

## **Initial Consonant Clusters in the Old Hungarian Age**

### **(The Relevance of Toponyms as Sources in Historical Sound Change)**

It is a widely accepted notion in the Hungarian literature of historical sound changes that the Hungarian language, due to its Finno-Ugric origins, does not prefer word-initial consonant clusters. When loan words with such structure appeared in the language, the original initial consonant clusters vanished, due to regular change. Because of this approach it is hard to find works on historical sound changes that do not focus on the discussion of the modes of reduction. However, in most cases the word-initial clusters had remained unchanged for hundreds of years before the reduction happened and some clusters are still present in words. It led me to consider the importance of another aspect of this element of language change, the examination of problems related to word-initial consonant clusters documented in the Old Hungarian Age.

The subtitle of my paper, however, reveals that the presentation and analysis of initial consonant clusters was not my sole objective. My purpose was to present a case study to confirm the relevance of toponyms as sources, in connection with a problem of historical linguistics still largely undiscussed. This group of words, besides providing a large amount of linguistic units for studies, can assist in the examination of the linguistic conditions of the Old Hungarian Age, from which we only have fragmented data today. These words, as they are correlated to locations, can be examined in connection with their neighbouring words and may be a great help in the reconstruction of the ethnical and linguistic conditions of a particular area. Thus by correlating them to other units in the system of names their actual linguistic context may be determined. As a result, the determination of their direct etimon and the allocation of the date of formation is made easier. In addition to this, they can contribute to the designation of the territorial spread of a sound change. These aspects show that toponyms provide much more information than common names, especially in connection with linguistic changes. At the same time the utilization of toponyms in the research required the entire study to be positioned within the context of onomastics.

I think the presentation and analysis of the examined toponyms clearly shows that the common conception of the theory of historical sound changes – that the Hungarian language, especially in the Old Age, did not tolerate words with consonant clusters in initial position – should be revised. I believe that the group of more than 900 lexemes from the Old Hungarian Age, which have initial consonant clusters, should not be disregarded. Obviously, in my thesis I could not ignore the fact that most of these clusters were reduced in time. The number of

consonant clusters, however, convinced me to reconsider the problem of the modes of reductions.

According to the common concept, the Hungarian language did not "like" such structures, thus they were reduced. Yet the incidence in old historical toponyms indicates that a great number of words with initial consonant clusters can be documented from the very beginnings of the history of the Hungarian language. This gives rise to a contradiction: if so many words with such phonological structures could appear in the language, why was the reduction needed later? Behind the motivation of reduction it seemed necessary to separate 2 types of sound changes: changes due to adaptation, which is the result of the unfamiliarity of initial clusters, and changes due to analogy, which can be considered subsidiary. I presume that this could make the explanation of sound changes related to word initials more complex and refined.