-lived collaborative conworld

Jan Strasser & Tam Blaxter

The Reconstruction Game

Step 1:

Create a protolanguage, which must be kept secret.

Step 2:

Derive five daughters from each protolanguage.

Step 3:

Have a second team reconstruct the protolanguage from the description of the daughters only.

The Reconstruction Game

Ndak Ta

Mbi tsip Tsinakan, ngu lu diaka peras, ngu lu diaka âk lu lats um Kasadgad, ngu lu merkat âk Tol on Imbi: Isla raits i ob lu ospâk âk lu mebwe âki mpen, isla im as ewek lats sai, selkon.

Proto-Isles

Síkim húyi huyi hápayi múmuytiq, súyi súynim tátaysiq, sawnunh níni? Tzay, namdzaw muypama yáyawtziq, yíyi sítziwsnim qas títiwsin.

Ndak Ta and the Edastean languages

Ndak Ta

Mbi tsip Tsinakan, ngu lu diaka peras, ngu lu diaka âk lu lats um Kasadgad, ngu lu merkat âk Tol on Imbi: Isla raits i ob lu ospàk âk lu mebwe âki mpen, isla im as ewek lats sai, selkon.

Created to be the proto-language
for the original ZBB reconstruction relay

Created a-priori (as a language isolate)

Ndak Ta and the Edastean languages

Phonology (interesting features)

- Distinguishes oral and nasal vowels
- Allows (phonetically) syllabic nasal consonants at word edges
- Distinguishes /k^w b^w ŋ^w/ from /k b ŋ/
- Has /ts/ but no /tʃ/

Ndak Ta and the Edastean languages

Morphology

- Verbs take suffixes to indicate tense, aspect and voice, and prefixes to indicate mood
- Nouns are invariant, but pronouns and determiners inflect for case and number
- Adjectives agree with their head for number

Ndak Ta and the Edastean languages

Syntax

- Mostly head-initial
- Basic word order is VSO, with SOV and OVS also occurring in certain constructions
- Determiners precede nouns; adjectives, genitives, relative clauses and PPs follow them

Ndak Ta and its immediate daughters

	'five'	'send'	'eight'	'tree bark'
Ndak Ta	/dau/	/pilai/	/sudn/ [sudŋ]	/mbëro/ [m̩bëro]
Adāta	/doː/	/pileː/	/huda/	/abaro/
Ndok Aisô	/dɔj/	/pilɔj/	/sud/	/mbaʔew/ [m̩baʔew]
Naidda	/du/	/peli/	/son/	/mvaro/
Fáralo	/do/	/pila/	/hudɛ/	/ɛbæru/
Qedik	?	?	?	?

The Reconstruction Game

Basic conworlding to create a historical background:

Team A created the **Aiwa Valley**, including several maps, sketches for the cultures of their languages' speakers, and brief descriptions of other peoples in the region

Team B created the **Eastern Isles** setting with short culture descriptions and a fairly detailed religion/philosophy

The Reconstruction Game

Reconstruction of the protolanguages did not get very far:

Only one participant ever published any results
(several years later)

<http://www.zompist.com/proto-ran.html>





The Derivation Relay

Goal:

Exploring linguistic change over great time depths

Method:

Several long chains of daughterlanguages,
all of them starting from the same source

The Derivation Relay

Quick-and-dirty approach:

Every participant had just two weeks to...

- come up with sound changes
- provide a basic description of morphology and syntax
- translate a sample text

Adāta and the Dāiadak languages

Adāta:

Sinakan, dizaka xezor, dizaka ax las ax Kāxad,

mēkat ax Zama on ax Thālo, ro abise sip:

Īlanu i ro ape ob ōpākātia ax meze ai,

eze dizakalas rūlas ro īr hēkon īla in.

Created during the Reconstruction Relay, thus quite sketchy –

but connected to an existing setting

Adāta and the Dāiadak languages

Adāta:

- Descended from southwestern dialects of Ndak Ta, thus a close sister of Ndok Aisô and a slightly more distant sister of the Eastern Edastean languages: Fáralo, Naidda, Buruya Nzaysa and Komejech
- Ancestor of the Dāiadak languages and thus of the largest described language family of Akana
- Principal dialect of Adāta is that of the city of Athalē – the birthplace of the prophet Zārakātias

Adāta and the Dāiadaḱ languages

Phonology

- Adata vocalised the distinctive syllabic sonorants of its ancestor (the name is cognate with *Ndak Ta*) and simplified many consonant clusters
- It also monophthongised diphthongs and levelled the distinction between oral and nasal vowels (\tilde{V} in open syllables coalesced into VN sequences)
- The result is a simpler phonology, with a syllable shape of (C)V(C)

Adāta and the Dāiadak languages

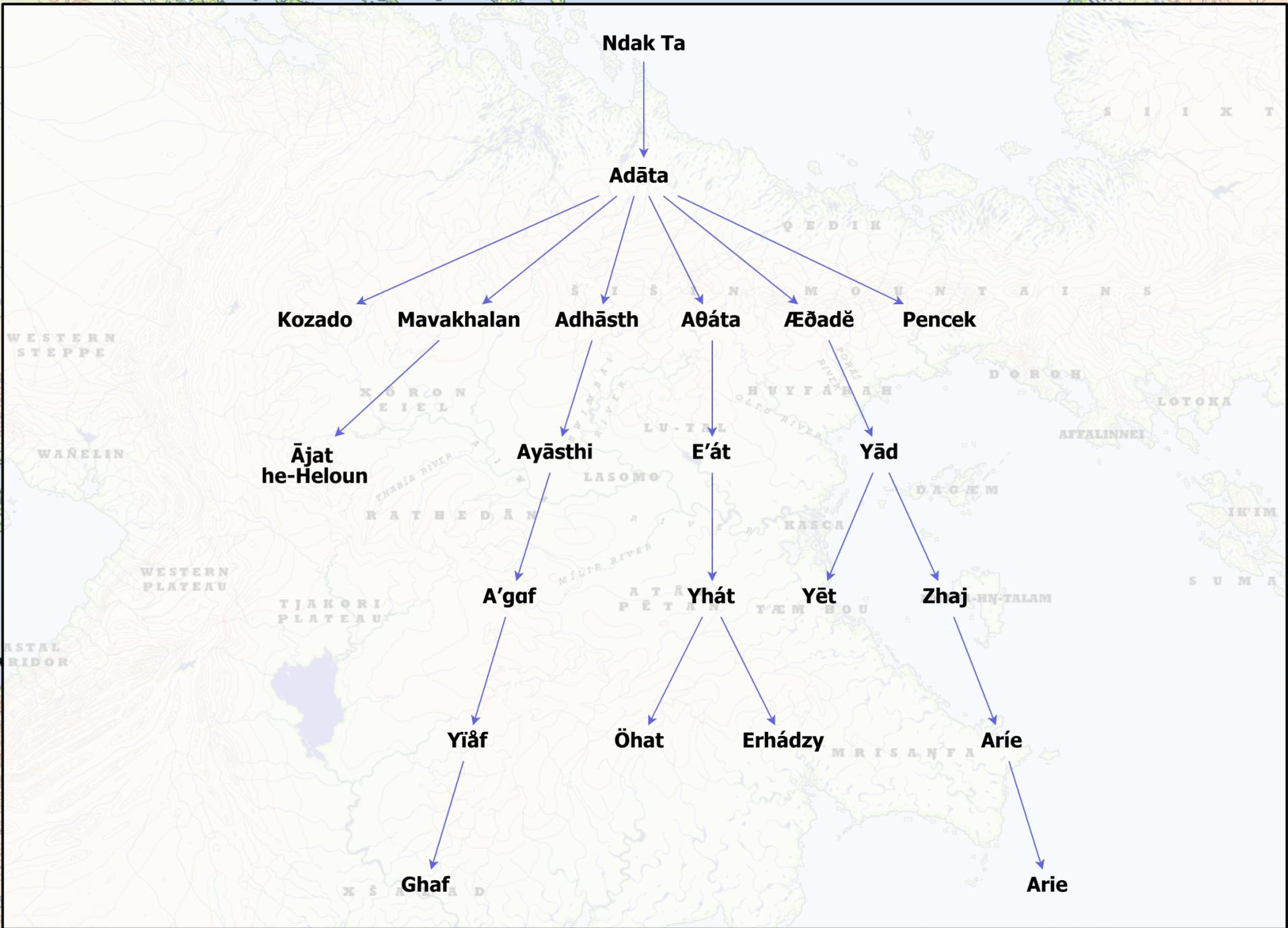
Morphology

- Adāta morphology remains relatively regular, although it exhibits slightly more irregularity and synthesis than its ancestor
- On verbs it preserves the mood prefixes and aspect/number suffixes, although no longer distinguishes tense
- Nouns have relatively little inflection, distinguishing only an (optional) plural form (although pronouns also distinguish case)

Adāta and the Dāiada languages

Syntax

- Adāta is SVO in affirmative main clauses (note that Ndak Ta was VSO) and VSO in negatives, with WH-fronting in questions
- Determiners precede nouns while adjectival phrases, possessives and relative clauses follow them
- Adāta has prepositions



Dāiadak languages: Lasomo branch

	‘moon’	‘hand’	‘one’	‘king’
Adāta	/t ^h a:lo/	/ton/	/ke/	/dizaka/
Æðadě	/ta:lo/ [t ^h a:lo]	/dun/	/gi/	/ðjesk/ [ðjesk ^h]
Yād	/to:l/ [t ^h o:l]	*/dun/	/dʒi:/	/ðjesk/
Yēt	/ta:ḷ/	/dɔ:ɣn/	/dʒɛʒ/	/θjisx/
Zhaj	/t ^h or/		/zi/	/zijsuk/
Arie	/t ^{hw} a:ɹ/ [t ^h ɔ:ɹ]		/aɹi:/	/aɹi:ɹ ^w ʉ?a/ [aɹi:ɹʉ?a]
Arie	/t ^w ɑ/ [t ^h ɔ]		/aɹi/	/aɹiɹʉ/

Dāiada languages: Athalē branch

	‘moon’	‘Kasadgad’	‘king’
Adāta	/t ^h a:lo/	/ka:xad/	/dizaka/
Aθáta	/θalo/	/ka:θ(las)/ [ka:ð(las)]	/θiska/
E’át	/sal/	/ke:(las)/	/ʃisk/
Yhát	/sal/	/qa(les)/	/tsisk/
Erhádzy	/zal/	/ka(les)/	/tɕiɕ/

Dāiadak languages: Other branches

	‘moon’	‘Kasadgad’	‘king’
Adāta	/t ^h a:lo/	/ka:xad/	/dizaka/
Kozado	/t ^h al/	/kahodo/	?
Mavakhalan	/(a)θɔlɔ/	/kɔxaǰ/	/z̥zaka/ [ˈz̥zaka]
Adhāsth	/θa:l/	/ka:ɦat/	/ðezax/
Pencek	/t ^h ara/ [t ^h a:ra]	/kaʃtɕ-/ [ka:ʃtɕ]	/tirk/ [ti:rk]

Moving on...

As the relay went on,
people tended to take much longer for their turns...

...and others started broadening the language family for fun,
aiming for more variety and realism (e.g. substrate loanwords)
and providing more cultural and historical detail

**>> Start of a full-scale
collaborative conworld project**

More Detail

Historical detail added mostly in group discussions at the ZBB;
also on IRC and (starting in 2009) at a dedicated forum

Wiki articles about languages, cultures and regions
(since 2007; dedicated AkanaWiki since 2008)

Maps

created to visualize specific historical constellations
original continent map was seen as canonical, but unrealistic
>> lots of discussion; there is still no definitive world map!

Additional languages

New languages in the Edastean family
(mostly in branches not descended from Adāta)

Languages from other families
(Peninsular, Western, Núalís-Takuña, Xōronic...)

Several other projects were proposed, but not realized

Additional language families

Proto-Peninsular:

Xarru pihi niç,
thuriarxa larut thu sunax niç pihi hn sumaç thuthuriskaxku mta
titiskri mn fiksa ham mn thuritçlasku.

Additional language families

Proto-Núalís-Takuña:

Kima'i'ú nuwakaíwkañu ki,
tumú suw'i'ú tumú kima'i'áa a ka'ajta,
tumú kima'i'áa kima'i'úw kima'ira'úw paranaká a sarautuwpikaj,
tumú kima'i'ú pij'ú,
ta'mú suw'i'ú tumú kima'i'áa a ka'ajta.

Additional language families

Proto-Xōronic:

Ponqemahlu:ttə um nətəqəq ma:həhtoq əto,
ənkahta la: nətəqqukəh.

Linguistic reconstruction

Based on early side notes about surrounding peoples,
an attempt to “reconstruct” **Proto-Eigə-Isthmus** was started

Source:

Loanwords in existing Edastean languages
(but these words had not been intended to derive from PEI)

This worked surprisingly well,
although there is still no real grammar of PEI

Proto-Eigə-Isthmus

Faraghin

<i>baš</i>	‘even, flat’
<i>daradan</i>	‘dance’
<i>ghantač</i>	‘dragon’
<i>maghačan</i>	‘loot’
<i>sempan</i>	‘twist, turn’
<i>čark</i>	‘king’
<i>mašt</i>	‘house, palace’
<i>rantan</i>	‘test, prove’

Miw

<i>pasta</i>	‘cloth’
<i>varjā</i>	‘dance’
<i>kwintas</i>	‘bird’
<i>mēg</i>	‘be rowdy’
<i>timpīza</i>	‘necklace’
<i>zintī</i>	‘taboo’
<i>kim</i>	‘recipe’

Ngauro

<i>*djak</i>	‘king’
<i>*mos</i>	‘city’
<i>*zanta</i>	‘legal’
<i>*kaime</i>	‘study’

Proto-Eigə-Isthmus

<i>*bas-</i>	‘smooth’
<i>*đarjad-</i>	‘dance’
<i>*gwent-</i>	‘fly’
<i>*meg-</i>	‘behave badly’
<i>*tsimp-</i>	‘twist’
<i>*trelk</i>	‘king, ruler’
<i>*mos</i>	‘dwelling’
<i>*zant-</i>	‘decide, judge’
<i>*kajm-</i>	‘know’

Revision of existing material

Some participants revised their own languages
(Naidda, Ayāsthi)

Goals:

More realism, better-quality conlanging

Adaptation to the historical context

(e.g. innovations shared between neighbouring languages)

Revision of existing material

Problem:

Some important languages were lacking a full grammar,
and their creators were not active anymore

Ndok Aisô:

Êtsdehad, ru dixêheu mêgeu, od ru mekeuta Aitol od Ngadagoi,
od ru dixêheuxa Axôkseuhod, wisoideu ngugoi:

Isleu i noi keutsa woi mege mpêd, egek lots tablik edeusas êb ê.

Revision of Ndok Aisô

Re-engineering of sound changes to capture the original flair
while aiming for a more realistic diachronic development

Collaborative grammar-writing, trying to fill a typological gap
between the two nearest Edastean languages

>> quite successful;
inspired ongoing revision of some Isles languages
(Zele, Thokyunèhòta...)

The Second Derivation Relay

Problem:

Many people expressed interest in joining the project,
but rarely did so because they felt they needed
to learn a lot about existing material first

What should we do in order to attract new participants
(and to make them stay with us)

?

The Second Derivation Relay

Project:

A new Derivation Relay, organized somewhat differently:

- Designed to avoid very deep, thin language families for a higher degree of realism
- Protolanguage more detailed than Adāta or Ndak Ta
- Two different protolanguages
(for fleshing out regions that need more attention):

Proto-Western and Proto-Peninsular

The Western languages

Proto-Western:

Γ^weyeʔu tabe lāšⁱʔi mēyuk čeldawata.

ʔašēʔi tak^waduʔu mēyuʔu t^hula besawak^hiw,

k^welaʔi šiduʔu mēyuy ɣlaʔtawata,

laʔi naʔtuduʔu mēyuy wadžedzakata.

Yawaʔu k^hayaʔu nat mēcaduʔu mēyuy k^wek^wuta.

The Western languages

Proto Western - Phonology

- A very un-European phonology
- Distinguishes labialisation, two series of affricates, aspiration on plosives, a lateral fricative and a glottal stop
- A four vowel system with nasalization contrast

The Western languages

Proto Western – Morphology

- Nominals distinguish case (Erg/Abs/Obl), number and gender (edible/inedible)
- Inalienably possessed nominals are marked for the person and number of the possessor
- Adjectives are prefixed to nouns
- There is also a large system of classifiers
- The verb exhibits concord for both core participants and is optionally marked for evidentiality

The Western languages

Proto Western – Syntax

- Fairly strongly head final – OV, postpositions, nominal modifiers precede the noun, etc.
- Particles and conjunctions follow the head of the first phrase in a clause

The Western languages



First generation Western languages

	‘cook’	‘fourth’	‘see’	‘wool’	‘green’
PW	/k ^w ek ^w u-/	/mētsadu-/	/tʃelda-/	/t ^h ula-/	/yɫuna-/
PCW	/gōgū-/	/metsōgū/	/dzēldē/	/t ^h ūlē-/	/yɫuŋē-/
Iɲomocé	/kœgu/	/mœŋ ^h ɛz/	/ceudo/	/tuɪl/	/luɲno/
Çetázó	/k ^w eg ^w u/	/modzađu/	/çelda/	/θula/	/yɫuna/
Gezoro	*/kek/	*/mǔtsad/	*/sɛrd/	*/t ^h ur/	*/glun/
Tmašare?	/k ^w ek ^w o/	/mētsaro/	/tʃelta/	/tola/	/lō-/
Empotleʔá	/kɣwɯ/	/mɛnāɣ/	-	/t ^h ɣlā/	/wɣna-/

Coastal Western languages

	‘cloud’	‘road, path’	‘relative’	‘big’
Proto-Coastal-Western	/p ^h e _l ē/	/p _r ɔ _g u/	/be _d zɛnōʔxūwōējē/	/ɣɛdzē-/
Isho‘u ‘Ohu	/p _e da/	/ba _d o _g u/	/be _z anōhugogāda/	/ha _z ē-/
Doayâu	/ɸala/	/p _u tau/	/ba _r ināfoaja/	/gi _r ā-/
Ìletlégbàku	/p _e je/	/pa _t a _g b _u /	/xu _w ageje/	-

Summary

What went right?

WESTERN
STEPPE

XÖRON
EIEL

WAÑELIN

WESTERN
PLATEAU

TJAKORI
PLATEAU

COASTAL
CORRIDOR

XŠALAD

LASOMO

ATÄX
PÉTAN

HUYFÁRAH

TÆM HOU

MRISANFA

QEDIK

Š I Š I N M O U N T A I N S

LU-TAL

DOROH

FMANA-HN-TALAM

LOTOKA

APPALINNEI

S U M A

S I I X T A G

IKIM

R U S

W

Relays and Reconstruction games

The reconstruction game and the first relay *weren't* billed as a collaborative conworlding project – so those people who got involved at the beginning were mainly interested in creating their own language material.

They allowed many people to get involved at once, without having to commit for long-term involvement.

They allowed people to work on their own projects alone, in their own way.

Relays and Reconstruction games

They only *required* sketchlangs,
so a lot of material was produced very quickly.

But they did require languages presented
in a coherent academic linguistic style,
and they made sure that not too much joke content was added.

They provided some cultural background to work from.

Many entry points

There have been multiple formal entry points:
the reconstruction game and the two relays

The way material was written for these games
made passing reference to other material
– languages (Isles grammars), cultures, history –
which then became entry points for others to work on

It also enabled people to move around within the project easily

The Flagship

The Edastean family

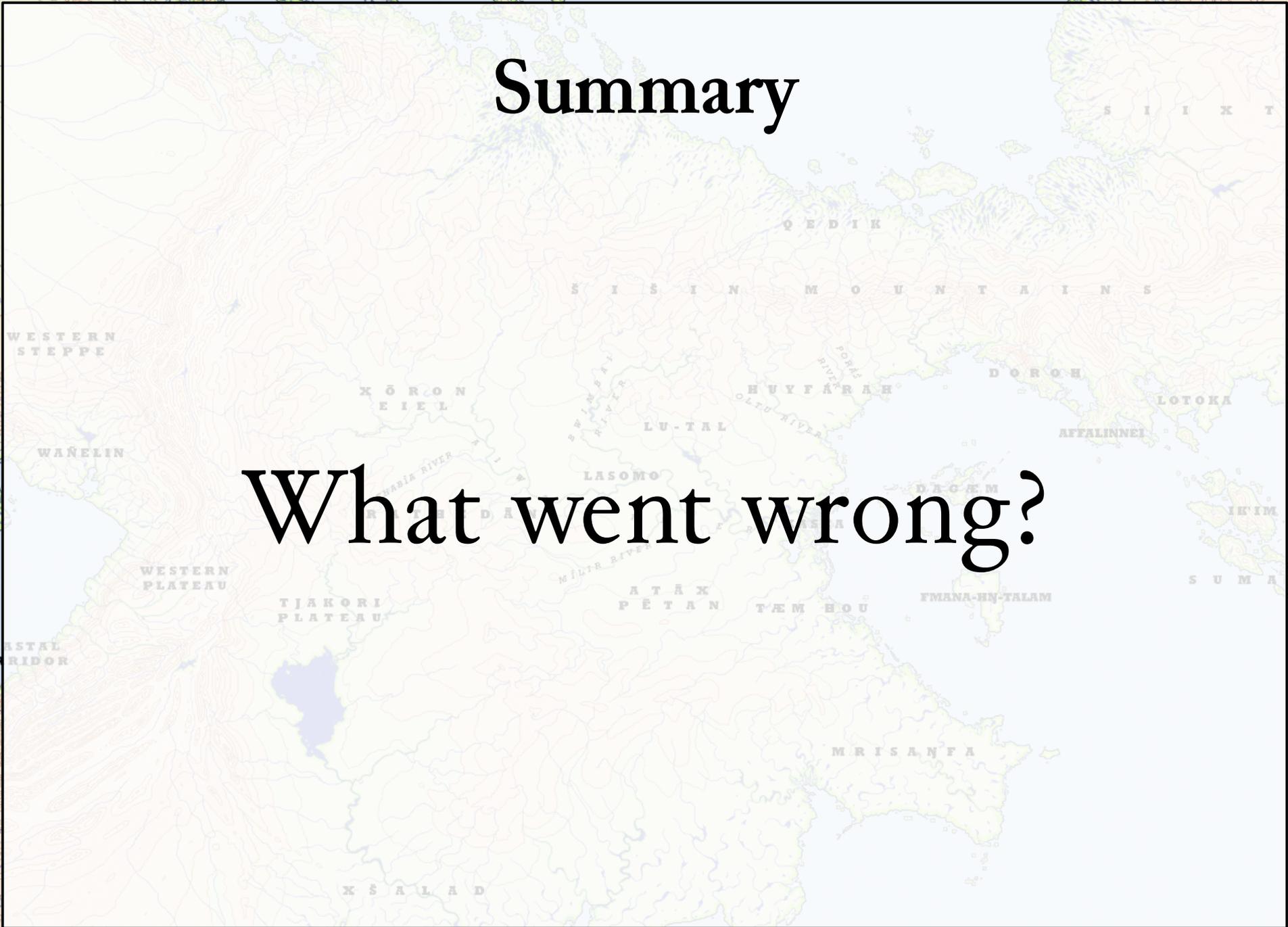
– and particularly Adāta and the Dāiadak family –
were shared ground for the majority of contributors

Although flawed in other ways, this is the biggest conlang family
we know of – and this has lent the project a certain prestige

>> Everybody feels fond of Adāta and the Edastean family;
they have become the project's flagship
and have helped maintain enthusiasm

Summary

What went wrong?



Holes

The relays as a way of generating lots of material
have also caused problems:

Many languages were either underdocumented to begin with
or have been lost due to an early lack of a collective storage space

Now we're interested in realism,
but then we were interested in making weird/different languages
and in making reconstruction hard

some languages are not realistic, but other things depend on them

Putting people off

The second relay was specifically intended to get new participants – but it wasn't actually very successful

A combination of increasingly long and late turns, the complexity and un-IE-ness of the protolangs, and lack of enthusiasm made it result in a much shallower, smaller family (although broader and more realistic)

Democracy and Politeness

During the last year in particular
there has been a slowdown in the Akana project

This is mostly due to people being unwilling
to move forward on issues

until others who have previously been involved have had their say,
or until all who have expressed an opinion agree

Summary

Lessons to be learnt!



Lessons to be learnt!

Don't vote, don't be polite – just get on with it

Work bottom-up (don't work on a map first!)

Think about the style/quality/approach you want,
and be clear about that from the start (or engineer the situation...)

Start with a disguised knowledge test

A topographic map of Europe and its surrounding regions, including parts of North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. The map shows contour lines, major rivers, and geographical features. The text is overlaid on the map.

Thank you!

Links

Akana Wiki: <http://tzirtzi.ipage.com/akana>

Akana Forum: <http://akana.dreamersdisease.de>

ZBB thread: <http://zbb.spinnwebe.com/viewtopic.php?t=19130>

IRC channel: <irc://irc.sorcery.net/akana>