

## THE INDIFFERENCE STAGE OF TURKISH SUFFIX VOCALISM

LARS JOHANSON

The development of vowel harmony in the Turkic languages is far from clear in detail. One of the most crucial issues is the genesis of Turkish labial harmony. The current view of this phenomenon is highly inconsistent and the matter should be reconsidered, so much the more as the development assumed plays a central part in the history of Anatolian Turkish, i.a. by offering criteria for its periodization.

Even the starting-point of the development is problematic, since the state hitherto supposed for the Old Anatolian Turkish (OAT) suffix vocalism seems incompatible with the Old Turkic (OT) system assumed.

Traditionally, three classes of alleged high vowel suffixes are distinguished in OT:

1. Suffixes with an illabial vowel.
2. Suffixes with a labial vowel.
3. Suffixes with a fourfold vowel alternation.

Since we doubt that the vowel of class 1 had a back variant and cannot determine if the vowels of class 2 were really high, we here use the symbols {i} and {W} respectively. Since the qualities of the vowels of class 3 and the nature of their alternation are still open to discussion, the symbol {°} is used. Examples: (1) possessive suffix {(s)i}, (2) causative suffix {tWr}, (3) possessive suffix {(°)m}, passive suffix {(°)l}.

OAT appears to have the following corresponding classes:

1. Suffixes with preserved {i}.
  2. Suffixes with preserved {W}.
  - 3a Suffixes with labial vowels
  - 3b Suffixes with illabial vowels
- } going back to {°}.

The OT class 3 thus seems to have split up into one labial and one illabial sub-class. Here the first problem arises. If class 3 had a fourfold alternation of high full vowels, i.e.  $\{X\} = \iota/i/u/\ddot{u}$ , the absence of a corresponding labial harmony in OAT is hard to explain. Traditionally, 3a and 3b are supposed to imply  $\{U\} = u/\ddot{u}$  and  $\{I\} = \iota/i$  respectively. OAP labial harmony is thought to have made its first progress as late as in the 14th century, the process starting by rounding of the 3b vowels under the influence of a labial stem vowel. Later on, according to the same standard view, a corresponding delabialisation of the vowels of 2 and 3a after unrounded stem vowels took place. The resultant alternation  $\{X\}$  finally gained ground in class 1.

Also this idea of a *direct* development from an OAT system, where the feature  $[\pm \text{round}]$  is relevant in suffix vowels, to a late Ottoman Turkish system of fully applied labial harmony is, however, contradicted by numerous linguistic data, especially in transcription texts of the Middle Ottoman (MO) period. The 17th century is regarded as the decisive developmental phase. The detailed and clear picture drawn by G. Hazai in his excellent analysis<sup>1</sup> of the morphonologic system of this period is, for example, at variance on several points with the traditional conception. We find many so-called 'reaction phenomena' which cannot be explained within the framework of a labial harmony in progress but only as facts of a linguistic stage prior to the harmony process.

In a recent paper<sup>2</sup> we have presented an alternative theory about the development of suffix vocalism in Turkish and Azeri. Its arguments are partly substantiated by materials from two 17th century Azeri transcription texts, written by a Frenchman in Roman script (henceforth referred to as *Az.*). According to this theory, a transitional *indifference stage* is to be postulated between the initial developmental stage – where the feature  $[\pm \text{rounded}]$  is still relevant for suffix vowels – and the final one on which the qualities  $[+ \text{rounded}]$  and  $[- \text{rounded}]$  are dictated normatively by the stem vowel. The indifference stage is characterized by parallel use, promiscuous or stylistically differenti-

<sup>1</sup> G. Hazai: *Das Osmanisch-Türkische im XVII. Jahrhundert. Untersuchungen an den Transkriptionstexten von Jakab Nagy de Harsány.* Budapest, 1973. These materials are henceforth referred to as *H.*

<sup>2</sup> L. Johanson: *Die westghusische Labialharmonie.* In: *Orientalia Suecana*, vol. 27 (in print).

ated, of variants, representing the former stage, and new, phonologically indifferent variants, which are often even phonetically "neutral" to the feature of roundedness and tend towards a reduced, lax articulation. We represent such neutral variants by the stereotype  $\mathcal{E}$ . Note that the indifference stage is really a *preliminary stage* and not an *initial phase* of labial harmony. Labial suffix vowels change, it is true, more easily to neutral vowels after unrounded stem vowels, and *vice versa*, so that the original suffix vowel tends to be preserved longer after a vowel of the same quality. This conservative, residuary feature of concord should not, however, be mistaken for an inceptive tendency of active, offensive labial harmony.

All suffixes of the classes 1-3 do pass through the intermediate stage on their way to labial harmony but there are considerable chronological differences between them. Suffixes may be termed more or less 'progressive' depending on the stage of development attained at a given point. Generally speaking, Anatolian Turkish suffixes are more progressive than their equivalents in Azeri. Let us scrutinize some representatives of each class from this point of view, proceeding from the more conservative to the more progressive suffixes.

#### Class 1

Since 1 is the last class to adopt labial harmony, it enables us to observe the preliminary stages most clearly. In 17th century texts,  $\{(s)i\}$  shows signs of the indifference stage, though only in nonfinal position: H. *oglini* ~ *oglini* (MT: *oğlunu*)<sup>3</sup>, III. *ierunde* ~ *yerende*<sup>4</sup> (MT: *yerinde*), Az. *elende* (MT: *elinde*) etc. Also the subsequent development is faster here: in some Azeri dialects labial harmony now has reached this position, whereas a neutral  $\mathcal{E}$  appears in final position instead.

#### Class 2

The relatively progressive optative suffix  $\{sWn\}$  mainly displays labial harmony in H. but there are remnants like *gielßen* (MT: *gelsin*) and *bilßen* (MT: *bilsin*) which are unaccountable according to the current theory. While the causative suffixes  $\{DWr\}$  and  $\{Wr\}$  are harmonized in H., Az. shows the old labial forms and, occasionally, neutral forms like *gecher-* (MT: *geçir-*). III. has, in the same way, *degistur*

<sup>3</sup> MT represents the Modern Turkish forms.

<sup>4</sup> III. = J. Németh: Die türkische Sprache in Ungarn im siebzehnten Jahrhundert. Budapest, 1970. (Analysis of the so-called Illesházy manuscript of 1668.)

suffixed first plurel of the preterit already has the form {DXQ} in H., but Az. still preserves labial forms as well as neutral ones, e.g., *kessdek* (MT: *kestik*). The original labial form is still alive in the invariable {dux} of modern Azeri dialects.

The copula of the third person, though of late origin, undergoes the same changes as suffixes with OT equivalents. In MO it shows no signs of labial harmony but an interesting indifference phenomenon, seemingly contrary to palatal harmony: *dür* after unrounded back stem vowels, e.g., *vardür* (MT: *vardır*). This is a first graphic symptom of phonetic neutralization which we expect to start after unrounded stem vowels. The correspondent neutral vowel in Az. is written *dr*, *der* etc. e.g., *vardr*, *yedr* ~ *yerder* (MT: *yerdir*) etc.

Note that the neutral vowel appears also after rounded stem vowels. Since in this case it could not possibly be explained as a so-called 'transitional sound', it has been labelled as a 'reaction phenomenon'. In our view, such neutral vowels evidently do not *react* to the labial harmony process but simply *precede* it.

### Class 3

No plausible explanation has been presented for the the peculiar OAT innovation, allegedly consisting in a retrogression of the labial harmony alternation {X}. There is, however, no proof of the existence of such an alternation in the OT ancestor of Turkish and Azeri. Moreover, the Arabic script is not unambiguous enough to determine the qualities of the corresponding OAT suffix vowels, i.e. to decide if 3a and 3b had really {U} and {I} respectively.

If the morphological unit {<sup>o</sup>} comprised non-high reduction vowels<sup>5</sup>, the question of continuity must be put differently. As vague sounds in a weak position, these vowels must have been especially susceptible to qualitative influence and thus a probable starting-point of tendencies towards labial harmony. These tendencies may have been more or less strong in different OT dialects. In the predecessor of OAT, the unit {<sup>o</sup>} may have been represented by non-high reduced vowels of a rather labial shade, e.g., {O}. It is possible that the same qualities are inherent in the OAT variants of 3a, whereas the variants of 3b are secondary, i.e. delabialized, neutral representatives of the indifference stage.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., G. Doerfer: *Khalaj Materials*. Bloomington, The Hague, 1971. P. 286.

## Class 3a

The first singular of the preterit and the genitive are examples of rather conservative morphemes in H. and show almost exclusively labial vowels. In some earlier texts, however, delabialized forms like *hekimen*<sup>6</sup> (MT: *hekimin*) and *guenderdem*<sup>7</sup> (MT: *gönderdim*) do occur. In Az. variants with *un* appear to have a more conservative stylistic status than those ending in the neutral form *en*. Cases like *halkün* (MT: *halkın*) which seem to violate the rules of palatal harmony are, again, the first signs of incipient neutralisation in H.

The adjective suffix going back to {l°G} often occurs, e.g. in H. and in Meninskis dictionary, with delabialized vowel even after labial stem vowel. Also in Az. the suffix represents the indifference stage, the variants *lou* and *li* occurring—as it seems, indiscriminately—side by side. The fact that labial variants are preserved longer after labial stem vowels is, again, to be regarded as a conservative feature and should not be interpreted in terms of labial harmony.

The more progressive privative suffix {s°z} has only delabialized variants in H. In Meninskis dictionary, the phonetically neutral character of *ɛ* is clearly marked: *ışsyz* (MT: *işsiz*) etc. Our Az. material mostly shows *seuz*; cf. Afshar *ə* in [susəz] (MT: *susuz*) etc.<sup>8</sup>

The state of this suffix in MO substantiates our view particularly well. Generalized delabialization cannot possibly be explained in terms of harmony tendencies, since this would mean that these tendencies counteracted themselves. Nor can delabialization be considered a 'reaction', as the only actual labial harmony process to react to is demonstrably initiated in a later period.

## Class 3b

The progressive suffix {l°Q} has already developed into {lXV} in MO. In OAT the vowel is basically illabial. The few cases where it is written with *wāw* are commonly regarded as first signs of labial harmony but should rightly be interpreted as remnants of the labial form, preserved longer after labial stem vowels than elsewhere. Thus the

<sup>6</sup> A. Bombaci: Recenti edizioni di testi turchi in trascrizione. In: *Oriente Moderno* 29/1949, pp. 176-189. P. 182.

<sup>7</sup> B. Brendemoen: *Tyrkiske transkripsjonstekster i Topkapı Sarayı i Istanbul*. Oslo, 1977. P. 129.

<sup>8</sup> L. Ligeti: Sur la langue des Afchars d'Afghanistan. In: *Acta Orientalia (Hungarica)* 7/1957, pp. 110-156. p. 120.

new feature is the appearance of the delabialized variant, probably the neutral  $\mathcal{F}$ , which is likely to hide behind the notations hitherto transcribed as "lik, lıq" etc.

In Az. the suffix in question appears to be much more conservative. It displays—without any discernible tendency towards labial harmony—both original labial vowels (written *o* or *u*) and  $\mathcal{F}$ , eg. in *tembelleuk* ~ *tembelek* (MT: *tembellik*). Azeri dialects still maintain the neutral form in the shape of an invariable {leq} (written *lwq* in Arabic script<sup>9</sup>).

Even the most progressive suffixes of voice are sometimes found in labial OAT forms, which are likely to be rests and not the embryo of labial harmony. In later transcription texts there are several examples of passive and reflexive suffixes with labial vowel (*o, u*) or with the neutral vowel, written *e*. Similarly, the much more conservative Az. contains both labial forms such as *gunderul-* (MT: *gönderil-*) and il-labial forms like *kessel-* (MT: *kesil-*). But even here the suffixes in question tend towards labial harmony, which is the final developmental stage of standard Turkish and Azeri suffix vocalism.

<sup>9</sup> See K. Foy: *Azerbajġanische Studien mit einer Charakteristik des Südtürkischen*. 1. In: *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen*. Westasiatische Studien 6. Berlin, 1903, pp. 126–193. P. 183.