

**Language relationships and comparative reconstruction****I. How comparative reconstruction works**

- (1) When two or more languages are genetically related, we can compare their sounds/words/structures **reconstruct** the characteristics of their common ancestor language
- (2) Polynesian cognate sets (Crowley 1992) — a well-accepted case of related languages

<i>Tongan</i>	<i>Samoa</i>	<i>Rarotongan</i>	<i>Hawai'ian</i>	<i>Māori</i>	<i>gloss</i>	<i>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	ʔaa	‘four’	f:f:ʔ:h:ʔ
feke	feʔe	ʔeke	heʔe	ʔeke	‘octopus’	f:f:ʔ:h:ʔ

**II. How comparative reconstruction doesn't work**

- (3) 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?
- (4) 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'ta	‘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?
  - What about using the *ancestor* of the Semitic languages?
  - Where are the *regular* sound correspondences?

### III. Another example of why determining genetic relationships is hard

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

Greek  $\delta\epsilon\kappa\alpha$  [ðeka]      English *decade* / *ten*      (compare Old Saxon *tehan*)

- Genetically related forms may look *less* alike than loanwords

### IV. Some Korean–Japanese correspondences from Martin (1966)

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

(6) The modern standard languages

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

(7) 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 <sup>(h)</sup> ], [patak]
‘liquor’	[sake]	[suul], [suil]

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

	<i>proto-Korean-Japanese</i>
‘house’	*jipye
‘field’	*pataxye
‘liquor’	*swalǵye

(9) Assessment

- There was later criticism of Martin (1966) — didn’t make use of the OJ vowel/diphthong system...
- But examples like this suggest that comparative reconstruction *may* be successful
- Still, there is a concern — can we rule out the possibility that we are dealing with large numbers of very old loanwords?

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

- (10) (Reasonably) plausible proposals
- (a) Map from S 1990: 95
  - (b) North Asian connections:
    - Japanese and “Ryukyuan” as sister languages
    - Relationship between Japanese/Ryukyuan and Korean?
    - Relationship between J/R/K and the “(Ural)-Altaic” group? *most traditional*
  - (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
- (11) Implausible theories that are not widely accepted (see “Quechua~Semitic” above!)
- (a) Japanese and Indo-European
  - (b) “Japanese and Tamil” — what about *Proto-Dravidian* (ancestor of Tamil)?
  - (c) Random other claims: Basque, Sumerian, ...

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

- (12) 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
- (13) 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

#### VI. Evidence for a connection with Austronesian?

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