

Manuscripta Castreniana: A General Preface to the Series

Matthias Alexander Castrén (1813–1852) was by far the most significant Finnish linguist of the 19th century. When he died at the young age of 38, he left behind a huge corpus of field data, collected by himself during prolonged expeditions to Karelia, Lapland, Arctic Russia and Siberia from 1838 to 1849. In the short periods of time he spent in an academic environment, he was largely occupied by university teaching and social activities and had little opportunity to synthesize his collections, a situation aggravated by his rapidly progressing and ultimately fatal illness. Therefore, and in spite of his active production of specialized articles, reviews and travel reports during his lifetime, a major part of his scholarly heritage remained unpublished when he died. Ever since, the fate of this legacy has stood in the focus of Finnish linguistics.

In Castrén's lifetime it was said that he had "written the grammars of fourteen languages", but the actual number of separate idioms documented by him is much larger, coming close to thirty. Moreover, although his main focus was the Samoyedic branch of Uralic, he also recorded several Finno-Ugrian idioms, including varieties of Finnic, Saamic, Mari, Komi and Khanty, as well as languages and dialects belonging to the Turkic, Mongolic, Tungusic and Yeniseic families. With most of these languages, he was the first to collect any kind of coherent grammatical information, which, moreover, was complemented by lexical collections of varying sizes. Not surprisingly, he is today regarded as the founder of not only Uralic, but also Altaic and Palaeosiberian linguistics. An important feature of his approach was that he worked in the framework of a consistent linguistic theory, close to what is today known as "basic grammar".

It has to be added, however, that Castrén was not only a linguist, but a multidisciplinary scholar equally versatile in the fields of ethnography, folklore, mythology, archaeology, history and human geography. Although he had both predecessors and successors, he is with good reason honoured as the pioneer and foremost representative of the Finnish school of linguistic anthropology, a tradition that was formed several decades before the international breakthrough of the field. Using a more modern term, his way of looking into languages in their overall extra-linguistic context, would correspond to the concept of "rich grammar". Considering his work on mythology, especially the study of shamanism, he was also the founding figure of the so-called "Northern Paradigm" of mythological studies, a branch of comparative religion whose significance has only recently been fully understood.

Folklore and mythology were discussed by Castrén in a number of public lectures he gave at the Imperial Alexander University in Helsinki. Linguistic topics were treated by him in a series of academic dissertations, presented between 1839 and 1850. In addition, he authored grammatical sketches with vocabularies on Izhma Komi and Hill Mari, published in Latin in 1844 and 1845, respectively. After his last expedition he started working on a new series of German-language academic grammars to which he gave the general title *Nordische Reisen und Forschungen*. The series was authorized and financed by the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg, and the first volume, on Khanty, appeared in 1849. In his remaining two years, Castrén managed to complete the manuscript for a second volume, on Samoyedic.

With Castrén's death, however, the future of his grammars was in danger, and the series would have been discontinued had it not been taken up by his colleague Anton Schiefner (1817–1879). From 1852 to 1861, Schiefner rapidly completed the project by editing and publishing, not only the Samoyedic volume, but also five other volumes of Castrén's linguistic field data, as well as a reissue of the Khanty volume. To these, he added the German editions of five volumes of Castrén's lectures and earlier publications, including letters and travelogues, which were also being made available in parallel Swedish versions under the name *Nordiska resor och forskningar*, published between 1852 and 1870. This 12-volume international series immediately consolidated Castrén's reputation and has been used as a basic tool of reference ever since—even for languages for which more extensive descriptions have subsequently become available.

In spite of the extremely valuable contribution made by Schiefner to Castrén's legacy, it was almost immediately realized that even more needed to be done. For one thing, there remained important parts of Castrén's materials that were not included in the series published by Schiefner. Moreover, Schiefner, who was not a field linguist, occasionally made mistakes when reading and interpreting Castrén's handwritten materials, which were not always in an accessible format. The idea of republishing Castrén's data in a more complete and correct form was first suggested as early as the 19th century, and this became one of the long-term objectives of the Finno-Ugrian Society, which was founded in Helsinki in 1883 with the specific goal of continuing Castrén's work in the field of Uralic and Altaic linguistics and ethnography.

During the almost 140 years of its existence (as of 2021), the Finno-Ugrian Society has, indeed, cultivated Castrén's legacy by both financing new field work by many generations of scholars and by publishing the results of their work. However, the full publication of Castrén's manuscript materials has not been realized until now. After the idea had once again been mentioned in connection with the 110th anniversary of the

Society in 1993, the plan of opening a new series of publications under the name *Manuscripta Castreniana* gradually ripened. This series is scheduled to contain a critical edition of all relevant parts of Castrén's manuscripts, including both linguistic descriptions and non-linguistic materials. The series will consist of both printed volumes and digital materials available on the website of the project.

In accordance with the original agreement with the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences, Castrén's manuscripts were placed in the library of the Imperial Alexander University of Helsinki, where Schiefner sent them after completing his work on them. For unknown reasons, however, a small part of the materials remained in the archives of the Academy in St Petersburg. The academy also received Castrén's important ethnographic collections from Siberia. The materials kept in Helsinki have been bound into 33 mainly folio-sized volumes, which, over the years, have been preliminarily catalogued and microfilmed. Unfortunately, the work has never been professionally completed, which is why the volumes still offer surprises to those delving into them.

For the new series of publications, the Finno-Ugrian Society has mobilized a representative team of experts. The volumes, published in a free order, are divided into three sections: *Linguistica*, *Realia* and *Personalia*. The *Linguistica* section will contain Castrén's grammatical and lexical data on all the languages he documented. The *Realia* section will contain his notes on extralinguistic realities, including ethnography, folklore, mythology, archaeology, history and geography. Finally, the *Personalia* section will contain his letters and travelogues, as well as a biography with a full bibliography of his works. The contents of all the volumes are annotated on the basis of today's level of scholarship. In this connection, it may be recalled that large parts of Castrén's materials, including, in particular, those dealing with subsequently extinct languages, are the only extant documents on the topics they deal with.

English was chosen as the language of this series in order to give Castrén's oeuvre the visibility it deserves among the international and Anglo-Saxon readership for whom English is the first language of scholarly communication. The Swedish and German editions, published in the 19th century, will, of course, retain their historical value, but they are inevitably losing their relevance as sources of primary data. For practical reasons, though perhaps unfortunate for some readers, certain parts of the primary material in our new series are made available only in the original languages, that is, mainly Swedish. This is particularly the case with Castrén's letters and travelogues. Even so, the present series will provide a basis for the future translation of these materials into other languages, including English.

Juha Janhunen