

**Theses of doctoral dissertation (PhD)**

**INITIAL CONSONANT CLUSTERS IN THE  
OLD HUNGARIAN AGE  
(THE RELEVANCE OF TOPONYMS AS SOURCES IN  
HISTORICAL SOUND CHANGE)**

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## **1. Possible Directions in the Study of Word-Initial Consonant Clusters**

The problem of word-initial consonant clusters has been in the focus of Hungarian linguistics from the very beginning. Even authors of the earliest grammars noticed the lack of Hungarian words that start with two or three consonants – except for loan words. This characteristic of the Hungarian language helped both historical comparative linguistics (the study of related languages) and Neogrammarians (concerned with the description of rules beyond linguistic changes) to focus on word-initial consonant clusters, as it proved to be a productive field for their examinations. By the end of the 19th century more systematic studies came up with the idea that the connection of two consonants in word-initial position is an exception in Hungarian. Thus it is not a surprise that the works on this subject attempted mainly to explore the phonological features of reductions that eliminated the phonologically unusual clusters. There are but a few works that tried to present the other side of the phenomenon, the question of word-initial consonant clusters that appeared in the Hungarian language.

I think that the direction of the earlier studies very well reflects the theoretical views of historical phonology on initial consonant clusters, that the reductions in the affected lexemes happened with the consistency of phonological rules. This approach to the problem might suggest that as far as initial consonant clusters are concerned, the only possible object of the analysis is the mode of reduction that eliminates the consonant structure. The degree of clusters, which can be often dated back for centuries, and the word-initial consonant clusters that multiplied and became rooted in the language in time are only two additional aspects of a clearly defined linguistic change.

I, however, think that by focusing on the ways Hungarian language integrated loan words of certain phonotactical structures into its own phonotactical system, a crucial element of linguistic change might be overlooked. It is the fact that the foreign language induced a change in the phonotactics of Hungarian. Almost every paper mentions that loan words weakened the tendency of reductions, or in other words, the resistance of Hungarian against the structural pattern of the other language, yet no one has drawn the conclusion from it. Still, it is generally accepted that a

phonological change has a cause and a result in the language as well. Studies in historical sound changes and descriptive phonology have shown that due to loan words the old phonological and phonotactical characteristics of the Hungarian language changed gradually and the reduction of consonant clusters was not inevitable any more. It is often mentioned that in loan words which appear in dialects the reduction still happens, but I, however, agree with the latest phonological studies, that this phenomenon should not be considered the main principle of Hungarian, and it is merely a regressive feature, often associated with sound changes.

In my thesis I did not intend to present the history of consonant clusters from the very beginning of the Hungarian language as a history of "struggle" (as it is generally accepted today). Instead, I tried to present the process in which the phonotactic pattern of the other language became part of the Hungarian. The change, of course, includes the efforts of cluster reductions. Therefore I included the analysis of word-initial consonant clusters and the question of their reduction in my thesis. I believe that these two tendencies are on the same level of importance, and their analysis as two different responses for the same linguistic feature might complement the studies of phonological integration of loan words, generally and in this specific field as well.

## **2. Methodological aspects of the study**

### *The periodical scope of the study*

My thesis deals with the history of initial consonant clusters until the end of Old Hungarian age. It is not difficult to see the reasons for choosing this period, although there is always the arbitrariness in the setting of the limits. It was the Old Hungarian age in the history of the language when word-initial consonant clusters first appeared. The change in the initial consonant clusters marks its first caesura in around the first decades of the 16th century, when word onsets with two or more consonants appeared in words of internal creations in documents (see e.g.: 1517: *prwchek*, EWUng. *prűcsök*, 1527: *Ptrewſſkeleonek*, EWUng. *prűszköl*). The Old Hungarian age seems to be heterogeneous from the aspect of the history of these structures. The nature of the change was different in the first half of the period (in the Árpád age) when, after the Hungarian

conquest, the linguistic environment changed and the first words with initial consonant clusters appeared in the Hungarian language, and it was different again, when words with such structures spread in great number, inducing changes in the phonotactics of the language. I tried to observe the chronology of the change as far back in history as it is possible.

*The linguistic data of the analysis*

Any linguistic data and fact can function as a source in historical linguistics. Summaries of the history of the Hungarian language mention cognate languages, contact languages, contemporary language and linguistic records as basic sources of historical linguistics. Obviously, the simultaneous use of these sources may lead to the most reliable results, yet the linguistic records – when available – form the best ground for every study in historical linguistics.

It is generally known that most of the linguistic information comes from one type of records, due to the characteristics of literacy in the Old Hungarian age (especially in its earlier period): the earliest data related to Hungarian were found in remnants of charters. These are mostly toponyms and anthroponyms. It is not without reason that studies often highlight that the toponyms of remnants have huge relevance in historical linguistics and especially in the study of historical sound changes, due to their age and significant number as opposed to other elements of the lexis. Although the data from the remnants of charters is well documented and the documentation is reliable, if we take a look at works on the general history of Old Hungarian or works that focus on specific questions of the age, it may seem that common words gained priority over toponyms in the descriptions: most of the sound changes and the tendencies are demonstrated with examples of common words. Even when the reader encounters examples with toponyms, these have common word name constituents in almost every case, thus the toponym is only meant to support the linguistic change of that particular common word, or more precisely, the tendency of the sound change that the common word demonstrates (usually until the period when the lexeme's common word forms appear). It is very rare to see a toponym in an example without a common word parallel in the description of historical sound changes. And as most of the phonological changes are independent from higher linguistic levels (i.e. morphology, meaning), studies in historical sound

changes lose a great number of linguistic data by neglecting the phonological changes of toponyms that do not contain common word lexemes. .

Toponyms, however, besides their usefulness in the description of the phonology of Old Hungarian from the earliest years with records, have an additional advantage over common words. In one of his works, Loránd Benkő calls attention to the benefits that the study of this type of words can bring. As Benkő notes, toponyms, as opposed to common words, are correlated to locations, thus they include the linguistic characteristics of those living (or who lived) in the area. The most important result of their spatial correlation is that they can be analysed on their own and in connection with their neighbouring words and may help the reconstruction of the ethnical and linguistic conditions of a particular area. Thus by correlating them to other units in the onomatosystem, 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. And, as the biggest obstacles for diachronistic studies are the distance in time and the inappropriate sources, historical linguistics need to use as many points of reference as possible in the discussion of a particular problem. In my paper I wanted to present how the descriptions of historical sound changes may benefit from the application of data related to toponyms.

#### *Principles of data collection*

Data collection is an essential theoretical and methodological problem in the study of the early stage of historical sound changes related to word-initial consonant clusters. Since my objective was to focus on the analysis of quality and incidence of consonant clusters and not on their reduction, during the collection of data I paid special attention to toponyms that have documented forms with consonant clusters from the Old Hungarian age. By making this stipulation my only objective was to reduce the number of conclusions that are based solely on etymology.

Besides the problem of being dependent on fragmented data and etimologies, the identification of the lexemes's language is another

difficulty. Usually there is no such problem with common names for their earliest records are from Hungarian documents and from glossaries that prove their Hungarian origin. But it is different in the case of toponyms. Remnants of the Old Hungarian age usually don't refer to their original language clearly, so it happens rather often, that conclusions concerning the Old Hungarian language are drawn from non-Hungarian data. It was then crucial to consider the principles of identifying data from remnants as these could have Hungarian, German, Romanian or Slavic origins. I tried to sum up all the aspects from the literature of onomastics and historical linguistics that could provide guidelines for the identification of charter remnants and for connecting them to the Hungarian language. In this work I relied on onomatosystematical relations (name pairs, synonyms, phonological variables), informations about the origin of the name (name giving from anthroponyms, toponym formants) and the study of integrative processes in cases of borrowed names (phonological changes that affect word endings, other adaptation processes, sound changes that are exclusive in the Hungarian language).

### **3. Thesis results**

#### *Types of word-initial clusters in the Old Hungarian language*

Following the theoretical and methodological questions of the application of linguistic sources I think it is relevant to describe the data used in the thesis. It is necessary, because it enables the verification of the analyses for everybody and future studies will be able to use it as their starting point. And there is also a concept in the Hungarian linguistic theory, that there were no consonant clusters in the Old Hungarian language, because they were subject to reduction. However, I think that this concept is no longer valid from a philological perspective, since there are more than 1400 toponyms and appellatives in early written records. In the publication of linguistic data I emphasized the separation of words with definitely Hungarian origins from words with uncertain origins. In many cases it was impossible to determine, what was the original language of a name at the time it was recorded in the charters. In some cases the names were left without full definitions due to philological or reading problems. On the basis of all these findings, the following consonant clusters were the most recurrent in word-initial position in the Old Hungarian period:

*dr-, pr-, br-, kr-, gr-, sztr-, tr-, hr-, st-, sztr-, szl-, pl-, kl-, bl-, fr-, szv-, sp-, szk-, gl-* etc.

*Characteristics of word-initial consonant clusters in the Hungarian language*

Phonological features of clusters of two consonants:

a) The second elements in clusters of two consonants are usually *r*, *l* or *v*. From these, *r* is the only one that could appear after any consonant, except one. It never followed *zs*, but this can be considered a random gap, because there is only one word in written records from the Old Hungarian age with a consonant cluster starting with *zs*: +?1248>1393: *Sdala* (KMHsz. 1: *Zsdála*). The dominance of these 3 sounds is explained by their phonological features (besides the influence of the source language): *l* and *r* are not sonorant nasal sounds, and in the latest phonological classifications, *v* does not function as a fricative in such position, but similarly to *l* and *r* it functions as a sonorant.

b) The difference between *l*, *r* and *v* becomes clear if we consider that *v* could appear in first position — in written records, before *l* and *r* —, but *l* and *r* are only documented in second position.

c) The role of the other group of sonorants, the nasal sounds in second position should be mentioned, too. On the basis of their occurrence in the records, this is a rather rare type, but the occurrence of nasals after plosives and fricatives in multiple variations is verified.

d) There are but a few cases of fricatives in second position. Only *v* could be considered an exception, see article a).

e) Verified cases of plosives in second position only include consonants after *s*, *sz*, *z* and *zs*. The unique nature of this cluster is proved by the fact that their reduction happened with a vowel prosthesis in the Old Hungarian age (too).

f) There are no consecutive consonants with the same manner of articulation, except in *Gbelény* ~ *Kbelény*.

Phonological features of clusters of three consonants:

a) In Hungarian, the first element in a cluster of three consonants is *s* or *sz*. (The *zdr-* cluster has one occurrence in names: 1439: *Zdragurfalva* (Cs. 1: 748), but in this position it is the only possible version from the aspect of voicedness.) It is not surprising to see that only voiceless sounds

can appear in second position, namely *k* and *t*. The absence of *p* is a question here, yet the written record [1290–1295]: *Spreng* (Gy. 2: 184) cannot be identified as Hungarian with absolute certainty.

b) In clusters of three consonants the third sound is *l* and *r*, which, as we have seen, are the most frequent sounds in the second positions of clusters of two consonants. The reason for this is clear. Based on the examination of contemporary appellatives, Péter Siptár notes that clusters of three consonants are, in a way, combinations that were formed from the ramifications of larger clusters. Siptár argues that in clusters of three consonants the first two sounds and the last two sounds must be combinations that (can) appear in clusters of two consonants. So clusters of three consonants could not be structured in any other way, because in the Old Hungarian age plosives in second position could only follow fricatives, and plosives were followed by *l* and *r* only.

#### *Consonant clusters always reduced in Hungarian*

As word-initial consonant clusters got into the Hungarian language by loan words, it must be kept in mind during the evaluation of the word-initial consonant clusters presented here, that the types described above were not only dependent on the Old Hungarian language, but they were the consequences of initial consonant clusters of the languages that got in contact with Hungarian. Indeed, this is something that is manifested through the "filter" of the Hungarian language, but if a type of cluster was not present in Slavic languages, in German, in Romanian or in Latin, obviously it could not appear and spread in Hungarian. It is easy to see that clusters which were internal creations of Hungarian followed these patterns. That is exactly why such statistics are worth being contextualized. The analysis concerning the consonant clusters in the neighbouring nations's language would tell about the Hungarian language: there might be clusters that never occurred in Hungarian and some did in a few cases. It is not easy to do such comparisons, because there are no statistical analyses that could clearly describe the types of consonant clusters that were present in the languages and dialects of the Carpathian Basin in the second half of the Middle Ages. That is why the construction of a detailed typology for consonant clusters that are always reduced, would be an extremely difficult work. Therefore in my thesis I only attempted to focus on some of the basic features.



This is the summary of the features of consonant clusters that are not verifiable in the Hungarian language:

a) On the basis of the characteristics of clusters of two consonants in Hungarian, it is very likely that the absence of these clusters is random: *hn-*, *zm-*, *zn-*, *zsd-* and *zsl-*. The classification of *vk-* and *vn-* is not clear, because of possible reading problems, besides the fact that *v* ( $\beta$ ) was often vocalized in these clusters. Thus, from the group of clusters of two consonants, it was *bd-*, *msz-* and *pt* that, as I assume, did not get into the Hungarian language in their original form. Due to the lack of evidence, *scs-* may be considered an element of this group, too.

b) From the group of clusters of three consonants, based on the functions of clusters of two consonants, the presence of *spr-*, *szmr-* and *szpr-* would have been possible in the Old Hungarian language, yet there is no evidence to prove this.

c) The sounds  $\check{r} \sim r_p^\circ$  and *rz*, common in western Slavic languages, were regularly replaced by *r* in Hungarian.

d) There are no written records to demonstrate the presence of *vlcs-*, *vlk-*, *vrb-*, *vrn-* and *vrs-* clusters in the Hungarian language, because these clusters are usually represented in Hungarian in their dissolved forms: 1425/1426: *Walko*, FNEsz. *Valkó*. In other cases vocalization makes it impossible to verify the presence of initial consonant clusters: 1328: *Vrnafalua* (Cs. 2: 362). It is proved that the *v* sound of these clusters is always followed by *l* or *r* sonorants in Slavic words that possibly got into the Hungarian language, too.

e) These consonant clusters have similar features: *hlb-*, *hrb-*, *hlm-* and *hrv-*. Just like in the clusters of three consonants starting with a *v*, the reduction affects the first and the second consonant: 1408: *Horborthyn* and 1505: *Hrbotin* (FN. 122). But e.g. 1347: *Holoboka*, 1464: *Hlwbok*, 1525: *Hlboka* (FN. 124).

f) The analysis of the remaining clusters of three and four consonants (*blh-*, *drn-*, *szrny-*, *trny-*, *trszt-*, *tvrd-*) reveal similar characteristics in their structures and their adaptation in the Hungarian language.

The clusters demonstrated here do not appear in present day Hungarian, or even if they do, they are not very frequent. Their absence in Old Hungarian might be explained by a phonological constraint, that neither their first two sounds, nor their last two sounds appeared in

Hungarian words, so the phonotactics of lexemes that start with these were considered rather strange, even in comparison with other words that had consonant clusters. That is why in these cases – unlike in clusters of two or three consonants – the reduction always happened in Hungarian.

*Reduction of initial consonant clusters by adaptation and analogy*

After the description of the word-initial consonant clusters of the Old Hungarian language, it seemed to be necessary to describe the other aspect of the process that resulted in the change of word onsets, too. It should not be neglected that the word-initial consonant clusters were indeed reduced in most of the words that got into the Hungarian language. As earlier works on historical sound changes have dealt thoroughly with the reduction modes of consonant clusters from theoretical and practical aspects as well, in my thesis I only attempted to find the motives behind the tendencies of reduction.

There is a certain agreement in the literature of historical sound changes concerning the status of word-initial consonant clusters: because of the features of its original phonotactics, Hungarian language does not "like" word-initial consonant clusters, thus the tendencies of reducing all or most of the clusters in the new lexemes can be observed in the course of its history. Records of old toponyms, however, show that there have been a great number of words with initial consonant clusters from the very beginning of the language's history. This gives rise to a contradiction: if so many words with such phonological structures could appear in the language, why was the reduction necessary later? Behind the motivation of reduction it seemed necessary to separate 2 types of sound changes: change due to adaptation, which is the result of the unfamiliarity of initial clusters, and change due to analogy, which can be considered subsidiary.

#### 4. Publications

##### Studies:

1. Szótagvizsgálatok ómagyar kori lexémákon. A szókezdő mássalhangzó-torlódás a korai ómagyar korban. In: Kovács Zoltán, Szirák Péter (eds.): *Juvenilia I. Debreceni bölcsész diákkörösök antológiája*. Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 2006, 45–57.
2. Szótagvizsgálatok ómagyar kori lexémákon. In: Balogh László, Mező Ferenc, Tóth László (eds.): *A Debreceni Egyetem Tehetséggondozó Programjának II. Konferenciája*. Debrecen, Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, 2006, 269–274.
3. Az *s*, *sz* kezdetű szó eleji mássalhangzó-kapcsolatok a régi helynevekben. In: Hoffmann István, Tóth Valéria (eds.): *Helynévtörténeti tanulmányok 2*. Debrecen, Debreceni Egyetem Magyar Nyelvtudományi Tanszéke, 2006, 195–206.
4. Az etnikai viszonyok tükröződése a szókezdő mássalhangzó-torlódások körüli nyelvi változásban. In: Hoffmann István, Juhász Dezső (eds.): *Nyelvi identitás és a nyelv dimenziói*. Debrecen–Budapest, Nemzetközi Magyarságtudományi Társaság, 2007, 89–96.
5. Hangváltozás, adaptáció, analógia. *Magyar Nyelvjárások* 45 (2007), 51–61.
6. Helynévkutatás és hangtörténet avagy a helynevek forrásértéke. In: Bölcskei Andrea, N. Császi Ildikó (eds.): *Név és valóság. A VI. Magyar Névtudományi Konferencia előadásai*. Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem BTK Magyar Nyelvtudományi Tanszéke, 2008, 175–182.
7. A szókezdő mássalhangzó-torlódások vizsgálatának néhány kérdéséről. *Magyar Nyelvjárások* 47 (2009), 99–109.
8. Névpárok, szinonimák és fonológiai variánsok. *Magyar Nyelvjárások* 48 (2010). In press.