

SAMPSA HOLOPAINEN
HELSINKI – VIENNA

Ugric and Samoyed ‘raven’

1. Introduction¹

Although there are some, probably areal, innovations shared by the Ugric and Samoyed languages (see Helimski 1982: 56–68 for an overview and Häkkinen 2007 and Zhivlov 2018 for discussions of some problematic issues) there are only very few potential lexical innovations in the Ugric and Samoyed languages and very few Uralic cognates shared exclusively by these branches. Zhivlov (2022: 366–368) lists only eight exclusively shared cognates.² In this paper, I would like to discuss one possible Uralic cognate limited to Ugric and Samoyed, namely, the alleged word for ‘raven’, to celebrate Riho Grünthal’s career where questions of Uralic etymology, reconstruction, and prehistory have also played a great role (see, for example, Grünthal et al. 2022).

The recent decades have seen great advances in Uralic etymology, with many new Samoyed–Finno-Ugric etymologies suggested and many earlier suggestions criticized (see, for example, Aikio 2022; 2006; 2015). However, there are some alleged cognates that have not been included in more recent studies but have also not been explicitly criticized or rejected; sometimes such

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2. In addition to Zhivlov (2022), some potential Ugro-Samoyed etymologies have been discussed by Holopainen (2022: 106–107) and Helimski (1992–1993; 1997; 2023)

etymologies still continue to circulate in etymological dictionaries, as is the case with the etymology of Hungarian *holló* ‘raven’ and its possible Ob-Ugric and Samoyed cognates which are still presented as a valid comparison in EWUng and ÚESz. In this paper, the problems of this etymology are discussed: the analysis examines whether this etymology can be reconstructed for Proto-Uralic, and whether the alleged cognates can be connected by some other means; since the alleged Proto-Ugric lexicon probably includes loanwords from some unknown source(s), as highlighted by Holopainen (2023b), it is important to discuss this Ugro-Samoyed etymology from a similar point of view. As this particular etymology has also been considered a derivative in Proto-Uralic or Proto-Ugric, the discussion is also interesting from the point of view of Uralic diachronic word formation.

2. Background

The following etymological comparison is presented in UEW, and a certain Proto-Uralic etymon **kul3* (*kul3-k3*) ‘raven’ is reconstructed based on these forms (the notation of the Samoyed forms here follows the dictionaries published after UEW):

Hungarian *holló* ‘raven’

Eastern Khanty (Vakh dialect) *kɔʎək*, Southern Khanty (Upper Demyanka (Narygin) dialect) *χuləχ*, Northern Khanty (Obdorsk dialect) *χoləχ* ‘raven’

Southern Mansi (TJ) *kolā-k*, Eastern Mansi (Lower Konda) *χolχ*, Western Mansi (Pelym) *kulk*, Northern Mansi (Sosva dialect) *χuləχ* ‘raven’

but as those etymologies are not very convincing in the light of historical phonology, a short commentary is in order. Proto-Uralic **šorma* ~ **šarma* ‘smoke-vent of a tent’, considered a dubious Uralic etymology by Holopainen (2022), shows an unexpected short vowel in Mansi, so the Proto-Uralic origin of the alleged Ugric and Samoyed cognates looks even more uncertain. Some of Helimski’s Ugro-Samoyed suggestions are also not convincing due to phonological problems: Proto-Uralic **āñčā* > Hungarian *egyenes* ‘straight’, Proto-Samoyed **ensā* id. (Helimski 1992–1993: 116) is phonologically problematic: the Samoyed cognates show a disharmonic stem that has no parallels in inherited words; Hungarian vowel *ë* does not fit the reconstruction **ä* given by Helimski. Regarding the uncertain Proto-Uralic **ma* (? **mawi*) ‘today’ suggested by Helimski (1997: 301; 2022: 482), reflected only by Mator *mā* (formally < Proto-Samoyed **mä*) and Hungarian *ma* ‘today’, see Holopainen (2023a: 123).

Tundra Nenets *xuli* (хулы) (Salminen 1998: 272), Forest Nenets *кӱли*, Tundra Enets *kuruke*, *kul'uke* (Helimski En. manuscript), Forest Enets *кӱлке* (Sorokina & Bolina 2001: 59; 2009: 198), *kuljik*, *kurik* (Mikola 1995: 130, No 1394, 131, No 1425), Nganasan *kulaʔa* (Helimski Ng. manuscript) (*кӱлаʔа*) (Kosterkina et al. 2001: 72), Selkup (Taz) *kylä* (cognates in other Selkup dialects are also mentioned; see Alatalo 2004: 341, 2379 s.v. *kulä* for more Selkup data), Kamas *kuli*, *kuuli*, (Kojbal) *kullae* ‘raven’

UEW does not give reconstructions from the intermediary proto-languages, but it should be noted that according to Zhivlov (2006: 171), the Proto-Khanty and Proto-Mansi reconstructions are as follows: Proto-Khanty **kɔ̃lək*, Proto-Mansi **kulāk* (see also Honti 1982: 149 No. 259). The Proto-Samoyed word is reconstructed as **kulâjê* by Janhunen (1977); see below for the discussion of this reconstruction.

It is noted in UEW that it is unclear whether the derivational suffix **-kV* was added to the stem already in Proto-Uralic, but among the Samoyed languages, only Enets reflects a form with a *-kV* suffix. The possibility that the word is originally onomatopoeic is also mentioned.

Similar arguments regarding the origin, distribution, and derivation of the etymology were expressed already in TESz (II: 134), and the same issues are largely repeated by the later Hungarian etymological dictionaries EWUng (570) and ÚESz (s.v. *holló*); the Uralic etymology is also mentioned by DEWOS (487–488). The Uralic etymology has been briefly discussed also by Anikin & Helimski (2007: 202–203) who accept it but note that the Proto-Uralic word is probably originally of onomatopoeic origin.

Both UEW and TESz remark that Munkácsi's (1901: 351) Indo-Iranian etymology for the Uralic word is implausible. Munkácsi had assumed a loanword from an Indo-Iranian form akin to Modern Persian *kalāy* ‘raven’ and Sanskrit *kālaka-* ‘some kind of bird’. Both TESz and UEW considered the loan etymology unlikely mainly due to Samoyed cognates (no certain Indo-Iranian loans with such a distribution in Uralic are known) and also note that similar onomatopoeic words are found in many languages. It can now be added that there are also several phonological problems: the form *kalāy* is Modern Persian and does not have a good Iranian or Indo-European etymology. Assuming an old loan from a modern Iranian form into Proto-Ugric is, of course, problematic. The *l* in Modern Persian has to be a late development and there are no good examples of early Iranian loans showing **l* as this phoneme was missing from the Proto-Iranian vowel inventory (see Holopainen 2019: 202–203, 335). Sanskrit *kālaka-* ‘some kind of bird’: according to EWAia I: 344, s.v. this word is of unknown origin and no connection to the Persian word is mentioned. It is possible that the word is derived from the adjective *kāla-* ‘black’ that is likewise of unknown origin but possibly a Dravidian loan. Anikin & Helimski

(2007: 203) also noted that the Indo-Iranian etymology is unlikely, arguing that the Proto-Uralic word is probably of onomatopoeic origin.

The Uralic etymology is not included in Janhunen’s (1981) or Sammal-lahti’s (1988) discussions of Uralic etymologies but it has received support in various etymological works of the late 20th and early 21st century. Honti (in an article, which originally appeared in 1985; here the 2013 reissue is cited) discusses the etymology in the context of the problems with the reflexes of the cluster **lk* in Hungarian, arguing that a cluster **lk* could be reconstructed for this Proto-Uralic word. Abondolo (1996: 122, No. 413) supports the etymology (and reconstructs **kulki-CV*, following Honti’s idea) but notes the problem with the retained **l* in Samoyed. The idea of **lk* will be discussed below. He also notes problems with the Ob-Ugric vocalism. Riese (2001: 35, 37) mentions the Uralic word **kul₃(-k₃)* as a Proto-Uralic derivative in his presentation of Mansi nominal derivation but does not comment on the etymology in more detail. This word is listed as the only Uralic derivative with a suffix **-k₃*. Róna-Tas & Berta (2011: 1049, 1064, 1279) do not discuss the etymology in detail but mention the Uralic and Ugric origin of Hungarian *holló* (reconstructed as Proto-Ugric **kul₃-k* < Proto-Uralic **kul₃*) in their presentation of Hungarian historical phonology and in their list of Hungarian words of Uralic origin. They support the idea of a Proto-Ugric derivative. The Uralic etymology is also supported by Anikin & Helimski (2007: 202–203), as noted above.

3. Analysis of the etymological data

3.1. The Ugric data

Contrary to what has been claimed earlier (UEW, EWUng), the words in Khanty, Mansi, and Hungarian cannot reflect a Proto-Ugric derivative with a suffix **-kV*. Hungarian *ó* points to a single velar (*holló* < Pre-Hungarian **kulakV* or **kulayV*), whereas both Ob-Ugric cognates show *k* that can only reflect geminate **kk* regularly; a single Proto-Uralic/Proto-Ugric **k* would yield **γ* in Khanty and Mansi (Honti 1999: 139–150; Zhivlov 2023: 143). If the stem itself goes back to Proto-Ugric, the derivatives date to Hungarian and Ob-Ugric.

At first glance, it looks plausible that a Proto-Ugric underived stem **kuli* could be reconstructed. The Ob-Ugric cognates, Proto-Khanty **k₃l₃ak* and Proto-Mansi **kulāk*, could reflect a Proto-Uralic **u_i* stem (cf. Zhivlov 2006: 170–171): the Ob-Ugric vocalism is similar to the reflexes of Proto-Uralic **kudi-* ‘spawn’, **kum₃ci* ‘twenty’ (cf. Aikio 2013: 13–14). Based on these, a Proto-Ugric **kuli* could then be reconstructed.

It is well-known that Hungarian *o* goes regularly back to Uralic **u*; however, it is debated whether **u* > *o* would be regular in the reflexes of old

i-stems in Hungarian. According to Sammallahti (1988: 501, 514), who reconstructs complicated conditions for the development of **u* in Ugric, Uralic **i*-stems should not yield *o* in Hungarian. It is true that there are few unambiguous cases of PU **u* > Hungarian *o* in *i*-stems, but some possible examples can be found, at least **kuri* ‘steep hillside’ > Hungarian (dial.) *horhó* ‘road in a mountain pass’ (Aikio 2013: 13). It is also true, however, that most of the Hungarian correspondences of etymologies showing Proto-Khanty **ṣ*, Proto-Mansi **u* (Zhivlov 2006 reconstructs Proto-Ob-Ugric **ū* in these cases) do not show *o* in Hungarian. Also, according to Zhivlov (2023: 142), in Uralic **u_i* stems Hungarian *u* ~ *ú* is the regular reflex, not *o*.

Regarding the geminate **ll* in Hungarian, it is noted by UEW, TESz, and later Hungarian dictionaries that Hungarian *ll* is the result of a secondary gemination in an intervocalic position (see also Bárczi 1958: 142, where *holló* is discussed as a case of secondary gemination). This is a possible explanation but the issue is not quite clear; Molnár (2003: 207–208) notes that in Old Hungarian, many words that in the present language have *ll* or *rr* still had only a single consonant that was later geminated in intervocalic position. It is, however, doubtful whether the Old Hungarian writing conventions can be trusted on this issue, as *ll* and *rr* in many cases correspond to Proto-Uralic **lk* or **rk* (for example, PU **wolka* ‘shoulder’ > Hungarian *váll*, PU **worka* ‘sew’ > Hungarian *varr*).³ Old Hungarian *Holo* (> *holló*) in the 13th century is also mentioned by Bárczi (1958: 142) as such a case. It is true that in Hungarian dialects, the secondary gemination is widespread, but in the cases where a geminate is found in all dialects it seems that it corresponds regularly to a Proto-Uralic **lk* or **rk* cluster. The geminate *ll* in Hungarian could perhaps be an indication of an old cluster in this word, meaning that the Pre-Hungarian reconstruction would be **kulkVkv* or **kulyVkv*; this would not be comparable with the Ob-Ugric comparanda. Contrary to what Honti (2013: 123) claims, the Ob-Ugric words have to reflect single **l* and not a cluster **lk*, as this would yield a metathesis in both Khanty and Mansi, and we would expect a consonantal reflex of **k* to survive (Zhivlov 2023: 143); compare the well-known examples PU **kulki*- > Eastern Khanty *кӱгал*- ‘stride’, PU **tulka* ‘feather’ > Eastern Mansi *towl*, Eastern Khanty *tõgal*.

3. There are some examples of single *l* in modern Hungarian corresponding to Proto-Uralic **lk*. It is possible that there is some conditioning factor here; a good example of single *l* is Hungarian *jel* ‘sign’, from Proto-Uralic **jälki* ‘trace’ and *világ* ‘light’ < Proto-Uralic **welki* ‘white, glowing’, and in such cases one could suppose that single *l* is the regular reflex in old **i*-stems. Hungarian *szál* ‘splitter’, *szálfa* ‘timber’ < Proto-Uralic **čelkaw* would be an example of *l* in an old *a*-stem but Metsäranta (2020: 158) notes that some of the nouns included in the Uralic comparanda might include relatives of the verb **čeli*- ‘cut’, meaning that the Uralic background of Hungarian *szál* requires

3.2. The Samoyed data

Janhunen (1977: 77) reconstructs the Proto-Samoyed word for ‘raven’ as **kulâjâ*; according to Tapani Salminen (personal communication), this could be better rendered as something like **kulij*. Janhunen also gives “(onom.)” next to the reconstruction, assuming that the Proto-Samoyed word is of onomatopoeic origin. Anikin & Helinski (2007: 202–203), who discuss the etymology briefly, give a Proto-Samoyed reconstruction **kul3* but note also that it might have been just **kul-*. As Abondolo (1996) has noted, Proto-Samoyed **l* is problematic here, as the Proto-Uralic **l* should become Proto-Samoyed **j*; there are conditions for Proto-Uralic **l* to be retained as Proto-Samoyed **l* but this etymology does not fit those conditions. **l* is retained before Uralic **-a, -ä*, but the word for ‘raven’ cannot be reconstructed as a Proto-Uralic/Pre-Samoyed **a*-stem: in *a*-stems, Proto-Uralic **u* yields Samoyed **â* (Zhivlov 2023: 152), so the vocalism instead points to an old **i*-stem. In Uralic **i*-stems, **u* is retained as Proto-Samoyed **u* in closed syllables and before Uralic **l*. This etymology would otherwise fit the last rule but the **l > *l* is irregular here. Samoyed vocalism could reflect an old **u_i* stem but the *l* is problematic in this case. Contrary to what is claimed by Honti (2003: 123), the Samoyed cognates cannot go back to a Uralic form with a cluster **lk*; this cluster should yield **j* or zero in Proto-Samoyed but it cannot be retained as **l* (Zhivlov 2023: 150). All of this means that a Proto-Samoyed reconstruction such as **kulij* cannot regularly reflect the Proto-Uralic **kuli*, which could be reconstructed based on the Ob-Ugric (and perhaps Hungarian) forms.

The internal relations between the Samoyed cognates are regular concerning the first syllable but the second syllable vocalism and the possible derivational suffix show unclear correspondences. According to Janhunen (1977: 77), it is unclear whether a Proto-Samoyed derivative can be reconstructed: it is noted by Janhunen (1977) that the Nganasan cognate (perhaps) lacks the derivational suffix. However, the long vowel in the second syllable of the Nganasan word *kulaa* (contrary to the form *kula* given by UEW) makes this impossible and shows that the Pre-Nganasan/Proto-Samoyed pre-form of the word has to be **kulajV*. The variant *kulaʔa* with a glottal stop poses problems as this cannot be regularly derived from **kulajV*. It is possible that *kulaʔa* is an augmentative of *kulaa* with secondary shortening of the long *aa* because of phonotactics.⁴

further research. (See also Holopainen 2021: 206–207 and references there regarding the possible Indo-European origin of Proto-Uralic **ćelkaw*.)

4. I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers and to Kaisla Kaheinen for pointing out problems with the Nganasan word to me.

It is also clear that *-ke* in the Enets cognates is an additional derivational suffix; it should also be noted that the *l* in Enets words is irregular, as this cannot reflect Proto-Samoyed single **l* which merged with **r* in Enets (Mikola 2004: 66). However, forms with *r* are also found in both Enets languages (see above), and in Castrén's original notes only forms with *r* are found (see Mikola 1995: 130, No 1394, 131, No 1425), so the *l* forms are probably secondary in Enets. Although the derivational processes in individual Samoyed languages require more research, it is apparent that the words reflect different derivatives and only the first syllable **kul-* could be unambiguously reconstructed for Proto-Samoyed.

4. Conclusions

No Proto-Uralic form can be assumed to account for the Ugric and Samoyed words discussed here; while a Proto-Samoyed word **kulVj* can be reconstructed, it is debatable whether a Proto-Ugric word can be reconstructed at all. As the derivational elements in the Ugric comparisons are also of different origin, it also remains possible that the words in Hungarian, Khanty, and Mansi are parallel loanwords from some unknown source. It is quite probable that many of the shared words in Ugric are parallel loanwords or Wanderwörter, and these include the animal names *hód* ~ Eastern Mansi *k_ontal* 'beaver' and Hungarian *hattyú* ~ Northern Khanty *χōtəŋ* ~ Northern Mansi *χatan* 'swan' (Holopainen 2023b).

It is difficult to assess whether the words could be originally onomatopoeic formations (as noted by earlier sources like UEW) but in the context of a bird name this idea is plausible. However, it is clear that the word is not a Proto-Uralic word of onomatopoeic origin as claimed by UEW. It is interesting that the other allegedly Uralic word for 'raven' – **kVrnVš* 'raven' (Aikio 2013) – shows irregular correspondences and is limited to western (Finno-Permic) languages; the Samoyed cognates presented in UEW are not included in the comparison by Aikio (2013), and the cognacy has been criticized also by Salminen (2010: 344–347). As even the Finno-Permic cognates display unclear vowel correspondences, it is disputed whether this word really can be reconstructed even to some intermediary proto-language level. In any case, because of these irregularities it cannot be assumed that **kVrnVš* or the like would have been the original Uralic word for 'raven' that would have then been replaced by later loanwords in the Ugric and Samoyed languages.

As is discussed by Salminen (2010: 347–352), onomatopoeic explanations are frequent in explaining bird names, sometimes adequately. However, it is debatable whether **kulV* or the like would fit the sounds made by a raven; for the time being, this solution does not appear likely.

Although suggesting loanwords from unknown sources is often not an ideal solution in etymological research, in a case like this, I believe it to be a plausible idea to suggest that the words for 'raven' in Hungarian, Khanty, Mansi, and in Proto-Samoyed are either separately borrowed from some unknown language of Northern Eurasia or the word has been borrowed into one of these Uralic languages and then diffused between the already separated eastern varieties of Uralic.

Vaguely similar words in some other languages of Siberia have been noted, as discussed by Anikin & Helimski (2007: 202–203): the Nenets word has been compared with Evenki *ōlū* 'raven' (< Proto-Tungusic **xōlī* according to Anikin & Helimski) by Pevnov (1985) but a borrowing in either direction is ruled out by Anikin & Helimski because there are no parallels to Proto-Samoyed **k* corresponding to Proto-Tungusic **x* in loanwords. Onomatopoeic origin is claimed for both words by Anikin & Helimski, who also mention Ket *'kil'* 'raven' as a similar onomatopoeic formation. It can of course be possible that all of these words are of independent onomatopoeic origin, but it is not at all clear whether these words reflect the onomatopoeic conventions of the languages in question and whether **kul-* or something similar can imitate the sound made by a raven. It would be interesting to investigate the history of these words, as well as the words for 'raven' in other languages of Siberia, in more detail but this remains a task for further research. For the time being, a borrowing from an unknown source remains a possible solution for the words for 'raven' in Ugric and Samoyed.

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