

On the Northeast Asian Vowel Shift

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Abstract

Proto languages and the earliest attested languages of Northeast Asia, including Proto-Turkic, Proto-Mongolic, Old Korean, and even the controversial Proto-Altaic, all have long been assumed to have had a palatal-velar harmony. In the last decade, Ko (2011, 2013, 2018), Ko et al. (2014), Joseph et al. (2020) have rejected this conventional view and instead presented a revised view that the original vowel harmony was of a tongue root type, which may have shifted to a palatal-velar harmony only in Turkic and in one branch of Mongolic languages. Recently, Barrere & Janhunen (2019) have argued against this revisionist view, presenting long-overdue arguments in favor of the conventional view with a special focus on Proto-Mongolic vowel harmony. They further extended their analysis to other languages in the area, claiming what they call Northeast Asian Vowel Shift (cf. Janhunen 1981), a major areal phenomenon involving a diachronic shift from a palatal-velar harmony to a tongue root harmony. In this talk, I will provide a comprehensive and critical overview of the conventional approach to Northeast Asian vowel harmonies, including Barrere & Janhunen's recent arguments, and try to reinforce my revisionist view on the matter.

References

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