

The comparative study of some Korean and Thai lexical items

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Introduction

The Korean and Thai languages belong to different linguistic family. The Korean is the agglutinative language and belongs to Altaic Family. Its syntactic structure is SOV and phonological system is rich of vowel harmony. While the Thai is the isolating language and belongs to Tai Family. Its syntactic structure is SVO and phonological system consists of tones and initial consonant clusters.

During the years 2002 - 2006 I have been working for the Korean-Thai Dictionary project arranged by Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. I have found that some Korean and Thai lexical items are quite similar both in their pronunciation and meaning, for examples;

탄	/ταν/	“coal”	ถ่าน	/τηαν/	“charcoal”
광	/γωαN/	“wide, broad”	กว้าง	/κωααN/	“wide, broad”
마	/μα/	“horse”	ม้า	/μαα/	“horse”
송	/σoN/	“sending”	ส่ง	/σoN/	“to send”
패	/πθ/	“defeat”	แพ้	/πhθ/	“to be defeated”

I have been informed that approximately 70% of Korean words are Chinese loan words, So, I have made up the hypothesis that the corresponded Korean and Thai lexical items come from Chinese. In this article, such kind of Korean and Thai lexical items are drawn and compared in their forms, sounds, and meanings.

Data Collecting

In collecting data, the Thai lexical items which their sounds and meanings correspond to those of the Korean are drawn. I get more data from the article entitled “Chinese and Thai: Are They Related Genetically?” (Prapin Manomaivibool, 1976). In this article, more than 200 correspondences of Thai and Chinese are shown, and the two languages are pointed to be genetically related. The Korean lexical items as well as the Chinese characters are investigated and collected from the **사전통합 United Dictionary** which is provided by <http://dic.naver.com>.

Data Analysis

Firstly, the Korean and Thai lexical items are compared both in their sounds and meanings. The chart of comparative data demonstrates the comparative lexical items as well as the Chinese characters. The phonetic representatives of the Korean follow the phonological systems suggested in the **사전통합 United Dictionary**. Those of the Thai follow the phonological systems suggested in the book **Sound and Sound Systems: Thai Language**, (Puttachart Potibal, 1998). And those of the Chinese are the reconstructed sounds of the Middle Chinese suggested by Bernhard Karlgren (1954) appeared in Prapin Manomaivibool (1976).

Study Result

By comparing the data of Korean and Thai lexical items, it is founded that the corresponded items can be grouped into 4 groups according to their sound and semantic characteristics. The 4 groups of data are as following:

1. Identical Sound and Meaning

The Korean and Thai lexical items in this group are identical in both their sounds and meanings, for examples;

Korean	Thai	Meaning
객 / ㄱ ㅊ ㅊ /	แขก / &๕๓๓๓๓๓๓๓ /	“guest, stranger”
	ก	
마 / ㅁ ㅁ /	ม้า / ㅁ ㅁ ㅁ /	“horse”
송 / /	♦□☹ / ส่ง / ♦□☹ /	“to send”
		“sending”

The comparative data in this group are shown in chart 1.

2. Similar Sound – Identical Meaning

The Korean and Thai lexical items in this group are similar in their sounds and identical in their meanings, for examples;

Korean	Thai	Meaning
금 / ㄱ ㅁ ㅁ /	คำ / &๕๓๓๓๓๓๓๓ /	“gold”
만 / ㅁ ㅁ ㅁ /	หมื่น / ㅁ ㅁ ㅁ ㅁ ㅁ /	“ten thousand”
	น	
膿 / ㅁ ㅁ ㅁ /	หน / ㅁ ๒ ๒ ㅁ /	“pus”
	อง	

The comparative data in this group are shown in chart 2.

3. Identical sound – Related Meaning

The Korean and Thai lexical items in this group are identical in their sounds and related in their meanings, for examples;

Korean	Thai
기 / ㄱㅣ / 기개 “how many pieces”	แกง / &๕๕๕ “how many” /
기 / ㄱㅣ / 기마 “riding horse” /	ขี่ / “to ride” &๕๕๕ (on horseback etc.) ๕ /
가 / ㄱㅏ / 물가 “price(s)” /	ค่า / “value” &๕๕๕ ๕ /

The comparative data in this group are shown in chart 3.

4. Similar Sound – Related Meaning

The Korean and Thai lexical items in this group are similar in their sounds and related in their meanings, for examples;

Korean	Thai
구 / ㄱㅜ ◆ 구세대 “the old generation” /	เก่า / &๕๕◆ / “ancient”
근 / / 근간 “root and trunk” ㅜ ⊕ ■	โคน / “base of a tree” น &๕๕□□ ■ /

남	/	남성	“the male, a man”	หนุ่ม	/ ■◆○ /	“young man”
		■㉟○		น		
	/					

The comparative data in this group are shown in chart 4.

Discussion and Conclusion

The data shows that the corresponded Korean and Thai lexical items are the Chinese loan words. However they are used differently because the Korean and Thai belong to different language families and their morphological systems are absolutely different.

As the Korean is the agglutinative language, the Chinese loan words will follow the Korean morphology as below:

1. Most of the Chinese loanwords are used in the compounds, e.g.

견 appears in the word 견갑 “shoulder”

우 appears in the word 우유 “cow’s milk”

2. The Chinese loanwords which are originally verbs are used as the stems, e.g

패 “defeat” can become the verb as 패하다 “to be defeated”

답 “answer” can become the verb as 답하다 “to reply”

In contrary, the Thai is the isolating language as same as the Chinese. Besides, both languages are also hypothesized to belong, at some remote period, to the same linguistic family (Prapin Manomaivibool,1976: 26). So the Chinese loanwords are used without derivation.

In conclusion, the Korean lexical items which I have found similar to the Thai have led me to be interested in the relationship between the Korean and Thai. Even though I have found that the two languages are related through the Chinese borrowing, I would like to go on investigating more lexical items which are not included in this study. The followings are the examples of the corresponded Korean and Thai lexical items which are still waiting for my investigation.

Korean		Thai	
가	ᄃᄂ	กา	&ᄃᄂᄂ
티	◆ᄃ	ที(ท่า)	◆ᄃᄃ
파	□ᄂ	ผา	□ᄃᄂᄂ
부	ᄃ◆	ผุ	□ᄃᄃ◆
쌀	◆ᄃᄂ●	(ข้าว)สาร ร	◆ᄂᄂ■
군	ᄃ◆■	คุณ	&ᄃᄃ◆■
익	ᄃᄃᄃ	อีก	ᄃᄃᄃ&
상	◆ᄂᄃ	ข้าง	ᄃᄃᄂᄂᄃ
온	ᄃᄃ□■	อุ่น	ᄃᄃ◆■
판	□ᄂᄃ	แผ่น	□ᄃᄃᄃ■

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