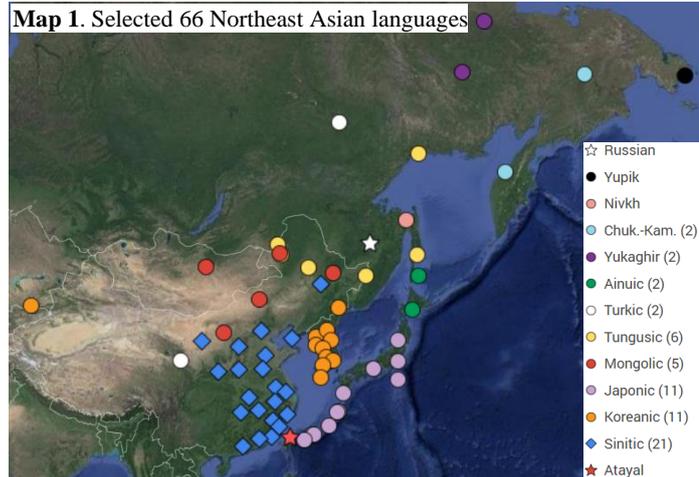


(De-)Altaicisation as convergence and divergence between Japonic and Koreanic languages

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Following an initiative to include Japanese and Korean into the Altaic macro-family by Philipp von Siebold (1832) and a systematic linguistic-oriented investigation in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries by Gustav John Ramstedt (1952, 1957, 1966), the question whether the Altaic macro-family even exists is still unanswered (see the genealogical view à Miller 1971; Menges 1984; Robbeets 2005 vs. the areal-typological view à Janhunen 2007; Vovin 2009). However, the existence of a common ancestor between Japanese and Korean has recently gained more supporting linguistic evidence (e.g., Whitman 1985, 2012; Francis-Ratte 2016). But instead of revisiting their origin, the present study devotes attention to typological features that distinguish Japonic and Koreanic languages from the other Altaic languages both on the synchronic and diachronic levels by taking into account also historical languages.



To emphasise family-internal diversity, the present study does not compare standard written languages as in most previous studies (e.g., Janhunen 1999, Robbeets 2017). Instead, this typological comparison takes into account various Japonic and Koreanic spoken varieties with the hypothesis that they show signs of mutual convergence, which is at the same time divergence from other Altaic languages. The data include 11 Japonic (5 Japanese and 6 Ryukyuan) and 11 Koreanic varieties, which are placed in comparison to 44 other languages spoken in the Northeast Asian neighbourhood such as Sinitic, Mongolic, Tungusic, Turkic, Ainuic, Yukaghir and Chukotko-Kamchatkan languages as well as Russian, Yupik, Nivkh and Atayal (see Map 1). To supplement a diachronic aspect, the comparison also includes 12 historical languages: Old and Middle Japanese, Old and Middle Korean, Old and Middle Chinese, Ruan Ruan (Mongolic), Old and Middle Mongol, Jurchen as well as Old Turkic and Chagatai.

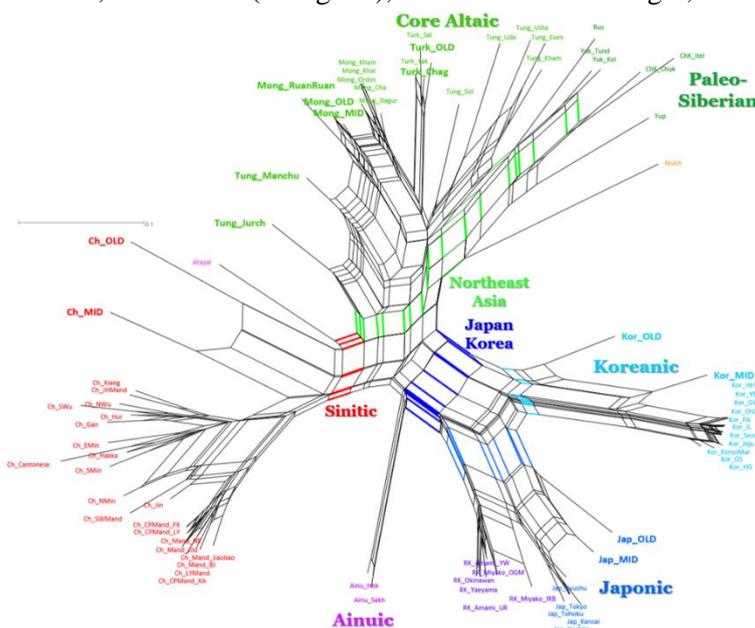


Figure 1. Typological distance between Northeast Asian languages

By using a computational-aided quantitative method, the present study investigates 40 typological features in all areas (phonology, lexical semantics, morphosyntax and grammaticalisation paths) and measures overall distance between typological profiles of individual languages (see Figure 1). Then, the investigation goes into details with specific features that distinguish Japonic and Koreanic from other Altaic languages while also taking earlier language forms into account.

The quantitative method reveals several interesting points regarding the (de-)Altaicisation of Japonic and

Koreanic languages. First of all, Old Japanese and Korean were typologically not so close to the core Altaic languages, neither modern nor the ancient Turkic, Mongolic and Tungusic languages (see also Vovin 2015). Features that clearly distinguish Japonic and Koreanic languages from the core Altaic languages are, e.g., presence of (i) contrastive level tones (high vs. low), (iii) overt subject marking on noun (nominative case), (iv) honorific verbal morpheme (Japanese *-(r)are-*, Southern Ryukyuan *-oor-*, Korean *-si-*), (v) predicative possession with topic possessor, while (vi) lacking distinction between inclusive and exclusive 1PL pronouns (cf. Robbeets 2017: 589, 594, 602). Moreover, the uses of numeral classifiers are functionally robust in Japonic and Koreanic languages (see also Robbeets 2017: 597-598), while occurring only sporadically in several heavily Sinicised Altaic languages such as in Salar, a Turkic language spoken in Western China (Hahn 1999: 399). Some of these features can be regarded as retention of the erstwhile situation that have endured the contacts with Altaic languages later on.

Some of the aforementioned features can also be considered as more recent areal convergence, e.g., lack of distinction between liquids /r/ and /l/ in East Asia (Vovin 2019). Nevertheless, many features, such as predicative possession with topic possessor, can be subject to influence from Sinitic languages, i.e. Sinicisation, as written Chinese has been a prestige language throughout the attested history of Japanese and Korean. The correlation with non-Sinitic neighbouring languages, especially Ainuic and Nivkh that became pre-Sinitic substrates in Japanese and Korean, is also worth mentioning. For instance, Koreanic languages and Nivkh exclusively share the use of locative-ablative markers (Korean *-eyse*, Nivkh *-(u)x* ‘from’ = ‘in’). In total, Japonic languages share as many as 20/40 features with Ainuic languages, while Koreanic languages as many as 16/40 features with Nivkh, both of which might point to pre-historic contacts during the Late Jōmon period (ca. 1500 – 900/300 BC) and Buyeo period (ca. the 2nd century BC – 346 AD), respectively, at the earliest or to later recorded historical encounters.

Individually, Japonic languages possess such non-Altaic features like lack of vowel harmony and final stop consonants, neutralisation of final nasal consonant *-N*, split encoding of nominal predication *-da/Ø* ‘to be something’ and *ir-/ar-/ur-* locational predication ‘to be somewhere.’ Likewise, such independently developed non-Altaic features in Koreanic languages are, e.g., three series of stop initials *k-kh-kk* (cf. two-ways system *k-g/kh* in most Altaic languages), lack of independent demonstrative pronoun (mainly occurring as attribute in a noun phrase, *ku kes* ‘that (thing)’ but rarely ***ku* ‘that’ alone) and presence of preverbal negative morpheme *an* ‘not.’ Interestingly, the difference between plain negative verb *anh-* ‘not (to do)’ and existential negative verb *eps-* ‘not (to exist)’ is such a feature that Koreanic shares with Ryukyuan and not with Japanese. Even more interesting are the contrastive level tones, which are still actively present in most modern Japonic languages, but only preserved in the Koreanic varieties along the eastern coastline, i.e. Hamgyeong, Gangwon and Gyeongsang (Yeon 2012: 169-170). Whether this is due to preservation-favouring force from Japonic languages across the sea still remains unclear and discovering more of such features would definitely provide better insights.

Despite the Japonic and Koreanic languages being conventionally classified as languages of the Altaic typology (e.g., Janhunen 2007, 2014; Tranter 2012a), these languages, both today and in the past, still differ from the core Altaic languages in many grammatical aspects (see also Vovin 2015). Given also that there is no strong proof of common Proto-Altaic lexical items nor solid regular sound correspondences (à Janhunen 2010: 296, cf. Robbeets 2017) but rather borrowings between languages of the Altaic typology, our results speak in favour of a Paleo-Asiatic origin of the Japonic and Koreanic languages (à Janhunen 2010; Vovin 2015). However, later through intense language contacts with a number of neighbouring languages, Japanese and Koreanic languages became Altaicised and then de-Altaicised again (à Janhunen 1999, cf. Robbeets 2017: 616), in a similar fashion to their neighbours in the north, the Ainuic and Amuric languages (Janhunen 2009: 62, 2016; Gruzdeva 2018). This recent de-Altaicisation can partially be regarded as convergence between the Japanese and Koreanic languages that took off by estimate during the 4th century on the Korean Peninsula, at the latest, and continued across the East Sea up till today (à Janhunen 2010: 290; Vovin 2010: 239-240).

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