

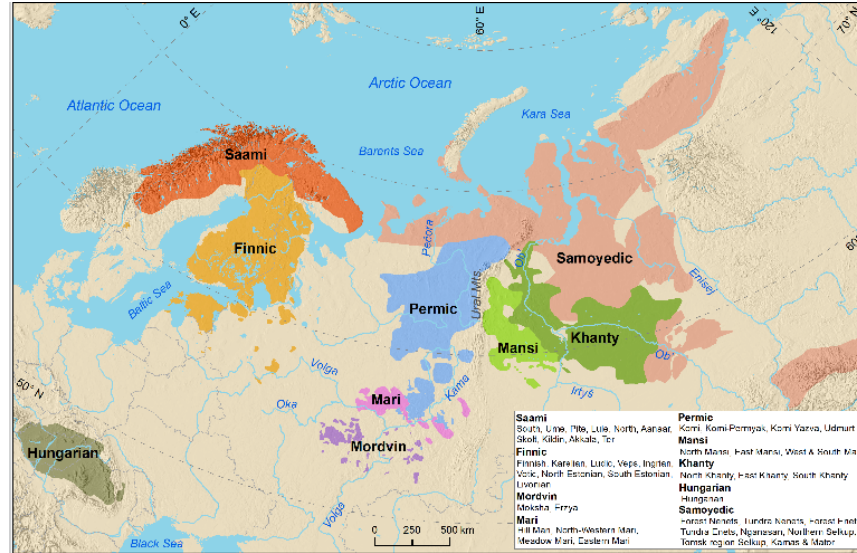
# Ice eyes, blood eyes: Remarks on the Uralic singulative marker \**čilmä* ‘eye’

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## Introduction

Proto-Uralic \**čilmä* exists in the unchanged meaning ‘eye’ in virtually all Uralic languages. It has also other, metaphorical meanings such as ‘mesh’ (“eye of a net”) in many languages. However, it has gone unnoticed by comparative Uralicists that in many languages, reflexes of \**čilmä* also have a grammatical function of individuating single particles of referents of collective or mass nouns – they are used as **singulative markers (individualizers)**, as implicitly documented by lexicographers of dozens of languages and dialects of five of the nine main branches of Uralic.

This study was initially inspired by Däbritz’s (forthcoming) study of number in Siberia.



## Preliminary results and discussion

**More research is needed.** Hungarian *szem* may be better understood in terms of classifiers (Haspelmath & Moravcsik 2019), but the similarities are striking. There are also analogous ‘eye’ singulatives in Ket, the Yeniseic neighbor of Selkup (Helimski 2016).

Singulatives such as \**weri-čilmä* ‘drop of blood’ and \**jäni-čilmä* ‘ice crystal; hailstone’ – incidentally present in all branches with dual number – can, in principle, be reconstructed all the way back to Proto-Uralic. Saami \**-čelmē* has been borrowed to Karelian and Ladic (Aikio 2009). — But what is the origin of **Komi-čir** (cf. *šin* ‘eye’) in, e.g., *lijmčir* ‘snowflake’, *jičir* ‘rime, ice crystal’ and *vačir* ‘water droplet’?

## Background

Although the original meaning for \**čilmä* is unanimously reconstructed as ‘eye’, it does not come as a surprise that words for ‘eye’ are also commonly used for ‘seed’ and that are often eye shaped. Moreover, it is natural that the meaning is also extended to ‘grain’:

## Data

Apparently, only lexical and grammatical descriptions of Selkup have described reflexes of \**čilmä* (> Selkup *saj* ~ *haj*) as a kind of singulative marker (Bekker et al. 1995; Bykonja et al. 2005; Däbritz, forthcoming):

*üdythaj* ‘drop of water’, *tüthaj* ‘spark (of fire)’, *šauythaj* ‘grain of salt’, *čoberhaj* ‘single berry’, *qaškathaj* ‘single star’, *fešqythaj* ‘single nut’, ...

Many similar singulative formations are found in other Samoyedic languages, and in the neighboring **Khanty and Mansi**, but also in **Saami and Hungarian**:

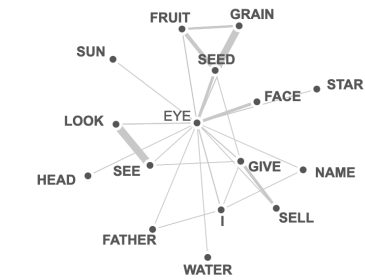
	N. Saami -čalbmi	N. Mansi -sam	N. Khanty -sem	Hungarian -szem
berries, fruits	many	many	many	many
‘hailstone’	<i>čuorpmas-</i>	<i>pöl’-</i>	<i>potom-</i>	<i>jég-</i>
‘snowflake’	<i>muohta-</i>	<i>tüjt-</i>	<i>Loňš-</i>	<i>hó-</i>
‘sandcorn’	<i>sátto-</i>	<i>sěj-</i>	<i>sej-</i>	<i>homok-</i>
‘drop of blood’	<i>varra-</i>	<i>kēlp-</i>	<i>wür-</i>	
‘egg of roe’	<i>meadđen-</i>	<i>pör-</i>	(KhE <i>māran-</i> )	
etc.	...	...	...	

## Preliminary conclusion – with a grain of salt

Proto-Uralic singulatives in \**čilmä* ‘eye; single piece of’

Proto-Uralic	Saa	Ms	Kh	Sam	Hung	Komi
* <i>weti</i> ‘water’	(✓)	✓	(✓)	✓		?
* <i>weri</i> ‘blood’	✓	(✓)	✓			
* <i>jäni</i> ‘ice’	✓				✓	?
* <i>lumi</i> ‘snow’	✓	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)	?
* <i>tuli</i> ‘fire’		(✓)	(✓)	✓		(?)
* <i>męrja</i> ‘berry’	✓	(✓)		(✓)	(✓)	
* <i>męrnę</i> ‘roe’	(✓)	✓	✓	(✓)		(?)
* <i>ępti</i> ‘hair’	✓					
* <i>waji</i> ‘grease’	✓					

✓ = Proto-Uralic noun; (✓) = other noun with identical meaning



Cross-linguistic colexifications of ‘eye’ (CLICS s.v. EYE)

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