

Contrasting “Altaic” Languages (Turkic, Mongolian and Tungusic Languages) with Special Reference to Noun Categories (Case)

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0. Introduction

Linguists have been debating the genealogical relationship between the three Altaic language groups for some time. But as yet no one has been able to establish a lexical correspondence among the core vocabularies of these languages based on the strict laws of phonetic change, such as the correspondences that have enabled us to assign Armenian to the Indo-European language family.

The basis for hypothesizing a relationship between the three, then, must be grammatical similarity. But can these language groups really be considered grammatically similar? Thanks to typological studies carried out in recent years, we now know that languages with a suffixing agglutinative morphology and subject-object-verb syntax (and the closely related modifier-modified word order) constitutes the most plentiful language type in the world. At the same time, the Indic languages demonstrate that such distinguishing features as word order are easily changed under influence from without. All this suggests that the “grammatical similarities” among languages that share such general features are not very meaningful.

Is it possible, however, to identify more specific grammatical similarities that could not plausibly be ascribed to coincidence? In an effort to answer this question, I have endeavored to contrast grammatical forms found in three of the languages at issue, emphasizing function rather than form. Specifically I have chosen to focus on case forms.¹ To contrast forms in detail can also contribute to our understanding of typology. A few years ago, Kamei, Kono, and Chino proposed an “Altaic type” of syntax (1996: 28–9). However, it remains for future studies to illuminate the essential characteristics of this Altaic type. It should be possible to make a significant contribution to such typological research by carefully contrasting grammatical elements in various Altaic languages, which epitomize this type, and analyzing the extent of their similarities and differences.

1.1 Number² and types of cases

	Turkic Languages		Mongolian Languages	Tungusic Languages				
	Turkish	Yakut	Mongolian	Ewen I ³	Ewenki I	Udehe II	Nanay III	Manchu IV
Nom.	-ϕ	-ϕ	-ϕ	-ϕ f	-ϕ	-ϕ	-ϕ	-ϕ
Gen.	-(n)in ⁴	—	-ы ² /-ын ²	—	—	—	—	-i
Def.	-(n)i ⁴	-(n)i ⁴	-г/-ыг ²	-w	-wa ² /-ba ²	-wa ²	-wa ²	-bə
Acc.	(-ϕ)	(Part.) -ta ⁴ /-da ⁴	(-ϕ)		-ja	/-ba ²	/-ba ²	(-ϕ)
Indef. Acc.	—	—	—	-ga ² -	—	-na ²	-go ²	—
Des.	—	—	—	-du ²	-duu	-du	-do ²	-də
Dat.	-(y)a ²	-ga ⁴ /-ка ⁴ etc.	-д/-т (руу ² /луу ²)	-tki ² etc.	-tkii etc.	-tigi	-či	—
Dir.	—	—	—	-la ² /-dola ²	-laa ²	-la ²	-la ² /-dola ²	—
Loc.	-da ² /-ta ²	—	—	-la ² /-dola ²	-laa ²	-la ²	-la ² /-dola ²	—
Abl.	-dan ² /-tan ²	-(t)tan ⁴	-aac ⁴	-duk ²	-duk	-digi	-jiajji ²	-či
Inst.	(Inst.-Com.) -(y)la ²	-(i)nan ⁴	-aap ⁴	-č	-t	-ji	-ji	-i
Com.	/ile	-liin ⁴ / diin ⁴ etc.	(-тай ³)	-ñun ²	—	—	—	—
Ess.	-ce ² /-çe ²	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Comp.	—	-taakar ⁴ /-daakar ⁴ etc.	—	—	—	—	—	—
Prol.	—	—	—	-li ²	-lii	-li	—	(dəri)
Elat.	—	—	—	-gič ²	-git	—	—	—
Dir.-L.	—	—	—	-kla ²	-klaa ²	—	—	—
Dir.-P.	—	—	—	-kli ²	—	—	—	—
Number of Cases	7 (9)	8	6 (9)	1 3	1 1	9	8	6 (7)

1.2 Definite/indefinite accusative and partitive

In Turkish and Mongolian, the indefinite accusative has no explicit marker.⁴ The noun with no explicit marker also has an indefinite accusative meaning in Manchu (Tamura 1990). On the other hand, some Tungusic languages (Ewenki, Solon, and Negidal of group I) have an explicit marker for the indefinite accusative. This case is used to indicate something that is indefinite, generic, or a part rather than the whole, and its function is similar to the partitive case found in a number of Uralic languages in that it is used with the negative (Kazama 1997).⁵

[Ewenki] (Konstantinova 1964)
mookaar-ə gənəkəl, tadék mookaar-wə ədu nəkəl.
woods-Indef.Acc. gather-Imp. then woods-Def.Acc. here put Imp.
"Go and gather firewood (indefinite), and then put the firewood here."

ukummi-*ja* uŋkukəl!
milk-Indef.Acc. pour-Imp.
"Pour part of the milk!"

omolgil ŋarbakir, unta-*ja* aačín bičəətin.
youths barefeet shoes without be-Past-3.pl.
"Young men were in bare feet and wore no shoes."

In Nanay, the locative case can be used to express "a part."
uikə-wə duktəuri. (Kazama 1997 p.109)
door-Acc. bang-Imp.Part.
"to bang all over the door"

uikə-lə duktəuri. (Kazama 1997 p.109)
door-Loc. knock-Imp.Part.
"to knock the door"

ŋoani mapa-wa miawam-*dola*-ni garpaxani. (Kazama 1994 p.47)
he bear-Acc. heart-Loc.-3sg. shoot-Past-3sg.
"He shot the bear in the heart."

Also in Turkish and Mongolian, the ablative case can be used to express "a part."

[Turkish]
Öğrenciler-*den* Hasan Japonca biliyor. (Hayashi 1995 p.93)
student-pl.-Abl. Hasan Japanese know
"Among the students Hasan knows Japanese."

O su-*dan* içtim. (Hayashi 1995 p.93)
that water-Abl. drink-Past-1sg.
"I drank a part of the water."

Hırsızı kolun-*dan* tuttum. (Lewis 1967 p.38)
thief arm-Abl. catch-Past-1sg.
"I caught the thief by the arm."

[Mongolian dialects of Inner Mongolia] (Chingertai 1991, p.p.169-70)
yar-*ača* ni bariqu
arm-Abl. 3sg. catch
"to catch him by the arm"

budayan-*ača* ni idek
rice-Abl. 3sg. eat
"to eat a part of the rice"

tuyul-i segül-*eče* ni tataysan
calf-Def.Acc. tail-Abl. 3sg. catch-Past
"(I) caught the calf by the tail."

1.3. Designative case

Regarding the designative case found in most of the Tungusic languages, previous studies have stated that (1) it always takes a personal possessive suffix; (2) it expresses the meaning of "sth. *for someone*" (expressed by the personal possessive suffix); and (3) syntactically, it indicates the object. However, I was able to determine that even some intransitive verbs take the designative case and that the verbs that take it are limited to a certain range of meaning (almost always *actions that yield the thing in question*, such as "discover," "obtain," "pursue," "make," "appear," etc.). Among the Tungusic languages, the distribution of the designative case and that of the aforementioned indefinite accusative are complementary. In terms of function as well, the indefinite accusative with a personal suffix is used designatively. This type of grammatical case is found in no other Altaic languages.

[Nanay]
mii aagbi daŋsa-*go-iwa* gačini.
I brother-1sg. book-Des.-1sg. buy-Past-3sg.
"My brother bought me the book (for me)."

[Ewenki] (Menges 1953)
Kyldnakaan mata Məŋunkaan ahaatkaanma ahyy-*ja-wy*
Kyldnakaan hero Mengunkaan girl-Def.Acc. wife-Indef.Acc.-Ref. (marry)
"The hero Kyldnakaan took the girl Mengunkaan as his wife."

Complementary distribution of designative case and indefinite accusative in Tungusic languages

	Des.	Indef. Acc.
Ewen (I)	-ga ² /-ŋa ²	—
Ewenki (I)	—	-a ² /-ja ²
Solon (I)	—	-a ² /-ja ²
Negidal (I)	—	-a ² /-ja ²
Orochi (II)	-laa ² /-jaa ² / naa ²	—
Udehe (II)	-na ²	—
Hezhen (II?)	—	—
Nanay (Kur-Urmi dialect) (I + III)	-na ²	—
Nanay (III)	-go ²	—
Olcha (III)	-ju ²	—
Uilta (III)	-ddoo ²	—
Manchu (IV)	—	-∅
Sibe (IV)	—	—(?)

1.4. (Definite) accusative subject of a subordinate clause

In Mongolian, the accusative is frequently used to indicate the subject of a subordinate clause.

Түүнийг гэртээ харихад бусад нь яриагаа үргэлжлүүлжээ.
 he-Acc. home-Dat.-Ref. return-Dat. others 3sg. talk-Ref. continue-Caus.-Past
 "When he had returned home, the others were continuing their talk."

This occurs when the subject of the subordinate clause is different from the subject of the main clause. If the nominative case is used, it is assumed that the subject of the subordinate clause is the same person as the subject of the main clause.

Доржийг ялсан гэж бодсон.
 Dorj-Def.Acc. win-Past Quot. regard-Past
 "(People thought that) Dorj had won."

Дорж ялсан гэж бодсон.
 Dorj(Nom.) win-Past Quot. regard-Past
 "Dorj thought that he had won."

Something similar is seen in the Tungusic languages as well. In Manchu, the accusative is used for the oblique subject of an indirect quotation (Kubo 1981).

geren hafasa *simbe* sain seme alaha bihe,
people official you(Acc.) good Quot. announce be-Past
"People and the official announced that you were good."

In Turkish, the next example is found (but its syntactic structure is a problematic).

Onu akıllı buldum.
him clever regard-Past-1sg.
"I regard him as a clever person."

1.5. Accusative function of reflexive possessive

In Mongolian and the Tungusic languages, in a sentence in which the subject is in the third person, if a third-person pronoun or a noun with a third-person possessive suffix is used, that pronoun or noun is understood to refer to someone other than the subject of the sentence. In other words, it carries a fourth-person meaning. Meanwhile, when something belonging to the subject appears in the same sentence, the reflexive possessive suffix must be used.

[Mongolian]

Дорж ном-*оо* дүүд-*ээ* өгсөн.
Dorj book-Ref. sister-Dat.-Ref. give-Past
"Dorj gave his own book to his sister."

Дорж ном *нь* дүүд-*ээ* өгсөн.
Dorj book 3sg. sister-Dat.-Ref. give-Past
"Dorj gave someone's book to his sister."

Дорж ном-*оо* дүүд *нь* өгсөн.
Dorj book-Ref. sister-Dat. 3sg. give-Past
"Dorj gave his own book to someone's sister."

[Nanay]

ñoani sogdata-ngo-*ji* siaxani.
He fish-Alien.-Ref.sg. eat-Past-3sg.
"He ate his own fish."

ñoani sogdata-ngo-*ani* siaxani.
He fish-Alien.-3sg. eat-Past-3sg.
"He ate someone's fish."

Interestingly, Mongolian and Tungusic languages share several important points with respect to the reflexive possessive. When the reflexive possessive is used, the accusative does not appear; rather, a form using the reflexive possessive suffix without any case suffix only functions as the object.¹

1.6. Case indicating a route or way

The sense of a route or way is indicated in Mongolian by the instrumental case and in Turkish by the ablative or accusative (when the meaning is along the lines of "follow a road").

Most of the Tungusic languages have a special case to indicate the sense of a route or way (the prolativ). Nanay has no prolativ; the locative has both an ablative and a prolativ meaning. (There is an ablative case in addition to the locative, but it is rarely used.)

1.7. Case taken by "become" (translative)

The *ol-* of Turkish, *бол-* of Mongolian, and *o-* of Tungusic languages (*osi-* in the Nanay examples below), meaning "become," take a noun with no case marker,¹ which indicates that the referent has undergone a change. The transitive verb derived from "become" also takes a noun with no case marker.

[Turkish]

Rıza başkan oldu. (Hayashi 1995 p.101)
Rıza chairman become-Past
"Rıza became a chairman."

[Mongolian]

Тэр хоёр танил тал болов. (Ozawa 1983, p. 57)
that two good friends become-Past
"The two became good friends."

[Nanay]

inzhener osiori. (Onenko 1986, p. 256)
engineer become-Imp.Part.
"to become an engineer"

[Turkish] (*Here the transitive verb is not derived from "become.")

Padişah İbrahim'i sadrazam yaptı. (Hayashi 1995, p. 100)
sultan İbrahim prime minister make-Past
"The sultan made İbrahim a prime minister."

[Mongolian]
хүүгээ эмч болгосон
son-Ref. doctor become-Caus.-Past
"He made his son a doctor."

[Nanay]
ñoambani zven'evoj osiwaanķipu. (Onenko 1980, p. 316)
him section leader become-Caus.-Past-1pl.
"We made him the section leader."

In these Altaic languages, the above-mentioned verbs are also used as one-place verbs. To put it another way, in these languages, the verb meaning "become" also carries the meaning of "come into being."

[Turkish]
Akşam olmak. (Takeuchi 1989, p. 289)
evening come into being-Infinit.
"It gets dark."

[Mongolian] (Ozawa 1983, p. 57)
Алирс болжээ.
cowberry ripen-Past
"The cowberry has ripened."

[Nanay]
saaksa osiini. (Onenko 1980, p. 316)
frost come into being-Pres.-3sg.
"The frost breaks out."

Something to note here is that these caseless nouns appear in copulative sentences as well. In most Altaic languages, a copula is not used in present-tense affirmative copulative sentences, but in other cases (past tense, negative, etc.) we find an element that functions as a copula. (In the Mongolian and Nanay examples below, this function is performed by *bi-* and *байх*, which function as verbs of existence.

[Turkish]
Barış şarkıcı. (Hayashi 1995, p. 100)
Barsh singer
"Barsh is a singer."

Ahmet doktor idi. (Takeuchi 1989, p. 184)
Ahmet doctor Copula-Past
"Ahmet was a doctor."

[Mongolian]
Би монгол хүн. (Nukushina 1998, p. 128)

I Mongolian people
"I am a Mongolian."

Энэ сайхан цай байна. (Nukushina 1998, p. 129)
this good tea be-Pres.
"This is good tea."

In a situation in which the speaker affirms the fact in the present, the copula is used (Nukushina 1998, p. 129).

[Nanay]
Һоанчи мии баларчи жiasilbi. (Onenko 1986, p. 153)
they I old friend-pl.-Ref.
"They are my old friends."

mii amimbi vrach bičin. (Onenko 1986, p. 24)
I father-1sg. doctor be-Past
"My father was a doctor."

In these languages, it seems clear that there is a connection between copulative sentences and sentences with the meaning of "becomes."

1.8. Case doubling

In Turkish and Mongolian, case doubling is not generally permitted, meaning that one will not see two words in the same case and performing the same function in one sentence.

In the Tungusic languages, however, the double accusative is common in causative sentences made from transitive verbs. In addition, the double accusative is sometimes seen with the "whole and part" sentence structure.

[Nanay]
alosimji naonjokam-*ba* dansa-*wa* xolawandini. (Avrorin 1961, p. 34)
teacher boy-Acc. book-Acc. read-Caus.-Pres.-3sg.
"The teacher made the boy read the book."

Һоани мара-*wa* miawam-*ba*-ni garpaxani. (Kazama 1994, p. 40)
he bear-Acc. heart-Acc.-3sg. shoot-Past-3sg.
"He shot the bear in the heart."

In some of the Tungusic languages, the double accusative may appear when a numeral or an adjective indicating quantity comes after the noun it modifies.

ñoani toiŋŋa /əǰji / oi sogdata-wa waaxani.
 he five / many / few fish-Acc. get-Past-3sg.
 "He got five / many / a few fish."

ñoani sogdata-wa toiŋŋa-wa /əǰji-wə / oi-wa waaxani.
 he fish-Acc. five-Acc. / many-Acc. / few-Acc. get-Past-3sg.
 "He got five / many / a few fish."

In Mongolian as well, the double accusative occurs when either a numeral or the quantitative adjective meaning "all" floats after the noun.

ЭНЭ НОМ-ЫГ БҮГД-ИЙГ авъя.
 this book-Def.Acc. all-Def.Acc. buy-Cohor.
 "I will buy all these books."

ЭНЭ НОМ-ЫГ хоёр-ЫГ авъя.
 this book-Def.Acc. two-Def.Acc. buy-Cohor.
 "I will buy these two books."

However, with numerals, it is more common for the preceding noun to be unmarked or in the ablative case.

ЭНЭ НОМ хоёр-ЫГ авъя.
 this book two-Def.Acc. buy-Cohor.
 "I will buy these two books."

ЭНЭ НОМН-ООС хоёр-ЫГ авъя.
 this book-Def.Acc. all-Def.Acc. buy-Cohor.
 "I will buy two from these books."

In most dialects of Ewen and Ewenki, when the usual word order is used, agreement is the rule not only for numerals but for all adjectives, and for a variety of cases. There are also dialects in which only the modifier displays the case marker. Agreement occurs with respect to number, person, diminutive, and augmentative, as well as case.

[Ewenki (Poligus dialect)]
 tunŋa-wa ulukii-l waam. (Konstantinova 1964, p. 117)
 five-Acc. squirrel-pl. get-1sg.
 "I got five squirrels."

[Ewen]
 ilan-dula ʃu-l (Benzing 1955b, p. 71)
 three-Loc. tent-pl.
 "in the three tents"

[Ewenki] (Kolesnikova 1966, p. 45)
 bu aja-l-ji-tin jawi-l-ji-tin əjækii surusinəw.
 we good-pl.-Inst.-3pl. boat-pl.-Inst.-3pl. downstream depart-Past-1pl.
 "We departed downstream on their good boats."

[Ewen] (Benzing 1955b p.66)
 munrukan ɲonomaŋ-aŋja-l-bi korit-aŋja-l-bi idəč pasakalvin.
 rabbit long-Aug.-pl.-Ref. ear-Aug.-pl.-Ref. together hit-3pl.
 "The rabbits with long ears hit together."

In Udehe as well, when quantity is being expressed, only the modifier is given a case marker.

[Udehe] (Benzing 1955a, p. 149)
 ila-ma aŋani ʃaa-ma nəŋini
 three-Acc. year ten-Acc. day
 "for three years" "for ten days"

2. Conclusion

The similarities and differences I have found among the languages and language groups addressed in this paper are summed up below.

« Similarities among the three Altaic language groups »

Unmarked nominative (1.1), unmarked translativative (1.7)

« Similarities between Turkish and Mongolian »

Indefinite accusative unmarked (1.2), partitive-like use of ablative (1.2)

« Similarities between Mongolian and the Tungusic languages »

Reflexive possessive endings and their accusative use (1.5)

« Distinctive feature of Mongolian »

Accusative subject of subordinate clause (1.4)

« Distinctive features of Tungusic languages »

Designative (1.3), prolativative (1.6), explicit indefinite accusative (1.2)

In truth, however, it is misleading to place all these features on the same level, since they vary considerably in terms of importance, rarity, and so forth. In addition, there are differences and similarities that can be explained historically and those that cannot; that is to say, differences may be the result of linguistic changes that caused two similar languages to diverge from one another, while similarities may reflect mutual

influence between two divergent languages. The task of carefully assessing and ranking the abovementioned features with regard to such factors is the next step, and more extensive and in-depth descriptive research into each of these languages and their dialects will need to be carried out with that goal in mind.

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Abbreviations

Abl.	Ablative case
Acc.	Accusative case
Alien.	Alienable possession
Aug.	Augmentative
Caus.	Causative voice
Cohor.	Cohortative mood
Com.	Comitative case
Comp.	Comparative case
Dat.	Dative case
Def. Acc.	Definite Accusative case
Des.	Designative case
Dir.	Directive case
Dir.-L.	Directive-Locative case
Dir.-P.	Directive-Prolative case
Ess.	Essive case
Gen.	Genitive case
Imp.	Imperative mood
Imp. Part.	Impersonal Participle
Indef. Acc.	Indefinite Accusative case
Infin.	Infinitive
Inst.	Instrumental case
Loc.	Locative case
Nom.	Nominative case
pl.	Plural
Pres.	Present tense
Prol.	Prolative case
Quot.	Quotation marker
Ref.	Reflexive possessional ending
sg.	Singular
1	1st person
2	2nd person
3	3rd person

Notes

¹ My major is the descriptive study of Tungusic languages by means of fieldwork, and my knowledge is entirely insufficient in Turkish and Mongolian languages. I ask for comments and suggestions from specialists in these languages. I would like to thank Mutsumi Sugahara and Renzo Nukushina for their significant comments and suggestions on Turkish and Mongolian. All errors and inadequacies are my own.

There are about 27 Turkic languages, about 10 Mongolian languages, and about 10 Tungusic languages. But in this paper, the information is mainly on Turkish, Mongolian (Khalkha dialect), and Nanay for each group. The consideration of older stages of every group of these languages is also insufficient.

² The following table is for the purpose of convenience in contrasting the languages. Although the same names are given for forms in each language, the functions may not be the same. In this paper these names are unified for the purpose of contrasting the tongues. Each language presents different problems in deciding whether some forms are cases or not. Therefore the number of cases on this table is also selected for the sake of convenience.

I would like to add some information concerning the problem of the number of cases in each language. The instrumental case of modern Turkish is not a suffix but a particle, because it does not cause the movement of accent (Hayashi 1995 p. 97). There was another form considered to be the instrumental case in old Turkic. There remains a fossil element of this suffix in such words as *kış-in* "in winter" in modern Turkish. Further, there was the form of the directive case in old Turkic (-*Garu*²), and its trace remains in such words as *içeri* (<*iç-gerü) "in, into, inside". The inclusion of the essive case is also a problem, but it shows the same behavior as locative and ablative in appearing as "pronominal n".

Among Turkic languages, Yakut does not have the genitive case and the locative case; meanwhile Yakut has the comitative case, the comparative case, and the explicit indefinite accusative case. These differences perhaps occurred under the influence of Tungusic and Mongolian languages.

In Chuvash, the dative case and the definite accusative case have the same form (Shogaito 1989 p. 872).

In Mongolian some scholars accept the abessive case and the essive case. The directive case *-pyy* is derived from an independent adverb *yyy*, "down, downstream".

Among Tungusic languages, the northern languages have many cases, and the southern languages have fewer cases (perhaps under the influence of Uralic languages in the north, and under the influence of Mongolian and Chinese in the south).

³ Roman numerals represent the subgroups of Tungusic languages classified by Ikegami (1974).

I: Ewen, Ewenki, Solon, Negidal; II: Orochi, Udehe; III: Nanay, Olcha, Uilta; IV: Manchu, Sibe

⁴ But in Turkish, the definiteness of the noun is not the only condition for accusative marking. When the noun moves from the position immediately before the verb, definite accusative marking is used. Semantic conditions alone are insufficient for accusative marking. Syntactic, morphological and pragmatic aspects must be considered (Kuribayashi 1989). The sequence of the noun of the indefinite accusative case and verb can be considered as a kind of noun incorporation (Kuribayashi 1989).

⁵ In fact, some scholars call this the partitive case, for example Poppe 1931 (a sketch of Solon).
aforementioned indefinite accusative are complementary. In terms of function as well, the indefinite accusative with a personal suffix is used designatively. This type of grammatical case is found in no other Altaic languages.

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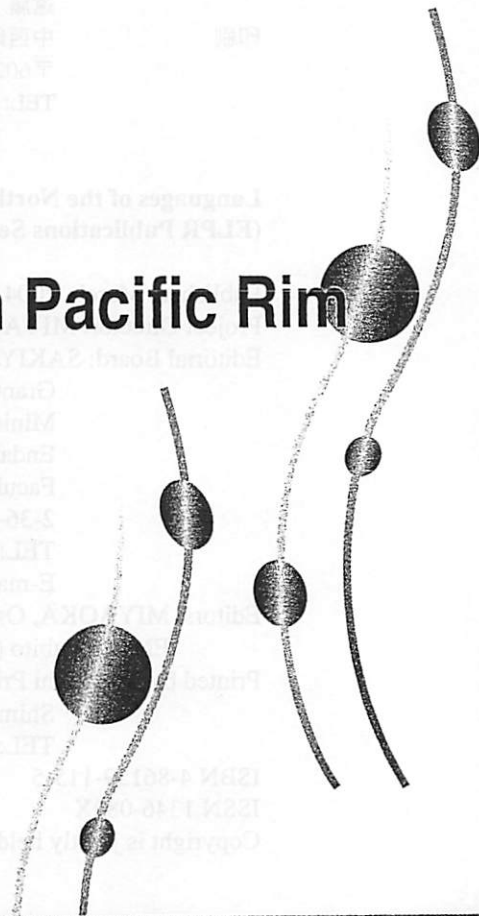
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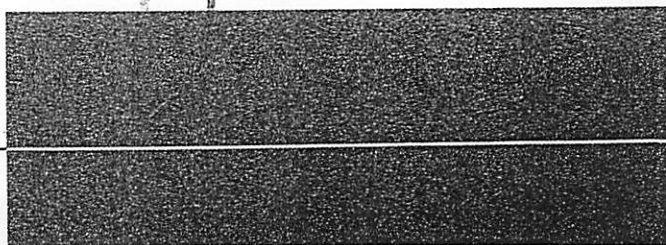
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