

The very highly connected nodes in the Ob-Ugrian networks

1. Introduction

Physicist Albert-László Barabási who was born in Transylvania and educated in Hungary now works in New York. In 2002 he published a book entitled *Linked* (Barabási 2002a) which has since been reprinted in English several times. Up to the present (2008) this book has been translated into thirteen languages, including Finnish and Hungarian (Barabási 2002b and 2008, respectively). While studying computer networks, Barabási and his colleagues accidentally discovered that natural and social networks do not behave in the same way as networks in mathematics. While connections between nodes in the latter emerge randomly, the stronger nodes of natural and social networks by virtue of having more connections are capable of better facilitating connections. Like the World Wide Web almost all complex networks of the most varying types of systems from biochemical processes to social relations behave in this way. The results of Barabási's research re-established the study of networks through which the concept of the "very highly connected node" has become widely accepted. Moreover, the title of this paper, which reflects my aims, has been taken from his research: to draw a picture of the multifarious, multi-dimensional and interrelated connections between both the Ob-Ugrian peoples and the investigation of these along the axes of time and space.

According to Barabási the fewer the connections between individual members of networks, the more vulnerable the networks in question are. The lesson from the 150-year-old history of Ob-Ugrian studies is that international research has played a crucial role in the survival of the Khanty and Mansi peoples. Although it is self-evident that there is a great need for improving the internal relations between the Khanty and Mansi communities themselves, there is also an equally great need for strengthening ties between native speakers and foreign students and researchers of these languages and cultures. The influence of an outside internationally known charismatic personality or a vigorous student may have lasting consequences, sometimes for decades, with regard to the revival and strengthening of a given community.

The narrow framework of this paper does not allow me to offer a full description of Ob-Ugrian studies. Instead, I would like my paper to be considered only as a case study: by presenting one characteristic or another aiming at the very highly connected nodes in an intricate network, I would like to relate the history of the study of the Ob-Ugrian peoples and languages, as well as provide a description of their present state. Among these nodes there are institutions, individuals (native and foreign) and also publications.

2. Societies, schools and workshops for scholarly studies

2.1. The Finno-Ugrian Society

First I would like to mention the 125-year-old Finno-Ugrian Society whose field of study goes far beyond the Ob-Ugrian linguistic area. Aided by the financial support of this Society two scholars, Kustaa Fredrik Karjalainen and Artturi Kannisto, resided in the Ob region for several years, living with these people while recording and collecting a large amount of lexical and grammatical data, texts and folklore material. K. F. Karjalainen spent four years (1898–1902) among the Khantys, whereas A. Kannisto travelled all over the land of the Mansis surveying every single dialect of this language on an expedition that lasted five years (1901–1906). About the same time (1898–1900) U. T. Sirelius made a trip along the River Ob engaging in ethnographical research. The research work conducted by these scholars was closely connected to the studies of the true pioneers of this profession, their predecessors, M. A. Castrén and August Ahlqvist and their contemporaries. Meanwhile, in 1900–1901 Heikki Paasonen also spent ten months among the Khantys of Konda and Surgut thanks to a scholarship from the University of Helsinki.

Although before World War I selecting, funding and preparing scholars for expeditions was the main task of the Finno-Ugrian Society, its activities were more extensive than this. The systematisation, documentation and publication of primary linguistic material collected during these expeditions together with the publication of research results, was and still is, of equal importance. The well-known periodicals and series published by this Society with their international distribution have helped to unite an international public interested in the Uralic languages and their cultures. Unfortunately, because these publications use special, perhaps complicated phonetic transcriptions, and mostly appear in German little benefit was passed on to the native speakers of the languages in question. Only after the elapse of a generation did professionally trained scholars emerge

from the indigenous Ob-Ugrian population who were able to benefit from these publications.

Since several field workers were not able to publish their linguistic collections either due to their obligation to edit linguistic material other than their own or because of their untimely death, the publication of these records was bestowed on the Finno-Ugrian Society and continued to be so for decades. Thus Paasonen's Khanty dictionary was published by Kai Donner (1926), Karjalainen's vast collection of eight Khanty dialects was edited by Y. H. Toivonen (1948). The Mansi text-material of Kannisto was published by Matti Liimola (1951–1963), although his dictionary has not yet been published. The Hungarian Edit Vértés published the grammatical notes and text-materials of Karjalainen and Paasonen. Interestingly enough the birth of Vértés and death of Karjalainen and Paasonen occurred in the same year: Karjalainen died of a heart attack he suffered after returning from the funeral of Paasonen in 1919, the year Vértés was born.

From the beginning, the connections between scholars associated with and supported by the Finno-Ugrian Society spread beyond the national borders. It was a Hungarian, János Jankó who interested U. T. Sirelius in Ob-Ugrian culture while preparing for an expedition to Siberia. János Jankó and his companion, József Pápay also met Karjalainen during their Siberian expedition.

Jankó and Pápay's journey to the Ob region was financed by an eccentric Hungarian aristocrat, Count Jenő Zichy. It is worth noting that, unlike the Finno-Ugrian Society in Finland, in Hungary, the other centre of Ob-Ugrian studies at that time, there was no institution whose strategy for Siberian studies was farsighted. Therefore, expeditions of Hungarians could only be realised either with the support of generous benefactors or, more frequently, through the exceptional efforts of dedicated activists. The first lone hero was Antal Reguly who died 150 years ago in 1858 at the age of 39. His expedition was funded by the Hungarian Society of Scholars [the predecessor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences], and by the donations of many private citizens. The decoding of Reguly's records was the aim of Bernát Munkácsi when he left on his journey to the Mansi region in 1888–1889, this journey being made possible thanks to professor József Budenz, who awarded Munkácsi his own great prize of the Hungarian Academy, which he received for his new book. József Pápay aimed to decode the Khanty texts of Reguly. He left on his journey to the Khanty region ten years later, 1898–1899. The worthy successor today of these pioneers was Éva Schmidt, whose scholarly achievements will be discussed later.

Until the first half of the 20th century there was little overlapping between the networks of native speakers and scholars. The yield of these various collections enriched the discipline, but for the indigenous population there was no benefit. Good relations or even friendship based on mutual respect may have been

born between travelling scholars and native informants, but such contact did not usually have any any lasting effect. The field workers published little information, if any, on the circumstances in which their collection of material took place and even less personal data about the informants. Usually, they did not bother to record the names of their informants. Their publications, rarely, if ever, found their way back to the region in question—partly because of political tensions, the Soviet Union having isolated itself. But even when a publication accidentally did reach them, there was no one able to read it. In spite of all this, the work of these pioneers was not without effect. According to a Russian ethnographer, Zoya Sokolova, it was no accident that at the beginning of the 1990s it was the Ob-Ugrians who first established their national organisations among the indigenous peoples of Siberia. The extensive and never waning interest of Finnish and Hungarian scholars over the last 150 years has bolstered a consciousness of the high value of the cultural heritage of these peoples, and given them a strong feeling and awareness of being part of a larger community.¹ No such thorough and systematic studies have been done among other Siberian indigenous peoples.

2.2. Institutions in the Soviet Union and in Russia

2.2.1. The Institute of Northern Peoples

The world opened up to the Ob-Ugrians first of all in the 1920s when the Institute of Northern Peoples (INP), which later continued its work under the auspices of the Herzen State Pedagogical Institute was founded in Leningrad. In common with the sons and daughters of other Siberian peoples, the Khantys and the Mansis who aspired to become teachers, cultural workers, would-be writers and artists were educated at the INP. Since during the Soviet period, unlike pre-World War I times, neither the Finno-Ugrian Society nor any other scholarly society had the opportunity or permission to conduct field work among the indigenous peoples of the Soviet Union, the Herzen State Pedagogical Institute (since 1991 Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia) was the only establishment in which foreign scholars allowed to meet native speakers of the various Siberian languages. This opportunity was first exploited by Wolfgang Steinitz, then in the 1950s others came, such as György Lakó, Béla Kálmán, Károly Rédei, János Gulya and László Honti, to mention only those specialists in Ob-Ugrian studies who collected large amounts of material from students at the INP. The process of collection, and field work in general, also had an effect on the informants themselves: the most important linguist among the Khanty, N. I. Terëshkin

¹ Zoya Sokolova, personal communication.

(1913–1986) being a student of Wolfgang Steinitz. The competent Mansi linguist, Ye. I. Rombandeyeva (1928–) has related several times the importance in her career of meeting György Lakó in 1952 and becoming his Mansi informant. The elderly lady scholar Rombandeyeva remembers with high regard the elegant bespectacled gentleman György Lakó, who always embarrassed her by courteously helping her to don her overcoat with its shabby rabbit-hair collar of which she was so ashamed. The result of this work with Rombandeyeva was Lakó's (1956) Northern Mansi grammar, and a product of this cooperation was that this responsive student also learned the methods of language description. Similarly, in 1957, she was also the informant for Béla Kálmán (1976)—consequently, the material of Kálmán's collection of Mansi texts is, for the most part, derived from Rombandeyeva. During this period of collective activity she became aware of the need to be able to precisely describe phonemic features, which provided a basis for her argument in favour of marking long vowels. In 1958 she met Vilmos Diószegi who repeatedly urged her to collect and describe the religious heritage and culture of the Mansis. After her first study (Rombandeyeva 1963) on the cultural traditions related to childbirth, there followed several other papers on ethnology and folklore. One of her main works is a collection of folklore texts (Rombandeyeva 2005) containing texts collected in the last 100 years or more. She has participated in international conferences and congresses, given lectures at universities abroad, and in this way has become the most well-known representative of Mansi scholarship.

It was Béla Kálmán who first observed Yuvan Shestalov's literary talent, and he was also the first editor to publish Shestalov's poems abroad. We may assume that being native informants and linguistic advisers to Károly Rédei in 1964 in Leningrad had a similar effect on the forming of Ye. A. Nemysova's professional career and that of M. K. Vagatova's literary activity (Rédei 1968). Leningrad was the place where young students could also gain access to literature from outside the Soviet Union. Both Yuvan Shestalov and Ye. I. Rombandeyeva mentioned repeatedly how greatly they had been influenced in their approach to their own mythology by Bernát Munkácsi's (1892–1921) collection of Mansi folklore.

2.2.2. Research centres in Siberia

As far as Ob-Ugrian is concerned the most important research centres in Siberia are in Tomsk and Novosibirsk. Among the ethnographers at Tomsk State University first mention should be made of N. V. Lukina (1937–) as one who has carried out extensive field work among the Ob-Ugrians and also played an important role in connecting the Siberian peoples to the international network by

translating, inter alia, Karjalainen's grandiose trilogy of Ob-Ugrian mythology from the German (1994–1996), and the travel notes of Sirelius (2001). Together with her colleague, V. Kulemzin, she wrote a book about the Khanty people for a Russian audience (1992). Both Kulemzin and Lukina are authors of the volume on Khanty mythology, which was the result of international cooperation (2006). Lukina's role in educating the new Ob-Ugrian intelligentsia cannot be overestimated either as a teacher of graduate students or an editor of various publications. The achievements of her disciples, Tat'yana Moldanova and Timofey Moldanov, is already acknowledged, for which reason I wish to mention some other publications of the new Mansi and Khanty generations: Khromova (2004), Ivanova (2004), Popova (2001, 2003, 2008) and Taligina (2004). Also, the linguistic school associated with the Novosibirsk State University has educated several Khanty scholars. Long series of projects and publications prove that cooperation between native and non-native scholars can be fruitful (Koshkarëva & Solovar 2004, Solovar 2006, Kaksin 2007, Skribnik & Afanas'yeva 2007). Also, colleagues from the Novosibirsk Conservatory have collected musical material from among the Khantys (Nazarenko 2000, 2005).

2.2.3. Institutions functioning in the Ob-Ugrian linguistic area

Beginning in the 1990s, due to a revival of national identity and also to the benevolence of the local authorities, a growing number of academic institutions emerged in the Ob region, and in an inverse proportion the more distant centres of research started to lose their importance. In Khanty-Mansiysk, the capital of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, a centre was founded called the Research Institute for the Revival of the Ob-Ugrian Peoples which—having been restructured and renamed several times—it still operates as the Ob-Ugrian Institute for Applied Studies and Data Processing (*Обско-угорский институт прикладных исследований и разработок*). In the same city a state university was also founded in 2001 which took on the tasks of the former teacher training college and which has a special department for the education of Ob-Ugrian students. In answer to the call of the homeland, many scholars have recently returned to the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug from different parts of the Russian Federation: Ye. I. Rombandeyeva from Moscow, D. V. Gerasimova and N. A. Lyskova from St Petersburg, A. I. Saynakhova from Central Asia.

In 1991 Éva Schmidt founded the Folklore Archive of the Northern Ob-Ugrian Peoples in Beloyarskiy, along the lower course of the River Kazym (Schmidt 2001). Following in her footsteps a series of similar institutions emerged in the Ob region: a Mansi archive was founded in Berëzovo (Csepregi

1997a), archives for Forest Nenets in Var'yegan, and Eastern Khanty in Lyan-tor, and soon after that a central archive was established in Khanty-Mansiysk. In the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug several institutes were established for recording and documenting the traditions of the Khanty, Komi and Tundra Nenets nationalities, with the Ethnolinguistic and Ethnographic Research Workshop of these institutes maintaining close contact with the archive founded by Éva Schmidt. Éva Schmidt recognised that the traditional ways of collecting linguistic and folklore material were insufficient: taking into consideration the dramatic trend of a shrinking of indigenous population only a large-scale and well organised material collection project could offer the chance of success in the saving and documentation of Ob-Ugrian folk-tradition as a whole. This was the objective towards which she had worked until the end of her life: an institute of her own founding under the name of the Centre for Dialectology. A draft for this had already been published in the *Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne* (Schmidt et al. 2001).

3. Personalities with wide contacts

3.1. Nodes between Ob-Ugrians in traditional ways of life

It has long been known that Ob-Ugrian communities have widespread and strong networks of their own: marriage customs and the rule of exogamy require familiarity with and precise knowledge of kinship relations. Due to exogamy members of a clan or, in a wider context, whole populations of one or another river-valley had close contact with one another or even with peoples in faraway territories. Trading traditions between them are also centuries old. They have precise knowledge of what can be expected of clan members and how this should be reciprocated. Let me mention, for example, the Khantys of Synya where there is a clear division of tasks: the fishermen of the Ob trade with their reindeer-breeding relatives in the Ural mountains and every item has its fixed price, for example, a bucket of fish oil is worth a reindeer fawn.² The networks also survive migration of Khantys to urban areas. The settlement policy of the Soviet era aimed at cutting the bonds between tribes and clans, and mixing them with settlers and alien populations, although mostly in vain: the Khantys of Salekhard, that is, the city dwellers, maintain contacts with their kin only and do not fraternise with outsiders.³ Even if they do not transmit their language to their children, they pass on their contacts.

² Eszter Ruttkay-Miklián, verbal communication.

³ Ágnes Kerecsi, verbal communication.

One among many: Ivan Stepanovich Sopočin

There are an ever growing number of people among the Ob-Ugrians who have contacts with the outside world, including scholarly relations. I am not referring only to the educated Mansis and Khantys as individuals who have kept up and cultivated their bonds with their kinfolk even after they occupied their place in the world of scholarship and science, but also to those many who have never left their native land. As an example I would like to mention only one person from the Surgut Khanty area, the one I have known the best. He was Ivan Stepanovich Sopočin (1910–1993), the most famous shaman in the region of the Tromagan and Agan rivers in the second half of the 20th century. According to Juha Pentikäinen (1998: 65), “[h]e was the only one to survive out of the eight shamans imprisoned during the Stalinistic persecutions in the 1930s against the national leaders of the Khanty people in the area.” He became the focus of international attention in the 1980s when he was discovered by Estonian, Finnish, Russian and, finally, also Hungarian ethnographers. It was his kinsman, Yeremey Aypin, then a local cultural activist and later to become a well-known writer, who led the researchers to the wise old man. To some extent also Aypin’s literary achievements are based on the life experiences and adventures of his uncle (Aypin 2002a). The subject of Aypin’s novel, the story of the Khanty uprising against Soviet oppression at the beginning of the 1930s has also been taken from Sopočin’s life story (Aypin 2002b). It was also Aypin who led the Estonian film director Lennart Meri (later president of the independent Estonian Republic) to Ivan Stepanovich while he was shooting a film on the bear-feast traditions of the Khantys of the River Agan in 1985–1987 (Meri 1987). At the end of the 1980s researchers of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Novosibirsk visited I. S. Sopočin several times and collected musical and linguistic material from him (Nazarenko 2000, 2005; Koshkarëva 2004, 2005). The texts of his shamanistic songs have been published by Márta Csepregi (Csepregi 2006, 2007). The Finnish folklorist Juha Pentikäinen obtained important information from him, and others, on the Elk-myth in 1990 (Pentikäinen 1998: 65–75). We had an opportunity to enjoy Sopočin’s talented tale-telling indirectly even earlier, when László Honti (1978) published one of his elk-tales which he had recorded with the help of his son who was then studying in Leningrad. In 1991 a Hungarian ethnographer, Ágnes Kerezi, spent time with him and gained his confidence (Kerezi 1997). Just that time a photo album was being compiled by Erzsébet Winter (1995) through the good services of which many can catch a glimpse of the world of Ivan Stepanovich. In 1992 the ethnomusicologist Katalin Lázár and linguist Márta Csepregi joined Ágnes Kerezi on an expedition to visit I. S. Sopočin. The main source of their book on Surgut Khanty folk tradition was the wise elder of the Sopočin fam-

ily (Lázár 1997). Other members of the Sopochin family were also important informants on folk tradition and language (Csepregi 1997b, 1998, 2005) after they joined the international network: Sopochin's sons Yosif and Yeremey visited Finland and Hungary, and his granddaughter, Olesya has been studying in Hungary and was a valuable source of information for those studying the Surgut Khanty dialect. A documentary film has been made on the life of the Sopochins (Gadó 1999).

Ivan Stepanovich himself, who never left his native land, knew more about how networks function than we might think, that is, the Khantys, who live in the taiga are always connected with those who live in the cities. The latter he simply called Russians. He told his children: "In this world under the sky and above the ground we all belong together. Neither the Khanty nor the Russian people could be happy at the expense of the other. It is bad also for the Russians if the Khanty suffer, and the Khanty cannot be happy even if the Russians are badly off."

3.2. Scholars as nodes

As mentioned above, in the 19th century networks of native speakers and scholars functioned independently of one another and were connected, if at all, only accidentally and in a few nodes. The situation started to change slowly in the first half of the 20th century. Let me illustrate the widening and strengthening of connections between native informants and scholars, and the inclusion of the Ob-Ugrians in the network of scholarly studies, by mentioning the careers of two scholars born in the same year, Valeriy Chernetsov (1905–1970) and Wolfgang Steinitz (1905–1967).

Beginning in 1925, Chernetsov started to get acquainted with the language, folklore and ethnography of the Mansi on several expeditions. As an archaeologist, historian, and ethnographer his achievements are equally extraordinary. On the basis of his field work he is closely connected to his predecessors, A. Reguly, B. Munkácsi and A. Kannisto, since he collected materials, as they did, along the Lozva and Northern Sos'va rivers. He tried to unravel the ancient pictographs of Tagil, the same ones that had also astonished A. Reguly in 1845 (Chernetsov 1964, Szíj 2003). He was an active participant in establishing the literary Mansi language and by means of his good relations with native speakers became a pioneer in connecting the respective networks of indigenous Mansis and scholars. His travel notes (Chernetsov 1987) bear witness to his sincere interest in the life of indigenous people.

The German Wolfgang Steinitz lived in the Soviet Union between 1934 and 1937 and was a professor at the INP in Leningrad. By the end of the 1920s, he

had established connections with leading linguistic circles in Finland, Estonia and Hungary. In his years in Leningrad he worked together with Soviet scholars (among them also Chernetsov), but what was more important was his teaching and field work with his students among of the indigenous nationalities in the north. As was also mentioned above N. I. Terëshkin considered himself one of his students. In 1935 he left for the Ob region on a six-month-long expedition, an unrealisable dream for any other foreign scholar at that time. Steinitz had good relations with state administrators and politicians, as well as officials in the field of education. He took part in establishing the Khanty literary language, just as did Chernetsov in the case of Mansi. Steinitz's touch could be felt for decades not only in Leningrad, but in area of the indigenous settlements as well: as late as 1996 Éva Schmidt found a retired lady teacher in a remote village in the Oktyabrskoye Okrug who happened to have been a former student of Steinitz in Leningrad.

After World War II Wolfgang Steinitz became a leading figure in international Finno-Ugrian studies. His students in Ob-Ugrian studies pursued significant careers in both East and West Germany. His scholarly oeuvre was crowned by the collective opus of Steinitz and his students; the dialectological and etymological dictionary of Khanty (Steinitz 1967–1993) which is a basic piece of Ostyakology which is in itself a very important node. Until the present the Mansi and the Khanty peoples have been able to benefit only from those parts of the opus published in the Soviet Union. More recently, however—partly due to German–Russian collaboration—Steinitz's oeuvre is becoming available also to the Khantys (Titel & Winkler 2000) and some of the texts collected by him have also been published in Cyrillic transcription with a Russian translation (Neménysova 2000).

Éva Schmidt (1948–2002) was a scholar whose activity was connected with almost all of the Ob-Ugrian tribes and ethnic groups and—without exception—with all fields of Ob-Ugrian studies (see the obituary of Simoncsics 2003). By the time she first met Mansi and Khanty people in Leningrad in 1970 she had already become familiar with the all the available works of Reguly, Munkácsi, Pápay and Steinitz and read the first literary works of these peoples of recent literacy, including Soviet war novels, in their native languages—as translated from Russian. Later she learned to speak each and all of the Northern Khanty dialects and was fluent also in Mansi. She made herself a link between Western scholarship and the so-called national intelligentsia of the Ob-Ugrians and their national community. For her it was easy to reach a common note with elderly people who were aware of the value of their cultural tradition as well as of its evanescent nature and, for that reason, they trusted her with their innermost lore of knowledge: myths, songs and tales. By her own account she was able to con-

nect with the younger generations only with some difficulty, but in spite of this one can come across people of any generation even in the most far away corners of Western Siberia who remember her as their acquaintance and true friend. Several of them have cherished the memory of the Hungarian woman from their youth whom they met in their school and who addressed them in their native language, and this was an event which changed their lives.

When Éva Schmidt founded the folklore archive in Beloyarskiy in 1991 she recruited her early colleagues from the Kazym region. After having acquired the methods of collecting and documenting folklore and linguistic data, her first team-mates left working on the archive and stepped out a separate path in their scholarly studies. That is why Éva Schmidt had to make a new start on the archive and after some reorganising, the archive work recommenced, this time with new Khanty colleagues from the Ob region. They started the task of collecting from among their kinfolk and began publishing material in series observing high scholarly standards in transcriptions of both the Cyrillic and Roman alphabet with Russian translations (Khomlyak 2002, Uspenskaya 2002, Slepenskova 2003, Schmidt & Pyatnikova 2006).

Éva Schmidt travelled all over and around the western half of the Ob-Ugrian linguistic area several times, getting acquainted and making friends everywhere, and people—as is fitting in a strongly connected node—were always seeking her companionship. She was not only thoroughly familiar with the physical geography of the region, but also, and even more so, with its cultural geography, since she knew the cultic sites and their guardians well, just as she did the idols and the traditions connected to them, more often than not much better than local population, since she had a whole 150-year-old collection of folklore and religious tradition in her head. What she thought most important was to return to these traditions by teaching them again to the locals in the vicinity of the cultic sites. That is why she transcribed the heroic epic songs collected by Pápay into Cyrillic, thus giving it a new life with the aid of melodies added and composed by Leonti Taragupta, a later descendant of Pápay's informant. Yet Éva Schmidt did more: she not only transcribed heroic epic songs from the obsolete Sygva dialect collected by Reguly, but also translated them into the Berězovo dialect and, if she thought it necessary, she also translated Mansi texts into Khanty. For the Konda Mansi people, Russified by the 1930s, she compiled an index of folklore texts collected by Munkácsi and Kannisto with the names of the informants to the fore—the thought behind this being to inform locals about the great achievements of their ancestors. In addition she also presented them with some texts translated into Russian—returning ethnic culture to people by re-teaching it. All of this and much more information is contained in her annual reports for the MTA Néprajzi Intézet [Ethnographical Institute of the Hungarian

Academy of Sciences] and was published after her death in the 1st volume of *Schmidt Éva Könyvtár* [Éva Schmidt Library] (2005).

Let us return for a moment to the theory of Barabási. According to this theory (Barabási 2003: 109–113), if nodes are removed randomly from scale-free networks, they are not damaged; rather they are astonishingly robust and capable of tolerating errors. If, on the other hand, highly connected nodes are removed, networks are quickly dissolved, which means in practice that random errors do not threaten the integrity of these networks, while they are almost defenceless against targeted assaults. Thus, highly connected nodes are the vulnerable spot of networks. Éva Schmidt was just such a highly connected node in the Ob-Ugrian network. Too many people and too many projects depended on her. After her tragic death, these people felt abandoned as one of her former colleagues wrote in the volume dedicated to her memory (Voldina 2004: 70) and also the projects conceived and started by her were cut short. The loss of Éva Schmidt is to be seen as a huge hole in the safety net of Ob-Ugrian studies and through this hole sharks move about freely in and out—these are the enemies of Ob-Ugrian ethnic survival.

4. Invisible mesh in the net

Publications as important constituents of Ob-Ugrian networks have been mentioned. But there is also invisible mesh in these net(work)s: the unpublished papers of late collectors. In the followings I shall mention a few of these.

After the death of V. N. Chernetsov, his written records were left to the Tomsk State University. A part of his Russian language and easily-sold material was published by N. V. Lukina: these were his research diary (Chernetsov 1987) and his translations of Mansi tales (Chernetsov 1997). The original Mansi texts had already been prepared for publication by Éva Schmidt in the 1980s and they should have appeared as the 2nd volume of *Specimina Sibirica*. In the meantime Éva Schmidt's attention had been diverted and she moved to Western Siberia where she started her own work of collecting. For decades this material had filled the shelves of the editor János Pusztay, and after the death of Éva Schmidt it was transferred to the Department of Finno-Ugric Studies at the University of Szeged where most of the intensive studies of Mansi are now being carried out in Hungary. Years go by, but no word has been heard about its publication.

As for not publishing some of the material, I myself belong to those who should be blamed. Edit Vértes had been active in publishing K. F. Karjalainen's and H. Paasonen's materials for four decades. As she got older she repeatedly

expressed her desire to see the final publication of all of the material, a task she would not have liked to leave to somebody else. But exactly this is exactly what did happen: when she died in 2002, it was me to whom Karjalainen's unpublished texts from the Tremyugan, Likrisovskoye and Vasyugan region of the Eastern Khantys from her archive were assigned. Six years have passed since then and I am still waiting trying to find the time when I shall be able to study, edit and publish these extremely valuable texts.

N. I. Terëshkin is known in the profession as a former expert in Eastern Khanty dialects. His native dialect was Nizyam and he collected quite a large quantity of material from this region. After his death his heirs entrusted Éva Schmidt to take care of his written records and this she set out to do. After the death of Éva Schmidt, Terëshkin's records were transferred to Khanty-Mansiysk and we can only hope that the material will receive the professional treatment it truly deserves.

The archive of Éva Schmidt is the largest of those in existence. Her original recordings are still in the archive of Beloyarskiy, while copies have been stored in the Linguistic Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences which has produced 882 hours of digitalised material on DVDs. If we respect Éva Schmidt's will not to publish these materials until twenty years after her death, then in 2022 when their processing work could be started, the most of the material would certainly be unintelligible and/or undecipherable both to a native Khanty and a foreign scholar. However, the Linguistic Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences has begun to edit her legacy. The contents of the first four volumes of the Éva Schmidt Library [Schmidt Éva Könyvtár] (2005, 2006, 2008a, 2008b) were meant to be made public while the author was still alive, thus the publishing of these is not forbidden.

Research among the Ob-Ugrian peoples was from the 19th century on a race with time: collecting and documenting, as far as anything exists for collection and documentation. Karjalainen's moving metaphor predicted the foreseeable fate of the Irtysh Khanty:

Ostjakit sulavat kuin lumi kevätauringon paisteessa: rinteillä, jopa aukealakin näkyy pälvä, ja päivä päivältä paahtaa aurinko kuumemmasti lisäten sulamisen vauhtia. Pian ei ole talvivaipasta nähtävänä muuta kuin ravitseva muta uuden heinän juurella. Synkistä rotkoista tai metsän sisästä jonkun komon juurelta tarkkaava kulkija voi löytää kulon tai varisseiden lehtien peittämän jäätikön, mutta vihoittavassa luonnossa ei mikään muistuta sitä, että joku aika sitten samoilla seuduilla hallitsi talven valta. (Karjalainen 1983: 85)

‘The Ostyak people are melting like snow in the spring sunshine. On the slopes and in the clearings [of the taiga] there are even now some bare patches here and there, but the sun has begun to shine more and more, and so the pace of melting is quickening. Soon nothing more will be seen of the mantle of snow, but the nourishing soil beneath the new grass. In dark holes and under some crooked trees in the forest the observant eye may stumble upon chunks of ice, but nothing in the green of nature reminds us that not long ago this terrain was in the grasp of winter.’

Indeed, most of the published texts are keeping alive the memory of dialects not spoken any more. Such are the published texts in Southern Khanty of K. F. Karjalainen, H. Paasonen and Serafim Patkanov. The heroic epic songs, the most richly documented Khanty folklore material collected by Reguly, preserved the Sygva dialect, which became extinct soon after the death of Reguly’s informant Maksim Nikilov, for posterity.

Thanks to the work of Wolfgang Steinitz and Éva Schmidt, the Sherkaly dialect of Khanty which is now considered practically extinct, has become one of the best documented dialects. In addition to grammars and school text books, Éva Schmidt’s Sherkaly grammar has also been published (Schmidt 2008a), a work originally written as a teaching manual as early as the 1970s. The 4th volume of Éva Schmidt Library contains a collection of songs by the female bard, Anna Lyskova, from the Sherkaly area (Schmidt 2008b).

Ulla-Maija Kulonen has also chosen an extinct Mansi dialect, Konda, from the collection of Artturi Kannisto, as an object for analysis and description and written a school book on the nature and structure of a dead language (Kulonen 2007).

5. Tattered net(work): the present state of Khanty and Mansi dialects

I can only present a sketch concerning the present state of Ob-Ugrian idioms. Since there has been no sociolinguistic research in this field, I shall have to rely on my own personal experience and also partly on indirect sources.

Until very recent times the waterways were only open to travellers in North-western Siberia in the summer, which meant mainly the rivers Ob and Irtysh. Thus, it is no wonder that the centre of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug was founded right here in 1930 and was first called Ostyako-Vogul’sk, then Khanty-Mansiysk. These rivers were the scene of the first encounters between the Ob-Ugrians and Russians and, as a consequence, the process of assimilation is in its most advanced phase along these rivers. Karjalainen well

foresaw the coming fate of the Khantys settled along the Irtysh and its tributaries (Demyanka, Konda) saying that by the 20th century they would all be Russified. In one of her last lectures in Spring 2002 Éva Schmidt said concerning the Konda Mansis that beginning with the end of 19th century mixed marriages had become a general tendency, with the commonest type being marriage between a Mansi male and a Russian female, and soon Russian became the family language leaving the Mansi language in a state of devastation by the beginning of the 20th century. Now, only the oldest people have some knowledge of Mansi, due to the fact that they have communicated in this language with their grandparents until the age of 15–16. For them Mansi has become a kind of secret language later used between parents who did not want their children to understand their speech. Neither their children's, nor their grandchildren's, generation have inherited the native language and the number of the most elderly is very small (Gugán 2002: 41).

In the 20th century travelling north in the vicinity of Sherkaly one would first encounter the southernmost settlements of the Khantys. These were divided into two groups: one which used to live along the River Little-Sos'va and another along the River Ob. The folk culture of the former was almost intact during the 1930–1940s, but later this group was deported. Subsequently, the region was declared a nature conservation area and only one smaller Khanty settlement was allowed to remain in its original location. The descendants of the deported Khanty settlers were resettled along the Ob and in Khanty-Mansiysk, respectively. The other group has disappeared, its language can be recorded only sporadically from elderly people, and among the under 30s no one is able to speak it anymore. The situation is similar among the Nizyam Khanty where only elderly women speak Khanty.

Moving further northwards along the Ob the next larger settlement is Polnovat. The Khanty living in and around Polnovat speak the Lower-Kazym dialect and the traditional culture was safeguarded among them until the 1970s. Then a system of boarding schools was introduced here also for children over ten. In these schools they may even have been physically punished for speaking their native idiom among themselves. Even young teachers with a Khanty background who were educated in the INP in Leningrad forbade the use of the Khanty language arguing that Khanty is not a civilised language. Thus, this generation has also lost its mother tongue and Russian has become the family language even within Khanty-Khanty marriages (Gugán 2002: 42).

North of Polnovat the next settlement along the Ob is Berëzovo. There is only one village in which the Berëzovo dialect is spoken today and this is Tegi where it is being used less and less by the young. Although the settlements along the River Kunovat have never been interfered with artificially, the status of the

language is in danger there as well, since industrialisation (logging) indirectly upsets the social structure and results in language loss among the native population. In the area of the River Synya, on the other hand, where the system of settlements has also remained intact, the traditional culture and together with this also the use of the native language have not been narrowed down (Gugán 2002: 42).

Sofia Onina, herself a native of the area, separates the Khanty of Synya into three groups on sociolinguistic grounds: 1) all generations of the traditional, reindeer breeding and fisher-hunter population speak their native idiom well, 2) of the inhabitants of the central village of Ovgort, the adults speak Khanty, although their children only understand the language and do not speak it, 3) the educated Khanty in the area who have moved elsewhere neither use their native language nor teach it to their children (Onina 2008). Mária Sipos has also recently given an account of the revitalisation efforts among the Khanty of Synya (Sipos 2006). Even more recently the Department of Native Peoples of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug has published the full documentation of a bear-feast in Synya that took place not long ago (Taligina 2007).

The northernmost groups of Khantys live in close proximity to the Nenets who consciously preserve their tongue and traditions. Like the Nenets the Khantys of the area also lead a nomadic way of life breeding reindeer, and after finishing boarding school their children return home, which means that their mother tongue continues to be preserved. This area—like the Synya and the Kunovat valleys—is part of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, and it can easily be understood why the general view of those in Khanty-Mansiysk is that every Khanty speaks his/her mother tongue in the Yamal Peninsula. This is not quite true, language loss is also common among those who change their way of life, but the high self-esteem of the Nenets has had an effect on the Khantys as well.

Among the northern Mansi groups the linguistic situation in the Urals (Ivdel' and its surroundings) is the most favourable, since here we can find villages with purely Mansi populations. After being dispossessed of their herds of reindeer they turned to hunting and fishing, visiting towns only for trading purposes. As long as they are able to maintain the present form of livelihood, their language will have a good chance of survival. Nevertheless, several Mansi settlements have been Russified in recent times and this process is accelerating. Sporadic Mansi settlements continue to exist only along the Upper-Sygva (Gugán 2002: 43).

According to experts in this field, it is the Kazym dialect that displays the most vitality. Éva Schmidt has estimated that the number of Kazym speakers is approximately 2,000. The speakers of this dialect comprise a majority in

the field of culture and science, and most school manuals and belles lettres are published in this dialect. Together with the Synya dialect it may help to ensure the survival of Khanty idioms. It is not inconceivable that in a later phase when familiarity with their mother tongue becomes more important for self-identification as an indigenous people of the North, these flourishing dialects will be those that Khanty people will choose to learn again. The chances of survival for Mansi language are much less favourable: collectors can only record folklore texts from the oldest people nowadays.

Eastern Khanty dialects are spoken east beside the confluence of the Ob and the Irtysh, along the Middle Ob and its tributaries. As I mentioned above, Russification is spreading along the Ob. This means partly that the valley of Salym, the area closest to Khanty-Mansiysk, has possibly been completely Russified by now—though we have no reliable information concerning this, other than Terëshkin's Salym Khanty lexical collection compiled in the 1950s (Terëshkin 1981). Due to industrialisation Khanty language settlements have disappeared from the shores of the Ob and the language has been driven back to the upper courses of its tributaries.

Surgut dialects are spoken along the rivers Pym, Tromagan, Agan and Yugan. It is difficult to gauge the exact number of speakers. According to official data, in 2005 there were 2,800 indigenous people in the Surgut Okrug, 98% of which were Khantys, 2% Forest Nenets and Mansis. About 500 families, that is, more than 2,000 persons live in the tribal lands (KhMAO 2008). In my experience those Khantys who lead a traditional way of life, breeding reindeer, hunting and fishing, do use their language: only those who have moved to the towns rid themselves of it and transfer to Russian—even within the course of a generation. The number of Surgut Khantys is greater, totalling about 800 when those kinsfolk who live on the banks of the River Agan and belong administratively to the Nizhnevartovsk Okrug are added.

The easternmost dialects of Khanty are spoken along the rivers Vakh and Vasyugan. The Vakh valley is located in the Nizhnevartovsk Okrug, and 1,765 indigenous people have been recorded as residing on the banks of the river, the greater proportion of which are Vakh Khantys (Nizhnevartovsk 2008). The number of speakers of this dialect has been cautiously estimated at 50 by Andrey Filchenko on his homepage, where he gives further information concerning the numbers of speakers of other Eastern Khanty dialects that he has studied:

Based on our field work over the last 10 years the above statistics could be amended with regards to the Eastern Khanty dialects: Yugan, Vakh, Alexandrovo and Vasyugan (table below), and perhaps, the total number of the Eastern Khanty dialect speakers is nowadays to be realistically placed at under 3,000.

Total Population Number of Speakers

Yugan Eastern Khanty	>	700	>	500
Vakh Eastern Khanty	>	200	>	50
Vasyugan Eastern Khanty	>	120	>	20
Alexandrovo Eastern Khanty	>	150	>	20

(Filchenko 2008 [sic, verbatim].)

Quite recently we received promising information about these Khantys living along the upper course of the Vakh, in the remotest village of Korliki. In 2006 Sachiko Sosa and Susanna Virtanen, assisted by Zoya Ryabchikova, reported that every generation of settlers daily use their mother tongue.

These Khantys living in area of Alexandrovo and in the valley of Vasyugan share the harshest fate: They are isolated from their kin by the fact that the area, the Vasyugan valley, in which they live belongs not to the Tyumen Oblast, but to the Tomsk Oblast, and is thus cut off from the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug. Here it was not the industrialisation of the area (drilling for oil and gas) that initiated assimilation, but the large scale settlement of politically deported people along the river in the 1930s. At that time about 1,000 Khantys lived along the River Vasyugan and the number of settlers in the valley soon rose to 50,000 (Nagy 2007: 26). According to Andrey Filchenko,

The majority of Vasyugan Khanty are currently linguistically assimilated Russian monolinguals numbering under 150 pers. The numbers of Vasyugan Khanty officially registered vary from source to source, however, based on the original research there are around 20 Khanty who permanently reside on Vasyugan river and have practical knowledge of traditional language and culture. They are bilingual minority native language speakers, all over the age of 50. The number of semi-fluent speakers, capable of maintaining restricted basic conversations in Khanty does not exceed 50, principally placing these dialects in the group of languages in the imminent danger of extinction within a single generation. (Filchenko 2008 [sic, verbatim].)

6. Networks of dialects in space and time: historical dialectology

Those conducting analyses of the Ob-Ugrian linguistic situation are often satisfied with stating the fact of language loss. On the other hand, scholars like Éva Schmidt and others who have spent more time in the field have also observed that these dialects are living and in a state of continual change. As Éva Schmidt expressed the matter in one of her reports: “To sum up the field work carried out in connection with Pápay’s texts: at present every village speaks a dialect other than that spoken at the end of the 19th century.” (Schmidt 2005: 79). Munkácsi and Pápay had similar experiences when they tried to find the dialectal variants recorded by Reguly, but they could not: Reguly’s dialectal variants had disappeared during the preceding 50 years. Also, we had the same experience with Eastern Khanty: the dialect as recorded by Paasonen and Karjalainen in Surgut commonly called Yugan and Tremejuga (J and Trj) was different from that which we could now hear in the valleys of Yugan and Tromagan. Vowel-harmony has disappeared, there is no past tense with *-s*, but nonetheless new structures have evolved in their place. A very characteristic change has spread over the whole linguistic area of Khanty: lateral spirant *ʎ* became *t*. By the end of the 19th century this change was limited only to the southern dialects of Khanty which later began to spread northwards and eastwards, respectively. This may be one symptom among many others, but it does suggest that *t*-dialects will die out sooner or later. Namely, the *t*-dialects thrive in those areas most exposed to assimilation and *t* substitutes a sound that is wholly alien, strange and missing from the Russian phonological system. Khanty people brought up in orphanage have told us that they began using *t* instead of *ʎ* in their Khanty speech in order to avoid attracting attention. In the Surgut dialect using *t* instead of *ʎ* is also a logopaedic problem: *t* is uttered instead of *ʎ* the articulation of which is more difficult, by Khantys in defective speech also. Since both *t* and *ʎ* are highly frequent phonemes in Khanty and not only as word stems but also as grammatical morphemes, the use of *t* at the expense of *ʎ* would lead to the formation of too many homonyms, an obstacle to understanding and communication in general. When a language becomes incomprehensible, it soon becomes obsolete.

The Ob-Ugrian languages offer many opportunities for studying historical dialectology. This is also a task which must be accomplished as long as the speakers of these languages live, since such an enterprise can only be realised with the help of, and in close cooperation with native informants and local experts, that is, in a network of highly connected nodes.

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