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JAPANESE *aru*, *iru*, *oru* 'TO BE'

[*oru* ist *bin aru*]

Among the Japanese expressions for 'to be', the verbs *aru* (unmarked), *iru* (animate subject) and *oru* (humble variant of *iru*) are of special interest (cf. Martin 1975: 194f. for a descriptive account). We may look for cognates of these verbs in the (other) Altaic languages.

In his comparative list of verbs in Japanese dialects (1987: 674ff.), Martin adduces these verbs as follows:

- B *aru* < **ara-* (? = **a-ra-*). 'be'.
A *iru* < *wi-* < **wi[y]-* < **bu/q-Ci-*. 'be; sit'.
?A *oru* < *wor-* < **bo(-)ra-* ? < **bu/q- ara-*
 (or *wi ar-* < **bu/q-Ci ara-*). 'be'.

Elsewhere I have argued that the accent classes A and B originally represent initial Low and High tone, respectively (1993), which is the opposite of the traditional reconstruction. Type A' of *oru* „may be contracted from an early compound of A+B (*wi- ar-*). *Oru* < *woru* is A throughout the Ryūkyūs but the cognate of *aru* 'be' uniquely seems to be Type A' in Yonaguni; everywhere else, and earlier, *aru* is B" (Martin 1987: 282). It appears that *aru* adopted the accent pattern of *oru* in the westernmost dialect of Yonaguni.

When we look at the continental languages, the first likely cognate is the Tungusic verb *bi-* 'to be', which is easily identified with Japanese *i-*, OJ. *wi-*. It is attractive to identify the Korean verb *i-* 'to be' with these possible cognates (cf. already Ramstedt 1957: 44). If these identifications are correct, we cannot simply reconstruct **bi-*, which would yield *pi-* in Korean, cf. MK. *pirís-* 'to begin' < **bir-*, Tk. *bir* 'one' (Starostin 1991: 99).

Turning now to Classical Mongolian, we find a variety of expressions for the verb 'to be' (cf. Grønbech & Krueger 1976: 43f.):

- (1) *a-* in the durative form *amui* 'he is', the gerunds *an* 'being', *ara* 'in order to be', etc.¹
- (2) *bü-*, *bö-* in *bülüge* 'has been', *bükü(i)* 'to be', *bürün* 'being', *böged* 'being', *bögesü* 'if it is', *bögetele* 'as long as'.
- (3) *bai-* 'to stand, wait, remain, dwell', later 'to be'.
- (4) *bol-* 'to become', also 'to be'.
- (5) *bui*, *buyu* 'being', which is a noun equivalent to Turkish *var*, e.g. *bars bui* 'there are tigers', negative *ügei* (Turkish *yok*).

Comparing these forms with Japanese *aru*, *iru*, *oru*, it is natural to identify CM. *a-*, *ara* with Jap. *ar-* and CM. *bü-* with OJ. *wi-* and Tungusic *bi-*. Starostin rightly reconstructs Proto-Altaic **bui-* 'to be', Jap. also 'to sit', and notes a variant OJ. *u-* < **bu-* with the same meaning (1991: 68). The labial articulation is preserved in the southernmost Ryūkyūan dialect of Hateruma, which has *bi-* for *(w)i-* (cf. Starostin 1991: 270). It follows that Jap. *oru* < *woru* must be derived from **bu-* plus *ar-*. Filling in the tones, I arrive at Proto-Japanese monosyllabic **ár-*, **bwì-* vs. disyllabic **bù-ár-*. The reconstructed cluster of **bwì-* also accounts for the loss of the labial articulation in the Korean verb, so that the stem form can be taken as Proto-Koreo-Japanese.

Turkic *böl-* 'to become, to be' must be compared with Mongolian *bol-* 'to become' (cf. Poppe 1960: 99), not with Japanese *(w)or-* < **bù-ár-* 'to be' (cf. already Miller 1971: 37). It may represent **bu-* plus *ol-* 'to take a position'. Turkic *är-* 'to be, to exist' can be identified with Jap. *ar-*, and Turkic *bār*, Turkish *var* 'there is' from **bu-* plus *är-* with Jap. *(w)or-*. However, there is an alternative etymology which connects Turkic *bār* with Mongolian *bari-* 'to take', Korean **pār-* 'to 'earn', Jap. *haraw-* < **páràp-* 'to sweep, to pay' (wrong accent pattern! Starostin 1991: 287), cf. also Turkic **bēr-*, Turkish *ver-* 'to give', Jap. *hirow-* < **pirip-* 'to pick up' (Starostin 1991: 282), which may be cognate with Indo-European **bher-* 'to bear'. The second etymology may be preferable.

This brings us to the possibility of identifying Proto-Altaic **bu-* with Proto-Indo-European **bheH₂u-* 'to be, to grow' (cf. Lubotsky 1995: 224f. for the shape of the root), which I tentatively reconstruct as Proto-Indo-Uralic **bVgu-*, where **V* denotes an unknown vowel (cf. Kortlandt 1989: 83). If Japanese *ar-* represents **a-ra-* (cf. Martin 1987: 677) and can be identified as the *ra*-aorist (cf. Menges 1943) of the root which is attested in Mongolian *a-* and the same holds for Turkic *är-*, the latter may be cognate with Proto-Indo-European **H₁es-* 'to be', where **H₁-* represents a glottal stop. Note that Miller's examples of Jap. *e* reflecting Proto-Altaic **ä* (1985: 78ff.) are all root-final and may therefore contain a suffix, so that the only phonetic reflex of **ä* appears to be *a* in Japanese.

¹ According to Poppe (1974: 102) the form *ara* does not exist but the form *arun* 'being' does.

If these etymological correspondences between Japanese and Indo-European are correct, there is a splendid parallel formation in Jap. *aru* 'is' vs. *oru* 'am' < *woru* on the one hand and German *ist* 'is' < **es-ti* vs. *bin* 'am', Old High German *bim*, Middle Dutch *bem* < **bw-es-mi* on the other. While there can hardly be a direct etymological connection here, one may wonder if the Japanese formation has something to teach us about Indo-European.

Apart from the German forms, we also have Old English *bi-* < **bwi-* beside *e(a)-* < **es-* in the present indicative of the verb 'to be', like Jap. *iru* < *wiru* beside *aru*, cf. Latin *fio* 'I become', Old Irish *biuu* 'am wont to be'. It appears that the stem *bi-* which is found from Ireland and Britain to eastern Siberia and the southern Ryūkyūs can be derived from a suffixed formation **bwi-* < **b(Vg)ui-* which is an extension of a common root **b(Vg)u-*. No such historical identification is possible in the case of German *bin*, which is a conflation of **biu* and **im*, cf. Old English *bio*, *bēo* and *eom*, *eam* 'am', also *biom*, whereas the accent pattern of Japanese (*w*)*oru* points to a compound **bū-ár-*. Though most Indo-European root enlargements must probably be derived from prehistorical suffixes, it seems at least possible to me that some of them represent earlier compounds. If this is correct, we may compare Jap. **bū-ár-* with the Old Irish subjunctive *be-* < **bes-* < **bwes-* of the verb 'to be' (cf. Kortlandt 1984: 185) and derive the Indo-European *s*-presents from a compound formation, e.g. Umbrian *ferest* 'he will carry' < **bher-es-*, Greek (*kat*)*hedoūmai* 'I will sit (down)' < **sed-es-* (cf. Pedersen 1921: 23ff.) from 'he is to bear', 'I am to sit'.

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