

V.M. ILLICH-SVITYCH AND THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF URALIC AND DRAVIDIAN LINGUISTICS  
(PRELIMINARY REPORT)

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In the preface to his work "A Comparison of the Nostratic Languages", V. M. Illich-Svitych wrote: "In the more advanced areas of comparative linguistics...there has recently emerged a certain tendency to overestimate the possibilities of the method of internal reconstruction, whose application without the strict control of external comparison can lead to the construction of a multitude of equally probable and equally arbitrary proto-systems. Such a situation requires that we go beyond the limits of any single language family. Only external comparison guarantees the appropriate verification and enables us to select the single variant out of numerous possible historical reconstructions which most closely approaches reality. The very existence of 'Nostratic linguistics' can be justified by the fact that it not only utilizes the achievements of Indo-European, Uralic, Altaic, and other branches of comparative linguistics, but is itself intended to significantly further the development of these areas, just as, e.g., Indo-European aids in the development of Germanic, Slavic, and Iranian studies" (vol. 1, p. 2).

Such a definition of the problem follows naturally from not defining the primary goal of Nostratics to be the determination of a genetic relationship between the six major language families of the Old World. Basically, this fact was already demonstrated by V. M. Illich-Svitych in his earlier, preliminary publications: 1) "Towards a Comparative Dictionary of the Nostratic Languages"; 2) "Correspondences of Stops in Nostratic Languages"; 3) "The Origin of the Indo-European Guttural Series in the Light of External Comparative Data"; 4) "The Reconstruction of Uralic Vocalism in the Light of External Comparative Data".

What is important is that even these first works, which were devoted specifically to proving the remote genetic relationship of the families in question, inspired the author to embark on the study of the comparative historical grammars of these families. This was because Illich-Svitych did not consider the principal goal of the Nostratic theory to be merely proving the kinship of the major language families of the Old World. Instead he set himself the task of creating a comparative historical Nostratic linguistics, that is, a comparative historical phonology, morphology, and word-formation of the Nostratic languages. Proving the genetic relationship of these languages was seen by him as a by-product of solving the primary

task. It is only natural that the creation of Nostratic historical comparative linguistics required a painstaking examination of the data used for comparison, as well as a verification of the precision and reliability of the established reconstructions in each of the compared language families. Elsewhere I have pointed out that in the etymological tradition of each group of the related languages there exists a tendency to convert the corpus of proposed etymological solutions into a closed system, by means of which it is supposedly possible to solve all etymological problems arising in the course of analyzing the languages of the given group. Such an approach is completely appropriate and to reject it would be tantamount to rejecting one of the basic principles of etymological studies. However, in the absence of the strict control provided by external comparison this approach can lead to a situation in which, in those areas of comparative linguistics with highly developed etymological studies, the corpus of etymological propositions appears to be overloaded with versions characterized by exceedingly insignificant differences in probability. A characteristic example is that of Indo-European etymological studies, in which we find a large and ever-growing number of such etymologies. This is particularly true of the basic corpus of root etymologies with dubious derivational, grammatical and semantic motivation. Thus, for example, if one wished to utilize Indo-European material for Nostratic comparison, Pokorny's dictionary would be quite insufficient for the purpose, since one would have to subject each entry to careful scrutiny and etymological revision. As one uses Illich-Svitych's "Opyt...", one becomes convinced that just such a review was carried out by the author. On the basis of my own experience I can confirm that this revision was every bit as necessary for Indo-European as it was for any other of the Nostratic daughter families.

As if seeking to avoid the mistakes and extreme positions of their Indo-Europeanist colleagues, Uralic etymologists as a rule have shunned root etymologies and semantically suspicious comparisons. When such comparisons occur in the course of comparative Uralic research, they are usually excluded from "respectable" etymological collections. Due to this strictness, precision, and moderation, Uralic etymological studies compare favorably with Indo-European. However, this moderation and precision have not protected Uralic linguistics from the other extremity. Since the end of the "Golden Age" of Uralic studies, there has been a tendency to "simplify" the overall picture in Uralic reconstruction by excluding from it those elements which are insufficiently motivated by the existing corpus and which don't fit well into the accepted structural schemata, in part without any further careful comparative investigation. In Uralic etymological studies this trend is accompanied by an extreme

tendency to identify the etymological picture with the picture produced by reconstruction. Most often this finds expression in the rejection of parallels only because of their non-correspondence in some detail of the reflexes expected by comparative phonology, although the phonological reconstruction of Uralic is itself still far from complete. A rich collection of such comparative phonological "purisms" can be found in Károly Rédei's new Uralic etymological dictionary where, for example, parallels are rejected because of a lack of correspondence in vowel series.

Thanks to his considerable experience in comparative and etymological research within the fields of Slavic and Indo-European, Illich-Svitych was able as early as the 1960's to grasp rapidly both the strong and weak aspects of the Uralic comparative tradition and to determine exactly the level of precision which the strictly comparative procedure had attained. As the basis for the Nostratic comparison he chose the classical Finno-Ugric reconstruction of Settel and his school in its full scope. This choice attests to Illich-Svitych's profound understanding of the strategies of comparative historical research, since however attractive the given reconstructions may be in terms of structure, phonology, and typology, the practicing comparativist above all requires a maximally articulated inventory of reflexes, precisely such as that provided by the classical Finno-Ugric reconstruction.

One should not conclude, however, that Illich-Svitych's adoption of the "classical" reconstruction was motivated exclusively by "strategic" considerations. I will cite an example. Following Toivanen, Illich-Svitych examined the reflexes of affricates in Saami, choosing the variant with three series of medial affricates. In the rough draft of his comparative Nostratic phonology he writes: 'In Saami the existence of sibilants as the third reflex of affricates in the given position renders probable the hypothesis that here the original opposition was ternary, and hence analogical to the similar opposition in stops (geminate, simple affricates, and spirantized affricates \*č<sub>1</sub> and \*č<sub>2</sub>)'. And further: 'The reconstruction for Uralic of a ternary opposition of affricates defined in terms of the nature of closure in intervocalic position (as suggested by Saami) appears to be confirmed by certain comparisons.'

Subsequently this reconstruction was confirmed by external data (see Table 1, next page).

Thus, in all cases where Illich-Svitych adopted those subtleties of classical Uralic reconstruction which distinguish the latter from modern conceptions, this occurred because modern Uralic studies lacked a convincing comparativist justification for rejecting the results obtained by classical methods. Of course, Illich-Svitych's solutions are not decisive in all such cases. The problems of affricates, laterals, and intervocalic stops remain extremely complex,

and their solution also depends on the state of reconstruction of the compared proto-languages. However, this means that in Uralic the given problem can not be deemed solved and that there remain possible solutions which are alternatives to the currently popular "simplified" Uralic reconstruction.

Table 1 Uralic affricates and their correspondences

glottalic affricates	Ural.	<i>kičča</i> 'small'	Kartv.	<i>kuč</i>
		<i>koččv</i> 'basket'	Ham.-Sem.	<i>k(w)š</i>
plain affricates	Ural.	<i>ručv</i> 'to press, to destroy'	Ham.-Sem.	<i>rs</i>
voiced affricates	Ural.	<i>počka</i> 'flank'	Ham.-Sem.	<i>phd</i>
		<i>wičv</i> 'to see'	Alt.	<i>užā-</i>

In my opinion, Illich-Svitych obtained his most interesting and promising results within Proto-Uralic in the reconstruction of the Uralic vowel system. His research in this area continued up to the time of his tragic death in August 1966. The results are scattered in various entries in the "Nostratic Dictionary" and are extremely laconic in nature. In his reanalysis of the Uralic data, Illich-Svitych brilliantly demonstrated the thesis which I introduced at the beginning of my paper.

In contradistinction to Uralic, in Dravidian studies Illich-Svitych's work dealt mainly with consonant systems. Most of his new ideas in this field concern the prehistory of the several Dravidian phonemes. Thus, he demonstrated that the two Dravidian trills (dental *r* and alveolar *ɽ*) are the result of a phonologization of initially allophonic variants conditioned by the character (series) of the final vowel of the relevant Nostratic stems:

#### Dravidian *r*

1. Drav. \**par*- 'big' : Alt. \*[*bara*], Ural. \**para*
2. Drav. \**kar(a)* 'thorn, blade' : Alt. \**gara*, Ural. \**kara*
3. Drav. \**kor-* / \**kur-* 'crane' : Alt. \*[*kara/kura*]
4. Drav. \**kar(a)* 'bank, shore, edge' : Alt. \**kira*
5. Drav. \**narv* 'fire; to be in flames' : Alt. \*[*naha*] 'sun'
6. Drav. \**kūr* 'antelope, deer' : Alt. \**[gūra* 'male antelope']
7. Drav. \**murv-* (variant *murv-*) 'to smash, to break' : Ural. \**mura* / \**mora* 'friable, fragile'
8. Drav. \**ēr-* / \**eri* 'to shine brightly, to flame' : Alt. *jaru-* 'to shine, to shine brightly'
9. Drav. \**ūr-* 'to thaw, to melt' : Alt. \**ūRu* 'to flow'

### Dravidian \*ɽ

1. Drav. \**ir(a)-/er-* 'to break' : Ur. \**erä* 'to fall apart, part, portion'
2. Drav. \**ēr-* 'male' : Alt. \**ērä* 'male'
3. Drav. \**ēr-* 'to rise' : Alt. \**urä* (*ōra ~ or[a]*) 'to rise'
4. Drav. \**kar* (variants \**kār*/\**kār*) 'black' : Alt. \**Karä* 'black'
5. Drav. \**mār* (variant \**mār*) 'offspring' : Alt. \**[miarä-* 'marry']
6. Drav. \**murV* 'to twist, to turn' (depalatized variant \**muri-*) : Alt. represented by Mong. \**muri-*, Tung. \**mōri-* 'to turn'
7. Drav. \**peɽ-* 'to pick, to collect' : Alt. \**bari-* 'to take in (one's) hand'
8. Drav. \**nerri* 'forehead, front side' : Ur. \**nēre-* 'front of head'

### Dravidian long vowels

Example: Drav. \**-īr-/\*-īr-* 'to drag' : Alt \**ir'a*  
("Opyt" contains seven examples of similar correspondences).

Ur. *ā* : Finno-Baltic *ā* ~ elsewhere \**ä* reflexes (*a/ä*-stems)

- A. 1. 'to ford' : Fin. *kaalaa-* ~ Lapp *galle-* (< \**gälä-*), Mord. \**kälä-*, Cher. *kel-*, Perm. \**kêl-*, Vogul \**käl*, Ostj. *kül-*, S.Ostj. *kit-*, Kung. *kel-* (open [e]) 'to rise';
2. 'mountain, forest' : Fin. *vaara* ~ Lapp *varre-* (< \**wärä*), Vogul \**wār/wär* (< \**wära?*);
3. 'hair, down' : Fin. *naava* ~ Lapp *njave-* (< \**näwä-*);
4. 'fork, branching' : Fin. *haara* ~ Lapp *sarre* (\**šärä*)
5. 'face' : Fin. *naama* ~ Lapp *namme* (< \**nämä*)
6. 'custom' : Fin. *naala* ~ Lapp *nalle* (< \**nälä*)

Ur. *ē* : Finno-Baltic *ē* ~ elsewhere \**ä* reflexes

- B. 1. 'side, half' : Fin. *pieli* (< \**pēle-*) ~ Lapp *bälle-*, Mord. \**pälä*, Cher. *pel, pele*, Perm., *pól*, Vogul \**päl*, Hung. *fél, fele-*.

### External comparisons

Ur. *ā*

1. Ur. *kälä* 'to walk' : Alt. [*kälü*] : Drav. *kāl-* (Opyt I, N 161)
2. Ur. *ñäwä* 'hair, down' : Drav. \**ñāv-* or \**ñāv-* (Opyt II, N 322)
3. Ur. *wärä* 'mountain, forest' : Drav. \**vār* (Illich-Svitych notebooks)

Ur. *ē*

1. Ur. *kēle* 'tongue, language' : Alt. *k'älä* (Opyt I, N 221)
2. Ur. *wēre* 'edge, shore' : Drav. *var-* 'side, edge' (DED 358; Illich-Svitych notebooks)

Another result of the successful application of external comparison was Illich-Svitych's successful explanation of irregularities in the length of first-syllable vowels as due to compensatory lengthening brought about by the reduction of final low vowels, cf. Drav. *-īr-/-īr-* 'to drag', 'to pull' (corresponding to Alt. *ir'a*), etc. (there are seven such examples in the first two volumes of Illich-Svitych's dictionary), although lengthening does not occur when an etymologically expected high vowel is reduced.

In other instances external comparison compelled Illich-Svitych to introduce changes in the Dravidian reconstruction. Thus, it proved to be the case that entities which correspond externally to sibilants and point to a consonant series reconstructed by Illich-Svitych as composed of laterals, coincided with a class of morphemes containing Drav. *c-/cc-* and giving the reflex *k-* in North Dravidian and Bragui. This led Illich-Svitych to reject the notion that this reflex is secondary, positionally conditioned, or sporadic, and to reconstruct a particular Dravidian phoneme *c<sub>1</sub>-*. On similar grounds he proposed the reconstruction of Drav. *p<sub>1</sub>-* (a lax *p-*), which has variants exhibiting two-fold reflexes: *p- ~ v-*.

In all such instances, one can see that external comparisons inspired Illich-Svitych to examine alternatives which had been rejected or overlooked in the course of internal comparison within the daughter languages, and to reestablish the strict control of the comparativist procedure.

Dravidian languages came into the orbit of Illich-Svitych's Nostratic research at a comparatively late date (later than the other language groups). This seems to explain why we now find many Dravidian parallels that were not used by him even in the first edition of Emenau and Burrow's etymological dictionary. On the other hand, new advances in the acquisition of Dravidian data, particularly Central Dravidian, as a rule have confirmed the proto-Dravidian nature of the parallels proposed by Illich-Svitych on the basis of one of the Dravidian groups. Thus, for example, comparison #160 (\**kājw-* 'to chew'), which, as we can see today, should now include the Dravidian morpheme introduced by Illich-Svitych on the basis of South Dravidian material available at the time.

As I have attempted to show, Illich-Svitych's research was not based on a comparison of reconstructed protoforms taken from etymological dictionaries and certainly not on the comparison of individual lexemes selected from dictionaries, as his critics have sometimes claimed. His work was distinguished by an exceptional attention to the entire corpus of the comparative evidence from individual languages, as well as by a methodological rigor which is often lacking in the work of many of his critics.

Yet another conclusion that emerges from a study of Illich-Svitych's Nostratic works is that only extreme methodological rigor, precision, and comprehensiveness of scope can ensure true success in the investigation of remote genetic relationships among the world's languages.

Translated by Joseph Schallert

Table 1

glottalized affricates	Ur. kićca 'small' ~ Kart. kuç Ur. koćca 'woven basket' ~ SH k(w)ş
plain affricates	Ur. ruća 'crush, destroy' ~ SH rs
voiced affricates	Ur. poćka 'thigh' ~ SH phğ Ur. wićia 'see' ~ Alt. üžä

Table 2

Uralic	Altaic	Dravidian	Reconstruction
a	a	a	*a
o	o	o/a	*o
u	u	u	*u
ä	ä	a	*ä
e	e	e	*e
i	i	i	*i
ü	ü/ö	u	*ü

Table 3

The Uralic  $\bar{o}$  in e-stems

Nr.	language word	Finn.	Mordv.	Mari	Perm'.	Mansi	Hanty
1	'sinev'	suone-	*sAn	*sün/sön	*sęn	*tęn	*pan
2	'arrow'	nuole-	*nal	*nölö	nel	*ńel	ńal
3	'(fish-) scale'	suomu	*śav	*šüm/šöm	śem	*sēm	sam
4	'bird cherry-tree'	tuome-	*lam	[lom-bo]	lęm	*lēm	[[fom:fam]
5	'to rub'	huosia	----	čüčeš	?	*sęs-	čač
6	'to build'	vuole-	----	----	vel	----	----
7	'to peel'	kuore-	*kar'				
8	'mountain'	vuore-	----	----	ver	----	----
9	'young'	nuore-	----	nör-ga	----	----	----
10	'way, rank'	juone-	jAn	jön	----	----	----

Table 4

The Uralic  $\bar{o}$  in a-stems

Nr.	language word	Finn.	Mordv.	Mari	Perm'.	Mansi	Hanty
1	'intestine'	suole-	*suļa	šolo	*šul	----	*söl
2	'to lick'	nuole-	*nola	nula	*ńula	ńal-ant	*nöl-/ *ńal
3	'to die'	kuole-	*kule-	kola-	*kulΔ	kāl	*köl/ *kāl
4	'berry'	puola	----	----	*pul	[*pul]	----
5	'side; half'	puole-	*pola	----	----	----	----
6	'forehead'	kuono	*końa	----	----	----	----
7	'tent-pole'	vuole-	----	----	[*yl-]	[*wūla]	*wöl

Table 5  
The Uralic *ö* in e-stems

Nr	language word	Finn.	Mordv.	Mari	Perm'.	Mansi	Hanty
1	'river'	joki	jov	----	*ju	*jē	*jogəñ
2	'arch'	jousi/ joutsi	jonks	[*jānež]	----	[*jāxt]	*jogat
3	'door'	ovi	----	----	----	*ēw	*oɣ-
4	'cartilage'	----	----	nörgö	----	*ñēr	*ñarəɣ
5	'cheek'	poski	----	----	----	*pēt/ pajt	*pöɣəθ/ puɣθ
6	'moisture'	noro, noru	----	nörö, nöra	*ñur	*ñēr	*ñor
7	'to drink'	juo<*joɣe	----	jües (3sgPr)	*ju	[*ēj/ej]	*jōñt'
8	'swan'	juotsen	lokšti	jükšə	*juś	----	----
9	'to peck'	nokkia, nokka	----	----	----	nēk <sup>w</sup>	*noɣ-
10	'bosom'	pove	*ponga	[*pongyš]	[pi-]	[*pūt]	[*pūɣəΔ]
11	'three'	kolme	*kolmə	[kym/ kum]	[*kqlm]	[kūrəm/ kūrm]	koΔəm
12	'saliva'	karei nolki	nolgə	----	----	----	----
13	'straw'	olke	*olgə	----	----	----	----

Table 6  
The Uralic *o* in a-stems

Nr.	language word	Finn.	Mordv.	Mari	Perm'.	Mansi	Hanty
1	(to) sleep	----	*udə	----	----	----	oθ/aθ
2	dream	----	udoma	[omo]	[qlm]	[*uləm/ ülm]	laθəm/ oθəm/ upəm]
3	squirrel	orava	*urə	ur	*ur-	----	----
4	peel	Est. kōba	*kuvə	kuvo	----	----	----
5	fence	otava	[*oš]	----	----	*uś	*wač
6	hare	----	*numolə	----	----	----	----
7	to wait	odotta	ušə	wuča (3sgPr)	----	----	----
8	slave	orjA	urē	----	----	----	----
9	awl	ora	*urə	----	----	----	----
10	house	kota	*kudə	kudo	*kq-, ka	----	kat
11	orphan	orpo, orvo	urəs	*urwezə	----	----	----
12	male	oras	urəs	----	----	----	----
13	piglet	porsas	purc	----	pgrś	----	----
14	to penetrate	----	suva	----	----	tū/tūj	θāñ
15	mild, weak			[lynzyri]	----	[*lāncen]	[lōñsi/ luñtə]
16	space	jotka	jutkə	----	----	jot, jət	
17	birch	koivu	*kujv (>kig)	kue, kugi		[*kēl]	
18	head	oiva	----	wuj	----	*ēwa/ *āwA	oɣ/uɣ/ōɣ
19	son	poika	*pujə	[*pū]	[pi]	*piɣ	pāɣ
20	duck	sotka	śulgə	šue	[*śulə]	*śēl'	saj