

Typological features of Itelmen and its neighboring languages

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The genealogical relationship between Itelmen (Kamchatka, Russia) and other Chukotko-Kamchatkan languages (Chukchi, Koryak, Alutor and Kerek) has been argued among linguists. Some linguists suspect the cognation of Itelmen with the others. In this paper, I present some typological features of Itelmen and its neighboring languages, which are mainly Koryak and Ainu. The purpose of this discussion is not to prove the genealogical relationship of Itelmen. Here, it is important to know the features these languages share in common and those which are different.

Koryak has had contact with Itelmen for a long time. Itelmen was divided into three groups: Southern, Eastern, and Western Itelmen. Southern and Eastern Itelmen became extinct in the 19th century and now only Western Itelmen exists. Southern Itelmen and Northern Kuril Ainu had contact in the southern portion of Kamchatka. There is not enough evidence that shows the influence resulting from contact between Southern Itelmen and Northern Kuril Ainu.

Itelmen has a rich consonant cluster of up to 7 consonants used at the word-initial and 6 consonants at the word-final. In Chukchi, one of the Chukotko-Kamchatkan languages, CC occurs but CCC does not. Koryak inserts ə to avoid CC(C). Itelmen is an agglutinative language and does not have compounds or incorporation, while Koryak and Ainu have both. Itelmen and Koryak have some common features, such as personal pronouns, some affixes, and a small lexicon. Itelmen has first, second, and third person, as well as singular and plural, while Koryak has dual person and Ainu has fourth person.

The affix order of the verbs also contrasts in Itelmen and Koryak. Tense and aspect are marked only by the suffix in Itelmen, while in Koryak, they are marked by the prefix and the suffix. The alignment for Itelmen is S=A=P, that is, S (intransitive subject), A (transitive agent) and P (transitive patient) are all given in an absolutive case, while the alignment for Koryak is A/S=P; namely S and P are given in an absolutive case, but A appears in an ergative case. In Itelmen, person agreement appears only in the verb, but in Koryak, the adjective and the noun are also marked by person. Ainu is characterized by a

V=A (verb=adjective) type and also has person agreement. In Ainu, person-marking with the noun demonstrates possession (ku=tekehe ‘my hand’), while in Koryak, the person agreement with the noun forms the predicative (qajəkmiŋ-i-γəm ‘I am a boy’).

In summary, there is a small amount of evidence for the existence of borrowing between Itelmen and Northern Kuril Ainu. Itelmen and Koryak have some common features (personal pronoun, verb agreement, etc.). Koryak and Ainu share the characteristics of incorporation and person agreement in adjective and noun, which do not exist in Itelmen. It is assumed that Ainu and Itelmen have not significantly influenced each other and the differences between Itelmen and Koryak are also substantial.