Altaic from the Point of View of Tungusic
Past & Present State and Future Prospects

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Abstract: The traditional Altaic theory operates with three branches: Turkic, Mongolic and Tungusic, where Tungusic plays a rather peripheral role. However, if we consider Korean and Japanese as well, Tungusic branch may occupy a central position from the geographical perspective and play an intermediary role within the Altaic language continuum. To prove this view, the history together with the current research of this topic is scrutinized and an overview of major events in the history of Tungusic studies is provided.

For the future prospects we found out that an interdisciplinary research which would combine comparative linguistics (i.e. study of new lexical parallels\(^1\) and Altaic comparative grammar), genetics, archaeology, and anthropology (more specifically the study of human migration) is the most promising procedure that will provide a new perspective of Altaic studies for example in the newest projects of Robbeets\(^2\) and Blažek & Schwarz\(^3\).

Keywords: Altaic, Tungusic, comparative linguistics, archaeology, anthropology

Özet: Geleneksel Altay teorisi üç kol üzerine kurulmuştur: Türk, Moğol ve Tunguz. Tunguzca, diğer iki kol ile kıyaslandığında daha dış bir rol dedir. Ancak, Korece ve Japonca da buraya dahil edilip Tunguzcanın konuşulduğu bölgeye de coğrafi açıdan bakıldığında, Tunguzcanın bu teorinin ortasında yer aldığı ve

\(^1\) e.g. alternative etymologies:
Tg. *maha* “paw” (EDAL 902)...Kor. mãn “hand” (PKE:105-06)
Tg. *pufute* “child” (EDAL)...OKor. *puk* “boy” (Lee 1977:88)
Tg. *ur* “male”...Tk. *uri* “male child” (EDAL:607/1039)


\(^3\) http://www.muni.cz/phil/research/projects/30385

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dolayısı ile Altay diller bütünü içerisinde aracı konumunda olduğu söylenebilir. Bu görüşü kantlamanak için, çalışmaların konusu bütün boyutlarıyla ele alınmış ve Tunguz çalışmalarına dair önemli gelişmelerin genel bir değerlendirme yapılmıştır.

Geleceğin araştırmalar için ise, Altay çalışmalarına yeni bir bakış açısı sağlayacak ve karşılaştırmalı dilibilm (başka bir deyişle güncel söz varlığı benzerlikleri çalışmaları ile karşılaştırmalı Altay dilleri dilibilgi), genetik, arkeoloji ve antropolojiyi (özellige göc çalışmalarları) bir araya getirecek disiplinler arası bir çalışmaların en etkili yöntem olacağını düşünmekteyiz. Bu tür çalışmalarla Robbeets' ve Blažek ile Schwarz’ın çalışmalarını örnek olarak verilebilir.

Anahtar Sözelikler: Altay dilleri, Tunguzca, karşılaştırmalı dilibilim, arkeoloji, antropoloji

1. In the traditional conception of the Altaic theory operating with three branches, Turkic, Mongolic and Tungusic ('Micro-Altaic'), the Tungusic branch played a rather peripheral role. We note that the proto-Altaic reconstructions of Poppe were based especially on Mongolic. When Korean and Japanese are taken into account as well, the Tungusic branch shifts to the central position in geographical perspective. This corresponds with its intermediary position within the Altaic language continuum, independently of genealogical or areal interpretation of similarities between the five Altaic branches. It is characteristic that the proto-Altaic reconstruction of Sergei Starostin and his team applied in EDAL follows Tungusic.

2. The first surviving dictionary of Manchu with grammatical remarks, called Dajcin guran ji iioñi bitxe, was compiled by the Chinese Hun-Jao in 1682 (cf. Zaxarov 1875: xv). Very soon it was followed by another Manchu dictionary called Manju nikan ñu adali iioñi bitxe (1690). The first European grammatical description of the Manchu language was written by the French Jesuit Gerbillon in the 1680s, but published under the title Elementa Linguæ Tartaricae in 1696. The first European dictionary of the Manchu language was translated from its Manchu-Chinese original by Amyot and published by Langlès in 1789. In the 19th

5 http://www.muni.cz/phil/research/projects/30385
century these were superseded by the grammars of von Gabelentz (1832) and grammar and dictionary of Zaxarov (1879, 1875). The first information to European scholars about the non-literary Tungusic languages was mediated by Witsen (1692:654). He had recorded the text of the Paternoster in one of the Evenki dialects. He also introduced the term Tungusic. In 1730 Strahlenberg recognized the whole group of the Tungusic languages (cited after the English edition from 1738:52). In Appendix called Harmonia Linguarum he compared c. 25 lexemes in two Evenki and one Even (Lamut) dialects. The relationship of Manchu to Evenki and Even was recognized by Pallas (1787:xxv). The first standard description of Evenki was written by Castrén (1856). In his Vorwort the editor Schiefner presented the regular phonetic correspondences between Evenki and Manchu. In 1896 Grube transcribed and translated the Jurchen-Chinese glossary, illustrating the close relation between Jurchen and Manchu, mentioned already by Klaproth (1823:292-93). The modern transcriptions of Mudrak (1985, 1988) and Kane (1989) demonstrate that Jurchen was an older stage of Manchu. During the 20th century all non-literary Tungusic languages are satisfactorily described. The comparative effort was crowned by publications of “Tungusic comparative phonetics” (Cincius 1949), “Tungusic comparative grammar” (Benzing 1955), and “Comparative dictionary of the Tungusic languages” (Cincius 1975-77). Also valuable were the synthetic studies of Lopatin (1958), Sunik (1959, 1968), Menges (1968a, 1968b, 1978a) and Miller (1994). New syntheses appeared in the latest decade: Janhunen (2005), Malchukov & Whaley (2012), Schwarz & Blažek (2012).

3. The term ‘Altaic’ was introduced by Castrén in 1844, cf. Castrén 1845[1846]:185, and its definition in his dissertation (1850:2): ‘Quod commercium earum animadvertentes pariter atque plures scriptores, soliti item sumus nosmet, has omnes, quarum mentionem fecimus, linguas Finnicas, Samojedicas, Turcicas, Mongolicas atque Tungusicas communii complecti nomine, atque ut esset quo interea uteremur, appellavimus eas linguas Altaicas, cum gentes ipsae ab ultima antiquitate fuerint atque magna ex parte adhuc sint regionum in vicinia montium Altaicorum incolae.’ A more realistic opinion was expressed by Klaproth (1823:295):
‘Die tungusischen, mongolischen und türkischen Dialekte zeigen unter sich einen sonderbaren Zusammenhang.’ Two classics of the Altaic studies, Ramstedt (1952-57) and Poppe (1960, 1965), operate in this scope, although they admitted the Korean affinity too. More detailed studies between ‘Micro-Altaic’ and Korean & Japanese (Lee Ki-Moon, Murayama, Martin, Miller, Street, Vovin) bring new impulses, leading to the newly formulated system of sound rules and proto-Altaic reconstruction (Starostin 1991). It becomes a base for “Etymological Dictionary of Altaic Languages” (EDAL), published by Starostin, Dybo & Mudrak in 2003, where Tungusic plays the central role. If rational criticism of EDAL (e.g. Robbeets 2005) is applied in combination with reinterpretation of some assumed cognates as loans (e.g. Kotwicz 1939; Poppe 1966; Romanova et al. 1975; Menges 1978b; Doerfer 1984, 1985a, 1985b; Rozycki 1994; Vovin 2010), the final result promises a higher quality in Altaic studies in the 21st century.

4. Tasks for the future should follow in the topics which were already elaborated, namely comparative phonology, comparative morphology, comparative lexicology, onomastics, genealogical classification, substratal & adstratal interferences with non-Altaic languages.

4.1. The Tungusic comparative phonology, founded by Cincius (1949) and Benzing (1955), was further developed in partial studies of Doerfer in the field of Tungusic vocalism (1967, 1978b) or Dybo in her partial studies about Tungusic consonantism (1990a, 1990b). The Tungusic protoforms reconstructed in EDAL represent an alternative to the model of reconstruction of Cincius and Benzing, and are also rather different from Doerfer’s reconstructions. It is legitimate to ask for a unification of proto-Tungusic reconstructions.

4.2. After the pioneering studies of Menges (1943, 1952), Cincius (1948) and Benzing (1955) devoted to Tungusic morphology there are new studies about the Tungusic verb (Sunik 1962), noun (Sunik 1982, 1986; Boldyrev 1987) and pronoun (Bulatova 2003). A new synthesis, more diachronic than synchronically descriptive, should be expected.

4.3. The “Comparative dictionary of the Tungusic languages” compiled by Cincius et alii (1975-77) was for its time extraordinarily
important. But now it is already incomplete with respect to the fact that new important lexical materials have been published, e.g. Manchu by Norman (1977, 2013), Lami/Even by Novikova (1980) and Doerfer, Hesche, & Scheinhardt (1980), Nanai by Onenko (1980), Khamnigan Ewenki (Janhunen 1991), Khamnigan and Oluguya Ewenki by Tsumagari (1992), Ewenki (Boldyrev 1994), Ewenki of Manchuria by Doerfer & Knüppel (2004) etc. Several special studies were devoted to detailed analyses of partial semantic fields, e.g. zoological terminology (Novikova 1971a, 1971b, 1972, 1979, 1984), body part terms (Kolesnikova 1972, Dybo 1988; cf. Dybo 1996), designations of metals (Rybatzki 2002; cf. also Cincius & Bugaeva 1979). And a new comparative 200-word-dictionary of the Tungusic languages (Kazama 2003) should also be taken into account. This progress implies the time is already mature for a new comparative-etymological dictionary of the Tungusic languages based on the diachronic approach and operating with convincing reconstructions.

4.4. The Tungusic onomastic research is surprisingly relatively scarce, namely toponyms studied e.g. by Vasilevič (1958), Leončev & Novikova (1989), and ethnonyms analyzed e.g. by Stary (1990), Helinsky & Janhunen (1990), Menges (1995), Burykin (2000). This field expects new and systematic research.

4.5. The questions of classification have been discussed repeatedly already for at least a century. After the models proposed by Schmidt (1915), Cincius (1949) and Benzing (1955) new modifications and alternatives are discussed by Sunik (1959), Vasilevič (1960), Avrorin (1960), Doerfer (1973, 1975, 1978a), Ikegami (1974), Vovin (1993), Grenoble, Li, & Whaley (1999), Georg (2004). It seems, the situation is ready for a new synthesis evaluating all relevant approaches leading to the preceding models of the Tungusic classification and seeking a new solution.

4.6. The mutual interferences with neighboring non-Altaic languages allow us to determine the role of adstratal languages, namely Ugric, studied especially by Futaki (1975), and Samoyedic, studied e.g. by Joki (1976) and Anikin & Xelemskij (2007); further, Nivkh, where both roles, substratum and adstratum, are expectable, cf. Krejnovič (1955) or Panfilov (1973). Only the role of substratum is more probable in the case of
Chukcho-Koryak, whose impact on Tungusic was studied by Burykin (1984); Blažek (1997:58-60; 1999:124-26) and Blažek & Schwarz (2015:12), and Eskimo, proposed as the old predecessor of the North Tungusic populations by Vovin (2015).

Only with satisfactory solutions of these particular problems it is rational to solve the ‘global’ questions of localization of the Tungusic homeland or relation(ship) of Tungusic to other members of the Altaic club.

5. The problem of the Altaic theory consists not only in the relationships between the languages, but perhaps much more in which graphic model is appropriate for illustrating the development of whole language group. The creation of such a model is one of the tasks of our project.

The development of a language family has traditionally been depicted by tree diagrams, which began already in the time of August Schleicher (who was himself very likely inspired by F. L. Čelakovský). However, it is clear that this concept does not describe the convergent processes between languages. Consequently, an alternative known as the wave model was proposed by Schleicher’s successor, Johann Schmidt, although he did not reject the basic idea of a common Indo-European protolanguage. The development of real languages, which are related, should always be depicted by a combination of both the tree and wave models. It is natural to apply the same approach to a language entity whose relationship is still debated, as in the case of the Altaic languages. In principle, there are two scenarios describing the development of languages classified as Altaic.

A. A sole protolanguage disintegrates into several branches. During their development they are in mutual contact. Or to put it more poetically, one trunk spreads out into branches which become intertwined. This was the conception of the founders of comparative Altaic linguistics, Ramstedt and Poppe, and also the authors of EDAL, although with various degrees of emphasis on convergent processes.

B. A group of originally unrelated languages form a Sprachbund, where they are integrated into a secondary unity. Or more poetically, several different roots become intertwined into a new trunk. This idea is more
or less explicitly expressed by Ščerbak, Clauson, Doerfer, Janhunen, Vovin or Georg. But some of them admit at least a partial relationship (Janhunen: Tungusic+Mongolic; Vovin: Korean+Japonic, plus maybe Tungusic).

It may seem that the tree and wave models correspond with these two conceptions respectively and are mutually exclusive. However, experience with other language families demonstrates that these models represent only the same process seen from various perspectives. For a parallel, one might draw a comparison with the particle and wave theories of light. Only quantum theory could unite these seemingly antagonistic conceptions. Our ambition is to find an analogous unified theory in the field of Altaic research.

6. The importance of the Tungusic branch should be seen in its central position among other Altaic branches, which indicates that the probable Tungusic homeland in northern Manchuria could be close to the area where the Altaic languages were formed (cf. Vovin 2013a), independently of whether one prioritizes the divergent or the convergent model.

—The homeland of the Turkic language family was perhaps located in what is today Mongolia. One should note that especially the eastern part of Mongolia had to be more important with respect to better conditions for agriculture and possibilities for economic subsistence.

—The homeland of the modern Mongolic languages may be placed in the tribal territory of Chingiskhan in eastern Mongolia, between the Onon and Kertilen rivers, i.e. in the vicinity of the so-called para-Mongolic populations (Xianbei, Tabgač and Khitan) in southern Manchuria. This means that the Mongolic languages might have originated ultimately in the same area, or in the Khingan mountain range of western Manchuria, whence they moved westwards to Mongolia, gradually replacing the Turkic languages that were spoken there beforehand.

—The Tungusic homeland was probably in the Middle Amur region of northern Manchuria (also Janhunen 1996a).

—The ancestors of the Korean speakers also came from Manchuria before the beginning of the common era (also Vovin 2013b).
Finally, there is no consensus about the homeland of the Japonic languages, but according to the generally-accepted view, the ancestors of the Japonic speakers came from the Korean peninsula and ultimately from the continent, i.e. from the close vicinity of the other Altaic branches. It is probable they were pushed from the peninsula by the ancestors of the Koreans (Vovin).

We hope that our future research, with the help of achievements in toponymic and palaeoclimatic studies, will lead to construction of more complete models and bring about a better understanding of where and how the Altaic branches were connected in the past. The future research of the mutual relationships between the Altaic languages should also be combined with the results of non-linguistic disciplines such as DNA analysis (e.g. Nasidze et al. 2005, Kim et al. 2009, MHGDA 2009, Balanovsky et al. 2015, etc.) and archaeology (e.g. Tumen 2012). Only such interdisciplinary investigation can build a foundation for more reliable conclusions about the relationships within and outside Altaic.
Appendix: Tree-diagrams

A. The most detailed lexicostatistic analysis of the Tungusic languages was published by Alexander Vovin for nine living languages and literary Manchu (1993, 99-113). Vovin’s results may be depicted by the following tree-diagram:

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B. Younger results were obtained by the team of Sergei Starostin (ms. 2004), applying so-called ‘recalibrated’ glottochronology for 7 Tungusic languages, including Jurchen:

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<th>BCE</th>
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proto-
Tungusic

-320

620

Jurchen
liter.
Manchu

1150

Negidal
Ewenki

220

1020

Nanai

Ulchi
Orok

1390

C. George Starostin (2015, 568-69), using his modified ‘recalibrated’ variant of glottochronology, presents a quite realistic model of sequential disintegration of the Altaic languages, where the Tungusic branch occupies the central position.
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