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

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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. Honi 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- Lexical evidence for Proto-Ugric includes many outdated and obsolete etymologies; a thorough analysis based on regular sound-change is needed
- UWE: 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proto-Uralic</th>
<th>Proto-Ugric</th>
<th>Hu</th>
<th>Khany</th>
<th>Mansi</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*η</td>
<td>? *ŋ, *γ</td>
<td>ɛ, ? ɷ</td>
<td>ɔ, y (&gt; w)</td>
<td>ɔ, y (&gt; w)</td>
<td>Unclear conditions for the split of PU *ŋ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*ɛ</td>
<td>? *ɛ</td>
<td>ɛ (i), ɛ (0)</td>
<td>ɛ</td>
<td>ɛ</td>
<td>Few examples of ɛ &gt; cs (PU *ɛ immigrants &gt; Hu csúmda ‘knot’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*a, *ɛ</td>
<td>? *O</td>
<td>ʊ, ɛ</td>
<td>ʌ (1, t), s</td>
<td>ɛ, 7 s</td>
<td>Pug merger *a, *ɛ &gt; Ö often assumed but all the three languages show, possible evidence for retained s in some contexts (PU *paz &gt; Hu főzék ’saddle’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selected references:


Examples of problematic Ugric etymologies

- The cognates show dubious semantic correspondences and the assumed change *u > ő in Hungarian is irregular
- Even the relationship between the Ob-Ugric words uncertain
- A competing Turkic etymology for Hu tőltös has been suggested: €- Old Turkic *toltuć ‘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

PÜg ? *nköv ‘saddle’ > Hu nyeréh, Khany (East) nőyar, Mansi (South) nővő id. (UWE: 874)
- The relationship of the Hungarian and the Ob-Ugric forms is clearly irregular; although UWE 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 eŋ ‘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 *nayér is entirely speculative, however, and is based only on a hypothetical pre-form of Khantian Saka nyűr (< Proto-Iranian ‘niwom’) that denotes ‘cover, harness’ rather than ‘saddle’, this loan etymology should also be rejected as impossible

Interim 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

Different views on the taxonomy of Hungarian, Khanty and Mansi within the Uralic family: traditional view according to Eugen Rekowski, alternative view of Isakss Mikkola

The distribution of the Uralic languages. Map by Tiina Katikainen. Source: http://uat.btk.ki.se/images/uralic_map.png

Selected references:


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