

Terms of relatedness in Central Eurasia

(a pilot study)

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Terms of social relations are lexical items denoting various kinds of interdependence and interaction among people in a society: words denoting sex and age (e.g., man, woman, child), kinship terms (e.g., mother, father, son, daughter), and terms of social hierarchy (e.g., lords, lady, servant).

Although most of these words belong to the core vocabulary, evidence distinctly shows that they are prone to influence through language contact. In many languages of Eurasia there is a tendency of borrowing terms denoting non-primary collateral relatives or distant relatives in general (cf. Matras 2010: 82). Terms denoting aunts and uncles are especially subject to this kind of borrowing. For example, both English *aunt* and *uncle* (Durkin 2014: 421ff.) and the respective

German terms *Tante* and *Onkel* are loanwords from French. Terms for primary relatives are more stable but can also be displaced by borrowings. For example, Eng. *sister* is more likely a loanword from Scandinavian rather than a regular continuation of Old Eng. *sweoster* or *swuster* (cf. Durkin 2014: 198&421).

Language contact (along with other factors such as articulatory peculiarities of “baby talk”) is also involved in the astonishing spread of so-called “nursery terms” among genetically unrelated languages. The most well-known examples are the forms *mama* and *papa* denoting parents or grandparents in many languages of the world as well as *anna* (mother) and *atta* (father) in the languages of Central Eurasia.

Our hypothesis is that this contradictory situation has two main reasons. Firstly, terms of social relations share certain features with personal names (cf., categorising and characterising people). Borrowing of personal names is often a matter of ideology, prestige, or fashion (e.g., biblical/Jewish names displaced many pagan names in Christian societies, as did Arabic names in Muslim societies). Similar phenomena might take place in the field of kinship and social terms. Secondly, such borrowings can be a result of contamination in the process of code-switching in (especially pre-literate) bi-/multilingual communities, which is a very common feature of Central Eurasia.

Kinship terms of Indo-Iranian origin in Uralic

The loanwords reflect several different layers of Indo-Iranian borrowings into Proto-Uralic and its various branches, starting from Proto-Indo-Iranian loans. Some terms denoting kinship relations were borrowed from Alanian-type language into Hungarian and Permic and possibly into Ob-Ugric at a relatively late period.

In addition to Indo-Iranian loans, various Germanic and Baltic kinship terms were borrowed into the westernmost Uralic branches Finnic and Saami (LÄGLOS; SSA; Junttila 2015).

Convincing etymologies

Hungarian *asszony* ‘lady, mistress, wife’ (OHu *Ahchyn*, *achfin*)

← Alanian **(a)χšaina-*, > Oss *æfšīn* ‘mistress of the house’

This is a well-established and convincing etymology (Munkácsi 1901; Joki 1973: 253; EWUng s.v. *asszony*).

Mordvin E *mīrd’ē*, M *mīrd’ä* ‘man, husband’; Udmurt *murt*, Komi *mort* id. < PU **mertä*

← PII *mṛta-* ‘dead, mortal’ > OI *mṛtā-* ‘dead, mortal’ and *amṛta-* ‘immortal’, Av. *amaša-* ‘id.’ (cf. Gr. *βροτός* ‘mortal’) (NIL 489ff. With references)

PU **mertä* is borrowed from PII **mṛta-* with **er* as the substitution of **r* (Koivulehto 1999: 229). Finnish *marras* (< PFI **martas*) ‘dead’ is a parallel borrowing from Indo-Iranian.

Mordvin E *sazor* ‘younger sister’; Ud *suzer* id., Ko *sozor* ‘knitting mistake’ < PU **sasarV*

← PII **swasar-* > OI *svásar-* ‘sister’

The Mordvin and Permic words for ‘younger sister’ regularly reflect **sasarV*, clearly an old borrowing from PII **swasar-* to PU (Korenchy 1972; Joki 1973; Rédei 1986; UEW s.v. **sasarV*). Mari E *sūžar*, W *šžar* ‘jüngere Schwester’ has been derived from the same proto-form (UEW), but because of irregular vocalism it has to be a separate borrowing from some other branch of Indo-European, possibly from Baltic **sesor-*. It is well-known that the Baltic word for ‘sister’ was borrowed into Finnic (Fi *sisar*, Livonian *sezār* etc. reflect parallel borrowings according to Kallio 2017). Komi *sozor* shows a peculiar semantic development, but is phonologically regular cognate of Udmurt *suzar*.

Finnish *orpo* ‘orphan’, *orpana* ‘cousin, relative’, *orvas* ‘relative’; Saami (N) *oarbbis* ‘orphan; lonely and deserted’, *oarbbinaččat* (pl.) ‘siblings’; Mordvin E *urus*, *uros*, M *uras* ‘orphan’, ? E *urva*, M *äiva* ‘wife’; ? Mari E *rbeze*, W *ərbeze* ‘young, new; young boy, child’; Hungarian *árva*; Khanty (V) (*jəŋk-jurwi* ‘orphan’); < PU **orpV*

← PII **(H)arbhā-* > OI *árbhā-* ‘small, weak’

This is a certain Indo-European borrowing, usually assumed to be from Indo-Iranian. PU **o* from PII **a* is a frequent sound substitution. Reconstructing the PU forms is difficult because of various derivational suffixes in the modern forms; some of the formally and semantically divergent forms might result from later parallel borrowings from Iranian.

Komi *verēs* ‘husband’ (< derived from *ver* ‘man’)

← PII/PI **wiHra-* > OI *virá-* ‘man’

The Komi word has a cognate in Udmurt *vor-goron* ‘man’ (Zhivlov 2010). The borrowing into Permic has to be relatively early because it predates the Permic vowel-shifts. The etymology was first presented by Munkácsi (1901) but in many etymological sources the Komi word is connected with Finnish *orja* ‘slave’, Udmurt *var* id. and their cognates in Uralic (UEW s.v. **orja*), which cannot be correct because of irregular vowel relations.

Kinship terms of Turkic and Mongolic origin in New Persian and Uralic

Turkic			Indo-European (New Persian)			Uralic		Other attestations
Turkish	Tatar	Chuvash	Farsi	Dari	Tajik	Mari	Udmurt	
<i>aba</i> ‘elder sister; mother’ (dial.)	<i>āpa</i> ‘elder sister; aunt’	<i>apay</i> ‘mother’ (dial.)	<i>āpa</i> ‘mother’ (dial.)	<i>āpa</i> ‘elder sister’ (col.)	<i>apa</i> (col.) ‘elder sister’ (< Uzbek)	<i>āba(y)</i> ‘mother’ (< Chuvash)	<i>apa(y)</i> ‘elder sister/aunt’ (< Chuvash)	Mordvin <i>ava(y)</i> ‘mother’
		<i>akka</i> ‘elder sister; aunt’	<i>aka</i> ‘elder sister; aunt’ (in Medieval sources) (< Seljuk)		<i>aka</i> ‘elder brother’ (< Uzbek)	<i>aka(y)</i> ‘elder sister; aunt (younger than parent)’ (< Chuvash)	<i>aka</i> ‘elder sister; aunt’ (dial.) (< Chuvash)	Moksha <i>aka</i> ‘elder sister; aunt’
<i>ağa</i> ‘lord’; <i>ağabey</i> ‘elder brother’	<i>āga(y)</i> ‘uncle; elder brother’ (‘elder brother’ in dialects)		<i>āgā</i> ‘lord; father’ (col.) (< Mongolic)	<i>āgā</i> / <i>āgā</i> ‘lord, father/elder brother (head of the family)’	<i>oğō</i> ‘lord’	<i>kajin-aga</i> ‘wife’s elder brother’ (< Tatar)	<i>agay</i> ‘elder brother/uncle’	
<i>bacanak</i> ‘wife’s sister’s husband’	<i>bācanaq</i> ‘wife’s sister’s husband’ (dial.)	<i>pušana</i> ‘wife’s sister’s husband’	<i>bājenāq</i> ‘wife’s sister’s husband’			<i>posana</i> ‘wife’s sister’s husband’ (< Chuvash)	<i>bušon(o)</i> ‘wife’s sister’s husband’ (< Chuvash)	Bulgarian <i>bajanak</i> ‘wife’s sister’s husband’
<i>kayın</i> ‘in-law’, <i>kaynata</i> ‘father-in-law’, etc.	<i>qāyınata</i> ‘husband’s father’	<i>xuñi</i> ‘wife’s father’			<i>qaini</i> ‘wife’s brother’ (< Uzbek)	<i>oño</i> ‘father-in-law’ (< Chuvash); <i>kajin-aga</i> ‘wife’s elder brother’ (< Tatar)		
<i>yenge</i> ‘brother’s wife; uncle’s wife’	<i>cingāy</i> ‘elder brother’s wife’	<i>inje</i> ‘elder brother’s wife’	<i>yanga</i> ‘brother’s wife’ (in Medieval sources) (< Chagatai)	<i>yanga</i> ‘brother’s wife’	<i>yanga</i> ‘brother’s wife’ (< Chagatai)	<i>yenga</i> ‘elder brother’s wife’ (< Tatar)	<i>erengey</i> ‘aunt’ (Beserman) (< Chuvash)	Mansi <i>injk</i> ‘sister-in-law’ (< ?Tatar)
<i>anne</i> ‘mother’	<i>āna</i> ‘mother’	<i>anne</i> ‘mother’	<i>āna</i> ‘mother’ (in Medieval sources)		<i>ona</i> ‘mother’ (< Uzbek)		<i>anay</i> ‘mother’ (< Tatar)	Oss. <i>æna</i> ‘mother’
<i>ata</i> ‘father’	<i>āta</i> ‘father’	<i>atte</i> ‘father’	<i>atā</i> ‘father’ (in Medieval sources)			<i>ača(y)</i> ‘father’ (< ?Chuvash)	<i>atay</i> ‘father’ (< Tatar)	Oss. <i>æda</i> ‘father’
<i>baba</i> ‘father’	<i>bāba(y)</i> ‘grandfather’		<i>bābā(i)</i> ‘father; grandfather’	<i>bābā(i)</i> ‘father; grandfather’	<i>bābā(i)</i> ‘father; grandfather’		<i>babay</i> ‘grandfather’	Kurdish, Ossetic <i>baba</i> ‘father’

Komi *zon* ‘son’ (< Pre-Permic **zana*)

← Iranian **zana-* (from PIE **ǵenh₃-*, > Oss *zænæg* ‘son’)

This is a relatively late Iranian borrowing from Iranian because of Komi *z-* and the vocalism (Lytkin 1999; Koivulehto 2001b).

Doubtful etymologies

Hungarian *ara* ‘bride’; (OHu) brother of mother or sister’; Khanty (O) *ordi*, (Kaz.) *worti* ‘mother’s younger brother’; Mansi (L) *ār*, *oār*, LO *ār* ‘relative from mother’s or wife’s side’

← ? Alanian **awra-* ~ **arwa-* ‘brother’ > Oss *rvad*, *ærvadæ* (< PI **brātar-*)

Contrary to the claims by Korenchy (1972) these words cannot be regularly derived from a common Proto-Ugric form. Already Sköld (1920) considered this etymology uncertain because of phonological reasons. The Hungarian, Khanty and Mansi words might be parallel borrowings from Alanian; the forms in most Khanty languages include a derivational suffix *-ti*, also underived forms are found in at least Northern Khanty (*ṛn-ṛ* ‘daughter of the oldest sister’; DEWOS: 182).

Hungarian *húg* ‘younger sister’

← ? Iranian/Alanian **hwhā-* ‘sister’, cf. Oss (Iron) *xo* (< PII **swasar-*)

An old but problematic etymology (Munkácsi 1901). Already Ásboth (1905) noted that the problematic Hungarian suffix *-g* cannot be explained from the Iranian forms. The Iranian etymology remains uncertain, but there is no competing convincing etymology for the Hungarian word.

Mari E *mariy*, W *marā* ‘man, husband; Mari (ethnonym)’

← ? Iranian **marya-*, cf. OI *mārya-* ‘young man’

This is an old etymology (Munkácsi 1901; Jacobsohn 1922) but because of Mari *a* (which cannot reflect Pre-Mari **a*) this remains uncertain (Joki 1973: 280). The borrowing from Iranian should be very late (after the Proto-Mari period, so not earlier than 1000 years ago) which is geographically problematic.

Hungarian *özvegy* ‘widow’, dial. *ögyvesz*, *ögyvezd*

← ? Alanian **widwæz* (PII **HwidhawaH-*) > Ossetic *idæz* id.

Munkácsi’s (1901) etymology has not been accepted by most etymological dictionaries of Hungarian but is supported by Joki (1973). If the form *özvegy* of the literary language results from metathesis and the dialectal forms are more archaic, the etymology is likely. Hungarian **ö* can be regularly explained from earlier **wi-*.

Mansi (LU) *pañt*, (LO, So) *pānt* ‘the husband of older sister’

← ? Iranian **banda-* > OP *bandaka-* ‘liegeman’

The etymology (Munkácsi 1901) is semantically possible (a general meaning of ‘relative’ can have developed a more specific meaning in Mansi), but palatal *ñ* is difficult to explain from the Iranian form (as noted by Korenchy 1972: 63). If the etymology is correct, the Mansi word is probably a relatively late Iranian loan.

Improbable etymologies

Udmurt *ken*, *kenak* ‘daughter-in-law’

← ? Iranian/Alanian cf. Oss. *kyñz*, *kinzæ* ‘bride, daughter-in-law’ (< PII **kan(H)ihān-*)

While the Iranian etymology (Oranskij 1979: 43) is formally and semantically fitting, the Udmurt word also has a convincing Turkic etymology (< Chuvash *kin* ‘daughter-in-law’; Wichmann 1903: 71; Doerfer 1963–75: 1700) which seems more probable due to the intensive contacts between Chuvash and Udmurt. Udmurt *e* often corresponds to Chuvash *i* in loanwords (Wichmann 1903).

Finnish *isä* ‘father’; Saami (Kld) *g ʒʒ id.*; Mordvin M *ocā* ‘father’s older brother’; Mari E *iza*, W *azā* ‘older brother; father’s younger brother’; Hungarian *ős* ‘ancestor’ (< ? OHu *iēmucut* ‘our father’; Mansi *ās* ‘mother’s father’ < ? PU **icā*)

← ? PII **Hi-Hi-* > OI *īs-* M ‘lord’

The etymology (Tunkelo 1913; Koivulehto 2001a) should be rejected: many of the Uralic forms are so irregular that it is impossible to derive them from PU. The possibility of parallel borrowings from Indo-Iranian remains, but this seems also unlikely, as the consonantism (**č*) of the Uralic forms shows that the possible borrowing would have to be very early.

Koivulehto has considered the Samoyedic word for ‘father’ (Tundra Nenets *nise* < PS **eysä* < PU/Pre-Sa **äycā*) a parallel borrowing from and Indo-Iranian form with full-grade diphthong **ai-*, but this seems unlikely: the assumed form with full-grade is unattested in Indo-Iranian, and this would have probably given **ay*, not **äy* in Pre-Samoyedic. Furthermore, the Nganasan cognate (*yase*) is irregular and points to PS **yesä*. The Finnic word *isäntä* ‘master’, probably an opaque derivative of *isä* ‘father’, has also been considered an independent borrowing from the same Indo-Iranian root (from the unattested participle PII **ičant-* > Iranian **isant-*), but taken into account the problems with **icā*, this is unconvincing too.

Lexical age distinction for siblings in some Turkic, Mongolic, Uralic, and Indo-European languages

Note the proliferation of a lexical distinction between younger and elder siblings in Eastern Europe as well as Western and Central Asia, relatively unconnected to the genealogical classification of a language. As regards Turkic loan words used here in Uralic and Persian, see below.

