

## The actual troubles of comparative linguistics (Part 3)

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### Abstract

The so-called Nostratic theory proposed by the Moscow school of comparative linguistics and some other groups is an illustration of possible consequences of the blind usage of the lexical / etymological comparisons with ignoring of the grammatical criteria. Actually, we have a heap of different stocks. It is possible to reconstruct many common stems, but not common grammar. In other words: we can reconstruct this grammar, and we can suppose that it has been changed more quickly, in a rather more serious manner than vocabulary, but such scenario is fantastic and unreal. Thus, we should try to find another explanation of the Nostratic macrofamily and only after that we can find traces of more distant relationship.

**Keywords:** comparative linguistics; grammatical criteria of classification; Nostratic languages; Para-Nostratic languages; methodology of science

### 1. How can we guess the Nostratic puzzle?

Unlike Sino-Caucasian or Austric, Nostratic languages can hardly be compared to each other grammatically if we accept the data of lexicostatistics. Common grammatical features are not so evident. However, comparativists used to consider puzzles like Nostratic as normal.

languages / language families		original preposition of auxiliary components
Afro-Asiatic		+
Elamite		—
Nostratic (proper)		
Kartvelo-Dravidian	Kartvelian	+
	Dravidian	—
Narrow-Nostratic	Indo-European	+
	Uralic	—
	Altaic (incl. Eskimo and Aleut)	—
	Far East (Yukaghir, Chukotko-Kamchatkan, Nivkh)	+

We take into account the Far East language family that consists of Yukaghir, Chukotko-Kamchatkan and Nivkh branches. Also, we can admit Eskimo and Aleut languages as two different branches of the Altaic family. Thus, we simplify our classification. However, the Nostratic proto-grammar is unclear even in this case. Has the proto-Nostratic grammar been changed many times by drop or uprising of preposition? How can we prove it?

Herein we should turn also to the practice of one of the founders of the Moscow school of comparative linguistics – A. B. Dolgopolsky (Dolgopolsky 2005, 2012). He didn't exclude Afro-

Asiatic from Nostratic. He avoided glottochronology, so, he, as a rule, didn't reconstruct sublevels (Uralo-Altaic, Siberian etc.). Afro-Asiatic, Indo-European, Kartvelian, Dravidian, Elamite, Uralic (including Yukaghir), Altaic, Eskimo-Aleut, Chukotko-Kamchatkan and Gilyak (Nivkh) were full-fledged and equidistant stocks. Etruscan was mentioned as a possible part. But he didn't use grammatical criteria either. He described the proto-Nostratic language as highly analytic with strict (rigid) word order. For him the grammatical transformations, including emergence of prefixation, were straight but independent stages of transformation of the analytic system.

Thus, practically his narrative is a light version of comparative studies, cleaned out of the rather controversial issues, but with the same ignorance of grammar. His reconstruction is etymological, and grammar elements are described as etymological too.

Can we try something else?

The way out is to cut all Nostratic (with Afro-Asiatic and Elamite) into Nostratic A (with original preposition of auxiliary components) and Nostratic B (without this option), or, in other words, into Nostratic (proper) and Para-Nostratic.

By the way, Nostratic proper can also have some other common particularities, I suppose the existence of a system of noun classes and the existence of ablaut, but all features should be examined carefully. The same is also rightful to Para-Nostratic.

Earlier, Hurro-Urartian and Tyrrhenian (Etruscan and other) have been excluded from Sino-Caucasian and re-interpreted as Para-Sino-Caucasian because of the lack of preposition. However, really grammatical and even some lexical elements seem to have matches both in Nostratic and Para-Nostratic. The mistake is improved, and these languages are now included into Para-Nostratic.

macrofamilies	languages / language families	original preposition of auxiliary components
Nostratic (Nostratic A)	Afro-Asiatic	+
	Indo-European	
	Kartvelian	
	Far East (Yukaghir, Chukotko-Kamchatkan, Nivkh)	
Para-Nostratic (Nostratic B)	Uralic	—
	Altaic (incl. Eskimo and Aleut)	
	Elamite	
	Dravidian	
	Hurro-Urartian	
	Tyrrhenian	

Thus, we cut the so-called Nostratic languages into Nostratic proper (Nostratic A) and Para-Nostratic (Nostratic B) and now we can speak about reconstructing of two separated proto-languages.

## 2. Relationships of macrofamilies

We have received 4 macrofamilies supposed to be related, 3 of them (Nostratic, Sino-Caucasian, Austric) seem to have almost the same grammatical structure in a form of original left position of auxiliary components, while the 4<sup>th</sup> (Para-Nostratic) originally has no such option. However, it doesn't mean automatically that Nostratic, Sino-Caucasian and Austric macrofamilies are really more closely related to each other while Para-Nostratic is more distant. We should carefully verify all the matches to avoid the risk of comparison of passing similarity. We should solve whether the possibility of prefixation in Nostratic, Sino-Caucasian, and Austric macrofamilies really has originated from a common proto-language or has been elaborated independently. Especially it is right towards the Nostratic macrofamily, because the matches between Nostratic and Para-Nostratic languages, including, by the way, lexical and grammatical ones, verified by our colleagues of the Moscow school and other institutions, basically are not accidental. Thoughts of A. B. Dolgopolsky are not correct due to the description of dissolution of Nostratic and Para-Nostratic (comparativists practically do this), but we should foresee the situation when Nostratic and Para-Nostratic can be closely related, more than Sino-Caucasian and Austric to them. In this case their common proto-language (proto-Macro-Nostratic) without prefixation / left position can differ from proto-Austro-Sino-Caucasian with prefixation / left position.

This principle should be applied in long range comparison consistently and everywhere.

## 3. Conclusion

The examination of the Euroasiatic macrofamilies shows us the spoiling component in the comparative linguistics. This is the lexical analysis realized without the grammatical analysis. We don't reject the global comparison based on the lexical and / or etymological analysis. We don't repeat the errors of various antagonists of this method. They also have made serious mistakes in their own practice. Some of them can be reproduced even today and create obstacles. For example, the critical and even negative attitude toward Altaic, North Caucasian or Chukotko-Kamchatkan families is a result of activity of antagonists.

Basically, lexical and etymological reconstructions carry sense. When they are verified, they show real historical connections to us and dates of splits can reflex important events in the society. However, all these calculations should be realized in long range comparison together with other relevant procedures, including grammatical analysis, in other words, side by side.

## References

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