

The emergence of word-initial voiced stops in Proto-Hungarian

This presentation aims to bring new solutions to the old problem of the emergence of word-initial voiced stops in the prehistory of Hungarian. Word-initial voiced stops are frequent in modern Hungarian, but it is well-known that these arose during the relatively late prehistoric period, during the existence of Hungarian as an independent branch (Abaffy 2003: 122). It has been assumed that they emerged through sporadic changes $*p > b$, $*t > d$ (but not $k > *g$) in word-initial position in some inherited words, and became more frequent with the influx of Turkic and Iranian loanwords (Abaffy 1994: 16–18; Bárczi 1958: 113). However, it is problematic that in some cases Hungarian shows voiced stops even though the attested Turkic data points to voiceless stops (for example, Hu *gödény* ← reconstructed Western Old Turkic $*güdän$ or $*kütän$, cf. Middle Turkic *kutan* ‘a kind of bird’; Hu *dara* ← Turkic $*darī$ or $*tarī$ cf. Old Turkic *tariğ* ‘crops, millet, sowing’; Ligeti 1986: 193–194; Róna-Tas & Berta 2011: 1074–1075, 1078), and the more scarce Iranian loans also show a confusing picture, as corresponding voiced stops are found in some loans but not in others: Hu *bűz* ‘smell’ ← Iranian $*bauda-$ (> Ossetic *bud*, *bodæ* id.), Old Hungarian *kazdag* ‘rich’ ← Iranian (Alanic) $*gæzdig$ (> Ossetic *qæznyg*, *ğæzdug* id.) (Abaffy 1994).

It is also problematic that it is not known under which conditions the word-initial voiced stops arose in Hungarian in the first place, as these are not regular reflexes of any Proto-Uralic phonemes (contrary to word-internal voiced stops that developed regularly from the clusters of nasal and stop, Sammallahti 1988: 520). However, it has been claimed in presentations of Hungarian historical phonology that some inherited words have an irregular voiced reflex (Abaffy 2003: 118; Gerstner 2018: 107). The situation is somewhat similar as with the related Permic branch of the Uralic family, where similar voicing of has taken place (for example Proto-Permic $*bur <$ Proto-Uralic $*para$ ‘good’; Proto-Permic $*dīn <$ Proto-Uralic $*tūñi$ ‘base of a tree’); however, in Permic this process seems to be a regular, conditioned change, voicing assimilation caused by word-internal voiced consonant (Csúcs 2005: 154–158), whereas in Hungarian the situation is often described as sporadic or no conditions are not given (Maticsák 2020: 360; Bereczki 2003: 69–70; Abaffy 2003: 118). It has been suggested that word-internal voiced consonants caused the voicing of word-initial stop (MSzFE: 105; UEW: 374–375; Honti 2017: 15), similarly as in Permic, but the situation is complicated as numerous counter examples can be found. The voicing of stops has been sometimes been considered a shared, areal innovation of Proto-Hungarian and Proto-Permic, but the evidence is inconclusive (Csúcs 2021: 44).

Most of the alleged examples of the sporadic voicing in inherited vocabulary are problematic etymologies, showing also irregular vocalism and semantic mismatch in many cases; for example, Hungarian *bal* ‘left’ allegedly reflects Proto-Uralic $*palV$ (MSzFE: 105; UEW: 351–352), but the only cognate is Udmurt Ud *pal’l’an* ‘left’ that shows irregular vocalism; Hu *bőr* ‘skin’ is allegedly a reflex of Proto-Uralic $*perV$ ‘bark’ (MSzFE: 110–111; UEW: 374), but *ő* is not the regular reflex of Proto-Uralic $*e$. Some words have competing etymologies: for example, Hungarian *dug* ‘to squeeze’ has been considered both a loan from Turkic $*dig-$ ~ $*tig-$ ‘to squeeze’ (Róna-Tas & Berta 2011: 303–306) and a reflex of Proto-Uralic $*tuŋki-$ (MSzFE: 135; UEW: 537–538). Because of this, the idea that Proto-Uralic stops can be reflected by Hungarian voiced stops in anlaut is very doubtful.

In this presentation, all the relevant Uralic etymologies and loanwords will be discussed, and the aim is to determine when and under what conditions the word-initial voiced stops became possible in Proto-Hungarian.

References

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