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A Comparative Study of Two Altaic Languages: Uzbek and Korean

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I. Preface

The Altaic language family consisting of Turkic, Mongol, Manchuria-Tungus, and Korean, is widely used in the Eurasian area including the Balkans, Asia Minor, Southwest Asia, the Volga region, Central Asia, Southern Siberia, Northeast Siberia, Mongolia, Manchuria, the Korean Peninsula, and Japan. The Turkic language, a group within the Altaic language family, is spoken by the Turkic people in the Eurasian Continent. The languages included in this group are Turkish, Azeri, Turkmen, Uyghur, Kazak, Kyrgyz, Chubashi, Bashkort, Tatar, Altai, Hakas, Yakutu, and many more. Geographically, the Turkic language is the most widespread among the Altaic family languages, and also has the largest number of speakers and the longest history in the family. This language is spoken by over 24 Turkic people groups and 160 million people in the regions that cover the massive inland Asia, stretching from Yakutu of East Siberia to Gagauz of Eastern Europe. At present, the Turkic languages are the official languages for about 12 independent countries and autonomous regions. From the time of the Dolguol Empire to the Chakatai, Keupchak, and finally to the Osman Empire, the Turkic languages have gone through great changes and adaptation over a long period of time.

The comparative study of Korean and the Altaic languages of Northern Central Asia was first undertaken by

Leon de Rosny in 1864¹⁾, and was later continued by scholars such as G. Ramstedt²⁾, N. Poppe³⁾, P. Aalto⁴⁾, Bang-Han Kim⁵⁾, Ki-Moon Lee⁶⁾, Bek-In Seong⁷⁾. In the 1980's, a new group of scholars emerged in this field; their names include Dong-So Kim⁸⁾, Heong-Su Kim⁹⁾, and Han-Woo Choi¹⁰⁾. However, over a hundred years of research and study have not produced any substantial results. This could be attributed to a very small number of scholars in this field. This paper will examine the similarities between Korean and Uzbek in order to prove the close relationship between the two languages and further inform people about the largely unknown Uzbek language.

II. Uzbek Language

The Uzbeks are people of mixed blood whose ancestry includes the Turkics, Mongols and Iranians. Currently, most Uzbeks reside in Central Asia. Along with the Uygur language spoken by Uygurs in the Xin-jiang region of China, Uzbek belongs to the Eastern Turkic language group. Uzbek derived its origin from Karulluk, an ancient Turkic language, and the medieval Chakatai Language. Uzbek can be classified into a

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number of different dialects. The modern standard Uzbek is based on a dialect used in the southeastern region of modern-day Uzbekistan. Much of its vocabulary consists of words that have been borrowed from the Arabic, Persian, and Russian languages. Uzbek is the native language of about 22 million ethnic Uzbek people living in the Central Asian countries such as Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and also in Afghanistan and China. The Uzbek written language uses the Iranian-based Tashkent dialect for phonetics and the Ferghana dialect for its grammar and vocabulary. From the time of the Chakatai Empire, the first Islamic Turkic Empire, until 1920, the Arabic characters were utilized. The Latin alphabet was used for a brief period of time before the Soviet Union took over Central Asia. After the annexation to the Soviet Union, the Cyrillic letters were adopted as the official alphabet in 1940. However, after Uzbek was adopted as the official language in 1989, the Latin alphabet was restored as the official alphabet in 1995.

Early countries in the Korean peninsula were formed through alliances between the Altaic tribes on the peninsula. These countries belonged to the Altaic culture, which had grown separately and distinctively from Chinese culture. However, after the 7th century, Korean culture quickly fell under the Chinese influence. For that reason, Korean culture was regarded as a Chinese sub-culture. Also, the fact that a large portion of Korean vocabulary was also borrowed from China has contributed to this notion.

A high percentage of foreign words are found in Uzbek and Korean - more than 60% in both languages - limits our ability to study the historical relationship between these two languages. Nonetheless, many similar characteristics can be found in the phonetics, meaning, and structure of the languages.

III. Uzbek, as a Turkic language, and Korean

Although Uzbek seems quite different from Korean, it shares many similar characteristics with Korean in grammar, form, and meaning. Examples are as follows:

A. Suffixes for negative imperative in a verb

	Uzbek	//	Korean
	Verb stem + ma	//	Korean verb stem (+ji) + ma
Do not go:	Borma	//	Gaj ima
Do not give:	Berma	//	Jooj ima
Do not do:	Yozma	//	Haj ima
Do not eat:	Yema	//	Mukj ima

B. Postpositions

1) Postpositions of Possession

	Uzbek	//	Korean
	None	//	None
Uzbek National History:	Uzbek xalqi tarixi	//	Uzbek minjokyuksa
Uzbek Literature:	Uzbek adaviyoti	//	Uzbek moonhak
Asian Countries:	Osiyo mamlakatlari	//	Asia gookgadl

2) Postpositions for Location: at

	Uzbek	//	Korean
	Da	//	Ta
One of the postpositions for location in the ancient Turkic Language was {+DA}. When preceded by /l/, /n/, /r/, the postposition is pronounced as {+TA}. In modern Uzbek, the postposition {+DA} is used.			

Uzbek	//	Korean
Uy da	//	Jipesu at home
Yo' lda	//	Gilesu on road
Universitet da	//	Daehakgyoesu at university

According to Menges (1968:110), location nouns in the Turkic language such as ost, ust, past were ancient forms of

the postpositional words. Korean uses a dependent noun “*te*” to indicate location. This also appears in an interrogative ote.

Postposition for Location: from...to

Uzbek // Korean

gacha // **gaji (kaji)** to (+place)

Seouldan Toshkent**gacha** // Seoulesu Tashkent**gaji**

(From Seoul to Tashkent)

Toshkentdan Seoul**gacha** // Tashkentesu Seoul**gaji**

(From Tashkent to Seoul)

Siz bilan maktab**gacha** bormoqchiman //

dangshingua hamgye hakgyo**gaji** gagosipseupnida

(I want to go to school with you.)

C. Characteristics of an adjective derived from a noun using an adjectival affix

In Uzbek, many adjectives are derived from nouns by adding an affix to them. Uzbek has various forms of adjectival affixes (-li, ba-, bo-, be-, -gi/-ki/, -ee/-bee, chan, chil). The function and role of an affix may be different for different nouns and, in some cases, the affix cannot be attached to certain nouns at all. The process for derivation of adjectives using affixes is very complicated. Korean also has a similar word-forming method in which an affix is attached to an abstract noun to create an adjective.

Uzbek;

Dard (noun) disease, pain, ache

-li; dardli (dard + li)/ ill, painful, aching

-chil; dardchil (dard + chil)/ having little

resistance to disease, prone to illness

Korean;

Jihye (noun) wisdom

-ropda; Jihyeropda/ wise

Soochi (noun) shame

-sropda; Soochisropda/ shameful

D. Noun + Suffix (-chi)

Uzbek	//	Korean
Noun + chi	//	Noun + chi

In Uzbek, the suffix -chi adds more meaning to or modifies the noun, adjective, or verb to which it is attached. Combined with common nouns, it creates words of vocation and skill.

Tilchi	linguist
Ovchi	hunter
Paxtachi	cotton grower

In Korean, the suffix -chi is generally attached to the words that describe parts of body or organs to create new meaning.

Noonchi: noon (eye) + chi / ability to sense one's mind or inclination.

Balchi: bal (foot) + chi/ the area where a person's feet lies when he sleeps.

Palkoomchi - an elbow

IV. Comparative Study

A. Homonyms

Oppa: a title that a person uses to call or refers to an older person.

Pool: money, currency

Chama: almost, approximately

B. Examples from the Ancient Turkic Language

- **Tonga**: strong rope (an ancient Turkic title for a government official): a word that means thick and strong rope and it only appears in "Tongacur". A noun tonga was a widely used word in the ancient and the medieval time.

Uzbek **Tori**: hero (a title for an official)

Korean **Gomtori**, **Su-e-tori** : male names

Uzbek **To'r**: seat of honor

<i>Uzbek</i>	Bo'ri: a wolf
<i>Korean</i>	Wori: a wolf in Kyung Sang dialect
<i>Uzbek</i>	Qo'y: a lamb
<i>Korean</i>	Koi: a title for king of Baekjae Kingdom in the 6th century in Korea, which means lamb
<i>Uzbek</i>	Cho'lpon: Venus(planet)
<i>Korean</i>	Cho'lpon: Capital for an ancient country
<i>Uzbek</i>	Ordek: (Ori + dek) a duck
<i>Korean</i>	Ori: a duck

C. The Modern Languages

<i>Uzbek</i>	<i>Korean</i>	
Anqov	Anikopda	To be sickened and nauseated from disgust
Ey	Ey	Hey (when calling someone)
Suv	Soo	Water
Baxshi	Baxsoo	Shaman or a person with deep knowledge and insight in the spiritual world.
Chee	Chee (Gomchee, Chamchee, Danpoongchee)	A general name for edible wild plants
Chindan	Chindam	A truthful talk
Kamok	Kamok	Prison
Chok	Chok	1)Urgent 2)To urge a person to do 3)To hurry, fast
Qaychi	Qay	scissors
		(qaychil cutting with scissors; scissoring)

V. Conclusion

Turkic people were nomads whose life style was characterized by their constant tribal migration in the Eurasian Continent. The group movements and migrations effectively mixed one group with other homogenous or heterogeneous groups and, in doing so, they formed another

unique Turkic language or dialect. One of the most notable examples is the development of the medieval Turkic languages that used Iranian and Arabic as its base language.

The formation and development of the Turkic languages reflects the political outlook and history of Turkic peoples and empires in the Eurasian Continent. The languages have been greatly affected by incessant state of war among these Turkic tribes. In order to increase their chances of survival and to gain strategic advantages, these tribes frequently formed or broke off alliances with others regardless of the language or cultural characteristic of the other party.

Turkic empires such as Hun, Dolguol, Chakatai, Keupchacai, Celchuk were founded on inter-tribal coalitions. Continuous formations and break-ups of the empires have either converged or diversified languages and, as a result, new forms of Turkic languages have emerged. The westward migration of Turkic people, in particular, had a profound effect on the development of the medieval Turkic language, which succeeded the Karahan Turkic language. Turkic people encountered the Iranians and the Arabs during their movement and were later Islamized. Consequently, the phonetics, grammar structures, and vocabulary of the language were changed. While the Turkic language was greatly influenced by other languages, the influence of the Turkic language on other languages should not be overlooked.

Despite all the changes in the Turkic languages, Uzbek, a Turkic language, still shares many common characteristics with Korean, and thus, it is not too difficult to prove the kinship relation between them. Clearly, many contrasting characteristics also exist between Korean, an early settler's language, and Uzbek, a nomadic language. While Korean has kept most of its essential Altaic elements intact, Altaic languages of the nomadic people in the Eurasian Continent - Turkic, Mongol, and Uzbek which is discussed in this paper - have been greatly altered. Even though some of the Altaic

elements were lost or diluted in these languages, many common characteristics shared by the Altaic language family can be traced and identified. For this reason, further studies on this topic are highly desirable and encouraged.

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