

# Proto-Uralic

Community of Practice in Uralic Studies (COPIUS)  
Foundations of Uralic etymology

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# Phonology of Proto-Uralic

## a) consonants

| Stops    | sibilants    | affricates | nasals   | liquids  | spirants  | semi-vowels |
|----------|--------------|------------|----------|----------|-----------|-------------|
| <i>k</i> | <i>s</i>     | <i>č</i>   | <i>m</i> | <i>l</i> | <i>š</i>  |             |
| <i>t</i> | <i>ś</i>     | <i>ć</i>   | <i>n</i> | <i>r</i> | <i>š'</i> | <i>j</i>    |
| <i>p</i> | ( <i>š</i> ) |            | <i>ń</i> |          |           | <i>w</i>    |
|          |              |            | <i>ŋ</i> |          | <i>x</i>  |             |

## b) vowels

### 1st syllable

|          |          |              |
|----------|----------|--------------|
| <i>i</i> | <i>u</i> | ( <i>ü</i> ) |
| <i>e</i> | <i>o</i> | <i>ë</i>     |
| <i>a</i> | <i>ä</i> |              |

### 2nd syllable

|            |
|------------|
| <i>i/i</i> |
| <i>a/ä</i> |

# Notation I

- ‘ on top of letters (ś, ṅ) denotes palatalization
- ð = dental spirant (same phoneme as in English *th: the, that*), often also marked as d
- x or γ = velar spirant (same place of articulation as in *k* or *g*, but with constricted air flow that causes friction)
- w = bilabial, same phoneme as in English *what, where*
- č (c) = a so-called back or “cacuminal” affricate
- ć = palatal affricate

## Notation II

- ü = close labial front vowel, <y> in Finnish orthography
- ĩ (i) = close illabial mid vowel, close to Russian <ы>
- ë (e) = central illabial mid vowel

on the 2nd syllable notation:

- in most words only two possibilities, a close vowel i/i (traditionally e, nowadays sometimes also a reduced ə) or an open vowel ä/a whose frontness/backness is determined by vowel harmony
- the front-back distinction of i/i is often omitted in notation, cf. PU \**kamti* 'lid' (it would be more precise to reconstruct \**kamti*, but given that the vowel harmony is an automatic and predictable process it's not always implicitly marked)

# Proto-Uralic phonotaxis

- canonical 2-syllable structure (C)V(C)CV
- pronouns can be monosyllabic, a few 3-syllabic words are also reconstructable, perhaps originally derivations
- suffixes typically (C)CV(C?)
- second-syllable vowels determined by vowel harmony
- stress on first syllable
- long mid vowels in Finnic, \**ee*, \**oo*, were thought to arise from the vocalization of an earlier \**x*, PU \**käxli* 'language, tongue' > PF \**keeli* (Janhunen, Sammallahti), but nowadays long mid vowels are more commonly seen as a Proto-Finnic innovation (so-called Lehtinen's law, PU \**käli* > PF \**keeli*)

# Proto-Uralic morphology

## Cases

|                          |             |                                  |
|--------------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|
| sg                       | pl          |                                  |
| N -                      | - <i>t</i>  | > Fi NOM                         |
| G - <i>n</i>             | ?- <i>j</i> | > Fi GEN                         |
| A - <i>m</i>             | ?- <i>j</i> | > Fi ACC                         |
| L - <i>nA</i>            |             | > Fi ESS, INESS, ADESS           |
| Abl - <i>tA</i>          |             | > Fi PART, ELAT, ABL             |
| D/Lat - <i>kV, -ŋ, n</i> |             | > Fi GEN?, ILL, ALL              |
| carit. - <i>ktA</i>      |             | > Fi ABESS carit. suf.<br>ktVmV- |

# Proto-Uralic morphology II

“finite conjugation”

1. *-m -mAjn -mAt*
2. *-n / -t -tAjn -tAt*
3. *- -kV -t*

Proto-uralic had three series of possessive suffixes that had arisen from personal pronouns through agglutination (*-mV*, *-tV*, *-sV*). Dual possessive suffixes were marked by *-n* and plural possessive suffixes by *-t*



# Proto-Uralic morphology III

Several infinite verb endings can be reconstructed for Proto-Uralic:

- *-jV* *-mA* *-sA* *-ktAmA* *-k* *-pA* *-tA*
- imperative *k*, *-kA*, conditional *-ne*
- ?basic word order SOV
- postpositions, no prepositions
- ?3rd person clauses were nominal (*\*lintu lentäpä = lintu lentää*).
- unclear whether adjectives and adverbs formed their independent word classes