

Pan-Asiatic. Typology and Diachrony.

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It is perhaps best to approach the subject (see title) naively, simply by asking questions such as: Is it possible to imagine a map of all of Asia n hundred years ago by husbanding internal reconstruction, areal linguistics, typology, and imagination? By imagining such a map and by allowing for dynamics -- currents with the power to move one way or another, i.e., for languages to influence each other and change -- one could set up the equivalent of archaeology in linguistics. Of course, there are problems with the time depth: some areas lend themselves to reconstruction more easily than others (because of written records, perspicacity, our experience with other languages, older scholarship) and the emerging map would not necessarily reflect one and the same stage of reconstruction for all areas. Nevertheless, the attempt alone should be a worthwhile exercise and teach us to sharpen our tools. A few typical questions will now be presented.

Is aspiration a prime (a given, about which it is futile to ask further questions) or can it be assumed to have arisen, perhaps from some segmental

configuration (such as initial consonant clusters)? It has been thought for some time that at least some instances of the aspirated/unaspirated opposition in Chinese come from an element, perhaps *s, which was a morpheme and which, when adjacent to an unaspirated stop, eventually caused aspiration of that stop. That does not explain the great majority of aspirated stops in Sinitic. Are they all reconstructible? Do they correspond in the various Chinese languages? S. R. Ramsey (p.c.) has suggested that the aspirated stops in Korean developed from clusters. The large number of Chinese loans with the aspiration correlation must have served as a model or at least as a statistical support. Can such a scenario be envisaged for other languages? What about this correlation in Southeast Asia?

In South Asia (India) it is the aspiration of voiced stops which is considered a prime, for reasons having to do with the reconstruction of Indo-European, and the aspirated voiceless stops are discounted as secondary. This anomaly (aspirating voiced stops) has given rise to the competing glottalic theory which, in its turn, prompts the question whether glottalization is a prime. In Northwest North America it is, but is it in Asia?

One prejudice (perhaps of European reconstructionists, because of their own languages) is

the assumption that distinctive voice itself (t : d) is a prime. It need not necessarily be. In certain parts of continental Asia voice can be associated with the weakening of unaspirated stops (medially or when unstressed). Initial distinctively voiced stops seem to occur more toward the North (Mongolian) and West of Asia (Indic, Iranian, Semitic). The extreme East and North of Asia (Korean, Japanese, Ainu, Chukotian, Gilyak) seem to have had no voice distinction originally. Is voicing truly the distinction among stops or is this idea a Eurocentric prejudice? If it is not voicing, what is? Glottalization? Aspiration? Do these ever replace each other historically? In what order? Do some continents prefer some dichotomies over others? Africa and Europe seem fond of voicing and the Americas of glottalization. Can we deduce anything about prehistory from this?

Is it reasonable to expect that one can look for historical or areal implications in other sub-systems (nasals, fricatives) among the consonants? In other words, does the presence of, say, a hissing affricate such as ç in a system predict the presence of an ʃ? Is the glottal fricative h a prime, i.e., can we expect to find it at random in consonant systems, or is it implicationally bound up with certain features (aspiration of stops, the presence of an ʒ or ʁ in the

system, or perhaps even with the absence of a labial voiceless fricative)?

Among the nasals, Asia is certainly more hospitable to the velar nasal ŋ than the other continents, especially in initial position. Can this fact be connected with anything else, again, historically or areally? A personal prejudice of this writer is the notion that in the domain of the non-labial and non-velar nasals, either n or the palatal ɲ will be dominant, i.e., it will be preferred lexically or grammatically. In Gilyak (Amur region), ɲ seems to be statistically more frequent in roots and n in affixes. Is the inverse ever the case? Certainly ɲ is more audible, i.e., has a higher functional value. Does this fact have anything to do with what is being discussed here?

There seem to be points on the map of Asia where a k : q distinction (q is post-velar, often called uvular) is favored: Arabic in the West, Chukchi and Eskimo in the North, some Tibeto-Burman languages in the Southeast. Elsewhere, the distinction is weak or absent. What do we deduce from this?

Among vowel systems, the choice is between triangular ones (with five vowels as in Malayalam or Japanese, i e a o u, or with three vowels, as in Arabic, i a u) or rectangular ones (with nine vowels as

in Thai or with eight vowels as in Cambodian, or with seven vowels, as in the full vowels of Cantonese). Should these not be plotted on the map, to see whether anything like a historical or areal dynamic can be determined? Vowel systems, it is known, rotate, and in rotating expand or contract (gain or lose members). Are there universal tendencies in this which can be associated with specific areas in Asia?

As far as prosodies (supra-segmentals) are concerned, the first question which comes up is that of tone in those (mostly monosyllabic) languages in which a given pitch or pitch contour is bound up with a morpheme. Are these tones primes, i.e., were they always there, or can they be traced (as they can be in the case of much of Sinitic) to segmentals (syllable structure, clusters, laryngeal management)? Is this the case in all tone languages? Do tones possibly have other sources? Pitch accent of the Japanese type (also found in Middle Korean), in which pitch configurations are bound up with bisyllabic morphemes and can undergo changes induced by adjacent morphemes, present the same question: were they always there, or can they be traced to another feature, perhaps earlier vowel length?

There are continents where nasalization as a prosody (bound up with an entire morpheme or word) is

prevalent, e.g. Africa and South America. This seems also to be the case in parts of Southeast Asia. Was this phenomenon perhaps more widespread at an earlier time? Was perhaps voice in the initial segment in free variation with prosodic nasalization? The character which in Northern Standard Chinese is now read wàn 'ten thousand, large number, myriad' has two corresponding pronunciations in Sino-Japanese: man 'ten thousand' and ban 'many, all'. Is it enough to say that there was already oscillation in Chinese? If Japanese mugi 'wheat, barley, rye, oats' is an early loan from Chinese (cf. Sino-Japanese baku and Northern Standard Chinese mài), what is the precise phonological development? The alterationⁿ (or oscillation) of initial voiced stops with initial nasals is also known in some Altaic pronominal systems. In some basic and well established Uralic etyma a medial nasal such as -m- or -ŋ- can alternate with medial glides (-j-, -w-). Furthermore, the classical explanation of the Japanese voiced medials (-b- -d- -g- -z-) as having originated in sequences of "nasal-plus-stop" (*-mp- *-nt-, etc.) could be read: "nasalization-prosody-plus-stop".

Monosyllabicity has its center of gravity in the South-Southeast, like tone, with which it is connected. Is it a byproduct of the birth of tone? Is it implicationally connected with the tendency toward

initial-cluster avoidance?

There seems to be an opposition between North-Northwest and South-Southeast in another respect, as well, namely: affixed person markers in the verb (for subject and sometimes object) and in the noun (for the marking of possession) tend to occur in the West and North and are absent in the Southeast and East. Is this a byproduct of some prototypical East-Southeast Asian cultural trait, i.e., were there personal affixes once also in the East-Southeast, before they were extirpated by societal taboo?

Could it be said that, on the basis of the delicate balance between tense and aspect in the present-day languages of Asia, aspect is the older of the two and tense was originally restricted to certain lexical classes of verbs? Are there languages in which the history of passive and causative markers can be clearly traced? Are they from auxiliaries? What is the morphological status, on a pan-Asian scale, of 'can, is able, can be X-ed'?

Are the devices which carry the messages of durativity, momentaneousness, and frequentativity more iconic than other devices (e.g. those for causativity or passivity)? How many languages in Asia have explicit morphemes for the imperative and the vocative? Are these two categories in any way prone to iconicity

(vowel alternations, irregular stress, special prosodies)? If so, does this tell us anything about their age, i.e., are they younger or older than other parcels of the language?

Would an areal typology of negation be useful? There is affixal negation in Turkic, a negative verb which can be conjugated for person and tense in some Uralic languages, the Japanese negative verb, the distinction between existential negation and propositional negation, not to speak of others, unknown to the writer.

Perhaps too much has been made of SOV, its permutations, and the "normal declarative affirmative sentence". Scholars tend to speak in declarative affirmative sentences but other people normally converse, generally two persons at a time. The basic questions about the sentence ought therefore not be where S, O, and V are situated in relation to each other, but what it is in the message that the speaker wants to give prominence to, at a given point in the conversation. Prominence is dictated by the informational, but non-linguistic, context. How, then, is prominence expressed in the languages of Asia? By word order, by means of syntactic markers, by ellipsis (and counter-ellipsis)? Does animacy have a tendency to dominate, i.e., do personal pronouns and animate

nouns tend to occur in sentence-initial position? If so, does this affect the position of S (in SOV, SVO, etc.)?

If there is such a thing as animacy dominance, then we may wish to reckon with two syntactic stages. The early one, where ergativity was decisive, would be an agent-and-event sort of syntax. The later one would be a subject-and-object sort of syntax. In the former there is no room for transitivity; in the latter, transitivity is the key notion. Asia seems to be a living laboratory of languages with ergative syntax and with transitive syntax, sometimes both in the same language (with the choice often governed by aspect or tense). Is there a way to plot all this on a map and to ferret out archaisms and innovations?

There must be a name for the areal study of idioms (areal idiomatics?): the search for a specific set of idioms which are characteristic of large areas or perhaps of entire continents. One question which could be studied is whether such convergence is accidental, human-specific, or the result of historical diffusion. Thus, 'to dream' is see a dream in Japanese and see in a dream in Selkup (a Samoyed language in western Siberia). While dreaming is from the psychic sphere, mirrors are artifacts, often obtained through commerce from societies with superior metallurgy. In many

languages the name of the mirror contains references to 'seeing one's own shadow (or one's face)'. Perhaps such metaphors can be pursued even in the sphere of nature. The name of the otter (when it is not connected with the etymon for 'water') seems often to refer to 'sliding' or 'pulling (one's self or one's tail)'. If the otter had great economic importance in the past, as is likely, this designation may be due to taboo. Taboos arise in each culture; their birth is conditioned by cultural and economic factors. But taboos can also be borrowed, like any other pieces of cultural equipment, including words. — This is also the place to remind ourselves that we have avoided long enough looking seriously into the prehistoric dispersion of domestic-animal names such as that of the dog and the horse.

The exclusion of the non-continental portions of Asia (or of Eurasia) in this paper was by design and intended simply to keep the discussion within the bounds defined by this symposium. However, there are good reasons for also taking into account the islands and archipelagos in the South and the East of Asia. (Japan was included by force of tradition.) First of all, we can learn something from the history of peoples who spread because of superior navigational techniques: we can learn something about the speed of travel and

transmission and about the mechanisms of change. Second, the islands are not hermetically sealed off from the continents; in the case of the Malayan peninsula and Indonesia we can see a linguistic continuum to this day; there must be lessons we can draw from the study of such coastal situations.

Coastal configurations imply trade, and trade large-scale production, and large-scale production slavery, a subject which has not been considered seriously enough in the study of languages and language families on a large scale. This also applies to the size of populations. Linguistic communities were much smaller prehistorically and even fairly recently; people died when they were young, i.e., generations were shorter and did not overlap with each other as they do now (when some people know their great-grandparents). All this has implications for questions of creolization, of the speed of language change, of how language is transmitted, how a language splits into dialects, how social and occupational classes develop idioms of their own, and how kinship systems (and terminologies) are connected with language.

The importance of geography and topography is not restricted to the coast. Elevation is also significant. There are two areas in Asia -- the Indo-Chinese peninsula (especially Vietnam and adjacent

areas) and the Caucasus -- where elevation (mountains) can be correlated with history and therefore with languages, i.e., elevation reflects priority of arrival in an area. These are natural laboratories for the study of language and beg to be investigated in detail.

Originally this presentation was to have contained concrete and detailed examples of how some of the questions broached above can be treated. In thinking about how to present the treatment, so many more questions arose that the questions inhibited the thinking process and this paper became a repository of questions, in which answers were only rarely, and then cautiously, proposed. The participants in this symposium are asked to forgive this programmatic flaw and at the same time are urged to begin to answer some of the questions posed. Doubtlessly, their answers will also engender more questions.