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## JÓZSEF SZINNYEI (1857–1943)

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**Abstract:** As a successor of József Budenz, József Szinnyei was a dominant figure, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, of research on the Finno-Ugric languages in Hungary and of the associated teaching tasks at university level. He was an adherent of the Neogrammarian approach whose attention encompassed, in addition to the study of the other Finno-Ugric languages, Hungarian historical linguistics (especially historical phonology and the history of certain morphological formatives). In his research work as a linguist, historical studies were clearly dominant. His sphere of interest was centred upon the history of Hungarian, its Finno-Ugric background, and its comparison with related languages. In his comparative studies, he professed that language was continually changing but, since etymological studies could detect regular sound correspondences in the words of languages of the same family, sounds did not change randomly but in a systematic manner. He emphasized that sound law type changes could only be established on the basis of words that certainly, or at least highly probably, belonged together.

**Keywords:** historiography, historical linguistics, Hungarian linguistics, Finno-Ugric linguistics, proto-language reconstruction

József Szinnyei was born in Pozsony (Preßburg), in a family of intellectuals. Apart from himself, two of his closest relatives became members of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences: his father, József Szinnyei (Senior) and his brother, Ferenc Szinnyei. The former made his name as a bibliographer; in particular, as the author of the grand encyclopaedia *Magyar írók élete és munkái* [The lives and works of Hungarian writers], Vols.

I–XVI, Budapest, 1890–1914); after his untimely death, the last volume was finished by his younger son, the literary historian Ferenc.

József Szinnyei (Junior) started his schools in his birthplace and finished his secondary school studies in Budapest where one of his teachers was Gábor Szarvas, educating him in the classical languages and directing his attention toward Finnish. Between 1875 and 1878, Szinnyei attended Budapest University where one of his professors was József Budenz. The latter taught him Finnish (among other things) and recommended one of Szinnyei's earliest papers on linguistics for publication in Gábor Szarvas' journal, *Magyar Nyelvőr* [Hungarian Philologist].

Szinnyei was to become the initiator of Hungarian–Finnish cultural and scholarly contacts as we know them today. His drift towards the Finnish language, culture, and the Finns themselves, was almost inevitable. In 1879, at Budenz's recommendation, he was awarded a state grant to travel to Finland. He had fairly good knowledge of the language and the country by the time he arrived there. The Finns received him cordially and helped him master the language and familiarize himself with the life and circumstances in the country; at the same time, he provided his Finnish hosts with plenty of knowledge concerning Hungary. His command of Finnish became outstanding, an extraordinary achievement since at that time a foreigner who spoke Finnish at all was something of a curiosity. He maintained regular contacts with leading Finnish intellectuals of the time, and frequented the Finnish Theatre of Helsinki where he taught Czardash to the corps de ballet. It was there that he made the acquaintance of the Finnish actress who was to become his devoted wife. He regularly reported on his experiences in Hungarian journals, and in a book of a telling title (*Az ezer tó országa* [The country of a thousand lakes], 1882) he gave a detailed description of the land of the Northern relatives. At the time, that book was considered to be the most reliable and most comprehensive description of the country in any (foreign) language.

Returning from Finland to Budapest in 1881, he first worked as a clerk in the Hungarian National Museum, but as soon as in 1883 he became a honorary lecturer of Finnish language and literature at Budapest University. From 1886 onwards, he worked as associate professor of Hungarian language and literature at the same university, whereas in 1888 he was appointed full professor of the same disciplines at the university of Kolozsvár (Klausenburg) where from 1891 he also officially taught Finno-Ugric comparative linguistics. In 1893, he became professor of

Ural-Altai comparative linguistics in Budapest, a successor of his master, József Budenz. In 1884 he was elected corresponding member, and in 1896 full member, of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He continued teaching at Budapest University until his retirement (1928) except in the months of the 1919 Red Terror when he had to keep away from the university. After retirement, he worked as chief librarian of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences until the day he died. He also displayed useful organizing activity as vice-president (from 1904) and president (from 1922) of the Society of Hungarian Linguistics as well as editor of the journal *Nyelvtudományi Közlemények* [Studies in Linguistics] (1896–1930). An important act of organization of research was that he launched a scholarly series entitled *Ugor kézikönyvek* [Ugric handbooks] that was later renamed *Finnugor kézikönyvek* [Finno-Ugric handbooks].<sup>1</sup> The first volume of the series was a new version, revised and expanded by Szinnyei himself, of Budenz's Finnish grammar (Budenz 1894) that was altogether published in nine editions.

Szinnyei was at first interested in literary history, he even published papers on that topic, but then he was attracted more and more by the study of languages. That duality is shown by the facts that the language of early Hungarian literature was one of his favourite topics and that he also ventured translating pieces of literature; among other things, he translated excerpts from Kalevala. An important episode of his activities was the publication of a book entitled *A finn irodalom története* [The history of Finnish literature] (1885)—the more so since the Finns themselves wrote their first full literary history at a later date only.

In his research work as a linguist, historical studies were his exclusive sphere of interest. That sphere was centred upon the history of Hungarian, its Finno-Ugric background, and its comparison with the related languages. As a beginning scholar, he published a historiographic paper (1879) that was only possible to write for someone with a wide and deep knowledge of the topic. In it, he critically assessed practically the whole 18th-century literature on genetic relationships among Finno-Ugric languages published in Hungary.

<sup>1</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century, the term *Ugric* was used in the sense 'Finno-Ugric', and it was only somewhat later that it became a technical term for the Eastern branch of the Finno-Ugric family. At the same time, the compound *Finno-Ugric* (that is generally used today as the name of the whole family) was coined from the names of the two geographically farthest groups involved.

He professed that the facts were to be pinned down in linguistic description but that that was not enough: the researcher also had to say what made linguistic facts be the way they were known to be. He announced this credo also in the introduction of his inaugural address as a new member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (1888), discussing the history of Hungarian possessive suffixes and verbal person/number suffixes.

### 1. The textbook writer

As a university lecturer, Szinnyei obviously wished to make sure that students of Hungarian and the Finno-Ugric languages, as well as students of linguistics, be provided with appropriate learning aids. In order to promote the teaching of Hungarian in Finland, he co-authored a Hungarian course book (Jalava–Szinnyei 1880) with his Finnish friend Antti Jalava who started using it right away in his courses at the university. Later on, Szinnyei wrote a Hungarian grammar for Finns by himself (1912b) that gave a vivid survey of the phonology, morphology, and syntax of that language. Although during the twentieth century there was no shortage indeed in Hungarian course books or grammar books in Finland, the usefulness of this little book is shown by the fact that it was published in a third edition in 1950. On the other hand, in Hungary, Szinnyei republished József Budenz's *Rövid finn nyelvtan* [A compact grammar of Finnish] (1873) expanded by a chapter on syntax and a glossary (Budenz 1894). A year later, his *Finn olvasókönyv mondattani példatárral* [A Finnish reader with a collection of syntactic examples] (1895b) was published as a contribution to the successful teaching of Finnish in Hungary, a book that ran into a total of six editions. (It was by no means a book for beginners since, first, its syntactic examples required quite some familiarity with the language, second, its texts were selected from works of fiction, and third, it did not contain a glossary.)

An important product of his textbook writer's career was *Magyar nyelvhasználat* [Hungarian compared] (1896), published in six further editions in later years, which was in fact a compact summary of his university lectures on Finno-Ugric comparative linguistics. This book was written due to a demand that had also given rise to his *A magyar nyelv rokonai* [The kinship of Hungarian] (1883d), written "for the general public"—but it was a "mere" supplementary material to his university lectures, and highly technical at it, compiled parsimoniously out of

brief reminders and data, and not likely to give proper guidance to the uninitiated reader. It was said to be a major source of the unpopularity of Finno-Ugric linguistics with the average university student of the time, especially with those neglecting to attend the lectures in the first place. As a lecturer, he was not a fascinating personality; but he invariably provided his students with well-formulated, reliable, and accurate pieces of knowledge. This can be demonstrated by a list of his most eminent students, later becoming great scholars in the various subdisciplines of Finno-Ugric studies, including Zoltán Gombocz, Ödön Beke, Dávid Rafael Fokos-Fuchs, Miklós Zsirai, György Lakó, and Irén N. Sebestyén. The most outstanding merit of *Hungarian compared* was perhaps that, at a time when Finno-Ugric historical phonology was rather in its initial stages, Szinnyei tried to summarize and systematize the slowly accruing new insights in order to demonstrate the sound correspondences attested in the common word stock of the related languages. From the sixth edition onwards, Samoyedic equivalents were also given, hence the textbook was transformed from Finno-Ugric to Uralic in its approach. He also collected common elements of the nominal and verbal morphology and proved their ancient nature by a few data. The “Comparative word list” that closes the little book contains the oldest items of the Hungarian word stock in a thesaurus arrangement, with their equivalents in the other languages. Especially the seventh edition (1927a) was often cited in the international literature of Finno-Ugric studies for several decades; in papers that care for historiographic detail, it is still referred to today. The primary aim of that book was of course to give university students a reliable picture of the relatives of Hungarian and thereby to make them understand the essence of Hungarian being a Finno-Ugric language, a piece of knowledge that is essential for future teachers of Hungarian language and literature.

Along with *Hungarian compared*, we also have to mention a book written in German and published in two editions, *Finnisch-ugrische Sprachwissenschaft* (1901b, 1922), which gave non-Hungarian-speaking linguists of the period a concise but reliable summary of all relevant information on the Finno-Ugric family of languages and the grammatical devices that the members of that family inherited from Proto-Finno-Ugric. The Finno-Ugrists of today, or at least those not neglecting the historiographic background of their work, still refer to this nutshell-sized work in their papers. In its days, the appearance of *Finnisch-ugrische Sprachwissenschaft* must have been a momentous event. As one of its reviewers,

Zoltán Gombocz pointed out, it surpassed similar handbooks on Indo-European languages published in the famous Göschen series, and “a comprehensive handbook more reliable and more systematic than Szinnyei’s is simply not available either in Hungarian or in Finnish” (Gombocz 1910, 46–7).

It cannot have been easy to write a comprehensive study in Finno-Ugric comparative linguistics containing well-established results in those days since a sufficient amount of reliable linguistic material, especially concerning the related languages spoken in Russia, was not yet available, and the relevant descriptive, historical and comparative studies were still in their infancy. In his comparative works, Szinnyei professed that language was continually changing and that the etymological study of corresponding words of the languages concerned had detected regular sound correspondences; hence, sounds did not change randomly but in a systematic manner. In this view, the principle of Neogrammarian sound laws is manifested. He emphasized that sound law type changes could only be established on the basis of words that certainly or at least highly probably belonged together (1914, 53).

“The keystone of the method of modern linguistics is that, within the same language, sounds in the same environment change identically in the course of a sound change; deviations from that identity are only possible due to analogy or under the influence of another dialect or another language. This is the case in any language; however, the direction and result of sound change may be different in different languages. A consequence of this specificity of change is that the sounds occurring in common words or morphemes of related languages that were originally (that is, in the proto-language) identical, but have changed after the languages had separated, will differ regularly, in other words: they will correspond to one another in a regular manner.”  
(Szinnyei 1973, 279)

We have to add to this quote that Szinnyei considered analogy to be an important driving force of linguistic change (1935, 4). He had very high opinion of the influence of the Neogrammarian school, as the following quote demonstrates: “The principles of the Neogrammarians of Germany have soon had an effect with us, too. We started to work with stricter methods, and our firm results started to grow in number. Our horizon widened, and our sight penetrated deeper” (1927b, 528). He emphasized that he himself devotedly carried on his research work expressly in this spirit (*ibid.*, 529).

As a researcher doing comparative and historical linguistics in the Neogrammarian spirit, he obviously took it to be one of his tasks to recon-

struct proto-language phenomena as much as possible. However, it never occurred either to him or to any other Finno-Ugrist that Proto-Finno-Ugric should have been some homogeneous form of human language, a view that certain ageing colleagues today who, grotesquely enough, think of themselves as “young rebels” or “revolutionaries” would like to attribute to representatives of what they call traditional Finno-Ugristics. As a matter of fact, Szinnyei emphasized that—in general—not every change occurs in the same area, hence dialects come into being, dialects that obviously must have existed in the proto-language as well.

He wrote several grammar books for secondary schools (1885, 1887, 1897b) that have run into more than a dozen editions. Szinnyei’s grammar books replaced those by Simonyi in public education and remained in use for decades. In these grammars, the sentence was in the centre of attention—in particular, its form, rather than its content or truth value.

His Hungarian grammars in German and Finnish (1912a, 1912b) were stop-gap books in the international market and were received in professional circles with appreciation. The German version was reviewed by Ernst Lewy, very meticulously. He disagreed with Szinnyei on certain points, but he closed his review on a positive note:

“Fassen wir unsere Wünsche in Betreff des Buches zusammen, so möchten wir, daß das Buch im Ganzen mehr auf der, den fingr. [= finnisch-ugrischen; L. H.] Sprachen eigenen historischen Grundlage aufgebaut wäre (ohne daß darum die Vergleichung mit anderen fingr. Sprachen irgendwie hineinkommen sollte) und dadurch eine in der ung. Sprache rationelle Anordnung gewinne. Dadurch würde auch etwas Raum gewonnen, damit nicht grade Erscheinungen, die vom Deutschen abweichen und der Sprache ihr eigentümliches Gepräge geben, unter den Tisch fallen einen ähnlichen Vorwurf dürfte man auch Simonyis Buche<sup>2</sup> machen) [...] Dennoch ist das Buch, da das sprachliche Material aus dem Ungarischen, das es bringt, unbedingt zuverlässig ist und, wie gesagt, eine kurze [...] Grammatik des Ung. fehlt. Das Buch kann und wird als eine saubere Quelle wirken.”

(Lewy 1916–1917, 223)

## 2. The researcher

Of his papers in historical phonology, the first we have to mention is *Hogy hangzott a magyar nyelv az Árpádok korában?* [How did Hungarian sound in the Árpadian age?] (1895a) whose background was given by

<sup>2</sup> Meaning Simonyi (1907).

the millennium of the Hungarian Conquest, although this kind of retrospective phonological reasoning had had its forerunners, as he himself pointed out. It was with this paper that the scientific study of the historical phonology of the Árpadian age started. The author tried to find a plausible answer to the question in the title by palaeographic analysis and historical phonological reasoning. In this effort, he also considered the fact that the Hungarians had learned the art of writing, as well as the pronunciation of Latin, mainly from Venetians, therefore he tried to infer the sound values of *a* and *o* in early documents of Hungarian from Venetian spellings of Latin texts, obviously reflecting local Venetian pronunciations. The conclusion of this paper, contradicting several other authors, is that the sound corresponding to present-day *a* cannot have been closer, i.e., an *o*, in the period at hand. Other papers by Szinnyei in this field include *Középkori nyelvmélekeink olvasása* [Reading medieval Hungarian] (1897a) and *A magyar magánhangzók történetéhez* [On the history of Hungarian vowels] (1913–1914). These papers on Old Hungarian phonology met with some just criticism later on, but it is his definite merit to have initiated the study of the phonology of this period.

His interest in Hungarian historical linguistics encompassed morphology as well. He wrote several papers on the origin and history of various inflectional and derivational suffixes. In his inaugural address at the Academy (1888), having deployed dialectal representations of certain Hungarian possessive suffixes, he remarked that more about their alternants and history could be found out by the help of their correspondences with other Finno-Ugric languages. Speaking of the origin of Finno-Ugric personal suffixes, he presented the insight, already fairly evident in that period, that they had emerged from the relevant personal pronouns (at least) as early as in the proto-language but, what is more important, he pointed out the formal and functional relatedness of the third-person personal pronoun and the demonstrative pronoun. Despite all its merits, this work has only a historiographic interest today. He tried to explain the sound shapes of personal suffixes in Hungarian and related languages in line with Budenz's views (to become dated soon) on establishing sound correspondences; yet the structure of individual personal suffixes, the description of some members of the possessive paradigm are still considered valid today. This series of articles, the focus of which was on a historical explanation of the third-person suffixes *a/e*, *ja/je*, is a fair representation of his research methods. He attempted to review the full literature on the problem he was studying, seriously considering the earlier proposals, and



if he found them inadequate, he criticized them on the basis of an analysis of the fullest possible data base, arguing logically. He successfully disproved, with a logically constructed argumentation, the erroneous views of Pál Hunfalvy, a self-taught but very inventive linguist. It is with a similarly logical train of thoughts that he refuted the views of his contemporaries (Bernát Munkácsi and Móric Szilasi) that he thought were unacceptable. However, if he later came to realize that he himself had been in error on some point, he did not hesitate to admit it and to draw the reader's attention to his own error (1915–1917).

From among his studies in historical morphology, we have to mention those dealing with the origin of the third-person suffixes involving *n* (1901; 1905), too (cf. e.g., *megy-Ø* ~ *megy-en* 'he goes', *tesz-Ø* ~ *tesz-en* 'he does', but: *lát-Ø* 'he sees', *néz-Ø* 'he looks'). Although he is right when he says that 3sg verb forms do not in general contain an overt person/number suffix in Finno-Ugric languages, nevertheless he is wrong when he assumes, referring to some special cases, that it was the pronoun *ön* 'self' (cf. e.g., *önmaga* 'himself') that agglutinated to the stem (first in the imperative, and then spreading over to the tensed (indicative) forms, too); again, he is right in claiming that the 3pl *nak/nek* (cf. *men-nek* 'they go', *lát-nak* 'they see', *néz-nek* 'they look') is a combination of 3sg *n* and plural *k* (the historical source of *n* has not been clarified in a satisfactory manner ever since).

An important place in Szinnyei's oeuvre, from the point of view of historical morphology, too, is occupied by his small book entitled *A Halotti Beszéd hang- és alaktana* [The phonology and morphology of *Sermo super sepulchrum*] (1926a) in which—in addition to a reading of that early document that he proposed—he presented much of what he had said in his papers on historical morphology (and corrected much of what he had said on historical phonology). In this book, he wrote about the compounds, nominal and verbal stems, derived words, and morphemes of the nominal and verbal paradigms occurring in the text of *Sermo super sepulchrum*. Szinnyei actively studied Hungarian word formation and inflectional morphology from a historical point of view. In that work, he did not only take early written documents into consideration but he also observed whatever the present-day dialects were able to reveal.

His work in etymology cannot be said to have been especially significant from a quantitative point of view. He dealt with etymology in a number of his writings, especially with that of loanwords in Hungarian.

About half of his etymologies have proved to be right. It is also part of this area of his work that analysed and solved non-transparent compounds in Hungarian and other Finno-Ugric languages, even though some of these explanations were not his own results. Rather, by commenting on certain misguided interpretations by some of his contemporaries, he drew attention to earlier, correct, solutions. This was very welcome since the relevant literature (especially from earlier periods and from abroad) was not easy to access at the time. He made such etymological remarks on e.g., Hungarian *arc* ‘face’ < *orr* ‘nose’ + *szá(j)* ‘mouth’, Finnish *maailma* ‘world’ < *maa* ‘earth’ + *ilma* ‘air, sky’; in some other instances, he showed that contamination had produced new words like Hungarian *ordibál* ‘keep yelling’ < *ordít* ‘yell’ + *kiabál* ‘keep shouting’, *örökkön-örökké* ‘for ever and ever’ < *örök-ön* ‘eternal-ly’ + *örök-ké* ‘eternity-into’ (i.e., the adjective *örök* ‘eternal’ with a modal-essive adverbial suffix based on the superessive case marker *(V)n* and with the translative case marker).

### 3. The propagator

Szinnyei not only tried to familiarize the interested general public with the two most important Finno-Ugric languages (Hungarian in Finland and Finnish in Hungary); he also advocated the fact of these languages being related in both countries. In an article, he introduced the speakers of Finno-Ugric languages, the Finno-Ugric peoples: where and in what circumstances they lived, how many of them there were, etc. (1884a). This was indeed necessary, given that public thinking had got stuck with the idea of the Turkish connection pushed by Ármin Vámbéry, and the general public knew pretty little about the actual relatives of the Hungarians. Vámbéry’s fallacies had been smashed by Szinnyei’s master, József Budenz—but Szinnyei himself carried on with the debate, criticizing Vámbéry’s views in two papers written in Finnish: *Kuuluuko unkarin kieli suomalais-ugrilaiseen kielihaimoon?* [Does Hungarian belong to the Finno-Ugric family of languages?] (1883a) and *Suomen kielen heimolaiset* [Relatives of the Finnish language] (1883b); the latter was the first popularizing paper in Finnish on the family relationship of Finno-Ugric languages. In his book *A magyar nyelv eredete* [The origin of Hungarian] (1883c), he devoted enough space and effort to demonstrating the unscientific nature of Vámbéry’s statements on the alleged Turkic origin of Hungarian, pointing out that the origin of a language and the anthropological provenance of its speakers were two different things. He also

pointed out that most of Vámbéry's Hungarian–Turkish and Hungarian–Tartar identifications were simply wrong, given that he had ignored the requirement of regular sound correspondences as the basic principle of etymologizing. Another critical remark by Szinnyei unveiled ethical problems, too: Vámbéry apparently wanted to make his own conception of the genetic relatedness of Turkish and Hungarian seem more well-founded by distorting, indeed tampering with, the forms of certain Turkish words, in order to make them look more similar to the Hungarian words he wanted to bring into correspondence with them. This book by Szinnyei, only 26 years old at the time, was an important contribution to the termination of the “Ugric–Turkic war”, and Vámbéry himself had to admit in the end that Hungarian was a Finno-Ugric language. The book itself was a version of *Suomen kielen heimolaiset* (1883b) adapted to the needs of the Hungarian reader.

Szinnyei's *A magyar nyelv rokonai* [The kinship of Hungarian] (1883d) was definitely written with a popularizing intention in mind. It explained to its readers that genetic relationships among languages were not manifested in mutual intelligibility, given that related languages “are not necessarily similar to one another, rather, they differ regularly or systematically” (1883d, 10). To substantiate that claim, he cited Finno-Ugric “families of words” going back to the same etymon and having a Hungarian member, and illustrated the sound correspondences found in such sets of words in a tabular form. He emphasized that, although the word stock had an important role in establishing genetic relationships, the crucial pieces of evidence were provided by grammatical structures, since the word stock of a language changed relatively fast, whereas its grammar was always more conservative. He demonstrated this by presenting some ancient morphological devices of Hungarian and what corresponded to them in the other languages of the family.

*A magyarság eredete, nyelve és honfoglaláskori műveltsége* [The origin and language of Hungarians and their culture in the age of the Conquest] (1910a) is not a strictly scholarly work, either. Rather, it is a booklet meant for the educated general public of the period, a modest (and much shorter) forerunner of similar works by Zsirai (1936) and Hajdú (1962). In it, Szinnyei talked about the origin of the Hungarian language and of the Hungarian people, and pointed out that, despite the Turkic loanwords that were present in this language, Hungarian could by no means be considered “Turkicized” since its grammar had remained Finno-Ugric in its entirety; for the same reason, Hungarian could not be

considered a “Slavicized” or “Germanized” idiom, either. In addition, he described the way of life and social structure of the Hungarians of the time. The German version of this book (1920) helped readers in other countries to gather information about the language of Hungarians and to learn from where and what circumstances it was that they had migrated to the middle of Europe.

Szinnyei’s *A magyar nyelv* [The Hungarian language] (1935), also published in a number of editions, is a well-written book of popular science, briefly summarizing all up-to-date information on the life and changes of this language. It gives a plain account of the difference (and relationship) between literary and colloquial usage, the Language Reform of the nineteenth century, including its salutary effects and “wildings”, the earlier stages of the development of this language, Hungarian words borrowed from other languages, as well as genetic relationships in general and the relatives of Hungarian in particular. That he did not intend this book for a professional audience is clearly shown by the fact that both dialectal data and those taken from related languages are written in terms of standard Hungarian orthography, in order for the general reader to be able to see their correct reading, even if in an approximate manner.

#### 4. The lexicographer

*Magyar tájszótár* [A Hungarian dialect dictionary] (1893–1896, 1897–1901) was the result of Szinnyei’s pertinacious efforts of some sixteen years. That dictionary includes some 120,000 data, taken mainly from earlier collections. Szinnyei used a number of both printed and manuscript sources but he also collected material personally that he included in this dictionary. He performed all that work on his own. He had to decide, first of all, which words to include. He opted for all words that were not part of the standard language (either in its literary or colloquial version). The set of those words was then defined as consisting of three subsets: (a) dialect words proper, not known in the standard; (b) words whose dialectal meaning differed from that in the standard variety; and (c) words whose dialectal sound shape differed from the standard form in unpredictable ways. If Szinnyei had not done anything else in his life but compile this dialect dictionary, his name would still be in a distinguished position in the pantheon of Hungarian linguistics.

He helped promote language teaching and literary translation by his Finnish–Hungarian dictionary (1884b). For readers of Kalevala and

19th-century Finnish literature, this dictionary is almost indispensable even today, given that Szinnyei enriched its material by the word stock of contemporary Finnish works of fiction and Finnish folklore, too.

### 5. The language cultivator and spelling reformer

As a language cultivator, Szinnyei resented exaggerated orthology. His opinion was that foreignisms did not represent any danger for Hungarian, but excesses should be avoided.

In the fight for reforming and unifying Hungarian orthography, he backed up Simonyi's suggestions and favoured the unification of the system of spelling in the context of the wrangling about school orthography vs. academic orthography. In the end, it was due to Szinnyei's efforts that the Hungarian Academy of Sciences adopted most of Simonyi's suggestions in 1922, and Hungarian orthography became standardized. Szinnyei helped Simonyi in this matter despite the fact that—as becomes clear from materials found in Finnish archives—the latter had tried to prevent the former's appointment as a full professor at Budapest University<sup>3</sup> as a successor of Budenz, and after he was appointed all the same, Simonyi gave voice to his resentment, a fact that became known to Szinnyei (cf. Várady 1993).

Szinnyei also put forward an opinion on the issue of “Finno-Ugric linguistic spelling”; this was the time when the more or less unitary system of Finno-Ugric transcription was being defined. He favoured the replacement of former multifarious methods of data recording by Emil N. Setälä's (1901) transcription system. As soon as Setälä had made his proposal public, a debate started immediately in Hungary. Balassa (1902) proposed a number of modifications which Szinnyei (1902) mostly dismissed. More than ten years afterwards, Szinnyei said this about the reasonableness of Setälä's system:

“The principles of the so-called Neogrammarian school, of course, made an impact on our discipline, too. Phonetics came to the fore. The excellent phonetic training of our Northern colleagues [Finno-Ugrists in Finland—L. H.] and their endeavours at the finest possible representation of phonetic detail resulted in the establishment of a unified phonetic writing for Finno-Ugric languages [. . .] one thing is certain: renewal was needed. Beforehand,

<sup>3</sup> Simonyi did not favour the appointment of the other two candidates (Ignác Halász or Bernát Munkácsi), either, for “denominational reasons”.

there was extreme chaos in this area. [...] The discontinuance of that chaos and the distinction of fine phonetic detail were well served by the new system of representation, two properties of which, purposeful consistency and openness to improvement, cannot be doubted.” (Szinnyei 1914, 52–3)

## 6. The historiographer

Szinnyei also worked on the historiography of linguistics. His lengthy paper *Révai magyar-ugor nyelvhasználatása* [Révai’s work in Hungarian–Ugric comparative linguistics] (1879) dealt with the historiographic significance of Miklós Révai. The work of Révai in this area was worthy of attention, among other things, because initially he was an adherent of the idea of relatedness of Hungarian and Hebrew. Szinnyei expressed his appreciation for the activities and achievements of two of Révai’s forerunners, János Sajnovics and Sámuel Gyarmathi (see Vladár 2008), in clarifying the family relationships of the Hungarian language. He reviewed the sources from which Révai had taken his data and pieces of information. He emphasized that the source of his misguided word identifications was that the notion of regular sound correspondence or sound change had not yet been known in Révai’s age; nevertheless, he had managed to find a number of etymological connections that were substantiated by later research. Révai had also inquired into possible correspondences of certain Hungarian inflectional and derivational morphemes, mainly in vain. Szinnyei did not rest content with ascertaining the errors; he also tried to point out the reason why Révai’s individual assumptions had been wrong. Of course, in view of our present knowledge, several of Szinnyei’s comments also turn out to be in error. Out of appreciation of Révai’s work, Szinnyei edited and published the third volume of his book (Révai 1908) that had remained in manuscript in the author’s life. He also emphasized that Révai had recognized the variability of language and attempted to “preen” language use; on the other hand, in accordance with his own Neogrammarian approach, he definitely disapproved of Révai’s having set earlier stages of Hungarian language use as an example for his contemporaries to follow.

At the opening ceremony of the academic year 1923–1924, he delivered an inaugural speech on the historiography of Finno-Ugric linguistics as Rector of Budapest University. Of course, he started by commemorating János Sajnovics and his work. He commended Sajnovics’ correct insights, and disapproved of statements made at the end of the 19th cen-

ture which criticized the deficiencies of Sajnovics' work more austere than necessary: "Whoever looks at the elders' works with a young eye and through the magnifying glass whose lenses had been polished by many generations of scholars will easily fall into the fallacy of belittling the older generations" (1924, 7). This sober remark should be kept in mind when we evaluate Szinnyei's own work in Hungarian and Finno-Ugric linguistics in possession of our present-day knowledge. This speech by Szinnyei gives an objective overview of the development of Hungarian and Finno-Ugric linguistics from Sajnovics to the early twentieth century; it is to be regretted that it has not been included among the references of Jakab Máté's *A short history of 19th-century linguistics* (Máté 1997).

Szinnyei's lecture delivered on the centenary of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (1925; 1926b) is a useful historiographic survey of how the Academy had been sponsoring and organizing the research on the Hungarian language in those one hundred years.

## 7. Conclusion

At the beginning of his career, Szinnyei's views were strongly influenced by Max Müller's tenets. One sign of that influence, as he admitted later, was that, as a young scholar, he accepted the claim that the intention to interfere with the life and changes of a language is to be rejected since any intervention may only cause trouble rather than achieving its aim. That claim has been proved to be wrong by the Language Reform that brought about a number of useful developments accepted by the community of speakers, hence it had its positive results.

Szinnyei did not only mechanically and instinctively deal with language; he pondered on its essence and tried to find out why and how it existed and changed continually. His thoughts on language in general were briefly expounded in an address he delivered at the University of Kolozsvár in 1891 in which he stated, referring to Wilhelm von Humboldt, that language was "not an opus (*ergon*) but operation (*energeia*)" (1891, 17). The changes that take place in languages, he thought, were psychological manifestations (cf. 1891, 18), and psychology was an indispensable auxiliary science for linguistics in his view. In the same lecture, he also discussed the relationship between language and thinking, the role of language as one of the means of expression of culture, and the contacts between linguistics and the natural sciences.

Szinnyei maintained close professional contacts and a personal friendship with the most distinguished Finno-Ugric scholar of the age, Emil Setälä. It seems to be obvious that Setälä's views had influenced those of Szinnyei in many respects. This is shown, for instance, by the fact that, as perhaps the most ardent follower of Setälä, he accepted without reservation and adopted in his own papers on historical phonology Setälä's theory of gradation (Setälä 1896; 1911; 1912), based on the Finnic–Lapp group and projected back to Proto-Uralic (Proto-Finno-Ugric), soon to be rejected by a subsequent generation of researchers. In general, the Finns especially appreciated Szinnyei's work in historical and comparative linguistics. They also often emphasized, of course, that he had had a very important role in establishing and developing scholarly and cultural links between the two nations.

As was pointed out above, Szinnyei displayed important organizational activity as vice-president (from 1904) and president (from 1922) of the Society of Hungarian Linguistics as well as editor of the journal *Nyelvtudományi Közlemények* [Studies in Linguistics] (1896–1930). Also, he launched a scholarly series entitled *Ugric handbooks*, which was later renamed *Finno-Ugric handbooks*. He undoubtedly deserves all our appreciation for having continued and developed university education in Finno-Ugric studies, after Budenz, at the highest scholarly level of the period; for having summarized—in a nutshell, but reliably—the results of Finno-Ugric linguistics that far; for having started to elaborate on the era of the history of Hungarian in which the earliest extant documents were written; and for having compiled the *Hungarian dialect dictionary*. He was a researcher in the Neogrammarian vein, but not a leading figure either in the representation of that approach in Hungary or in Finno-Ugric studies; rather, he was a modest and trustworthy modifier of the circumstances that had taken shape before his *début*. He was a knowledgeable and professionally well-informed, but not especially creative, personality.

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