

Towards a unified theory of the foot in Ugric poetry and folksong

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What constitutes traditional “Hungarian” poetic meter has been widely discussed in the literature, but is on the whole poorly understood. Forms such as the Hungarian alexandrine (“*magyaros tizenkettes*”) came into fashion likely through the influence Ancient Greek and Latin epic poetry, although some maintain that the tendency towards trochaic meters is no doubt influenced by the rigid first-syllable primary lexical stress (and odd non-initial secondary stresses) in the language. Although Mansi shares this lexical stress pattern, which is indeed hypothesised to be derived from Proto-Uralic, Khanty is more varied, with word-initial stress not holding so strictly and often a function of the particular dialect.

This paper seeks to understand the origins of Hungarian poetic meter, and its relationship to lexical stress, through a comparative analysis of Hungarian folk song and poetry with that of Ob-Ugric (Northern Khanty and Northern Mansi), with particular reference to the combination of metric feet with agglutinating morphological constructions and the resulting lexical stress patterns. Additionally, we discuss the realisation of these feet through both dynamic and temporal accents. We uncover patterns of co-variation among the Ob-Ugric poetic structures – sung and spoken – and the literary use of feet to invoke tension, release, and pacing. Our work follows from Schmidt (1995) and Hatto (2017) and draws on the resources from the LMU Munich Ob-Ugric archives, Antal and Bernát’s fieldwork collection of Mansi poetry, and various sources of early Hungarian poetry and folk songs, particularly focussing on the Moldavian Csángós of present-day Romania. Consequently, we suggest that in addition to accent patterns, metric feet do indeed serve as a useful tool for the analysis and analogization of a common Ugric poetic and musical tradition.

We acknowledge that there is further work to be done in providing a stronger quantitative basis for the claims discussed in this paper, and additionally seek further clarification regarding the extent to which these features are better identified as having a common Turkic origin, as suggested by Vikár and others regarding the musicological genealogy of the melodic aspects of folk music.

Further reading

Hatto, A.T. (2017) *The world of the Khanty Epic Hero-Princes: An exploration of a Siberian oral tradition*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

László, V. (1993) *A Volga-kámai Finnugorok És Törökök Dallamai*. Budapest: MTA Zenetud. Int.

Schmidt, É. (1995) 'Az északi hanti énekes folklór metrikájának alapjai (a verssoron belüli szint)', *История и культура хантов*.

Budapesti Fazekas Mihály Gyakorló Általános Iskola és Gimnázium – Magyar nyelv és irodalom munkaközösség. (2003) *Verstani enciklopédia*. p.161. magyar.fazekas.hu

Keresztes, L. (1992) *Gyakorlati magyar nyelvtan*. Debrecen: Debreceni Nyári Egyetem.