

**THE NATURE
OF THE HUNGARIAN VS TURKIC
LINGUISTIC CORRELATIONS:
is Hungarian really a ‘proto-typical’
Uralic language?**

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In copertina: *The journey of the magyars?*

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THE NATURE OF THE HUNGARIAN VS TURKIC LINGUISTIC CORRELATIONS: IS HUNGARIAN REALLY A ‘PROTO-TYPICAL’ URALIC LANGUAGE?

Introduction

The purpose of this volume is to bring together a collection of essays that I have written during the last four years or so, all of which, but one, already published. The common thread of the essays in question, and, therefore, the thrust of the volume, is the topic of ‘the nature’ of the linguistic correlations existing between Hungarian and the Turkic languages.¹

Why would such a topic be of interest to the reader of Hungarian and/or Uralic studies, or even linguistic studies in general, one might ask, and the answer is as follows.

It is a well known fact that Hungarian shares numerous correlations with the Turkic languages, at almost any level of language – lexicon, phonology, major areas of morphology, typology and isomorphism. These correlations are so deep and pervasive, that it could be argued that Hungarian, is, in fact, closer to (Old) Turkic than to any of the languages classified, like Hungarian itself, as belonging to the Uralic (/Finno-Ugric) family. The conventional explanation for these correlations – within the framework of the Uralic theory and Hungarian historiography – is that they are the expected, ‘normal’ results of processes of borrowing, due to the long and intense contacts that occurred between the early Magyars and the nomadic people of the Eurasiatic steppe, in particular the Turkic peoples, during the centuries preceding the *honfoglalás* (between the IV/V and the IX/X Century AD, roughly). This interpretation, despite being in principle plausible, can nevertheless be called into question, for the following, linguistic and historical reasons:

- First of all, we do not have ‘independent’ evidence regarding these claimed, long and intense periods of contacts – this ‘symbiosis’. As a matter of fact, the symbiosis itself is ‘assumed’ to have taken place on the basis of the deep influence of Turkic over Hungarian – clearly, a circular argument;
- Second (and consistently with what stated above), all the historical, more or less contemporary sources of the early Magyars unanimously refer to them as Turkic and/or, more generally, nomadic peoples of the steppe, and not at all as: ‘*Uralic* peoples that have come under intense contact, and therefore

¹ Since the volume consists of several articles, published at different times, but all dealing with the same topic of the Hungarian vs Turkic (/Asiatic) correlations, the reader will find some overlapping data and argumentations?

influence, of the Turkic/Asiatic peoples of the steppe', as is widely claimed. To this it can certainly be objected, as it has been done, that the historical sources in question were confused, and wrongly identified the Uralic Magyars with the nomadic peoples, because of their symbiosis, their shared life style and culture. Even so, even if the sources were indeed *all* mistaken in their identification – claim that cannot be verified – this does not automatically prove that the Magyars were of Uralic origin. As a matter of fact, there is nowhere in the field of historiography, ethnography, archaeology and palaeo-anthropology any mention, any item of evidence, in support of the existence of an Uralic speech (-ethnic) community, or population, or 'culture' – this 'fact' now being confirmed also, and consistently, by genetic research. The terms 'Uralic', and 'Finno-Ugric' are simply 'labels' created by linguists in the XIX century, with these referring only to a linguistic model, a linguistic theory (the Uralic/Finno-Ugric theory) – these terms have no connection whatsoever with pre-historical and/or historical reality;

- The conventional interpretation of the presence of the Turkic (/Asiatic) component in Hungarian – a process of 'ordinary, normal borrowing' – was formulated about two hundred year ago, in connection with the creation of the Uralic theory, and is, by now, definitively out-of-date, in the same way as the theory itself. Thanks to the remarkable results achieved in the last 60 years or so in the field of studies generally referred to as 'language-in-contact', we know nowadays that, when a language (A) has such a deep influence onto another languages (B), at the point of affecting even (major areas of) the basic lexicon and/or the morphological structure of language B (as in the case of Turkic over Hungarian), then, usually, we are not really dealing with an instance of normal borrowing. On the contrary, it has now been observed across various (groups of) languages in contact that in this case we are dealing with what is often defined as 'intensive', 'abnormal' borrowing, as a result of which the affected language (B), typically, becomes a 'mixed' language.
- Last, but not least, we should not forget that it is often quite difficult to tell apart borrowed from inherited elements within a given language/dialect, even in the case of rather 'young' borrowing. As is well known, borrowed elements tend to adapt to the phonetic/phonological as well as the overall structure of the receiving language, at the point of becoming (immediately at the time of borrowing, or eventually) 'undistinguishable' from inherited elements. The question then arises: how could we possibly identify for sure the foreign elements (nouns, verbs, suffixes, phonemes, etc.) that are

assumed to have entered Hungarian over one thousand years ago, in the absence of old enough records (particularly on the Uralic and Hungarian side), that could assist linguists in this hard task?

This being the case, through its collection of articles, this volume intends to revisit the long standing issue of the (assumed) symbiosis between the Magyars and the nomadic peoples of Central Asia. It will do so in the light of current (diachronic and synchronic) linguistic knowledge, including ‘language-in-contact’ studies, whilst also paying attention to the relevant historical background, as emerges from the historical sources and the Old Hungarian documents. The data and arguments put forward in the articles will suggest that there are two ‘equally’ plausible explanations to account for the influence of Turkic over Hungarian, if we investigate the issue on the basis of linguistic clues only: a) Hungarian was originally a Uralic language, that later on became mixed (in the technical sense of the term) with Turkic/Asiatic languages; b) Hungarian was originally itself a Turkic/Asiatic language. This is because, as just mentioned above, through linguistic analysis only we can no longer tell apart what was borrowed from what was inherited (supposedly well over a millennium ago). Obviously, if one takes into account also the testimony of the historical sources, and the fact that there is no ‘extra-linguistic’ evidence in support of the existence of the proto-Uralic language family/speech community (at least not according to the conventional theory), then the (b) interpretation appears to be the most likely one.

To those who might object that the topic of the presence of the Turkic component in Hungarian is not of much interest, being not a novelty (as mentioned), it can be replied what follows: yes, this ‘fact’ has been since long known, but only to a restricted circle of specialists. As a result, hardly any reader (be he / she a student, a lay reader, or even a linguist who is, however, not specialist of Hungarian and/or Uralic studies) can understand and appreciate the real nature of this language, and its position within what is now referred to, in linguistics, as ‘the Ural-Altaic complex / Ural-Altaic typological belt / Ural-Altaic unique typological context’. In other words, whatever the origin of the Turkic component may be – borrowing, inheritance, share drift, or, most likely, the result of ‘multiple causation’, as is often the case across languages – its existence and its consistency should be made known to the wider readership, and not hidden away, ‘brushed under the carpet’ (for whatever reason), because this component forms an integral part of the Hungarian language as it has been transmitted to us thus far.

Finally, in addition to illustrating areas of the Uralic and Turkic component of Hungarian, the volume also offers a description of various, interesting aspects of the language, both from the synchronic and diachronic perspective.

All the articles included in the volume (as listed below), with the exception of: *Uralic vs Turkic morphology in Hungarian: The state of the art* (article n. 5), have already been published in various, international journals, all of which I thank for kindly granting me copy-right permission. The first three articles highlight the overall features of Turkic (/Asiatic) origin present in Hungarian, at various levels of language, whilst also reporting relevant items of information provided by the historical sources and outlining the ethno-linguistic situation of the Carpathian Basin at the time of the *honfoglalás*. The fourth and fifth articles concentrate on the description of the state of the art of Hungarian morphology. The last article deals with a theme a bit different from that of the others, being a review of two recent books published by Professor László Honti. It might at first appear a bit odd to include a review among a collection of essays; however, this choice is justified by the fact that the review has offered me an opportunity to comment on still debated, theoretical issues relative to the methods of historical linguistics in general, and Uralic historical linguistics in particular.

The list of articles (including mention of their original publication), and their order of presentation is as follows:

1. The linguistic influence of Turkic on Hungarian. *Turkic World Almanac*, Turkic Academy of Science 2014: 1-22; Reprinted in *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 2015 /II:69-88. www.federatio.org/joes.html
2. On the Position of Hungarian within the ‘Ural-Altai Typological Belt’: Historical and political influences. *Journal of Modern Education Review* 2015: 5/4: 367-38. (www.academicstar.us/UploadFile/Picture/20158/20158314364426.pdf).
3. La natura delle correlazioni linguistiche tra ungherese e turco. *Rivista di Studi Ungheresi* 2015: 14: 91-109.
4. Magyar-uráli és magyar-török morfológiai megfelelések: A tudomány jelenlegi állása. In É. Ferenczné Szócs, J. Gazda & E. Szabó (eds), *Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Nyomok az Időben*. Kovászna: Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Közművelődési Egyesület. 2017: 1-18.
5. Uralic vs Turkic morphology in Hungarian: The state of the art [original article]
6. Review of: 1) ‘László Honti (ed.): *A nyelvrokonságról. Az török, sumer, és egyéb áfium ellen való orvosság*. Budapest: Tinta Kiadó 2010, pp. 373’. 2) ‘László Honti: *Anyanyelvünk atyafiságáról és a nyelvrokonság ismérveiről: Tények és vágyak*. Budapest: Tinta Kiadó, 2012, pp. 282’. *Rivista di Studi Ungheresi* 2016 / 15: 188-195. (Hungarian version, with English summary, also available in: <http://sites.google.com/site/angelamarcantonio/Home>)