

THE ORIENTAL COMMITTEE OF THE HUNGARIAN ACADEMY OF
SCIENCES ON THE CO-OPERATION OF URALIC AND ALTAIC STUDIES
IN HUNGARY

On 14th December, 1966 the Oriental Committee of the HAS under the chairmanship of Professor L. Ligeti discussed the current problems of the co-operation between the Uralic and Altaic studies in Hungary.

Professor B. Kálmán in his report reviewed the history of Ural-Altaic studies. In the first period, beginning with Strahlenberg, the scholars had no doubts about the genetic relationship of the Uralic and Altaic languages. The Hungarian scholars of that time — Hunfalvy, Reguly, Budenz, Munkácsi and others — worked in this line. Although in the second period there were such eminent scholars as Sauvageot, Räsänen, Fokos-Fuchs and others, who believed in the genetic relationship the majority of the scholars were sceptical or even negative. The problem was made more complicated by the fact that while the affinity of the Uralic languages seemed beyond doubt, the affinity of the Altaic languages was strongly disputed. In consequence of the negative attitude towards the Ural-Altaic affinity and the growing specialization within the science itself the split between the Uralic and Altaic studies became almost total. Professor Kálmán emphasized that this split is harmful to both Uralic and Altaic studies. At the present stage of development of science it is impossible for one person to master all branches and this makes co-operation all the more unavoidable. The same trend of co-operation has been also observable abroad for some years past. In the United States and in the German Federal Republic, for instance Uralic and Altaic studies are combined in academic institutions, universities societies and publications. There can be no doubt that we are at the beginning of a third period which will be called the period of co-operation.

Concerning the possible fields of actual co-operation Professor Kálmán suggested the following areas of research:

1. Primitive historical correspondences between the two groups irrespective of the question of relationship;
2. typological similarities;
3. mutual influences between individual Uralic and Altaic languages;
4. geographical terminology and toponimics in the territory inhabited by both groups;
5. the Hungarian language in its historical contacts with Altaic languages;
6. co-operation in the research of pre-history, cultural and physical anthropology, folklore, folk-music and archeology. Professor Kálmán stressed in conclusion that the co-operation has to be realized both in organizatory activity and publications.

On behalf of Altaists A. Róna-Tas welcomed the idea of cooperation proposed by the Committee and by Professor Kálmán. In his report he underlined that from the fact that neither the views against nor those in favour of the Ural-Altaic affinity were convincing one should not conclude that the problem is insoluble. There was some kind

of interrelation among the two groups and we have to study it whatever it was. This is the common basic problem of both studies.

The objective conditions exist in Hungary for Ural-Altai research. The old traditions, the historical profile, the connections with the national studies, the relatively good access to the living material, and last but not least the favourable political and social conditions give Hungarian Uralic and Altaic studies a unique opportunity to contribute to the international scientific efforts to solve the problems of basic importance.

Wholly agreeing with the proposals of Professor Kálmán Róna-Tas mentioned some further possible fields where co-operation is needed:

1. The mutual discussion of methodological principles and their limits in establishing linguistic relationship;
2. the use of the facts of early contacts and later borrowings for chronology of linguistic developments;
3. sinoptic research of outside influence (Indo-European, Arabic, Paleo-Asiatic, Russian etc.) on both groups of languages;
4. the problems of substratum and language-change;
5. research on the causes of typological similarities;
6. problems of machine translation from Uralic to Altaic and vice versa.

After a thorough discussion of questions of principle and organization the Oriental Committee of the HAS adopted a unanimous resolution to make the proper recommendations to the Academy. The recommendations stress the need for further organisatory efforts in co-ordinating the Uralic and Altaic studies in Hungary and describe the views of the Committee on the short and long term tasks as well as the methods to be pursued for their realization.

A. Róna-Tas