

On contemporary research into Uralic grammar

Jussi Ylikoski (University of Turku & Sámi University of Applied Sciences)

The primary objectives of Uralic linguistics have remained largely unchanged for nearly two centuries, but the field continues to develop over time. The history of Uralic linguistics has witnessed periods of transformation, trends, and even revolutionary activities, yet, by and large, the progress has been steady. Similarly, the methods of historical-comparative linguistics have evolved gradually, becoming more refined over time, but without drastic changes.

In recent years, Uralic linguistics has also engaged in self-reflection and has gained increased visibility in the broader field of linguistics, notably through the publication of two massive reference works (*The Oxford Guide to the Uralic Languages* edited by Bakró-Nagy, Laakso & Skribnik; *The Uralic Language* edited by Abondolo & Valijärvi). These volumes offer a comprehensive yet condensed overview of the state-of-the-art in the 2020s, with the majority of contributions dedicated to the synchronic description of dozens of languages. However, the core task of the field, and probably the most significant content of the aforementioned works, still lies in what we know about the earliest phases of the family and the processes that led to the development of the current branches and individual languages.

Paradoxically, it is precisely these core aims – the reconstructions of the Proto-Uralic grammar and lexicon, and the evolution of the entire family – that tend to become outdated the quickest. Our understanding of Finnish phonology or the inflectional morphology of Tundra Nenets has not fundamentally changed over the past century, nor is it likely to change in the next hundred years. In contrast, our knowledge of the phonology, morphology and perhaps also syntax of Proto-Uralic, and consequently the entire development of the language family, is constantly evolving. In my talk, I will evaluate contemporary research into Uralic grammar in more detail and also consider the potential directions future research might take.