

can hardly avoid the inference that in the remoter past the general movement of Algonkin tribes was from west to east.¹

A particularly neat instance of the oft-times conclusive nature of linguistic evidence for the determination of the direction of a movement of population is that of the distribution of the Athabaskan languages. As is well known, these languages are spoken in three geographically isolated areas, a very large northern area (interior of Alaska to near Hudson bay), a Pacific area (southwestern Oregon and northwestern California), and a southern area (Arizona, New Mexico, and western Texas). As long as it is assumed, as is generally done on purely geographical grounds, that these three dialectic groups represent the equivalent major divisions of Athabaskan, there is no pressing reason of a linguistic nature for considering one rather than another as the historical centre of distribution. As a matter of fact, however, while the southern and Pacific dialectic groups are each of them clearly homogeneous and contrast with other groups of Athabaskan dialects,² I do not see that any evidence has been given to indicate that the northern dialects form a single group equivalent to these. Though these dialects have not yet been satisfactorily classified, it seems at least probable to me that they may ultimately be grouped into two or more major divisions, each equivalent in differential value to the southern group. Thus, I do not see that the divergence between, say, Carrier and Loucheux is less profound than that which obtains between, say, Chipewyan and Navaho. This being so, it would seem that the historical centre of gravity lies rather in the north than in either of the other two regions and that the occupation of these latter was due to a southward movement of Athabaskan-speaking tribes. It is important to observe that the argument is not in any way dependent on the fact that the northern tribes cover a much vaster territory than those of the other two groups or

¹ This in no way contradicts the fact that at a much later period there was clearly a westward drift of certain Algonkin tribes (Western Cree, Plains Ojibwa, Arapaho, Cheyenne). I am not inclined to believe that the western movement of the Cree is part of the same general movement of population that gave the Blackfoot their present home.

² Thus, Pacific Athabaskan as unit is characterized by *s* and *ç* as reflexes of both original *s* and *š* and *ç* and *j* respectively; in morphology we may note the frequent use of *-c* in "indefinite" tense forms of many verbs. Southern Athabaskan as unit is characterized by the development of original palatalized *k*-sounds to *ts*-sounds.