CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

SHARED VERB MORPHOLOGY IN THE TRANSEURASIAN LANGUAGES: COPY OR COGNATE?

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The genealogical relationship of the Japonic, Koreanic, Tungusic, Mongolic and Turkic languages, here referred to as “Transeurasian”, is among the most disputed issues of historical comparative linguistics. The major objections raised against the relatedness of these languages are, first, that they do not have enough bound morphology in common, and, second, that all similarities can be attributed to code-copying. Using the traditional comparative method as a basic tool, both objections are examined in this paper. Comparing copying patterns with genealogical patterns in a cross-linguistic sample of languages, twelve guidelines for the distinction between the effects of contact and inheritance in shared morphology are developed. Applying these criteria to the verb morphology shared by the Transeurasian languages, it is argued that the common morphology can best be accounted for by inheritance from a common ancestor.

1 INTRODUCTION

The genealogical relationship of the Transeurasian languages is among the most disputed classifications of historical comparative linguistics. Rather than using the traditional term “Altaic”, the term “Transeurasian” is proposed in reference to a large group of geographically adjacent languages that share a significant number of linguistic properties and include at most five linguistic families: Japonic, Koreanic, Tungusic, Mongolic and Turkic. The major objections raised against the overall genealogical relatedness of these languages are first, that they have some but not enough bound morphology in common, and second, that all similarities can be attributed to code-copying. In this chapter both objections will be examined.

On the basis of a comparison between copying patterns and genealogical patterns in a cross-linguistic sample of languages, the first part of this chapter develops twelve guidelines that help to distinguish between
the effects of contact and those of inheritance in shared morphology in general. In the second part these guidelines will be applied to the verb morphology shared by the Transeurasian languages. By way of conclusion, an answer will be provided to the question whether the shared verb morphology in the Transeurasian languages can best be accounted for by contact or by inheritance.

2 Guidelines for the Distinction between Copies and Cognates

Contrasting case studies of contact-induced morphology—including mixed languages—with cases of inherited morphology leads to the following guidelines. The guidelines one to six are indications against inheritance, while the guidelines seven to twelve increase the probability of a genealogical explanation.

2.1 Attachment of Shared Morphemes: To Shared Roots Only vs. Also to Unrelatable Roots

An indication of a copy is a restriction of shared morphemes to shared roots only. Agia Varvara Romani, a Romani dialect spoken in a suburb of Athens, for instance, copied the Turkish nonfocal present paradigm, but all copied morphemes are hosted by verbs copied from Turkish (Igla 1996, 214–216; Friedman 2009, 112). Bakker and Hekking (this volume, 199–202) find that contact with Spanish has substantially affected the morphology of three Amerindian languages, Quechua, Guarani and Otomi, but there are hardly any cases where the copied derivational or inflectional markers are found on native lexical entities; they are mainly restricted to nouns, verbs and adjectives copied from Spanish. As far as contact between Hittite and Luvian, the Indo-European languages of Anatolia, is concerned, Folke Josephson (this volume, 340–341) remarks that the evidence for copied bound morphology is restricted to some case endings and nominal derivational suffixes that were copied into Hittite only when attached to Luvian host lexemes. Kossmann (2010) argues that the borrowing of morphological paradigms together with foreign lexicon is a well-attested phenomenon in the languages of the world. Therefore, only shared affixes that can attach to native, unrelatable roots will be taken into account as genealogical evidence.