Semantic Examination of Genetically Related
Language Correspondences[1]

,,. . .variability of vocabulary, as reflecting social environment, obtains in
time as well as place ; in other words, the stock of culture concepts and there-
fore also the corresponding vocabulary become constantly enriched and
ramified with the increase within a group of cultural complexity. . . .for a
v o c a b u l a r y ... a i m s a t   a n y   g i v e n   t i m e t o s e r v e a s a
s e t o f s y m b o l s r e f e r r i n g t o t h e c u l t u r e b a c k g r o u n d
o f t h e g r o u p" (the italics are mine — M. B.—N.)[2]

This statement quoted from Sapir, which may be regarded as one of
the axioms of linguistics, also concerns those languages which existed more
than one thousand years ago, and which, before the dissemination of the indi-
vidual language families and their distribution into daughter languages, existed
more or less as uniform languages or proto-languages. So that we can gain an
insight into the economic and social organization of the community speaking
the proto-language as well as an insight into its culture and knowledge regard-
ing the surrounding world, we must reconstruct this proto-language, or the
word-stock with it, by making use of also the research results of other
branches of knowledge (ancient history, anthropology, ethnography, etc.).

Etymological research represents the first stage in the road leading
towards reconstruction.

The etymologist, when examining connectible words of genetically related
languages, besides a phonological and morphological analysis, but as by no
means a secondary task, subjects the words to a semantic treatment in the
interest that he can account for or refute their common origins from a semantic
point of view. In the course of the analysis historical semantics presents us
with methods to be employed, theories and observations — we cannot speak
about a separate semantics of the etymologies. ,,. . . in establishing the origin
of a word, we must make use of the theoretical and practical teachings of
research involving meaning changes ; a separate point of view for the etymology
cannot be possible. Because whatever would concern the semantic aspect of
the word that would belong to semantics. B u t s e m a n t i c s e x t r a c t s
g e n e r a l i t i e s f r o m t h e ,,r e l i a b l e" e t y m o l o g i e s i n n o t
a s m a l l m e a s u r e."[3]

[2] E. Sapir, Language and Environment. In : Selected Writings of Edward Sapir
in Language, Culture and Personality. Ed. by D. G. Mandelbaum. Berkeley and Los
Angeles, 1951. 94—5.
[3] S. Károly, Általános és magyar jelentéstan, Bp, 1970. 225.

From the series of tasks in which numerous difficulties and problems are hidden and which the etymologist must unravel in the course of his semantic investigations,[4] and from a disclosure of the semantic structure of the individual words through a presentation of the meaning changes as well as an explanation of them I can raise altogether only one single question which is t h e r e l a t i o n s h i p b e t w e e n t h e s e m a n t i c f e a t u r e s i n t h e m e a n i n g s o f w o r d s f r o m g e n e t i c a l l y r e l a t e d l a n g u a g e s a n d t h e h y p o t h e s i z e d p r o t o - m e a n i n g s.

The investigator, after making certain that two or more word correspondences do not have a more serious obstacle from a phonological or a morphological point of view, the relationship between the meanings of the words is subjected to the scalpel. In a large percentage of cases such words are disclosed whose meanings possibly show great deviations; the task of the investigator in these ,,heterogeneous'' meanings is to find all of those which are common. The investigator subsequently disassociates the individual meanings of the language data into constituents, that is into semantic features. Each semantic feature includes one substantial c h a r a c t e r i s t i c of an object, action, or concept specified by a given word or one of its r e l a t i o n s to other objects, actions, or concepts. The semantic features of the Hungarian word *domb* meaning 'hill' ('Hügel') are for the most part the following: 1. relief form, 2. elevation, 3. situated on the surface of the earth, 4. of an inclined side, 5. characteristic height (e.g., not higher than 200 meters), etc.[5] All of these features in the case of *hegy* 'mountain' ('Berg') could also be found with the difference that here the semantic feature specifying its height would be different (e.g., higher than 200 meters).[6]

At the time the semantic features are gathered — in so far as the possibility occurs — we cannot be unmindful of investigating the context of a given word, of the historical linguistic data in connection with languages possessing written records (we must treat these very cautiously, for the oldest historical language data do not always preserve the more original meaning), and finally, but not least, what might be considered an unessential feature according to our — those speaking Hungarian as a native language — way of thinking (e.g., is the slope of a hill steep or gentle) might according to the way of thinking of another (for example, nature) nation or a group of people speaking another dialect within a language community be an essential and possibly a distinctive feature[7] — therefore, in the word-stock of a given language the place occupied by the word must be considered.[8]

In determining the distribution of semantic features for each meaning of the genetically related language word and in placing the rows of semantic features obtained beside one another, we can establish as the result of our comparison which features can be found in all or in the majority of the meanings tested. These common features constitute the form of the semantic correspondences of the words, but in exceeding this they also carry within themselves the nucleus of the hypothesized proto-meaning.

[4] E. BENVENISTE, Problèmes sèmantiques de la reconstruction WORD 10 :251—264.
[5] On the basis of A Concise Interpretative Dictionary of Hungarian Bp., 1972
[6] On the basis of A Concise Interpretative Dictionary of Hungarian
[7] E. SAPIR, op. cit. 96.
[8] S. KÁROLY, op. cit. 255.

It is generally known that in the semantic features the richer meaning of a word designates a more concrete object, action, or concept than the object, action, or concept which are disposed of with fewer features.[9] At the same time it is also well known that in time we proceed always from more concrete meanings to more abstract ones. The present-day meanings of genetically related language words have become in the majority of cases, on the one hand, more abstract; on the other hand, they have gone through the whole series of meaning changes in the course of time and as a consequence of the latter factor, the number of previously mentioned common semantic features is decreasing. Thus, we are faced with the paradoxical situation that on the basis of the relatively small number of semantic features, we can hypothesize only a more general proto-meaning; since the fewer the number of semantic features, the more general is the meaning. The investigator, therefore, knows in vain that the proto-meaning should frequently be more concrete; he cannot happen upon this concreteness on the basis of the present-day generalized and changed meanings.

The supposition that the proto-meanings in the proto-language can frequently be considered to be more concrete is supported by the fact that not only one word, for example the word meaning 'hill', from the present-day languages has an etymological correspondence in the genetically related languages, but more have it as well (cf. reference B/1, C/1 and 3). In the sense of what has been said above, however, on the basis of further words meaning 'hill', we can hypothesize only a more general proto-meaning. It follows from all of this that in the Uralic or Finno-Ugric proto-language we can find not one, but two, or possibly three or four proto-meanings 'hill'; at the same time, however, we are sure that these same proto-meanings definitely do not originate from the faulty nature of the research methods, but that the present state of the genetically related languages does not in many cases make possible the slight differentiation between the same hypothesized proto-meanings.

The following question involuntarily emerges: whether our facts are or could be in this connection such as to enable us to ask whether there were differences in the proto-language between proto-meanings that seem to be the same today? I claim that there are. We must look for these facts, however, in the morphological carriers of the proto-meanings, that is in the proto-forms. In testing the relationship between the proto-forms and proto-meanings, we will comprehend the Uralic or Finno-Ugric proto-language, but more or less as a unified synchronous system showing already certain dialectal divisions.[10] Within this system the words having the same proto-meanings will show a three-fold division according to the proto-forms belonging to them.[11]

I have listed in the first group those doublets whose proto-forms are different, words independent of one another. By way of example, consider the following three doublets, or word-triplets:

[9] H. KRONASSER, Handbuch der Semasiologie, Heidelberg 1952. 116.
[10] P. HAJDÚ, Bevezetés az uráli nyelvtudományba (A magyar nyelv finnugor alapjai) Bp., 1966. 13.
[11] I collected my material from the published volumes of A magyar szókészlet finnugor elemei (principal editor GYÖRGY LAKÓ, 1. Bp., 1967, 2. Bp., 1971.) and the manuscript material, as well as the word articles of the Uralic Etymological Dictionary now under preparation. I took the proto-meanings from this dictionary.

A/1. **kum₃*
    'cloud; Wolke' FU
    (h. *homály*)
    ?fi., mord., zürj.,
    vog., h.

    *pilwe (pilŋe)
    'cloud; Wolke' FU
    (h. *felhő*)
    fi., est., lp., mord.,
    cher., votj., zürj., ostj., h.

  2. **mene-*
    'go; gehen' U

    (h. *megy-*)
    fi., est., lp.,
    cher., votj., zürj.,
    ostj., vog., h., jur.,
    tvg., selk., kam.

    *juta-
    'go; gehen'
    U
    (lp. N *jǫtte-*)
    lp., ?mord.,
    jur., jen.,
    tvg., mot.

    *jom₃-
    'go; gehen' U

    (?h. *indul-*)
    vog., ?h., jur.

  3. **päŋ₃*
    'head; Kopf' U
    (h. *fej*)

    fi., est., ?lp.,
    mord., votj.,
    zürj., vog., h.,
    ?jur., tvg.

    *ojwa
    'head; Kopf'
    U
    (fi. *oiva*)
    fi., est., lp., jur.,
    jen., tvg., ?taig.,
    karag.

    *uk₃(ok₃)
    'head; Kopf' U
    (ostj. Ni. *uχ*,
    Kaz. *ŏχ*, vog. So. *āwa*)
    ostj., vog., selk.

In the first example we see that the reflexes of **pilwe*, with the exception of vog., are in all the FU languages, while we can find the reflexes of **kum₃* in only five. The situation is similar with the proto-word **mene-* 'go; gehen' where outside of mord. and jen. we have data from all the languages; the reflexes of **juta-* and **jom₃-* are much more fewer. The picture changes to a certain extent with the words meaning 'head; Kopf'; here, that is, taking into consideration the Volgaic and the Permic and Ugric languages, we find reflexes of either one or only the other proto-word in all the languages. Naturally the possibility cannot be excluded that the same language has preserved two proto-words, but among them one has become extinct. But in the Samoyedic languages the reflexes of all three proto-forms are present.

    We can postulate on the basis of the etymologies enumerated here and those not presented here because of lack of space, that among the proto-meanings there could have once been a difference (in the case of those meaning 'go', for example, in respect to the direction or intensity of the action), but at the same time the fact cannot be left out of consideration that the dividing of the Uralic proto-language into dialects continually became stronger and in the formation of words having newer or approximately the same proto-meanings this dialectal separation could have also played a role.

    Words showing a palatal-velar sound opposition constitute the second group. Such ones are the following:

B/1. **ćɜŋka*
    'hill, hillock;
    Hügel' FU
    (?h. *-ság*)
    mord., cher.,
    ?vog., ?h.

    *ćiŋkä (ćüŋkä)
    'hill, hillock;
    Hügel' FU
    (?h.-*ság*)
    est., ?lp., cher.,
    ostj., vog., ?h.

2. *$kom_3(r_3)$
'hollow of the hand ;
hohle Hand' U

(zürj. *kamir*)
lp., mord., ? ?zürj.,
?jen., selk., kam.

*$käm_3(-n_3)$
'hollow of the hand, palm ;
die flache Hand, die hohle
Hand, Handteller' FU
(fi. *kämmen*)
fi., est., ?lp., ostj.

3. *$oŋl_3$ ($sŋ_3$, $sŋ_3-l_3$)
'chin, jaw-bone ;
Kinn(backen, -lade)' FU
(h. *áll*)
votj., cher., ostj.,
?h.

*$äŋ_3$
'chin, jaw-bone ;
Kinn(backen, -lade)' U
(zürj. Le. V *an*)
votj., zürj., ostj.,
vog., jur., jen., selk.,
kam., taig.

4. *$śale$-
'cut ; schneiden' FU
(h. *szil-, szilács-*)
fi., lp., cher.,
votj., zürj., ostj.,
vog., h.

*$śälä$-
'cut ; schneiden' FU
(h. *szel-*)
?[fi., lp.,], ?cher., ?h.

It is unquestionable that we are opposed to one of the methods of word-for-mation here, word-splitting, in the course of which a single word became di-vided into two variant forms and among these a partial or complete meaning separation came into existence. The formal separation can be registered, but the difference between the meanings is only in exceptional cases. Such an example is the second doublet where — in so far as we are able to hypothesize — the meaning of the velar variant is 'hollow of the hand' (that is, bent-in palm), the palatal sound variant of the FU age means the palm itself, but hollow of the hand as well.

At present and from the point of view of the topic it would be superflous for us to investigate which one of the doublets from the U or FU age would be the more original, and which one induced the coming into existence of the other ; but this much is sure, that when we find the reflexes of both a palatal and a velar sound antecedent in the same language, the semantic separation was already older, formed in the U or FU language, but in the opposite case nothing would account for the coming into existence of the variant forms.

The following doublets make up the third and at the same time most interesting group :

C/1. *$ćukk_3$
'hill, hillock, peak ;
Hügel, Spitze' U
(fi. *sukki*)
?fi., lp., zürj.,
?ostj., ?vog., selk.

*$ćsŋka$
'hill, hillock ;
Hügel' FU
(?h.-*ság*)
mord.,cher., ?vog., ?h.

*-kk- ⟷ *-ŋk-

2. *$kečä$
'circle, ring ;

*$keć_3$
'circle, ring;

*$kere$
'circle, ring ;

Kreis, Ring,
Reifen' FU
(?h. *kégy*)
fi., est., mord.,
cher., votj.,
zürj., ostj.,
vog., ?h.

Kreis, Ring,
Reifen' FU
(?h. *kégy*)
kar., lüd.,
est., ostj.,
?h.

Kreis, Ring,
Reifen' FU
(h. *köré, körül*)
fi., est., lp.,
votj., zürj., h.

-č- ⟵⟶ *-ć-* ⟵⟶ *-r-*

3. **mäk3*
'hill, mountain ;
Hügel, Berg' FU
(fi. *mäki*)
fi., est., ostj.

*mäkte
'tussocks ;
Rasen(hügel)' U
(fi. *mätäs*)
fi., est., lp.,
jur., selk., kam.

-k- ⟵⟶ *-kt-*

4. **ol3*
'chin, jaw-bone ;
Kinn(backen,-lade)' FU
(?h. *áll*)
lp., mord., vog., ?h.

*oŋl3 (*8ŋ3, 8ŋ3-l3*)
'chin, jaw-bone ;
Kinn(backen,-lade)' FU
(?h. *áll*)
lp., cher., votj., ostj., ?h.

-l- ⟵⟶ *-ŋl-*

5 **omtę*
'cavity, hole ;
Höhle, Höhlung' FU
(?h. *odú*)
?fi., ?est., lp.,
?mord., ?votj.,
ostj., vog., ?h.

*oŋtę
'(chest, abdominal) cavity ;
(Brust, Bauch) Höhlung' FU
(?h. *odú*)
?fi., est., lp., ?mord.,
?votj., ostj., ?h.

-mt- ⟵⟶ *-ŋt-*

6. **päjä*
'fire ; Fexer' FU
(zürj. S PO P *bi*)
?lp., ?zürj., ?ostj.,

*päjwä
'fire ; Feuer' FU
(fi. *päivä*)
?fi., est., lp., ? ?zürj.,
? ?ostj.

-j- ⟵⟶ *-jw-*

7. **puw3-* (*puɣ3-*)
'blow ; blasen' U
(h. *fúj-*)
mord., cher., ostj., vog., h.,
jur., jen., tvg., selk., kam.

*puš3-
'blow ; blasen' U
(fi. *puhu-, puhalta-*)
fi., est., lp., ?zürj., ostj., vog.,
selk.

-w-(-ɣ-) ⟵⟶ *-š-*

8. **saŋća-*
'stand ; stehen' FU
(fi. *seiso-, seise-*)
fi., est., lp., mord., cher.,
zürj., ostj., vog.

*salk3-
'stand ; stehen' FU
(h. *áll-*)
cher., votj., zürj., h.

-ŋć- ⟵⟶ *-lk-*

As can be established at first glance, the initial syllables of the doublets agree completely with one another: 1. *$\acute{c}u$-, 2. *ke-, 3. *$m\ddot{a}$-, 4. *o-, 5. *o-, 6. *$p\ddot{a}$-, 7. *pu-, 8. *sa-. An essential difference can be seen in the second syllables, that is in the word-internal consonants: 1. *-kk- $\leftrightarrow$ *-ηk-, 2. *-$\check{c}$- $\leftrightarrow$ *-$\acute{c}$- $\leftrightarrow$ *-r- etc. In comprehending the phonetic juncture features of a single sound and in describing with symbols the sound structure of the proto-words, we obtain the following diagram:

1. $VCV \leftrightarrow VC^1V$ (fourth and fifth doublet)
2. $CVCV \leftrightarrow CVC^1V$ (all the other doublets)

That is, inside the stem of the word in all the cases a new consonant appears by the same proto-meaning.

How should we explain this uncommon phenomenon? Perhaps that the phonetic form coocurrence of initial syllables in the above doublets is only a chance occurrence? Or would the same proto-meaning of words be founded on chance? Hardly. Or perhaps that the different word-internal consonants are actually derivational affixes, or derivational affix clusters? In accepting this explanation, however, we should reckon with earlier monosyllabic stems (possibly roots) in the meanings of which all the common semantic features of disyllabic stem meanings are included; we could therefore speak about monosyllabic concept-words. It is unquestionable that in the Uralic proto-language there were monosyllabic morphemes; they could have been pronouns or possibly interjections.[12] But the ability of pronouns to relate to the real world is not as great as that of concept-words.

We must search for a solution to the problem elsewhere. On the basis of research up to now, it is probable that in the Uralic proto-language one of the methods of word-formation was in word-initial consonant alteration. The essence of this can be summarized briefly in the following: one of the doublets which have the same meaning and which correspond in their initial syllables can be regarded as being older and more original. Its meaning was concerned with a definite object or action, etc.:

$$*CVCV \qquad *M^1$$

The new word came into existence in this way that instead of the more original word-internal consonant, a newer one appeared in the word-stem and with this a newer meaning was at the same time born:

$$*CVCV \qquad *M^1$$
$$\downarrow \qquad \downarrow$$
$$*CVC^1V \qquad *M^2$$

The essential semantic features of the later meaning correspond with the semantic features of the more original meaning; the hypothesized proto-meanings bear witness to this. But what proves that in regards to chiefly concreteness, there was a difference between the older and the newer meanings? In one respect it is that what we established in connection with words of the A and B groups: we can find the reflexes of two or three proto-forms in the

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[12] P. HAJDÚ, op. cit. 53.

same language. Our other theory is the following : it happens, but however rarely, that the difference between doublet meanings can be shown, as for example in the case of *mäk₃ and *mäkte.

Everywhere in the reflexes of *mäkte the meaning 'tussock ; Rasenhügel' is present :

f i.   'Rasenhügel, Erdhügel, Höcker, Mooshöcker'
e s t.   'Rasen, Rasenhügelchen, ausgestochenes Rasen- od. Torfstück'
l p.   'a species of Carex which forms tussocks and grows on bogs'
j u r.   'Rasenhöcker, Bülter'
s e l k. 'kleiner Hügel, kleiner Rasenhügel, Haufen'
k a m   'Rasenhügel, Erdhügel, kleiner Erdhügel'

In the etymology of *mäk₃ we can find it in only one case, in osjt. :

f i.   'Hügel, Anhöhe, Berg ; Abhang, Hang'
e s t . 'Berg, Hügel'
o s t j. 'kleiner Erdhügel, Bülte, Erdhöcker, R a s e n h ü g e l'

On the basis of the meanings of the etymological correspondences of *mäkte, we can rightly hypothesize the meaning 'tussock' ; but in connection with the meaning of *mäk₃, we only know that we can designate it as a hill or a relief form larger than a hill, or a mountain. A similar difference can be seen in the dobulet *omtẹ — *oŋtẹ, where the former meant some kind of cavity or hole, and the latter, however, a cavity inside a person or animal, the chest or stomach cavity.

A further problem is that among the doublets — from within Uralic or Finno-Ugric — which could have been primary, as well as the problem that was there some kind of connection between the quality of the consonant of the form assumed to be hypothetically more original and the quality of the consonant that appeared recently ; does the transposition of consonants show certain tendencies. In this actual initial phase of research it would be early to mention tendencies, as the supposition would be only that the collected — and here it is only presented in fragments — material shows that we are in the presence of word-splitting and word-formation concerned with one of the rather ancient or earlier m e t h o d s o f w o r d - f o r m a t i o n in the Uralic proto-language. I would have liked to there and now call the reader's attention to only this phenomenon. A common morphological and semantic, or perhaps morphosemantic, examination of the complete Uralic or Finno-Ugric word-stock is necessary in accounting for this supposition in what follows.

This work can be accomplished on the basis of such an etymological dictionary which beyond preparing the word-stock of a given language family has the goal of reconstructing the proto-forms and proto-meanings as well.

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