

**Reply to Benedict's comment in regard to my Sino-Tibetan *vulva*\***

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**Proto-Sino-Tibetan: Monosyllabic? Disyllabic?**

My disyllabic roots for Proto-Sino-Tibetan were based on disyllabic forms from several Tibeto-Burman languages and two Chinese dialect families. I cannot prove on the basis of a series of sound correspondences that the modern Kejia and Min forms derive from my reconstructed disyllabic Proto-Chinese root. I think their phonosemantic similarity is more than fortuitous and believe they are related in some way. To establish the nature of that relationship is the next step. It comes as no surprise to me that no Chinese characters are associated etymologically with these Kejia and Min morphemes. Within the colloquial vocabulary of Chinese dialects there are many items from the basic vocabulary which cannot be written with Chinese characters. I would imagine that this state of affairs has always existed, ever since Chinese-speaking communities began to write with the Chinese characters. As far as I can determine, no Chinese characters have been associated with any root for "vulva" at any early historical stage of the Chinese language. What does one do in a case like this? If one is restricted to working only with the Chinese characters and their reconstructed pronunciations, then the etymological problem is out of bounds. Blithely ignoring the question of whether or not there are Chinese characters to write morphemes, I have been trying to look beyond the Chinese dialectal region for phonosemantic correspondences across the entire Southeast Asian linguistic area.

**Genetic Classification and Sound Correspondences.**

Most languages of Southeast Asia have been genetically classified into families. What has been problematic for some languages of the area are the lower level subgroupings of individual languages. Genetic and contact relationships among Southeast Asian languages are highly complex. Lexical borrowing or diffusion occurs across genetic boundaries. I readily acknowledged that my subgrouping of lexical forms on the basis of their surface phonetic similarity was not guided by specific, demonstrable sound

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\* See Bauer 1991, Benedict 1991. [Ed.]

correspondences. Further, I was not trying to establish the genetic relationships of any languages by subgrouping languages and their lexical forms exhibiting surface phonetic similarity. I stated at the beginning of the article that I have accepted the conventional wisdom on the genetic classification of Southeast Asian languages.

### **Phonosemantic Similarity: Lookalikes, Comparabilia, Fusionates.**

The problem of coincidental phonosemantic similarity always lurks around the corner when one deals with monosyllabic morphemes from Southeast Asian languages. One cannot get excited over finding the occasional match in meaning and sound among CVC or CV morphemes in languages of this area. As the number of compared items increases, one would expect a corresponding increase in the probability of chance similarity among lexical items, referred to as lookalikes or comparabilia or comps. However, on the basis of fairly strict criteria for recognizing a sound-meaning match between a pair of CVCs from different languages, Bender concluded in his "Chance CVC correspondences in unrelated languages" (1969) that lookalikes were fairly rare. I would suggest that the phonetic similarity of *disyllabic* words identical in meaning taken from several different languages of the area should give one reason to pause long enough to ponder a possible link among such similar forms. It is not too farfetched to say that *Lisu* *tu*<sup>1</sup> *pi*<sup>6</sup> on Mainland Southeast Asia might be related in some transitional way to *Japanese-Kangawa* *tubi* via *Saisiyat-Tungho* *topi*? on Taiwan through the process of borrowing or diffusion. PKB calls these items lookalikes and does not want to classify them as fusionates. I think they may be more than just lookalikes, but at the moment I cannot "prove" they are fusionates.

### **Megalo-Phonosemantic Similarity.**

In parallel with PKB's concluding reference to what constitutes megalinguistics and megalolinguistics, I would like to end my comment with a quick look at what we might as well call megalo-phonosemantic similarity.

The following is a list of words from a variety of languages which mean "breast" (the meaning of two items is "nipple of breast"). The purpose of assembling this list is to demonstrate that the phenomenon of phonosemantic similarity exists for lexemes other than the oft-cited "mother" and "father" among a diverse group of genetically unrelated and geographically dispersed languages. In compiling this list, I have imposed a limitation on the phonetic shapes of the words: the list only includes disyllabic words made up of reduplicated CV-syllables in which the initial consonant is an affricate. The list would be more impressive if the second

syllable were made up of different sounds than the first, rather than a reduplication of it (reduplication seems to be a fairly common process of word-formation worldwide).

# LANGUAGE<sup>1</sup>

Family	Language	'Breast'
AF-AS	Hebrew	tsɪtsɪ
AM-IN	Aztec-Mejicano	tsi:tsi:
ALT	Japanese	tʃitʃi
AM-IN	Huichol	tʃiitʃi
S-T	Tibetan-Glo	tʃhitʃhi
AU-TA	Gelao	tɕi tɕi
N-C	Sambaa	tɕwi tɕwi 'nipple of breast'
I-E	Punjabi	dʒɪdʒɪ
I-E	Hindi	dʒɪ:dʒɪ
AM-IN	Quechua	tʃutʃu
AU-TA	Gaoshan-Amis	tʃutʃu
S-T	Manchad-Patani	tʃutʃu
S-T	Tinan	tʃʒutʃu/tʃyutʃu
N-C	Swahili	tʃhutʃhu 'teat, nipple'
IN-PA	Burun	dzudzu
IN-PA	Mindik	dzudzu
I-E	Romanian	tsatʃa
S-T	Mandarin-Beijing	tʃa tʃar

I propose that "breast" belongs to the same class of lexemes as "mother" and "father" for which many languages follow similar patterns of sound symbolism—using speech sounds to imitate the sound the baby makes sucking its mother's breast—to create the sound shapes of words for "breast" and "mother" (the sound shape of "father" is then based on some articulatory contrast). In addition to these three lexemes which together make up a word family, I believe that "suck" and "milk" (but *not* "vulva", although some languages may employ sound symbolism to produce words with this meaning) also belong to the same family and are affected by the same principle of sound symbolism.

## <sup>1</sup> Language Family Abbreviations:

AF-AS	Afro-Asiatic
ALT	Altaic
AM-IN	Amerindian
AU-TA	Austro-Tai
I-E	Indo-European
IN-PA	Indo-Pacific
N-C	Niger-Congo
S-T	Sino-Tibetan

## REFERENCES

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