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THE SO-CALLED URALIC ORIGINAL HOME (*URHEIMAT*) AND THE SO-CALLED PROTO-URALIC

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Abstract. The present study, based on current interdisciplinary research, wishes to take a stand concerning the location of the Uralic original home, and the evolution of Proto-Uralic. Contemporary Uralic languages developed in the so-called *Northern Eurasian linguistic zone*. While this zone displays several common features in terms of typology, language development and phonetic material, we can also recognise some notably distinct blocks within the same zone. Present day Uralic languages evolved from the three most western blocks of the Northern Eurasian linguistic zone, while the eastern block seems to have originally been Paleosiberian, serving as the basis for today's Ugrians, Samoyeds and Mordvins. This linguistics-based presupposition is further supported by genetic, anthropological and archaeological findings.

1. Introductory remarks

Following the debate that has been going on over the issue referred to in the title, we can say that the most crucial propositions of Indreko's study have still not been fully answered. (See Indreko 1948, about the origins of Samoyeds and the Saami /Lapp/, the relations between European and Asian cultural centres, the origins of Finno-Ugrians, the issue of original Europeans, the relations between the Mediterranean and periglacial zones /see the arrowheads with a conical edge found in the northern part of the Pyrenees, in the Baltic States and in Central Russia/.) It is a pity that Indreko's splendid study has made so little impact on the research devoted to the Uralic original home during the past 50 years.

During the past five years, however, contemporary research on the Uralic original home and the inseparable Proto-Uralic has gained momentum. This positive shift might be attributed to the application of new interdisciplinary approaches, and the greater time depth as opposed to the ones assumed and applied in former linguistic research.

2. The Northern Eurasian Linguistic Zone (NELZ) investigated from linguistic, genetic, anthropological and archaeological aspects

There are still several disputes going on concerning the development and the appearance of the earliest anatomically modern human in Europe but we can safely claim that he was present in Europe as early as 35-40 (maybe a bit more) thousand years ago, as there are also traces of him both in the central part of Northern Siberia, and at the lower part of the River Lena. There were some relations to be detected (exchange of goods, intermarriage) among the various communities already in the first phase of the anatomically modern human. On the vast territory, not only genetically and anthropologically different races, but also different cultures and languages developed. Due to the relations between the human communities described above, there might have been some similarities among these races, cultures and languages, while certain regional differences still continued to prevail. Relations between the communities were probably affected by climatic and geographical circumstances. (For instance, during the time of the last European glacial maximum, from 23,000 to 19,500 BC, the land stretching between Fennoscandia and the Alps was uninhabitable. There were some European regions, like Franco-Cantabria and the Dnieper-Don region where refugia were formed. After the glacial maximum people abandoned these refugia and populated the formerly uninhabited parts of Europe such as Northern Europe. During the same period of time, Siberia was not covered with ice.)

2.1. Now let us cite a few examples how these community relations, supposedly lasting for many thousand years, have shaped the linguistic, genetic, anthropological and archaeological character of NELZ.

The *linguistic situation* of Northern Eurasia, irrespective of the genetic classification of languages, seems to exhibit a great deal of similarity (e.g. except for Yenisei languages arriving relatively late in the area, all the dialects belong to the agglutinative-isolating language type, and they likewise show a similar tendency in the linguistic development of local cases and number. In these very categories we can trace other similarities such as identical phonemes *K, T, N, M, L*, applied as local and numeral morphemes, or the omission of *P* in grammatical functions.) (See more details in e.g. Pusztay 1987, 1990a, 1995.)

Genetic research has shown trans-Uralic connections moving from east to west. On the basis of their genofond, Finns do not differ from other Europeans, but the C/T transition appearing in their Y chromosome, which is typical in the Baltic states but is missing as we move on further south, is present in 86% of Yakuts, and 58% of Buryats (Savontaus & Lahermo 1999, Norio 1999). C allele cannot be traced in the central and southern European peoples, but is present among several Northern Asian peoples (the Saami and the Cheremis from the Finno-Ugrian peoples) and therefore it must be originating from Northern Eurasia. Tat C is frequent among the Baltic Finns and Zyrians, Finno-Ugrians living along the River Volga and Western Siberia, and also among Yakuts, Koryaks, Chukchi, Evenkis, Evens, Nenets, Yukaghirs, and even the Inuit in Greenland. The Tat C allele

variation of the Y chromosome is typical of the Arctic. This is the area dominant of the Y chromosome, which occurs among the peoples speaking Uralic, Altaic, and Indo-European languages. As far as maternal lineages are concerned, however, the situation is somewhat different as some people in Siberia speaking Altaic languages show congruence only with a few European Finno-Ugrian peoples (e.g. Estonian, Karelian) (Rootsi – Kivisild – Tambets – Adojaan – Parik – Reidla – Metspalu – Laos – Tolk – Villems 2000, 152). Tat C allele is present among Ostyaks, but is very rare among Hungarians. (Possible explanations: /a/ Voguls and Ostyaks received it relatively late along with other Siberian peoples; /b/ Hungarians and Ob-Ugrians have very few genetically similar features, or never used to have common traits; /c/ during their long migration, Hungarians lost this character but this also assumes the abrupt decline in the number of male population – op. cit. 153.)

Genetic flow starting from Northern Asia was incomparably smaller than that of the Middle East. The genetic distance present between Samoyeds and Europeans implies that there was no significant migration from north-west Siberia to Europe, which could have brought along Uralic languages (Niskanen 2000b, 41). (According to an alternative idea presented by Guglielmino, Cavalli-Sforza, Piazza, people speaking Uralic languages originate from Siberia, and today's Samoyeds are the genetically purest representatives of the original Uralic population.)

In the Finns' genofond we can also discover a ten-thousand-year older Pre-neolit element originating from the southern part of Europe along with the somewhat newer Indo-European genetic material coming from the German, Scandinavian and Baltic population (Norio 1999).

The unique genetic quality of the Saami can be attributed to two facts: the mixing of western European population coming from the Basque zone and the periglacial population on the one hand, and the genetic mutation during the permanent isolation from other populations on the other (Wiik 2000, 211).

The genofond of Estonians, similarly to their anthropological indicators, demonstrates a strikingly heterogeneous character. Among Estonians, Tat C allele accounts for less than a half of the Y chromosomes while the rest of their paternal lineages is identical with those of other European peoples (Rootsi – Kivisild – Tambets – Adojaan – Parik – Reidla – Metspalu – Laos – Tolk – Villems 2000, 153). On the basis of the main allele frequencies we can differentiate between two groups of Estonians: the western and the eastern group. North-east and south-east Estonians are somewhat closer to eastern Finns, and western Estonians to their Indo-European neighbours (Heapost 2000, 101).

A number of *anthropological* enquiries show that there was a strong Mongoloid element in the groups migrating from Asia towards the West in the early Mesolithic. This population assimilated non-Mongoloid inhabitants living in western Siberia and near the Urals, thus giving rise to the Proto-Lapponid (Carpelan 1994, 25). The Lapponid type belongs to the Europoid, and not to the Mongoloid type. Graves in the Baltic States and Russia revealed two different

types: Europoid and Mongoloid, and also mixed or transitional types which were either Europoid and Mongoloid, or perhaps (Proto)-Lapponid (op. cit. 23). This might have been the prototype of the Europoid and the Mongoloid type. Proto-Lapponid can be found in the area stretching from the Baltic States and Poland to Western Siberia, while the Europoid can be traced in an area bordered by Central Europe, the Baltic States and north-west Russia (op. cit. 24).

The peoples of Western Siberia speaking Uralic languages are morphologically heterogeneous (Niskanen 2000a, 361).

Estonians are heterogeneous both genetically and anthropologically speaking (Heapost 2000, 101, 102).

Archaeological excavations revealed that the early Upper Palaeolithic settlements appeared on the Eastern European Plain between 38,000 and 33,000 BC. These communities later scattered in the area of western Ukraine, Moldavia, the Crimean Peninsula, the Ural Mountains and even on the territory of High North (north of the Arctic Circle), and in Siberia before 28,000 BC (Dolukhanov 2000b, 72).

During the Upper Palaeolithic, which was roughly the last glacial maximum (23,000–14,500 BC), communities were made up of very loosely related social units, which meant only a few (5–10 or 12–20) families related by kinship. These groups migrated on a seasonal basis and got in touch with other similar communities. As a consequence, they formed various bonds and contracts, intermarried, hence encouraging the development of intensive genetic and cultural interaction among the small groups (Dolukhanov 2000a, 12, 13).

During the time of the last glacial maximum, two refugia developed: one in Franco-Cantabria, and the other in the Ukraine (densely populated along the River Danube, but rather scarcely in the east right up to the River Volga). There was an active relationship between the two centres, which even severe icing did not prevent. Pictographs discovered in caves in the southern Urals (from the last phase of the Palaeolithic, that is after 13,000 BC) were drawn with the same technique (identical colours, style, theme, etc.) as those in Franco-Cantabria. The common goddess-figures of the two distinct cultures prove the existence of relations between the two refugia. It is perhaps not too bold to assume that this might serve as evidence for a cultic community stretching from the Atlantic to as far as the Urals. (It is also important to note that pictographs found in the Ural Mountains have nothing in common with those of the east, and Siberia.) (Julku 2000, 128, 129.)

The typical comb ceramic communities were members of a very broad network, in an area between Scandinavia and the Urals, which acted as mediators in the trading of valuable raw materials and the tools made of them, for instance copper and copper jewellery. Trading with copper had become a typical activity from Central Europe to the Altai by the end of the 5th millenary BC (Carpelan 1999, 258).

Important relations existed as far as the Urals also in the middle Neolithic. This might be proven by findings such as a runner of a sleigh made of yellow pine, and

the copper used by the Volosovo culture. There are no copper sites in the Volosovo region so copper must have been imported from the Urals. The use of copper was also typical of the eastern Finnish culture (op. cit. 259).

The commercial network trading with different metals at the beginning of the Bronze Age was running from Eastern Russia to Finland, and up to the Sayan Mountain in the east. This network had a significant impact on the development of the original Saami population living in the east of Finland. As a sort of continuation, a new form of culture started to develop in northern Fennoskandia, which initiated and contributed to the advancement of the (original) Saami culture (op. cit. 273).

Cultural relationship with original Indo-Europeans is known as the original ceramic expansion (according to the latest chronologies around 7000 BC in the Samara culture in the southern Urals and the central Volga region, around 6000 BC in the upper Volga region, around 5100 BC in Finland) along with the comb-pitted ceramic expansion (4500 BC in the upper Volga region, 4000 BC in Finland). Both ceramics were transported from the Volga-Oka region to Finland and Karelia, and expanded up to the Arctic (Parpola 1999, 188). The classic phase of the comb-pitted ceramic culture (from 4000-3200 BC) prevailed in a vast area reaching from the Urals to Finland. This region exhibited a very developed system of distribution, which required a great deal of linguistic conformity. Parpola refers to this classic phase as the Proto-Uralic era where the spoken language was Proto-Uralic (loc. cit.).

The cultural relations of people living in the coastal area of Finnmarken around 9000 BC were south-west oriented, but from the end of the Mesolithic they also started to open towards the south (Halinen 1999, 122).

The Volga-Oka region was a rather significant innovative centre as shown by the typical local comb ceramic (*Lyalovo ceramic*) appearing around 4000-3600 BC, which soon started to spread towards the north-west reaching as far as Karelia (Carpelan 1999, 256). This signals relations sustained in the framework of the western part of the Uralic complex (op. cit. 273).

The boat-axe culture became widespread from 3200 BC in the large part of Europe. Its local alterations appear in Eastern Europe around 2500 BC (op. cit. 261). The expansion of this culture reflects large-scale migration, which brought about the diffusion of innovations in the Baltic States and Finland (op. cit. 262).

It is possible, however, to find counterexamples which prove that there existed certain borderlines between various regions. Within the vast area of the NELZ, huge blocks started to develop, which, apart from a large number of similarities described above still show certain genetic, linguistic, anthropological and archaeological dissimilarities. Archaeological research conducted in the area show the existence of innovative centres emerging from time to time. It is very likely that these economic centres stimulated and fostered linguistic innovations as well.

In the area of the NELZ, we can distinguish between two markedly different *linguistic* blocks, eastern and western. The eastern block was formed in Siberia in the area to the east from the Yenisei, while the western one developed in Northern

Europe in a broad line between Fennoscandia and the Urals. In between the eastern and western blocks, there emerged a third, transitional block bordered by the Urals and the River Yenisei. Within these three blocks, according to their genetically closer linguistic relations, smaller groups (kind of linguistic families) developed or survived.

The eastern and western blocks of the NELZ are characterised by marked linguistic differences manifested between the Aspect-Tempus opposition, the marked-unmarked preterite, the marked-unmarked present, the distinction between, or absence of subjective-objective conjugations, the presence or absence of predicative inflection of the nominal, the possibility or impossibility to express an object with a locative, or the unmarked object / marked nominative (marked agent) versus marked object / unmarked nominative.

Under the heading of eastern block languages we can list all the Paleosiberian languages except for Yenisei, while the western block includes Balto Finnic languages, Cheremis and Permi languages.

The transitional block situated between the eastern and western block includes and combines elements from both opposing systems, and is therefore full of redundancies (e.g. unmarked preterite, unmarked present, marked present, marked preterite). This transitional block embraces some Uralic languages such as Samoyed, Ugrian languages and Mordvin, and also Yenisei languages.

Genetics claims that the original genofond and the original languages could survive only in faraway mountain areas or in the north, where farming population appeared relatively late (e.g. the Picts in Scotland, or the Basque and Finno-Ugrian languages). Northern Europeans and the Basque are genetically far more distant from Anatolians than other European peoples, which means that the first two have a higher rate of the original genetic components (Niskanen 2000b, 41).

Based on the European genealogical tree, the Saami can clearly be distinguished from other European peoples (they are the major outliers) while the Basque and the eastern Finno-Ugrians (Zyrian, Cheremis) are minor outliers (op. cit. 43). The genofond of the Zyrians and the Cheremis representing the eastern European Finno-Ugrians is typically European. The European Finno-Ugrians are genetically also Europeans, except for the Saami (op. cit. 45). The Saami are an isolated European group, their ‘outlier status’ is the result of a genetic drift. Genetically speaking, Cheremis and Zyrians are as distant from Samoyeds as Samoyeds from Icelandic people. This fact makes it highly unlikely that Siberians speaking Uralic languages would have an European origin. Originally, Samoyeds were people speaking a Paleosiberian language linguistically assimilated by the Uralic-speaking population coming from the south-west. This claim seems to be supported by the Y chromosome tests carried out on Samoyeds (op. cit. 46).

From among several *anthropological* tests, we must consider the ones focusing on body height. The results of these tests show that modern Finnish and modern Ugrian groups derive from two different anthropological bases: the Finns originate from the Europoids while the Ugrians from the Uraloid (Mongoloid). It is the extremely short Samoyeds (never taller than 160 cm) who are in closest relation

with Ugrians, which might be a result of genetic kinship. The Ugrian-Samoyed group is most likely the descendant of the original population once living in the forest belt of the West-Siberian plains. The direction of the change within the belt was NW > SE (Purundjan & Kozlov 1996, 369–370).

Dermatoglyphic tests revealed two distinctively different racial components of the Finno-Ugrians: the Europoid and the Mongoloid. The Europoid component has two modifications among Finno-Ugrians. The first group includes the majority of Finno-Ugrians (and this is the Northern European combination which eventually 'conquered' the Mongoloid component of western Siberian origin), while the second group comprises a much smaller number of peoples such as those of the Volga region, or Hungarians who display a combination with southern European peoples (Heet & Dolinova 1996, 287). All things considered, those belonging to the Europid type are Finns, Estonians, Mordvins, Zyrians, Hungarians, and, to a smaller extent also Vepsians, while Ostyaks are very markedly Mongoloids. Finally, Cheremis, Votyak, Saami and Vogul people are the mixture of the two racial types, but still being somewhat closer to Ostyaks (op. cit. 285).

Niskanen claims that Samoyeds are as distant from the Europeans as the Mongols. This might bring us to the conclusion that either Finno-Ugrians and Samoyeds separated long ago, or there never existed a common original home, consequently, linguistic similarities are only due to linguistic relations (Saukkonen 2000, 375).

The eastern and western Eurasian populations show different facial characteristics. The two populations met in a relatively new age in the region stretching between the Arctic Ocean and the Pamir / Tien Shan Mountain. Since there were environmental obstacles preventing the gene flow around the Ural Mountains and the Central Asian mountain area, a very sharp morphological and genetic boundary developed. On the Eurasian steppes, however, with no natural blockages around, there was a considerable flow of people both to the east and to the west (Niskanen 2000a, 360).

The difference is also evident in the skin colour. Europeans have a lighter skin colour than Northern Asians as they spent much longer time living on the northern latitude and in colder climate than Northern Asians (op. cit. 361).

If we finally take a closer look at *archaeological* findings we can see that the pan-European cultural zone dominant until the last glacial maximum, and characterised by Aurignacian industry, suddenly breaks up. This presupposes a general communication medium (X language), of which we have no knowledge at all. What we know is that there developed two different entities, a western and an eastern one, while the larger part of Central Europe became uninhabited. The language of these two entities in the periglacial Central and Eastern Europe was Proto-Uralic, while in the Mediterranean zone it was Basque-Caucasian (Dolukhanov 2000b, 74).

In the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic, the western Siberian and Central Asian tool industries differed considerably from the contemporary and subsequent Eastern European ones (Makkay 1990, 72).

In Russia, along the western border of the Mari and the Chuvas Republics, a frontier zone separating the two cultures developed relatively early. The Volga-bend lies to the east of this borderline, while the Volga-Oka region is situated westward. This latter region, following the early Mesolithic original immigration, soon became a kind of cradle where a larger number of populations with more advanced culture survived (Carpelan 1999, 273).

3. The so-called Uralic original home and the so-called Proto-Uralic

Prior to the genetic, anthropological and archaeological research summarised above, and based merely on an analysis of the archaic morphological and morphosyntactic characteristics of Uralic languages, I had described my propositions concerning the development of the so-called Proto-Uralic (Pusztay 1990b), the grouping of the languages belonging to the Uralic language family, along with the so-called Uralic original home (Pusztay 1994). My assumptions seem to be strongly supported by the disciplines referred to above.

The development of the so-called Proto-Uralic

The so-called proto-language of a language family can be defined as a rather belated station of general linguistic development. This idiom can traditionally be accepted as the starting point for languages of various language families. There are, however, several arguments supporting the idea that the history of languages belonging to a given language family had begun prior to the so-called proto-language era. We can notice a new tendency even among researchers following the traditional approach when they describe certain linguistic phenomena to have originated in the Proto-Uralic era, or even before that, in a pre-Uralic age (e.g. Honti 1995, 56 about the possible pre-Uralic development of possessive declension). Traditional diachronic-comparative linguistics reconstructs Proto-Uralic as a complete system (i.e. a phonological, morphological system with some syntax and rich body of vocabulary), which, irrespective of the factual results, could be acceptable. Nevertheless, this ‘fully equipped’ language must have developed, at some given time, in some particular place. Being aware of the fact that language development is a rather time-consuming procedure, this progress must have taken quite a few millennia.

Antecedents of the languages we today refer to as Uralic developed in the NELZ. My assumption of an Arctic language union (Pusztay 1992) can be easily reconciled with the theory of punctuated equilibrium applied to model the emergence and the development of language families (cf. Dixon 1997). According to this theory, people of different cultures and languages coexisted for many thousand years, forming evenly balanced relationships with each other, as a result of which some linguistic and cultural interaction developed. This balanced situation, due to some natural catastrophe, invasion of aliens, or the appearance of

new instruments of production, etc. got disturbed, bringing one of the groups into a dominant position, whose language and culture became influential, and made a more powerful and one-sided impact on other languages and cultures than before. This relatively brief period of time lasting no longer than a few generations is usually enough for a given linguistic situation to be rearranged. This idiom, embracing elements of the other languages in the region owing to the long period of coexistence, can be retrospectively viewed as the dominant element of a language family, which emerged following a new state of equilibrium, or in other words, the proto-language. This explication, although with different terminology but with similar content, corresponds with the chain of thoughts outlined earlier in connection with the development of the proto-language, and which can be illustrated by the following figures (Pusztay 1990b):

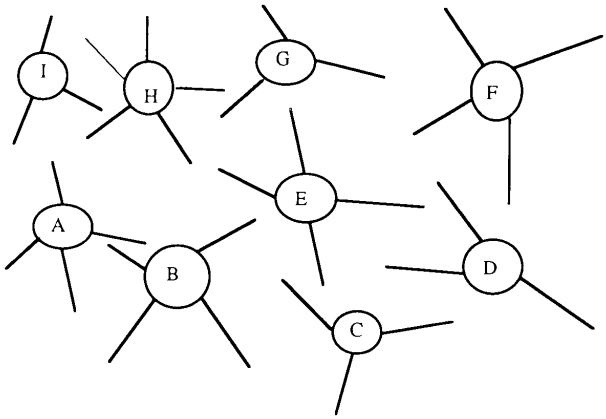

Fig. 1. Languages in loose connection.

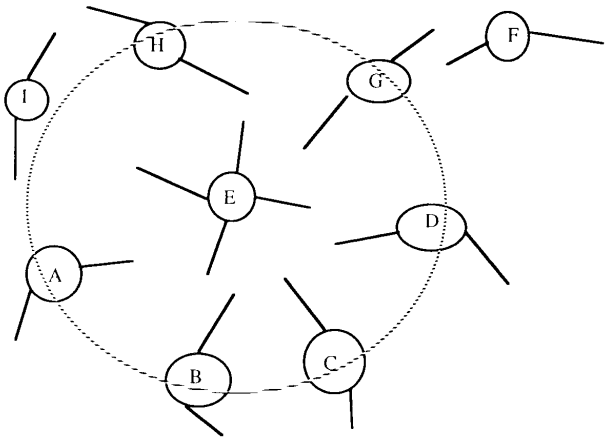

Fig. 2. Languages in closer connection.

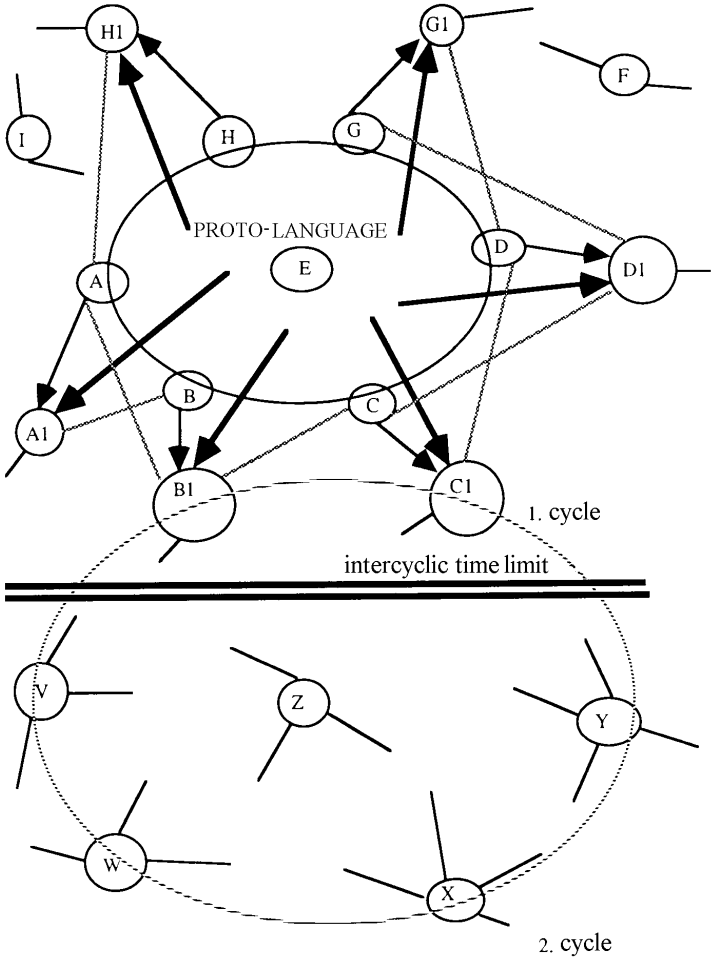

Fig. 3. The breaking up of the proto-language.

Relations justified on an archaeological basis, as described above, presume the usage of some common language, a *lingua franca*. Among the reconstructed Proto-Uralic lexicon there are a few notable cases when several proto-language forms exist to denote the same notion, most of which only differ either in their vowel sounds (see palatal-velar correspondence) or in their second syllable. I hold the view that, in the latter case, within an area with several languages, there is one common stem established to which each and every language group adds their own suffix. (Here the most remarkable difference is displayed between Finno-Ugrian and Samoyed languages. UEW does not seem to provide any answer for the huge difference of Samoyed languages, and suggests a considerable vowel and consonant loss in Samoyed. This, however, does not seem to follow any phonetic rule, although etymological research considers proper phonetic correspondence to

be a holy principle. (See examples to illustrate the phenomenon in Pusztay 1995, also in Pusztay 1983 though at that time with a more restricted body of examples). The traditional Finno-Ugrian approach naturally rejects this explication, claiming that the free morphemes of the proto-Uralic may either consist of two, or occasionally three syllables but are never monosyllabic, and they must also end with a vowel. This rejection neatly illustrates the fact that Proto-Uralic is being treated as a chemically pure product which is in sharp contradiction with the natural behaviour of languages.

There are also fierce terminological debates over the term *lingua franca*. In the field of Uralic studies it has become very common for experts, who have departed from the traditional ideas (such as archaeologists mentioned above), to operate with the term *lingua franca* as the means of communication among several peoples of a given region (e.g. Künnap 1998, Künnap 2000, Pusztay 1995, Wiik 1995, 1997, 2000). These contradictory ideas, often put a bit too harshly, stress that *lingua franca*, not being a natural language, is incapable of developing as naturally as other languages, and hence cannot become a so-called proto-language (see the latest study on the issue Laakso 1999). Because of the terminological consensus it might have been more fortunate to describe the procedure with the term *pidginisation*, and call the end product (Proto-Uralic) *pidgin*, since it is quite common to refer to *pidgin* as *lingua franca* in linguistic literature. The pidgin idiom may develop into a complete linguistic system (called *creolisation*), or it may also become an official language, or the language of fiction; it may consequently, function as any other natural language (in this case pidgin is called *creole*). This linguistic procedure has taken place a few dozens of times all over the world even during the past few centuries (see e.g. Fodor 1999) so we can boldly assume that it could have happened in prehistoric times as well. A language evolving this way – during the process described as punctuated equilibrium – may have become a so-called proto-language (see Haas 1966, 123 who claims that every language is a potential proto-language).

Grouping the Uralic languages

Careful analysis of morphology, the most archaic layer of Uralic languages, shows that there are significant differences between particular Uralic languages. According to traditional approach, Uralic languages originate from one single proto-language and explain striking dissimilarities with isolated development carried out in each language. The etymology of Uralic languages and their possible relations are usually modelled by a family tree. Nevertheless, it is quite easy to see that reconstruction based on a family tree model may not only be methodologically improper but also contradictory. The most obvious methodological objection is that the proto-language is being reconstructed on the basis of contemporary languages, which are subsequently derived from the proto-language. (A procedure I referred to earlier on as *incestus* /Pusztay 1995/.) Let me bring two examples of the apparent inconsistency:

– The existence of the dual is reconstructed on the basis of proto-language but it may be traced only in Saami, the (Ob)-Ugrian languages and Samoyed; the dual should not be traced back to the proto-language since, if we accept Saami existing between the Finns and Volga peoples, the phenomenon cannot be traced back to the so-called Finnic-Volgaic unity. This means that the phenomenon could not have encountered the Ugrian branch dual, hence it cannot be traced back to the Finno-Ugrian proto-language level either, although the relation with proto-Samoyed could be considered only in that case.

– It is held about the proto-language, even if not as firmly as the claim above, that it distinguishes between transitive-intransitive conjugation, but this only occurs in Mordvin, Ugrian and Samoyed. The critical approach as far as the procedure is concerned, however, is similar to the previous one.

Taking a closer look at the reconstruction of the lexicon, a few more examples could be cited to illustrate inconsistency.

Deficiencies of the family tree model have become evident even for those representing the traditional approach, hence the efforts to carry out more flexible experiments (see Sutrop's studies /1999, 2000/ about the history of the issue).

I first divided Uralic languages into two (Pusztay 1994), then into three blocks (Pusztay 1995). These three blocks suppose different origins for the various groups of Uralic languages. The two markedly opposite groups are as follows: the *western* group comprising the antecedents of contemporary Baltic Finnish languages, and the *eastern* group embracing the antecedents of the contemporary Ugrian, Samoyed and Mordvin languages. In between the two there is a *middle group*, including the antecedents of contemporary Cheremis and Permi languages. The eastern block is likely to have originally been Paleosiberian since its grammar exhibits several features also typical of other Paleosiberian languages (e.g. the differentiation between transitive and intransitive conjugation, the predicative inflection of nouns /this is missing in the Ugrian languages but is present in all the Altai languages/, or the dual, except for Mordvins, is present in several Paleosiberian languages such as the Chukotko-Kamchatkan, the Eskimo Aleut languages or the Gilyak).

As early as 1982, Helimskij published a study about the closer connections between the Ugrian and Samoyed languages belonging to the eastern block, though still relying on the traditional division and hence supposing closer relations around the proto-language era. There were heated debates (and also some eerie silence) following the classification of Mordvins into the eastern block (first by Pusztay 1989). The existence of the so-called Volga Unity was first questioned by Setälä (1928) and later firmly rejected by Bereczki (1974) but it was still widely held that Mordvins belonged to the Finnic-Volgaic languages. The morphology and morphosyntax of Mordvin are so different from the neighbouring Finno-Ugrian and other languages that e.g. Lewy (1961) thought of Mordvin as being connected with Caucasian languages. I hold the view that Mordvins were part of the eastern block for the following reasons: the differentiation between transitive and intransitive conjugation (and the possibility to express the relationship

between subject and object), the use of locative to express the object, the plural nature of the object denoted in the verb structure, the predicative inflection of nouns (including the use in casus obliqui) and the existence of determinative declension. Also, I find it possible to connect the determinative declension with the predestinative declension of Samoyed languages. All the other listed characteristics – bar the lack of predicative inflection of nouns in the Ugrian languages – are present in Ugrian and Samoyed, and, in fact, in all the other Paleosiberian languages. The phonological, (to some extent) morphological and a great deal of lexical correspondence can be understood as the consequences of permanent areal relations. Typical Mordvin linguistic characteristics listed above are usually explained by the inner development of the language. However, without any external impact it is highly unlikely for a language to form new grammatical categories, or grammatical subsystems. If Mordvin had any structural feature missing from its closest linguistic environment but were present in languages spoken a thousand miles further away, we might suspect some sort of a coincidence. The greater the number of these coincidences, the smaller the chances for this being a random incident. Yet we also need to accept the fact, at least for the time being, that the idea of an eastern-western (proto)-Mordvin migration has not yet been supported by archaeological findings. (Would it be foolish to suppose that the ancestors of Mordvins migrated from West Siberia along with the ancestors of Hungarians? See the possibilities to express subject-object relations within transitive conjugation in Mordvin, and also its partial appearance in Hungarian /*én-téged, én-titeket,* cf. *lát-ok* - *lá-tom* and *lát-lak/*.) In any case, it would be highly practical to carry out a full-scale genetic investigation on Mordvins.

The languages of the western and the middle block are basically the Finno-Ugrian languages. The western block can be characterised by the lack of features apparent in the eastern block. There are, however, a few features present in the middle block that are also there in the eastern block, e.g. dysfunctional differentiation between the two conjugations in Cheremis, or the refunctioning of the 'double conjugations model' in Permi languages. (This might be explained as follows: due to some relationship with the eastern block, the middle block might have borrowed some structural elements, but the impact was not strong enough to transmit these items together with their proper functions.) We definitely need further research to support this claim on the one hand, and to find out whether linguistic innovations could have set off in the Volga-Oka innovation centre (see above) identified by archaeologists, and what kind of linguistic mediation this centre could have been responsible for, on the other hand.

We also need to mention that the three blocks were not at all homogeneous. This might be best illustrated by the eastern block. Earlier on, the genetic and anthropological differences and similarities of Ugrians and Samoyeds were mentioned. On a linguistic level we might enumerate some differences, for instance, the ones between the structural manifestations of transitive and intransitive conjugation, or the lack of predicative inflection in Ugrian languages.

Within the eastern block, Ugrian languages might have acted as a kind of bridge between the actual Finno-Ugrian languages (that is, languages of the western and middle block) and the Samoyeds. This presupposed role is neatly illustrated by the reconstructed items of UEW, when two different etymons are reconstructed for the same notion. Each of these can be demonstrated in Ugrian languages but in the following, one shows correspondence only with Finno-Ugrian, while the other with Samoyed languages (Pusztay 1991, Pusztay 1995).

I did not classify the Saami language into any of the blocks. I am still of the opinion that Saami cannot be considered to be adjacent to Finnic languages as it is often the case in family tree illustrations. Both genetic and anthropological research (see above e.g. Carpelan 1999) support my proposition that the Saami were originally Arctic migrants who had (among others) Siberian relations in the prehistoric times. These relations are evident in the existence of dual shared with Ugrian and Samoyed languages, but we can also find a large number of lexical correspondence originating from the so-called Uralic era, which can only be found in the Saami and Samoyed, and also in Ugrian languages (Pusztay 1995).

From the above argumentation we can draw the conclusion that the Uralic language family does not originate from one single proto-language.

The Uralic age

The NELZ is made up of a chain of language blocks being in close connection with each other. Since I reject the idea of a single proto-language, I must also refuse the concept of a single original home, but accept instead the existence of a chain of *Urheimats* retrospectively considered to be an original home.

Despite the above negative statements I do agree with the idea of the Uralic age. The beginning of this period can archaeologically be determined (around 8000 BC) when a new flow of population and a new culture emerge in the Yenisei basin: they were supposedly the predecessors of contemporary Yenisei peoples. Yenisei languages, despite the process of homogeneity lasting for a few thousand years, have been strikingly different from other languages of the NELZ (i.e. they are inflecting languages, having a separate category for the grammatical genus, their unique verbal paradigms are said to be close to the Basque, or according to other views, to Caucasian languages, but we also know of theories claiming that Yenisei languages come from a Sino-Tibetan root /for a comprehensive scientific survey see Pusztay 1980/). My proposition is that this new population wedged into the area between the Ural Mountains and the Pacific, populated by Paleosiberian peoples, isolating the westernmost group from the rest. This originally western Paleosiberian group started to have more intensive relations with the Finno-Ugrian groups living to the west (chiefly with the so-called middle block but possibly also with the western block – see the Samoyed-Finnish correspondences listed by Künnap (1998), and developed into the eastern block of Uralic languages. The development of a shared language was encouraged by the many similarities in the structures of the languages, and those relations that had previously existed.

The main event of the Uralic age: the lexicon of the eastern block slowly becoming Finno-Ugrian.

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