

What do Uralic studies do? What do we not do?

Community of Practice in Uralic Studies (COPIUS)
Introduction to Uralic Studies

www.copius.org

Last updated 30 November 2021



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

This presentation will discuss...

- **what is understood** by Uralic studies (in broader and narrower sense)
- **what Uralic studies do** (and why):
 1. the “hard core”: the relatedness of the Uralic languages, i.e. comparative-historical linguistics
 2. contrastive and applied studies
 3. research of individual (especially: minor) Uralic languages
 4. non-linguistic studies: culture (ethnography, religion, folklore, literature...), history (archaeology, historiography, etc.), interdisciplinary approaches
- **what Uralic studies do **not** do** (and why not)

Introduction: Uralic/Finno-Ugric studies

“Uralic” vs. “Finno-Ugric”

- Uralic = languages spoken on both sides of the Ural mountains
 - **NB:** the question where Proto-Uralic was spoken is still debated, but most mainstream researchers do NOT locate this “primeval home” on the Urals!
- Finno-Ugric: an “antipode term” (“Klammerbezeichnung”) based on the **geographic** extremes where its speakers are found.
 - The Finnic languages are spoken in the Northwest, the Ugric languages in the East (Ob-Ugric in Siberia) and in the South (Hungarian)
 - The term does not imply that the language family falls into two main branches, “Finnic” and “Ugric”.
 - Compare the logics of the term “Indo-European”: the Indo-European language family does NOT consist of only two main branches called “Indic” and “European”.

F Finno-Ugric

FO Baltic-Finnic

- FO1 Finnish
- FO2 Karelian
- FO3 Veps
- FO4 Ingrian
- FO5 Estonian
- FO6 Votic
- FO7 Livonian

FS Sami languages

- FS1 Western Sami
- FS2 Central Sami
- FS3 Eastern Sami

FU Ugric

- FU1 Hungarian
- FU2 Mansi
- FU3 Khanty

FP Finno-Permic

- FP1 Komi-Zyrian
- FP2 Komi-Permyak
- FP3 Udmurt

FW Finno-Volgaic

- FW1 Mari
- FW2 Mordvinic

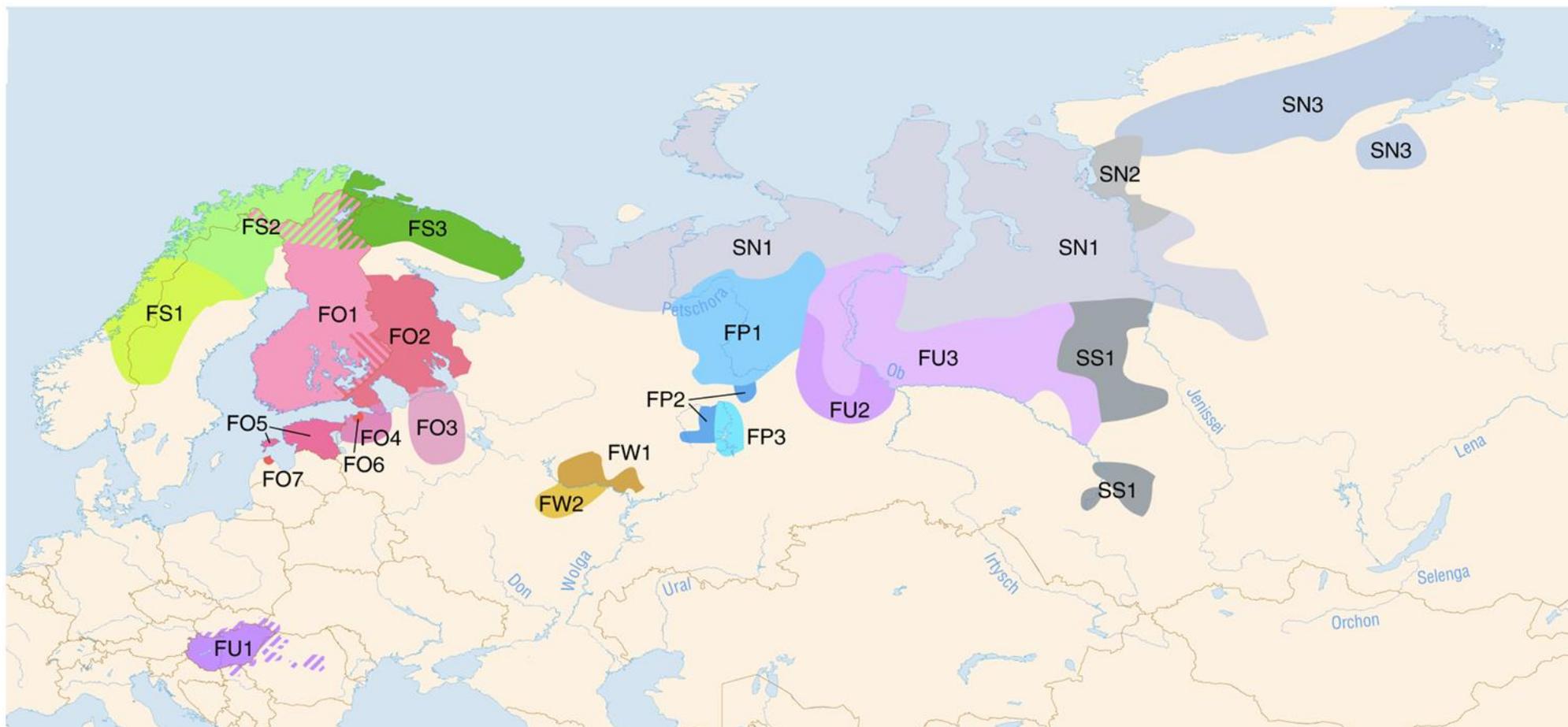
S Samoyedic

SN Northern Samoyedic

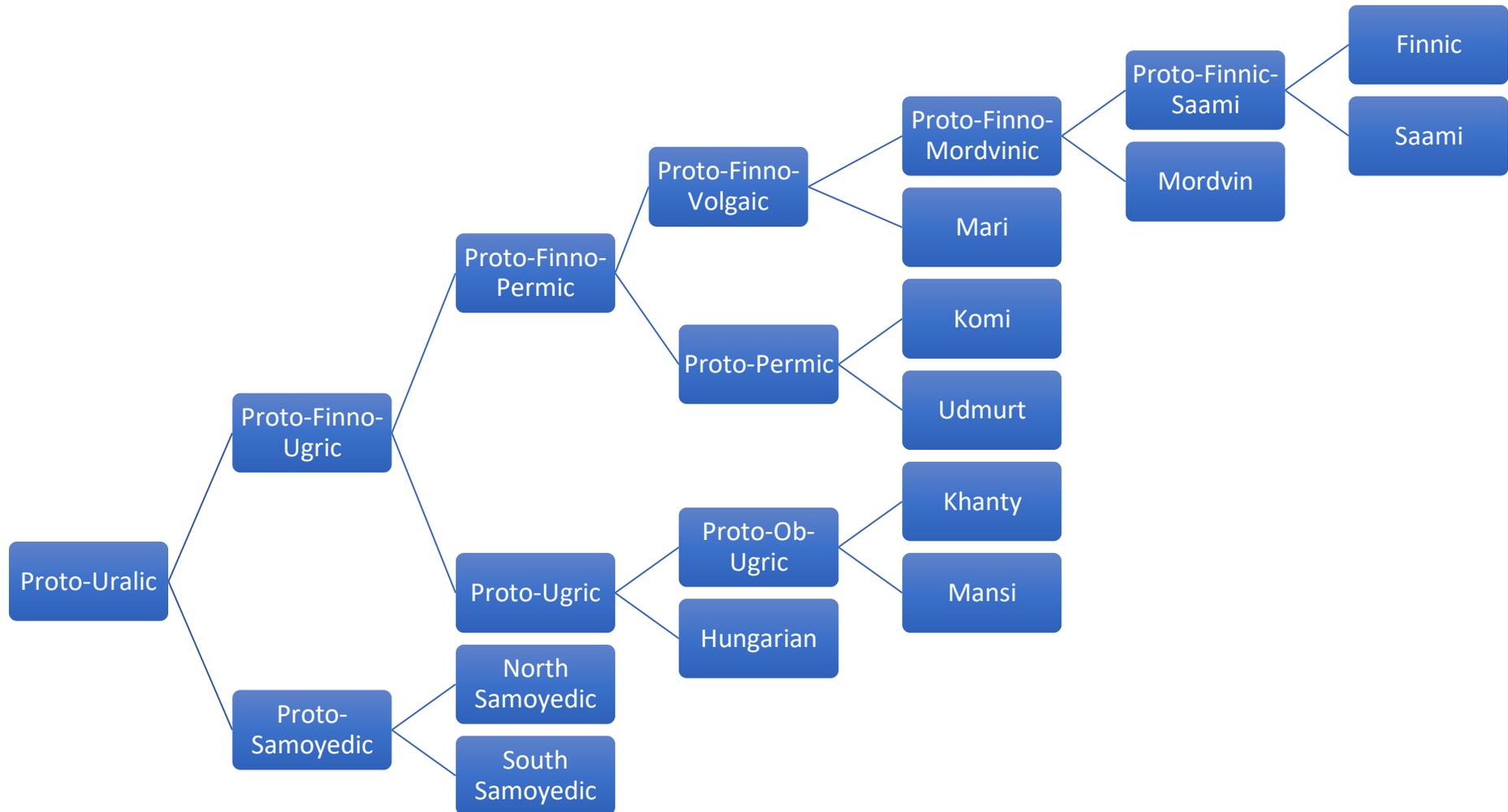
- SN1 Nenets
- SN2 Enets
- SN3 Nganasan

SS Southern Samoyedic

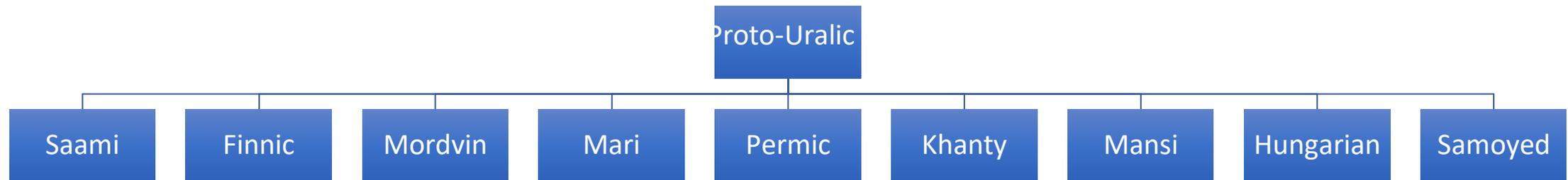
- SS1 Selkup



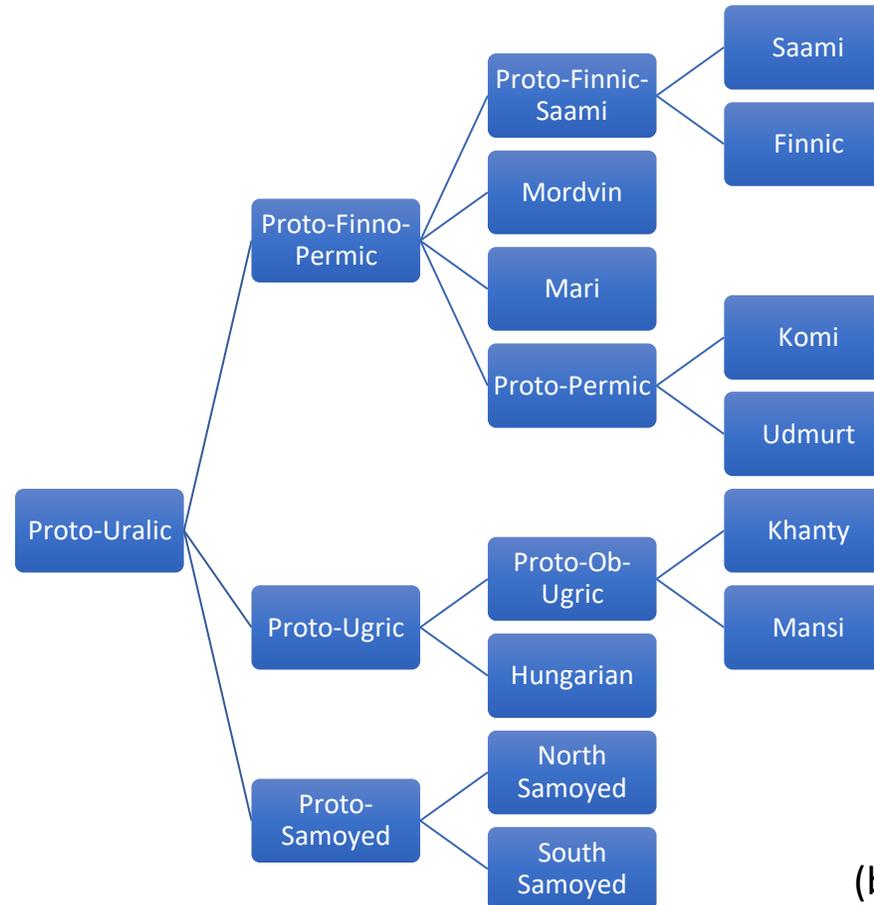
Traditional binary family tree: primary split of Proto-Uralic into Finno-Ugric and Samoyed



The “comb” (“bush”, “rake”) model with parallel branches



Non-binary compromise solutions



(based on Kulonen 2002)

Uralic = Finno-Ugric?

- **Accepting a non-binary model means that the terms *Uralic* and *Finno-Ugric* can be used as synonyms – as they, in fact, often are!**
- The main issue here is the relationship between Samoyedic and other branches of Uralic:
 - is Samoyedic fundamentally different from all the others or just a branch among others?
- This question, like some other details of the family tree (in particular, whether Proto-Ugric or Proto-Finnic-Saami can or should be reconstructed), is still a matter of debate.

The hard core of Uralic studies

The basis of Uralic studies: Language relatedness

- Language relatedness = **descent from a common proto-language** which really existed and can be reconstructed to a sufficient extent
- **Relatedness does not require:**
 - **similarity (the presence of a certain number of similarities)**
 - **mutual intelligibility**
- Relatedness (reconstructing the common ancestor: “family tree”) is part and parcel of the comparative method of historical linguistics
 - **NB:** The family tree is not just a metaphor taken over from other disciplines!
- The relatedness of the Uralic languages has been accepted by the international research community since the turn of the 19th century and confirmed by countless studies since then.

False friends in finding relatives

Hawaiian		Greek	
aeto	'eagle'	aetos	'eagle'
noonoo	'thought'	nous	'thought'
manao	'to think'	manthano	'to learn'
mele	'to sing'	melos	'melody'
lahui	'people'	laos	'people'
meli	'honey'	meli	'honey'
kau	'summer'	kauma	'heat'
mahina	'month'	men	'moon'
kia	'to arrive'	kion	'pillar'
hiki	'to come'	hikano	'to arrive'

An example of coincidence. Similar words in Hawaiian (Austronesian) and Greek (Indo-European) that are not related by any means. (Trask 1996: 220)



Hungary First

Február 19. · ⚙

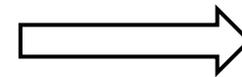
A szlovák nyelv a magyar nyelv egyik sajátos változata!

olha	iskra szikra	oblok ablak	slivka szilva
borotva	K	obrus abrosz	sobota szombat
ca boszorka	kabát kabát	olej olaj	somár szamár
gáň buzogány	káčer gácsér	opát apát	straka szarka
bivaly	kačica kaeca	P	streda szerda
a cédula	kapusta káposzta	pagáč pogácsa	stôl asztal
el	kaštieľ kastély	palacinka palacsinta	sukňa szoknya
citrom	kláštor kolostor	pálenka pálinka	sused szomszéd
cékla	klietka kalitka	pancier páncél	Š
csákány	klobása kolbász	paprikáš paprikás	šablŕa szablya
	klúč kulcs	párny páros	šál sál
	koláč kalács	pastier pásztor	šiator sátor
		pekár pék	šek csekk
		peniaze pénz	škola iskola
			štráik sztráik

An example of similarity caused by areal contact: a Slovak-Hungarian word list. Some of the similar words are Slavic loans in Hungarian, some are Hungarian loans in Slovak, some are German (or other) loans in both.

“In short, Finno-Ugric and broader Uralic were established with reliable methods based on solid evidence – morphological agreements and sound correspondences – very early in comparative linguistics and this early work had a major impact on thinking in the field and on the development of Indo-European study.” (Campbell & Poser 2008: 94.)

Joannes/János Sajnovics, *Demonstratio idioma Ungarorum et Laponum idem esse*, 1770 – the **first work of scientific value that demonstrated the relatedness** of two Uralic languages: Hungarian and Saami



Consonant changes (lenition) in Indo-European and Finno-Ugric

- Romance languages

Latin	lupus 'wolf'	pater 'father'	vita 'life'	focus 'fire'
Italian	lupo	padre	vita	fuoco
Spanish	lobo [β]	padre [ð]	vida [ð]	fuego [ɣ]
French	loup [u]	père [<perre]	vie	feu [fø]

- Finno-Ugric languages

Proto-FU	*repä- 'fox'	*käti 'hand'	*kota 'house'	*joki ~ *juka 'river'
Finnish	repo	käte-	kota	joki
Khanty	—	ket, köt	hat, хот	jöχan, jɔɣəŋ
Mari	rəwə-ž	kit : kiðe-	kuðo	joye- 'flow'
Hungarian	rava-sz 'sly'	kéz	ház	-jó (in names of rivers)
Komi	ru-ć	ki	-ka, -ko	ju

Languages and nations?

- The rise of historical-comparative linguistics (and the professionalization of linguistics in the modern sense) in the 19th century **coincided with Romantic Nationalism and various ethnic emancipation projects** in Europe (“the invention of tradition”)
- Romantic Nationalism regarded **nations as organic wholes** (“families”): each nation or ethnic group has its own “*spirit*” (*Volksgeist*), manifest in its history, language, culture, world view, etc.
- Historical-comparative linguistics was seen as a **window into the national past**, conflating the (pre)history of a language with the (pre)history of its speakers



The Feszty Panorama (Feszty-körkép) (1894) depicting the „arrival of the Hungarians” in 895 in the Carpathian basin is a salient example of romantic nationalism. The notion of *one language – one nation* was widely believed even in the end of the 19th century. The „Finno-Ugric origin” of Hungarians was hard to fit into this narrative and therefore difficult to explain to the general public.

Uralic studies and the national cause



Antal Reguly (1819–1858) was the Hungarian pioneer of linguistic and ethnographic fieldwork among the Uralic peoples of Russia.

“We have no seas nor overseas colonies, to which we might send scientific expeditions (...) Our origins and our linguistic relatives are the pole around which we and only we can make discoveries (...)”
(The Hungarian Academy of Sciences decides to grant funding for Antal Reguly’s fieldwork in Russia in 1842)



“There is only one thing that has affected me deeply and powerfully, I can live only for that, everything else is subsidiary. I have decided to show the Finnish people that we have not been torn apart from the world and world history, but that we are related to at least one sixth of mankind. Grammars are not my principal aim, but without grammars this aim cannot be achieved.”

(M. A. Castrén to J. V. Snellman 1844; translation quoted from Korhonen 1986: 66).

M. A. Castrén (1813–1852), Uralicist, father of modern Sibirolgy and Samoyed studies, first professor of Finnish at the University of Helsinki.

Posthumous portrait painted by Erik Johan Löfgren in 1859. (Wikimedia Commons.)

The persistent popularity of “being related”

- Already more than 100 years ago, Finno-Ugricists understood that **linguistic relatedness does not directly translate into genetic relatedness** between speaker populations.
 - *“By ‘kindred peoples of the Finns’ [suomensukuiset kansat] we mean those peoples who speak languages related to Finnish. This point needs to be made, because linguistic relatedness does not prove physical or racial relatedness, it only proves that the languages at issue are formations or mutations deriving from essentially the same proto-language.” (E. N. Setälä 1916)*
- Although banished from serious scholarship, the idea of such parallels between the relatedness of languages and the relatedness of peoples **lives on in politics, arts, and popular culture.**



On Kindred Peoples’ Day, the 3rd Saturday of October, the “kinship” between the Finno-Ugric peoples is celebrated with concerts, programmes and lectures in Finland, Hungary and especially Estonia.



„Ethnofuturism” is an artistic trend originating from Estonia which entwines ethnic symbols, stylistic elements and narratives with modern, urban concept. In the last 30 years, ethnofuturism has become a defining trend in fine and applied arts, music and fashion in the Finno-Ugric nations, with the pursuit of catching the „Finno-Ugrian spirit”.

„Bird catchers” by Udmurt artist Sergei Orlov. The bird symbolizes the Udmurt soul, which is easily tamed.

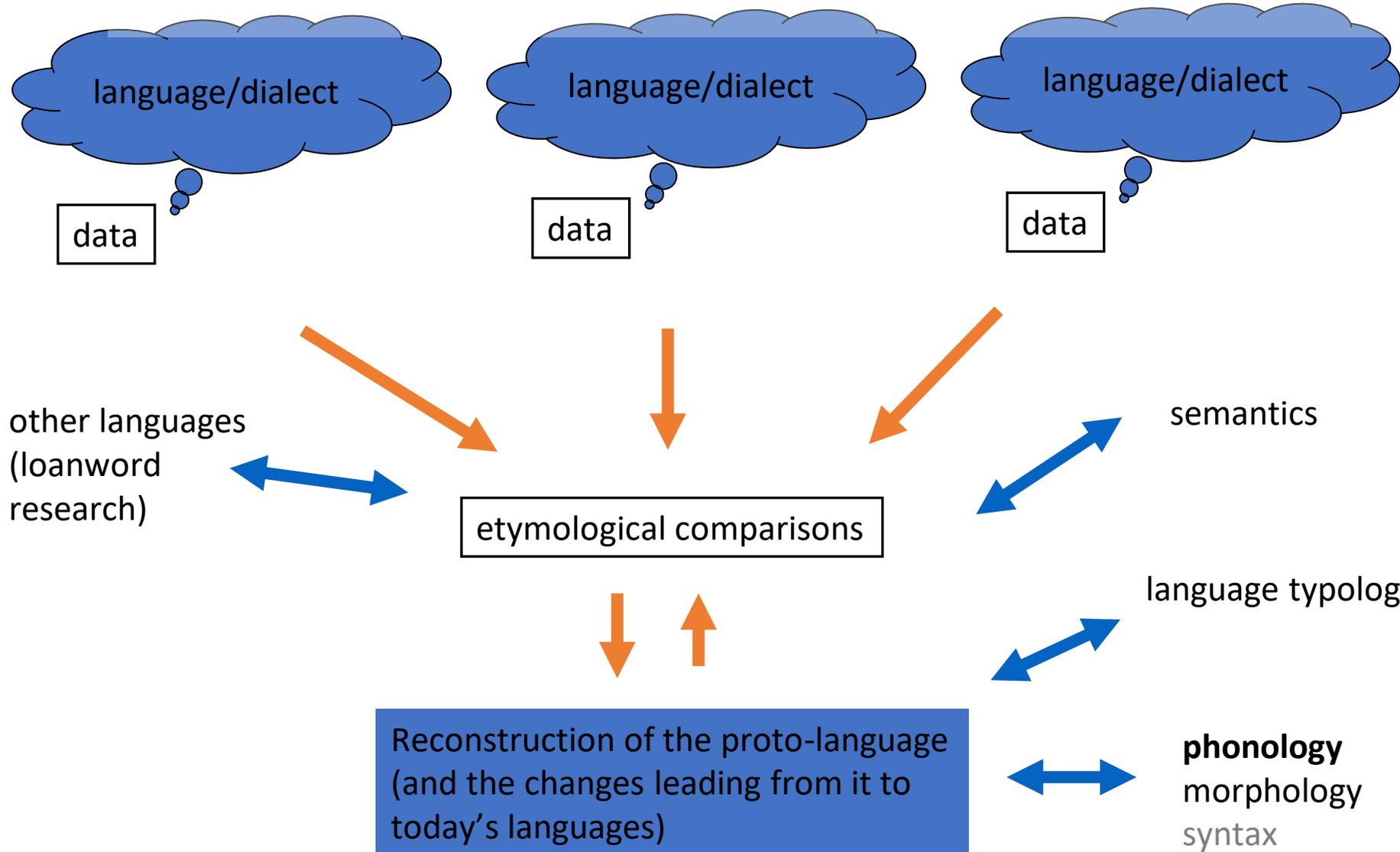


the Mordovian world music ensemble *Oyme*



traditional cut lines and embellishments can be found in Udmurt designer Polina Kubista’s collection

How comparative-historical linguistics works



*Empirical science: Research begins with the **extraction of data**. It cannot be directly based on abstractions like "language".*

*How are **meanings** constructed? How do they change?*

What kind of features do human languages have? How do they interact?

Reconstruction of sounds, forms, sentences: easier with smaller and more closed systems?

... and what it requires

- For the extraction of data, **proper documentation and description** of relevant languages
 - for example: phonological analysis to find out which sounds are phonemes and which ones are allophonic variants
 - more about language documentation in the Sociolinguistics slides
- **Knowledge of general linguistics** and its methods; knowledge of linguistic typology
 - for example: if the proto-language seems to have a vowel system which is very untypical and rare in the world's languages, there might be something wrong with the reconstruction
- Knowledge of **relevant contact languages**, in order to recognize possible loanwords and other contact influences
- General **historical and cultural background** knowledge

What do we know about Proto-Uralic?

- Linguists largely agree about the **sound system**, especially the consonants. (see the Proto-languages slides)
- **A few hundred words and numerous suffixes** can be reconstructed.
- **Central characteristics of morphology** are fairly well known, and this allows for the reconstruction of at least some features of Proto-Uralic syntax.

Some examples of PU vocabulary:

**elä-* 'live' > Fin *elä-*, Hun *él*, Komi *ol-* etc.

**ila* 'under' > Fin *ala-*, Hun *al-* etc.

**ojwa* 'head' > Nenets *ɲæwa*, North Saami *oaivi* etc.

**miñä* 'daughter-in-law' > Fin *miniä*, Hun *meny* etc.

**ńoma(-la)* 'hare' > North Saami *njoammel*, Hun *nyúl* etc.

**käktä (kektä)* '2' > Nenets *śid'a*, Hun *két* etc.

Examples of Uralic word-formation:

**-mtV* for ordinal numbers: **wijtti-mtV* 'fifth' > Fin *viide-nte-*, Hun *ötö-d* 'fifth (part)', etc.

**-kta-/*-pta-* for deverbals causatives: **elä-ktä-* 'make somebody live, maintain, support' > Fin *elä-ttä-*, Hun *él-tet* etc.

Historical-comparative Uralistics in our days

- There are etymological dictionaries (*Uralisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, language-specific dictionaries and other projects), and innumerable studies on etymology, historical phonology, morphology etc. The work on many details of the reconstruction continues.
- Historical-comparative studies are also conducted on **subgroups of Uralic**, for instance, reconstructing Proto-Finnic or Proto-Samoyedic phonology.

The material of the *UEW* is now online at uralonet.nytud.hu. The best compact overviews of Proto-Uralic are Sammallahti (1988) and Aikio (forthcoming).

URALONET
Based on the *Uralothek*

RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR LINGUISTICS
HUNGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

Search in Protoforms No Browse ?

Protolanguage: All U FU FW FP Ug

Certainty: All Uncertain Certain

Reconstructed protoform / CV skeleton: Initial position Medial position Final position

Whole word form

Lexical fields: -

Reconstructed meaning: Hungarian German English

Search in cognates ?

Search in commentaries ?

Bibliography ?

Search

Conclusion: The hard core of Uralic studies

1. **Research of linguistic relatedness** = historical-comparative linguistics, especially the interaction of historical phonology (sound changes, the development of sound systems) and etymology (history of words)
1. General overviews, **reconstructions of Proto-Uralic**, comparative etymological dictionaries, etc.
1. Historical-comparative study of **individual branches of Uralic** (for example: Proto-Samoyedic phonology, the history of loanwords in Finnic...)
1. Historical-comparative **study of detail questions** (for example: history of Uralic vowel systems, development of the Permic case systems...)

Languages great and small

We work with very different languages

The Uralic languages are roughly as closely or as distantly related to each other as the Indo-European languages from Iceland to India.

Perceived similarity	Example from Finno-Ugric	Example from Indo-European
Mutually intelligible to a considerable extent	Finnish and White Sea Karelian	Czech and Slovak
Not mutually intelligible, but bilinguals will easily recognize related words and systematic correspondences	Finnish and North Saami	English and German
Not mutually intelligible, but some central similarities can be pointed out even to laymen	Finnish and Hungarian	English and Hindi

We work with very different languages

The Uralic language family includes

- cultivated and well-researched state languages with millions of speakers (such as Finnish and Hungarian);
- minority languages already extinct or extremely endangered, with just a few speakers (such as Forest Enets or Livonian);
- and a broad range of situations in-between these two extremes.

The **vitality or endangerment of a language** can be assessed or measured with various methods, tools or scales, such as EGIDS, the extended version of Fishman's GIDS (Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale), or the UNESCO scale of endangerment.

Intergenerational transmission (whether the language is passed on to new generations) is **perhaps the most crucial factor for the maintenance of a language**, but there are other relevant dimensions, too.



Klavdiya Plotnikova, the last Kamassian speaker, died in 1989.

Dimensions of endangerment 1. Acquisition

Is the language acquired by new speaker generations?

- In many minority families around the world, parents still choose to speak only the majority language with their children.
- If the language transmission has already been disrupted, **is anything being done to restore language acquisition** (“language nests”, i.e. immersion kindergartens) or to support adult “lost generations” in reclaiming their language?

In the late 1990s, Inari (Aanaar) Saami, spoken in Finnish Lapland by a few hundred people, only had 4–5 active speakers under 30 years of age. Since then, language acquisition has resumed, with the help of a language nest.



Dimensions of endangerment 2. Games of numbers

Decisionmakers and the general public like playing with speaker statistics. However, **there is no “critical number” above which a language would be “safe”**.

- Inari (Aanaar) Saami has survived throughout times, although the number of its speakers has probably never exceeded one thousand. The Finno-Ugric “state languages” of European Russia – Mordvin, Mari, Komi, Udmurt – have hundreds of thousands of speakers but are losing speakers constantly.

Speaker statistics should not be trusted blindly. Especially with multilingual minority communities, **the definition of “mother tongue” may be problematic**, and “speakerhood” can be understood in many ways.

- *“My mother is an Enets, my father is a Nganasan, my husband is a Dolgan, my sons speak only Russian. So, who am I supposed to be?”* Some informants of Szeverényi & Wagner-Nagy (2011) defined themselves as Nganasans or even identified themselves with the Nganasan “mother tongue”, despite not being able to speak the language.

Dimensions of endangerment 3.

Standardization and written use

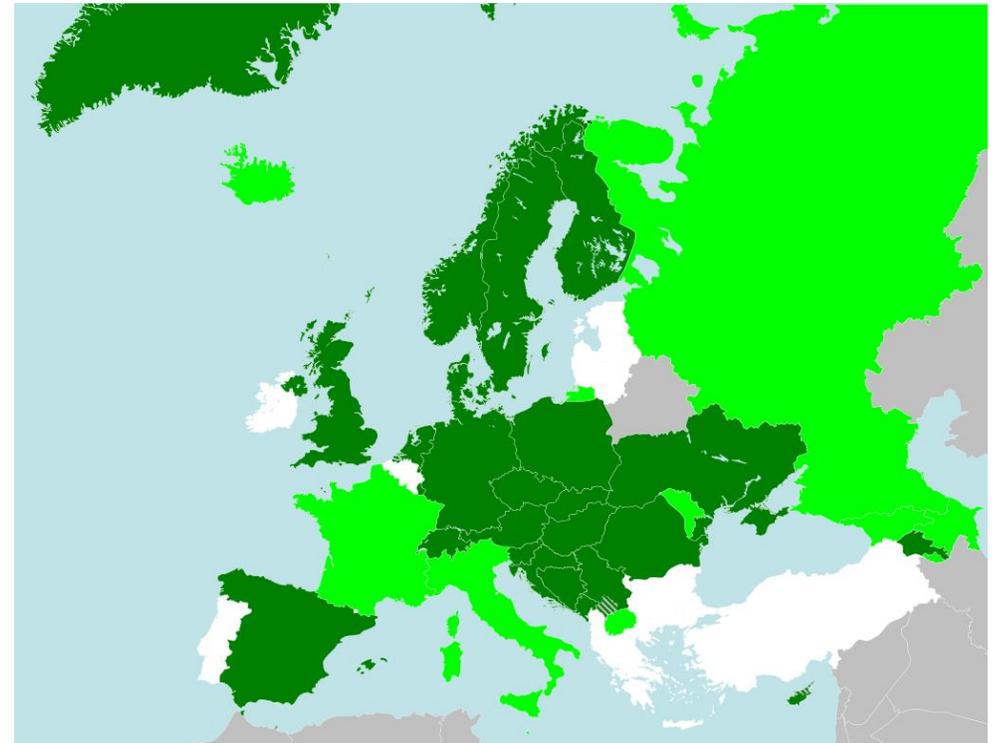
- **Is the language used** in education, government, work, and mass media?
- Does the language have a **standardized written form** and a literature?
 - Many endangered languages maintain a symbolic written public presence, but in reality, they are almost exclusively used in informal spoken interaction. Many Uralic languages are primarily spoken in rural communities and especially between elderly speakers.



A school coursebook of the Veps language. Veps, like almost all Uralic minority languages of Russia, has a written standard, and it can be taught as an optional subject at schools. However, very few children actively speak Veps outside the Veps classes.

Dimensions of endangerment 4. Legal status

- Most Uralic minority languages are **supported by language laws** and/or officially acknowledged in their titular regions.
- However, language laws and institutional arrangements **often fail to guarantee really efficient support** and protection.



States that have signed (light green) or signed and ratified (dark green) the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. (Source: Wikipedia)

Dimensions of endangerment 5. Use in communication

Is the language used in face-to-face communication, or does it only have official, ceremonial, or symbolic uses?

- Many endangered languages have been reduced to “kitchen languages” used in informal spoken communication – but some have retained or reclaimed the formal domains while losing their role in everyday life.



The last traditional speakers who acquired Livonian as their first language in a Livonian-speaking community are no more among us; there are no villages where Livonian is spoken on the street or in the shops. However, there are currently some 20 “revitalized” speakers with a fluent command of Livonian (and many more with symbolic proficiency in the language). Some of them write poetry in Livonian.

МЕНАМ ВЕЛӚДЧАНІН №10.



Миян велӚдчанін
Мира уличавылын.

‘Our school’. From a school presentation for the Komi language class. (Source: multiurok.ru)

All Uralic minority/non-state languages are more or less endangered.

However, many of them have official and written uses to some extent.

- This requires language planning, documentation, and research, school curricula and teacher education, professional journalism and training of journalists, literature and literature studies, etc.
- In short, they have institutions for “national philologies”, although often with sparse resources and under the constant pressure of the dominant state language.
- Such institutions can also train or employ linguists, language teachers or other language professionals specializing on these languages.



The Sámi University of Applied Sciences in Guovdageaidnu / Kautokeino, Norway, focuses on Saami language, culture, arts and livelihood.
(Graphic by Mahtte Sikku Valio, from the website samas.no.)

JOH. ANDREAS SJÖGREN'S

LIVISCH-DEUTSCHES UND DEUTSCH-LIVISCHES WÖRTERBUCH.

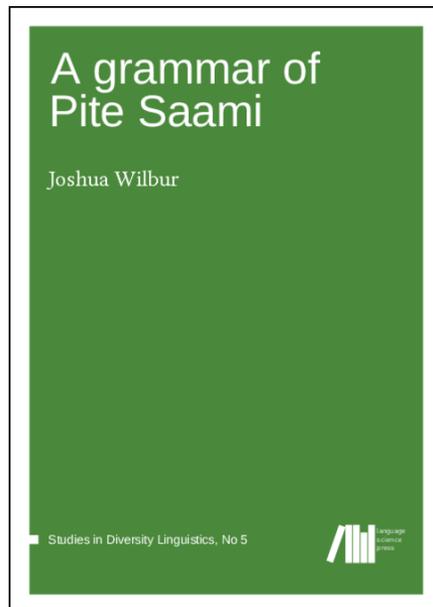
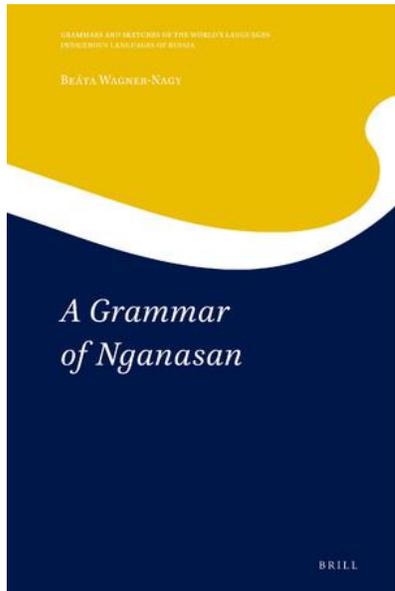
IM AUFTRAG DER KAISERLICHEN AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN HERAUSGEBT

VON

FERDINAND JOH. WIEDEMANN.

Even the smallest Uralic minority languages are documented to some extent.

- For all Uralic minority languages that were still alive in the end of the 19th century, there are dictionaries or word lists, grammars or descriptions.
- The documentation and description of many Uralic minority languages has continued up to our days.



German-Livonian-German dictionary from 1861 (top left), representing the first academic linguistic studies on Livonian.
Nganasan descriptive grammar (~130 speakers) from 2018
Pite Saami descriptive grammar (~20 speakers) from 2016

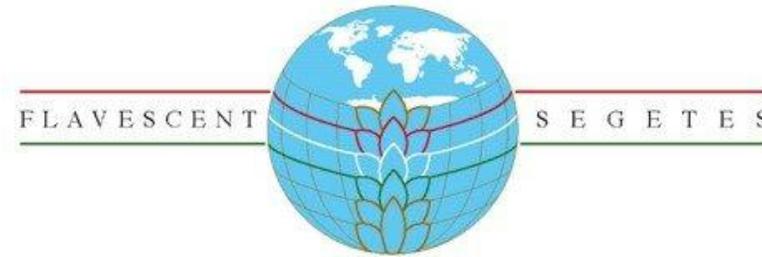
Online visibility

Excerpt from ranking: W3Techs estimated percentages of content languages on the world's top 10 million websites (as of March 2018).

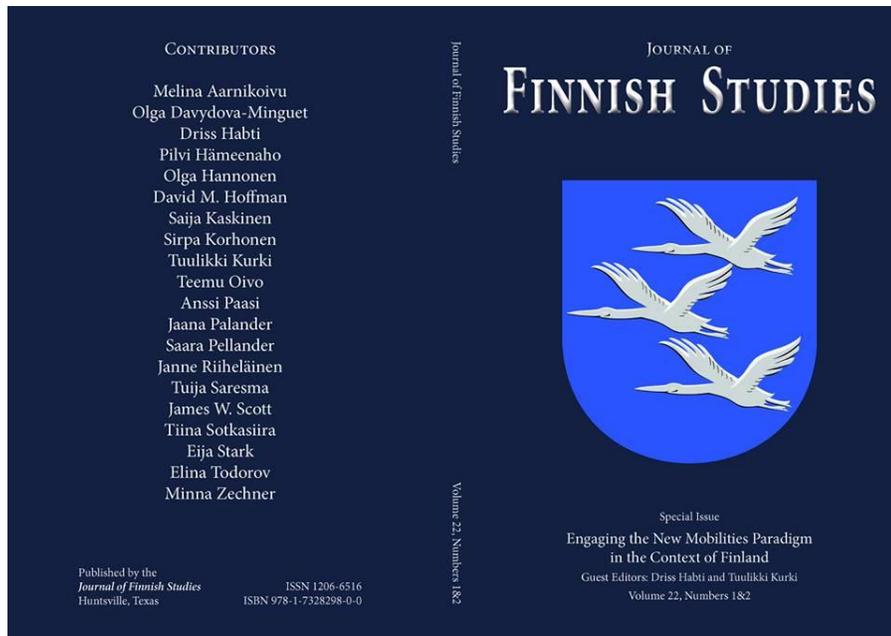
Hungarian, Finnish, and Estonian rank nicely among other European nation-state languages – and ahead of some non-European “big” languages such as Hindi, the fourth most-spoken language of the world.

Source: Wikipedia

17	Arabic	0.6%
18	Greek	0.5%
19	Hungarian	0.5%
20	Swedish	0.5%
21	Romanian	0.4%
22	Slovak	0.4%
23	Danish	0.3%
24	Indonesian	0.3%
25	Finnish	0.3%
26	Thai	0.3%
27	Bulgarian	0.2%
28	Ukrainian	0.2%
29	Hebrew	0.2%
30	Norwegian Bokmål	0.2%
31	Croatian	0.2%
32	Lithuanian	0.1%
33	Serbian	0.1%
34	Norwegian	0.1%
35	Slovenian	0.1%
36	Catalan	0.1%
37	Latvian	0.1%
38	Estonian	0.1%
39	Hindi	0.1%
40	Azerbaijani	0.1%

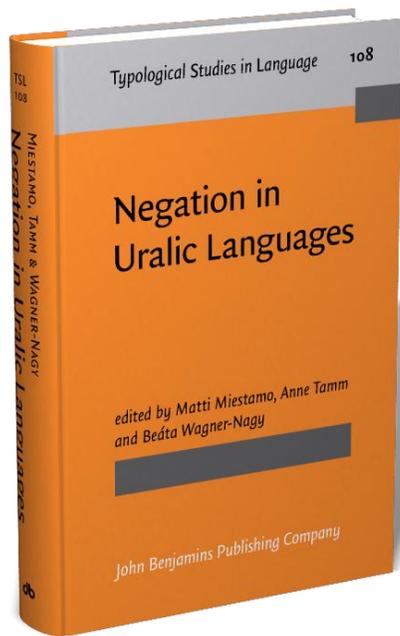


NEMZETKÖZI MAGYARSÁGTUDOMÁNYI TÁRSASÁG
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR HUNGARIAN STUDIES
ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DES ÉTUDES HONGROISES
SOCIETAS INTERNATIONALIS STUDIORUM HUNGARICORUM
INTERNATIONALE GESELLSCHAFT FÜR HUNGAROLOGIE
МЕЖДУНАРОДНОЕ ОБЩЕСТВО ПО ХУНГАРОЛОГИИ



Hungarian, Finnish, and Estonian studies have their own institutions, societies, publication series, promotion programmes and congresses, both domestically and worldwide.

Many professionals who teach and research in these areas do not know other Uralic languages nor work with comparative-historical linguistics.



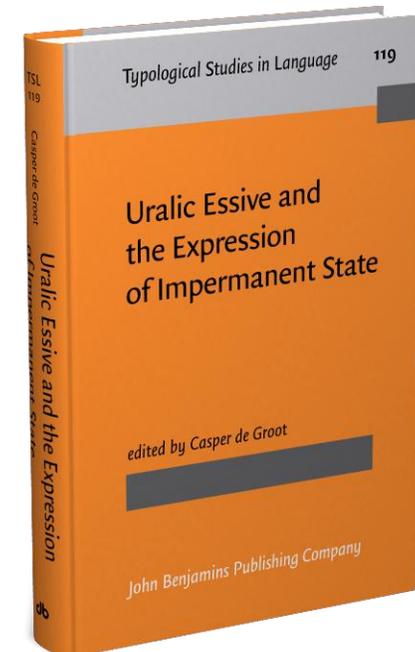
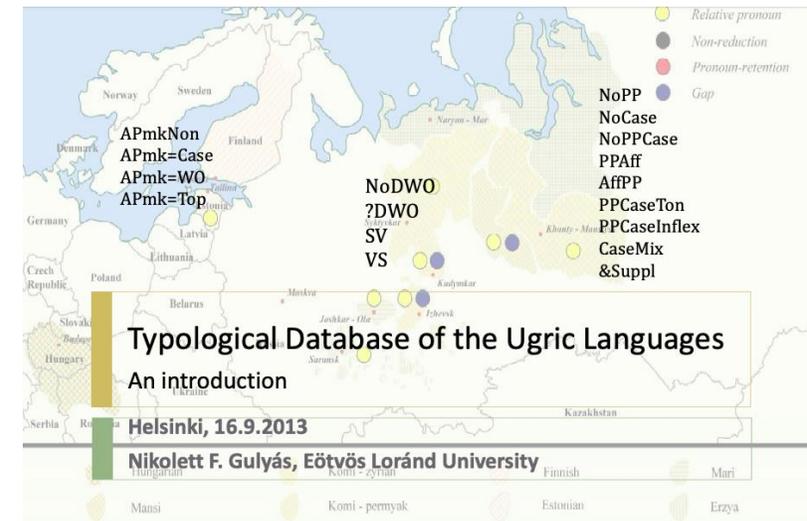
Linguistic typology

Linguistic typology explores and classifies the **diversity of languages according to their structural features.**

E.g.: where do certain features appear, which are frequent or rare in the languages of the world in general, how do the structural features of a language interact or depend on each other, etc.

Typological analyses, comparisons, and research projects **help linguists understand the structure of Uralic languages.**

Conversely, data from Uralic languages can help linguists worldwide understand the diversity of human language and the general principles underlying it.



Outside the hard core: from languages to speakers and cultures

Linguistics and beyond

- *Uralic/Finno-Ugric* is a **linguistic** concept pertaining to the (distant) **historical relatedness of languages**
- **Culturally and genetically**, today's Uralic speakers often **have more in common with their non-Uralic neighbours** than with their distant linguistic relatives!
 - There is no such thing as “Finno-Ugric/Uralic race / culture / ethnography / folklore / literature / music / religion / etc.”...
- ... but **there are strong and time-honoured non-linguistic research traditions** often understood as part of Uralic/Finno-Ugric studies: “Finno-Ugric ethnography”, “Finno-Ugric folklore studies”, even “Finno-Ugric literatures”.



Eva Toulouze is a renowned ethnographer focusing on the religion and traditions of Finno-Ugric peoples.



A traditional religious service of Udmurts in Varkled-Bodya (Bashkortostan), one of the communities Eva Toulouze studied with her PhD students.

Emblem of the Association of Finno-Ugric Literatures. They hold the Finno-Ugric Writers' Congress every other year.





Uralistic fieldwork before World War I was often “**holistic**” and **interdisciplinary**: alongside language, researchers documented and explored the folklore, religion, immaterial and material culture of minor Uralic peoples.

Kai Donner (1888–1935) doing fieldwork with Southern Samoyeds.

“In the history of ethnographic research in Finland, it is possible to find two types of fieldwork tradition. The first tradition started from M. A. Castrén's explorations and research and the second one from August Ahlqvist's. Donner can be included in the first group with Castrén and Sakari Pälsi, unlike other contemporary philologists, or cultural researcher colleagues, who used the method of August Ahlqvist. Donner's holistic, lively and participant-observation based way of work is articulated in his writings two years before Malinowski (the „father” or social anthropology – eds.) published his thesis about modern fieldwork.” (Louheranta 2006, <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:952-10-3529-3>)

Examples of diversification at the University of Helsinki:

M. A. Castrén, the first professor of Finnish language and literature, covered in his work a thematically vast area which later has been divided between several new chairs and institutes.

Finnish language and literature 1850–

Finnish language and literature

Finno-Ugric studies 1892–

Finnish language

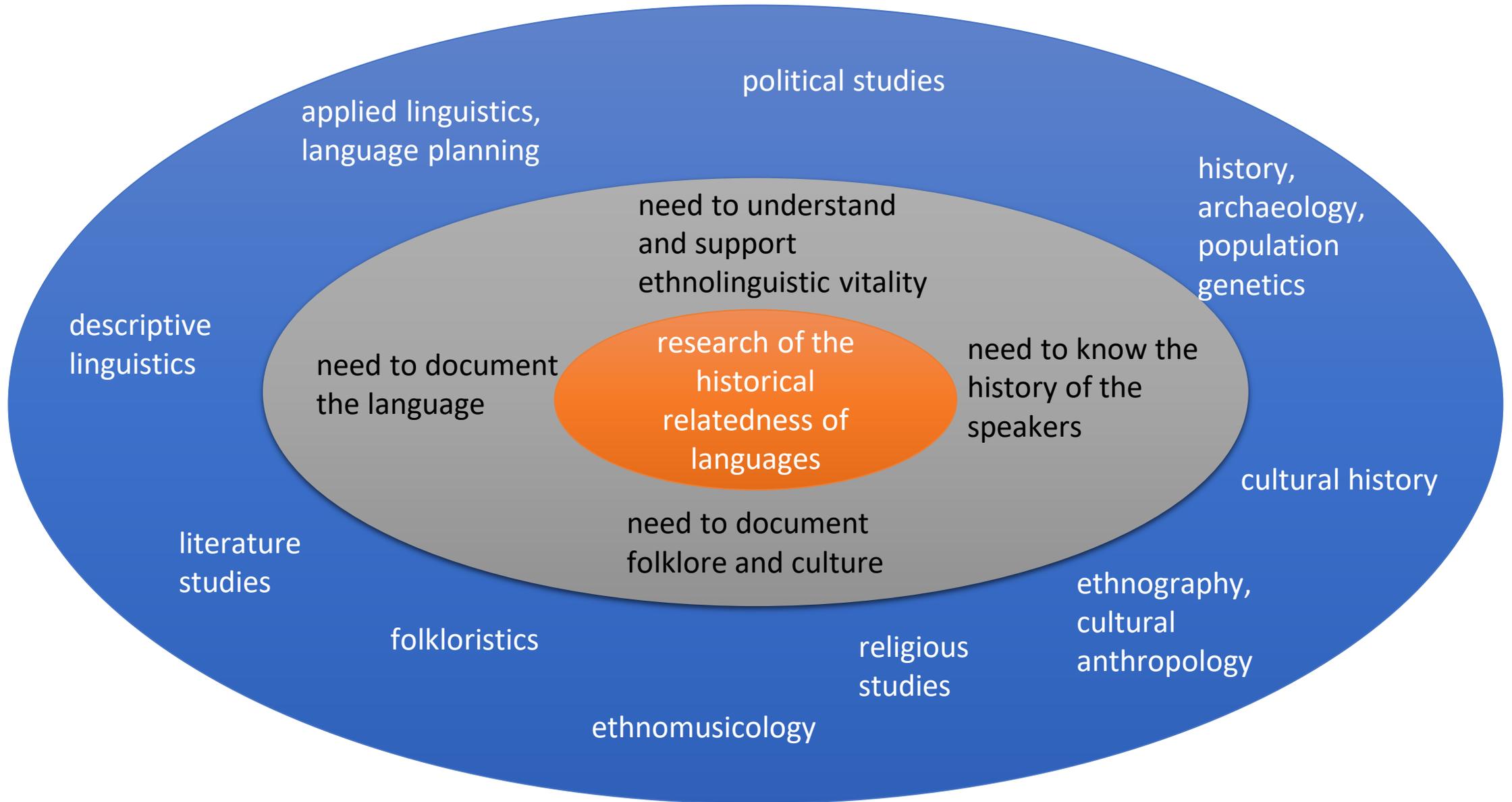
Finnish literature
1913–

Finnish and comparative
folklore studies
1908–

(Finno-Ugric)
ethnology
1921–

Finnic languages
1929–

Finno-Ugric studies



Language and culture are interconnected...

- **Cultural studies and policies require theoretical and practical knowledge of the language** at issue, such as:
 - communicating with speakers and understanding sources,
 - understanding the history and origins of expressions,
 - exploring folklore and other language-based culture, etc.
- **Linguistic studies require extralinguistic background knowledge**, such as:
 - *Wörter und Sachen* (in order to understand the history of words, you need to know the history of things),
 - the social side of linguistic behaviour (for example: politeness),
 - the cultural and political history of speech communities,
 - the politics of language planning, etc.

... but not necessarily historically/genetically

- **Knowing a language can be essential for:**
 - modern philologies: Finnish / Estonian / Hungarian studies – especially literature but also history, art, politics, etc.
 - modern areal studies: Saami studies, Baltic Sea Region studies, Central European studies...
 - applied linguistics: teaching and learning languages, etc.
 - general linguistic studies: theoretical linguistics, linguistic typology, etc.
 - general cultural studies: religious studies, ethnography, folkloristics, etc.
- These areas of research, however, typically do **not require any knowledge of other Uralic languages** or historical-comparative Uralistics.



Róbert Gragger (1887–1928), literature scholar and the founding father of international Hungarian studies, according to a famous anecdote: **“Even the history of the Hungarian railways belongs to *Hungarologie!*”**

Part of *Uralic studies*, or not?

→ Depends on resources, traditions, and institutional policies.

The concept of Saami Studies, inspired by indigenous and postcolonial studies worldwide, has been launched as a reaction to traditional “Lappology”, its exoticizing and “othering” view on the Saami.

The *Giellagas* institute at the University of Oulu represents two main focus areas of Saami studies.

Most of the topics listed here have traditionally been explored also under the label of “Finno-Ugric (Uralic) studies”.

Saami Language Studies

- Structures of Storytelling
- Language Technology
- Language Revitalisation
- Sociolinguistics
- Linguistics

Saami Cultural Studies

- Indigenous Politics
- Saami Music Tradition
- Duodji - Arts and Crafts
- Saami Culture Environment
- Culture and Language Education

Can we speak about Uralic studies in a holistic, cross-disciplinary sense?

+

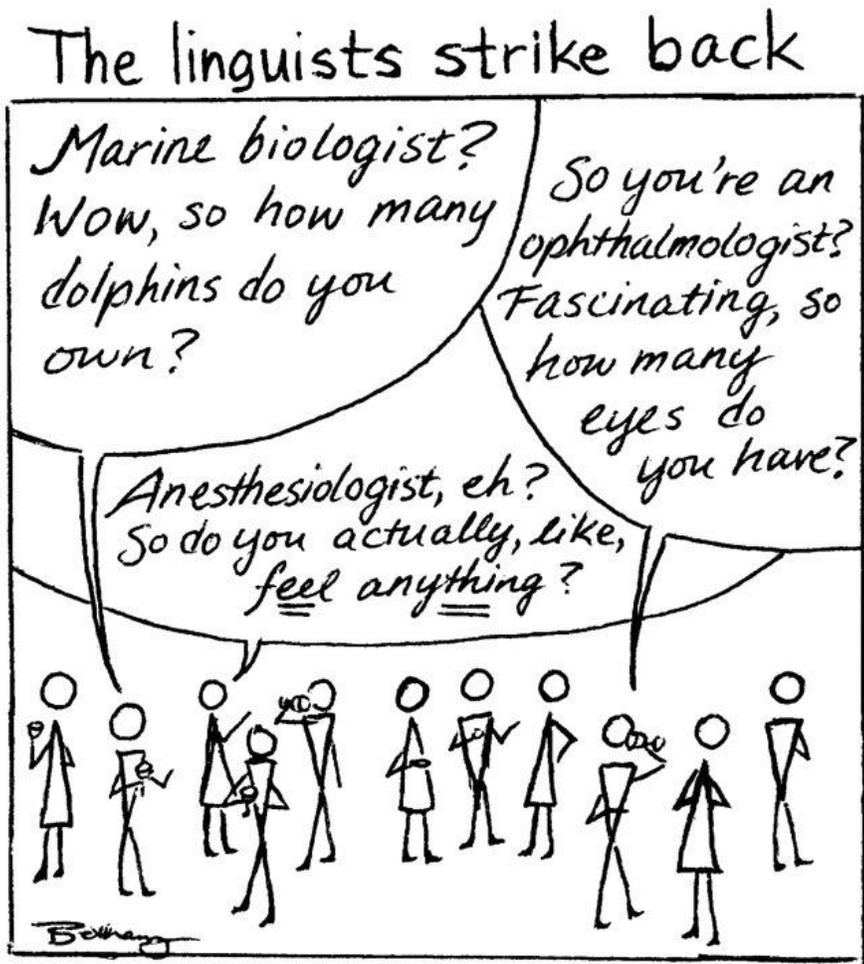
- **Common research questions**, particularly in prehistory
- **Research of literature, folklore**, and other language-based culture **needs knowledge of languages**
- Institutional frameworks outside the “Finno-Ugric countries” can include areal studies and national philologies
- Important research traditions

-

- **There is no Uralic “race”**, culture, history, literature etc. – for many areas of study, linguistic relatedness is irrelevant
- Proto-Uralic **culture, religion, ethnography etc. cannot be reconstructed** in the same way as the Uralic protolanguage can
- Focus on linguistic relatedness may obstruct the view on areal and contact phenomena

What we don't do

We don't just “know all the languages”

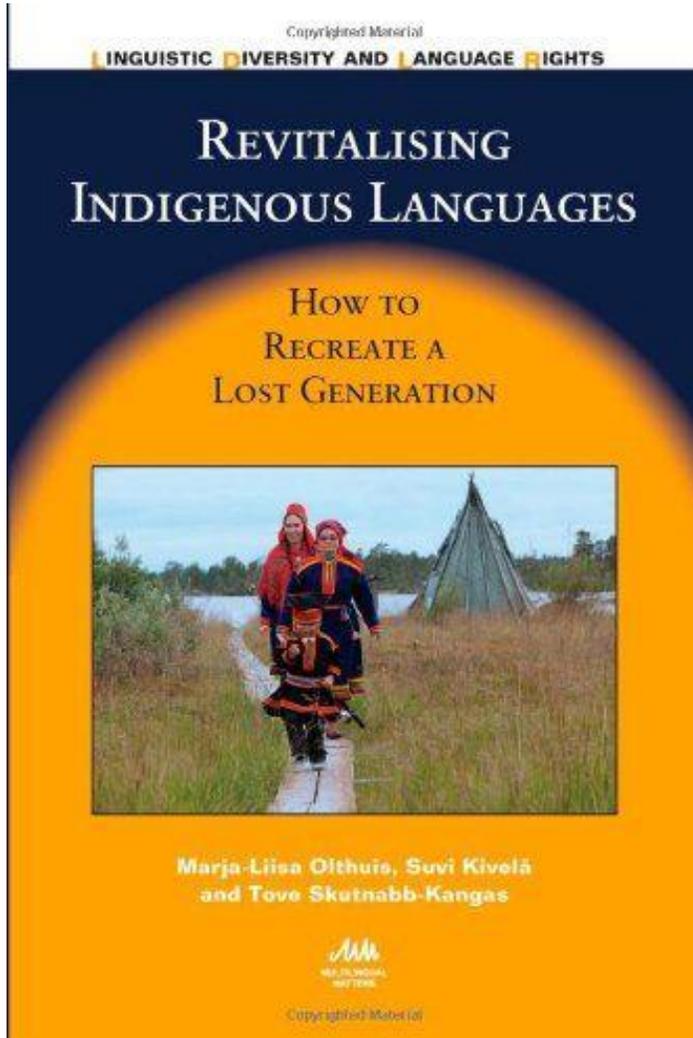


Many Uralicists speak or read many Uralic languages. It is important also because many central sources have been published in Hungarian, Finnish, or Estonian.

However, **linguistics is about exploring the structure and use of (a) language**, not about “knowing languages”.

And speaking a language does not make you a linguist – birds are not the best ornithologists.

We don't "save dying languages"



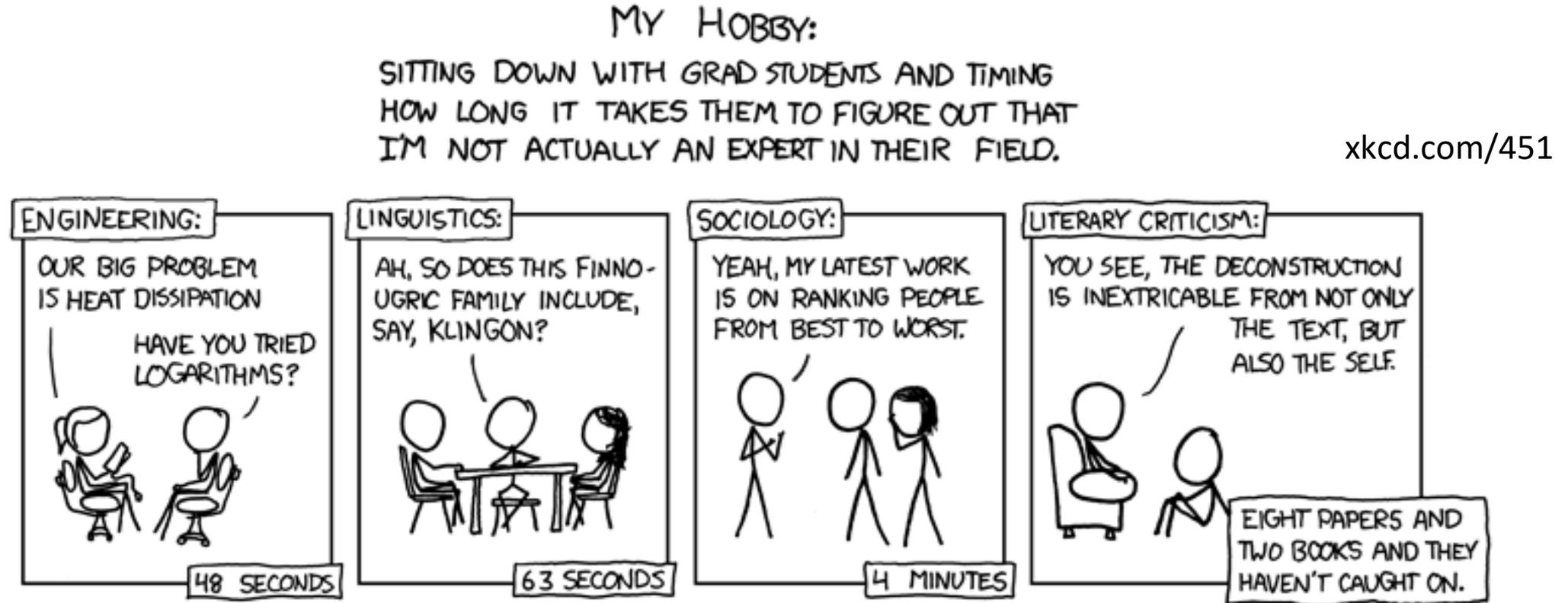
Linguistic research, documentation and expertise can and does **help in reversing language shift**.

Linguists can help the speech community regain their heritage language; they can train, support and encourage speakers. They can also inform decision-makers and help them plan sustainable and diversity-friendly language policies.

However, if the speakers themselves do not want to continue using their language (and if the decision-makers do not support them in this), **no outsider experts will be able to "save the language"**.

← In the famous case of Aanaar (Inari) Saami in Finland, the initiative to revitalization came from the speech community itself, and local activists played a crucial role.

We don't just speculate about prehistory



The comparative method works with “quasi-hard” data and with regular processes or rules. Historical linguistics is a quasi-exact science.

We don't “prove that languages are related”

- For Uralicists of our days, “**proving that Finnish and Hungarian are related**” is **no longer a relevant task** – just like modern geographers do not spend their time proving that the Earth is round. The relatedness of the Uralic languages is already proven beyond any reasonable doubt.
- However, we are still working on the details and implications of relatedness.
(*How* are these languages related – how did the proto-language split into daughter varieties, and how can we distinguish shared heritage from later contact-induced changes or parallel developments? Exactly how does this relatedness show? What does it imply for the structure of these languages? What does it tell us about the prehistory of these populations? What is there in addition to relatedness (for instance: ancient loanwords)... ?)

We don't “force foreign patterns on our languages”

- Those not familiar with serious linguistics often assume that mainstream linguists are just slavishly **copying the models**, structures, and terminology of “**major**” **European languages**.
 - Therefore, all basic concepts of grammar should be reinvented for Uralic studies (preferably, by people who do not represent the academic mainstream).

In the 17th century, all European grammars followed the model of Latin and Greek. However, **today's linguists are working on the basis of worldwide typological comparisons**.

→ All serious linguists know that, for instance, *case* in a language like Hungarian or Finnish is a different thing than *case* in a language like German, Russian, or Latin.

... nor do we want to exclude everything “foreign” ...

Some critics of the Finno-Ugric linguistic affinity believe that linguistic comparisons with other languages **have been deliberately sabotaged** by academic mainstream linguists.

- Hungarian proponents of “alternative” theories typically claim that the Finno-Ugric relatedness has only been established by banning all other avenues of research: *‘Nowadays, Finno-Ugristics is fully established, all Sumerian-Hungarian research is considered to be „unscientific”, representatives of this theory are blacklisted, publishing in Hungary is possible, but still difficult, because the communists are still sitting on key positions in all sectors of education (and elsewhere).’* (Tóth 2007: 5)

Some proponents of alternative, non-mainstream theories have also accused academic Uralistics of **ignoring or downplaying the role of language contact**.

- Kalevi Wiik (1932–2015) became famous in Finland and Estonia with his theories about language shift as the main factor in language change. When criticized by mainstream Finno-Ugricists, he accused them of conservative prejudice against language contact: *‘In linguistics, this [the purported “new way of thinking”] automatically leads to increased attention on language shift and concomitant phenomena. (...) I know that the “contact-theoretic” aspects which I have presented are already “fashionable” abroad, and I also know that before we even notice it, they will be in fashion in Finland as well.’* (Wiik 1998: 422, 424)

... because, in fact, we have always known the importance of language contacts

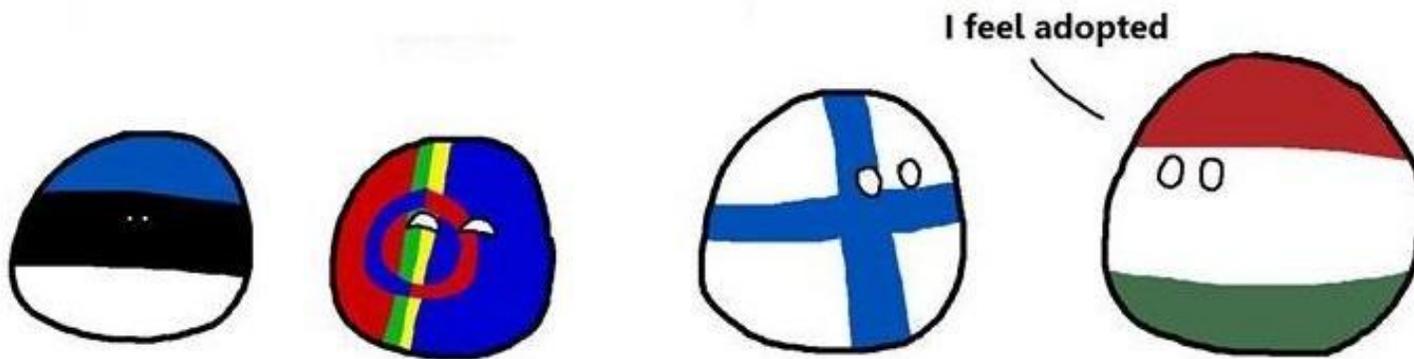
- Language contact, loanword research in particular, has always been an essential part of mainstream Uralistics:
 - **Historical linguistics cannot function without contact linguistics:** in order to identify inherited words and constructions, they must be distinguished from loanwords and contact-induced innovations.
 - Identifying (pre)historical language contacts can help us establish relative (“borrowed before/after sound change X”) or even absolute chronologies (“borrowed at the time of historically attested contacts with Y”).

Proto-Uralic **weti* ‘water’ – Proto-Indo-European **wed-en/r-*: ancient loan or a trace of ancient relatedness?

Finnish *jumala* ‘God’ and *taivas* ‘sky, heaven’ with cognates; Hungarian *tehén* ‘cow’ and *tej* ‘milk’ < (Indo-)Iranic; famous examples of important prehistorical cultural contacts with languages which are no more spoken in the geographic neighbourhood of Uralic!

National root-seeking is not our primary task

- Peoples and ethnic groups are **complex products of historical, political and cultural processes.**
- Alongside archaeology, genetics and other sciences, historical linguistics can shed light on the prehistory of a nation. However, its primary goal is to discover the **linguistic past of a *language*, not the genetic or cultural past of its speakers.**



(Hungarians' cultural background sets them apart from their linguistic relatives, therefore Hungarians have a hard time grasping what being "Finno-Ugric" means to them.)

In particular, we don't try to prove the superiority or inferiority of any language

- Pseudolinguistics sometimes builds on conspiracy theories: academic mainstream linguistics is in the hands of enemies who want to hide and downplay the true, glorious origins of our nation and language.
- In fact, given that all languages are based on human beings' universal cognitive-linguistic facilities and universal communicative needs, **all languages are equally rich and expressive**: there are no “primitive”, “undeveloped” or “inferior” languages...
- ... and, as already stated, historical linguistics is not about finding the origins of a nation – or confirming the superiority of a nation in relation to others.

Further reading and sources

History and reception of Uralic studies

Korhonen, Mikko (1986). *Finno-Ugrian language studies in Finland 1828–1918*. Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica.

Stipa, Günther Johannes (2006). *Finnisch-ugrische Sprachforschung von der Renaissance bis zum Neupositivismus*. (Mémoires de la Société Finno-Ougrienne 206.)

<https://www.sgr.fi/sust/sust206/sust206.pdf>

Sándor, Klára (2011). *Nyelvrokonság és hunhagyomány*. Budapest: Typotex.

Zsirai, Miklós (1937). *Finnugor rokonságunk*. Budapest. (Updated ed. by Gábor Zaicz: Budapest: Trezor, 1994.)

Historical and comparative linguistics in general

Campbell, Lyle & William Poser (2008). *Language Classification: History and Method*. Oxford University Press.