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Interconnections Between Toponym Etymology and Historical Dialectology

Abstract

Certain dialectal phonological oppositions can be especially complex in terms of their genesis. The phonological binaries developing as a result of various changes may also reflect different attributes in terms of both chronology and regional variation. Thus, when conducting studies in historical dialectology, the investigation of sound changes behind dialectal phonological oppositions is a priority. This necessitates the etymological analysis of toponyms or their appellative components serving as records of such phonological oppositions. I discuss how toponym etymology may prove useful for historical dialectology. The awareness of the etymology of certain toponyms may indicate early phonological changes that could not otherwise be detected due to lack of data. In other cases, it is exactly toponym etymology that may help us argue that variability between data is not the result of sound changes but only of orthographic inconsistency. I also wish to highlight that toponym etymology does not always provide strong guidance for historical dialectology. The weakness of such studies is often represented by uncertain etymologies that only refer to deduced personal names or toponymic etymons.

Keywords

toponym etymology, phonology, historical dialectology

1.

In this paper, I discuss a narrower aspect of the interconnections between toponym etymology and historical dialectology, namely, the etymological background of phonological oppositions in Old Hungarian. Dialectal phonological oppositions can be rather complex in terms of their genesis, with different underlying processes of change being discernible in the background. The phonological binaries, variations developing as a result of this, may reflect different attributes in terms of both chronology and regional variation. Therefore, when conducting studies in historical dialectology, the investigation of sound changes behind phonological oppositions presents itself as a key task. At the same time, the exploration of sound changes cannot take place successfully without the etymological analysis of those specific linguistic data in which the phonological oppositions can be documented in Old Hungarian. This primarily means the etymological study of the toponymic data of charters and the proper name and their appellative components (in relation to the source characteristics of the age referred to as the early Old Hungarian Era, 895–1350). In this paper, therefore, I discuss how toponym etymology may prove useful in studies of historical dialectology, while I also wish to highlight those cases in which studies in historical dialectology cannot rely on toponym etymology (or can do so only to a limited extent). I illustrate the above with examples of oppositions of various forms from Old Hungarian, including the presence or absence of the *l* sound, as well as *i* ~ *ü*, *ë* ~ *ö*, *i* ~ *ë*, *é* ~ *í*.

2.

Toponyms in Hungarian could be formed from anthroponyms, common noun antecedents, and we may also talk about loans coming from other languages. When presenting various phenomena, I will discuss these etymological layers separately.

2.1.

One of the types of dialectal variants showing phonological opposition is represented by those examples in which, besides the chronology of the data, we may also draw conclusions about the direction of phonological changes based on the **anthroponym etymons** and their antecedents.

For example, the settlement name *Beken(y)* has both labial [bekön(y) ~ bekün(y)] and illabial data [bekën(y) ~ bekin(y)] in sources ([1193–6]/1216: *Sulgabekin* ~ 1318/1325: *Bekun*, Bács County, Gy. 1, p. 214). Of these, the original status of the illabial form seems to be more plausible due to the also illabial *Beken(y)* form of the anthroponym base word (cf. 1138/1329: *Beken*, personal name, FNESz.). The chronological relationship between the labial [kerecsöny ~ kerecsüny] and illabial forms [kerecsény] in the settlement name *Kerecsen(y)* (1327: *Kerechen* ~ 1324: *Kerechun*, Gy. 1, p. 542) can be established in a similar way. It was the anthroponym *Kerecsen(y)* (cf. 1274 k.: *Kerechen*, personal name, FNESz.), that served as the basis of this name, which can be derived from the old Hungarian *kerescsen* ‘a type of falcon’ noun (FNESz.).

Personal name etymons may prove to be useful for us in many other cases as well when trying to decide which form was primary in Old Hungarian: the one containing the *l* sound, or the one without it. We may include the toponyms whose personal name antecedents also include the *l* sound among those that originally used the *l* sound as well. Thus, for example, the toponym *Rátót*, supported by data showing both the [rátolt] and [rátót] forms (1283: *Ratold*, Pest County, Gy. 4, p. 554, 1460: *Ratholthfalwa*, Vas County, Cs. 2, p. 788 ~ 1428: *Rathodfolua*, Vas County, Cs. 2, p. 788), was created metonymically from an anthroponym, and it is not only the personal name base word in Hungarian sources that contains the *l* sound but also its German anthroponym antecedent (cf. 1203: *Ratolt*, personal name, cf. Old German personal name *Ratold*, *Ratolt*, FNESz.; Bahlow, 1980, p. 402). The dropping of the *l* sound and the concomitant lengthening of the preceding vowel (*ol* > *ó*) is thus the result of a secondary sound change in this name.

In other cases, the foreign language antecedent of the personal name confirms just the opposite, that is, that the *l* was added to the toponym in a secondary manner. Data of the settlement name *Gyirmót* appear in both [gyirmót] and [gyërmolt] sound forms (1267: *Giurmoth*, Cs. 3, p. 549 ~ 1338: *Germolth*, Győr County, Gy. 2, p. 589). As etymologically the settlement name may be associated with the Old German personal name *Germoud* ~ *Germout* and the

German family name *Germut* (FNESz.; Bényei & Pethő, 1998, pp. 15–16), we may reconstruct the changes of the two forms: *gyirmót* > *gyërmolt*. We can also witness the insertion of the *l* in the case of the settlement name of *Bogád*, data of which appear in [bogád] and [bogáld] forms (1276: *Bugad* ~ 1332–5/PR.: *Bogald*, Baranya County, Gy. 1, p. 287), and which derives from the anthroponym *Bogát* (cf. 1211: *Bogat*, anthroponym, FNESz.) and the Slavic linguistic antecedent (cf. Serbo-Croatian *Bogat*, personal name, FNESz.) of this personal name also appears without *l*.

2.2.

The foreign language **equivalents** of **loan names** may also serve as guidelines when defining the chronological relations of variants. Today's settlement name *Csetnek* can be found in medieval records both with a labial and illabial vowel (in the second syllable): showing [csitnik] and [csitnük] forms (1258/1334: *Chythnik* ~ 1258/1336>1430: *Chytnuk*, Gömör County, Gy. 2, p. 490). The name is of Slavic origin and the Slavic linguistic form has an illabial second syllable vowel (cf. Slovak *Štítnik*, FNESz.), and based on this we may suppose the primacy of the illabial form among these variants.

In connection with another type of variant, the names featuring the *é* ~ *í* opposition, we may use the example of the settlement name of *Eszék*. The settlement name shows an *é* ~ *í* opposition, [eszék] ~ [eszík] variants in its second syllable in old Hungarian (1196>454, 1330, 1332–5/PR.: *Ezeek*, *Essek* ~ 1339: *Ezyk*, KMHsz. 1, p. 93), and of these it is also the Slavic linguistic antecedent that makes the primacy of the *é* form plausible. The toponym *Eszék* is of Southern Slavic origin and the Slavic language connection confirms the primacy of the *é* form (cf. Serbo-Croatian *Ösek* ~ *Ösijek*, FNESz.).

2.3.

Among toponyms based on appellatives we may also find examples in which the etymology of the base word may help us decide the relationship between the variants. Some Hungarian appellatives with an *i* ~ *ü* opposition have roots in ancient times and the corresponding words in related languages may help us establish the relationship between the labial and illabial forms. For

example, parallels from related languages may help us in connection with the toponyms including the appellative *fil* ~ *fül* ‘ear’ (1323: *File*, Gy. 2, p. 386 ~ 1268/347: *Fyul*, HA. 3, p. 61). It confirms the primacy of the illabial form that in languages related to Hungarian, for example in Vogul, the lexeme also has an illabial form in records (vog. *pil* ‘ear’, Benkő, 1957, p. 17; TESz.). We need to add, however, that a connection with the anthroponym *Fülöp* ~ *Filep* is also an option in the etymology of these names.

3.

At the same time, toponym etymology does not always provide reliable guidance for studies in historical dialectology. We need to be careful especially with those etymologies which rely on inferred etymons. We can find such examples in all three toponym categories.

3.1.

The abundant records of the settlement name *Köröskény* include a great variety of phonological forms: [keriskíny] ~ [kereskény] ~ [kerüskény] ~ [kürüskény] ~ [köröskény] (1240: *Keryskyn*, Gy. 4, p. 414 ~ 1290 k.: *Keresken*, Gy. 3, p. 206 ~ 1292 [c: 1296]: *Kerusken* ~ 1301: *Kurusken*, Gy. 4, p. 414). According to publications in toponym etymology, the settlement name was formed from an anthroponym, and the personal name used as its basis is probably of Old Turkic origin (cf. Old Turkic **keriškän* ‘litigant’, FNESz.). The problem is caused partly by the fact that the personal name has no records in Hungarian and partly because the antecedent Old Turkic form is also only an inferred one, and thus we cannot establish with certainty the relationship between the name variants.

Data of names including **common nouns** or having a common noun antecedent also illustrate well the uncertain situation caused by the inferred forms in the etymology of these names. In the case of many Hungarian words with an Old Turkic origin, for example, the inferred etymon causes uncertainty. Thus, for example, the word *iker* ‘twin’ can be found in sources both in the

labial [ikür ~ ikör] and the illabial [ikir ~ ikër] form (in its second syllable) (1095: *ikirbucur*, OklSz., p. 80 ~ +1214: *Ykvr̄tou*, Nyitra County, HA. 4, p. 59), and based on the Old Turkic component (cf. **ikir*, WOT.): so we may consider the illabial form to be primary only with uncertainty. What is more, this uncertainty is made even more complicated by the fact that the Old Turkic forms were usually reconstructed while relying on the old form of Hungarian words with a Turkic origin.

The situation is similar in the case of the word *berkenye* ‘sorbus’, which also appears in early sources both in a labial [berekünye ~ berekönye] and illabial [berkinye ~ brekinye] form (1274: *Brekyne*, *Berkyne*, TESz. ~ 1278: *berecune*, Gy. 4, p. 265). Of these, based on the inferred Slavic **brěkynja* we suspect that the illabial form was primary, but again, this cannot be stated with certainty (TESz.; Kiss, 1995, p. 16).

The settlement name of *Kartolc* is a **loan toponym**, data of which include the [kartóc] and [kartolc] variants (1156: *Kortouc* ~ 1349: *Kartholc*, Nyitra County, Gy. 4, p. 404). The perception of the relationship between the variants is made uncertain, however, by the fact that the original Slavic form is only the inferred Slovak **Krtovci* toponym (FNESz.; Tóth, 2004, p. 455).

3.2.

In other cases, the establishment of the direction of changes between phonological variants is difficult because the etymology of the given linguistic element (appellative or toponym) is either uncertain or unknown.

In the case of **common nouns** of an unknown origin (also occurring as parts of toponyms) and showing a labial ~ illabial opposition as, for example, *bükk* ‘beech’ [bik] ~ [bük] (1259/1390/1454: *bykfew*, Kraszna County, HA. 3, p. 73 ~ 1228/1305/1361: *Buk*, Komárom County, HA. 3, p. 60) and *üreg* ‘hole, cavern’ [ireg] ~ [irüg] (1113: *Erig*, Nyitra County, Gy. 4, p. 482 ~ 1229: *Irug*, Bihar County, HA. 1, p. 80; cf. TESz.; EWUng.; Zaicz, 2006), at most it is the frequency of labial and illabial forms and the first occurrence of data that may serve as points of reference when determining the primary form (TESz.; FNESz.; Póczos, 2001, p. 49; Rácz, 2007, p. 298).

The establishment of the chronological relationship is difficult also if there are several possibilities that may be considered in connection with the etymology of a given **toponym**. For example, the names *Köre* (1332–7/PR.: *Kerey*

~ 1323: *Kure*, Gy. 3, p. 110) and *Körű* (1326: *Kereu* ~ 1245: *Curu*, Gy. 3, p. 110) (cf. 1459: *Kwre*, family name, FNESz.) can be listed among those which originally included a labial vowel if the personal name serving as its basis is really connected to the Old Turkic personal name *Kürü* and the Old Turkic common noun *kür* ‘brave, bold’ (FNESz.). It is more likely, however, that these names derive from a Hungarian participle meaning ‘turning’ (derived from the verb **ker-* ~ **kör-*), thus the labial primary phonological form is less justified (FNESz., Juhász, 1979, pp. 445–455).

4.

In certain cases, the etymology of the toponyms may make us think of such earlier sound changes which we would not necessarily consider based purely on toponymic data. Although these names do not show phonological oppositions, they may have a role in defining the regional basis of a particular phonological change.

4.1.

This is the case, for example, with the insertion of *l* if we cannot find a form without *l* among the records of the toponym and it is only the relevant **personal name etymon** that indicates the secondary addition of *l* to it. The settlement name of *Cselcsény*, for example, has records only with *l* in medieval sources (1328: *Chelchen*, Hont County, Gy. 3, p. 251), however, as *Csécsény* was formed from an anthroponym (cf. 1164–5: *Chechen*, personal name, FNESz. *Csécsény*), we may suspect the secondary presence of *l* in it.

4.2.

The insertion of *l* does not cause a phonological opposition in certain data of a **common noun** origin either, thus we may find records of this element containing *l* only during the Old Hungarian Era (895–1350) in the entire language area. Based on the etymology of the common noun, however, we may still suspect the *l* insertion, for example, in the case of the settlement name of *Bocsárd* (1327: *Bolchard*, Abaúj County, Gy. 1, p. 69), which was created from the old Hungarian occupational name *bocsár* ‘cooper, cup bearer’ (cf. 1211: *Bocar*, EWUng., 1237–40: *buchardionis*, FNESz.). The *l* of the derivative word *hold* ‘moon’ may also be the result of subsequent insertion based on the etymology of the common noun as it was created from the noun *hó* ‘moon, month’ with the *-d* diminutive (1309/Cod.: *Hulduualach*, Alsó-Fehér County, Gy. 2, p. 165) (TESz.; EWUng.; Nyirkos, 1987, p. 128).

5.

In other cases, it is exactly based on toponym etymology that we may argue that variability in data is not a result of sound changes but only of orthographic inconsistency at the time.

During the early Old Hungarian Era (895–1350), for example, the sound value of the *i* and *y* letters could be both *i* and *ě*, thus without adequate etymological information we cannot decide conclusively if the data reflect the same phonological form, while the marking of the *ě* sound with the *i*, *y* and *e* letters or an actual underlying *i* ~ *ě* entail a phonological and possibly even dialectal difference. The plant name *körtvély* ‘pear’, for example, often appears in sources as a common noun or a toponym component in rather diverse forms (+1275[XIV.]: *Kirtuiles*, *Kyrtuiles*, [kirtvílyes ~ kěrtvílyes], Gy. 3, p. 110, 1295/423: *Kerthweler*, [kěrtvély-], Gy. 1, p. 510 ~ 1256: *keththeus kurtuwelfa*, [kürtüvély- ~ körtövély-], Gy. 3, p. 108). The forms written with *i* ~ *y* among the records, however, tend to reflect an orthographic feature based on the etymology of the word and not an *i* ~ *ě* dialectal duality. The supposed Hungarian base form of *körtvély* was **kertβeli*, which may derive from the Old Turkic **kertweliy* or

**kertmeliy* antecedent (WOT). Also based on the etymological background, we may suppose that in the case of *szeg* ‘corner, protrusion, peak, part of a village, area’ (1270: *Ilsuazyg*, Gy. 4, p. 523 ~ 1293: *Lukazeg*, Gy. 1, p. 488 ~ +1256: *Molunzug*, Gy. 1, p. 864) the form written with *y* is pronounced with *ě*. The *szeg* found in records in toponyms is probably the same as the appellative *szeg* ‘pointed iron tool’, representing a version separated from it semantically. The latter is an ancient remnant from the Ugor era and the Ugor base form could be **šerjk3* (TESz.; UEW.).

6.

The knowledge of the etymology of toponyms featuring a phonological opposition is also essential in historical dialectology because it may happen that the frequency of a certain phonological opposition is influenced by the etymological attributes of the toponyms.

6.1.

In many cases we may suppose, for example, the creation of forms with the subsequent insertion of *l* in the case of toponyms deriving from Slavic languages. Among the forms inserting the *l* sound, those Slavic toponyms are represented in a high number in the case of which the Slavic topoformants *-(ov)ica*, **(ov)ьсь/*-evьсь* are replaced in Hungarian by the *-óc* and *-olc* forms (Tóth, 2004, p. 454; Kenyhercz, 2014, p. 206), for example *Babócsa* (1289: *Boboča*, [bobócsa ~ babócsa] ~ 1313: *Bobolcha*, [bobolcsa ~ babolcsa], Gy. 1, p. 275, cf. Bulgarian *Бобовица* placename, Serbo-Croatian *Bòbovica* placename, Slovak *Bobovica* placename, FNESz.), *Daróca* (1281: *Darucha*, [daróca ~ darúca], Gy. 1, p. 249 ~ 1349: *Darolcha*, [darolca], Baranya County, Gy. 1, p. 278, loaning of the South Slavic *Dravica*, FNESz. *Darócaköz*), *Garbolc* (1229/1550: *Gurbuc* [gorbóc] ~ 1339>348: *Gorbolc*, [gorbolc], Németh, 2008, p. 91; cf. Serbo-Croatian *Grabovac*, Slovak *Hrabovec*, FNESz.; Mező & Németh, 1972, p. 46; Kiss, 1995, p. 19).

It is also frequent, however, that the Slavic formant *-оньць/*-евьць appears in Hungarian with the *olc* ending and the form without *l* has no records at all during the era, for example *Tiszolc* (1334: *Tyzolch*, [tiszolc], Hont County, Gy. 3, p. 273, cf. Serbo-Croatian *Tisovac* placename, Slovenian *Tisovec* placename, Slovak *Tisovec*, FNESz.), *Varsolc* (13[41]: *Worsolch*, [vorsolc] ~ [varsolc], Kraszna County, Gy. 3, p. 522, cf. Serbo-Croatian *Vrševac*, placename, *Vrševce*, placename, FNESz.; Tóth, 2004, p. 455).

The fact that the frequency of the *ó* > *ol* change is influenced by the above-detailed etymological attributes of toponyms is made even clearer by the findings of Valéria Tóth. She argues that this change is especially rare among common nouns and the name ending *-olc(s)* is typically a toponymic phonological type (Tóth, 2004, pp. 456–457).

6.2.

Among the names with the opposition *é* ~ *í*, it may also be the attributes related to their origin that influence the presence of certain phonological forms. If, for example, data of the antecedents of a toponym containing *é* are written mostly with *i* or *y*, we may suspect an *í* > *é* direction of change in the name. The features of the names belonging here, however, indicate that in their case we may witness not only phonological changes. The early status of certain data with *í* may also be related to the fact that the *-in* affix that is frequent in Slavic could become an ending *-ény* due to the influence of the other settlement names with an ending *ány/-ény*, for example Sl. *Sajtin* > Hungarian *Sajtény* (cf. Bényei, 2012, pp. 106–107). This may be considered in the case of *Lébény* and *Trencsén* as well, as revealed by data (1208: *Libin*, *Libyn* ~ 1267: *Liben*, Cs. 3, p. 683, cf. Czech *Libín*, placename, Polish *Lubin*, placename, FNESz., 1208: *Trincin* ~ 1243: *Trenchen*, Trencsén County, FN., p. 79, cf. Old Slovak **Trnčín* > **Trnčín*, FNESz.). This process of change in the case of names discussed here practically indicates the adaptation of Slavic linguistic forms to the Hungarian language. All this makes the belonging of data both with *i* and *y* to the Hungarian name system (or the sound value of the recorded *i*, *y*, *í* letters) dubious, simultaneously with the existence of the *é* ~ *í* opposition within the same group of language users.

7.

In this paper I wished to introduce the extent to which the results of studies in historical dialectology depend on the exploration of etymological features. Although the awareness of the etymology of a given toponym or common noun may provide a reference point when assessing phonological oppositions, it is still important to emphasize that based on the etymology of names and their early historical data, the likelihood of establishing primary forms varies. It is also obvious, however, that such types of studies are inseparable from the most recent results of etymological descriptions. In this regard, although Hungarian research on historical dialectology may rely on the most recent etymological findings of Turkology (see WOT.; Honti, 2017), the etymological studies regarding Slavic loan words have changed little in the past 65–70 years. Therefore, such a renewal in the field of Slavic studies would certainly provide a huge impetus also for research in historical dialectology and phonology.

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