

Assessing irregular and “sporadic” developments in the prehistory of Hungarian vocalism

SLE 2021

Sampsa Holopainen

University of Vienna & Austrian Academy of Sciences

sampsa.petteri.holopainen@univie.ac.at

Aims of this talk

- Investigation of certain problems of Hungarian historical phonology through the principle of regular sound-change; challenging the idea of "sporadic" sound-change, prevalent in research on Hungarian historical phonology but considered outdated by many Uralicists.
 - Part of a bigger project dealing with historical phonology of the Ugric languages (Hu + Ob-Ugric: Khanty and Mansi), supported by an APART-GSK grant from the Austrian Academy of Sciences
- Attempt to explain the contradictory developments, to contribute to the understanding of regular developments in Hungarian.
- Case studies of problematic etymologies showing the alleged sporadic developments.

Research problems

- Is $*u > a$ in Hungarian a regular sound-change or an illusion created by erroneous cognates and lax methodology in reconstruction?
 - What are the conditions for this sound-change (cf. the more regular [?] $*u > o$, \acute{u})?

Background and methodology

- "Tendencies" and sporadic sound-changes vs. sound-laws.
- Two different approaches to sound-change and PU lexicon since the 1980s (Janhunen 1981, Sammalahti 1988, Helinski; Aikio 2012, 2015; Zhivlov 2014 vs. UEW).
- History of **u* also complicated by words with **e* showing *u*-like reflexes in West Uralic (PU **jexi-* > Fi *juo*, Hu *i-*, *iv-*, UEW **juke-*, see Zhivlov 2014).
- Interpretation of Old Hungarian material presents challenges (some vowel-changes happened during that period, but *o* and *a* [å] often ambiguous).
- NB nothing phonetically suspicious in *a* reflecting earlier **u* (cf. TN *χar* < PU **kura* 'knife'), but the aberrant and divergent reflexes of **u* in Hungarian make the situation problematic.

Background and methodology

- Honti 2013: 6
- “... given that sound changes are often less than “sound laws”; usually they are mere “tendencies of sound change”.”
- Zhivlov 2014: 113
- “The basic tenet of this methodology is the principle of regularity of sound laws (...). Taking this principle seriously means that we cannot invoke “sporadic developments” as an explanation in historical phonology.”
- Cf. Ringe 2004: 237: “Modern work in sociolinguistics has shown that the scenario just summarized is slightly oversimplified; most importantly, sound changes pass through a variable phase before “going to completion,” and occasionally the progress of a sound change is arrested in the variable phase, giving rise to irregularities (see, e.g., Labov 1994 for discussion). But the statistical preponderance of regular sound changes remains impressively massive, and it is almost always methodologically advisable to treat explanations involving irregular sound changes with suspicion.”

Background and methodology

- The historical phonology of the Ugric languages (Hungarian + Ob-Ugric: Khanty and Mansi) less well known than many other branches, although recent studies (Zhivlov 2006, 2014; Aikio 2015, 2018) have improved the situation.
 - For example, Aikio (2018) presents new sound-laws for Hungarian: $*j\eta > gy$ $*aj\eta i > agy$ 'brain', $*waj\eta i > vágy$ 'lust' and $*nč > r$: $*ponč i > far$
- Problems in the taxonomy of Ugric: PU > PUg sound-changes sometimes sometimes ad hoc ideas (cf. Tálos 1984); PUg reconstructions in general rather unreliable, esp. regarding vocalism.
- Old Hungarian evidence: sometimes open to various interpretations ($u > o > a$, the emergence of the labial ã in Hungarian; Bárczi 1958; E. Abaffy 2003).

The research material (see handout)

- Proto-Uralic and Proto-Ugric etymologies showing $*u > *a$ in Hungarian (sources: MSzFE, UEW, Sammallahti 1988, Aikio 2012, 2013, 2015)
 - In the UEW (PU or PFU, PUg), total of 31 instances of $*u > a$ (including uncertain etymologies and words with “alternative” reconstructions)
 - Aikio’s 2013 word-list of back-vocalic PU words includes 7 cases (if words like *hó* : *hava-* are counted), vs. 9 cases of $*u > u \sim \acute{u}$ and 6 cases of $u > o$ (NB no Proto-Ugric etymologies)
- Some irregular etymologies of the UEW have been corrected or rejected by later research: *hab* ‘foam’ rather from $*kompa$ ‘wave’ than $*kumpa$, with only the alleged Finnic cognate *kumpu* pointing to $*u$ (Aikio 2015) *had* (NB OHu *hodu*) rather from $*kontV$ than $*kunta$ (Aikio 2015), *hamu* ‘ash’ < $*kad’-ma-$ < PU $*kad’a-$ ‘to leave’ (instead of $*kud’mV$ in UEW; Abondolo 1996), *far* < $*ponči$ ‘tail’ rather than $*purV$ ‘back’ with an irregular Kh cognate (Aikio 2018)

**u* > *a*: examples of erroneous etymologies

- PUg **arV* ~ **urV* ? > Hu *aránt* 'against', *iránt* 'towards', Kh V *ur* 'edge', Ms TJ *or* 'mountain ridge'
 - The Ob-Ugric cognates do not point to **u*, the choice of PU vowel seems ad hoc. Zhivlov (2014: 120) derives the ObUg words from **wara* 'edge'. The etymology of the Hu word(s) requires further research.
- PU **runkV* > Hu *rág* 'to chew', Ms L *rågn-*, TN *luṅkībā-* id.
 - Irregular and unconvincing etymology: Mansi *g* from **ṅk* impossible, TN *l* cannot reflect PU **r* (no regular cases known; usually assumed that Anlaut **r-* was impossible in PU).
- PU **tuli-* > Hu *talál* 'to find', Fi *tule-* 'to come', TN *to-* id. etc.
 - The Hu etymology is considered uncertain by the UEW too, due to semantics. There is no compelling reason to assume that *talál* is from **tuli-*.
 - A competing etymology has been suggested by Aikio (2002), who derives it from PU **tolwa-* (> Nganasan **tojbu-* 'to take, transport, deliver', Kamass *tu-* 'to arrive; to reach')

**u > a*: examples of plausible etymologies with problematic reconstructions

- Pug **kajV* ~ **kujV* > Hu *hajt* 'to chase', Ms So *χujt-* 'to tempt'
 - Mansi **u* rather points to **a–a* stem **kaja-*
- PUg **tultV* > Hu *táltos* 'sorcerer', Kh Vj *tolt* 'fever', Ms N *tūlt(en)* 'easily'
 - No compelling evidence for **u* in ObUg; the semantic connection is dubious.
 - Note also the possible Turkic loan-etymology (← T **taltutči* 'the one who exercises loss of consciousness' < T **tal-* 'to faint'; considered possible by WOT: 841–843)
 - Possible Turkic connections of the Ob-Ugric words should be investigated further.

**u > a*: examples of plausible etymologies with problematic reconstructions

- **puwi ~ *pawi > Fi puu, Mari *pu, PP *pŭ, Hu fa, PSam *pa > TN pá 'tree'*
 - **u* mostly based on Finnic, Mari ambiguous, Hu and Sam rather point to **a*
- **śuwi ~ *sawi > Fi suu, Mari *šu, PP *śŭ, Hu száj 'mouth'*
 - Similar case to 'tree' above. Cf. *szád < ? *śVwinti*
- **kowji > háj 'fat'*
 - Often reconstructed as **kuja*, which would fit the rule after **k* (see the next slide), but the reconstruction with *u* is based solely on Finnic evidence. Cf. *úszik?*
- The sequences **Vw* develop to *uu, oo* in Finnic (Aikio 2012, Kallio 2018): often the quality of Finnic vocalism has been projected back to PU (cf. Kallio 2012), but here Hungarian and Samoyed show more archaic vocalism
 - Hu **w* disappears regularly
- **kuwli > hall?* Real case of *uw > Hu a?*
 - In Hu, probably two PU stems have merged: **kuli-* and *? *kunti-li 'to listen'*

**u* > *a*: conditions

- Earlier solutions by Sammallahti 1988:
 - Proto-Ugric *ú* vs. **ǔ*; Does not explain conditions for **u* > *a*
- Hu **u* > *a* is regular after **k*: ~ 10 good etymologies:
 - **kulki* > *halad* 'to proceed', **kurV* > *harag* 'hate', **kura* > *harmat* 'dew'
- Exceptions: before if not followed by **m*, **n*, **ń*, **p*, ? **d*', **r* or **l*
 - **kuda* > *hol-nap*, **kupla* > *hólyag*, **kuńa* > *huny*, **kuńci* > *húgy*
 - The Proto-Ugric material of MSzFe and UEW includes some counter-examples, esp. In the Ugric material: however, most of these reconstructions are problematic, and often show no real evidence for **u*: for example PUG **kućV* > Hu *-hoz* (case ending), V *kutəŋ*, O *χōśá* (uncertain vocalism, irregular sibilant)
- Regular after **m* (only few examples): **mura-* > *mar*, **muča* > ? *hagy-máz*
 - **mulV* > *múlik* 'to pass', **muna* > *mony* only exceptions
- Regular in *i*-stems before a velar consonant:
 - **tukti* > *tat*, **tuxi* > **tawə* > Hu *tó* : *tava-*

**u* > *a*: conditions

- Possible counter-examples and unexplained cases
- PU **ukti* (UEW: **utka*) > Hu *út*: *uta-* 'road'
 - Contradictory vocalism (Aikio 2013), does not necessarily reflect earlier **u*; further research required.
- PU **tuni-* > *tanul* 'learn', *tanít* 'teach'
 - Most branches point to **u*, although the Permic cognates are problematic.
 - Hungarian *a* might be due to contamination with *tanú* 'witness', *tanács* 'council'? (← Turkic **tanug*, **taniš*, see WOT: 846–849)

Concluding remarks

- Analyzis of these certain sound-changes show that many sporadic cases in the history of Hungarian can be dismissed as either false cognates or false reconstructions
- A large part of the cases showing **u* from **a* can be explained as erroneous or improbable and many of the remaining etymologies can be reinterpreted (no evidence of **u*); the Ugric reconstructions with **u* are especially problematic
- Historical development of vowels in Hungarian is more regular than has been often assumed and there is no need for "sporadic" sound-changes
- Many apparently irregular changes can be explained through conditioning factors, even if some exceptions remain
 - Further research on the development of PU **u* in Hungarian (and in Ob-Ugric) is needed

Thank you for your attention!