

Today's topic:

- **Determining relatedness**

Determining relatedness

- Using the comparative method to reconstruct a proto-language is only valid if the descendant languages are related
 - In many cases, this is not a problem — discuss?

Determining relatedness

- Some well-known proposed language relationships that are controversial (FYI only)
 - Japanese–Korean
 - Altaic (Turkic–Mongolic–Tungusic ...+ Japanese–Korean)
 - Na-Dene–Yeniseian

Determining relatedness

- Criteria for establishing language relationships:
“The best similarities to use are ... *systematic* meaningful correspondences in lexical items, morphology, and grammar” (*IHL*, p 109)
 - **Regular** sound correspondences in lexical items
 - Correspondences “should not be confined to a single area of the language”
 - Shared **suppletive items** are less likely to arise by chance

Determining relatedness

Criteria *not* to rely on for establishing the existence of a relationship:

- Non-linguistic (ethnic, cultural) factors
- **Typological characteristics**, especially frequently occurring ones
 - Can languages change their typological characteristics over time?
 - Can languages that are known to be related have different typological characteristics?

Determining relatedness

- Here is a proposed list of arguments in favor of a Uralic-Altaic relationship (Fujioka 1908, via Shibatani 1990, *The Languages of Japan*)
 - Uralic: Baltic, Finnic, Hungarian
 - Altaic: See above (already controversial)
- How good are these arguments?

Determining relatedness

- (1) Fujioka's fourteen characteristic features of Ural–Altaic languages
 - a. No consonant sequences occur in word-initial position.
 - b. There are no native words that have the sound *r* in word-initial position.
 - c. There is vowel harmony.
 - d. There are no articles.
 - e. There is no grammatical gender distinction.
 - f. Verbal inflections are expressed by suffixing elements.
 - g. There are many kinds of verbal endings.
 - h. Pronominal declensions are expressed by attaching particles.
 - j. Postpositions, instead of prepositions, are used.
 - k. In the expression of possession, the existential “be” expression, instead of the possessive “have”, is used.
 - l. In the comparative expression, the ablative “from”, instead of “than” is used.
 - m. In the interrogative expression, a question particle is attached in sentence-final position.
 - n. Conjunctions are not used widely.
 - o. Modifiers precede the modified heads, and the object is placed before the verb.

Determining relatedness

- “We can never prove that two languages are not related.” (IHL, p 110)
 - Discuss?