

## The Genealogy of the Japanese Language

— Tamil and Japanese —<sup>1)</sup>

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### Introduction

In search of languages genetically related to Japanese, linguists over the last one hundred years have compared Japanese with almost every other language in the world—not only those of neighboring peoples such as Ainu, Korean, and Indonesian, but even Greek; yet none of these efforts have succeeded in establishing any kind of kinship.

It was more than ten years ago that interest in the Dravidian languages of South India began to spread among some Japanese researchers. Similarities between Japanese and Dravidian had been first pointed out in the mid-nineteenth century. In his major work, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian Family of Languages*, the English missionary R. Caldwell, cites resemblances and discusses the connection between the two languages.

The Japanese-Dravidian connection was studied in Japan for the first time by Susumu Shiba, who approached the subject from the point of view of religion. His findings were presented in “Kodai ni okeru Nihonjin no shikō” (Ways of Thinking of Ancient Japanese), which appeared in 1970 in the journal *Jinbun ronsō* (No. 18, Kyoto Women’s University), and in a later study, “Dravida-go to Nihongo” (Dravidian Languages and Japanese), published in the same journal (No. 22-23, 1973-74).

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1) Expanded version of the public lecture delivered at the 96th General Meeting of the Linguistic Society of Japan, on June 4, 1988, at Gakushuin University, Tokyo.

Comparative linguist Akira Fujiwara began publishing the results of his research on Dravidian in 1974. In 1981 he put out a book entitled *Nihongo wa doko kara kita ka* (Whence the Japanese Language? Tokyo: Kodansha). His extensive comparisons of lexical items, comparing a number of words, including some particles and auxiliaries, were impressive. However, because he took on the Dravidian family as a whole, his methodology was rather clumsy, and he failed to sufficiently demonstrate a kinship with Japanese. Another problem was that he did not take ancient Dravidian languages into consideration.

Prof. Minoru Go, who has been engaged mainly in research on Japanese genealogy, with a focus on Altaic for several decades, has also kept an eye trained on Dravidian, although he has not published anything on this subject. I got my start in this direction when he suggested that I study Telugu, one of the Dravidian languages. I became the fourth Japanese to undertake the genealogical study of Dravidian and Japanese.

Earlier, I had done comparative research on Korean, Ainu and other languages, and published *Nihongo no kigen* (The Origins of the Japanese Language) (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1957). This experience led me to decide to confine my research only to one branch of Dravidian, at first Telugu, and then to Tamil, especially classical Tamil. I chose Tamil for the following reasons:

First, it is a language spoken by a large group of over 48 million. Second, it is a very old language; 2,500 *Caṅkam* verses, written in ancient Tamil between 200 B. C. and 200 A. D., are preserved. Third, a detailed grammar of ancient Tamil survives, the *Tolkāppiyam*, written around the third century B. C. (Among other Dravidian languages, literature in the Kannada language can be traced back only as far as 1100 A. D., and that of Telugu, to 1200 A. D.).

Fourth, while dictionaries in other Dravidian languages are

small and simple, there is a large Tamil lexicon. Published in 1936, the *Tamil Lexicon* consists of seven volumes compiled over a period of twenty years by a special committee at the University of Madras. It contains 104,000 word entries, giving ancient usages, indicating dialects, and detailed definitions. An additional reference I have used is *A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary*, edited by T. Burrow and M. B. Emeneau, which came out in 1960. A revised and enlarged edition appeared in 1984 (hereafter abbreviated DEDR).

These are the tools that make possible the accurate comparison of Tamil and Japanese as far as the meaning of words and grammatical features are concerned. The geographic neighbors of Japanese suffer from a dearth of documentary sources going back to earliest times. The oldest extant documents in Korean were produced in the fifteenth century, and those in Mongolian in the thirteenth century. The Ainu language does not have a writing system. This paucity of documents recording the ancient forms of the languages in the vicinity of Japan has been a major stumbling block in the study of the genealogy of Japanese. Tamil is extremely important in that its very old forms are known to us.

I traveled to South India in 1980 to continue my research, receiving invaluable aid from Ms. Rama Lakshmi and Ms. V. N. Balambal. On New Year's Day the following year, I showed Prof. Jaroslav Vacek of Charles University in Prague a list of the word correspondences I had collected for Tamil and Japanese. He kindly took time out of his busy schedule to check over the list with great care. For one year beginning in the fall of the same year, I studied the reading of classical Tamil at the University of Madras under Prof. Pon Kothandaraman. During the winter break I visited the Tiruch district, his home village, and was able to observe the old Tamil New Year's celebrations.

In March 1983, Prof. Arunsalam Sanmugasdas, linguist at the University of Jaffna in Sri Lanka, and his wife Manonmani, came

to Japan on a Japan Foundation grant, one of their purposes being to assist me in my research. They had grown interested in the Tamil-Japanese connection after hearing a lecture I gave at the 5th International Conference/Seminar on Tamil Studies held at Madurai in the Tamil state of India in 1981.

As guest researchers here at Gakushuin University, Mr. and Mrs. Sanmugadas studied classical Japanese literature and are now working on a translation of the *Man'yōshū* into Tamil. They have meanwhile continued to give me invaluable assistance in my study of the Tamil language. They themselves are Tamils, and have taught me much not only about their language but about Tamil customs as well.

### **The Phonetic Systems of Japanese and Tamil**

#### a) Vowels

The oldest writings preserved in Japan, which go back to the eighth century, tell us that (1) ancient Japanese had eight vowels, that (2) there was no distinction between long and short vowels, that (3) diphthongs were strictly avoided, (4) all syllables ended in a vowel, and that (5) the eight vowels were divided into two groups.

Group A: a, i, u, ö

Group B: e, ë, ī, o

The vowels in group A were found in 85 percent of all vowel usage, and those in group B in only 15 percent. Word roots and the initial parts of words used group A vowels, rarely those of group B. The same vowel in group A could be repeated with a consonant in between to form a word, such as *kata* (hard), *kimi* (millet), *kötö* (matter), and *туру* (crane). But this was never the case for the vowels in group B.

The vowels in group B are believed to have resulted from the

merging of two vowels, as follows :

ia > e, ai > ě, ui > ĭ, öi > ĭ, ua > o

From all these, it can be hypothesized that the vowel system prior to the eighth century was made up of four vowels, or those in group A. I compare these four with Tamil vowels.

The old Tamil vowels were: a, ā; i, ĭ; u, ū; e, ē; and o, ō. By comparing these with Japanese vowels, I ascertained the following correspondences.

Japanese	Tamil
a	a, ā, o, ō
i	ĭ, ĭ, e, ē
u	u, ū
ö	u, ū

#### b) Consonants

Neither Japanese nor Tamil have (1) clusters of consonants coming at the beginning of words, (2) double consonants in the middle of words, (although they occur rarely in Tamil words). Japanese has no cerebrals.

##### Japanese

consonants at head of word

k-, s-, t-, n-, F-, m-, y-, w-

consonants mid-word

-k-, -s-, -t-, -n-, -F-, -m-, -y-, -w-,  
-r-, -<sup>n</sup>g-, -<sup>n</sup>z-, -<sup>n</sup>d-, -<sup>n</sup>b-

##### Tamil

consonants at head of word

k-, c-, t-, ñ-, n-, p-, m-, y-, v-

consonants mid-word

-k-, -c-, -t-, -n-, -p-, -m-, -y-, -v-,  
-ṭ-, -ṇ-, -r-, -l-, -ṅ-, -ḷ-, -ṟ-, -ñk-,  
-ñc-, -nt-, -ṇṭ-, -mp-

Consonant correspondences are as follows :

word-initial	word-medial	
Jap. /Tam.	Jap. /Tam.	Jap. /Tam.
(1) k- : k-	(1) -k- : -k-, -kk-	(2) - <sup>n</sup> g- : - <sup>n</sup> k-
(3) s- : c-	(3) -s- : -c-, -cc-	(4) - <sup>n</sup> z- : - <sup>n</sup> ç-
(5) t- : t-	(5) -t- : -t-, -tt-	(6) - <sup>n</sup> d- : -nt-
	(7) -t- : -ṭ-, -ṭṭ-	(8) - <sup>n</sup> d- : - <sup>n</sup> ṭ-
(9) n- : <sup>n̄</sup> n-, n-	(9) -n- : - <sup>n̄</sup> n-, - <sup>n̄</sup> n <sup>n̄</sup> -	
	(10) -n- : - <sup>n̄</sup> n̄-, - <sup>n̄</sup> n̄ <sup>n̄</sup> -	
(11) F- : p-	(11) -F- : -p-, -pp-	(12) - <sup>m</sup> b- : -mp-
(13) F- : v-	(13) -F- : -v-	(14) - <sup>m</sup> b- : -v-, -vv-
(15) m- : m-	(15) -m- : -m-, -mm-	.....
(16) y- : y-	(16) -y- : -y-, -yy-	(17) -r- : -r-
(22) w- : p-		(18) -r- : -l-
(23) w- : v-	(23) -w- : -v-	(19) -r- : -ṛ-
.....		
	(24) -s- : -ṭ-, -ṭṭ-	(20) -r- : -ḷ-
(25) s- : t-	(25) -s- : -t-, -tt-	(21) -r- : -ṛ-
(26) s- : <i>zero</i>		
(27) <i>zero</i> : c		
(28) ya : ā, a, ē, e		

Note: *zero* signifies no corresponding consonant.

### Word Comparison

In comparing Japanese and Tamil words according to the rules of sound correspondence, comparison is confined to word roots or stems. In Japanese, verbs have the most clearly defined stems. *Saku* (to bloom), the most common type, is a verb with five conjugations in the 8th century, as follows :

*sak-a, sak-i, sak-u, sak-ë, sak-e*

As this shows, the five forms of the verb *saku* share the same

root, *sak-*, which expresses the basic concept of *saku*. This stem functions in actual usage, when it is followed by one of various suffixes, -a, -i, -u, -ë, and -e, linking it to the next word.

Nouns, too, may conjugate. Take the word *kaze* (wind) for example. When combined with another word to make a compound noun, *kaze* sometimes becomes *kaza*, such as *kaza-Fana* (“wind-flower”, meaning “snow or rain falling like flowers in an early-winter wind”) and *kaza-maturi* (“wind festival”, or ritual for warding off storms). *kaz-* is the root of *kaze*.

The most basic unit of a word, whose further subdivision would deprive the word of its core meaning, is what we call the “word-root”. For Japanese verbs and nouns, the initial part of the word, made up of a consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC-) sequence, is the word-root.

Word-roots in Tamil, too, consist of a CVC- sequence, as is well known in the world of linguistics. In comparing Japanese and Tamil words, therefore, I focus on these CVC- roots, observing the phonemic rules strictly, and only then considering similarities in meaning.

My research has shown very close phonemic correspondences between Japanese and Tamil words, in a comparison of 400 pairs of words, but because of space limitation here, let me give a sample of the correspondences for Japanese “F” and Tamil “p” and “pp” below. Most of the Japanese samples are words in the ancient language, and the Tamil samples are those found in *Caṅkam* verses. The entire list is given in *Sound Correspondences between Tamil and Japanese* (Tokyo: Gakushuin University, 1980) and in *Nihongo izen* (Before Japanese) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1987).

**Table 1. Word Correspondences (Jap. F: Tam. p., pp)**

J. /	Far-u	(to swell, expand)
T.	par-u	(to swell [DEDR 3972])
J.	Far-ara	(to be broken off)
T.	par-i	(to be sundered [OEDR 3962])
J.	Far-uka	(to be far off)
T.	par-a	(to be far, wide [DEDR 3949])
J.	Far-a	(the ocean)
T.	par-avai	(sea [DEDR 3949])
J.	Fat-akë	(field for cultivation)
T.	paṭ-ukar	(rice field [DEDR 3856])
J.	Fat-u	(to end, perish, die)
T.	paṭ-u	(to perish, die [DEDR 3852])
J.	Fir-ö	(wide, great)
T.	per-u	(great, large [DEDR 4411])
J.	Fök-u	(to eulogize, praise)
T.	puk-aṛ	(eulogy [DEDR 4235])
J.	Fot-o	(time)
T.	pöt-u	(time [DEDR 4559])
J.	Far-u	(to become bulky)
T.	par-u	(to be bulky [DEDR 3972])
J.	Far-e	(to be diffused, as clouds, gas)
T.	par-a	(to be diffused, as clouds [DEDR 3949])
J.	Far-a	(field of sky)
T.	par-am	(heaven [T.L. 2499])
J.	Far-aFu	(to exorcise)
T.	Par-avu	(to exorcise [T. L. 2503])
J.	Fat-u	(first, new of the season)
T.	paṭ-u	(to appear for the first time [DEDR 3852])
J.	Fat-u	(to stay [ship])
T.	paṭ-u	(to stay in a harbour [T.L. 244])



J.	Fin-a	(rustic)
T.	pin	(rear place [DEDR 4205])
J.	Fuk-asu	(to smoke, steam)
T.	puk-ai	(to smoke, vapor [DEDR 4240])
J.	För-ö	(cloth cover)
T.	pör-vai	(covering [DEDR 4590])
J.	För-u	(to desire)
T.	pur-i	(to desire [DEDR 4287])
J.	Fut-a	(cover, lid)
T.	put-ai	(to bury, hide, cover [DEDR 4509])
J.	Fut-o	(to be bulky)
T.	puṭ-ai	(bulkiness, protuberance [DEDR 4253])
J.	Fur-e	(village)
T.	pul-am	(village, place [DEDR 4303])
J.	Fun-e	(ship)
T.	puṅ-ai	(raft, boat [DEDR 4321])
J.	För-ö	(tumor, abscess)
T.	pur-r-u	(scrofulous, scurby one [DEDR 4336])
J.	taF-uru	(to die)
T.	tap-u	(to perish, die [DEDR 3068])
J.	öF-ö	(big, to flourish)
T.	upp-u	(to become big, bloat [DEDR 666])
J.	aF-u	(to meet, be fit)
T.	opp-u	(to agree, be fit [DEDR 924])
J.	köF-u	(to beg)
T.	küpp-u	(to join hand as in worship [DEDR 1894])
J.	tuF-a	(spittle)
T.	tupp-al	(saliva [DEDR 3323])
J.	suF-u	(to suck)
T.	cüpp-u	(to suck, sip [DEDR 2621])

The sound “F-” shown above is pronounced “h-” today. It is widely accepted among Japanese linguists that this “F-” was “\*p-” in prehistoric Japanese. “Japanese F- : Tamil p, pp”, therefore, is the same thing as “Japanese \*p : Tamil p, pp”.

A comparison of kinship terms in the two languages also indicates a connection. Many kinship terms which are not mentioned in the oldest extant documents (8th century) and which have not been found in mainstream Japanese since then have been preserved in dialects spoken in the northeastern end of Honshū and the southwestern tip of the Japanese archipelago. The reason for this is still unknown, but it has been discovered that corresponding kinship terms existed systematically in old Tamil. It is, therefore, difficult to dismiss the similarities as accidental.

Table 2. Japanese and Tamil Kinship Terms

		Japanese Dialects		Old Tamil
		Tohoku (North-east) Region	Ryukyus	
Father	accha	Iwate, Aomori (Shimokita)	chan (Amami, Kakeroma Is.)	accāṅ
	acha		Okinoerabu, Yoron, Yaeyama Is.	
	acha, aja	Aomori (Nishi-Tsugaru), Akita (Hiraka)	Kikai, Tokunoshima, Okinoerabu, Yonaguni Is.	
	aya	Aomori (Tsugaru), Iwate (Kokonoe)	Ishigakijima	ayyā
	tanda	Akita, Iwate, Yamagata, Niigata		tantai
Mother	āya	Aomori (Shimokita)		
	ayā		Okinawa (Shuri)	āyāḷ
	aya	Aomori (Shimokita), Akita, Yamagata, Niigata		
	accha	Aomori (Tsugaru)	asse ; Amami	āccāḷ
	ata > ada	Yamagata (Mogami)		āttāḷ

	appa	Aomori (Tsugaru), Akita (Kazuno), Iwate	Tanegashima, Okinawa, appa (grandmother): Yaeyama, Iriomote	avvai
	aba	Aomori (Tsugaru), Akita		
	amma	Fukui, Ishikawa, Mie, Kōchi	Amami, Okinawa, Yaeyama, Iriomote,	ammai
	ammā		Okinawa, Amami, Yoron, Kume, Yaeyama	
Elder brother	annyā	Fukushima, Yama- gata, Niigata, Ishikawa		aṇṇā
Elder sister	anne	Iwate, Fukushima, Niigata, Ibaraki		aṇṇai

### Grammatical Correspondences

The following are some of my findings through typological comparison.

- 1) Nouns do not decline.
- 2) Subject is followed by predicate.

(Examples)

Tamil : Vēṇil pōyirru.

Japanese : Haru sarinu.

(Spring has gone.)

Tamil : Kaṭal peritu.

Japanese : Umi hiroshi.

(The sea is vast.)

- 3) Adjective comes before noun.

Tamil : veṇ tiṅkaḷ

Japanese : siroki tuki

(white moon)

Tamil : cem malar

Japanese : akaki hana

(red flowers)

- 4) Adverb comes before verb.

Tamil : Mella naṭa.

Japanese : Yukkuri aruku.

(Slowly walk. [Walk slowly.]

Tamil : Eṇrum aruḷal vēṇṭum.

Japanese : Tūne-ni ataFu besi.

(Always give should. [(You) should always give.]

- 5) Object comes before verb.

Tamil : Kalliṅ nāṭpali ūṭṭi.

Japanese : Isi ni sasagemono o situ.

(Stone on offerings put. [(I) put the offerings on the stone.]

- 6) There are no relative pronouns.

Tamil : Avar irunta eṇ neñcu.

Japanese : Kare sumu waga kokoro.

(He lives my heart. [My heart, in which he lives.]

- 7) Auxiliary verb comes after the verb and at the end of sentence.

Tamil : Eṇṇatūum pariyaḷ vēṇṭā.

Japanese : Sukosi mo dōjō subekarazu.

(Not at all, sympathize should not. [(You) should not sympathize at all.]

- 8) Auxiliary forms follow a specific order. For example :  
1) verb, 2) causative, 3) passive, 4) aspect, 5) negative,  
6) tense, and 7) interrogative, as in the following sentence.

Tamil : Naṭa—<sup>1</sup>tta—<sup>2</sup>ppaṭ—<sup>3</sup>ṭat—<sup>4</sup>anṭ—<sup>5</sup>um—<sup>6</sup>kollō.

Japanese : Yuk—ase—rare—<sup>3</sup>tara—<sup>4</sup>zara—<sup>5</sup>mu—ka.

(Go make be have been not may ?  
[Have I not been made to go ?])

- 9) Particle comes after noun and verb.

Tamil : Aruḷ *um* aṇṇu *um* aṇṇ *um*... .

Japanese : Megumi *mo ai mo* gimu o hatasu hito *mo...*  
 (Favor too, love too, duty fulfill person  
 too... [favor, love, and persons who fulfill  
 duties...])

Tamil : Entai *vantu* uraittaṇaṇ.

Japanese : Watasi no titi ga *kite* katatta.  
 (My father came and said.)

- 10) Interrogative form has interrogative particle at the end of a sentence.

Tamil : Yātu *ceyvāṅ-kol*.

Japanese : Nani suru *ka*.

(What do ? [What do you do ?])

Tamil : Ōri *kollō*, allāṇ *kollō*.

Japanese : Ori *ka* hoka no hito *ka*.

(Ori ? another person ? [Ori, or another  
 person ?])

- 11) Unlike in Japanese, the personal suffix comes at the end of a Tamil verb, but this was not always the rule at a time when *Caṅkam* were written, and never the case in the Malayalam language. These facts seem to show that the use of the personal suffix was a later development.
- 12) Japanese demonstrative pronouns—“ko” (indicating objects “near”), “so” (“middle”), “a” (“far”), and “idu” (“when, where”)—correspond to Tamil pronouns, “i”, “u”, “a”, and “e”. The list below details the correspondences.

	Japanese			
	near	middle	far	indefinite
	kō	sō	ka (a)	i
thing	kō-re	sō-re	ka-re (a-re)	idu-re

place	kō-kō	sō-kō	ka-siko (a-soko)	id-uku
direction	kō-ti (ko-nata)	sō-ti (so-nata)	(a-ti) (a-nata)	idu-ti
relation	kō-nō	sōnō	ka-nō (a-no)	

**Tamil**

	near	middle	far	indefinite
	i	u	a	e
thing	i-tu	u-tu	a-tu	e-tu
place	i-ñku	u-ñku	a-ñku	e-ñku
direction	i-ñkē i-vviṭam	u-ñkē u-vviṭam	a-ñkē a-vviṭam	e-ñkē e-vviṭam
relation	i-nta	u-nta	a-nta	e-nta

**Note :**

1. Because of consonant correspondence (26) and vowel correspondence (6), the Japanese “so” corresponds to the Tamil “u”.
2. The pronoun “a” that began to appear in the Heian period (794–1192) may have been a result of sound shift from “ka”, but it may also be that “a” had been in use since much earlier and appeared for the first time in the Heian-period documents. If the latter is the case, the demonstrative pronoun indicating objects far was the same between old Tamil and Japanese.
- 3) Because of the vowel correspondence (4), the indefinite pronoun “i” in Japanese corresponds to “e” in Tamil.
- 4) From these, we can say that the stems of the “middle”, “far”, and “indefinite” demonstrative pronouns were very similar between Tamil and Japanese.

**Particle and Auxiliaries**

Below is a list of particles and auxiliary verb correspondences between the two languages.

**Table 3. Particle and Auxiliary Verb Correspondences**

	Japanese	Tamil
Particles (postposition)		
1) Case indicator particle		
i) Follows the noun to link it with another noun.	tu nō ga	atu in aka, akam
ii) Follows the noun to link it with a verb.	ni tō	in oṭu
2) Conjunctive [?] particle		
Follows the verb to link it with another verb.	te	tu
3) Adverbial particle		
	Fa mō	vāy um
Denotes a preceding word to be the topical about which something is said. Essential for making a sentence. Not related to case.	ka ya	kō, kol *yā>ē, ā
Auxiliary Verbs		
1) Makes the verb transitive and causative.	asu	ttu
Makes the verb intransitive and passive.	aru	ar, ir
2) Perfect voice		
Transitive verb	tu	tt
Intransitive verb	nu	nt
Conjunctive form	ari	ir
3) Tense		
Past	k	—
Future	mu	um

## 4) Other

Obligation, necessity

bēsi vēṅṭ

(I have shown the examples of corresponding sounds and usages of these particles in "Nihongo Izen" (Before Japanese. Iwanami 1987 p. p.247-328).)

Some of the correspondences shown above may be difficult to accept. Some Tamil particles and auxiliaries begin with a vowel, but their Japanese counterparts do not. They are :

Tamil	Japanese
atu	tu
iṅ	nō
aka, akam	ga
iṅ	ni
oṭu	tō
um	mō
um	mu

The reason for this may be explained as follows. Throughout the history of the Japanese language, the last syllable of a word invariably ends in a vowel. So, if a particle following it began with a vowel, a diphthong would have occurred. Diphthongs, however, were strictly avoided in ancient Japanese. When a vowel was combined with another, a consonant might be put between them, or one of the vowels dropped. The latter was common. That is why almost no Japanese particles begin with a vowel. (The only exception is the particle "i", but it may have been pronounced "yi".)

In Tamil, there are many words which end in a consonant. They can be easily followed by a particle that begins with a vowel. When a particle that begins with a vowel follows a word that ends in a vowel, "v" or "k" is often inserted between the vowels. Alternatively, either the vowel at the end of the preceding word



or the vowel at the beginning of the following particle is dropped. For example :

pū in (of flower) — pūvin ["-v-" inserted]  
 cēmpu in (of tree) — cēmpin ["-u-" dropped]

If we assume that when a noun or a verb was followed by a particle the vowel at the beginning of that particle was always dropped, we can say that the Japanese particles correspond to Tamil particles, taking a form that has dropped the initial vowel. The consonant/vowel correspondences between Japanese and Tamil in the particles and auxiliary verbs listed above are all supported by the consonant/vowel correspondences in the word roots of noun, adjective, and verb.

### **Critiques of the Ohno Hypothesis**

The possibility of a genealogical relationship between Japanese and Tamil suggested by the data I have cited in part above came under vociferous attack in Japan in 1981-82. Critics against me claim that my findings are false and my research is riddled with errors. Among them is Muneo Tokunaga, one of the very few Japanese who understand the Tamil language. He wrote (my translation) :

I have studied Prof. Ohno's lists of correspondences, but believe they reveal his ignorance of the phonetic system peculiar to Tamil, lack of attention to Dravidian sound systems and word structure, and the phonemic changes unique to southern Dravidian languages, as well as the misuse of *A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary* (DED). He selected words arbitrarily from the DED, distorted their meanings, and misunderstood their English translations. His work disregards the achievements of Dravidian linguistic research conducted over the last century. As a Tamil specialist, I find absolutely

no scholarly value in the Ohno theory. If Professor Ohno thinks my argument alone is not enough, I advise him to ask leading Dravidianists overseas for comments (most important of whom are Bh. Krishnamurti, Hyderabad ; K. V. Zvelebil, Utrecht ; and M. Andronov, Moscow. They should not include scholars in the Tamil Nadu state, who are so eager for attention from overseas.)

*(Bulletin of the Kokusai Gengo Kagaku Kenkyujo, Kyoto Industrial University, 2-1, March 1981, pp.9)*

With the exception of Tokunaga, most of my critics have little knowledge of the Tamil language and their knowledge of ancient Japanese is superficial. None of the native Tamil speakers who cooperated in my research have doubted any basic connection between Japanese and Tamil. Below I would like to mention three Western scholars who commented on my theory, two Europeans and an American. Their comments were made on the basis of my publications in English, which consist thus far of two books and two papers as follows :

*Sound Correspondences between Tamil and Japanese* (Gakushuin University, 1980)

*A Study on the Relationship between Tamil and Japanese* (I. J. D. L., Vol. XII, No. 2, 1983)

“The Loss of Initial C in Tamil and S in Japanese” (Uyaraivu University of Madras, 1983)

“Worldview and Rituals among Japanese and Tamils” (Gakushuin University, 1985)

Kamil V. Zvelebil was the first person to give serious attention to my work and extended encouragement to me. He kindly sent me his books and papers on the Dravidian Languages, and also gave me much advice. In his essay “Tamil and Japanese—Are They Related? The Hypothesis of Susumu Ohno” (*Bulletin of the*

*School of Oriental and African Studies* [B. S. O. A. S.], University of London, Vol. XLVIII, part 1, 1985) he says :

One general remark at the outset : a distinction must be made between *evidence* and *proof*. Is there any valid evidence at all for a (genetic ?) relationship between Tamil and Japanese ? This question in my opinion, expressed with utmost caution, may be answered in the positive. On the other hand, if we ask about proof of such relationship, there is, so far, none. However, the evidence—in matters of deep grammar, lexicon, and probably even in phonology—is such that the positing of some kind of non-accidental connexion between Japanese and Tamil (Dravidian) is not intrinsically ruled out. It would be premature, sweepingly to dismiss such a hypothesis as impossible and fantastic.

Going into more detail, Zvelebil writes :

In *Sound correspondences* Ohno also dealt briefly with phonology ; but more importantly, he has discussed two problems pertaining to phonology in the two papers mentioned above. Although the paper on the loss of the initial affricate/sibilant in Tamil/Japanese (April, 1982) may be somewhat lacking in philological sophistication, the phenomenon itself is striking ; we must not forget, however, that this tendency is in fact confined to South Dravidian and is strongest in Tamil-Malayalam. It points rather to parallel but unconnected developments in the two languages or groups of languages. Nevertheless, even a common tendency, though not a proof of genetic relationship and a 'special connexion', points to a shared trend or direction in phonological development and should not be dismissed altogether, particularly in the light of other cumulative evidence. The August 1982 paper on intervocalic -p- is thought-provoking indeed : according to Ohno, intervocalic -p- actually did exist in old Tamil, at least in a

few relic forms, and it corresponds to Japanese -F- which developed from earlier -p-. This Japanese -F- is 'voiceless' and 'bilabial'. Some Dravidianists (Emeneau, Krishnamurti) do not reconstruct \*-p- even for the protostage but according to D. W. McAlpin, for example, it seems best to maintain it since the contrast helps separate -v- (\*-p-) from a possible \*-v- and from other shifts. In my manual of comparative Dravidian phonology I discussed this problem at some length and tended rather to maintain an intervocalic \*-p-. Now Ohno cites a Japanese correspondence for the Tamil *tapu* 'to kill' (which he correctly locates in the old Tamil grammar *Tolkāppiyam*, although he greatly antedates the work into the fifth century B. C.), viz, taFu-. If we accept this correspondence, it would support our hypothesis of the reconstruction of a pre-Tamil \*-p- for Dravidian. According to Ohno whereas the contrast of -p- : -v- was lost in Tamil, it has been preserved in Jap. -F- : -b-.

Prof. Vacek, too, refers to my work in "The Dravido-Altaiic Relationship" (*Archív Orientální* 2 Volume 55/1987 ACADEMIA PRAHA). He has some reservations about the semantic correspondences, expressed as follows :

On the whole, Ohno's work is an interesting attempt which will obviously be subjected to further revisions, but it seems that the sum total of the sound correspondences makes their accidental appearance impossible. Some of his etymologies could also be enlarged by Mongolian parallels, ...

But he also says :

Personally we consider as most persuasive such etymologies in which the relation is direct—verb to verb, noun to noun—with a relatively exact semantic agreement. Etymologies in which in one language we have a verb and in the other a noun are possible, it is true, but at this stage of research

into this subject they are less persuasive,...

Prof. Roy Andrew Miller of Washington University, in the United States, attacked Zvebil's cool appraisal in a severely critical essay, "Tamil and Japanese?" (*B.S.O.A.S.*, Vol. XLIX, part 3, 1986), dismissing my findings altogether. He says, "Ono has studied his 1980 book, and indeed all his books and papers, with hundreds of alleged Japanese linguistic forms that are entirely imaginary, 'words' that are attested for no known stage of the language, 'words' that can neither be cited nor documented—forms that are, most simply put, lexical ghosts".

I wrote a response to this salvo and sent it to the editor of the *B.S.O.A.S.* This respected journal, however, apparently does not wish to follow through the debate. Although I feel that pursuing the debate is not nearly as important as getting on with my research and that it will take a very long time before this theory can be sufficiently tested, I wish to defend myself on several accounts.

1. Miller claims that I have encountered criticism in Japan for my findings presented in *Nihongo to Tamirugo* [Japanese and Tamil] (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1980). I was frankly astonished by much of the hubbub at that time for I realized that my critics were for the most part neither scholars of old Japanese nor of Tamil. As they are unfamiliar with the ancient literature, they could not comprehend the forms and meanings of the words I was citing. At the time, no university in the country was actively studying the possibility of a Tamil-Japanese connection, but as a result of my probing the issue, the University of Tokyo as well as Gakushuin University where I teach, opened up an inquiry into the matter. There was suddenly a surge of media coverage of the subject, and I found myself, although at the beginning of my research, in the center of a nationwide debate. I am still avidly pursuing my research into the matter, and a verdict has

not yet been reached concerning the extent of the correspondence between Tamil and Japanese.

2. Since January 1983 I have been presenting my findings in *Kaishaku to kanshō* (Interpretation and Appreciation), one of the leading scholarly journals in the field. I have so far presented over 300 words in each language, and precisely explained the form, meaning and source of each correspondence. Some of them may be off the mark—scholars of the future will sort out the facts and build on my findings to make further revelations—but Miller's claim that out of 12 words he considered from my list only 2 (17%) are possibly accurate is a gross miscalculation that harms the credibility of my research. Below I will answer his charges directly. As each of the examples with their technicalities takes up a lot of space to explain, I will here limit myself to four of the words.

i) Although Miller claims that “Jap. Kaer- <KaFer- is properly ‘to turn over, go upside down, not capsize’”, there is clear evidence that it does mean ‘to capsize’. One assumes that he is familiar, as is any student of Japanese literature, with the eighth century poetry anthology, *Man'yōshū*, in which appears the following example :

Ofobune wo/ kogino susumi ni/ ifa ni furi/ *kaferaba kafere/*  
imo ni yoritefa (#557). (If I cannot marry her, my big ship  
which I row along may capsize by running against a great  
rock.)

As I did not write the words “ship” and “row” for the above poem, I hope Miller will concede that my presenting KaFer-'s meaning as “capsize” is not “juggl (ing) the evidence to make it appear to be much better than it is”. I can understand, however, that as he is probably only familiar with modern Japanese, this example, known by any graduate student in Japanese literature,

appears to Miller to be one of my “ghosts”. Miller also quotes the *Vocabulário da língua de lapam com a declaração em Portugues* (Nagasaki, 1603), giving the impression that he uses the volume. Why did he then fail to note that in the supplement clearly appears the entry :

Cayeri, eru, etta.

Funega cayeru. (A ship capsizes) Virarse, ou emborcarse a embarcação. (p. 338 V)

ii) Miller states that “kara “stone” (is) a form totally unknown to any Japanese, or in any Japanese dictionary”, and elsewhere that “kara “stone” does not, and never did, exist”. Allow me to contradict him with the evidence, taken from valid sources read by all in the field. The twelfth century A.D. dictionary, *Myogisho* (Tokyo: Kazama Shobo, 1962), gives 4 Chinese characters which mean “stone mortar”; Japanese kana characters (romanized below) are presented for each Chinese equivalent :

砧	kara-usu	(p. 598)	礮	kara-usu	(p. 603)
碓	kara-usu	(p. 602)	碾	kara-usu	(p. 607)

We can see that in all 4 characters above is included the radical for “stone”, “石”. Moreover, in all standard and dialectal Japanese we have the following doublets, given in *Zenkoku hogen jiten* (Tokyo: Tokyodo, 1951) :

<i>dialectal</i>	<i>standard</i>	<i>meaning</i>	<i>dialectal</i>	<i>standard</i>	<i>meaning</i>
gani	kani	crab	gabu	kabu	stump
game	kame	tortoise	gasu	kasu	dregs
gama	kama	pit, hole	gara	(kara)	stones

According to the above example, the dialectal form “gara” corresponds to the standard form “kara” (p. 204). “Gara” once again appears as a dialectal form meaning “stone” in the highly authoritative *Nihon kokugo daijiten* Vol. 5 (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1974),

p. 176, and its usage is widespread, found on Sado Island, and in the Niigata, Mie, Kyoto, Nara and Toyama prefectures. One can see from the above how an untrained student in the field, ignorant of “gara” and unaware of the dialectal correspondence between “k” and “g” might be led to mistakenly believe that I invented “kara”; however, a closer reading of a wide range of materials attests to the credibility of my claim.

iii) The Tamil word “tapu” means “to kill, to die”. Miller believes, however, that the words I regard as being the corresponding Japanese verbs, “tafuru” (intransitive) and “tafusu” (transitive), are my inventions. It is true that the old forms no longer appear in modern dictionaries, as they have changed to “taoreru” and “taosu”. Possibly that is why Miller doubts their existence. However, in the 12th century dictionary, *Myogisho*, Chinese characters for the words appear with their meaning in Japanese kana characters :

- 仆 tafuru : this Chinese character illustrates a human being falling and dying. (p. 27)
- 斃 tafuru : the radical “死” in this character means “death”. (p. 890)
- 殮 tafuru : the radical “歹” in this character means “corpse”. (p. 886)

Both “tafuru” and “tafusu” also appear in *Jidai-betsu kokugo daijiten* (Tokyo: Sanseido, 1967) p. 439, and in *Nihon kokugo daijiten*, Vol. 12, p. 656 with the meaning of “to kill, to make fall down” and “to die, to fall down”. Therefore, in the light of other research that confirms a correlation between Japanese -f- and Tamil -p-, it seems to me that a possible correspondence between Japanese “tafuru/tafusu” and Tamil “tapu” is not so far-fetched. Certainly it is an exaggeration to claim that I am inventing ghosts. I just happen to read more widely than Miller.



iv) Regarding the old Japanese word “aze/aje”, Miller states, “the *Vocabulario* tells us nothing about ‘reed instrument’ or ‘pressing down the threads’, and all these are no more than figments of imagination”. However, anyone who reads past the head words into the explanations themselves in the *Vocabulario* will find the following :

Aje: Espaço da ordidura do tear quando se desencontrão huns fios dos outros abaixandose huns, & aleuantandose outros. (Space in the arranging of the warp, where the threads cross when one set is pressed low and the other raised.)

Ajedake: Huas duas canas que atrauesão na tea pera senão emburulhar o fiodo, ou a ordidura.

(Two canes which pass across the web of cloth so that the spun or woven part does not become entangled.)

Compare these to the explanation of Tamil “accu” in *Tamil Lexicon* (Madras: Madras Univ., 1936) :

Weaver’s reed instrument for pressing down the threads of the woof. Comb-like frame in a loom through which the warp threads are passed and by which they are pressed or battened together. (p. 25)

Miller writes as if the sound “je” in “aje” came from old “de.” It is true that the following change took place in the history of Japanese :

di > dži > ji thus “di” and the original “ji” were fused together.

du > dzu > zu thus “du” and the original “zu” were fused together.

But “je” (/ze/ and /je/ had no differentiation) in the Middle Ages could not have derived from old “de”. From this example, we can

see that Miller is mistaken and that the old Japanese “aze/aje” could be related to “reed instrument” or “pressing down the threads”.

My examples refuting Miller’s hasty conclusions regarding the validity of my research could be expanded, but these few should at least make it amply clear that he is basing his remarks on only a superficial reading of a small body of reference materials.

3. As for why some of the words I bring forth to support my claims of correspondence are not in the dictionary I co-authored, *Kogojiten* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1974), Miller clearly does not realize that it was published on a relatively small scale, and aimed at university students. It only contains about 42,000 words in total, unlike the *Nihon kokugo daijiten* which contains about 450,000 words. If a word does not appear in my dictionary, it in no way implies that the word is a fabrication. If so, what can we say for the 408,000 “ghosts” that are catalogued in the *Nihon kokugo daijiten*?

I was delighted to read in Prof. Zvelebil’s unprejudiced article (*B. S. O. A. S.*, XLVIII, 1, 1985, pp. 116-20) that he calls for a fair examination of the evidence before any hasty conclusions are drawn. In contrast I was equally disappointed to read how someone like Miller, who has obviously only a cursory knowledge of old Japanese and appears unable to use classical dictionaries, should try to poison the atmosphere of international cooperation in tackling the knotty, as yet unsolved problem of the genealogy of the Japanese language. I fully agree with Miller that “at the very least, the study of these questions will also need the services of someone able, and willing, to look up words in a Japanese dictionary, if we are ever really to learn anything about Tamil and Japanese”. Unfortunately, it seems that Miller has to use other than modern dictionaries and also has to read original texts of Japanese classical literature if he wants to keep abreast of these

matters.

### Conclusion

The evidence for a Japanese-Tamil relationship can be further accumulated, and this will increase the possibility that a linkage can be proven. The questions that will quickly follow, then, are when and how their connection began. There are three possibilities. One is that language was transmitted [from India] to Japan by land. Another is that it was transmitted by sea. The third possibility is that an intermediary language existed—possibly in what is presently the Chinese province of Yunnan, or further west—and that it was carried southward to India and eastward to Japan. Deciding when and how the Japanese-Tamil relationship began, however, is a task for the future.

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## 日本語の系統

## — タミル語と日本語 —

日本語とタミル語との間には、あらゆる音素について対応が存在する。それは28の音韻法則に整理され、約400語の対応語がある。両言語は膠着語で、文法構造上対応するのみならず、助詞・助動詞に至るまで、音韻法則に支持されて対応する。これは従来言われて来た朝鮮語、アイヌ語との間には見られない点である。大野の研究に対し K. Zvebil, Vacek らは支持を表明したが、村山七郎, R. Miller は無価値であると非難した。しかし村山はわずかに二三の単語を攻撃しただけである。Miller は、その批評の文章において、Miller 自身がいかに日本の古代語を知らないか、また、古代日本語を研究する基本的知識、技術を持たないかをみずから暴露した。ここにその実例があげてある。

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