The Tai-Kadai and Austronesian language phyla are related at multiple levels

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A relationship between the Daic (Tai-Kadai) and Austronesian language phyla has long been posited, originally as part of an Austro-Thai macrophyllum. The lexical evidence was quite restricted and the suggestion that this indicated a split of considerable antiquity at the level of Proto-Austronesian. A significant expansion of data in recent times, both in respect of Formosan languages and the Daic languages of South China has re-ignited the discussion. Essentially, two proposals have been put forward to model this relationship, one suggesting a direct relation with PAN, the other with PMP (Proto-Malayo-Polynesian). The paper evaluates existing proposals, comparing them with reconstructed Tai, Kra-Dai and Hlaic, as well as suggesting new comparisons. It suggests that these do not generate a consistent result and that the only convincing explanation of the comparisons with different subsets of Austronesian is to suppose the relationship is multi-genetic. In other words, intense contact across the Taiwan Strait in the early period of Austronesian maritime activity allowed different elements to compose Daic as a whole. The individual branches of Daic are thus seen to sometimes include lexicon which derives from Austronesian but which does not characterise the phylum as a whole. This can be compared with the genesis of Malagasy, where multiple islands contributed to the lexicon of present-day Malagasy.