



glottothèque
languages of Anatolia, Caucasus, Iran, Mesopotamia



Turkic in the LACIM area

Phonology

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Technical details

The basis for descriptions, transcription systems

- The basis for Turcological descriptions is Standard Turkish of Turkey. StT is a ***strongly engineered language***, or, in other words, an ideal Turkic language created by linguists and Turcologists. Reality does not always comply with these theoretical requirements.
 - Spoken varieties of Turkic in the LACIM area may deviate considerably from the ideal state of affairs, due to lack of standardization, language contact influences, the preservation of a more archaic shape of certain elements, or new developments in individual dialects.
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Transcription systems

There are different systems for the transcription of Turkic non-standard varieties:

- Linguists and dialectologists use a transcription based on the so-called **Fundamenta** (officially: *Philologiae Turcicae Fundamenta*) or the **ETLL** (*Encyclopaedia of Turkic Languages and Linguistics*).
- Transcriptions by linguists from Turkey are normally based on the Turkish alphabet, with additional signs and diacritics indicating sounds that are not part of the standard pronunciation.

For this highly complex issue, please consult the following surveys (Tables 1 & 2)!

Table (1) Transcription of vowels

My transcription of Persian and Iran-Turkic items	corresponding sign in IPA	phonetic description	ETLL	comment
<a>	[a]	front open unrounded	a	realizations of the so-called short Iranian /a/
<æ>	[æ]	front open to open-mid unrounded	ǣ	
<ɑ>	[ɑ]	back open unrounded	ɑ	realizations of the so-called long Iranian /ā/; vowel length may occur in Iranian and Turkic roots
<â>	[ɒ, ɔ]	back open/open-mid rounded	ǣ̃	
<e>	[e]	front close-mid unrounded	e	in alternation with [ɪ]
<ä>	[ɛ]	front open-mid unrounded	ǣ	
<i>	[i]	front close unrounded	i	realization of the so-called Iranian long /ī/
<ɪ>	[ɪ]	front close to close-mid, unrounded, slightly centralized	ĩ	in alternation with [e]
<ɨ>	[ɨ]	central-back, close to close-mid unrounded	ĩ̃	only in Turkic roots
<o>	[o]	back close-mid, rounded	o	realization alternates with [u]
<ö>	[ø] [œ]	front, close-mid, rounded, often slightly centralized/ front, open-mid, rounded	ø	only in Turkic stems; realization alternates with [y], [ʏ]
<ø>	ø	close-mid, central, rounded (between o and ö)	ô	
<u>	[u]	back close, rounded	u	
<ʊ>	[ʊ]	back, close to close-mid, slightly centralized	ʊ̃	realization alternates with [o]
--	[u]	close, central, rounded (ETLL: 'near front'), between u and ü)	ũ̃	
<ü>	[y], [ʏ]	front, close, rounded often slightly centralized	ü̃	only in Turkic stems; realization alternates with [ø]
--	[ʏ]		ÿ̃	
<ə>	[ə]	central unrounded, short neutral vowel	ə	
<ː>	[ː]	colon after a vowel indicates vowel length	:	

Table (2) Turcological transcription of consonants

My transcription of Persian and Iran-Turkic entries	corresponding sign in IPA	phonetic description	ETLL	comment
<j>	[dʒ]	voiced post-alveolar affricate	ǰ	
<č>	[tʃ]	unvoiced post-alveolar affricate	č	
<ɟ> <dʰ>	[dʰ]	pharyngealized post-alveolar stop, media lenis		
<g>	[g]	voiced post-velar/uvular stop	ġ	Word initially as realization of <ġ>; sometimes for <q>, especially in Sandhi
<ɣ>	[ɣ]	voiced velar to post-velar fricative	ɣ	
<h>	[h]	unvoiced pharyngeal fricative		
<ž>	[ʒ]	voiced alveolar fricative	ž	
<q>	[q]	unvoiced velar to post-velar stop	ḳ	
<ŋ>	[ŋ]	velar nasal	ŋ	often in combination with velar or post-velar stops
<ʃ> <sʰ>	[sʰ]	pharyngealized voiceless alveolar fricative		
<š>	[ʃ]	unvoiced post-alveolar fricative	š	
<ʔ>	[ʔ]	unvoiced glottal stop	ʔ	
<y>	[j]	voiced palatal glide or approximant	y	
<x>	[x]	unvoiced velar to post-velar fricative	χ	
<v>	[v]	voiced labiodental fricative	v	<w>; [v] also occurs as a realization of /b/
<w>	[w]	voiced labial-velar approximant	w	appears occasionally as a realization of Persian or Turkic /v/, probably also due to influence of local languages, and as part of the diphthong [ow]

Phonology

Vowels

Turkic languages display a basic equipment of **eight vowel phonemes** in highly symmetrical distribution:

- two **high vowels**, namely front *ı* [i] and central-back *ı̈* [ɨ],
- and **two open-mid vowels**, namely front *ä* [ɛ] and back *a* [ɑ].

Every unrounded vowel has a rounded counterpart in roughly the same position, forming four pairs:

- *ı* [i] vs. *ü* [y] *ı̈* [ɨ] vs. *u* [u],
- *ä* [ɛ] vs. *ö* [œ], *a* [ɑ] vs. *o* [ɔ].

Most varieties of the greater area have preserved a ninth vowel phoneme, the front/close-mid “closed” *e* [e].

Table (3) The basic Turkic vowel inventory

	Front		Back	
High	i [i]	ü [y]	ı [ɨ]	u [u]
Close-mid	(e)			
	e [ɛ]	ö [œ]		
Open			a [ɑ]	o [ɔ]

- The full vowel quality appears only in stem syllables.
 - Suffix vowels display reduced pronunciations; they become shorter and therefore more centralized.
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Contact-induced changes in the Turkic vowel inventory

The vowel inventory of the dialects under observation is heavily influenced by properties copied from local contact languages, which also disturbs the basic rules of Turkic sound harmony (see below).

Under the influence of contact languages, such as Iranian, Semitic, and Greek, characteristic changes in the vowel inventory occur:

- Most Turkic varieties of the LACIM areal have copied the **unrounded front near-open vowel** **ǎ** [æ], which is part of the Iranian or Semitic opposition of old short *a* [a, æ] and old long *aː* [ɑː, ǎː].
 - /a/ may be pronounced more back than in Turkish and is sometimes **labialized to ǎ** [ɑ/ɑː, ɒ/ɒː].
 - The **front rounded vowels** **ö** and **ü**, which normally do not pertain to the inventory of the contact languages, are often centralized, i.e. **ö > ó**, **ü > ú**, or delabialized: **ö > e** or **ü > i**
 - Turkic **ĩ** [ɨ] may be fronted to **ı** [ɪ].
 - In many varieties, **o** is pronounced more close, near **u**.
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The consonant inventory of Turkic displays:

- **five pairs of voiced/unvoiced stops and affricates**, namely the bilabial stops *p/b*, the alveolar stops *t/d*, the velar stops *k/g*, the post-velar/uvular stops *ƙ/ǵ* [q/ɢ], and the affricates *č/ǰ* [tʃ/dʒ]. According to their position, the unvoiced stops *k*, *t*, *p* may be aspirated [k^h, t^h, p^h].
 - **four pairs of voiced/unvoiced fricatives**: the labio-dental fricatives *f/v*, the alveolar sibilants *s/z*, and the post-alveolar sibilants *š/ž* [ʃ/ʒ], and the velar fricatives *x/ɣ*,
 - a **voiceless glottal fricative** *h*,
 - **two nasals**: a bilabial *m*, and an alveolar *n*,
 - **two liquids**: an alveolar approximant *r* and a lateral approximant *l*,
 - **one glide**: a palatal approximant *y* [j].
 - **The voiced post-alveolar sibilant ž [ʒ]** is a foreign element that does not appear in genuine Turkic lexical items.
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Consonants

A set of consonants is synharmonic, appearing only in combinations with certain front or back vowels, such as **front k** [k] vs. **back ƙ** [q], and **front g/y** vs. **back ğ/ɣ** [g, ɣ]. The so-called *yumuşak g* (written <ğ>) mainly occurs in Standard Turkish and related dialects.

Moreover, Turkic words do not begin with **ǰ-**, **ɣ-**, **l-**, **m-**, **r-** and **z-**:

- The appearance of **word-initial n-** is restricted to interrogatives such as, for instance, (*nimä*) *nä* ‘what’, *niyä* ‘why’, *näǰä* ‘how’, and *näčä* ‘how much’.
 - Similar **h-** (< *older q-) appears in interrogatives *hačan* ‘when’, *harda* ‘where’, and *hangu* ‘which’.
 - Word-initial **m-**, as, for instance, in the personal pronoun 1st singular *män* ‘I’ (< *bän*) is secondary and has originated through regressive assimilation of *b-* to the following *-n*.
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Copied elements in the consonant inventory

Especially in spoken varieties in Southeastern Anatolia, Iraq and West Iran, elements foreign to Turkic appear, such as

- the **retracted tongue root glottal stop** *ʿayn* [ʕ],
- the **pharyngeal fricative** *ḥ* [ħ],
- the **bilabial** *w*,
- the **uvular plosive** *k* [q],
- and the **unvoiced velar to post-velar fricative** *χ* and its **voiced counterpart** *γ* [ɣ].

Most of these items are copied from Semitic languages or Kurdish, and they do not have the status of phonemes. The degree of their realization varies, and their distribution may deviate from the original.

this lecture

is part of the series *Glottothèque: Languages of the Anatolia, Caucasus, Iran, Mesopotamia; grammatical snippets online*, ed. by. C. Bulut, A. Donabédian-Demopoulos, G. Haig, G. Khan, P. Samvelian, S. Skopeteas, N. Sumbatova. Bamberg/Cambridge/Göttingen/Moskow/Nicosia/Paris: LACIM network.

A banner for the LACIM glottothèque project. It features a dark blue background with a faint image of the Earth. The word "LACIM" is written in large, semi-transparent blue capital letters at the top. Below it, the word "glottothèque" is written in a white, elegant serif font. On the left side, there is white text providing information about related lectures and the website. On the right side, the project's title is repeated in a white, monospaced font.

You may find related lectures and further information at the Glottothèque website at:
<https://spw.uni-goettingen.de/projects/lacim/>

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