

Morphophonology as a window to Ainu linguistic past

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As a language, or a small family, without any known relatives, Ainu offers few opportunities for traditional comparative work. The interdialectal correspondences in Ainu are mostly trivial, and the external contacts with neighbouring languages are also relatively recent. In this situation, it is worthwhile to examine whether any information on the past stages of Ainu can be retrieved by the method of internal reconstruction. This paper will discuss the diachronic evidence preserved in Ainu morphophonology, especially the so-called affiliative form of nouns and the causative stem of verbs. The analysis shows that Ainu once underwent a process of final vowel loss. This conclusion has consequences for our understanding of Ainu morpheme structure.