A POSSIBLE SLAVIC ETYMOLOGY OF HUNGARIAN KULLANCS ‘TICK’

Возможная славянская этимология венгерского kullancs ‘клещ’

Данная статья посвящена этимологии венгерского существительного kullancs ‘клещ (лат. Ixodes ricinus)’. Славянское происхождение слова было предложено лингвистами в XIX веке, однако в XX веке эта идея была отвергнута, что в основном было обусловлено фонетически. После краткого обзора истории исследования этого слова, в статье приводится аргументация в пользу того, что можно игнорировать, или, как минимум, считать незначительными, фонетические сложности, возникающие при сравнении венгерского слова kullancs с его славянскими эквивалентами. Таким образом, необходимо снова поднять вопрос о его славянском происхождении.

Ключевые слова: kullancs, клещ, венгерский, славянский, этимология, заимствования, фонетика, языковые контакты

According to Ferenc Papp’s statistical analysis based on Géza Bárczi’s etymological dictionary [SzótSz.], 9.36% of the roots contained in the Explanatory Dictionary of the Hungarian Language [ÉrtSz.] are of Slavic origin [PAPP 1967: 521]. Although no similar examination has been carried out since the release of the TESz. and EWUng., it is hardly probable that the more recent results of etymological research would give substantially different figures. This almost 10% is a large number, since these Slavic words are not much fewer than those of proven Finno-Ugric origin, while Turkic and German loanwords constitute each only about 5% of today’s Hungarian vocabulary. Not only is this Slavic layer present in all fields of Hungarian language usage (asztal ‘table’, tiszta ‘clean’, szabad ‘free’ etc.), but these words have been adapted phonetically to such extent that an uninitiated native speaker would deem them an inalienable part of ancient Hungarian vocabulary. Though the connection of most of these words to their Slavic originals can be made quite evident by a simple comparison (e.g. széna ‘hay’ – Serbo-Croatian, Slovakian, Russian seno; dolog ‘thing, work’ – Slovenian, Russian dolg; macska ‘cat’ – Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian, Slovakian mačka), Hungarian has some more obscure Slavic borrowings, too[cf. ZOLTÁN 2005], that have only lately been proven to be loanwords. This article aims to demonstrate that the Hungarian word kullancs ‘tick’ may also be one of these.

The Slavic counterparts of kullancs are Russian клещ, Belarusian клещ, Ukrainian кліщ, Polish kleszcz, Czech klišt’, Slovakian kliešť and Slovenian klòšč. The phonetic resemblance between these and their Hungarian equivalent is remarkable, and though no regular correspondence can be established between the respective phonemes, the case should be examined more thoroughly before we dismiss it. Semantically, these words are a perfect match of one another, and, as will be shown
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below, their phonetic discrepancies cannot be regarded as a proof that kullancs is not a borrowing from a Slavic language.

Neither a Finno-Ugric nor any other explanation has been proposed concerning the etymology of this word, but the idea to link it with the above mentioned Slavic forms is a relatively old one. Gyarmathi [1816: 41] was the first to compare it to Slavic klests (whereby he presumably meant Russian kiez), then Leschka [1825: 121 under kollants and 131 under kullants] held it straightforwardly a Slavic loanword; he refers in both entries among various correct forms to a Polish one klonsts (=kląszcz), which is wrong [Szljsz. 875]; this fictitious Polish word was then adopted by Dankovszky [1833: 560 under kollants, kullants] who also believed that Hungarian kullancs is a Slavic loanword. But the related literature tells us that though the Slavic etymology of the word used to be accepted in the past, this point of view has faded since then – most of all because István Kniezsa rejected it. Géza Bárczi [SzófSz. 180] confidently deems kullancs a Slavic loanword because of Slovenian klöšč, though admitting that a Proto-Slavic *kloščo with a nasal vowel that can be reconstructed from klöšč is not attested. It is precisely this point that Kniezsa [1941: 285–286] contests in his review of Bárczi’s Magyar szófejtő szótár: according to him, this explanation of kullancs, originating from MiklósiCh [1871: 33, cf. Szárvas 1882: 269; 1886: 119], is ‘completely wrong since Slovenian klöšč cannot go back to *kloščo (in every other Slavic language it is klěščь).’ However, he doesn’t dismiss the possibility of a Slavic etymology because he adds: ‘if the Hungarian word is indeed of Slavic origin, its -n- can only be some kind of supplementary sound’. This opinion is cited approvingly by Nýírkos [1987: 159] in his treatise about inetymological consonants in Hungarian. Notwithstanding, the SzlJsz. [874–875] lists kullancs among the words of non-Slavic origin, declaring that ‘its origin is unknown’. The entry states again that there is no real trace of a hypothetical Proto-Slavic *kloščo, and affirms that Slovenian klöšč is not enough to reconstruct a nasal vowel since, on the one hand, Slovenian o can originate not only from Proto-Slavic nasal ḥ but also from non-nasal o and, on the other hand, Slovenian klöšč is most probably a comparatively recent development formed by the blending of the original Slavic word for ‘tick’ with klop (cf. Russian klon ‘shield bug’), as Berneker [1908–1913: 517] assumed. Kniezsa makes no remark on the front-back difference between the vowels of the Hungarian and the Slavic words.

The judgement of the Hungarian etymological dictionaries in this regard is rather negative. Tész. [2: 665–666] mentions the possibility of a Slavic etymon, yet emphasizing that this is just a vague hypothesis. EWUng.’s opinion [1: 845] is quite similar, though it states that the word is of unknown origin and that ‘a Slavic etymology is hardly probable because of the vowels’ different place of articulation’ („Herleitung aus dem Slawischenwegen der unterschiedlichen Vokalharmoniekaumwahrscheinlich“). Both dictionaries agree that Slovenian klöšč is a recent form that developed analogically to klop. ESz. [458] does not mention this detail nor the possibility of a Slavic etymology altogether – it only declares that the word is of
unknown origin. However, Gábor Zaicz, its editor-in-chief, had concluded in a previous study that in the case of our early vocabulary a -cs [tʃ] in final position of a word means it’s a loanword [ZAICZ 1982: 59].

To sum it up, in order to link Hungarian kullancs to Slavic къевъ, kleszcz, kliešt’ etc. (< Proto-Slavic *klēšćь), we must explain the following phenomena:

1. the insertion of a vowel in the initial consonant cluster kl-
2. the gemination of -l-
3. the insertion of an -n- before word ending -cs
4. the difference between Slavic front and Hungarian back vowels.

As we’ll see below, it is possible to provide all these questions with an at least partially convincing answer.

1. The insertion of an additional vowel between two consonants to facilitate pronunciation is one of the three main methods Old Hungarian used to adopt when it had to deal with initial consonant clusters (the other two are insertion of an additional vowel before the consonant cluster and omission of one or two of the cluster’s consonants). To name but a few of the numerous examples: barack ‘peach’ < Western Slavic brosky; bolond ‘fool’ < Slavic blǫdь; gerezd ‘segment, clove’ < South Slavic grezdь; perec ‘pretzel’ < Middle High German brez(e); and some toponyms: Balaton < Slavic Blatsь ‘muddy’; Baranya < Slavic brana ‘gate’; Trencsén < Slavic Trncin [KESZLER 1969: 16–40]. Róbert Kenyhercz’s updated volume about toponyms with initial consonant clusters gives a lot of other examples, from which 42 begin with kl-[KENYHERCZ 2013: 63, 84–85, 107–108, 130, 155–156, 208].

2. The gemination of a consonant, especially in intervocalic position, is a not much less common phenomenon in the history of the Hungarian language. Several consonants are affected by it and -l- is one of the most typical ones, mainly in the Eastern but also in some Western dialects [MNyT. 134]. Geminated forms appear as early as the 14th century (1270, 1285: kelemeš– 1342: kellemes ‘pleasant’; 1231: holó– 1315: hollo ‘raven’) and can still be heard by contemporary speakers: MNyT. gives forms like halladás ‘progress’, Kellenföld ‘a district of Buda’ and elemi ‘elementary school’, but an attentive ear can catch similar ones such as náللad ‘at your place’ (instead of nálad), töllem ‘from me’ (instead of tölem) and tökelétes ‘perfect’ (instead of tökéletes) even in 2018. Many of these geminates have stayed in the domain of dialectal or non-standard use (the above cited ones or csallán as opposed to csalán ‘nettle’, szöllő as opposed to szőlő ‘grape’ etc.), but a lot have made it to the standard language and become the one and only correct and official form of a word. This might have happened to kullancs, too, in the case of which TESz. [2: 665–666] and EWUng. [1: 845] cite two forms with a single -l-: Kulanchs from 1565 (the oldest attestation of the word) and koláncstul from 1835 (a relatively recent, suffixed form). Unless we consider these forms to be orthographic mistakes, they testify that the word kullancs did have an alternation between single and double -l-, and since gemination of intervocalic -l-’s is attested from the 14th century onward, it can’t be decided which form was the original one. If the variant with a single -l- is the earlier one, something similar must have happened as with kollár ‘wheelwright’, another
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Slavic loanword with an almost identical phonetic structure where the single -l- of the Slovakian etymon kolár became -ll- in Hungarian [TESz. 2: 527].

Kniezsa [SzIzs. 874–875] and Nyírkos [1987: 159] say that the -n- of kullancs is an ‘in etymological supplementary sound’ that cannot and does not need to be explained. Following SzIzs., we can dismiss the possibility that it has Slavic roots since it has no traces in any Slavic language (there is no Slavic form with a nasal vowel or consonant). Therefore it has to be a later Hungarian development, whether the Slavic etymology is true or not. And this is by far not as inconceivable as one might think at first sight, since there are several parallel cases where a Hungarian word got a supplementary -n- in similar position without any palpable reason [cf. Nyírkos 1987: 150–164]. Consulting TESz. at a few words with the same ending, we can find that the -n-’s of bogáncs ‘thistle’ [1: 321], bakancs ‘(hiking) boots’ [1: 222] and bilincs ‘handcuffs’ [1: 301] are ‘inorganic supplementary sounds’ inserted at a later period (bogáncs was formed from bog ‘tangle’, bakancs from boka ‘ankle’, while bilincs is a loanword from Old Turkic and no Turkic form has an -n- in it). These -n-’s have no etymological roots, they are just there, exactly like in pairs such as bográcscs/bográncs ‘cauldrón’, korbácscs/korbáncs ‘whip’, fakopáncs/fakopáncs ‘woodpecker’ and muslincscs/muslinca ‘midge’. Actually, the ending -ncs became so widespread in Hungarian that the language reformers of the 18th and 19th centuries even used it as a suffix to create words like agancs ‘antlers’ – probably from ág ‘twig, branch’ [NyÚSz. 1: 2; CzF 1: 41; TESz. 1: 100–101]. Moreover, an in etymological -n- was inserted before -cs and -c in the toponyms Nőtics (older Nőtincs < Slavic Netyč) and Rohonec (Slavic Orehovec), while Kelecsény, Szacsal, Becs, Debrecen and Daróc also had secondary forms like Kerencesény, Szancsal, Bencs, Debrencen and Darone [Tóth 2004: 462–463]. Although this change was not as frequent as the interpolation of an -l- before another consonant [Tóth 2004: 454–462], these examples demonstrate that the case of kullancs is not the only one in this regard. Furthermore, Janúrik’s [2018: 5] proposition that -cs could be a word formation suffix in itself is also worth noting – and could open new ways for the analysis of this word –, though he doesn’t provide any additional explanation about it and indicates with a question mark that this is just a conjecture.

Though these analogies are relatively convincing, there is one more way of explaining this additional -n- in kullancs, be it not less hypothetical than the previous one. The Slavic words meaning ‘tick’ originate from *kľeštjo-’s stem with the primary meaning ‘to clench, to pinch’ that gave, among others, Russian клемшить ‘to clench, to pinch, to squeeze’ and клемш/克莱ш ‘pincers’ [VASMER 1: 569; Trubácev 10: 14 *kleštiti]. The consonant clusters -stj- (or -stj-) became -šč- in Proto-Slavic and were then either conserved or simplified in the various daughter languages (e.g. Bulgarian -ст-, Czech and Slovakian -št- or the spirantized Russian -ш- [cf. Vaillant 1: § 17 and § 29]). The -cs of Hungarian kullancs attests that the etymon of this word must have been a Slavic form with -šč- (compare Proto-Slavic *ščorba>Hung. csorba, Proto-Slavic *ščuka>Hung. csuka), and it’s possible that Hungarian native speakers compensated the simplification of this cluster they found too hard to pronounce with the insertion of an -n- (similarly to the much more...
widespread phenomenon of compensatory lengthening). Though we don’t have any parallel examples for this kind of compensation, this assumption would explain why all Hungarian sources have solely forms with an -n- while there is no Slavic etymon to be found that has a nasal.

4. Although the quality difference between the vowels of kullancs and those of its Slavic equivalents is the most problematic point of the word’s Slavic etymology, this riddle can be unravelled too, at least to a certain extent. The corresponding entries of TESz. [2: 665–666] and EWUng. [1: 845] reveal that the word has another, quite early variant, killincz', dating from 1599, and a Csángó dialectal form, kiliš', that goes back to reconstructed *killint’s'. Kiliš' is adopted from CSURY [1939: 81] who, citing Hungarian kolláncs and killincz, Slovenian klošč and klešč, Czech klišt and Rusyn kl’išč, and referring to MIKLOSICH [1871: 33], declares that the word is of Slavic origin. CSURY himself took kiliš' from WICHMANN’s Csángó dictionary [CsángSz. 78] that sadly does not tell us anything else about the word, and so did the newer Dictionary of the Hungarian Dialect from Moldova [MMTSz. I/1: 503], giving the form kílnics (that is, a homonym of standard Hungarian kilincs ‘door handle’). These latter forms are much closer to the Slavic words, especially to Ukrainian кілиць that is used in the neighbouring regions of Moldavia. Although, according to TESz., the Hungarian forms with back vowels seem to be the older ones and the connection between the variants with different vowel quality is obscure, these facts make the possibility of a borrowing much more likely and plausible.

Besides these forms, other quite interesting ones can be found in MTsz. [2: 60]: paklincs ‘tick’ (Kiskunhalas and Nógrád regions), pakeléncs ‘shield bug’ (Erdővidék region), and pákullancs ‘tick’ (Mátyusfölde and Tallós regions). The broad geographic distribution of these variants suggests that forms beginning with pa-/pá- were once relatively widespread in the Hungarian speaking areas; therefore they should by no means be regarded as some kind of local development but rather as remnants of a more extensive phenomenon. MTsz. doesn’t reveal anything more if not that there exists another dialectal word meaning ‘tick’, óvantag, but that doesn’t seem to bring us any closer to the solution. ÚMTsz. [4: 330] cites the forms paklincs and páklingcs: paklincs was noted in Vác and in several places throughout the Great Hungarian Plain (Szentlőrinckáta, Hajdúnánás, Kiskunság, Csongrád, Ada) with the meaning ‘sheep ked’ (a brown fly that resembles a tick and blood-feeds on sheep), and páklingcs in the village Hugyad in Nógrád county with the meaning ‘a parasite of hens’. Both words refer to very tick-like parasites but not exactly to ticks – and as it will be shown in the next pages, this is not without a reason.

Though in the following argumentation we are going to assume that the above cited forms have one common root with kullancs and are only variants of it, it is important to keep in mind that this is not a certainty. In TESz.’entry of paklincs [3: 63], kullancs is only mentioned with the warning that the connection

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1 A glimpse at the primary source of this form reveals that here cz = cs [č]: „Mert nekem egyéb barátom lőhul nincz, / Hozzád en ugy ragazkodom mint killincz.”

[https://rmk.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/RMK_I_309-310/?r=0&amp;pg=4&amp;pg=12&amp;layout=s]
between the two words needs closer investigation – though TESz has no doubts that "paklínca, pakelénča, pákelénč, paklínč and their voiced alternatives baglínca and baglínč have the same origin (the transition between $p$ and $b$ is not without parallel examples in Hungarian). The main issue of TESz. seems to be that the earliest forms (1611: pákelénč, paklínč) mean 'shield bug', the meaning 'tick' is first attested only in 1789 (paklínč), and in 1889 a third meaning appears: baglínca, baglínča 'fruit fly, midge'. TESz. doesn't know anything about the origin of these words, yet deems it evident that the three-syllable versions are the older ones (probably because they are attested earlier). EWUng. [2: 1099] says more or less the same, though suggesting that 'shield bug' is the primary meaning and the other two developed under the influence of 'kulláncs' [cf. ÚMTsz. 3: 629] and also to klész, klesz, klíšt, kliés't, klőš both in form and meaning, we are going to presume that there is some kind of etymological connection between them.

The prefix pa- has good chances to indicate Slavic origin, since it exists in the Slavic languages and in a couple of Slavic loanwords in Hungarian too. Among these, standard ones are "pázsit 'lawn' (< Slavic *pažiti, from the verb žiti 'to live') and its less common variant pást [SzlJsz. 406; TESz. 3: 139], pök 'spider' (<Slavic pauk < Proto-Slavic *paǔkə [SzlJsz. 428]), and pózna 'pole' (< Slavic *paźźina [SzlJsz.444]), but there are a few dialectal ones, too: paszkodál 'to pilfer' (< Slovakian paszkoda 'dirt, filth' [SzlJsz. 396]), pátyosz 'fluff' (< Slavic *pačesčь [SzlJsz. 405]), pāz 'rod used for fishing under ice' (<Serbo-Croatian pauz < pažzь [SzlJsz. 405]), and pazsrák 'gluttonous' (< Slovakian pažrár, from Proto-Slavic *žvřěti 'to eat, to gobble' [SzlJsz. 407]). One of the most common Slavic words formed with this prefix is 'memory': Russian námyť, Polish pańięć, Czech paměť, Slovakian pamäť, Serbo-Croatian náměm, Bulgarian nāmēm. VASMER’s etymological dictionary [2: 308], though leaving aside the function of the prefix in question, traces the stem of this word back to Indo-European *ṃttis, a root with reflexes like Lithuanian atmintis 'memory', Sanskrit matis, mātiś 'thought, opinion, view', Latin mēns, mentis 'mind, intelligence', Greek μνήμη 'memory' and English mind. (According to HADROVICS [1976: 65–66], Hungarian elmélkedik 'to cogitate' and emlékész 'to remember' originate from this Slavic stem, too.)Russian námyť 'memory' is the noun of nómityć 'to remember' (cf. Old Church Slavonic помнић : pamtě́) – in the case of deverbal nouns, the prefix pa- normally doesn’t bring about any change of meaning, it is merely a variation of the verbal prefix po-. István Kniezsa uses the term ‘trivializing verbal prefix’ for pa- when discussing the Slavic antecedent of pázsit [SzlJsz. 406], but this makes little sense in a stylistically neutral word like pázsit. It is equally dubious if the pa- of pazsrák is a ‘pejorative prefix’ [SzlJsz. 407], since *žvřěti 'to eat, to gobble, to devour' already has a pejorative overtone when referring to people. However, the case of pa- as a denominal prefix is completely different: nouns formed with pa- can indicate something very similar but not identical to what their original nouns mean, in other words pa- can convey a meaning as ‘not real, false, fake’. For example, Russian сы́н ‘son’ and дочь
(stem: дочер-) ‘daughter’ form their ‘fake’ variants with the prefix пасо́нок ‘stepson’ and пасо́чница ‘stepdaughter’, and so does клен ‘maple’, since the words пасе́н и не́клен mean another kind of maple, the field maple; or Czech klič ‘key’ that turns to ‘picklock’ when prefixed as пакли́ч [VASMER2: 297; VAIL-LANT 4: 757–759; КОПЕЧНЫЬ 1963: 160; BORYŚ 2005: 406; ESJS 11: 667 under the entry по; for a more detailed description of the Slavic prefix pa- see BORYŚ 1975: 13–67]. So the dialectal words паклинс, пакелéнс and пáкullанс that can refer to other parasites than ticks (‘sheep ked’, ‘parasite of hens’, ‘shield bug’, ‘midge’) may originate from a Slavic form like *паклешчь meaning ‘a parasite similar to a tick’, a form that’s not attested but that could have existed judging by the extensive geographical distribution and old age of its prefixation. Furthermore, two of these three dialectal Hungarian forms with the prefix pa- have front vowels, which brings them even closer to their presumable Slavic etymon(s).

It is possible that Hungarians borrowed a front vowel variant (or more) and the quality change was an inner development. This is what happened to боро́тва ‘razor’, that comes from Slavic бри́вa [TESz. 1: 348–349] and that has an old-fashioned but living alternate version with front vowels: бёрëтва. Here it is evident that the vowel quality change took place due to the word’s mixed vowel structure (as far as their vowels are concerned, Hungarian words are either front, back, or mixed) and that the e-s of the first two syllables turned to o-s under the influence of the word ending a (in Hungarian short a is pronounced like [n], so its position lies even more in the back than in most languages). Maybe something similar happened to kullанс, too: the front vowels of forms like паклинс/пакелё́нс shifted to the back under the effect of pa-, and then perhaps this vowel structure was transposed to some of the variants without pa-, which have since then overcome their front vowel variants and became the only standardized form of this word (perhaps also in order to dissimilate from the more frequently used килинс ‘door handle’). But it’s equally imaginable that an earlier form that was closer to its Slavic etymons intermingled with a word unknown to us now, resulting in the ultimate form as kullанс.

In conclusion, we hope to have been able to show that the above described phonetic problems that led the main Hungarian linguists of the 20th century to reject the hypothesis that kullанс is a Slavic loanword are in fact not as compelling as to rule out this possibility. While seeing the difficulties of this assumption, we feel that the information we managed to collect rather supports this theory than refutes it, and would like to invite whoever’s concerned with the history of Hungarian and with Hungarian–Slavic language contact to consider it again.

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DOI: 10.31034/047.2018.01
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DOI: 10.31034/047.2018.01