

Language relationships and comparative reconstruction

I. Genetic affiliation of Japanese? What languages might it be related to?

- (1) (Reasonably) plausible proposals, as summarized in Shibatani (1990: Ch 5)
 - (a) Map from S 1990: 95
 - (b) North Asian connections:
 - Japanese and “Ryukyuan” as sister languages — YES
 - Relationship between Japanese/Ryukyuan and Korean?
 - Relationship between J/R/K and the “(Ural)-Altaic” group?
 - (c) South Asian connections:
 - Japanese related to Malayo-Polynesian or Austroasiatic?
 - Japanese related to Tibeto-Burman?
 - (d) Japanese as a mixed language/creole
 - Austronesian substratum with Altaic superstratum
 - Austronesian-Altaic hybrid or mixed language
- (2) Less plausible theories that are not widely accepted
 - (a) Japanese and Indo-European
 - (b) “Japanese and Tamil” — what about *Proto-Dravidian* (ancestor of Tamil)?
 - (c) Random other claims: Basque, Sumerian, ...

II. Evidence for a connection with Altaic or Ural-Altaic groups?

- (3) What languages are (Ural)-Altaic?
 - (a) Altaic: See S 1990: 102 diagram (with Miller’s claims about J/R/K)
Uralic: Finno-Ugric languages (Finnish, Hungarian, Estonian, ...)
 - (b) Note: Some historical linguists dispute the existence of Altaic; Ural-Altaic is even less widely accepted
- (4) Evidence for relationship
 - (a) Fujioka’s “fourteen characteristics” (S 1990: 96)
 - Problems: Typological characteristics; mostly negative
 - (b) Comparative reconstruction — controversial, but most successful at the level of Japanese/Korean

III. Evidence for a connection with Austronesian?

- (5) What languages are Austronesian? — Subfamilies include: Formosan, Malayo-Polynesian (incl. Indonesian, Tagalog, Polynesian lgs like Hawai’ian, Samoan)
- (6) Evidence for relationship
 - (a) Polivanov’s list of characteristics (S 1990: 103-4) | Typological again...
 - (b) Comparative reconstruction

IV. How do we decide whether two languages are genetically related?

(7) **Genetic relationship** as used in historical linguistics does not refer to human biology — it means that two languages have developed over time from the same ancestor language

- The two languages used to *be* the same language

(8) Which English word is genetically related to the Greek word?

Greek *δεκα* [ðeka] English *decade* / *ten* (compare Old Saxon *tehan*)

(9) Quechua & Semitic [excerpted from “How likely are chance resemblances between languages?” by Mark Rosenfelder, accessed at <http://www.zompist.com/chance.htm>]

“Now let's look at a list of *Quechua and Semitic* resemblances posted to *sci.lang...*”

	<i>Quechua</i>		<i>Semitic</i>	
q:q	wanaqo	‘guanaco’	anaqate	‘she-camel’ (Assyr.)
q:k	qollana	‘leader’	kohen	‘priest’ (Heb.)
	onqoy	‘sickness, illness’	thomko	‘ill use, afflict’
	qoleq	‘silver’	purku	‘gold’ (Assyr.)
q:g	t'eqe	‘rag doll’	degem	‘model, specimen’ (Heb.)
	ch'enqo	‘small thing’	enegu	‘suck’ (Assyr.)
	wanqara	‘drum’	balangu	‘kettle-drum’ (Assyr.)
	qocha	‘lake, pond’	gubshu	‘mass of water’ (Assyr.)
q:Ø	watuq	‘diviner’	baru	‘seer’ (Assyr.)
	waliq	‘abundant’	baru	‘become full’ (Assyr.)
	umiqa	‘jewel’	banu	‘headgear, diadem’ (Assyr.)
	maq't'a	‘young man’	batulu	‘youth’ (Assyr.)
q:r (?)	atoq	‘fox’	bachor	‘fox’ (Coptic)
q:č(?)	ch'olqe	‘wrinkle’	chorchi	‘wrinkles’ (Coptic)
q:t	perqa	‘wall’	birtu	‘fetter; fortress’ (Assyr.)
q:p	qoleq	‘silver’	purku	‘gold’ (Assyr.)

- Problems?
 - Shouldn't we use the *ancestor* of the Semitic languages?
 - The sound correspondences do not look *regular*

(10) Upshot: People love lists of words from different languages that resemble each other...

- But finding “similar” words is no proof of genetic relationship between languages

(a) Borrowing? (from each other, or both from a third language)

(b) Chance resemblance?

V. Comparative reconstruction

(11) When two or more languages are **genetically related**, we can compare their sounds/words/structures and thereby **reconstruct** the characteristics of their common ancestor language

- (12) Polynesian cognate sets (Crowley 1992) — a well-accepted case of related languages

<i>Tongan</i>	<i>Samoan</i>	<i>Rarotongan</i>	<i>Hawai'ian</i>	<i>Māori</i>	<i>gloss</i>	<i>consonant correspondences</i>
kafa	ʔafa	kaʔa	ʔaha	kaha	'strong'	k:ʔ:k:ʔ:k, f:f:ʔ:h:h
ʔufi	ufi	uʔi	uhi	uhi	'yam'	ʔ: Ø:Ø:Ø:Ø, f:f:ʔ:h:h
afi	afi	aʔi	ahi	ahi	'fire'	Ø:Ø:Ø:Ø:Ø, f:f:ʔ:h:h
faa	faa	ʔaa	haa	ɸaa	'four'	f:f:ʔ:h:ɸ
feke	feʔe	ʔeke	heʔe	ɸeke	'octopus'	f:f:ʔ:h:ɸ, k:ʔ:k:ʔ:k

VI. Some posited Korean–Japanese correspondences from Martin (1966)

Martin, Samuel E. (1966). Lexical evidence relating Korean to Japanese. *Language* 42: 185-251.

- (13) The modern standard languages

	<i>modern Japanese</i>	<i>modern Korean</i>
'house'	[ie]	[tʃip]
'field'	[hatake]	[pat ^(h)], [patak]
'liquor'	[sake]	[sul]

- (14) Looking at older forms (based on orthographic evidence, internal reconstruction)

	<i>Old Japanese (8c)</i>	<i>Middle Korean (15c)</i>
'house'	[yipe]	[tʃip]
'field'	[patake]	[pat ^(h)], [patak]
'liquor'	[sake]	[suul], [suɰl]

- (15) The proto-language forms as reconstructed by Martin (1966)

	<i>proto-Korean-Japanese</i>
'house'	*jipyē
'field'	*pataxye
'liquor'	*swalǵye

- (16) Assessment
- (a) There was later criticism of Martin (1966) — didn't make use of the OJ vowel/diphthong system...
 - (b) But examples like this suggest that comparative reconstruction *may* be successful
 - There are more recent attempts that have increased the number of plausible apparent cognates between Japanese and Korean (and/or Altaic)
 - (c) Still, there is a concern — can we rule out the possibility that we are dealing with large numbers of very old loanwords? Why aren't there greater numbers of systematic cognates?
- (17) Why is it so hard to investigate the origins of Japanese on the basis of the comparative method? Some contributing factors:
- (a) Large time depth separating Japanese from (possible) relatives
 - (b) Possibility of extended language contact, especially with Korean
 - (c) Possibility that Japanese is actually a mixed language, involving a language-contact situation between Altaic and Austronesia