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László Károly

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A Historical Approach

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Preface

Ad meliora...

The present book originates from my doctoral thesis defended in 2008 at the University of Szeged, Department of Altaic Studies under the title *Yakut derivational morphology. An historical approach – Deverbal nominals*. My thesis went through minor and major repairs in the last years: (1) I changed the title to more accurately reflect the scope of the book; (2) I included the comments and corrections of my reviewers; (3) I regularly consulted and added the newly published literature; and as the biggest change (4) I completely reorganized and reclassified the derivational suffixes. In my thesis the suffixes were assigned classes according to their etymology. For a pure historical analysis it was an ideal framework. But it turned out at the end that the functional side of the derivational system remained completely invisible. This conclusion forced me to reorganize the whole work and to put more emphasize on functionality.

The complete process of preparation from the very beginning through the doctoral thesis to this published book provided me two very important conclusions which are almost as important as the factual results of my research presented in the following chapters. The first conclusion was already visible in my thesis: a historical-comparative analysis of the derivational system of the Yakut language with those of the other Turkic and Mongolic languages remains an area for future examination, simply because of the lack of preliminary research in the very topic. If we just look at the neighbouring Altaic languages, i.e. South Siberian Turkic and Buryat, it is clearly visible that no systematic research has been done in historical-comparative word-formation. Thus the available literature can only be used with reservations. It is the book by Marcel Erdal, *Old Turkic word formation* (1991), that solely pro-

vides systematic research on derivational morphology in the immense field of Altaic studies. This is therefore extensively used for my research.

The second conclusion became visible when I started to classify the derivational suffixes according to their functions. Searching for a possible framework it turned out that there is hardly anything done in respect to semantic categorization of the derivational suffixes. The present situation was expressively described by Štekauer, Valera and Körtvélyessy (2012: 238): 'if the description of word-formation in the great majority of languages is rather poor, the onomasiological viewpoint, i.e. the way of expressing various semantic categories, approaches zero. […] On the other hand, there is no agreement on the number of the semantic/conceptual categories and, thus, there is not a universally accepted list of them.'

Even if the situation is as bad in derivational morphology as it was described by Štekauer, Valera and Körtvélyessy, I could again profit from Erdal (1991) because it has a reasonable system of the functional categories. My framework is actually based on those of Erdal (1991), Comrie and Thompson (2007) with my own special additions. It is however far from perfect; some problems and questions are discussed in the book, but many for further consideration, because either I could not solve them, or they were far off of the very topic. I hope that I can return to these issues in future publications.

According to the above mentioned two conclusions I consider the present work an initial phase of the research towards the establishment of a general framework for the better understanding of Turkic, or in a broader sense Altaic derivational morphology. I can additionally imagine that it turns out that the system used in my analysis is not adequate for a general description and thus have to be modified, or completely rewritten. But at least the direction of research is clearly determined.

During the preparation of this book I have got lots of useful comments, remarks and corrections from colleagues all over the world. Without mentioning them by name here I express my thanks and gratitudes to this community of altruists. It goes without saying that any of the faulty passages, errors or omissions in the book are entirely my own responsibility.

I dedicate this book to my late teacher, Árpád Berta, who not only supervised my doctoral thesis, but started me on the challenging and at the same time exciting path of Turkic linguistics.

Frankfurt am Main, June 2012 László Károly