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## THE UNITY OF SPEECH AMONG THE NORTHERN AND THE SOUTHERN DÉNÉ

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The merest tyro in linguistic differentiations can tell at a glance a Polynesian dialect from any representative of the Slavonic or Germanic group of languages. The remarkable preponderance of vowel over consonant sounds in the former is as great as the reverse is in the latter. These are, however, nothing but material or outward differences that do not affect the soul of a language. What the philologist is concerned with above all is its morphology, its process of word building, the rules that govern the relations of its component parts, and the particular alterations that may spring up as it splits into dialects.

Taking as an instance the Déné languages of North America, a close study of their characteristics will reveal the fact that they are at the same time monosyllabic and polysynthetic, agglutinative and inflective, much as these properties seem to be mutually self-excluding. I have more or less adverted on these points in previous writings.<sup>1</sup> My purpose in the present paper is not to enlarge thereon. I prefer to call the reader's attention to a particularity which, considering the vast extent of the area occupied by the Déné family and the great isolation of several of its branches, I consider nothing short of wonderful: I mean the practical identity, the morphological and grammatical unity of all its dialects.

From the arid wastes of Arizona and even the sunny plains of Mexico to the frozen deserts that confine the haunts of the Eskimo, the same roots, sometimes with unimportant variations, quite often without an iota of difference, are used by members of tribes separated by a distance of more than two thousand miles, where aborigines alien in blood and language have ranged for unknown centuries. The same delicate and highly significant sounds occur in the dialects

<sup>1</sup> See especially *The Déné Languages*, *Transactions of the Canadian Institute* vol. 1, Toronto, 1889.

