

Early Indo-Iranian lexical influence in the Uralic languages

Sampsa Holopainen

University of Helsinki, Finland
samps.holopainen@helsinki.fi

Introduction

Uralic (Finno-Ugric) is known to have acquired loanwords from Proto-Indo-European and several of its successors, such as Indo-Iranian. Although Aryan loanwords in the Uralic languages have been the topic of many studies, the substitution patterns of the Aryan loanwords are less well established than those of the Germanic, Baltic or Slavic loanwords, and many questions remain unsolved concerning the distribution and exact classification of the Aryan loanwords.

In this poster I aim to give a general overview of the early Aryan lexical influence in Uralic based on the MA thesis I am working on.

Materials and methods

I have gathered a corpus of proposed Indo-Iranian etymologies for Uralic words from the central research literature of the subject and try to review how well the etymologies are argued; are the datings of the loanwords to some certain stage of Aryan correct, or are the proposed etymologies of Aryan origin at all?

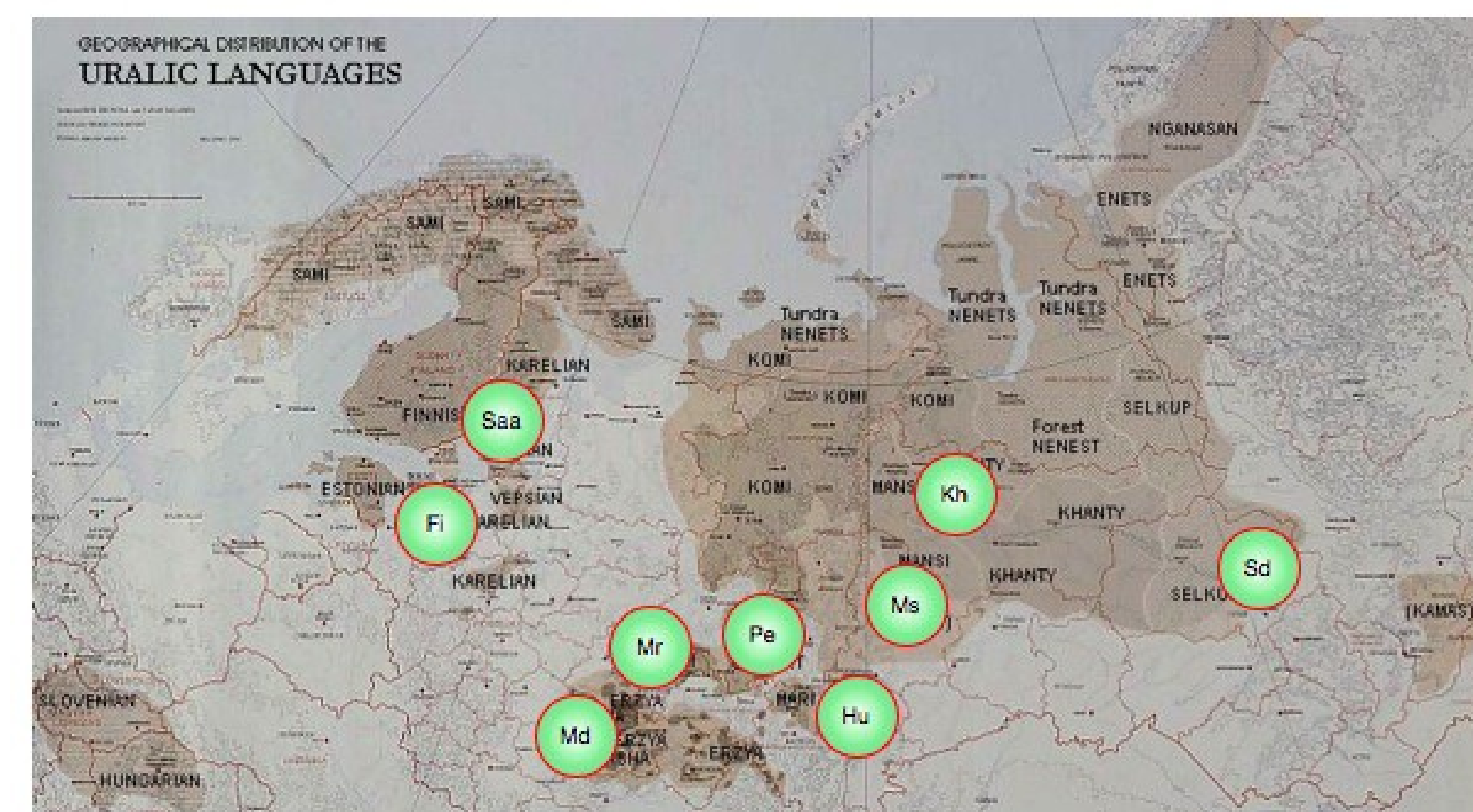
The distribution of these loanwords seems to be Uralic languages rather westernly, which might be partly caused by the research historical fact that the lexicography of Khanty, Mansi and Samoyed is less well known.

General remarks on the loanword data and some reviewed etymologies

In some loanwords the Aryan **a* has been substituted with Uralic **a*, for example Proto-Uralic **asera* 'lord' < Proto-Aryan **asura*. In some loanwords Aryan **a* or **ā* have been substituted with Uralic **o*, for example Proto-Uralic **ora* < Proto-Aryan **ārā* 'awl' (Koivulehto 2001: 248). According to an established view it is possible to explain this substitution through labial pronunciation of **a* in Proto-Aryan, due to the small amount of vowels in Aryan.

Aryan loans with first syllable **e* in Uralic pose more questions. Some of them are certainly Pre-Proto-Aryan and thus predate the sound change **e* > **a*, but the exact dating of some is problematic; Koivulehto (2001) has proposed "Pre-Iranian" origin for some of the "e loans". However, the Aryan origin of at least some of the "e loans" can probably be shown to be erroneous: for example Mordvin *rišme* ~ *rišmä* 'chain' etc. is probably a loan from Proto-Baltic **rišima* (Grünthal 2008: 328–329) rather than from Pre-Proto-Aryan **rečmi* (Koivulehto 2001: 250). Another example is Proto-Uralic **-teksä* 'ten' < "early Proto-Iranian" **deca* (Koivulehto 2001: 255) which is only attested in (supposedly) combined words, such as Finnish *kahdeksan* 'eight', *yhdeksän* 'nine' and does not exist as a separate word; also the proposed cognates in other languages are abrupt and too reduced to be analysed, such as Saami *gávcei* 'eight', *ovcei* 'nine'; so the whole existence of the word **-teksä* can be doubted.

A well-known fact is that none of the Aryan loanwords in Proto-Uralic have cognates in the Samoyed branch. The proposed loans with such a wide distribution in Uralic are not very thoroughly argued and can be explained as erroneous on phonetic grounds, for example Proto-Uralic **aše* (Joki 1973: 252–25) cannot be a loan from Proto-Aryan **as-* 'to be'. Instead, Samoyed has acquired few Aryan loans independently, such as Proto-Samoyed **wata-* 'grow' < Proto-Aryan **wakš-*, as shown by Aikio 2002.



Picture 1. The Uralic (= Finno-Ugric) language family

The widest known historical distribution (in light brown) and the current distribution (in brown) of the Uralic languages according to Riho Grünthal and Tapani Salminen; the approximate early distribution of the Uralic branches c. 2000–3000 years ago (in green), then forming a continuum of closely related languages, according to Salminen. Retrieved 23.8.2013 from www.helsinki.fi/~tasalmin/Uralic.jpg

Saa = Saami, Fi = Finnic, Md = Mordvin, Mr = Mari, Pe = Permian, Hu = Hungarian, Ms = Mansi, Kh = Khanty, Sd = Samoyed

Preliminary results, hypotheses for further research

Despite the good standards of earlier research on the subject, it seems that it is possible to refute some Indo-Iranian etymologies, which probably will make it possible to express updated views about the general distribution of these loanwords in the Uralic languages. Because some of the "Iranian" loanwords with **e* can be shown to be false etymologies, I believe that also some other criteria for dating of the etymologies have to be reconsidered and revisited. This will hopefully help in creating new settings for ethnic history of the speakers of Uralic and Indo-Iranian languages.

Picture 2. The approximate locations of the Proto-Aryan and Proto-Uralic languages, on the basis of Parpola (2012) and Salminen (2002). According to Kallio (2006), both Proto-Uralic and the dispersal or Proto-Aryan can be dated to c. 2000 BCE.



Further information

The terms *Uralic* and *Finno-Ugric* refer to the same family of languages. For research historical reasons the terms are sometimes used slightly differently, but these days these two terms can be used as synonyms (for a detailed discussion see Salminen 2002).

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to Tapani Salminen for letting me use his map, as well as to The Fund of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Helsinki and The Alumni Fund of the University of Helsinki for supporting my ongoing MA thesis. The basis of the Map 2 is retrieved from Wikimedia Commons.

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