

IN MEMORIAM ANTS-MICHAEL UESSON



Ants-Michael Uesson, a prominent innovative linguist, was born in the family of a lawyer in Tallinn on 13 August 1926. He obtained his secondary education at the gymnasia of Westholm and Gustav Adolf in Tallinn. In his youth Ants-Michael Uesson was arrested by the Gestapo, at the age of 18 he was a fighter for the liberation of Estonia in the detachment of Admiral Johan Pitka until he had to escape to Sweden in a sailing boat in 1944. In Sweden he was engaged in a number of jobs in the Skåne County, eventually in a medicament company. In 1957 he set up a medicament company of his own which became his life's work until his high age.

Ants-Michael Uesson began to attend lectures on comparative linguistics, read by Professor Nils Holmer who was a most distinguished linguist with widely varied interests. In 1955 Ants-Michael Uesson passed Licentiate Examination in Nils Holmer's subject. In 1961, Ants-Michael Uesson together with Nils Holmer and another fellow-student published an innovative article on language types, blood groups and areals of culture in the series on linguistic of "Språkliga bidrag". Nils Holmer retired on a pension at the end of the 1960s and since then his subject on comparative linguistics ceased to be in the university curriculum. However, by 1970 Ants-Michael Uesson had written and issued his manuscript "On Linguistic Affinity. The Indo-Uralic Problem" in Malmö with the help of the publishers "Förlag AS Eesti Post", which was meant to become his doctoral dissertation, however, the defence of the work turned out to be impossible. Thanks to the publication of his book, the general public could more widely get acquainted with his work.

Ants-Michael Uesson's book demonstrates that forty years ago he held viewpoints which strike as most contemporary today and therefore should again be included into the current discussion about the origin of Uralic languages and their contacts with other language groups. Ants-Michael Uesson wrote in conclusions of his book, "As we accept that the hypothetical Uralic, the different Turkic, Mongolian and Manchu-Tunguz primitive stages and, in addition, the Indo-European primitive stage, all have had a past when these primitive stages may

have been formed from different constituents, there is nothing to contradict the assumption that several of these old constituents (from which the different Uralic, Altaic and Indo-European primitive stages have been crystallized) could have been identical at the same time as several other of these old constituents were non-identical in all certainty" (p. 100). "One can suggest in conclusion that the concept of linguistic affinity at least as far as old linguistic stages are concerned, should include both genetic affinity and contact relationship, because basically it is a question of the same phenomenon, but viewed from different angles" (p. 117).

During the following decades, Ants-Michael Uesson was a fairly active speaker and writer at various forums of the Swedish Estonians in exile, addressing also linguistic issues among other questions. For three months, in the spring 1999, when I delivered a course of lectures on Innovative Views in Uralistics at Lund University, Ants-Michael Uesson was constantly one of the listeners and participants in discussions about the problems raised, although for this purpose he had to travel from the neighbouring city Malmö. As a result of our contact, he published a number of papers in the University of Tartu proceedings "Fenno-Ugristica". Against a more extensive background, in his "Finno-Ugric and Indo-European" (FU 22, 1999) Ants-Michael Uesson quite critically treated of Kalevi Wiik's hypothesis about Uralic-Indo-European language relationships. In 1999, Ants-Michael Uesson took part in the work symposium "Roots" III in Estonia and made a presentation "Indo-European and Uralic" (FU 23, 2000) which he summed up as follows, "My

opinion is still that the Finno-Ugric peoples inhabited as a belt an area from the Urals to the Baltic Sea and possibly even to the Atlantic Ocean. North from them were the Arctic peoples — the Saamis, the Samoyeds, the Yukaghirs and presumably several populations speaking Paleo-Siberian languages. South from the Finno-Ugrians were the Indo-European peoples also like a belt from the Atlantic at least to the Caspian Sea. In the same way as there was a certain *Sprachbund* between the Finno-Ugric peoples there was a similar *Sprachbund* between the Indo-European peoples..." (p. 200). His articles "On Some Interesting Similarities in Indo-European and Finnic Vulgar Terms" (FU 26, 2004) and "On the Lexical Similarities in the Finnic and Indo-European Terms for (Domestic) Animals and Agriculture, Also Birds, Fishes etc." (FU 27, 2005) addressed old relationship in word-stock. In the paper "On the Possible Relationship between Finnic and Sinic" (FU 27, 2005) Ants-Michael Uesson critically observed Jingyi Gao's respective hypothesis.

Owing to the death of Ants-Michael Uesson in Malmö on 24 June 2009, linguistics lost its prominent and innovative representative. Ants-Michael Uesson was an extremely tolerant and amicable person, at the same time — man of principle. His scientific legacy and fond memories of him will always remain with us.

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