

About the Linguistic Scholarship We Ought to Have

or:

Linguistics and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Hungary:

From the Theory of Hungarian-Hebrew Linguistic Affinity to the Dismissal of Finno-Ugric Studies

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The title of this paper invokes the central statement of Pál Hunfalvy’s (1810–1891) opening study in the first Hungarian scholarly periodical dedicated to linguistics, *Magyar Nyelvészet* (Hungarian Linguistics). Originally trained in law and increasingly turning to linguistics, Hunfalvy was elected corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1841 and, seventeen years later, he was invited to join the regular membership. As such, he became an influential advocate of Altaic comparative linguistics and, later, of Finno-Ugric comparative research. (The distinction between the Altaic and Finno-Ugric fields is significant and it will be discussed in further detail later.) His academic leadership manifested itself also in launching this pioneering periodical in 1856. In his introductory piece, he wrote that the country’s internal and external conditions would determine “the Hungarian linguistic and historical scholarship that we ought to have” (*a lenni kellő*), which in turn will inform the journal’s program. The fact that Hungary was a multilingual and multicultural kingdom obliged Hungarian scholars to study all the languages spoken in the territory of Hungary and the history

of all of the country's communities. The nation must possess its country, the "historical space of the past and present we acquired" also by the power of scholarship, enhancing its material and intellectual riches alike and for the edification of the humanity in its entirety.¹ Most vehemently, however, he argued for positioning scholarship as a salient element of national life: in compliance with the country's external conditions, and, especially, its European identity. Being a European nation, not in the geographical, but the "true" meaning of the term, Hungary must engage with scholarship in an active manner: to build on Europe's combined Christian and Greco-Roman intellectual heritage, turning it into a cultural capital that serves as a wellspring of continuous spiritual nourishment. Hunfalvy aimed to hold the new periodical to the standard of non-antiquarian and productive science, which formed the foundation of European academic work.

He did not simply pledge to pursue scholarly inquiry under a positivist and European banner. He juxtaposed Europe and Asia, suggesting that just like European consciousness, Asian identity had nothing to do with geographical origins. It signified the lack of the dynamic and creative intellect that in his eyes characterized Europe. He resorted to generalization when contending that although in the Middle Ages Muslim Arabs surpassed Christian Europe due to their interest in and extensive translations of classical Greek scholarship and philosophy, because they did not internalize the Greek teachings, what became the basis of Europe's scholarly development, could not galvanize Arabic thinking.² Hunfalvy's lines do not merely stand for a belated illustration of the European Enlightenment's self-celebratory critique of the Orient or Orientalism in the meaning Edward Said used it, that is a discursive pattern. Addressing the

¹ Pál Hunfalvy, "Mit akar a *Magyar Nyelvészet*?" (What does Hungarian Linguistics want?) *Magyar Nyelvészet* (Hungarian Linguistics) 1 (1856): 2.

² Hunfalvy, "What does Hungarian Linguistics want?" 5-6.

Hungarian readership, Hunfalvy used the image of non-innovative Asia to move from the depiction of the European ideal to disparaging what was praised as Asian in national life.

Since the Middle Ages Hungarian historiography emphasized that the Hungarian forefathers had been Central Asian nomadic horsemen, valiant warriors, who by conquest made the Carpathian Basin their homeland at the end of the ninth century. Chroniclers successfully sourced the legacy of the Asian pagan past when arguing that the incorporation of the nomadic pagan people into Christian Europe was a manifestation of divine will. The storied transformation of the Hungarian tribal alliance of equals into a feudal corporate society in which free noblemen dominated over Hungarian and non-Hungarian commons and serfs deprived of privilege was also based on the same historical tradition.³ Since the Reformation, linguists both complemented and confirmed the explanatory value of the Oriental origins by emphasizing that the Hungarian language held close affinity with Hebrew and other eastern languages. In their and fellow historians' hands, Christian Europe's core ideas of the Orient turned into explanatory tropes of marginality, still in use in the nineteenth century. The Central Asian origins were used to explain both moral virtues and underdevelopment. Striking orientalist chords, Hunfalvy condemned what he saw as the uncritical reliance on the so-called Asian heritage:

If you tell him [the Hungarian scholar] that we do not have sufficient scholarship, talent, diligence, and that we are poor, the answer will be that the Hungarian is an Asian type. If you tell him that the Hungarian likes to exaggerate and builds castles in the air, while in despair he is incapable to avoid the smallest obstacle on the road [the answer is]: the Hungarian is an Asian type. You tell him, we are a valiant people: how could it be otherwise: we are an Asian type. Accordingly, our language is beautiful because it is Asian; and if our language is this or that, all is because it is Asian.

³ Jenő Szűcs, *Nemzet és történelem* (Nation and History) (Budapest: Gondolat, 1974), 83-85; 93-96.

The quote demonstrates how the self-Orientalizing discourse excused incapability to realize plans and evolve and offered the same argument to interpret all aspects of national life.

Throughout the nineteenth century, it also enabled speakers to amplify the cultural contrast between Hungarians and Germans as well as Hungarians and the other ethnicities in the country increasingly constrained due to imperial political ambitions and awakening national movements present in the region. Hunfalvy's attack was not less motivated by the fact that this self-Orientalizing discourse shaped the Hungarian collective sense of belonging to Europe differently than how he saw it fit.⁴

I describe this identity discourse as self-Orientalism following Said's coinage and views on the strategic bonds between the political and the scholarly in colonial settings. Self-Orientalism draws attention to the dynamics between the political and the scientific in the construction of the nation state and related processes shaping depictions of nationhood. This theoretical framework makes it possible to highlight that Hunfalvy's refusal to embrace the self-Orientalizing ideology was not due to his opposition to the politicization of scholarship. After all, he understood that the current conditions of the country should guide linguistic and historical inquiry. In fact, by supporting the notion that language forged a crucial bond among the members of the political nation and ethnic groups, Hunfalvy shared the opinion of most Hungarian politicians and intellectuals, who, by the early nineteenth century accepted language use as the sole criteria of ethnic identity.⁵

⁴ Simon, de Keza, *Gesta Hungarorum. The deeds of the Hungarians*, edited and translated by László Veszprémy and Frank Schaer, with an introductory study by Jenő Szűcs (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999), XLIII.

⁵ Ignác Romsics, "Nemzet és állam a modern magyar történelemben" (Nation and State in Modern Hungarian History) in Pál Pritz (ed.) *Magyarország helye a huszadik századi Európában: Tanulmányok* (Hungary's Place in Twentieth-Century Europe) (Budapest, Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 2002), 9.

This consensus was in the making at least since the late 1700s, when the language cultivation movement and the correlated efforts of language renewal gained momentum⁶ and, supporting them, the Hungarian Diet began a legislative process, which culminated in 1844, when, by law, Hungarian supplanted Latin as the official language of the country.⁷ Closely connected were the efforts for the realization of a national institution for the study of Hungarian and the promotion of scholarship in Hungarian. The Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) was founded in 1825, symbolically at the Diet, by the aristocrat philanthropist and politician, the pro-Habsburg reformer István Széchenyi (1791–1860).⁸

Whereas the foregrounding of language usage as a marker of ethnicity indicated a change in the conceptualization of nationhood, the ethnicization of national identity also attested to the continuing impact of medieval conceptualizations of collective belonging that heavily relied on the Central Asian forefathers' memory.⁹ Hungarian historiography often points out that modernization in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century was spearheaded by the nobility, as opposed to a bourgeois middle class, which also meant that premodern cultural and political values remained influential. As the legal historian Ferenc Eckhart noted, Hungarian

⁶ Endre Arató, "A magyar nemzeti ideológia jellemző vonásai a 18. században" (The Hungarian National Ideology's Characteristics in the 18th Century) *Nemzetiség a feudalizmus korában* (Nationality in the Age of Feudalism) (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1972), 153-155.

⁷ Orsolya Nádor, *Nyelvpolitika: A magyar nyelv politikai státusváltozásai és oktatása a kezdetektől napjainkig* (Budapest: BIP, 2002), 58-69; see also Gábor Almási, Lav Šubarić eds., *Latin at the Crossroads of Identity: The Evolution of Linguistic Nationalism in the Kingdom of Hungary* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), especially part I, "The Politics of Language."

⁸ Réka Lengyel and Gábor Tüskés (eds.), *Learned Societies, Freemasonry, Sciences and Literature in 18th-Century Hungary* (Budapest: MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Irodalomtudományi Intézet, 2017). The linguist Klára Sándor underlines that in Hungary as well as in other countries, the language cultivation movement and the foundation of national academies were political, rather than scholarly initiatives. Sándor, "Nyelvtervezés, nyelvpolitika, nyelvművelés" (Language Planning, Language Politics, Language Cultivation) in *A magyar nyelv kézikönyve* (Handbook of the Hungarian Language), edited by Ferenc Kiefer (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2003), 381–409; available from <http://mnytud.arts.klte.hu/tananyag/szociolingvisztika/nypol2.htm>; accessed on April 21, 2021.

⁹ Jenő Szűcs, *A Magyar nemzeti tudat kialakulása* (The Development of the Hungarian National Consciousness) (Szeged: Magyar Östörténeti könyvtár, 1992), 151, 154, 468. For the Hungarus identity see also: Ambrus Miskolczy, "'Hungarus Consciousness' in the Age of Early Nationalism," in Almási and Šubarić eds., *Latin at the Crossroads of Identity: The Evolution of Linguistic Nationalism in the Kingdom of Hungary*, 64-94.

noblemen read side by side Montesquieu and the sixteenth-century codification of customary legal code, the *Tripartitum*, a monument to the indivisibility and privilege of Hungarian nobility, still in use in the 1800s.¹⁰ The Central Asian origins theory was utilized as a support for the new language-based identity discourse, for example at the Diet, during the legislative discussions on language and the formation of HAS, or during the unprecedented public debate that the HAS founder Széchenyi's treatise *A' Kelet népe* (People of the East) triggered in 1841.¹¹ By arguing that the Asian nation is capable of progress and should embark on a path of modernization tailored to its needs and mentality,¹² Széchenyi did not merely rebuke his opponents' modernization plans modelled on Western Europe, neither did he contradict what Edward Said described as a western bias toward the "stagnating Orient." Széchenyi's title choice invoked the enduring impact of the traditional, self-Orientalizing identity politics. Whereas the *Tripartitum* invoked the Central Asian forefathers' legacy to codify the interests of nobility for perpetuity, Széchenyi aimed to shepherd the country as a whole toward change. Wrapped in a "reformed" self-Orientalizing rhetoric, *People of the East* reiterated Széchenyi's complex plans for integrated economic, social, and political development, in which language politics and its connection to the constitutional order (i. e. the status of the nationalities, nation was not only the nobility) as well as to national culture and learning formed an intrinsic part.

Hunfalvy's opening study in *Hungarian Linguistics* could be inserted into the long series of responses to the concerns regarding the politics and policies of language Széchenyi's *People of the East* had raised fifteen years earlier. Hunfalvy's analysis of European scholarship and its

¹⁰ Ferenc Eckhart, *A szentkorona-eszme története* (The History of the Holy Crown Doctrine) (Budapest Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1941), 254.

¹¹ László Tevesz, "A magyar liberális-nacionalizmus nemzetfogalma a „Kelet népe-vita” időszakában, 1841–1843” (The Nation Concept of the Hungarian Liberal-Nationalism in the Period of the “People of the East-Debate”, 1841-1843), *Századvég* (2007): 31-70.

¹² István Széchenyi, *A' kelet népe* (People of the East) (Pozsony: Wigand, 1841), 16-17.

key role in national progress demonstrates close kinship with Széchenyi's vision. However, writing in his capacity as a scholar (and not a politician), instead of creatively engaging with self-Orientalism, Hunfalvy condemned it, again, not because it politically implicated scholarship, but, for in his eyes, it was irreconcilable with scholarly progress and prevented Hungarian scholars to join European research.

In this opening article in *Hungarian Linguistics*, Hunfalvy's attack demonstrates how he deconstructed the correlation between the scholarly and the political elements of the Oriental theory of affinity. To replace it, he advocated a comparative historical method, which underscored the more recent theory of affinity among the so-called Altaic languages (Finnish, Turkic-Tartar, Mongolian-Manju, and Samoyed) and, consequently, also recalibrated its relation to national identity discourse. By placing Hungarian in the Altaic language family, scholars would learn not only about the other Altaic speaking communities, but also about the origins of the nation in a period from which written records had not survived. The Altaic theory was not claiming the glory that the Oriental theory ascribed to the Central Asian forefathers for other "relatives." Instead, it removed all together the preoccupation with pride from its approach to the national past, as Hunfalvy's ironic lines indicate:

'What! Are we related to so many riff-raff peoples?' so many of our scholars and non-scholars cry out. 'Yes, indeed, with so many, distinguished patriots.' 'But for God's sake, do they prove our honor?' so worry several of them. 'Surely they do not, and we will be embarrassed unless we hurry up.' Everyone's honor depends on one's own diligence and upstanding character, not other's, regardless how closely they are related: how would it dignify us, as a nation, if we were the kin of either the English, the Parthian, or the Moor... Let's put this childish vanity aside, which, rather than the Lapp affinity, shames us, because it makes us incapable to study, which is our greatest indignity.¹³

¹³ Hunfalvy, "What does Hungarian Linguistics want?" 18.

In other words, while it did not support the traditional national consciousness, Hunfalvy stressed that comparative linguistics could still perform as a national scholarship, by offering valuable lessons about the national language and history, and, thus, through its support for a modern European identification. He emphasized the methodological approach of “the right kind of scholarship,” because, as this article aims to demonstrate, he ascribed not only scholarly, but also a political role to his academic endeavors.

The scope of this paper is to chart Hungarian linguistics’ participation in the national identity discourse through the construction of theories of affinity and contribution to the language cultivation movement from the 1770s until 1860, that is from the heyday of scholarly self-Orientalism until the dusk of the Altaic theory. (The first refutation of the Altaic theory came in the early 1860s, as it was recognized that a language could be classified as member of only one language family and the Hungarian-Turkish affinity was unvalidated.) Accordingly and without committing itself to one theoretical framework, this paper joins the broad and deeply fractured conversation between scholars, politicians, and self-appointed experts on the Hungarian language’s origins and its relevance to the study of the origins of the nation or the nation’s characterology and self-consciousness. This debate continues until today and mobilizes a broad range of analytical and cultural arguments on various scholarly and public forums that often do not correlate.¹⁴ By focusing on how linguists permitted politics to be an intrinsic part of their academic pursuits for centuries, this article highlights how national identity politics and the politics of scholarship intertwined. What Hunfalvy presented as a stark contrast between

¹⁴ See, for example Klára Sándor, *Nyelvrokonság és hunhagyomány* (Linguistic Affinity and Hunnic Tradition) (Budapest: Typotex, 2012) and Sándor Szeverényi, “A finnugor ‘mítosz’” (The Finno-Ugric Myth) in László Hubbes and István Povedák (eds.), *Már a múlt sem a régi...az új magyar mitológia multidiszciplináris elemzése* (Not Even the Past Is as It Used To Be ...: The Multidisciplinary Analysis of the New Hungarian Mythology) (Budapest: Makat–Modern Mitológiakutató Műhely, 2015), 119-142.

linguistic approaches with combined political and scholarly implications, was the product of an extended development, in the course of which the Oriental theory created a basis for the study of Altaic affinity both through changing methodology and linguistics' continuing political commitment. This commitment thoroughly shaped Hunfalvy's academic engagements. Especially in the period following the introduction of the Finno-Ugric theory, which falls outside the purview of this study, due to their inherently political attitude to scholarship, linguists, believing to act for the benefit of the nation, were forced to withstand constant political scrutiny and attacks not only regarding the content and results of their scholarly investigations, but also concerning their work's relevance to the intellectual and cultural life of the nation and national identity discourse.

Scholarly self-Orientalism

Hunfalvy's repudiation of the self-Orientalizing scholarship subjected to harsh criticism what could be approximated to a school of thought and not one definite linguistic approach that, since the sixteenth century, has been arguing that Hungarian was akin to a range of so-called Oriental languages, first and foremost Hebrew. Scholars demonstrated the broader political, cultural, and intellectual contexts in which these "family of theories" evolved, the changing meaning and fluidity of affinity, and that these linguistic arguments coaligned with medieval historical narratives about the biblical origins of the European nations, specifically the descendance of the line of Japhet, son of Noah.¹⁵ In medieval European thought, every language

¹⁵ According to the linguist József Hegedűs, linguistic scholarship was influenced by non-linguistic, cultural and political claims as well. He points out that the eastern theory alleviated anxiety of lack of belonging, considering the clear disparity between Hungarian and the neighboring German and Slavic languages and fear of, what famously the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder predicted, isolation and disappearance amongst more populous communities of speakers. See, Hegedűs, *A magyar nyelv összehasonlításának kezdetei az egykorú európai nyelvtudomány tükrében* (The Beginnings of the Comparison of the Hungarian Language in the Specter of the Contemporary European Linguistic Scholarship) (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1966), 103. In *Calvinism on the Frontier: International Calvinism and the Reformed church of Hungary and Transylvania, c. 1600-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), Graeme Murdock suggests that the Ottoman Wars brought to the surface cultural concerns closely

spoken on earth stemmed from Hebrew, often considered the *Ursprache*. As Zsuzsa C. Vladár explains, since the Reformation, the examination of ties of affinity (understood differently than in the modern period) fell within the scope of the study of vernaculars and was intrinsic to the linguistic method itself. By establishing the given vernacular's closeness to Latin, Greek, or Hebrew,¹⁶ description also provided evidence of the prestige or rank of the language— also through the concept of *vetustas* (antiquity, the state of being old aged, long-standing) the linguistic examination reflected the medieval historical thinking.¹⁷ Early modern linguistic scholarship worked in a Latin-centered linguistic paradigm that employed categories rooting in Greek studies. Accordingly, vernacular grammatical phenomena, morphology, syntax, and word formation were described and explained through categories used for the teaching and analysis of Latin.¹⁸ Latin was deemed a guide for style, composition, and other aspects of written expression in Hungarian.¹⁹ Applying this method forced Hungarian authors to rely on categories that proved to be inadequate to describe Hungarian linguistic phenomena, not mentioning that it placed Hungarian at disadvantage vis-à-vis Indo-European and especially Romance languages in the “competition for prestige.”

The recognition that Hungarian could not be fitted into the frameworks constructed in Latin grammars and the availability of Hebrew grammars in Latin set the stage for early modern

tied to existential anxieties, pushing Protestant scholars to both depict the plight of Hungarians in terms comparable to the stories of biblical Israelites and look into the question of Hebrew affinity. Approaching the question from the perspective of the history of grammar studies, Zsuzsa C. Vladár confirms Hegedűs's argument noting that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors viewed it as a problem and repeatedly commented that there were no kin languages to Hungarian, which dilemma was closely connected to the question of “descriptibility”—see discussion in the body of the essay. C. Vladár concludes that the affinity with Hebrew offered one solution for both problems. Zsuzsa C. Vladár, *A korai magyar grammatikák* (The Early Hungarian Grammars) (Budapest: Tinta Könyvkiadó, 2016), 68-69.

¹⁶ C. Vladár, *The Early Hungarian Grammars*, 68.

¹⁷ C. Vladár, *The Early Hungarian Grammars*, 69.

¹⁸ C. Vladár, *The Early Hungarian Grammars*, 30.

¹⁹ C. Vladár, *The Early Hungarian Grammars*, 38.

theories of Hebrew-Hungarian affinity. The Protestant common noble János Sylvester (1504–52), an Erasmian scholar and student of Melanchthon, was an early translator of the New Testament, author of the first Hungarian grammar *Grammatica Hungarolatina*, published in 1539, and not less importantly, an advocate of the Hebrew-Hungarian affinity theory. His work confidently employed categories that were derived from Hebrew grammars, which, like vernaculars, were “fitted” to the study of Latin, nonetheless exhibiting sufficient flexibility to describe linguistic qualities that Hungarian had and Latin lacked. The reliance on Hebrew depictions proved to be a fruitful path in addition to enforcing “close-enough” categories and metaphorized depictions based on Latin textbooks.²⁰ By emphasizing similarities, for example in objective verb conjugation or possessive pronouns, Sylvester concluded that Hebrew and Hungarian were alike, using the term *affinitas*.²¹ Although Sylvester’s work remained unknown to Hungarian scholars for the next two centuries, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century authors followed Sylvester in mainly focusing on structural characteristics, however, several authors published comparative word lists as well in order to illustrate the connection between the two languages.²² In addition, as noted, certain categories also used in Hebrew grammars, for example *affixum* (largely corresponding with suffixes) and *radix* (root) entered Hungarian grammars.²³

Drawing reinforcement from the broader political and cultural context depicted earlier, in the nineteenth century, these two linguistic concepts were utilized to detect Hebrew-Hungarian affinity, also illustrating Hebrew grammars’ continuing importance in developing descriptive linguistic categories. For example, the influential polyglot linguist Ferenc Verseggy (1757–

²⁰ C. Vladár, *The Early Hungarian Grammars*, 30-31, 75.

²¹ C. Vladár, *The Early Hungarian Grammars*, 73.

²² C. Vladár, *The Early Hungarian Grammars*, 41. See also András Cser, A magyar nyelvtudomány történetének áttekintése a kezdetektől a 20. század elejéig (Review of the History of Hungarian Linguistics from its Emergence until the Beginning of the Twentieth Century), 4; available from https://btk.ppke.hu/uploads/articles/8564/file/Cser_Nytud_tort.pdf; accessed on April 21, 2021.

²³ C. Vladár, *The Early Hungarian Grammars*, 66, 71, 78-79.

1822), a member of the Order of St. Paul, bible translator and grammarian, active in the language cultivation movement, who, in German-speaking Pest, delivered sermons in Hungarian until the order was dissolved in 1786, stressed that Hungarian was an Oriental language. The proof in his eyes was twofold: first, Hungarian could not be described through the rules of any western language. Second, its roots, word derivation, and the system of suffixes, in addition to the structure of speech and its modes pointed at Hungarian's eastern character and close relationship with Hebrew.²⁴ Verseghy's main opponent within the language cultivation movement, the likewise influential linguist and advocate of the Learned Society, in addition to being newspaper editor and publisher, poet, bible translator, and grammarian, and not less important, member of the Piarist order, Miklós Révai (1750–1807) shared Verseghy's opinion about Hungarian being an Oriental language and a kin to Hebrew. (In stark contrast to most orthographical or grammatic questions about which they fiercely debated thus dividing the language cultivation movement.) Révai's biography pointed out that "Nobody used this error [i. e. the Hebrew-Hungarian affinity] of his era in a more systematic and, one could say, scientific manner than Révai. That the Jewish (sic!) and Hungarian languages were related, to him was a certain and unquestionable truth."²⁵ Révai's claim that in Hungarian, verbal suffixes were once pronouns, influenced scholars throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. He also opined that the Hebrew preposition [et ׀א] of the accusative case was reflected in the Hungarian accusative noun suffix, -t or -tt, and that these parallel phenomena indicated that the two languages were related. These findings

²⁴ Ferenc Verseghy, *Prologium in Institutiones Linguae Hungaricae, Ad Systema Adelungianum, genium item linguarum orientalium, ac dialectum tibiscanum & transylvanicum exactas. Bevezetés a magyar nyelv törvényeibe, amely Adelung rendszere, nemkülönben a keleti nyelvek szelleme, valamint a tiszai és az erdélyi nyelvjárás alapján készült* (Introduction to the Laws of the Hungarian Language, Based on Adelung's System, the Spirit of the Oriental Languages, and the Tisza (Theiss) and Transylvanian Dialect), translated to Hungarian by Balázs Hegyi (Pest: Trattner, 1793; Szolnok: Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok Megyei Verseghy Könyvtár, 1998), 37, 43.

²⁵ József Bánóczy, *Révai Miklós élete és munkái* (Miklós Révai's Life and Works) (Budapest, Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Könyvkiadó Hivatala), 265.

returned, for example, on the pages of Pál Csató's (1804–1841) award winning study that explored Hungarian suffixes and derivatives.²⁶ Son of an impoverished Transylvanian nobleman, like Révai, Verseghy, or even Hunfalvy, Csató also pursued different careers: first, he studied to become a priest, then law, later he tried himself in journalism and even became embroiled in literary disputes. He was also a talented playwright. In this study published in 1834 by HAS, by refuting Révai's conclusion about the evolution of suffixes and that they proved Hungarian's relation to Hebrew, Csató emphasized grammar studies' necessary contribution to the language renewal efforts since they could determine the rules of word derivation and the formation of composite words.²⁷ Considering the correlations early nineteenth-century scholars recognized between linguistic research and the practical applications of grammar studies, it is all the more important to take notice that, based on his grammatical investigations on inflexion, Sylvester concluded that Hungarian "does not lack anything that the holy tongues possess, rather, with regard to expressive capacity 'it easily exceeds every language.'"²⁸ Sylvester put his finger on the grammatical flexibility that the language renewal movement pronounced as one of the foundations of their work. Indeed, centuries after him, Révai proposed that in addition to reviving old expressions, based on the study of the structures of Hungarian, new words should be derived.²⁹ In the same vein, Csató emphasized that the study of suffixes highlighted the ways in which Hungarian enriched its vocabulary.³⁰ Not independently, he also contended that whereas the reliance on suffixes indicates that Hungarian was an Oriental language, the measure of kinship between two languages could be determined based on the number of root cognates.³¹

²⁶ Pál Csató, "A' magyar nyelvbeli ragasztékok és szóképzők" (Suffixes and Derivatives in the Hungarian language) in *Nyelvtudományi pályamunkák* (Buda: Magyar Tudós Társaság, 1834), 1-98.

²⁷ Csató, "Suffixes and Derivatives," 13-15, 98.

²⁸ C. Vladár, *The Early Hungarian Grammars*, 68.

²⁹ Bánóczy, *Miklós Révai's Life and Works*, 253.

³⁰ Csató, "Suffixes and Derivatives," 2.

³¹ Csató, "Suffixes and Derivatives," 2.

Proponents of the Oriental theory, thus, established long-enduring connections between different aspects of language study: while the comparison to Hebrew aided the analysis of Hungarian, this analytical work contributed to both a deeper understanding of the rules of the language and, from the practical point of view of nineteenth-century scholars, to the “correct” way of language renewal. In other words, the “belief” in Hungarian’s Oriental character, even if indirectly, correlated with the drive to enrich it with new words. This attitude was not restricted to linguistic circles only. The future president of the Learned Society, later governor of Transylvania Count József Teleki (1790–1855) articulated this connection in 1816, in his prize-winning study that answered the call for papers of the periodical *Magyar Museum* “According to what scientific laws could and should new words and phrases enrich the Hungarian language with regard to [the vocabularies of] sciences and crafts?” Language renewal should serve the glory of the language, the interest of the homeland, and the advancement of the nation’s learnedness, the introduction to Teleki’s 540-page-long study stated. Its path, however, should be set according to “our language’s idiosyncratic nature, apparent characteristics, and true Oriental character, different from the Western languages.”³² Not only does Teleki’s approach to language renewal echo Széchenyi’s theory thirty-five years later that national development should be tailored after the national character, but, by emphasizing Hungarian’s Oriental character, it also confirmed that scholarship was the only means to achieve the political goal of language cultivation. Teleki’s treatise opens a broader view on the enduring alliance between politics and linguistic research in the early nineteenth century. Moreover, it demonstrates the deep impression

³² Count József Teleki, “A Magyar Nyelvnek Tökéletesítésére új szavak és új szólásmódok által” (For the Perfection of the Hungarian Language by New Words and Phrases), in *Jutalom Feleletek a Magyar Nyelvről, A Magyar Nemzeti Museum 1815. 1816. 1817. esztendei kérdéseire I* (Awarded Replies about the Hungarian Language to the Question so of the Hungarian National Museum’s Questions of the Years 1815, 1816, 1817 vol. 1), István Horvát (ed.) (Pest: János Tamás Trattner, 1821), 3. Available from <http://real-r.mtak.hu/814/6/16563.pdf> ; Internet, accessed June 2, 2019.

that the emergence of a historically informed approach left on the study of Hungarian, which, as it will be emphasized, significantly altered the study of affinity. It is only after a detailed review of the history of the Hungarian language since biblical times and through the conquest to the most recent period, that Teleki began discussing linguistics, reaching back to the beginnings in the Reformation. He argued that comparative analysis of word-formation and the study of the language's character and the sounds of the roots in addition to the examination of earlier documents and grammatical analysis of the living language allowed scholars to establish Hungarian's "true affinities."³³ He believed, Hungarian was an original language, "undeniably" similar, "in kinship with" the languages of the Orientals or Semites and the Finnish or Lapp.³⁴

Teleki could have relied on Révai's later linguistic work: *Antiquitates literaturae hungaricae* (Hungarian Literary Antiquities) from 1803 and the 1804 *Elaboratio grammatica hungarica* which promoted the study Hungarian's history and its affinities within the language cultivation movement.³⁵ In other words, Révai affirmed that the constant changes language went through should be studied in order to properly chart the system of rules that governed it.³⁶ What makes this change even more significant is that it was a result of Révai's revision of his earlier view on Hungarian's Oriental affinity under the influence of the second Hungarian treatise that advocated the Hungarian language's connection to (what later would be called) Finno-Ugric

³³ Teleki, "For the Perfection of the Hungarian Language," 13.

³⁴ Teleki, "For the Perfection of the Hungarian Language," 13-14. Here I omit the discussion of not only the impact of German linguistics—Révai's historical linguistic approach is praised also for predating that of Bopp, Grimm, and Humboldt's works—but I also leave undiscussed previous excursions about the connections of Hungarian with Finnish and other languages spoken in Siberia. The literature on this topic is abundant. An early summary of the "Finnish comparative linguistic research" is Ferenc Toldy's introductory study to a commemorative volume honoring Antal Reguly, whose linguistic collection compiled during his travels in the Russian Empire 1839–1846 became the basis of modern Altaic scholarship in Hungary beginning in the late 1840s. Toldy, "Reguly Antal s a finn-magyar kérdés" (Antal Reguly and the Finnish-Hungarian Question) in *Reguly-album: történeti és szépirodalmi tartalommal* (Reguly-Album: with Historical and Belletristic Contents) (Pest: Reguly-Társaság, 1850), V-CXXIX. One of the most influential studies in this topic is Miklós Zsirai, *Finnugor rokonságunk* (Our Finno-Ugric Affinity) (Budapest: MTA, 1937).

³⁵ Bánóczy, *Miklós Révai's Life and Works*, 310.

³⁶ Bánóczy, *Miklós Révai's Life and Works*, 314.

languages, without, however, denying its Oriental affinities. (In the following, in a rather ahistorical manner, I use the term Finno-Ugric for simplicity's sake.) Like most of his contemporaries, leading literati and shapers of public opinion, motivated by "patriotism, ashamed of the kin who smelled of fish," he dismissed the findings of the first Hungarian scholarly treatise by the Jesuit scholar János Sajnovics (1733–1785), who, in 1770, suggested that Hungarian was related to Lapp.³⁷ Thirty years later, in 1799, reading the study of the Transylvanian physician Sámuel Gyarmathi (1751–1830) that identified Lapp and Finnish as if they were two dialects of the same language and argued that Hungarian was related to them, Révai changed his opinion. He embraced the idea of multiple affinities and argued that the Oriental affinity of Hungarian prevailed. "I walked with pleasure and especially long on the path lit by Oriental torches, so I can find support for both affinities," he declared.³⁸ The coexistence of the two affinities, in Révai's mind, was logically connected to his thesis that Hebrew was not the original language from which Hungarian descended. The affinity between Hebrew and Hungarian resembled the relationship between cousins and not that of mother-daughter relationship. Hungarian had preserved significant quantity of linguistic material from the *Ursprache*, which led Révai to conclude that "Our language ... with its words' simpler forms ... stands above Hebrew also today."³⁹ His explanation for the affinity with Finnish followed similar logic: it was the product of descentance from a common progenitor.

The historical approach and the not yet formalized understanding of affinity characterizing these works (and studies published in the first half of the nineteenth century)

³⁷ Bánóczy, *Révai's Life and Works*, 266. On the coinage of "kinship smelling of fish" or its variation "kinship smelling of fish fat" see Honti, "About the Affinity of Our Mother Tongue," 167-169. In 1935, Zsirai argued that Bél refused Strahlenberg's findings for the very same reason.

³⁸ Bánóczy, *Miklós Révai's Life and Works*, 279.

³⁹ Bánóczy, *Miklós Révai's Life and Works*, 328-329.

demonstrate that Altaic scholarship did not evolve contrary to the self-Orientalist understanding but organically emerged from it—thus putting in a different perspective Hunfalvy’s ire against the self-Orientalizing discourse, which, he argued, hindered advancement in the field of linguistics.

Reform of linguistic self-Orientalism and the emergence of Altaic scholarship

In contrast to what the title suggests, Sajnovics’s study, *Demonstratio. Idioma Ungarorum et Lapponum idem esse* (Demonstration. The Hungarian and the Lapp languages are identical) argued that the two languages (as well as other languages, such as Chinese) were closely related.⁴⁰ In Sajnovics’s view, the basis of the affinity lay with phonetic and morphological correspondences in addition to a shared vocabulary, illustrated by a comparative list of 150 words. That the Lapps could not understand his Hungarian speech the same way as Sajnovics could not understand the local language (even though, a rumor suggesting the opposite had been circulated in Copenhagen), Sajnovics stated, was not contrary to the claim of affinity, but an evidence of the historical transformation of both languages. To illustrate this change, in the second edition of the treatise he published parts of the recently discovered twelfth-century prayer *Halotti Beszéd és Könyörgés* (Funeral Sermon and Prayer) and claimed that given that it was written per the request of the Church with the goal to address common people and incite among them piety at funerals, it reflected the living language of the time. He provided a transcription to current Hungarian as well as a Latin translation to underpin his argumentation and allow non-Hungarian-speakers to access the text.

⁴⁰ János Sajnovics, *Bizonyítás A magyar és a lapp nyelv azonos* (Budapest: ELTE, 1994), (the Hungarian translation of the second edition of the Latin text by Zsuzsa Vladár.) About the Chinese affinity, with which Sajnovics credits his mentor Maximilian Hell (1720–1792), see page 54. Klára Sándor, *Nyelvrokonság hunhagyomány*, 408; Zsirai, *Finnugor rokonságunk*, 492-493.

The examination of Gyarmathi's linguistic oeuvre further supports the approach to the Oriental and Altaic affinity theories as concomitant phases on the continuing evolution of linguistic research. His first grammar study celebrated "Hebraists" contributing to Hungarian grammar studies and argued that the Hungarian language was connected to "Jewish (sic!), Chaldean, Syriac, etc."⁴¹ His thinking changed after studying Swedish, Danish, English, and other languages with August Ludwig von Schlözer (1735–1809) in Göttingen, where he published *Affinitas linguae hvngaricae cvm lingvis fennicae originis grammaticae demonstrare*. It is believed that based on Sajnovics's experience, Schlözer advised Gyarmathi to carefully word his findings. It may have been thanks to Gyarmathi's political vein that in the introduction to the treatise, he praised the work of the same Pál Beregszászi Nagy (1750–1828), who vehemently advocated for Hungarian's Oriental character as a response to Sajnovics's work three decades earlier, which he allegedly never read.⁴² "The studious will find in his work those elements which our language acquired from the *East*. My purpose is to develop the *Northern* contributions," Gyarmathi explained the connection of his work to that of Beregszászi Nagy and its support for multiple affinities.⁴³ The three parts of *Affinitas* and the three appendixes, presented Hungarian and Finnish, compared Hungarian and Estonian, and the third part was dedicated to the comparison of Hungarian with "other" Finnish languages. In addition, it compared the Hungarian and Polish grammars and demonstrated loan words from German, Tatar, Turkic, and Slavic languages present in Hungarian to point out that they should not be counted as proof of linguistic affinity. Moreover, Gyarmathi offered a list of cognates to demonstrate that words change meaning over

⁴¹ Sámuel Gyarmathi, *Okoskodva tanító magyar nyelvemester* (Hungarian Language Master Instructing Smartly) (Kolozsvár (Cluj): Márton Hochmeister, 1794), xiii.

⁴² Sámuel Gyarmathi, *Grammatical Proof of the Affinity of the Hungarian Language with Languages of Fennic Origin*, translated, annotated, and introduced by Victor E. Hanzeli (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1983), 1.

⁴³ Gyarmathi, *Grammatical Proof*, 1. Emphasis is in Hanzeli's translation.

the ages. *Affinitas* demonstrates Finno-Ugric affinity manifesting itself in noun and verb conjugation, in the creation of comparative degrees of adjectives, the names of the numbers, the creation of cardinal numbers, the use of pronouns, syntax, and cognates.⁴⁴

Révai's openness toward the proto-Finno-Ugric research did not find followers until the mid-1800s.⁴⁵ Yet, change continued through the combined study of Hungarian's Oriental affinities and the practical application of grammar studies to the language cultivation movement as exemplified by János Nagy's (1809–1885) study, *A magyar nyelv szóalkotó s módosító ragainak nyelvtudományi vizsgálata* (The Linguistic Examination of the Hungarian Language's Word-Forming and Word-Altering Suffixes), published by the HAS in one volume with Csató's work. Nagy was a Catholic theologian and linguist, professor of Oriental languages at the Szombathely theological academy, and, since 1833, HAS corresponding member. In other words, unlike the scholars mentioned before, his primary expertise lay within Oriental philology. He systematically examined all the Hungarian sounds marked by a letter and concluded that every consonant had once signified a suffix, which could be either a new word creator or word modifier.⁴⁶ Thus, he utilized Semitic linguistics' focus on consonants (that are recorded in writing as individual letters, unlike like vowels which are marked by diacritical signs) to explore the very part of the language's structure, which other scholars considered key to the broadening of the Hungarian vocabulary. Five years later, in his inaugural address on the occasion of being appointed regular member of HAS "The General Basic and Comparative Linguistic Guidelines with the imageries of Shem's Oriental Linguistic Scions' Resembling Hungarian," he further

⁴⁴ Zsirai, *Our Finno-Ugric Affinity*, 503.

⁴⁵ See fn. 34.

⁴⁶ Nagy, "A magyar nyelv szóalkotó s módosító ragainak nyelvtudományi vizsgálata" (The Linguistic Examination of the Hungarian Language's Word-Forming and Word-Altering Suffixes) in *Nyelvtudományi pályamunkák* (Buda: Magyar Tudós Társaság, 1834), 118.

expounded on Hungarian's Oriental affinity and the manner in which linguistics can guide the enrichment of Hungarian expression. He aimed to "shed light on our language, set limits to exaggerated comparisons and word analysis, establish some ground rules for the cultivation of our domestic language, diminish prejudices, and mostly, encourage youngsters ... to study Oriental languages." The latter, he argued, was important because it allowed to highlight the characteristics of Hungarian. Nagy, thus clearly articulated what Hunfalvy would repeat as well, namely that the comparison between languages that belong to the same language family advanced the study of Hungarian.⁴⁷ Accordingly, he also broke with the Hungarian-centered view and studied the history of four Semitic languages: Hebrew, Arabic, Syriac, and Chaldean (Aramaic). Through the repeated comparison of the letters, he observed both the ways in which they resembled to and those in which they differed from Hungarian. While Hungarian used suffixes whose (original) meaning could not be established with confidence, word formation in Semitic languages occurred through the change of the root's sounds (i. e. vowels). Nagy argued that this practice was once present in Hungarian, as exemplified by the 't-vowel-r' words, for example *tér* (noun: space or place), *tör* (verb: breaks), or *tűr* (verb: endures or suffers).⁴⁸ Nagy concluded that Hungarian prevailed over Semitic languages, because it preserved the pristine character of its original roots, and when creating new words, instead of transforming the root, it rather jointed two roots together.⁴⁹ His conclusion, unsurprisingly reminds of Sylvester's and Révai's praise for Hungarian: they both saw Hungarian's superiority underlying its unparalleled ability to create new words and thus enrich itself.

⁴⁷ János Nagy, "A nyelv általános alap, és hasonlítási vezér elvei, szem' keleti nyelvsarjadékainak a magyarral hasonlatos képeivel" (The General Basic and Comparative Linguistic Guidelines with the imageries of Shem's Oriental Linguistic Scions' Resembling Hungarian) in *Magyar Tudós Társaság 5. Évkönyve: Második Osztály, Értekezések 1838-1840* (Buda: A' Magyar Királyi Egyetem Betűivel, 1842), 7.

⁴⁸ Many of the words in this list are meaningless to the author of this study and probably other modern Hungarian speaker readers.

⁴⁹ Nagy, "The General Basic, and Comparative Linguistic Guidelines," 37.

Ten months later, likewise in the framework of an inaugural speech, bible translator and, independently from this achievement, the first Jewish member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Móric Bloch compared Hungarian to the Finno-Ugric language Zyrian or Komi.⁵⁰ HAS invited Bloch to join the membership as an acknowledgement of his service to the cultivation of the Hungarian language through his Hungarian translation of the Pentateuch from the Hebrew original. In his appointment, however, several political and linguistic factors played important roles—which reveals yet another way in which the importance ascribed to language usage affected majority-minority relations in Hungary. Prior to taking a leadership role in the struggle for Jewish emancipation in 1840, the year in which he was elected to HAS, Bloch worked as a journalist.⁵¹ In his efforts to publicize his translation and earn subscriptions that would help cover the costs of production, he described his translation as a helpful tool to learn both Hebrew and Hungarian and he even hinted on its relevance to the study of the affinity between the two languages. It remains unclear whether he did so being driven by economic optimism or out of scholarly conviction he promoted his work by noting its relevance to the Oriental affinity and the closely related language cultivation movement. His words surely echoed Liberals demanding linguistic acculturation as a condition of Jewish emancipation.

Addressing the HAS assembly, Bloch based his analysis on the sole written text in Zyrian available at the time, a translation of Matthew's Gospel recorded in Cyrillic script from 1823. Although he indicated that he had founded his investigation on German Indo-European linguistics, by inserting demonstrations from Hebrew, Latin, Sanskrit, and German, he analyzed Hungarian-Zyrian concordances referencing multilingual comparisons, which took into account

⁵⁰ Móric Bloch, *Nyelvészeti nyomozások* (Linguistic Investigations) (Buda: A Magyar Királyi Egyetem' Betűivel, 1841.)

⁵¹ Móric Bloch, *A zsidók* (The Jews) (Buda: Magyar Királyi Egyetem, 1840); his articles in Hungarian and German appeared in *Hasznos Mulatságok* (Useful Pastimes) *Pesther Tagesblatt* (Pest Daily) in 1838.

phonetics, all parts of speech, and the conjugation of both nouns and verbs.⁵² Despite the apparent tautological character of the study: by comparing Zyrian and Hungarian, he neither nuanced or refuted, merely illustrated the Finno-Ugric affinity of both Hungarian and Zyrian, he stressed that affinity is proven because the likeness between the two languages could be detected in all their elements.⁵³ Nevertheless, the study is notable because by choosing Zyrian, he discussed Finno-Ugric affinity through the comparison of Hungarian with one of the least studied members of the language family.

More significant, however, is that in contrast to the implied scope of this research, namely contributing to (proto) Finno-Ugric comparative studies, in his final conclusions, Bloch relied on self-Orientalism's consensus on Hungarian's unmatched creative and expressive potential. In Bloch's view, "In Hungarian, the infinite number of applications of the basic words opens (...) an infinite field for grammatic operations, enabling us to express the finest conceptional amendments (...)." ⁵⁴ Furthermore, he declared that in superiority Hungarian matched Sanskrit, the language considered the most creative and original by German linguists. Had Hungarian possessed similar number of roots as Sanskrit in the earliest period of the history of the languages, Bloch added, Hungarian could have been considered even superior over Sanskrit.

Bloch's laudatory tone was not lost on the academicians' ears. Ten years later, in his introduction to the *Reguly Album*, the literary historian and HAS Secretary Ferenc Toldy (1805–1875) listed Bloch's presentation among the Hungarian works that addressed the "Finnish-Hungarian Question." The *Album* celebrated Antal Reguly (1819–1858) the traveler

⁵² Bloch, *Nyelvészeti Nyomozások*, 13; unnumbered fn.

⁵³ Bloch, *Nyelvészeti Nyomozások*, 13.

⁵⁴ Bloch, *Nyelvészeti Nyomozások*, 35.

ethnographer and linguist, whose collections compiled during his travels in Siberia and Russian Central Asia became the foundation of Hungarian Altaic and Finno-Ugric scholarship. Toldy recorded Reguly's travels, about which Reguly regularly sent reports to HAS. (At the time, Toldy read these to the assembly.) In a letter sent in 1843 from Kazan to HAS, similarly as Hunfalvy would argue in 1856, Reguly suggested that his work would contribute to the "national scholarship," that is deepen the knowledge of "our language and our history," since his collections would reveal the "real original Hungarian" element in national culture.⁵⁵ In the *Album*, having presented Reguly's thoughts and work, Toldy offered his readers his interpretation of the comparative Altaic field's significance, in sharply different terms, regarding both content and tone, thus further amplifying the legacy of the self-Orientalizing view.

Toldy noted that in contrast to the "biased German scholarship" represented by Schlötzer's research, Reguly's "objective" work demonstrated that Hungarian was part of the Ural-Altaic language families, which could be divided into six "classes," relating to each other the same way as the "classes" in the Indo-European family do. Invoking Révai's claim about the common ancestry of Hungarian and Hebrew, Toldy stressed that while Hungarian was closest to Finnish, more precisely to the "Uralic Finnish" languages, this affinity was not based on genealogical connection between the two languages, rather on descent from a common ancestor. *A propos* linguistic classification, he argued for Hungarians' glorious ancestry and its lasting legacy:

Hungarian is a member of a populace [*népség*] of enormous geographical spread ... that since the historical era often played great roles ... and what can raise our breasts deservingly: the Hungarian is the most noble branch of this ancient and giant race ... creating a millennium-old state, making it prosper through civilizing benevolence, sharing true freedom within its borders without distinction to

⁵⁵ "Reguly Antal lev. Tagnak Kazánban, m. évi nov. 7. költ levele, mellynek lényeges részei ekkép következnek" *Magyar Académiai Értesítő* (HAS Newsletter) 4, no. 2 (January 1844): 22.

ethnicity or class, reached to the highest achievements of humanity, thus, most among all the branches of its race, ensuring its eternal survival.⁵⁶ The difference between Reguly's and Toldy's words illustrate that while for the Altaic scholar, who believed in Hungarian's twofold affinity to Turkic and Finno-Ugric languages, comparative scholarship offered an insight into the evolution and system of Hungarian and would reveal details of the history of Hungarian speakers before the era of written documents, for the literary historian and functionary, the linguistic findings ought to carry a political message as well, something that pointed beyond their scientific significance. Toldy found this message in the propagation of the Hungarians' past grandeur.

Conclusion: inaugurating Altaic research

Not unlike Reguly, the linguistically inclined Hunfalvy defined the scope of Altaic research void of the pathos of the Oriental affinity theory, emphasizing that the scope of this research was national because it subjected the national language and history to examination. In January 1851, that is less than a year after the *Reguly Album* was published, Hunfalvy's paper delivered at the meeting of the HAS' Linguist Department, "Nyelvészeti teendőink, s a finn népek régiségei" (Our Linguistic Agenda [to dos], and the History of the Finnish People), outlined the Hungarian Altaic comparative linguistic program. It used similar verbiage as in his above cited article from 1856, but it was (still) free of the furor against self-Orientalism.⁵⁷ Hunfalvy underlined that through linguistic research, Hungary joined modern European scholarship, advanced progress, and, as noted many times previously and later, helped learn about the earliest periods in Hungarian history, from which no records survived.⁵⁸ Hence, he stressed, "In Altaic linguistics ... we must take the lead, if our academic life wants to avoid the

⁵⁶ Toldy, *Reguly-album*, 121-122.

⁵⁷ Pál Hunfalvy, "Nyelvészeti teendőink, s a finn népek régiségei" (Our Linguistic Agenda [to dos], and the History of the Finnish People) *Magyar Academiai Értesítő* (HAS Newsletter) 11 (1851): 1-20.

⁵⁸ Hunfalvy, "Our Linguistic Agenda," 3.

biggest shame, the shame over incapacity.”⁵⁹ Most importantly, he vouched for Altaic studies claiming that it fulfilled the very same role as earlier linguistic research did in national life :

The order, in which our linguistic studies should follow, corresponds with the interest of this era ... the scholarly interpretation, collection, and ordering of our vocabulary, our most thankful duties, require the study of the related languages. Even if no European interest would suggest so, it should be done here. ... until our linguists do not study the Finnish and Turkish languages, neither our grammars nor our dictionaries will comply with the linguistic requirements...⁶⁰

He declared that the study of Hungarian, the goal that generations of Hungarian linguists shared throughout the centuries, required the comparative linguistic method and its application in the Altaic field.

Among Hunfalvy’s writings on the Altaic affinities published between 1851 and 1856, his 1855 article in the *HAS Newsletter* is significant also because it confirms that his anger toward the self-Orientalizing practice’s alleged anti-scholarly attitude in 1856 stemmed not from his aversion to the Hebrew or Oriental affinity theory per se. (His advocacy for Turkish affinity connected him to Révai, for example.) In 1855, he explained that comparative linguistics could not be eschewed for two reasons: in every language there were foreign elements that intrigued scholars, and, in every community, there was a need to understand their historical roots. However, if there was no preparation to meet these needs, comparative linguistics turned into “history making. This is what we see in the case of the chroniclers. The less they knew about real language comparison, the more daringly they compiled prehistory.”⁶¹

Hunfalvy’s passionate rebuttal of self-Orientalism in 1856 should be read as an advocacy for comparative linguistics. He criticized other approaches, which aimed to explain Hungarian

⁵⁹ Hunfalvy, “Our Linguistic Agenda,” 4.

⁶⁰ Hunfalvy, “Our Linguistic Agenda,” 6-7.

⁶¹ Pál Hunfalvy, “A' török magyar és finn szók' egybehasonlítása” (The Comparison of Turkish, Hungarian, and Finnish Words) *Magyar Akadémiai Értesítő* (HAS Newsletter) 15 (1855): 67.

linguistic phenomena “from within” and by comparing the language of historical documents (and thus stopping the study of the language’s historical development at the high Middle Ages) alleging that these were the only ways to detect the “originality of the language.”⁶² Hunfalvy reproached his critics for operating with scientifically untenable categories, such as “originality,” and suggesting that comparative linguistics could interfere with the “purity” of a language. He also attacked authors who misinterpreted the consequences of neighborly relations between unrelated language communities, such as the unescapable presence of loan words.⁶³ In this debate Hunfalvy identified language study as an avenue to the exploration of national history, while his critics emphasized language studies’ relevance to the understanding national character.

Finally, in 1860 in a much subtler tone than four years earlier, Hunfalvy pilloried the statement according to which the free spirit of the Hungarian nation manifested itself in its language. The argument, while could be connected to the German philosopher, Johann Gottfried Herder’s writings, is familiar from Toldy’s study, which in turn reiterated the works of earlier Hungarian authors, who pronounced freedom as an underlying value of national life since the times of the conquering nomadic Hungarian tribes who, accordingly, lived in a sort of proto-democratic alliance.⁶⁴ Hunfalvy pointed out that the behavior of languages followed regular patterns, they did not develop or changed following the caprice of the spirit, but according to rules, the existence of which was independent from the current state of scholarship. These rules, he said, were present even if they were still unknown or repeatedly misinterpreted.⁶⁵

⁶² Pál Hunfalvy, “Apologia. A’ magyar igeidők” (Apology. The Hungarian Verb Tenses) *Magyar Nyelvészet* (Hungarian Linguistics) 5 (1860): 254.

⁶³ Pál Hunfalvy, “Ballagi „a’ magyar nyelvészkedés köre”” (Ballagi, “The Planes of Hungarian Linguistics”) *Magyar Nyelvészet* (Hungarian Linguistics) 5 (1860): 476. In 1848 Bloch changed his last name to Ballagi. The reference is to an article he published.

⁶⁴ Joachim Székér, *Magyarok eredete* (Hungarians’ Origins) (Pozsony, Komárom: Wéber Simon Péter, 1791.)

⁶⁵ Hunfalvy, “Apology,” 266-67.

Even if the Altaic theory was constructed on such misinterpreted rules of the language, it offered Hunfalvy and other linguists to stand up against the self-orientalist academic culture and demand for themselves the same patriotic merits students of Oriental affinities claimed for themselves. Hunfalvy exchanged the earlier self-laudatory tone and redirected the focus away from the country's past grandeur and its legacy to the quasi-axiomatic contribution of scholarship and learning to national life. Scholarly engagement, in his view, could also be directly converted to acknowledgement on the international stage. Hunfalvy promoted a more abstract and elitist scholarly contribution to the nation state in comparison to his opponents, who, in turn, responded by refusing to accept a theory, which they presented as a promotion of a kinship "stinking of fish." The mode of the discussions around the Altaic theory set the tone for the debates about the Finno-Ugric theory beginning in the last third of the nineteenth century.

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