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**Dene-Yeniseian And Dene-Caucasian:  
Pronouns And Other Thoughts**

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## Some recently proposed external connections of Na-Dene:

1. Sergei Nikolayev:

**"Sino-Caucasian Languages in America"**.

// In: Dene-Sino-Caucasian Languages, Ann Arbor, 1991.

[**Na-Dene and North Caucasian**, both as members of Dene-Caucasian].

2. Merritt Ruhlen:

**"The Origin of The Na-Dene"**, 1996-98.

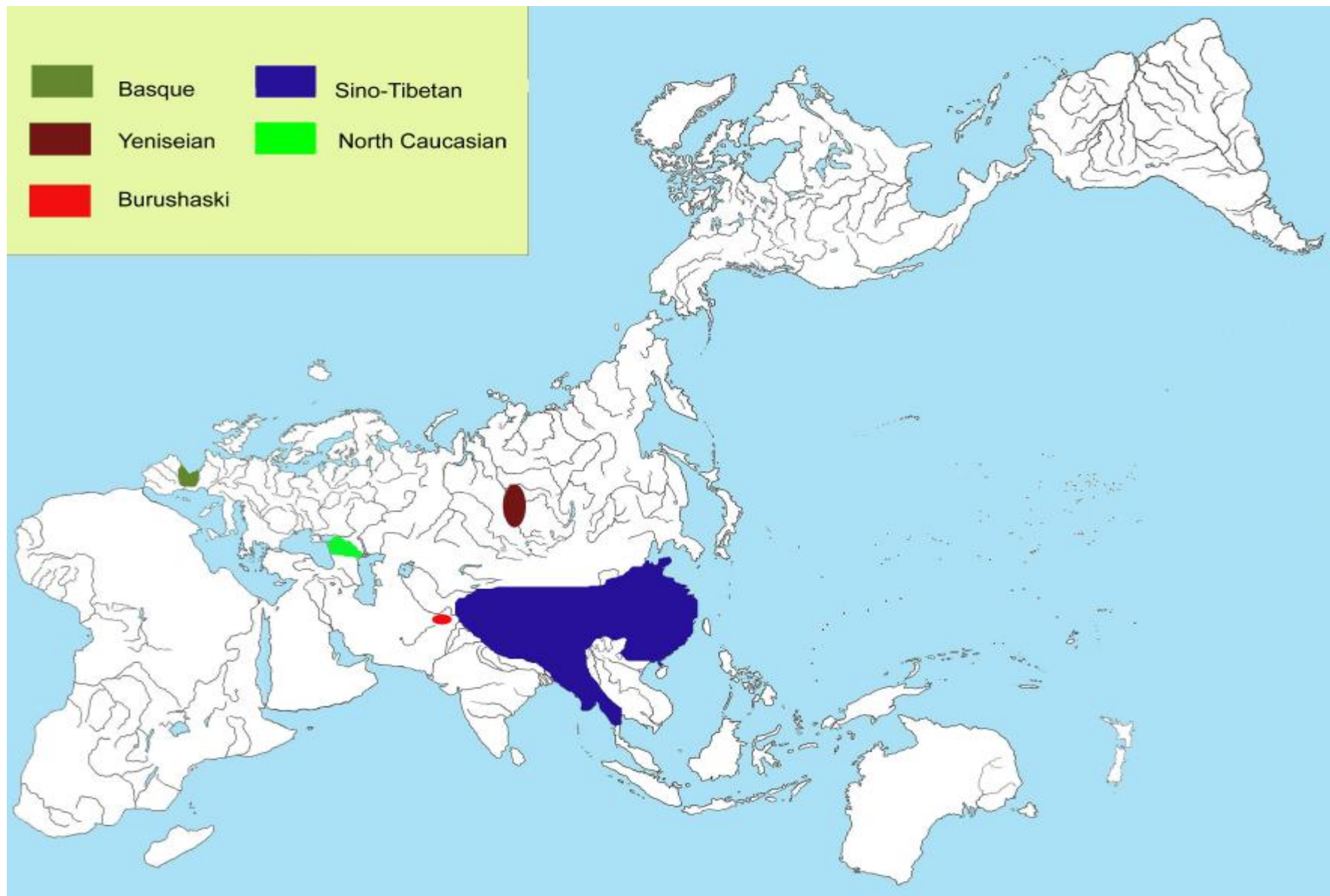
// In: Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 95.

[**Na-Dene and Yeniseian**, both as members of Dene-Caucasian].

3. Edward Vajda:

**"A Siberian link with Na-Dene languages"**, 2008.

[**Na-Dene and Yeniseian** as a separate macrofamily, agnostic on Dene-Caucasian].



**Sino-Caucasian [S. Starostin, 1984-2005]**

## General comparison

	<b>Type of data used</b>	<b>Methodology</b>
<b>Nikolayev</b>	Basic and cultural lexicon	Systematic establishment of regular correspondences (for consonants only)
<b>Ruhlen</b>	Basic and cultural lexicon	"Mass comparison" (assembling cognates based on phonetic/semantic similarity)
<b>Vajda</b>	Basic and cultural lexicon + grammatical morphemes	Non-systematic establishment of regular correspondences; demonstration of paradigmatic homologies

## Main problems

<b>Nikolayev</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>— inadequate and incomplete data on the Na-Dene side</li><li>— lack of further elaboration of hypothesis</li></ul>
<b>Ruhlen</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>— refusal to apply the comparative method</li><li>— emphasis on “pure” taxonomy rather than reconstruction</li></ul>
<b>Vajda</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>— incomplete and/or odd correspondences</li><li>— highly questionable grammatical homologies based on dubious treatment of Yeniseian data</li></ul>



## Positive:

- none of the three theories contradict or are incompatible with each other
- all three theories based on independent research, suggesting the right direction

## Negative:

- none of the three theories settle the issue to general satisfaction

Important question: *What should be the primary object of research?*

bilateral comparison:

## **Dene-Yeniseian**

[Eyak-Athabaskan + Tlingit = Na-Dene] + Yeniseian

or

multilateral comparison:

## **Dene-Caucasian**

[North Caucasian + Sino-Tibetan + Yeniseian + Basque + Burushaski + Na-Dene]

Answer:

Depends on the existence of specific  
homologies / correspondences /  
statistical correlations  
between Na-Dene and Yeniseian  
that are not present between Yeniseian  
and other potential branches  
of Dene-Caucasian.



## Vajda's evidence for "Dene-Yeniseian"

Type of evidence	Unique for Dene-Yeniseian?
Lexical cognates	No [see Starostin, Nikolayev, Bengtson, Ruhlen, etc.]
Phonetic correspondences	No [see Starostin]
Grammatical cognates	No [see Starostin, Bengtson]
Paradigmatic evidence	Yes — but <u>highly problematic</u> , based on questionable internal phonetic and semantic reconstruction of the Yeniseian verbal system; can hardly be used as "primary" evidence

A brief example of the advantages of multilateral comparison:

## Personal pronouns in Dene-Caucasian

[based on reconstructions published by P. Benedict, M. Krauss, J. Leer, S. Nikolayev, I. Peiros, S. Starostin]

## The basic comparative table

	North Caucasian	Sino- Tibetan	Yeniseian	Burushaski	Basque	Na-Dene
1 <sup>st</sup> p. sg. [A]	*zō	*ŋa(y)	*ʔaʒ	ʒa	ni	x-? š-?
1 <sup>st</sup> p. sg. [B]	*nV	*kV	*-ŋ / *b-	a-		
2 <sup>nd</sup> p. sg. [A]	*uō	*na	*ʔaw	u-n	hi (yi)	*ñə-
2 <sup>nd</sup> p. sg. [B]	*ɸwV	*k(h)V	*kV / *Vk	gu- / go-		*(y)i
2 <sup>nd</sup> p. sg. [C]						Tl. wa'é

## Quantifying the evidence:

[1 point = close phonetical similarity and good distribution in daughter branches]

[0.5 points = distant phonetical similarity and/or sporadic distribution]

	Sino-Tibetan	Yeniseian	Burushaski	Basque	Na-Dene
North Cauc.	1	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	1	1
Sino-Tibetan		1.5	1	1	1
Yeniseian			<b>3.5</b>	1	1
Burushaski				1	1
Basque					0

Conclusion: this subset of evidence argues for a closer connection between **North Caucasian**, **Yeniseian**, and **Burushaski**.

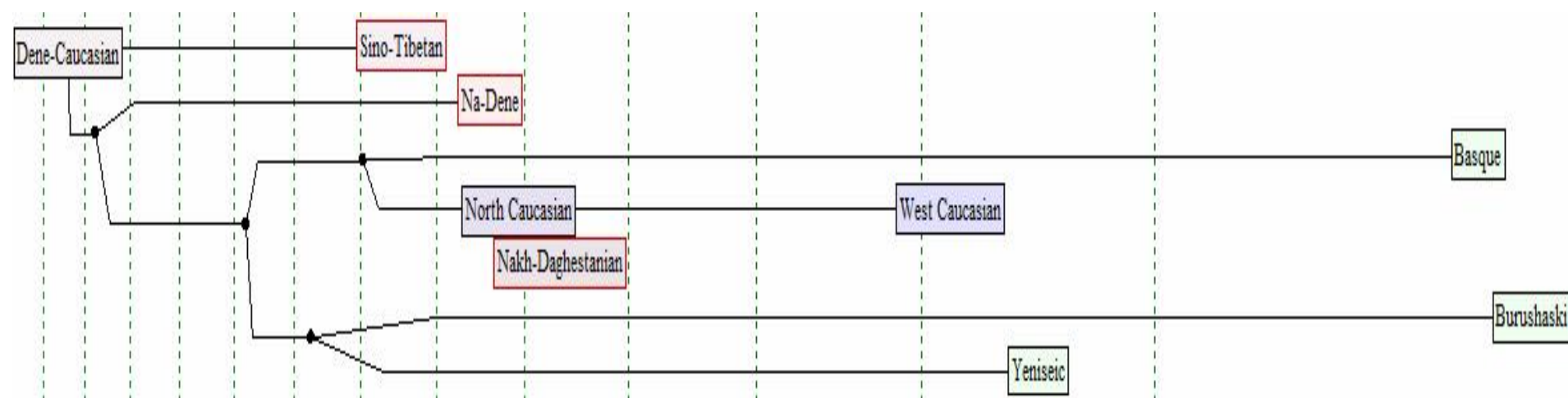
Moreover:

Yeniseian-Burushaski resemblances are paradigmatic!

	Independent	Dependent
1 <sup>st</sup> person	Yen. *ʔaʒ : Bur. ʒa	Yen. *-ŋ : Bur. a-
2 <sup>nd</sup> person	Yen. *ʔaw : Bur. u-n	Yen. *ku- : Bur. gu-

## Another piece of evidence:

A potential genetic tree  
drawn on the basis of lexicostatistical calculations  
between 50 generally most stable items on the Swadesh wordlist



**Result:** agrees with the pronominal evidence, with the exception of Basque.

Some specific isoglosses between Burushaski and Yeniseian:

	Burushaski	Yeniseian
‘eat’	*śi- / *śe-	*sī-
‘hand’	*-reŋ	*íɔŋ
‘not’	*be	*wə
‘name’	*jek	*ʔiG

Cf. the following paradigm for ‘name’:

	Kott	Burushaski (Hunza)
singular	ix	ik
plural	īk-ŋ	ić-iŋ

## **Conclusions and recommendations:**

1. No, or almost no, evidence for Dene-Yeniseian as a self-contained linguistic taxon.
2. Evidence for “Dene-Yeniseian” has to be incorporated into existing evidence for “Dene-Caucasian”.
3. A binary connection should rather be sought between Yeniseian and Burushaski (but hard to explore without external data).
4. Grammatical systems of Dene-Caucasian branches can serve as “primary” evidence only to a very limited extent, and should be treated very cautiously.



More data on Sino-Caucasian and its daughter branches available at

**“The Tower Of Babel”** Project site:

<http://starling.rinet.ru>