

## Studies on Slavic-Hungarian Linguistic Relations\*

The bilateral nature of Slavic-Hungarian language contact forms a linguistic spectrum that, despite several centuries of research and the publication of groundbreaking works during this period, continues to offer opportunities for investigation to linguists studying this field. This is not only due to the fact that these relationships remain active today – highly diverse and constantly evolving among Slavic and Hungarian communities with close economic, political, or neighbourhood ties – but also because scientific achievements in the meantime often enable new investigations into historical linguistic material, refining or even revising previous conclusions.

Such research results are presented in András Zoltán's recently published volume titled *Slavo-Hungarica. Studies on Slavic-Hungarian Language Contact*, which, as stated in the author's preface, contains "Hungarian-language studies of interest to Hungarian researchers, written over the past twenty years", organized into two main thematic groups. The first and larger section of the publication includes eighteen studies dealing with Slavic loanwords in the Hungarian language, or with words of third-party origin analysed through Slavic analogy. The second thematic group, comprising only three studies, contains the author's writings on Hungarian loanwords that found their way into Old Belarusian and Old Ukrainian, as well as on the 15<sup>th</sup>-century reception of the *Legend of Saint Ladislaus* in Moscow (p. 7).

In the *Preface*, emphasizing the complexity of the topic, András Zoltán also points out that etymological questions can by no means be considered definitively settled. In this respect, he merely aims to present possible alternatives and remains open to the existence of other explanations – particularly regarding the materials of Hungarian language variants spoken outside of Hungary, which currently represent the most significant field of intensive Slavic-Hungarian language contact. At the end of this section, the author thanks the invited reviewers for their useful and valuable comments, acknowledges the contributions of other individuals who supported the completion of the volume, and expresses gratitude to the Hungarian Linguistic Society for the opportunity to publish it (p. 8).

The first thematic chapter (*Slavic in Hungarian*) begins with the article *Some Chronological and Dialectological Questions Regarding the Slavic Loanwords of Our Language*. The author briefly outlines the centuries-long history of research on Slavic loanwords in Hungarian, highlighting several key works and drawing attention to the fact that "most of our oldest Slavic loanwords are not region-specific, but are spread throughout the entire Hungarian-speaking area" (p. 12). As a result, their status as substratum elements is unquestionable. At the same time, identifying the exact source language requires many additional points of reference, and it is essential to take into account marginal language contacts and the phonological characteristics of the donor languages – such as the Hungarian realization of Proto-Slavic *dl* or *ort-*, *olt-* clusters – as well as to closely examine the chronology of older Slavic loanwords reflecting Slavic nasal vowels. This is because

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“when hypothesizing possible Slavic language (or dialect) sources, we must consider both the temporal sequence of Slavic and Hungarian sound changes and the spatial differences in how these changes unfolded” (p. 17).

The next study is titled *Slavic-Hungarian Linguistic Interaction Before the Hungarian Conquest*, and alongside presenting the main theories about how early Slavic loanwords entered the Hungarian language, it also points out that the origin of these words cannot be proven from a linguistic point of view, despite the fact that “even scholars representing the main current of Hungarian Slavic studies have not excluded the possibility that some of our old Slavic loanwords were adopted from East Slavic before the Hungarian Conquest” (p. 20). This is illustrated with examples that, following the questionable etymological analyses of Sándor Rot, were incorrectly integrated into foreign scientific literature as well. Of the words connected to Rot’s analyses, András Zoltán considers only the ethnonym *lengyel* (< *lengyen*) [Polish], which can be traced back to the Slavic tribal name *lędjan(e)*, as a possible example of pre-conquest borrowing. However, he also emphasizes that “there are no definitively provable traces of Slavic-Hungarian linguistic contact during this period in the Hungarian language”, and thus “we do not have enough evidence to resolve the question” (p. 24).

In the sub-chapter titled *Slavic-Hungarian Linguistic Contacts in the 11th Century*, the author highlights that if we want to somehow filter out, from the mass of early Slavic loanwords, those that appear in written sources from the period in question, we must pay special attention to loanwords that reflect the Slavic *jers* (reduced vowels) (p. 27), because if these were borrowed as *i* and *u*, then they most likely originated before the 12<sup>th</sup> century (p. 30).

The following study is *The Trubetzkoy Periodization of Slavic Language Development and Hungarian Slavistics*, which provides a detailed analysis of the view expressed by Nikolai Sergejevich Trubetzkoy in 1922. According to him, “a language splits into multiple languages when its dialects are no longer capable of undergoing common innovations. Therefore, in the case of the Proto-Slavic language, the *terminus ad quem* is the last common Slavic sound change, which is traditionally considered to be the loss of the so-called *jers* – short vowels represented in Old Church Slavonic Cyrillic manuscripts by the letters ѣ and ъ – in certain positions. This process unfolded over time during the 10th–12th centuries across the Slavic-speaking world in a largely uniform manner” (p. 32). The study also discusses the reflections of Hungarian Slavic research on this matter.

In the article *Byzantine Rite Slavic Elements in Hungarian Christian Terminology*, the author draws attention to the fact that – contrary to Chelimsky’s view that all Slavic elements in Hungarian Christian terminology derive from the language of the Slavs living in the Carpathian Basin – some early Slavic elements of ecclesiastical terminology in the Hungarian language preserve traces of the Byzantine mission, specifically those that can be proven to have Balkan origins (p. 36). As examples of such words, Zoltán provides detailed analyses of *karácsony* ‘Christmas’, *pitvar* ‘anteroom’, and the expression *hálát ad* ‘to give thanks’ (pp. 37–42).

Regarding *Slavic parallels to the Hungarian auxiliary verb ‘fog’ ‘will’*, the author emphasizes that the Ukrainian language offers a good parallel to the Hungarian future tense construction with the auxiliary *fog*. Through a thorough historical analysis of the two future tense paradigms used with verbs of continuous aspect in several languages, it is assumed that in early Old Hungarian, the Slavic auxiliary (*j)ęti*, already functioning as a future tense marker, was translated with the Hungarian verb *fog*, which originally meant “to grasp, to take” (*ergreifen, nehmen*) (p. 48).

In his *Marginal Notes to the Etymological Dictionary*, Zoltán expresses his appreciation for the compilers of the dictionary, emphasizing that his notes do not constitute a traditional critique, as he usually does not question the etymologies themselves but rather corrects data or highlights inconsistencies in the morphological interpretation of undisputed Slavic etymons (p. 50). In summarizing the material, the author points out that the errors he identified fall into three main categories:

- 1) **Typographical errors** – involving letter pairs whose cursive forms are not clearly distinguishable in the typeface used in the dictionary (e.g., Cyrillic *б – в, и – у*; Latin *ě – ě, l – ł*);
- 2) **Transcription errors** – no clear, principled decision seems to have been made on how to transcribe Cyrillic data, leading to inconsistent practices among the collaborators;
- 3) **Slavic prefixed nouns** – a fundamental misunderstanding of Slavic deverbal noun formation is apparent throughout the dictionary (p. 68).

In his study titled *László Hadrovics, the Etymologist*, the author also draws attention to the fact that Hadrovics devoted his entire life to Hungary-focused Slavic studies (p. 70), and that he explored the influence of Slavic and other languages on Hungarian with just as much success as he investigated Hungarian influence on the languages and literatures of neighbouring peoples (p. 73).

The next article in the volume is titled *Lajos Kiss, the Slavist*, in which the author highlights that, like Hadrovics, Lajos Kiss also pursued Slavic studies with a focus on Hungarian relevance throughout his life, and that “his work is a clear testament to the fact that Slavic studies is not only a national science in Slavic countries but also in Hungary” (p. 75). In addition to discussing the scholarly contributions of Kiss, the author provides a highly detailed and original etymological analysis of the Hungarian noun *seb* (1. ‘wound’, 2. ‘speed of the water’s current’) and the corresponding adjective *sebes* (1. ‘wounded’, 2. ‘fast’) (pp. 77–80).

In the sub-chapters *Király és karéj* [King and Slice] (pp. 81–84), *Denevér; bőregér és a vámpír -pír-je* [Bat, Leather Mouse and the -pire of Vampire] (pp. 85–89), *Darázs és vizsga* [Wasp and Exam] (pp. 91–95), and *Kócska* [Stray] (pp. 97–101), the author explores the etymology of the Hungarian words mentioned in the titles.

In the article titled *Varia Etymologica*, Zoltán presents the etymologies of several words (*zabráll* ‘to loot’; *törődik* ‘to care’, *törekedik* ‘to pursue a goal’; *farvív* ‘wake left behind a boat on water’; *bőregér* ‘bat’; *márkázott vaj* ‘branded butter’; *anyaszentegyház* ‘Holy Church’), which he had previously only discussed in conference presentations – some in response to research by István Nyomárkay, and others at the request of the Modern Philological Society, of which he was president (pp. 103–108).

In the study *Semantic Issues Among Our Old Slavic Loanwords*, the author points out that in many cases, “our old Slavic loanwords entered Hungarian with meanings different from those expected on the basis of their use in Slavic languages”, which he illustrates through a detailed semantic and etymological analysis of the word *parázna* (from ‘empty’ to ‘harlot’) (pp. 109–112).

The following article, titled *The Career of a Galician Chancery Latinism*, investigates the etymology, spread, and semantic changes of the word *hoszpodár* (originally meaning

‘master’), which was used as a ruler’s (grand ducal) title in Wallachia, Moldavia, Lithuania, and Moscow. The author emphasizes that the word first took on the meaning of ‘ruler’ in the Old Ukrainian language in Galicia under Latin influence in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century (pp. 113–121).

In the sub-chapter *Russian ‘начкун’, Hungarian ‘pancser’*, the author discusses the etymology of the Russian word *начкун* (‘bungler, amateur’), and notes that “if *начкать* indeed comes from the German verb *patschen*, then *начкун* is distantly related to the Hungarian word *pancser*, which in informal speech refers to an ‘inept or clumsy person’, regardless of occupation.” (pp. 123–130)

In the last article titled *Slavic Analogies for Hungarian Idioms II* (in the first thematic chapter) Zoltán examines Slavic equivalents of the Hungarian expressions *szabadon bocsát / enged* (‘to release / free’) and *rabul / foglyul ejt* (‘to capture / take prisoner’), concluding that *szabadon bocsát / enged* in both Hungarian and Slavic languages likely originated as a calque of the German *freilassen* (pp. 131–134).

The second chapter, titled *Hungarian in Slavic*, opens with the article *Hungarian Words in Old Belarusian*, an earlier version of which was presented in 2004, i.e., twenty years prior to the current publication, at the 7<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Hungarian Linguistics. In this article, Zoltán lists numerous Hungarian words that became established in Old Belarusian between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, with clearly demonstrable Hungarian origins (pp. 137–142).

In the article *The Trace of Old Hungarian ‘szerencs’ in Carpatho-Ukrainian*, the author argues that *szerencs* (‘highwayman’), which disappeared early from Hungarian written records, may have entered the local dialect of the Maramureş Ruthenians as a loanword before its complete disappearance. This is supported by the version of the *Niagovo Postilla* published by Aleksei Petrov in the early 1900s, where the word appears – suggesting it must have already existed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (pp. 143–145).

The final article in the volume analyses the story of the deadly clash between Saint Ladislaus and Batu Khan, as recorded in the Old Russian chronicles under the title *The Killing of the Ungodly Batu Khan in Hungary*, among the events of the year 1247. At the same time, there is nothing to rule out the possibility that the appearance of the Hungarian–Serbian Saint Ladislaus legend in Russia occurred around the 1480s and was connected to the diplomatic relations between King Matthias I of Hungary and Ivan III of Russia. The author of the story was clearly a Serb from Hungary, and the original text was written in Serbian – just like the Dracula tale, which also reached Russia through diplomatic channels (pp. 147–150).

The publication concludes with a nearly thirty-page bibliography standardizing the references cited in the sub-chapters, a list of the original places of publication, and indexes of names and subjects.

If nothing else, this brief review may at least serve to highlight the diversity of the writings in the volume and the deeply scholarly intent that characterizes the research behind them – hallmarks of András Zoltán’s work. We hope that, thanks to this publication, an even broader professional and general readership will become familiar with the effects of the

Slavic-Hungarian language contact, as well as the related research findings. This aim is certainly supported by the fact that the volume is freely available online at the following link: <<https://doi.org/10.26546/5061202>>.

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