

On Sino-Tibetan Alliance

Baoya Chen (Tujia)

Department of Chinese Language and Literature
Yunnan University, Kunming, Yunnan, China

Until now, the theory to research Sino-Tibetan is the Family Tree which came from Comparative Linguistics in 19th century. In this theory, the determination of cognate languages depends on Phonetic Correspondence. But the features of languages in Sino-Tibetan Family is quite different from those of Indo-European Family. In this paper, I have compared some Sino-Tibetan languages, finding that we can not put forward a method to distinguish cognate words from borrowings even if we have got the phonetical correspondence. I have raised a concept of Linguistic Alliance to explain the complex relation in Sino-Tibetan languages. I think, the relation between any two groups in Sino-Tibetan Family should be explained by Linguistic Alliance. According to Linguistic Alliance these languages have been developing not only by dividing, but also by merging. It is impossible and unnecessary to differentiate one evolution from another in Sino-Tibetan Family, but we can decide the close relation in any two languages and any two kinds of cultures by phonetic correspondence. It is the value of Linguistic Alliance in researching Sino-Tibetan languages.

1. Weakness of Sino-Tibetan Family

What groups does Sino-Tibetan Family include?

Fang-Kuei Li (1937) thought, Sino-Tibetan Family consisted of Chinese, Tibeto-Burman group, Miao-Yao group and Zhuang-Dong group. Most of Chinese scholars have accepted this Four Group Theory.

The classificatory criterion of Four Group Theory is the similarity, most languages in the four groups have tones, classifiers, a lot of monosyllable, often using function words and word order as the major grammatic methods.

The base of the family theory is founded on A. Schleicher's Stammbaumtheorie. The Stammbaumtheorie was advanced in the research on Indo-European languages. If some languages developed from one language, according to regularity of sound change, there should be phonetic correspondence in the basic words among these languages. So the determination of the cognate languages should depend on phonetic correspondence.

The Four Group Theory has adopted the Stammbaum-theorie, but did not determinate the kinship according to phonetic correspondence strictly. We should make clear first, tone, classifier, monosyllable, word order, function word can not be used as criteria to determinate the kinship. These similarity may arise from influence among languages. Vietnamese language belonging to Austro-Asiatic Family has had 5 or 6 tones under the influence of Chinese (A. Haudricourt, 1954), Karen having kinship with Tibeto-Burman group has changed its object from front of verb to the rear under the influence of Mon-Khmer group. Tone, function word, classifier may also come out from different cognate languages independently. Tibetan language had no tone before, its tones appeared independently of Chinese tones. Chinese classifiers appeared independently of Tibeto-Burman group.

Just because the similarity of tone, monosyllable, function word and word order has no reliability, P.K. Benedict, J.A. Matisoff and so on insist on determining kinship by strict phonetic correspondence in the basic words of different languages, especially by strict phonetic correspondence in core words, such as "eye, ear, nose, hand, foot, heart, sun, moon, mountain, water, one, two, three, etc." basic words and core words are most stable, most unchangeable and most generative. They are seldom borrowed from one language to another. According to core word correspondence, Benedict eliminated Zhuang-Dong group and Miao-Yao group from Sino-Tibetan Family, the reason is that Zhuang-Dong group and Miao-Yao group have no words corresponding to those of Tibeto-Burman group and Chinese. Benedict thinks the so-called cognate words are loan words.

This Two Group Theory can not explain the kinship of Sino-Tibetan languages also. In South-western China and Indo-China, here is the major coexistent zone of Chinese, Sino-Tibetan group, Zhuang-Dong group and Miao-Yao group, even the core words can be borrowed each other. Va language belonging to Austro-Asiatic Family has not only a set of native numerals but also a set of borrowed numerals from Dai language:

	Native	Borrowing
one	/tiʔ/	/ʔet/
two	/ra/	/sɔŋ/
three	/loi/	/sam/
four	/pon/	/si/
five	/phuan/	/ha/
six	/liah/	/rhok/
seven	/ʔa liah/	/tɕiat/

eight	/si dai/	/pɛt/
nine	/si dim/	/kau/
ten	/kau/	/sip/

Evidently these loan words have phonetic correspondence with Dai numerals.

In Bai language, a lot of words are borrowed from Chinese, including core words:

	Borrowing	South-Western Chinese Dialect
heart	/çi(55)/	/çĩ(55)/
liver	/kã(55)/	/kã(55)/
bone	/kua(44)/	/ku(31)/
foot	/ko(44)/	/tçio(31)/
rice	/me(33)/	/mi(51)/
hand	/sɯ(33)/	/sou(51)/
brain	/no(33)/	/nao(51)/
red	/tshɛ(44)/	/tshi(31)/
say	/sua(44)/	/so(31)/

These loan words have phonetic correspondence with the words in South-Western Chinese Dialect. Take the example of tone, tone /55/ of loan words versus tone /55/ of the Chinese Dialect words, /44/ versus /31/, /33/ versus /51/. According to regularity of sound change, even if sound change has happened in language or South-Western Chinese Dialect, there is still phonetic correspondence between the two languages. The /p/ or /ph/ in ancient Chinese has changed into /f/ in some condition, in Bai language it is still pronounced /p/ or /ph/, but keeps the phonetic correspondence: /p/ or /ph/ of Bai to /f/ of Chinese.

In 19th century, historical comparative linguistics could determinate the kinship by phonetic correspondence because Indo-European languages had complex morphological changes, borrowing seldom happening in core words. To borrow a core word means to borrow all kinds of morphological changes concerning with this word. To borrow a personal pronoun means to borrow its masculine, feminine, neuter; its ablative, accusative, dative, genitive, instrumental, locative, nominative, objective, oblique, possessive, subjective, prepositional; its singular, dual, plural, etc. This is a complex system. The more complex a system is, the more difficult the borrowing is. In these languages, core words are seldom loan words. But in Chinese, Tibeto-Burman languages, Zhuang-Dong languages, Miao-Yao languages, there are few morphological changes, borrowing happening easily. When these people live across an area, that is south-western China and Indo-China, borrowing happens more easily, even stretching

into core words, still keeping phonetic correspondence. In these languages, we have no strict method to distinguish loan words from native words, neither does Benedict.

Phonetic correspondence can not be used to determine the kinship of these languages. For example, some numerals of Zhuang-Dong have correspondence with those of Chinese (taking the example of De Hong Dai):

	De Dai	Chinese Yue Dialect
one	/lɔŋ(33)/; /et(11)/	/jət(55)/
two	/sɔŋ(35)/	/song(55)/
three	/sa:m(35)/	/sam(55)/; /sam(33)/
four	/si(55)/	/si(33)/; /sei(33)/
five	/ha(31)/	/ŋ(13)/
six	/hok(11)/	/luk(22)/
seven	/tset(11)/	/tsət(55)/
eight	/piət(11)/	/pat(33)/
nine	/kau(31)/	/kəu(35)/
ten	/sip(35)/	/səp(22)/

Some scholars say, these words are cognate words of Chinese and Zhuang-Dong, other say they are loan words from Chinese. No one has a strict criterion to demonstrate his point of view.

Does Tujia language belong to Zhuang-Dong, Miao-Yao, or Tibeto-Burma? Some words of Tujia have relation with Zhuang-Dong and Miao-Yao:

elder sister:	/a(35)ta(55)/(Tujia), /to(12)/(Yao)
eat:	/ka(35)/(Tujia), /kɯn(24)/(Zhuang) /kin(33)/(De Dai).
horse:	/ma(55)/(Tujia), /ma(42)/(Zhuang), /ma(31)/(Dong), /ma(11)/(Miao), /ma (231)/(Yiao), /ma(41)/(De Dai).
cat:	/mo(21)/(Tujia), /meu(21)/(Zhuang) /meu(31)/(Dong), /meu(35)/(De Dai).
rabbit:	/mau(21)tho(55)li(55)/(Tujia), /to (35)/(Zhuang), /pa:ŋ(33)ta:i(51)/ (De Dai), /thou(24)/(Yao), /thua (11)/(Li).
long:	/ɣiɛ(21)pa(21)/(Tujia), /ɣai(31)/ (Zhuang), /ja:u(51)/(De Dai), /ɣa:i (53)/(Mulam).

fast:	/ɕiau(55)xui(55)/(Tujia),/hoi(453)/(Dong),/xhi(44)/(Miao).
drink:	/xu(21)/(Tujia),/hə(53)/(Miao),/hop(55)/(Yao).
day:	/ne(55)/(Tujia),/ŋhe(33)/(Miao),/ŋo:i(55)/.
year:	/nũ(21)/(Tujia),/njin(11)/(Dong),/njhu(44)/(Miao),/ŋang(24)/(Yao).
seed:	/ne(55)nã(55)/(Tujia),/ŋjhu(33)/(Miao),/nji:m(33)/(Yao).
spit:	/phi(35)/(Tujia),/pi(35)/(Zhuang),/phju(35)/(Dong).
tree:	/kha(21)mũ(21)/(Tujia),/məi(31)/(Dong),/ton(31)mai(41)/(De Dai),/mai(42)/(Shuei).
Some Tujia words have relation with Tibeto-Burma:	
head:	/kho(55)pa(55)/(Tujia),/ko(12)/(Tibetan),/qə(33)po(55)tʂɿ(33)/(Qiang),/po(33)/(Jingpo).
sky:	/mie(35)/(Tujia),/mo(33)ɰ(33)/(Yi),/lā(11)mu(31)/(Jingpo).
day:	/ne(55)/(Tujia),/nji(12)ma(12)(Tibetan),/nji(21)/(Yi).
horse:	/ma(55)/(Tujia),/m(33)/(Yi).fire: /mi(55)/(Tujia),/me(12)/(Tibetan), /m(21)-tu(55)/(Yi),/mi(33)/(Qiang)
grass:	/si(21)/(Tujia),/ʒ(33)/(Yi).
face:	/ku(35)tha(55)/(Tujia),/kha(33)njə(33)/(Yi),/qha(31)qha(33)/(Qing)
die:	/se(35)/(Tujia),/ɕi(54)/(Tibetan), /si(33)/(Yi),/sɿ(33)/(Jingpo),/ʃe(55)/(Qiang).
I:	/nga(35)/(Tujia),/nga(12)/(Tibetan), /nga(33)/(Yi),/nga(55)/(Qiang), /ngai(33)/(Jingpo).

According to Four Group Theory, these words are cognate words of Sino-Tibetan Family. According to Two Group Theory, the former are loan words from Zhuang-Dong or Miao-Yao. There might be no last conclusion.

2, Sino-Tibetan Alliance

Either Four Group Theory or Two Group theory is based on Stammbaumtheorie. As we have seen, Stammbaumtheorie has lost its generality in South-western China and Indo-China. Many languages of South-western and Indo-China have been merging and dividing. Considering the complexity, it is necessary to abandon the Stammbaumtheorie. We substitute Sino-Tibetan Alliance for

Sino-Tibetan Family. This Alliance includes Chinese, Tibeto-Burma Miao-Yao, Zhuang-Dong and some Mon-Khmer languages. The Basic criterion to determinate the allied relation is still the phonetic correspondence, because only phonetic correspondence can avoid the accidental similarity in tone, monosyllable, word order, classifier, functional word. There is indeed some phonetic correspondence among these groups, we call the core words which have phonetic correspondence covalent words, it means they have common cultural value. We might have no method to know if a covalent word is a cognate word or a loan word, but we can study cultural relation through covalent words. In Stammbaum theorie, a language can not change its kinship, but in linguistic alliance, a language can transform from one linguistic alliance to another after complex evolution. For this reason, the character of a culture is not unchangeable. From viewpoint of literature and archaeological materials, Miao-Yao and Zhuang-Dong might be assimilated to Sino-Tibetan Alliance after a long-term mergence.

Only when different language share a lot of covalent words, can we say they have allied relation among them. The number of covalent words in two languages reflects the density of two cultures. The more covalent words there are, the more intimate the two cultures are. The more different the phonetic system of these covalent words are, the longer the relationship of the two cultures has experienced. According to our incomplete statistics, distribution of covalent words in basic vocabulary among Tibetan, Chinese, Burmese, Dai is:

	Tibetan	Chinese	Burmese	Dai
Tibetan		312	201	69
Chinese	312		132	141
Burmese	201	132		54
Dai	69	141	54	

We have no strict method to tell loan words from cognate words in these covalent words, but the data above can explain the relationship between any two different cultures. Tibetan and Chinese had close relationship long long ago, therefore, there are more covalent words between the two languages. In the light of historical and archaeological materials, Dai people had moved Yunnan and Indo-China lately, so the relationship between Dai people and Burmese people is not so close, the covalent words between the two languages only 54. What we are most interested in is the relationship among Tibetan, Burmese and Chinese. Either Four Group Theory or Two group Theory put Tibetan and Burmese in one group, Chinese in another, but covalent words between Tibetan and Burmese are 201, covalent words between Tibetan and Chinese are 312, this is a

contradictory. From viewpoint of Sino-Tibetan Alliance this contradictory can be avoided. If Tibetan people want to come into contact with Burmese people, they must cross the Himalayas, Brahmaputra River and Irrawaddy River, while Tibetan people can get in touch with Chinese easily.

As Sino-Tibetan Alliance is a linguistic coalition formed through covalent words, it is not just a genetic coalition, so reconstruction of Sino-Tibetan Ursparche has been a fabrication. Suppose we have two different languages, A and B, their core words which have the same or similar meaning are:

A (a , b , c , d , ...)

B (a', b', c', d', ...)

When they contact in different regions, core words borrowing each other, at least, there might appear such languages:

C (a , b', c', d', ...)

D (a , b , c', d', ...)

E (a , b , c , d', ...)

"a, d'" in these three languages have phonetic correspondence. According to Stammbaumtheorie, C, D, E, have kinship, "a, d'" are the elements of Ursparche. If we reconstruct Ursparche F, "a, d'" are the necessary elements :

F (a , d', ...)

In fact, A, B are not cognate, C, D, E are not cognate, there is also no Ursparche F. The mistake is that we put the Stammbaumtheorie and phonetic correspondence in a completely different linguistic environment.

If early languages are:

G (a , b', c , d', ...)

H (a , b , c', d , ...)

There still might emerge languages like C, D and E by contact. We have no method now to determinate if C, D, and E come from A, B or from G and H. There is an irreversible process. In Stammbaumtheorie, we suppose language developed from one to two, two to four, and so on, it is feasible to reconstruct Ursparche through modern languages. This is a reversible process. Just as Stammbaumtheorie is reversible, we can reconstruct Indo-European Ursparche through modern languages. Linguistic alliance is an irreversible, we can not reconstruct Sino-Tibetan Ursparche.

There are a lot of languages like C, D and E in South-western China and Indo-China. In Tujia, "chest, horse, body, drink, sky, seed, fast, etc." have phonetic correspondence with those of Miao-Yao, "road, horse, cat, rabbit, tree, eat, you, etc." have phonetic correspondence with those of Zhuang-Dong, "sky, water,

five, horse, tiger, monkey, grass, head, die, etc."have phonetic correspondence with those of Tibeto-Burma. Because the words which have phonetic correspondence with those of Tibeto-Burma are more, we can say Tujia has closer kinship with Tibeto-Burma, meanwhile we can further conclude that Tujia culture and Tibeto-Burmese culture have more similarity.

In Indo-European Family, languages broke up according to Stammbaumche, languages belonging to Germanic group can not belong to Slavic group. This is not true of Sino-Tibetan languages. Naxi in Yunnan belongs to Yi branch of Tibeto-Burman group, Tibetan belongs to Tibetan branch, but in Rekong village of Xiang Country, Sichuan, village people belong to Naxi people, still keeping some Naxi custom, their language has a lot of words which have phonetic correspondence with those of Tibetan. If we put the language in Tibetan branch, how can we explain the fact that Naxi language in Lijiang, Yunnan, has a great number of core words corresponding phonetically with those of Yi branch? If we put it in Yi branch, how can we insist on strict phonetic correspondence? Sino-Tibetan Alliance can explain this fact: Rekong language shares more covalent words with Tibetan, Rekong culture and Tibetan culture have closer relationship. Phenomena like this can be found in Luoba language, Deng language, Dulong language, Nu language, Tujia language, Bai language, Qiang language, Pumi language. These languages have a number of covalent words with Tibetan branch, Jingpo branch, Yi branch, Burman branch respectively, it is quite difficult to put them in one branch. From view point of alliance, these languages have different relationship with all of these branches respectively.

3. Postscript

Stammbaumche is not sole model of linguistic evolution. In 19th century, when J. Schmidt studied Stammbaumche under A. Scheicher, he found a phenomenon different from Stammbaumche: the linguistic change spread like water wave, he proposed Wellentheorie. Bloomfield thought this was a model contrary to Stammbaumche. However, as what J. Schmidt and his successors studied are Indo-European languages, Wellentheorie at last had become a supplement to Stammbaumche, that is, cognate languages would diffuse each other like water waves. In the 1950s, M. Emeneau proposed Areal Linguistics, but he goes to another end, he thought language change was accompanied by areal stretch. It is too simple. The relation among Chinese, Zhuang-Dong, Tibeto-Burma, Miao-Yao is very complex, we should introduce Sino-Tibetan Alliance to explain this relationship.

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