

Subject: **Ancient Scripts and Languages**

Article: **42**

The Sumerian Language

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In article **18 - Towards Sumer and Elam** I have shown a map in which the Sumer people came to Mesopotamia from Central Asia, passing through the Indus valley. This route of expansion is not supported by many experts in the field of ancient cultures and languages. Their claim is that the Sumerian language is an isolate language and does not have any connection to other language groups.

Recently an article has been published that contains strong, if not conclusive evidence showing the connection of Sumerian with Turkish (1).

The article claims:

Sumerian is not a language isolate, as it is regarded so far, but that it may be classified as an r-Altai language of the Bolgar branch.

The Bolgar branch is a subgroup of the Turkic languages, which can be defined as the **r-Turkish** or the Uralic branch comprising the **Ob Ugric** and **Chuvash** languages, while the Turkish of present day Turkey can be defined as a **z-Turkish**. Words that end with a **-z** in the z-Turkish end with an **-r** in the r-Turkish. Furthermore, Sumerian and all Central Asiatic Turkic languages, as well the languages of the Caucasus –especially Georgian- and Basque from Western Europe, Korean and Japanese from Eastern Asia are agglutinative. In an **agglutinative language** most words are formed by joining morphemes together.

In 1990 the Turkish linguist Prof. **Osman Nedim Tuna** (1923 – 2001) (2) and later on Sumerologue **Muazzez İlmiye Çığ** (1914 -) (3) published several books in Turkish showing the close relationship between Turkish and Sumerian, but none of these works have been seriously taken into account by Western scholars.

In the conclusion of his article I. Kenanidis says:

The most basic vocabulary [of Sumerian] is common [with the r-Altai language], that is words meaning "a man", "god", "wind", "to write", "written symbols", metals, culturally important animals, and generally culturally important words. Nevertheless, this classification is not only based on vocabulary, as discussed already. Phonology, grammar and syntax, all point to the same direction.

The **Ural-Altai** languages consist of the Western, the Eastern and the Extinct groups. Sumerian, Elamite, Cretan and Etruscan are part of the extinct Ural-Altai languages. This classification has been discussed in article **2 - Diversification of Languages**.

Here are some examples from the article of Kenanidis, showing the close relationship of Turkish with Sumerian:

Turkish: ANA (mother) - **Sumerian: AMA** (mother)

Turkish: BOZ (dissolve, distort, break) - **Sumerian: BUR**

Turkish: DAHİ (additionally, moreover) – **Sumerian: DAH**

Turkish: KOŞ (run), **KAÇ** (run away) - **Sumerian: KAŞ** (run)

Turkish: AD (name) - **Sumerian: AD** (voice, noise)

Turkish: AYI (bear) - **Sumerian: AZ** (bear)

Turkish: BOL (to be, **OL** in Modern Turkish (MT)) - **Sumerian: GAL**

Turkish: KÖY (village) - **Sumerian: KEY** (position, area)

Turkish: TENGRİ (god, deity, **TANRI** in MT) - **Sumerian: DİNGİR**

Turkish: TOKU (to weave, **DOKU** in MT) - **Sumerian: TUKU**

Turkish: YAŞ (age, fresh) - **Sumerian: ŞAR, ŞUL** (youth, young man)

Turkish: -MAZ (never done) - **Sumerian: BAR-** (cannot be done)

Considering that Sumerian was spoken some 5,000 years before present, this small sample of similar words indicates that the two languages originated from a common source. The source language was most probably a root language that was spoken several thousand years ago in Central Asia. Therefore the logical conclusion is that Turkish or Ural-Altai and Sumerian did not loan words from each other, nor did those words emerge as pure coincidence. For more information about the root language and other examples regarding the relationship between Turkish and Sumerian, see article **1-Kök Dil Arayışı ve Türkçe** in the Turkish version of this site.

References

- (1) **Yet Another Suggestion about the Origins of the Sumerian Language**, Ioannis Kenanidis, International Journal of Linguistics, Vol. 5, No. 5, Oct. 23, 2013.
- (2) **Sümer ve Türk Dillerinin Tarihi İlgisi**, Osman Nedim Tuna, TDK, 1990, Ankara.
- (3) **Sümerlilerde Tufan ve Tufanda Türkler** and **Sümerliler Türklerin Bir Koludur**, Muazzez İlmiye Çığ, Kaynak Yayınları, 2013, İstanbul.