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**Areal groupings (Sprachbünde) within and across
the borders of the Uralic language family:
A survey**

A dolgozat azokról az areális csoportokról (Sprachbund) nyújt áttekintést, melyeknek uráli nyelvek is tagjai jelenleg, valaha tagjai lehettek vagy tagjainak kellett lenniük. Minden egyes Sprachbund esetében megkísérli meghatározni azok határait térben és időben. Számba veszi a legfontosabb vagy legnyilvánvalóbb következmények közül azokat, melyek megfigyelhetők az areális csoportot alkotó nyelvekben, különböző szerkezeti szinteken. Az utolsó rész a Sprachbundban való részvétel következményeit vizsgálja, az egyes uráli nyelvek taxonómikus helyzetét az eredet szerinti besorolásban.

This paper is an attempt to list areal groupings (Sprachbünde) in which Uralic languages participate or may have participated, in many cases together with non-Uralic languages. A list of such groupings can certainly be reduced or enlarged depending on the choice of criteria for distinguishing between Sprachbund phenomena and other types of phenomena resulting from language contacts. Discussing here varying definitions and views (cf. Becker 1948, Katz 1975: 11–20, Haarmann 1976, Balázs 1983, Stolz 1991: 90–107, Wintschalek 1993: 1–40) is hardly necessary. It is natural that the authors of individual Sprachbund studies, which are pertinent to Uralic linguistics seldom use the same criteria (it may be even assumed, that using very strict unified criteria may ultimately lead to contra-productive conclusions, like maintaining that there are no two language areas so similar that they can be both called Sprachbund, etc.). The differences in approaches lay i.a. in the relative weight given to structural and cultural aspects, to synchronic and diachronic considerations.

Personally, I am inclined to view (a) similar processes of phonetic and morphosyntactic change affecting different original systems or (b) relatively high degree of isomorphism in morphemic and semantic structures, in syntactic constructions and phraseology etc. between languages that are not closely related as especially important indications in favour of employing the notion of Sprachbund. This does not exclude, however, postulating on a line with relatively coherent and obvious units (like the Balkan or the Volga–Kama Sprachbund) much looser Sprachbünde (including those in which similarities are present mainly in

vocabulary, etc.): the transitions from «coherent» to «loose» (and further to «insignificant») are continuous and gradual.

The areal units under consideration are listed in an (approximate) chronological order, beginning from those, which appear to be most recent (from the viewpoint of the Uralic languages: some non-Uralic languages may have joined these units much earlier).

European Sprachbund (cf. e.g. Becker 1948: 51ff.)

To this belong from the Uralic side Hungarian, Finnish, and Estonian, since recently also (Standard Northern) Lapp (Sámi), see the ample literature dealing with the Europeanisation of these languages. Other Uralic languages are connected to it indirectly – via Russian, or the Rossic Sprachbund (see below). The position of Uralic languages within this unit was invariably passive, receptive, the most active role having been consequently played by Greek and Latin, later also German and French, and then English. They participate in the European Sprachbund independently from each other, though newly dated Finnish influences upon Estonian and Lapp can be visualised in its framework. The peculiarity of the European Sprachbund consists in its affecting, first of all, the standard and élite (cultivated) forms of member languages, in last decades also the youth jargons.

Rossic Sprachbund

(*Rossic*, instead of *Russian*, is used here as the English equivalent of Russ. *российский*, Germ. *Russländisch*.) Though treating the languages of the Russian Empire / the Soviet Union / the CIS as a Sprachbund is not very common, the corresponding issues were discussed in numerous publications on linguistic contacts and interactions (cf. e.g. Дешериев 1987, Панькин 1994). On a line with the Eastern Slavic and many other languages of the (historical and contemporary) Russian state, this Sprachbund includes on the Uralic side Votic, Veps, Karelian, Ingrian, Mordvin, Komi; less involved are or were Eastern Lapp, Cheremis, Votyak, Vogul, Ostyak, Selkup. All other Uralic languages – except Hungarian, Southern Lapp, and Northern Lapp – may be viewed, presently or historically, as marginal participants of this Sprachbund. The influences are almost exclusively unidirectional (from Russian, which belongs at the same time to the European Sprachbund and transmits corresponding impulses), and the degree of linguistic integration into this Sprachbund is almost strictly proportional to the degree of political, social, cultural, and ideological (orthodoxy, soviet mentality) russianisation of the speakers. The most obvious manifestations lie in the lexical and semantic domain (including phraseology). But there

are also typical – though not universally spread – phenomena affecting other structural levels in involved Uralic languages, like e.g. the trends towards a palatalised articulation of consonants before front vowels, towards using constructions with double negation (with negative pronoun, often with the borrowed prefix *ni-*, and a negated verb), towards reducing the number of verbal moods, or towards using compound sentences (i.a., with the interrogative pronoun «what» employed as relative conjunction) instead of original polypredicative constructions.

Upper Yenisei («Yenisei Qyrghyz») Sprachbund

The Turkic dialects treated presently as Khakas and Shor, and the Samoyedic Kamassian and Mator¹ formed its core zone. The similar, highly idiosyncratic changes of Proto-Turkic and Proto-Samoyedic **j-* (to a nasal if the second consonant of the same word was a nasal, to a palatal affricate otherwise; cf. Хелимский 1982: 40–41, Helimski 1997: 88) are an especially spectacular Sprachbund manifestation, but there are also many others, both in vocabulary (cf. Joki 1952, Хелимский 2000b: 284–319) and in grammar (e.g., using converbal constructions, cf. Helimski 1997: 188ff.). More marginal (but in some cases perhaps equally important) was the participation in this Sprachbund of Altai, Tuva, Tofalar (Turkic), Kott and Arin (Yeniseic), Western Buryat (Mongolic); cf. also the Yeniseic Sprachbund (below).

Baltic (Baltic–Scandinavian, «Hanseatic») Sprachbund

This unity played an important role in the development of Livonian, Estonian, and, to a lesser extent, Votic (but probably not of Finnish) during most of the 2nd mill. Its non-Uralic members are or were Latvian, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Low German, marginally also Lithuanian, Old Prussian, Northern Polish (with Pomeranian and Kashubian), High German (cf. Якобсон 1931: 15–16, Haarmann 1976: 106–116, 1977: 9–10, Stolz 1991, Klaas 1997) – the member list may vary depending on whether the emphasis is made on prosodic phenomena (Якобсон op. cit., Niit 1980, Niit – Remmel 1985) or e.g. on lexical interactions for which the Hanseatic trade contacts and later the spread of Baltendeutsch were responsible (cf. Hinderling 1981). Perhaps we deal here even with two superimposed and strongly overlapping Sprachbünde: Baltic-Scandinavian and Hanseatic (Hanseatic-Teutonic), which approximately corresponds to the recently suggested treatment of the Circum-Baltic language area as a «contact superposition zone» (Коптјевскаја-Тамм – Wälchli 2001). The studies on this

¹ The Sayan Samoyeds were formerly subjected (as *qyshtym*, vassals) to Turkic-speaking Yenisei Qyrghyzes.

area are intensively developing (Dahl – Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2001), so that new important findings and results can be expected.

(?) Danube (Carpathian) Sprachbund

The idea of a *Danube Sprachbund* (Hungarian, German, Slovakian, Czech, marginally also Serbo-Croatian, Slovene, Rumanian), presented e.g. by Skalička 1968, Haarmann 1976: 97–105, 1977: 8–9, Balázs 1983: 25ff., 1989, has both proponents and severe critics (cf. Futaky ea. 1978; Fodor 1984); the position of the latter appears to be much stronger. The argumentation with structural parallels is not really convincing; the relatively loose ties between Hungarian and neighbouring Slavic languages, as well as with German and with Rumanian, can be perhaps better visualised in the frames of the above mentioned European Sprachbund (with German as its influential core member). Some evident parallels in the domains of vocabulary and semantics (but hardly beyond these domains) are traces of the Vlachian shepherd colonisation and of the political dominance of Hungary in the Carpathian basin. If their presence is sufficient for postulating a Sprachbund, this Bund should be rather labelled as *Carpathian*.

Onogur Sprachbund

I am possibly – not necessarily – the first one to introduce this notion, but its postulation follows directly from the numerous linguistic and historical studies on Pre-Conquest Hungarians (see especially the works by Julius Németh, Lajos Ligeti, András Róna-Tas). There is ample evidence to suppose the existence in the second half of the first millennium AD in Pontic-Caspian steppes, later in the (eastern part of the) Carpathian basin, of a unity comprising the languages of the Magyars and of Bulgar Turks (*Onogurs*, the name of which has been inherited by the Hungarians). The participation of other steppe nomads – for example, of some Alan and Avar groups – cannot be excluded (cf. Абаев 1965). For obvious reasons the traces of this Sprachbund can be found only in its single survivor, the Hungarian language. Here these traces, starting with the labial vowel *harmony*, are abundantly present (cf. e.g. Bereczki 1998: 207–216), though it is not always easy to distinguish them from the heritage of both earlier and later Magyar-Alan and Magyar-Turkic contacts.

Volga–Kama Sprachbund

This unit includes presently Cheremis, Chuvash, Votyak, Tatar and Bashkir as its core members, Mordvin and Komi as peripheral members. It is the most spectacular case of an interfamilial areal unity comprising Uralic languages and, as research (cf. Серебренников 1960, 1972, Ахметьянов 1981, 1989, Bereczki 1998: 179–205, 217–224, 277–281, Wintschalek 1993) has shown, a not less

interesting object for areal linguistic investigations than the «classical» Balkan Sprachbund. Its various manifestations affect all levels of linguistic structure, starting with parallel phonetic developments (reduction of original short high vowels) and isomorphic temporal systems. The composition of this Sprachbund underwent changes in course of time. Ca. 1000 years ago the most active role belonged to the language of Volga Bulgarians (to be later partly inherited by Chuvash, partly transmitted to Tatar). It seems, however, that the Sprachbund came into existence still earlier and counted in the beginning and in the middle of the 1st mill. among its members also Magyar (> Hungarian) and Alan (> Ossete), as well as Proto-Permian (> Votyak, Komi), the languages spoken at that time in the Volga–Kama area. A specific accentuation rule (stress mobile due to its recession from high vowels), found in Chuvash, Cheremis, Moksha-Mordvin, Komi-Permyak, Yaz’va Komi, Ossete, and reconstructable for Proto-Hungarian, must have been one of early Volga–Kama Sprachbund manifestations (cf. Хелимский 1979: 129–130).

Ostyak (Ob–Yeniseic) Sprachbund

The cultural closeness of several Siberian taiga peoples in the Ob–Yeniseic region was evident both to their southern and their northern neighbours, who used for all these peoples the same ethnonyms (Хелимский 2000b: 31). However, the ties between the languages of Ostyaks proper, Selkups (Ostyak-Samoyeds), Kets (Yenisei Ostyaks), presumably also Pumpokolians (Pumpokol Ostyaks) were perhaps rather loose – with the exception of the core Sprachbund zone (Eastern Ostyak and Selkup, the areal unity of which raises no doubts²). The periphery of this Sprachbund comprised Vogul, Tundra Nenets (on Lower Ob) and Forest Nenets, Chulym Turkic, Western Evenki, to some extent possibly also Izhma Komi, some Siberian Tatar dialects, and Kott. Marginal remarks scattered in relevant literature (publications by Wolfgang Steinitz, Péter Hajdú – cf. especially Hajdú 1979, István Futaky, Hartmut Katz, Juha Janhunen and many others, including also the present author) do not form a clear picture and need to be systematised and supplemented. Only afterward will it be possible to decide to what extent the notion of this Sprachbund is appropriate and productive.

(?) Volga–Oka Sprachbund

In the 1st mill. (perhaps also earlier) this Sprachbund could include the dialects of Golyad’ and other now extinct Baltic tribes of the Eastern Baltic belt as well

² In the domain of phonology «als Gebiet, das im Zentrum der meisten Isoglossen liegt, erweist sich das Grenzgebiet des Ostjakischen und Selkupischen» (Katz 1975: 130).

as Mordvin, Cheremis, presumably also equally extinct Muroma, Meščera, and Merya (most probably a language going back to Proto-Finno-Lappic, cf. Berezki 1998: 265–269). Its core territory has been later completely levelled by Russianisation, therefore the whole issue is speculative and needs a lot of further research³. The ties within the genetically very problematic «Volgaic» branch (Cheremis + Mordvin) may be remnants of this Sprachbund.

(?) Yeniseic Sprachbund

At least one clear and highly idiosyncratic common trend of phonetic development, the rise of glottal articulation in closed word-final syllables, is an areal phenomenon and may suggest the former existence of a Sprachbund comprising Samoyedic, Ket (or the entire Yeniseic family), Tuva and Tofalar (Хелимский 2000a⁴). However, its postulation leads to chronological difficulties (Tuva and Tofalar as independent languages could hardly be contemporaries of Proto-Samoyedic where this phenomenon was already present), so it could be safer to assume instead a chain of contact-induced developments, with their starting point presumably in Samoyedic.

Ob-Ugric Sprachbund

After the dissociation of the Western Ugric (Hungarian-Vogul) areal-genetic unit (cf. Хелимский 1982: 20ff.) the languages of Voguls and Ostyaks, then still mutually comprehensible, formed this Bund (which is usually treated, not quite incorrectly, as a genetic unit) and underwent many parallel developments. In later times the core Sprachbund zone included Northern and Eastern Vogul and Western Ostyak, still later only Northern Vogul and Northern Ostyak, where convergent developments are especially evident (Honti 1982).

Core (Central) Uralic

Core (Central) Uralic, comprising Ugric, Permic, Cheremis, and (marginally) Mordvin, may be characterised as a former Sprachbund or as an areal-genetic grouping (cf. Хелимский 1982: 24–25, Напольских 1997: 109–111), relatively

³ Can it e.g. be assumed that the special susceptibility of Mordvin to Russian linguistic influences has been prepared by the former developments within the Volga–Oka Sprachbund?

⁴ In this paper I have indicated that the historical explanations of the Sayan Turkic glottalisation („pharyngealisation”) and of the glottal stop in different Samoyedic languages (Janhunen 1980, 1986, Helimski 1997: 124) as a co-articulation in closed word-final syllables are applicable also to the Ket language, so that treating the so-called „2nd tone” in Ket as an original prosodic phenomenon (Старостин 1982, Вернер 1990) is not necessary, as well as reconstructing Proto-Yeniseic as a tonal language. Historically, all cases with the „2nd tone” are similar to recent examples like Ket ²ho’p’ ‘priest’ (< Russ. *non*), ²l’e’s’ ‘forest’ (< Russ. *лес*).

loose and displaying itself in important tautodirectional – though only seldom fully identical – innovations, or rather structural tendencies = typological drifts (cf. Tauli 1966, Korhonen 1996: 165ff.). The most important Core Uralic features consisted in strengthening agglutinative trends and in the transition to accentual patterns with a single word stress (this transition usually triggered reductive processes, affecting first of all word-final vowels and syllables). Both geographically and linguistically the central position within Core Uralic belongs to the Permic languages (cf. Austerlitz 1985), in which the corresponding processes were especially consequent and far-reaching: this is the reason for the absolute domination of agglutination and for the spread of monosyllabic stems in Permic. An important role in developing Core Uralic features seems to have been played by contacts with southern neighbours – first with Indo-Iranian, then with Turkic languages – which, however, cannot have directly belonged to this Sprachbund. The Volga–Kama Sprachbund (see above) can be viewed as a later and much more coherent continuation of the Core Uralic.

Peripheral (Lateral) Uralic

On the contrary, the conservative Peripheral (Lateral) Uralic including Baltic Finnic, Lapp, and Samoyedic⁵ exhibits no signs of a Sprachbund. Its members simply seem to have preserved many original Proto-Uralic features much better than the core groups (cf. Korhonen 1996: 213–218). At least most archaic languages of these branches have rhythmic organisation of words with multiple stress, consonant gradation and related morpho-phonological phenomena, palatal vowel harmony but no labial vowel harmony, deviations from an «ideal» agglutinative scheme – e. g. in plural inflection. At least the first two among these features could have been supported by the octosyllabic versification (Kalevala verse, Northern Samoyedic shamanistic verse), also characteristic of Peripheral Uralic (Хелимский 2000b: 155–158, 187–188).

Eastern Uralic

Eastern Uralic (Ugric + Samoyedic) was rather an areal-genetic grouping (Хелимский 1982 with an analysis of the most important parallels) than a Sprachbund, though a secondary areal unity between Ugric and Samoyedic, esp. in the 3rd and 2nd mill. BC, cannot be excluded. There is hardly enough evidence for postulating

⁵ Mordvin can be viewed as the only Uralic language «on its own», sharing some Core Uralic features but belonging neither to Core nor to Lateral Uralic; cf. Keresztes 1986, Pusztay 1995: 83–95.

broader areal-genetic or areal groupings, including on a line with Ugric and Samoyedic also Lapp and Cheremis (Gulya 1975), or Mordvin (Pusztay 1995).

The title of this paper permits me not to indulge in a detailed discussion of those possible Sprachbünde which include or must have included the entire Uralic family, or to which the Proto-Uralic belonged. The concepts that could be mentioned in this connection are, for example, R. Jakobson's idea of a loose *Eurasian Sprachbund* (Якобсон 1931, Haarmann 1970, 1976: 128-134, 1977: 7-8, Balázs 1983: 14-16) and further studies in this direction, concentrating on individual phonological or morphological isoglosses and making usually special emphasis on the data from Uralic languages (cf. Haarmann 1970, Hajdú 1975a: 71-40, 1975b, Stadnik 2002)⁶, the arealistic interpretation of the *Uralo-Altaiic* problem (which, in my opinion, can be used only as addition to its genetic interpretation), the arealistic interpretation of the *Uralo-Yukagir* problem (which, I believe, is excessive in view of obvious genetic relationship between Uralic and Yukagir).

The areal factors must have played an important role in the formation of the following Uralic language groups and individual languages from the components, which were genetically at least partly heterogeneous, but underwent or continue to undergo common developments due to areal connections (cf. Хелимский 1982: 7-47):

Sayan Samoyedic,

comprising Mator and Kamassian (see above: Upper Yenisei Sprachbund);

Kamassian-Selkup

(the further formation of this unity seems, however, to have been discontinued many centuries before the Russian conquest of Siberia);

Northern Samoyedic

(Nenets-Enets, see below about the «Ene-Kasa» genetic unit + Nganasan), cf. an even more radical view expressed by J. Janhunen (1997: 459) concerning the taxonomic position of Nganasan;

Ob-Ugric

(Vogul + Ostyak, see above: Ob-Ugric Sprachbund);

⁶ The fact that individual phenomena studied in this context are usually present only in a relatively small part of the Eurasian languages, that their isoglosses practically never coincide, and that some phenomena may be equally well traced further (in the languages of America, Southern Asia, or Africa) permits me to characterise most of such studies as typological and contrastive (especially if «Eurasian» is confronted to Western European or to Indo-European) rather than arealistic. Many phenomena treated as *Uralo-Paleosiberian* isoglosses (cf. Pusztay 1987, 1995) are attested also in Altaic languages and must be rather viewed in the framework of the «Eurasian Sprachbund».

Komi-Permyak

(its dialects were originally hardly closer to each other than to Komi-Zyrian – the latter can be genetically qualified as a dialect of Komi-Permyak);

Volgaic

(Cheremis + Mordvin, see above: Volga-Kama Sprachbund, Volga-Oka Sprachbund);

Finnish

(the claim that its Western and Eastern components are heterogeneous is, however, valid only if Karelian and Ingrian are not treated – also historically – as Finnish dialects);

Estonian

(Northern Estonian + Southern Estonian, partly within the Baltic Sprachbund, see above).

On the other hand, the absence (discontinuation) of areal connections led to the dissociation of several original groupings, so that today they are (usually) disregarded in genetic classification:

Eastern Uralic

(Ugric + Samoyedic, an areal-genetic unit, see above);

Mator + the common ancestor of Nenets and Enets

(this grouping could be tentatively named «*Ene-Kasa*», a name based on the common self-appellation in the corresponding languages, cf. Helimski 1997: 210);

Western Ugric

(Hungarian + Vogul, see above in connection with the Ob-Ugric Sprachbund);

Finno-Mordvin

(Baltic Finnic + Lapp + Mordvin, originally perhaps the western branch of Finno-Volgaic);

(?) «Liflandian»

(Livonian + Southern Estonian, possibly only a temporary areal but not a genetic unit, cf. Viitso 1998).

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