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A Comparative Study on Tamil and Korean Language & Customs: the Similarity and its Origin

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Abstract - This comparative study examines the linguistic and cultural similarities between Tamil and Korean languages, challenging the predominant theory that associates Korean with the Altaic language family. Through systematic analysis of vocabulary, grammatical structures, and cultural practices, this research identifies approximately 500 words with identical pronunciation and meaning between Tamil and Korean, supporting the theory of a Dravidian connection to Korean origins. The study demonstrates that both languages share the subject-object-verb (SOV) sentence structure and employ postpositions rather than prepositions, distinguishing them from Indo-European languages. Beyond linguistic similarities, the research reveals identical customs between Tamil and Korean cultures, particularly in infant care practices and baby sign language, including seven specific body signs (Dhori Dhori, Cha Cha Ko, Konju Konju, Jam Jam, Abuba, Kkakkung, and Maemmae) that are remarkably similar in both cultures. These findings suggest a deeper historical connection between Tamil and Korean peoples than previously acknowledged in mainstream linguistic scholarship, providing evidence that Korean may have stronger ties to Dravidian languages than to the traditionally accepted Altaic family.

Keywords: Tamil-Korean linguistics, Dravidian Language Family, Comparative linguistics, Language origins, Cultural similarities, Infant customs, Subject-Object-Verb structure, Postposition grammar, Vocabulary comparison, East Asian linguistics, Korean etymology, Cross-cultural studies.

I. Linguistic affiliation between Tamil and Korean

Many theories have been proposed to explain the origin of the Korean language. The most prominent of these link Korean to the Altaic languages of central and east Asia, a family that includes Turkish, Mongolian, and Japanese. Although not definitively proven, this affiliation is accepted by most Korean linguists and deemed likely by Western linguists as well.

However, actually there are very few words which have the same pronunciation and the same meaning between Korean and each of the Altaic languages.

The competing theory associates Korean with the Dravidian languages, notably Tamil which has many similar words to Korean, both as agglutinative language.

This has been sustained by some scholars -- Homer B. Hulbert with <A Comparative Grammar of the Korean Language and the Dravidian of Languages of India>(Seoul, 1905) , Morgan E. Clippinger with <Korean and Dravidian: Lexical Evidence for an Old Theory> (Korean Studies No.8 : p.1-57, 1984).and Dr. Kang Kil-Un,a former professor of Suwon University, with <A Study on Korean Ancient History by Comparative Perspectives of Korean & Dravidian>(Seoul, 1990), In his book , Dr.Kang stated about 1,000 vocabularies are the same between Korean and the Dravidian languages of Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, and Kannada, based on ‘Dravidian Etymological Dictionary’ (Oxford Press, 1961)

Looking up two dictionaries of Winslow’s <English -Tamil Dictionary> (New Dehli, Asian Educational Services, 1983)and Percival’s <Tamil- English Dictionary>(New Delhi, Asian Educational Services, 2000), I have found out some 500 words between Tamil and Korean, which have the same pronunciation and the same meaning.

Some examples are as follow.

‘Nan Appa, Ni Amma ‘ (I am father, your are mother.) ‘Apa!’ in Korean is the same as ‘Appa!’ in Tamil, which means an exclamation of pain, or grief. ‘Apahada’ in Korean and ‘Avadhippadu’ in Tamil share the meaning of ‘ to be painful, to suffer’.

Similarly ‘Omomo!’ in Korean is the same as ‘Amama!’ in Tamil, which signifies ‘astonished, stunned, flabbergasted, appalled, shocked, dumbfounded’.

Tamil word ‘thalattu’ is the same as Korean word ‘dalaeda’ because they refer to soothe, calm down, mollify, cajole, coax a person, mostly a crying baby’.

Ni, inge wa! = Ni, iri wa!(You, Come here!), Ni, inge pa! = Ni, igeo pa!(You, Look at this!).

Ni pul vetti.= Ni pul beda.(You cut grass.)

/ Vanakkam = Vangapta (hello)/ Manevi = Manura(wife)/ Mottam=Mongttang(total, whole) / Ni, mottam tha! = Ni, mongttang dao!(You, give everything!)/ Sor = Ssal(rice)/ Vettugi = Mettugi(locust)/ Bambu = Baem (snake)/Nal = Nal (day) /Eru = Oruda(ascend, get on)/Ana = Hana(but)/ Kaelh =kaeda(ask) /

Cuta = Ssoda (shoot)

In grammar, Korean and Tamil share the sentence structure of subject–object–verb (SOV) pattern just like the Altai languages such as Japanese, unlike the Indo-European languages of SOV pattern . For example, Ni pul vettii.= Ni pul beda.(You cut grass)

Nan pampu cuttuvitten.= Nan baem ssoatta.(I shot snake.)

Besides, Tamil and Korean have ‘Postposition’, whereas English and other Indo-European languages generally has ‘Preposition’.

A preposition or postposition typically combines with a noun or pronoun, or more generally a noun phrase, this being called its complement, or sometimes object. A preposition comes before its complement;, while a postposition comes after its complement. For example, You came from Seoul. = Ni Seoul-iruntu vantatu. = Ni Seoul-eseo watta.

I am more lofty(upper) than you = Nan Unkalai- vita Uyarnta. = Nan ni-boda Uramhada.

Therefore, Korean is much closer to the Dravidian languages , notably Tamil than the Altai languages such as Japanese.

II. The similarity of Tamil and Korean customs, especially concerning baby & kids

As well as some 500 vocabularies similar between Tamil and Korean , there are still same customs of two peoples, especially concerning baby & kids.

The body signs of Tamil and Korean baby -- Dhori Dhori , Cha Cha Ko , Konju Konju , Jam Jam, Abuba, Kkakkung, and Maemmae - are the same.

Korean	Tamil	설명
1. Tori Tori (도리 도리)	1. Tiru Tiru (티루 티루)	A baby turns his or her head. Turn (your) head. Turn (your) head. 돌리다((Torida)) = v, ®£ (Tirumpu)
2. Chak Cha Kkung (짜짜꿍)	2. Cha Cha (짜짜짜)	A baby claps his or her hands.
3.Konji Konji ((곤지곤지))	3.Konju Konju (곤주 곤주)	A baby sticks his or her finger on the other palm.
4.Joem Joem ((짹짹))	4.Jam Jam((잠잠))	A baby makes his or her fists and makes them open repeatedly.
5. Obuba((아부바))	5.Appupa ((아뿌바))	An adult tells a baby to climb his or her back shoulder.
6.Kkakkung ((까꿍))	6.Kkakkung ((까꿍))	Peekaboo or bo-peep. You hide your face, especially with your hands, and then suddenly take your hands away saying “peekaboo”
7.Maemmae ((맴매))	<	