

«International Symposium»

Let's Talk about Trees

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Abstract

[Linguistics/Migration Theory]

Macrophyletic Trees of East Asian Languages Re-examined

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In this paper, I focus on a core feature of a linguistic tree—hierarchy. Each node of the tree branch has significant implications on the chronology of events relevant not only to linguistic relationship but also to cultural history and human migration. I re-examine several hypotheses of East-Asian macrophyla by testing them against a basic vocabulary core-list and establishing sound correspondences to determine the hierarchical relationship between the plausibly related language families. The study suggests three East Asian language phyla: Sino-Tibetan, Austro-Tai (Kra-Dai + Austronesian), and a tentative Austro-Miao-Yao (Miao-Yao + Austroasiatic). These macrophyletic alignments are incompatible with some hypotheses (e.g. Sino-Tai) or differ in hierarchical placement of phylum members (namely, the place of Kra-Dai with respect to Austronesian).

Discussions include how a macrophyletic hypothesis may affect the choices between competing subgrouping schemes at the lower levels down the 'tree'.