

Syntactic Similarities between Tamil and Korean

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Introduction

There are three parts in this paper, namely, Part I , Part II and Part III. In the first part is considered the question ‘where did the Koreans come from?’ with reference to the four principal directions and the languages that wielded some sort of influence on Korean. In the second part the syntactic similarities between Korean and Tamil are illustrated with suitable data relating to them. And in the third part it will be pointed out that language typology gives no guarantee for genetic relationship among languages of the world in general Korean and Tamil in particular.

Part I

The answer to the question ‘Where did the Koreans come from?’ is not just one but it is fourfold. As their origin is fixed to the four different directions, namely, the East, West, South and the North, we get four different answers. They are remembered as the Eastern theory, Western Theory, Southern theory and Northern theory.

The Koreans came from the East

According to Kim Chin-u Koreans originated from Japan and this view is in consonance with the statement that the Koreans came from the East. Lee Kim Moon, Professor at the Department of Korean Linguistics in Seoul National University, speaks about ‘ lexical correspondences between Koguryo (an extinct language spoken in Manchuria and Northern Korea) language and Old Japanese’. Owing to this lexical correspondence and some archaeological findings, he observes, “It is safe to say that old Korean was not the Peninsular dialect of Old Japanese. If

anything, Old Japanese was the insular dialect of Korean (1983, p.36)". The statement made above means that Japanese came as a dialect of old Korean and not that Korean as a dialect of Japanese.

The Koreans came from the West

The Western theory fixes the lineage of Korean to Dravidian, the chief language of the group being Tamil that has a continuity that goes to the beginning of the first millennium or even earlier. Around the third millennium BC people living near the Altaic mountains in central Asia began to migrate eastward confirming the view that the Koreans came from the West. Homer B. Hulbert supports the west theory. His idea was popular when the field of linguistics was in its inception or beginning. The syntactic features that Hulbert saw between Korean and Dravidian Languages are called typological features in the present day linguistics. According to the most popularly held view in the realm of modern linguistics typological similarities are not adequate enough to establish 'the genetic - relationship' among languages. Analyzing this problem Kim Chin-U says,

It is an accepted view that two are more unrelated languages may nevertheless share typological similarities. Three quarters of a century ago linguistics was still in its infancy, and one can imagine how striking and suggestive the typological similarities between Korean and Dravidian must have been looked to Hulbert, especially when Indo-European languages, about the well-established language family then, all shared a different typology (1983, p. 16)"

The Koreans came from the South

According to Southern theory Korean belongs to the Austronesian family, i.e., Korean is related to Austronesian languages such as languages of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Sumatra, Java, Philippines, Papua New Guinea etc.

Linguistic support for this argument includes open syllables, the honorific system, numerals and several body parts. On the other hand anthropological evidence includes rice cultivation, tattooing, and the myth of an egg as the birth place of royalty.

The Koreans came from the North

According to the northern theory Korean is a member of the Altaic language family. It is in fact the descendent of the Eastern Altaic along with languages such as Tunguz (the Tungusic language of the Evenki in eastern Siberia), Japanese, Ainu (A language spoken on the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido), Kamchatkan (relating to Kamchatka, a peninsula in E Russia). The Western Altaic consisting of languages such as Mongolian and Turkic (Turkish, Khazak, Uzbek, Tadjik etc.,). The parts of the Extinct Altaic, namely, Sumerian (a language of ancient Sumer, a language isolate which was spoken in Northern Mesopotamia (Modern Iraq), Elamite, the primary language in the present day Iran from 2800 – 550 BC), Cretan, a language relating to one of the Islands of ancient Greece, Crete, Cyprian, a language associated with Cyprus, Etruscan, (a language isolate spoken by close neighbors of the ancient Romans), Scythian (old Iranian) etc., have a close link with Tamil in general, particularly the first two, Sumerian and Elamite.

Part II

Syntax plays a vital or crucial or central part in the study of a language as it has interlinks on the one hand with phonology relating to speech or graphology connected with writing and on the other with lexis or vocabulary relating to the field of semantics or word meaning. Certain syntactic similarities between Tamil and Korean are presented with suitable illustrative sentences in the respective language script, namely, Tamil Bhrami script for Tamil and Hangul script for Korean along

with transliteration using the Roman letters of the alphabet or Latin script. Following are some Korean words with their pronunciation indicated within square brackets, their lexical meaning in English and the sound values of the Hangul alphabet used in them are also presented for enabling the readers of this paper to have a clear idea about particular Hangul alphabet and some of the sound values associated with it :

존 [son] Hand (ㅈ = s, ㅊ = o, ㄴ = n)

힘 [him] Effort or strength (ㅎ = h, ㅣ = i, ㅁ = m)

돈[ton] money (ㄷ = t, ㅊ = o, ㄴ = n)

내 돈 [ne ton] my money (ㄴ = n, ㅌ = e)

예름 [] This two-syllable Korean word means ‘summer’.

엘메 [] This two syllabled Korean word means ‘fruit’.

Verb or Predicate Final Languages

Korean sentences are predicate final – sharing the grammatical properties of other predicate final languages such as Japanese, Altaic, and Dravidian – and are very different from sentences of , for example, English, French, Chinese and Austronesian. Tamil, one of the most prominent among Dravidian languages shares this property, sometimes described as OV languages . In Korean all modifiers such as adjectives , adverbs, numerals, relative clauses, subordinate or co-ordinate clauses, determiners or genitive constructions must precede the element they modify. The illustrative examples given below and the explanations offered will make clear the predicate or verb final nature of both the languages namely Korean and Tamil . In these languages the relative and other clauses as well as the modifiers

마 | 매녀 | | | |

குழந்தை ஆடைகளை அணிந்து கொள்கிறது.

Korean

지니 거 H ㅅ ㅅㅅ

Cini-ka wus- ss

Jinee -NOM smile -PAST- INDIC

Jinee smiled.

The examples given below will illustrate the fact that Korean and Tamil are OV languages.

Peter H, Lee (2003: 32) says,

Korean

메드류가 짐어 | 저 짐을 먹어요

Andrew eats lunch at home.

Tamil

ஆண்ட்ரூ வீட்டில் மதிய உணவு சாப்பிடுகிறான்.

āṇṭru viṭṭil matiya uṇavu cāppiṭukirāṇ

Andrew home at lunch eats

Andrew eats lunch at home.

Korean

조연이 점장을 먹어요

Joan lunch eats

Joan eats the lunch.

Tamil

ஜோன் மதியவுணவை சாப்பிடுகிறாள்.

jōṇ matiyavuṇavai cāppiṭukirāḷ.

Joan the lunch eats

Joan eats the lunch.

The Korean sentence given below will further be an example for supporting the view that Korean is a verb final or OV language.

ki sonyo nin wiyu- lil masi -ass-ta

ki sonyon- nin wiyu- lil masi - ass- ta

the boy subject milk object drink past assertion
marker marker

The boy drank milk

Agglutination

Tamil and Korean are agglutinating languages. What Fromkin / Rodman (1973:230) say about agglutinating languages is true of Korean, an isolate and Tamil, the most ancient representative of the Dravidian languages. They describe agglutinating languages as follows:

In agglutinating languages, various morphemes are combined to form a single word, each element maintains a distinct and fixed meaning. In such languages, prefixes, suffixes and even infixes are used over and over again to build new words. They usually keep their same phonological shape, except for phonetic changes resulting from the regular phonological rules of the language.

Peter H. Lee (2003: 31) describes Korean as a typical agglutinative language in that one or more affixes with constant form and meaning may be attached to various stems. In *po-si-ot-kes-sum-ni-da* ([a respectable person] may have been seen), for instance the passive verb stem *po-i*: the subject honorific *-si*, the past tense *-ot*, the modal *-kes* (may), the addressee honorific *-sum*, the indicative *-ni*, and the declarative ending *-da* . He also observes, ‘Many Korean suffixes either do not have counterparts or correspond to independent words in non-agglutinative languages such as English and Chinese.’

The examples given below will serve as further illustrations:

Korean

Pusan kajji aju ppalli talli-nun kicha

Pusan to very fast run train

The train which runs very fast to Pusan

Tamil

மதுரைக்கு அதி வேகமாக ஓடுகிற இரயில்

maturaikku ati vēkamāka ōṭukiṛa irayil

Madurai to very fast runs train

The train that runs very fast to Madurai

aju (Korean) and ati (Tamil) are adjectives that modify ppalli and vekamaka respectively. As the adjectives in both the languages precede their modifiers, aju comes before ppalli and ati comes before vekamaka. And also we can say that aju ppalli that precedes talli modifies it and the Ati Vekamaka modifies the verbal form ōṭukiṛa. In both the sentences the head word is found at the end of the clause while it is found at the beginning of the relative clause.

Kajji and kku are post-positions in both the languages, Korean and Tamil. Korean and

Tamil make use of postpositions in the form of particles in Korean and as case markers in Tamil.

Part III

The main argument in this section would be the presence of typological or structural features such as predicate final or verb final sentences, agglutination, presence of common items of vocabulary, the use of post-positions instead of prepositions etc., do not guarantee that these two or more languages have genetic relationship.

John Guy, Curator of South and South East Asian Arts at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, says,

India with its insatiable appetite for gold seems to have taken the lead in the search for the yellow metal. You just have to look at the ancient Sanskrit name for South East Asia – Suvarṇabhūmi – which shows up in a whole variety of sources.

The principal reason for Indians migrating to south east Asia is made clear in the above extract. That lexical borrowing from people who come into contact with them is not uncommon even at earlier times is indicated in the passage quoted from Robert Blust.

Robert Blust (2013: 19) presenting facts about lexical borrowing from India says,

To show the extent of lexical borrowing from early Indian sources, about half of the more than 25000 base entries in the old Javanese dictionary of Zoetmulder (1982) are of Sanskrit origin. While this is an impressive record of contact, it must be kept in mind that the language of the old Javanese texts was that of courts, and hence reflects the linguistic world of the educated elite, not the peasantry. Moreover, despite a wealth of Sanskrit loan words relating to religion, government, trade and such material objects as pearls, silk, gemstones, glass and beads, the basic vocabulary of Javanese having only two known Sanskrit loans: *geni* (Skt. *Agni*) 'fire' and *megha* (Skt. *megha*) cloud.

The syntactic features that Hulbert deals with in his work *A Comparative Grammar of the Korean Language and the Dravidian Languages of India*, 1905 were very well received when linguistics was at its infancy. But the present-day – linguists would call them typological similarities and they are of the view that typological similarities are not enough to establish the genetic relationship among languages. The reason assigned by them for the similarities between languages like Korean and Tamil is not just a genetic relationship that is to say that these two languages have the same origin but cultural contacts, migration in search of wealth etc.

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