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HUNGARIAN HISTORICAL ANTHROPNOMY  
WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF LANGUAGE THEORY  
AND THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE

*Abstract.* In this paper I wish to present a general (theory-historical) overview of Hungarian historical anthroponymy in the past one hundred years. I do believe that through a thorough examination of the language-theoretic and methodological background of Hungarian historical anthroponymy, one can come closer to the solution of several problems relating to the investigation of old anthroponyms, and mainly name etymologies.

In this overview of Hungarian historical anthroponymy I use the non-cumulative form of science history writing as opposed to the classical positivist historical descriptions of linguistics. Applying this unordinary approach, it is possible to shed light on so far unmentioned language-theoretic and methodological interrelations in the field of anthroponymy.

1. In this paper I wish to present a general (theory-historical) overview of Hungarian historical anthroponymy in the past one hundred years. I think that, beyond providing an insight into the procedures of historical anthroponymy in Hungary, such a presentation, through its general nature (and through analysing the teaching of the Hungarian example), might prove useful for onomastic researches in other languages, as well.

2. The usual form of science history writing is positivist in nature and presumes the continuous accumulation of knowledge. Nevertheless, in this language-theoretic overview of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian historical anthroponymy research, I am going to use the non-cumulative alternative of science history writing opposed to the above-mentioned classical model. Due to this unusual method, it becomes possible to shed light on numerous language-theoretic and methodological interrelations which can be considered to be new, i. e. previously unobserved in Hungarian onomastics, and which primarily concern name etymologies.

The starting points of my theory-historical overview are THOMAS S. KUHN's science-philosophical theory published in 1962 and the 1997 typology by VERA BÉKÉS originating from KUHN's work. According to these models and abandoning the theory of accumulation, I assume that the development of science consists of alternations of incommensurable view systems, so-called paradigms, showing essential differences in their pre-

suppositions. However, in a somewhat different way from the above-mentioned models, in my overview a major role, implying inner contradictions, is given to those inclusions of the view systems defeated in the battle of paradigms, which were preserved in the dominant paradigm that became canonized as science.

When applying this point of view to the 20<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian historical anthroponymy research, I will take, relying on BÉKÉS's work, the results of WITTGENSTEIN's distinction between private and non-private language viewpoints as paradigm-determining features (1952).

3. Looking at present-day Hungarian historical anthroponymy research from this point of view, one can see that the view which is dominant in this scientific field nowadays dates back one and a half centuries. From the battle of the paradigms in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, approximately by the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, exactly the same private language philosophy triumphed over the other, which can be considered dominant even today.

Although, in other fields of Hungarian onomastics, the two schools of the private view (neogrammarianism, and then the structural view) have been present during these nearly one and a half centuries, historical anthroponymy can be considered to be much more homogeneous in this respect. This field of onomastics is still today dominated by analytical and positivist-based neogrammarianism.

4. I wish to analyze the reasons for this sort of homogeneity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century neogrammarianism-dominated Hungarian historical anthroponymy from a language-philosophical point of view. Doing so, I believe that it is advisable to start from the issue of how the positivist concept, which is characteristic of this view of language, has become dominant in Hungary, and how the forms of basic neogrammarian principles and methods, which are in use even today, have evolved.

Due to the neogrammarian nature or, in a wider sense, the positivist characteristic of Hungarian historical anthroponymy, the attention of this overview will be focused mainly on name etymology which is the most characteristic genre of analytical onomastics.

5. Although all etymological assumptions, intentionally or unintentionally, are based on the researchers' sense of language, the representatives of the two view systems see the scientific applicability of this factor in a different way. While the romantic-liberal (i. e. non-private) etymologists base their research largely on natural sense of (mother) language, the followers of the private view, due to their faith in objective truth, strive to exclude this consideration to the greatest extent possible, and thus, they base their findings primarily on data and the interrelations that can be drawn from

data and that are determined by private (i. e. Cartesian) presuppositions.

6. In the etymologies of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century both aspects were present. In the etymologies of the turn of the century, however, it was the private view that became dominant, i. e. the one that became the only accepted representative of science. Some traces of the battle between the paradigms can only be observed in the aftermath of the “Magyar nyelvtörténeti szótár a legrégebb nyelvemlékektől a nyelvújításig” [“Dictionary of Hungarian Language History from the Earliest Linguistic Records up until Neology”] edited by ZSIGMOND SIMONYI and GÁBOR SZARVAS (1890, 1891, 1893). ALADÁR BALLAGI’s 1903 critique of this work is the last episode of the 19<sup>th</sup> century paradigmatic battles, which took place between BALLAGI’s father and GÁBOR SZARVAS earlier and which concerned mostly other issues of linguistics.

The overwhelming response of the positivist view to ALADÁR BALLAGI’s critique was given by JÁNOS MELICH, who, in his writings “Laikusok évada” [“The Season of Laymen”] (1904a) and “Ritus explorandae veritatis” (1904b), considered BALLAGI’s non-positivist ways of reading (and explanations) of proper names as simply amateurish. This attitude of MELICH is well reflected in the titles of his above-mentioned writings.

The dominant positivist view became monarch in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its etymological interest and, connected to this, the motivating effect of historical toponomastics were so favourable to the analytical school of anthroponymy that it began to improve rapidly and, by the 1920s, mainly due to the writings of JÁNOS MELICH, ZOLTÁN GOMBOCZ and DEZSŐ PAIS, it became well established even with respect to the scientific principles and methods of this paradigm.

7. The private language concept characterizing the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century typically manifests itself in the neogrammarian name explanations, as the authors of these etymologies consider natural languages fundamentally homogeneous. Thus, they can notice language changes only in a temporal, or maybe in an areal aspect. However, they interpret these two types of heterogeneity in a restricted sense, within a Cartesian framework.

According to the non-private view, language can be grasped only in its dynamism, while positivists view the natural heterogeneity of language (including proper names) as fairly static, i. e. they describe temporal change as some kind of movement from one homogeneous state to another equally homogeneous one. The special, private interpretation of areal heterogeneity is primarily shown in that the authors of positivist etymologies draw a distinct borderline between the languages. This way of etymologizing creates the dichotomy of forms of inner origin and of foreign etymon in all etymologies. The dialects within a language are viewed in a similar

way, since they are considered to be fundamentally homogeneous and more or less firmly distinct from each other.

The basic methodological principle of positivist etymologies is also of Cartesian nature: according to the non-private view, language (and proper name) change can be brought about by every factor that can influence an individual's life, while private etymologies are based on the neogrammarian presupposition of mechanical, speaker-independent sound changes, i. e. on the presumptive existence of sound laws.

This is well reflected in a 1913 etymology by JÁNOS MELICH. According to this explanation the Old Hungarian anthroponym *Ajton* [ɔjton]<sup>1</sup> ~ *Ajtony* [ɔjtõ] can be traced back to the forms *Achtum* [ɔxtum] ~ *Obtum* [oxtum], whose consonant-connection including a (palato)velar voiceless spirant [x]<sup>2</sup> and a [t] originated from [lt] and then, by a regular sound change, it became [jt]. Since neogrammarians consider the changes [u] ~ [i]<sup>3</sup> > [u] and [n] > [m] as natural, MELICH draws the conclusion that the anthroponym *Ajtony* is of Turkish origin, because, along the same lines, it can be connected to the Turkish common noun *altın* [altɪn]<sup>4</sup> 'gold' and to Turkish anthroponyms including this word as an anterior constituent.

However, it could be instructive to have a look at the aftermath of this anthroponym explanation. MELICH's *Ajtony*-etymology received a lot of criticism based on the same methodology immediately after its publication (cf. for example BEKE 1914, GOMBOCZ 1914a, 1914b: 341–2, MADZSAR 1914, PRÖHLE 1913) and, at the end of 1913, the author himself slightly modified his view (GOMBOCZ-MELICH 1914-1930: 41). These two facts are indicative of the general application of this neogrammarian principle of explanation and, at the same time, its vagueness.

8. Considering all these factors it is not surprising that neogrammarian methodology received criticism as early as the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This did not remain without effect: due to the critical remarks, the

<sup>1</sup> It is crucial to know the phonetic background of the linguistic examples in order to comprehend the neogrammarian argument presenting the conception of sound laws. Although it is not authentic, I am going to provide these here and hereafter with their IPA-transcription for the better understanding.

<sup>2</sup> The two kinds of phonetic description of the sound [x] (viz. palatovelar or velar) is due to the fact that the area of the articulation considered velar by the IPA is commonly mentioned as palatovelar in the Hungarian literature because of the schematic division of the mouth cavity that slightly differs from the practice of the IPA.

<sup>3</sup> The cause of the two kinds of transcription is that the real phonetic features of this Old Hungarian reconstructed sound mentioned as velar *i* have not been thoroughly discussed up until now. The question if this sound is phonetically velar indeed or medial has not been brought up yet.

<sup>4</sup> Let me add here that the phonetic character of the Turkish sound *i* is not without its difficulties. Although it is commonly mentioned as velar it is taken as the counterpart of the medial [i] of the IPA sound set in the literature (FODOR 1999: 1426; but cf. for example PAASONEN 1913).

representatives of the school modified their conception fairly soon (at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century).

Since criticism was levelled mainly at the exceptionless theorem of sound changes, neogrammarians, admitting the unacceptability of this principle, introduced another supplementary methodological notion, viz. analogy. This factor, as a component tied to the individual and contrasting with the supposed mechanical sound changes, was meant to explain the exceptions to the alleged “regular” sound changes.

As analogy has been based on the associations of the speakers one has had to consider it as non-private by nature. Due to this analogy has been obviously appropriate to counterpoint the assumed speaker-independent sound changes being Cartesian by nature. Applying analogy, neogrammarians could easily explain those cases, which were not compatible with the assumed physical sound laws and which were deviant from a positivist perspective. Thus, the dominant (positivist) paradigm began to include an element, as a subprinciple, in a latent way, from a non-private (i. e. anti-Cartesian) language concept.

As analogy belonged to the other paradigm, building it into the positivist line of thought was not simple, because it resulted in a special inner contradiction in neogrammarian etymologies. The difficulty of this integration is clearly seen in an early attempt of neogrammarians (at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) to give explanations by means of analogy only if the phonetic form in question cannot be explained with the help of sound laws.

In this way analogy, which is based on the speakers’ association, could only be integrated into the neogrammarian line of thought with a kind of Cartesian restriction. Although the language users’ associations differ individually, within the framework of these positivist etymologies the associations of the speakers of a language or a dialect are uniform: they always appear at the same time and in the same way.

The fact that analogy, being non-private in nature, became a methodological principle necessarily led to the “loosening” of the rigid (Cartesian) concept of the school. Due to this “loosening” which, in another respect, is also often mentioned in the classical science-historical writings, some onomasticians, such as ZOLTÁN GOMBOCZ, who was active in the first three decades of the century and the other etymologists later in general, were able to represent a much more flexible version of this school. The rate of the flexibility of these linguists’ vein of thinking (enriched with anti-Cartesian elements) depends on the proportion of the latent non-private features in their language concept.

9. Analogy, based on the language users’ associations, is actually the

natural manifestation of the speakers' sense of language. The use of the sense of (mother) language as a methodological device, supplementing neogrammarian sound laws, is well exemplified by JÁNOS MELICH's writings, in which he discusses the problems of borrowing Christian names.

In 1905 MELICH still believed that the Christian names without the *-us* [us] ending came into Hungarian from those languages, in which they also lack this ending, i. e. from Italian, German and the Slavic languages. MELICH considered the Hungarian names to be completely explicable with the help of neogrammarian sound laws.

However, in 1914 he noticed a number of Christian names (*Ágoston* [a:goʃton], *Ambrus* [ɔmbruʃ], *Anna* [ɔn:ɔ], *Antal* [ɔntɔl], *Péter* [pɛ:tEr], etc.), which, applying the neogrammarian methodology, could not be derived from the above-mentioned languages. Therefore, he came forward with another conception, now based on the sense of language. According to this new conception, the Christian names with Latin *-us* endings came into Hungarian without any changes, but the *-us* endings coincided with the diminutive suffixes *-is* [iʃ], *-üs* [yʃ] in the Hungarian names, and consequently, the sense of language conceptualised this function into the *-us* endings of loan Christian names, and then, by clipping the assumed diminutive suffix, it created a new, shorter name.

The use of the notion of the sense of language, coming from the other paradigm, as a secondary principle is clearly shown in that, later (in 1940), JÁNOS MELICH was looking for another explanation for borrowing Christian names, which was more consistent with the neogrammarian language concept. From this time on, he did not consider the above-mentioned theory exclusive, thus he did not regard the majority of Christian names without *-us* as the forms coming from Latin Christian names with *-us* endings and then being clipped, but he derived them from the different declined forms of their Latin equivalents. (This situation did not really change later: although many a researcher dealt with the problem of the origin of Christian names, still, up to this very day, Hungarian historical anthroponymy has been characterized by the coexistence of different views.)

10. Analogy was introduced as a methodological notion so that the cases not consistent with the regular changes could be embedded in the neogrammarian way of thought. As a result, this subprinciple gave explanation to a number of name forms (and these explanations were satisfactory within this paradigm). Nevertheless, analogy can only be used as an etymological subprinciple if the analogue sound sequence, which would be able to be the basis for the association, exists in the given language or dialect. In the absence of such a phonetic form, neogrammarian etymologists can only talk about the vague origin of these name forms, or can only

refer to some kind of associative changes with undiscovered reasons (for example, dissimilation or the appearance of extra sounds).

To etymologize a name from a private perspective, beside the above-mentioned methodological uncertainty, the philological ground-work of name explanations has had its difficulties up to now. Although, in the spirit of the importance of data within positivism, several collections publishing names were compiled, Old Hungarian anthroponyms have not been systematically collected until KATALIN FEHÉRTÓI's reference book (2005). Thus, previously etymologists had to carry out tiresome philological pre-researches to be able to find the appropriate data.

11. Due to the language-theoretic and methodological contradictions, revealed above, and the defects of data collection (and other factors to be analysed later), the neogrammarian anthroponym explanations could not result in the straightforward etymons a positivist methodology would expect, in accordance with the faith in absolute truth.

To illustrate this kind of uncertainty in private name etymologies, I mention here, from several appropriate examples, the 20<sup>th</sup> century history of the etymology of *Cseke* [tʃɛkɛ].

In GYULA ZOLNAI's charter-dictionary, he posits that this anthroponym might be derived from the Old Hungarian verb *csek(ik)* [tʃɛk] ~ [tʃɛkik] 'cross, wade through' or the nominal *cseke* 'kind of grape' (SZAMOTA-ZOLNAI 1902-1906: XII, as well as 117-8). However, ZOLNAI changed his position immediately after JÁNOS MELICH took a stand on the Slavic origin of the name in his study (1904b: 315-6), in which he described ALADÁR BALLAGI's non-private etymologies as unscientific (including the derivation of *Cseke* from a Hungarian common word; cf. 1903: 110). As a result of this, in the preface to ZOLNAI's dictionary, ZOLNAI made fairly long apologies and mentioned JÁNOS MELICH as the only representative of scientific truth (SZAMOTA-ZOLNAI 1902-1906: XII) and published a correction following MELICH's above-mentioned conception (op. cit. 1136).

This, however, was not the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century history of this name etymology. After MELICH, referring to neogrammarian phonetic rules, published the foreign (Slavic) origin of the anthroponym *Cseke* as a proven (positivist) fact (1904b: 315-6), it was somewhat surprising that he and GOMBOCZ later claimed that the conception, according to which the name is of Slavic origin, was deficient, as the anthroponym *Cseke* was derived from the original form *Cseka* [tʃɛkɔ]. This, however, was the diminutive suffixed form of anthroponym *Csek* (otherwise being of unknown origin; 1914-1930: 912).

The etymology of *Cseke* has not been disambiguated up to the present day: while MIKLÓS KÁZMÉR adds the explanation of GOMBOCZ and

MELICH in his dictionary of family names (1993: 227), LAJOS KISS returns to the previous concept, considering *Cseke* as the derivation of the anthroponym *Csek* being of Slavic origin, but not excluding the possibility of the common word explanation (classified as unprofessional by MELICH previously), as LAJOS KISS also mentions the derivation of the Hungarian verb *csökik* [tʃøkik] ~ *csekek* ‘be backward’ with the suffix *-e* [ɛ] (1988: 533).

12. The language-theoretic and methodological contradictions unveiled so far are characteristic not only of historical anthroponymy, but of the 20<sup>th</sup> century toponymic and common word etymologies determined also by neogrammarianism. Nevertheless, the problem of uncertain derivation (within the paradigm) is more apparent in the case of anthroponyms.

This is a consequence of the special features of these names: anthroponyms are commonly (also) determined by factors relating to cultural history, they are short (often consisting of one syllable) and one can hardly reconstruct their old pronunciations because of their ambiguous orthographical features. Due to these factors, the methodological contradictions are more easily revealed in the case of anthroponyms. As a result, within a neogrammarian-positivist framework, these names can be derived from almost any language, which was in contact or in cultural connection with Hungarian at one time.

To illustrate this, from the several possible examples I pick out an attempt at an etymology of an anthroponym in the “Magyar Etymologiai Szótár” [“Hungarian Etymological Dictionary”] by JÁNOS MELICH and ZOLTÁN GOMBOCZ (1914-1930).

In this work, the authors claim that the old anthroponym *Ata* [ɑtɑ] can be derived equally from three languages. They think it is possible that this proper name is derived from the Turkish (not attested) \**Ata* [ata] anthroponym (cf. common Turkish *ata* ‘father’), or from a Latin personal name (cf. *Atto*), or from a Hungarian common noun (*ata* [ɑtɑ] ‘father’, later as *atya* [ɑtɒ]), too (op. cit. 167-8).

13. The relatively low number of anthroponym typologies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century literature can also be explained by this kind of uncertainty of etymologies (and, of course, the analytical interest of this branch of Hungarian linguistics): opposed to the later results of this paradigm being observed in the field of the explanation of common words and historical toponyms, the anthroponymic etymologies, which would be able to form the basis for typologies, have not been made clear yet.

Thus, in the new anthroponymic publications, structuralism could not really manifest itself opposed to historical toponymy which developed in parallel with the anthroponymy until the 1930s. It is not a coincidence that, in the respect of language theory and methodology, historical anthro-

ponymy did not exceed its analytical-etymological nature originating from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, although it enriched the language history, the orthography history and the historical science with a number of new findings.

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