

TSEVELIIN SHAGDARSÜRÜNG
(Mongolia)

Problems of methodology of Altaic comparative linguistics*

Abstract

Ancient and modern materials on the languages of the Altaic family are very valuable for the study of the history of Mongolian language because of the generic similarities of these languages to Mongolian. Studies on the evolutionary development of languages belonging to the same family as the Proto-Altaic language i.e. Mongolian, Manchu, Turkic, Korean and Japanese should therefore be compared as they will have a relationship to each other.

In the light of comparative studies of Mongolian language material in the sphere of Altaic linguistics this paper re-examines research methods in this field and considers the conclusions drawn by certain researchers.

*

Judging from the studies on Mongolian language carried out by international Altaic scholars, and other linguistic comparisons, there are many uncertainties in Mongolian linguistics, however, there are many areas of common agreement. Summarizing such uncertainties, there is a basis for saying that they are directly related to the research methodology. Further studies on these uncertainties including contentious opinions and conclusions related to the research methodology reveal that along with limitations of the comparative studies on the research materials, the individuality of researchers is influential.

Because of errors in methodology, the final conclusion of a research work becomes misleading, or it conflicts with reality. This is a common problem in any scientific field. I think that the Anti-Altaic theory in the sphere of Altaic studies is such a situation.

* A paper presented at International Conference "Historic and Cultural Relationship of Turkey and Mongolia" – on the 35-year anniversary of diplomatic relations of Mongolia and Turkey.

In this brief paper, I will not mention the names of scholars negatively and I intend to present my opinions on how and which methodology should be used for studying on research documents and materials in the future. But in the very beginning the earlier articles on this particular subject written by many scholars such as Hungarian professor András Róna-Tas¹.

Besides the research methodology, the individual approach of some researchers that may affect the results of the research work, are briefly touched on.

1. On the Methodology of the Comparative Studies

1.1 The necessity to study whether the meaning of a word was preserved or changed semantically in each language while distinguishing the words, which share the same root or later became loaned words, besides its morphology.

First of all, since ancient and modern materials on the languages in Altaic family are highly valuable for the study of the history of Mongolian language by their generic similarities, all studies, on the evolutionary development in all historic periods, of languages belonging to the same family from the time of the Proto-Altaic Language i.e., Mongolian, Manchu-Tungus, Turkic, Korean and Japanese must have a direct relationship to each other.

Judging from the comparative studies on the materials of Mongolian language in the sphere of Altaic linguistics, it seems at present that it is worth to reexamining some research methods and reviewing the conclusions of some researchers, particularly some Mongolian researchers. In this respect, there is a need to distinguish whether a word is a Common Word preserved from the Common Altaic Language or a Loan Word borrowed relatively later in the development of the vocabulary of the language. Regarding the present situation, scholars of Manchu and Turkic linguistics explain a number of elements in the Mongolian language on the basis of Turkic and Manchu linguistics. There are several reasons for this situation. Firstly they do it because of their lack of knowledge of Mongolian; secondly, because the studies on those languages are comparatively advanced, or because the individual researcher becomes passionate for his subject, in certain cases one's profession; thirdly, because of some political motivation. Also explaining the Mongolian language on the basis of other languages is becoming a fashion among some of our (Mongolian) researchers because of their habit of following the opinions of foreign experts and secondly, to show their own knowledge of foreign languages. Somewhat exaggerating they may soon be no Mongolian word left in the Mongolian vocabulary!

Transformation, assimilation and the disappearance of word meaning are common facts in the evolutionary process of any language. It is very possible that a word which once was a common word in Proto-Altaic language might have been preserved or lost, or else

¹ András Róna-Tas, *On the Meaning of Altaic*, Tractata Altaica, Wiesbaden, 1976, pp. 549-556; Ц. Шагдарсүрэн, *Монгол хэлний хөгжлийн эртний үе, түүнийг судласан тойм*, Эртний монгол хэлний судлал (Монголын судлалын сонгомол өгүүлэлийн эрхи, I хэлмэли: Монгол хэл, II дэвтэр), Ulaanbaatar, 1999, (67-125), pp. 72-73.

semantic or morphological changes of the word have taken place in one of the branch languages of Altaic family. Therefore, one should be very careful, while identifying all words, which have limited usage and unclear meaning in Mongolian, as loan words, merely because of inadequate knowledge or on the basis of current opinion or because a word is well established in another language.

For instance, considering the Mongolian word *čooq-a* in the idiom *tsereg tsuukh* /Mon. *čerig čooq-a*/ as a Manchu borrowing *cooqa* may be correct, but several points should be made clear in connection with this word. It is necessary to reconstruct the possible root of this Manchu word *cooqa* from the junction of morphology and semantics. Let us look at it more carefully. There is, for example, a Khitan word *caowur* 'to battle, fight and combat' transcribed as *ch'ao-wu-erh* in Chinese characters which was found in some Chinese sources. Also words *ča'ur*, *ča'ura-*, *ča'uru'al-* with meaning of *neke-* 'to chase', *dobtula-* 'to attack', *dayira-* 'to attack', *cerigle-* 'to attack', respectively, were found in some Middle Mongolian materials such as the Secret History of the Mongols². There is a passage ...*Basa Qubilai noyan-i Qarluyud-dur čayurayulbai...* in *Altan tobči* "Golden Chronicle", the 17th century Mongolian historical work and a word *čayurayulbai* is explained by the meaning of *ceriglegülbei* which is added between the lines in the manuscript³. (See appendix 1.) Also, in the text of *Hua-I I-iu* we find this word *ča'ura* (~*cawura* by H. Kuribayashi) in the Chinese transcription (see appendix 2)⁴. I think that *ca'ut quri*, the title that was rewarded to Chingis Khan from the Jin Empire of Jurchen has some connection to this word by its origin and meaning as Japanese scholar G.N. Kiyose clearly mentioned a Jurchen word *cauha* with the meanings 'army', 'weapons' and 'war'⁵ in his studies.

Therefore, the afore mentioned words in Mongolian, Manchu and Jurchen share the same origin and root, and it seems that even now these words still preserve their primary meanings. The word *ca'ut quri*, can, even now, be found in the colloquial Ordos as *cirik cur* and in the Buryat dialects as *sereg su:r* with the same meanings of 'army and weapons'⁶. Everybody knows there is also a modern Mongolian phrase *buu tsoor bolokh*. But here attention must be paid to one thing. It is probably not deniable that the Manchu word *cooqa*, which came from the * $\sqrt{\text{čayur}}$ root of Common Altaic Language, was reintroduced into Mongolian in a relatively later period (in the 18th cen.). Therefore, it seems necessary to distinguish the words, which once originated from identical root from those which were reintroduced later.

² Igor de Rachewiltz, *Index to the Secret History of the Mongols* (Uralic and Altaic Series, vol. 121), Bloomington, Indiana, 1972; N. Poppe, *On some Military Terms in the Yuan-ch'ao pi-shih*, Monumenta Serica - Journal of Oriental Studies of the Catholic University of Pekin, Vol. 26, 1967, pp. 506-517 (512); L. Ligeti, *Le Tabghach, un dialecte de la langue Sien-pi*, Mongolian Studies, edited by L. Ligeti, Budapest, 1970, p. 47; Г. Кара, *Книги монгольских кочевников*, Москва 1972, p. 10.

³ Hans-Peter Vietze, Gendeng Lubsang, *Altan Tobči*, Tokyo, 1992 (Cf. 85.b. 2686-2687).

⁴ Hitoshi Kuribayashi, *Word- and Suffix- Index to Hua-yi Yi-yü...*, Tohoku University, Sendai, 2003, pp. 74, 126.

⁵ G.N. Kiyose, *A Study of the Jurchen Language and Script*, Kyoto, 1977, pp. 112, 114.

⁶ N. Poppe, *Ancient Mongolian*, in: *Tractata Altaica*, Wiesbaden, 1976, p. 463.

In this way we recognize and we have doubted that the Mongolian words *alginči(n)*-, *alginčila*- 'to spy' mentioned in the *Secret History of the Mongols* are wrongly considered as Manchu. Also *jad* > *jadaran* the frequently mentioned tribe name which is explained as 'alien' in Mongolian in medieval literary monuments i.e., *The Secret History of the Mongols* and *Altan tobči*, is considered a Turkic word. Thus, there is no way not to have doubts.

In the same way, the model of compound words which are formed by the combination of the synonyms in Mongolian and foreign language are applied to all compound words. If one believes that *jitüge* 'envy' in the compound noun *ataya jitüge* 'envy' is definitely not Mongolian, then where will that lead countless compounds of synonyms and anonyms of genuine Mongolian? Actually, *jitüge* is a Mongolian word which is derived from *ji*- root which has the meaning of 'two'. There are, even now, some scholars who consider numerous Mongolian words with deverbal noun suffixes *-γ/-g* such as *sura*- *suray*, *öči*- *öčig* as Turkic borrowings. Words, which are found in Mongolian vocabulary, either practically in use or definitely recorded in its literary monuments, should not be ascribed to other languages as mentioned previously. Such common words are not rare in Mongolian, Turkic and Manchu-Tungus languages. For example, the verb *jasa*- 'to govern' in the idiom *ulus geri jasaqu* can be found in Jurchen; *qala*- 'to change' or 'to replace' in a wrestling term *bariča qalaqu* 'change one's grip' and in a military term *qaruyul qalaqu* 'replace a guard' has the same meaning as 'change' in Jurchen, Manchu, Negidal and Udehe languages⁷. These examples are witnesses that these words were common words in Mongolian and Manchu-Tungus, and they are not borrowings in Mongolian from Jurchen or Manchu-Tungus. Also it can be mentioned that some researchers consider a word *baitariy* 'Baidrag' (a place name) as derived from Turkic *bai tariğ*. If one considers this word having such a morphological structure, then modern Turkic root *bai* still preserves its active form in *bayan* 'rich', *bayalıg* 'riches, wealth', *bayaji*- 'to grow rich' in Mongolian. Regarding the word *tariy*, a planting field is called *tariy* in Western Mongolia. Acad. B. Rinchen wrote an article in which this word corresponded with the Russian word *none* 'field'.

However these points do not exclude the possibility of cross influences between Altaic languages in later periods and it is necessary to investigate each kind of influences separately. Hungarian scholar András Róna-Tas mentioned that the similarities in the Altaic languages have six different reasons such as area contacts, loan relations, typologically common features, ad stratum influence, identical origin and convergent development⁸. As to my own opinion, I agree with some of above-mentioned explanations, but I am sure more explanations could be added. However, I repeat my view, that we should not ignore the necessity to distinguish between the different explanations.

1.2. The Necessity to investigate the word in all possible related spheres including not only its present primary meaning, but also its secondary and forgotten meanings.

⁷ N. Poppe, *Jurchen and Mongolian*, in *Studies on Mongolia (Proceedings of the North American Conference on Mongolian Studies, 1978)* editor H.G. Schwarz, Western Washington University, 1979, pp. 30, 32.

⁸ András Róna-Tas, *On the Meaning of „Altaic”*, *Tractata Altaica*, Wiesbaden, 1976, pp. 549–556.

The phenomenon that word meaning changes and becomes distant from its original meaning is common in generic languages, which have the same origin, but which developed as different branches of languages in the course of time. Therefore, there are some cases in which the question of the word origin becomes doubtful. For instance, the Mongolian word *ciki* 'ear' and the words *kulak*, *gulak*, *kolak*, *golak* 'ear' in Turkic languages are morphologically quite different. But there are some Mongolian words such as *quliki* or *quluki* 'ear-wax' *qulmayi/lya/qu* 'to lay the ears back' and *quluyar* 'short-eared' that directly relate to the Mongolian word *ciki* that has some relations with its Turkic counterpart. The word *quluyar* in idioms such as *quluyar sir-a* 'the name of marmot' and *naγad qoyar quluyar cini yum sonosday yum uu?* 'Can your two ears listen?' corresponds with the meaning of *ciki*. There is also a possibility that Mongolian *qana-* 'to bleed' in *cisu qanaqu* 'to pierce (avein) so as to draw blood, the bloodletting' has the same root as Turkic *kan* 'blood'.

Many more such examples could be presented here and basically, it can be said that the relation to the meaning is still preserved in all these samples however, during their evolution they differentiated from the original meaning of their identical root.

1.3. Necessity to consider not only the present form of the words, but also all the historically transferred forms of them and in some cases, their forms reconstructed by linguistic methods.

In this regard, the "traditional" comparative method, customary in Altaic linguistics, was taken as a basis in above two cases. But it should be taken into consideration that there is an opinion that a different comparative method should be taken instead of that "traditional" comparative method⁹. So what is the background for this opinion? The traditional comparative method is criticized because the hypothetical primitive language (Mong. *bodul-un kele*, *Vorsprache* / *Ursprache*) of "idea"¹⁰ reconstructed in abstract way is developed in the mind and then its evolutionary paths are branched from itself. Therefore, the evolution of the generic languages in the same family is considered as not branched from each other, but as developed independently at the same time. However, it is important to reveal the comparatively independent constant correspondences of these languages, though, these independent languages are morphologically not similar. For example:

Mon. *nidiin* < PM. **nindun*; Evenk. *nundun*¹¹, Kor. *nun* 'eye'.

Mon. *möndür* < PM. **möndüri*, Kor. *muri* 'hail'.

⁹ Denis Sinor, *Observations on a new comparative Altaic Phonology*, "Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies", Tom. 26, London, 1963, pp. 133–144; Denis Sinor, *The Present State of Uralic Comparative Studies, Proceedings of International Symposium commemorating the 30th Anniversary of Korean liberation*, National Academy of Sciences, Republic of Korea, Seoul, 1975, pp. 117–146.

¹⁰ Санаандаа ургуулан бодож, буй болгосон зүйл дээр "хийсвэр" гэсэн утгаар "бодолын..." гэж хэлдэг ламжлал монголчуудын дунд өргөн байсан билээ. Ялангуяа аймаг, хошуу, шавийн хүрээнд алба татвар оноох зэрэгт энэ нэр томъёог болзмол жишиг болгож өргөн хэрэглэдэг байсныг Я. Цэвэл Чин сүзэгт Номун хан хутагтын шавь ("Түүхийн судлал" 25-р боть, Улаанбаатар, 1990, 123–152-р тал) гэдэг өгүүлэлдээ нь буй.

¹¹ Nicolaus Poppe, *Vergleichende Grammatik der Altaischen Sprachen*, Teil 1, *Vergleichende Lautlehre*, Wiesbaden, 1960, p. 39.

From the above example, together with reconstructing the “idea” form of Proto Altaic or Proto Mongolian (**nundun*–**nindun*, **monduri* etc.) one may trace at the same time the inner law, which describes how one of the two consonants on the junction of two syllables is assimilated in the branch languages of the same family. It seems that it is possible to say that the Mongolian *-d*, Evenki *-nd* and Korean *(-Ø)* corresponded to each other. But the transformation of the word *möndür*, which has the same structure with the *nidün*, is not as above. Therefore, some explanations are required in each case. Also there are many more examples such as Mon. *nutug* < AM. *nuntug* (Cf. MSH), which have a similar structure.

It is also necessary to pay attention to the phonetic harmony of the languages in Altaic family. It is necessary to consider carefully the compatibility of the sound shift, because following correspondences also occur along with morphological correspondences:

Mon. *r* ~ Tur. *z*; (therefore Mon. *-msar* / *mser* – Tur. *-msiz* / *msiz*)

Mon. *kü* / *gü* – Tur. *oq* – *ök* / *uq* – *ük* ¹².

Recently scholars such as S.A. Starostin¹³ have paid considerable attention to such correspondences in the Common Altaic languages.

1.4. The necessity of historical comparative studies in the broad field of Altaic languages in order to restore the original meaning of words and phrases, which meanings are almost forgotten, but are preserved in colloquial Mongolian and folk literatures such as proverbs (e.g., *dur-a-bar-ıyan durgıju dumda čimüge-ber-ıyen jirgekü* and *gere metü gerel-tei, tuyurya metü tuyaya-tai*¹⁴ etc.), lyrics of folk songs, folk-tales, epic and shamanic poems.

In this regard, let us take following two words *durayıju* and *jiregekü* in the proverb *dur-a-bar-ıyan durgıju dumda čimüge-ber-ıyen jirgekü* as an example.

Judging from the results of research on Ancient Mongolian, it is described that [*j + i*] structure of Mongolian is developed from [*d + i*] of Proto-Mongolian Language¹⁵. For instance:

PM. [*d + i*] > AM. [*j + i*]: Mon. *gejige* ‘pigtail’ < PM. **gedige*

Mon. *ajıl* ‘work’ < PM. **adıl*

Mon. *gujege* ‘belly’ < **güjige* < PM. **güdige*

Mon. *medege* ‘news’ < PM. **mejige*

(Man. *mejige*; Jur. *medige*;)

Mon. *jırya* ‘to enjoy’ < PM. **dırya*

Notice that this word occurs in the above-mentioned proverb *dur-a-bar-ıyan durgıju dumda čimüge-ber-ıyen jirgekü*!

¹² Marian Lewicki, *Turcica et Mongolica*, Kraków, 1949, pp. 255, 259.

¹³ С.А. Старостин, *Алтайская проблема и происхождение японского языка*, Москва, 1991.

¹⁴ Ц. Шагдарсүрэн, *Бөөгийн зохил болог туулийн хэлний утга судалын зарим асуудалд*, Mongolian Studies (The Korean Association for Mongol Studies), N. 10(2000), Seoul, 2001, pp. 117–127.

¹⁵ N. Poppe, *Ancient Mongolian, Tractata Altaica*, Wiesbaden, 1976, p. 468; Ц. Шагдарсүрэн, *Монгол хэлний хөгжлийн эртний үе, түүнийг судласан тойм*, Эртний монгол хэлний судлал (Монголын судлалын сонгомол өгүүлэлийн эрхи, I хэлмэли: Монгол хэл, II дэвтэр), Улаанбаатар, 1999, pp. 105–106.

Mon. *durgi* 'enjoy' < **durgi*- < PM. **dirya*

(Jur. *dirgala*- 'to enjoy')

Modern Mongolian word *jiryal* 'happiness' is found in the form of *dirgala* / *dzirgala* in a literary monument of Jurchen Little Script and this is one of over thirty Mongolian loan words in this monument¹⁶.

These evidences not only reveal that the form of the words *jirya*-, *durgi*-, *jirge*- in the above examples originally derived from [d + i] structure of Proto-Mongolian, it also shows that these words had a very similar meaning.

Thus, although the problems of the research methodology are here divided into four different parts to make them more understandable, they should be studied as a whole on each level because these parts are inseparable from each other.

2. On the Individual Researcher

2.1. Everybody has a tendency to become passionate towards one's own subject, but for scholarly purposes one should control such emotions and study the real facts carefully.

2.2. One should separate the research work from one's personal views. For example avoid explaining any language on the basis of a more studied language without detailed study on the less-studied language especially, if studies on one of the languages involved in this comparison are much more advanced.

In studying the historical development of the Altaic languages a complete comparative study is important at all levels, not only research on the Mongolian language. It is also time to use more effective new methods when researching Altaic comparative linguistics because from the beginning research on the development of the Mongolian language of the ancient period has not been adequate.

Similarly research on the etymology and semantics of Mongolian is backward because of the lack of comparative studies on Mongolian as compared to other Altaic languages.

Recently, however, scholars such as A.A. Б у р ы к и н have paid considerable attention to Mongolian language materials in the Altaic Comparative Linguistics¹⁷.

¹⁶ А.А. Бурыкин, *Монгольская лексика в текстах-образцах малого чжурчжэньского письма, Проблемы истории и культуры кочевых цивилизации Центральной Азии. Языки, фольклор, литература*, Улан-Удэ, 2000, pp. 52–55.

¹⁷ А.А. Бурыкин, *Роль монгольских языков для алтаистических исследований*, *Altaica*, Vol. II, Улаанбаатар, 2002, pp. 25–44.

3 : 1 9 b

3 : 1 9 a

札兒里茂迭木者。 聖音如也者					曩加思千戶狀	敏千篋迭古曩加思谷壇。 敏千篋迭古曩加思。 你多泥想火刺恢突兒。	哈兒班撒刺因。 哈兒班塔奔納。 桃源圖兒古魯阿速。	牙不罕扯裡元慢哈答哈刺黑三。 敏千篋迭古曩加思。	抹裡檀扯裡元慢哈答哈刺黑三。 敏千篋迭古曩加思。
------------------------------	--	--	--	--	---------------	---	--	--	--

Appendix 2. H. Kuribayashi, *Word- and Suffix-Index to Hua-yi Yi-Yü*,
Sendai, 2003, p. 111. Cf. (3:19b. 2:) čawura=qui- tur