Hurro-Urartian are not Dene-Caucasian

Alexander Kitaev

independent scholar; Moscow, Russia; e-mail: dikobraz1983@gmail.com

Abstract

The idea that Hurro-Urartian languages seem to be a part of the North Caucasian family was popular until 2000s. Within the North Caucasian family Hurro-Urartian were considered as closely related to the East Caucasian branch. This idea was shared by various scholars, including S. A. Starostin. Since 2010 the representatives of the Moscow school of comparative linguistics started to reject this idea and proposed to interpret Hurro-Urartian as a separate family within the Dene-Caucasian macrofamily. In 2008 J. D. Bengtson published materials for a comparative grammar of the Dene-Caucasian languages. From this we can see the Dene-Cuacasian character of Hattic and even Sumerian, but not Hurro-Urartian. The grammar of Hurro-Urartian is not Dene-Caucasian at all.

Keywords: comparative linguistics; grammatical criteria of classification; Hurro-Urartian languages; Sino-Caucasian (Dene-Caucasian) languages; Para-Nostratic languages; methodology of science

1. The actual classification of Hurro-Urartian according to the Moscow school

According to A. S. Kassian the Hurro-Urartian languages are Dene-Caucasian, but do not belong to the North Caucasian family. Within the Dene-Caucasian family they are even more closely related to Burushaski and Yeniseian languages.

He uses the 110 wordlist and finds 12 Dene-Caucasian matches (Kassian 2015):

HU *šuḫe "new";
Hur. uzi "meat";
HU *iš- / šu- "I" + ša-tti-la, šie-š, ša-š "we";
Hur. fe "thou";
Hur. time-ri "black";
Hur. zur-gi "blood";
Hur. apḫe "louse";
HU *šu- "one";
Urart. i-ni 'this';
Hur. šeri "tooth";
Hur. nu(ḫ)i "ear".

I am not going to analyze these matches thoroughly, especially noun stems which can be borrowed or can be interpreted as global etymologies. The pronouns *fe (<* we)* and *i-ni* evidently belong to global stems. Even the stem *iš- / šu-* "I" is not unique. It can be compared to *č-* in Kartvelian *čwen→ Georgian *čven*, Mingrelian *čki*, Laz *čkun* "we", "our" (+ Svan *mišgu* "my", *gwišgwej* "our, incl.", *nišgwej* "our, excl.").

2. Possible fossilized prefixes

According to articles devoted to the possible correlations between Hurro-Urartian and East Caucasian, some words can demonstrate fossilized prefixes (D'jakonov, Starostin 1988; Starostin 1998).

-u- (masculine)

HU *wutqhi, witēqh*i "son" > *Hurr. futqhi, fitēqhi* "son", "child";

-d- / -r- (inanimate)
Urart. *teš* "to ripen",
Hurr. *tex-* "to grow",
Hurr. *tid-* "to divide", "distribute", *tidenni, tidennūtu* "land distribution"; Urart. *t´it´j-u/o-šə* "allotment", "personal estate" (if not a reduplication);

-b- (inanimate)
Pax- "to destroy",
Piš-ešχ- "to pour out", "to vomit",
Puz-iχ- "to douse", "put in soak";

-r- (common animate)
aršə "young people", "children".

3. Cases

Hurro-Urartian cases (-š-, -n-, -w-, -r-, -t- etc.) can be compared to East Caucasian or to Nostratic and Para-Nostratic. It is not accidental. All case markers are postfixes or clitics, and thus, have the same origin in various languages.

4. Criterion of the Verbal Morphology Template

Due to the verbal morphology template (Bengtson 2008) Hurro-Urartian can't be compared neither to Yeniseian and Burushaski nor to East Caucasian.

Ket

ad d-ansibɛt "I think"
ətn d-ansibɛt-n "we think"
bu ad da-ba-toŋ "she sees me"
bu u da-ku-toŋ "she sees you (Sg.)"

Burushaski

dú-ku-man-um-a "you (Sg.) were born"
a-tú-ku-man-um-a "you (Sg.) were not born"

Hunzib

m-aca-k´-ər "I cleaned (made clean)" (*m-* is a prefix of the 4th class).
Nowadays in Lezgian (also in Agul and Udi) the category of class / gender, according to traditional textbooks, is lost (actually it is transformed to the scale animacy / inanimacy), and so, I show here productive locative preverbs.

Lezgian

atun "to fall" → *av-atun, al-atun, aq-atun* etc. (Mejlanova, Shejkhov 1998)

Agul

ix´as "to put", "to throw" → *al-ix´as, al-č-ix´as, al-d-ix´as* etc. (Aleksejev, Sukejmanov 1998).

Udi

*ğe*s "to go" → *e-ğes, ta-ğes, la-j-ğes* etc. (Dzhejranishvili 1999)

The usage of verbal prefixes is a common feature of the Dene-Caucasian languages.

In the Hurro-Urartian languages prefixes are absent (Khachikjan 2010).

Hurrian

koz-ōš-o "you (Sg.) restrained (restrain-PRET-2SG)"
ūr-i-uffu=nna=ān "and I don't want it (want-TRANS-NEG+1sg=3pl.abs=and)"

Urartian

ar-in-[i]-nə "may he give it (give-JUSS-I-it)"
qapqar-u-l-i-nə "I wanted to besiege-it [the city] (besiege-OPT-it)"

5. The interpretation of Dene-Caucasian elements

The possible Dene-Caucasian elements (including fossilized prefixes) may be explained as borrowings and / or traces of code switching and other types of language contacts.

6. Conclusion

The grammatical analysis shows us that the Hurro-Urartian languages are not a part of the Dene-Caucasian macrofamily. As non-prefixal, they can't belong to the proper Nostratic[1] macrofamily either, so, they belong to the Para-Nostratic[2] macrofamily.

---

[1] The proper Nostratic macrofamily includes the following families and languages: the Indo-European family, the Afroasiatic family, the Kartvelian family, the Chukotko-Kamchatkan family, and the Nivkh language.
[2] The Para-Nostratic macrofamily is supposed to consist of the following families and languages: the Altaic family, the Uralic family, the Dravidain family, the Elamite language, the Hurro-Urartian family, the Tyrrhenian family, and possibly also the Eskaleut languages.

References

Aleksejev M. E., Sulejmanov N. D. 1998. Agul'skij jazyk (Agul language). in Aleksejev M. E., Klimov G. A., Starostin S. A. Testelets Ja. G. (eds). *Jazyki mira, kavkazskije jazyki* (Languages of the World. Caucasian Languages). Academia, Moscow; pp.: 399 – 408

Bengtson J. 2008. A Comparative Grammar of Dene-(Sino-)-Caucasian Languages. *Aspekty komparativistiki* 3, vypusk XIX (Aspects of comparative linguistics 3, issue XIX). Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow; pp.: 97 – 99

D'jakonov I. M., Starostin S. A. 1988. Xurrito-urartskije I vostochnokavkazskije jazyki (Hurro-Urartian and East Caucasian languages). *Drevnij Vostok. Etnokul'turnyje sv'az*i (The Ancient East. Ethnic and cultural connections). Nauka, Moscow, pp.: 164 – 207

Dzhejranishvili J. F. 1998. Udinskij jazyk (Udi Language). in Aleksejev M. E., Klimov G. A., Starostin S. A. Testelets Ja. G. (eds). *Jazyki mira, kavkazskije jazyki* (Languages of the World. Caucasian Languages). Academia, Moscow; pp.: 453 – 458

Kassian A. S. 2015. Klinopisnyje jazyki Anatolii (xattskij, xurrito-urartskie, anatolijskie): problemy etimologii i grammatiki (Cuneiform languages of Anatolia: Hattic, Hurro-Urartian, Anatolian), thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philology. Institute of Linguistics of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow

Khachikjan M. L. 2010. Xurrito-urartskije jazyki (The Hurro-Urartian languages). in Kazanskii N. N, Kibrik A. A., Koryakov Yu. B. (eds.) *Jazyki mira. Drevnie reliktovye jazyki Perednej Azii* (Languages of the world. Ancient relic languages of the Western Asia). Academia, Moscow; pp.: 118– 126

Mejlanova U. A., Shejkhov E. M. 1998. Lezginskij jazyk (Lezgian language). in Aleksejev M. E., Klimov G. A., Starostin S. A. Testelets Ja. G. (eds). *Jazyki mira, kavkazskije jazyki* (Languages of the World. Caucasian Languages). Academia, Moscow; pp.: 373 – 385

Starostin S. A. 1998. Hurro-Caucasica. Polytropon. K 70-letiju V. N. Toporova (Polytropon. On the 70th anniversary of V. N. Toporov). Indric, Moscow; pp.: 90 – 99