

# Hungarian historical phonology re-examined – with special reference to Ugric vocabulary and Iranian loanwords

APART-GSK project (Austrian Academy of Sciences), 2021–2023

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## Aims of the project

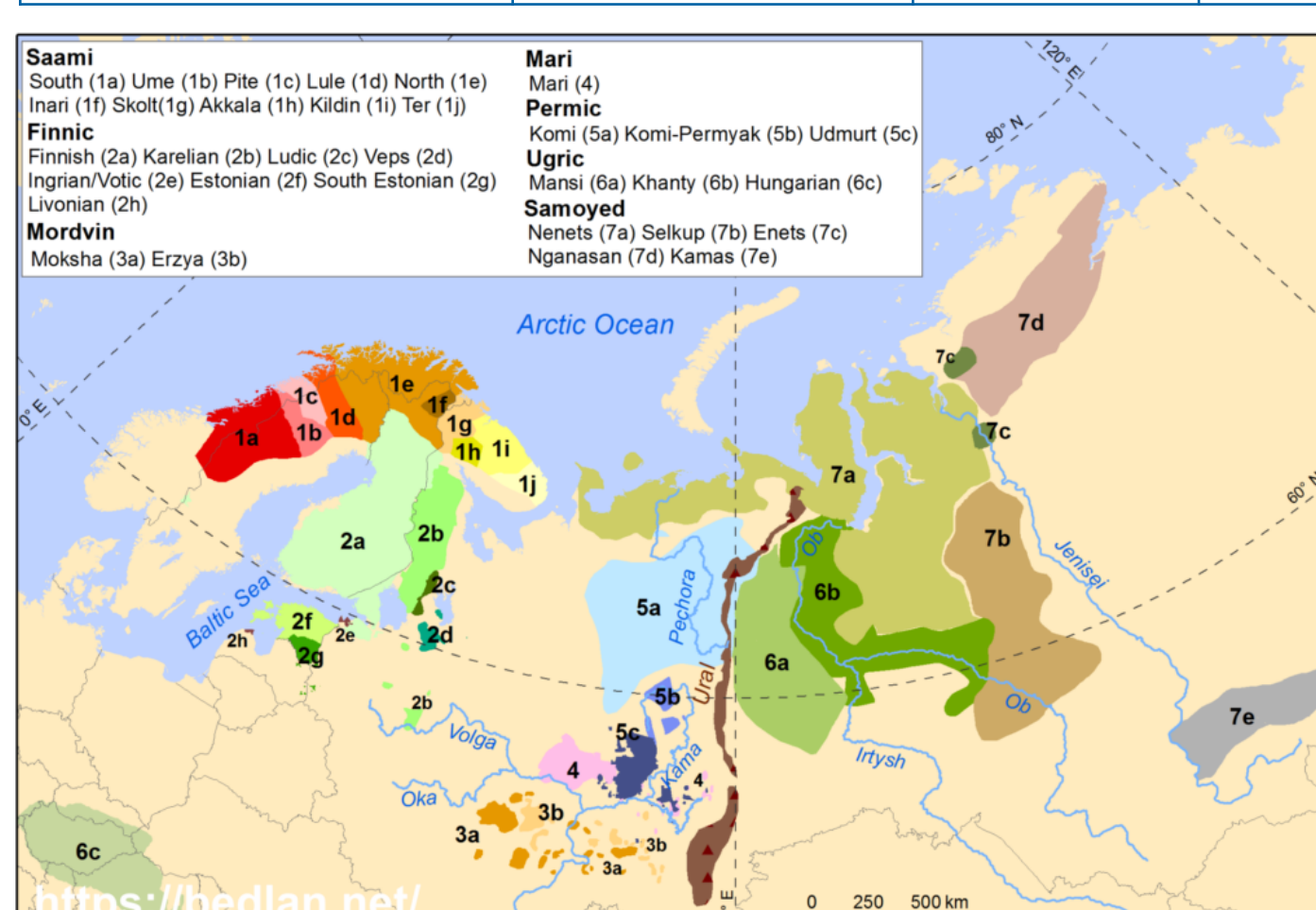
- Present an up-to-date view of the phonological developments leading from Proto-Uralic to Hungarian
- Critically analyse the common vocabulary of Hungarian and the Ob-Ugric languages (Khanty and Mansi) = lexicon of the Ugric proto-language
- **Database of Ugric etymology** (samples: <https://ugric.univie.ac.at/database>)

## Background and methodology

- Despite long research history, the historical phonology of Hungarian presents many problems; the conditions for many developments are poorly understood
  - The problem of “sporadic” sound-change (vs. “Neogrammarian” regularity)
  - New studies on Proto-Uralic phonologic reconstruction (Aikio 2012) provide new insights into the development of Hungarian
- Status of Ugric as an independent branch of Uralic is disputed (Salminen 2001)
  - Phonological evidence for Proto-Ugric scarce; vowel-developments poorly understood (cf. Honti 1982 for Ob-Ugric), require new scrutiny
- Lexical evidence for Proto-Ugric includes many outdated and obsolete etymologies; a thorough analysis based on regular sound-change is needed
  - *UEW*: 177 Ugric cognates; many problematic and irregular etymologies
  - Loanwords from various stages of Iranian to Proto-Ugric and parallel loans to Hungarian and Ob-Ugric (cf. Holopainen 2019) can provide useful information for the chronology of sound-changes in Ugric and Hungarian

## Examples of problematic developments in Hungarian historical phonology

Proto-Uralic	Proto-Ugric	Hu	Khanty	Mansi	Notes
*ŋ	? *ŋk, *ɣ	g, ? Ø	ŋk, ɣ (> w)	ŋk, ɣ (> w)	Unclear conditions for the split of PU *ŋ (PU *jāni > Hu <i>jég</i> ‘ice’ vs. PU *sanji- ‘enter’ > Hu (arch.) <i>av-</i> ‘penetrate’)
*ć	? *ć	sz [s], ? cs [č]	? ś	s, ć (> ś)	Few examples of *ć > cs (PU *ćolmi > Hu <i>csomó</i> ‘knot’)
*s, *š	? *θ	Ø, ?s	ʌ (> l, t), s	t, ? s	PUg merger *s, *š > *θ often assumed but all the three languages show, possible evidence for retained s in some contexts (PU *pesä > Hu <i>fészek</i> ‘nest’)



The distribution of the Uralic languages. Map by Timo Rantanen. Source: [http://wp.bedlan.net/images/uralic\\_map.png](http://wp.bedlan.net/images/uralic_map.png)

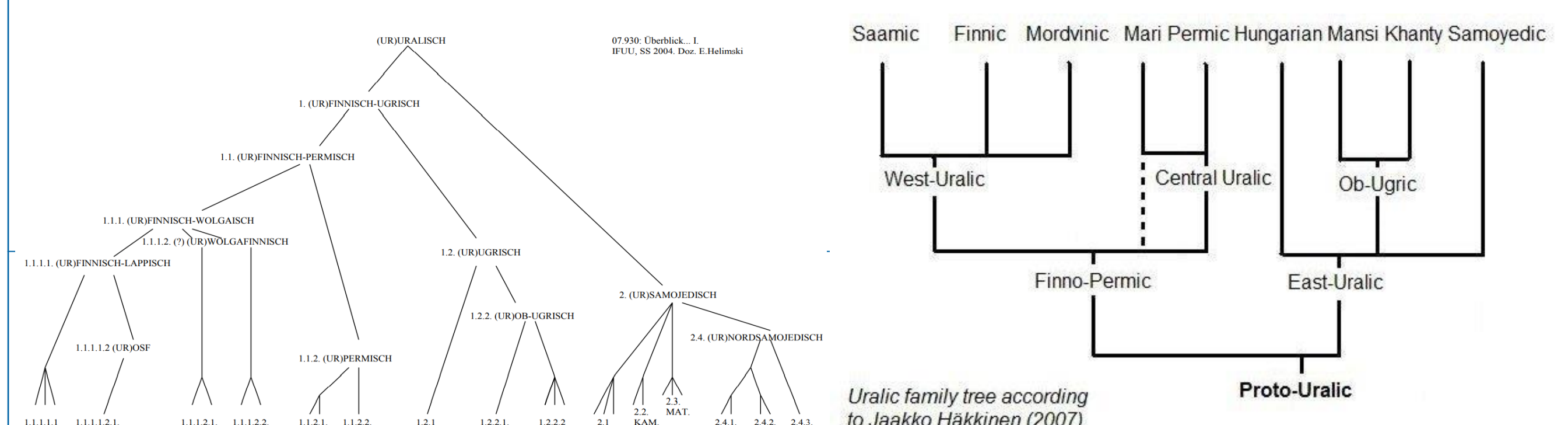
## Examples of problematic Ugric etymologies

**PUg ? \*tulV- ‘magic (?)’ > Hungarian *táltos* ‘sorcerer’, Khanty (East) *tolt* ‘fever’, (North) *toltn* ‘with magic’ Mansi *tülten* ‘easily’ (*UEW*: 895)**

- The cognates show dubious semantic correspondences and the assumed change \*u > á in Hungarian is irregular
- Even the relationship between the Ob-Ugric words uncertain
- A competing Turkic etymology for Hu *táltos* has been suggested: ← Old Turkic \**taltutči* ‘the one who exercises loss of consciousness’ (*WOT*: 841–843); in the light of the problems with the Ugric etymology, this might be a more convincing explanation

**PUg ? \*närkV- ‘saddle’ > Hu *nyerég*, Khanty (East) *nöyər*, Mansi (South) *näwrä* id. (*UEW*: 874)**

- The relationship of the Hungarian and the Ob-Ugric forms is clearly irregular; although *UEW* attempts to explain this through metathesis, it seems more probable that the words in Hungarian, Khanty and Mansi reflect separate loans from somewhere (Zhivlov 2016: 300)
- The possible Turkic origin (cf. Middle Turkic *egär* ‘saddle’) of these words has been refuted by *WOT* (1210–1213) on phonological grounds
- An Iranian origin has been suggested by Harmatta (1997): the reconstructed “East Iranian” source form \**nəyer* is entirely speculative, however, and is based only on a hypothetical pre-form of Khotanese Saka *nyürr* (< Proto-Iranian \**niwarn-*) that denotes ‘cover, harness’ rather than ‘saddle’; this loan etymology should also be rejected as impossible



Different views on the taxonomy of Hungarian, Khanty and Mansi within the Uralic family.: traditional view according to Eugen Helmski, alternative view of Jaakko Häkkinen.

Sources: Helmski, Eugene 2004: ÜBERSICHT ÜBER DIE URALISCHEN (finnisch-ugrisch-samojedischen) SPRACHEN. <https://www.slm.uni-hamburg.de/fuu/download/helmski/ural-genealogie-und-chronologie.pdf>  
Häkkinen, Jaakko 2012: After the Proto-language. *Finnisch-Ugrische Forschungen* 61. <https://journal.fi/fuf/issue/view/5896>

## Intermediary results

- ✓ Large part of Ugric cognates problematic > new light on the lexical relations of Hungarian and Ob-Ugric
- ✓ New interpretations of earlier etymologies
- ✓ New insights into the historical phonology of Hungarian

## Tasks of further research within the project

- Reassessing the possible derivatives reconstructed in Proto-Ugric
- More detailed scrutiny of the earliest Iranian loans in Hungarian (esp. the obscure donor languages)
- Developing the Ugric etymological database in a wiki-format, engaging other scholars of Uralic historical linguistics in the discussion

### Selected references: