

## TURKISH MIMETIC WORD FORMATION

Shinji Ghaeyri Ibo

The School of Asian Studies, The University of Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia

This paper attempts to find systematic correspondences among some Turkish mimetic words. Mimetic words semantically related to one another are examined. The examination reveals certain phonological correspondences among them. Alternations of particular sets of vowels and consonants as well as addition of certain 'extenders' expressing subtle shades of meaning in Turkish mimesis are proposed.

### 0. Terminology

Mimesis is the concept which is commonly referred to as sound symbolism or onomatopoeia. However, there is a slight difference in connotation between 'mimesis' and the other two. 'Sound symbolism' and 'onomatopoeia' often refer exclusively to sound imitation such as bow-wow, bang!, and oink. On the other hand, the term mimesis tends to be used to cover a broader conceptual range; It is used for **mimetic words** that comprise not only sound imitating words (or phonomimes), but also psychomimes and phenomimes which imitate psychological state and manner, respectively.

Let us look at some examples of phenomimes and psychomimes from Japanese which is known for its utilisation of an enormous number<sup>1</sup> of mimetic words. *warau* and *suru* in the chart below mean 'laugh' and 'do; perform', respectively.

Phenomimes (*gitaigo*) taken from Tamori (1989)

gera-gera warau	giggle
kera-kera warau	giggle
kusu-kusu warau	titter
kutu-kutu warau	chuckle
niko-niko warau	smile
nita-nita warau	grin
hera-hera warau	laugh flatteringly

Psychomimes (*gijougo*)

yaki-moki suru	be anxious
ira-ira suru	get irritated
hara-hara suru	feel uneasy
sowa-sowa suru	be restless
dogi-magi suru	be confused
waku-waku suru	be thrilled
saba-saba suru	feel refreshed

---

<sup>1</sup> *Nichiei Taishoo Giseigo Jiten* (Mito & Kakehi 1981) contains about 1,100 mimetic words.

Taking into account the large number of phenomimes in Turkish mimesis, I will employ not ‘onomatopoeia’ and ‘onomatopoeic words’, but only ‘mimesis’ and ‘mimetic words’ in this paper.

### 1. Admission of Mimetic Words

Admission of mimetic words can be a difficult task which requires deliberate selection as well as a good knowledge of the subject language(s). Garrigues’ (1995) survey of a Turkish-English dictionary on mimesis includes the word *güle-güle* as a mimetic word. Nevertheless, the word is actually the verb stem *gül-* to which the suffix *-e/-a* is attached and the reduplication is grammatically required. Virtually, any verb can take this form eg. *sev->seve seve*, *ağla->ağlaya ağlaya*, *bak->baka baka*. Therefore, words such as these are of verbal origin and can not be accepted as mimetic. I excluded words of non-mimetic origin from the data.

### 2. Object

In the present paper I will attempt to identify systematic correspondences in a group of semantically related Turkish mimetic words. The system consist of what I call **vowel alternation**, **internal vowel alternation**, **consonant alternation**, and **extenders**,<sup>2</sup> which work among the mimetic words. These terms are discussed immediately below.

### 3. Accounts for Vowel Alternation, Internal Vowel Alternation, Consonant Alternation, and Extenders

#### 3.1 Vowel Alternation

In Japanese, systematic correspondences among a number of mimetic words have existed since the earliest written records. For example, in 8th century Japanese, the mimetic words *saya*<sup>3</sup> and *söyö*, which are used adverbially with the suffixation of *ni* or *tö*, coexist. We can contrast the two words with each other as follows.

<a-ö> *saya* ↔ *söyö*

We can see the vowels *a* and *ö* are altered with each other in the mimetic words *saya* and *söyö*. As long as the vowel alternation does not occur in the course of reduplication (in which case it will be called internal vowel alternation) it will be treated simply as vowel alternation. The following mimetic words from 8th and 17th century Japanese are also examples of vowel alternation.

<a-ö> *kawara* ↔ *köwörö*<sup>4</sup>

<u-o> *suru-suru* ↔ *soro-soro*

---

<sup>2</sup> This terminology is adopted from GARRIGUES (1995).

<sup>3</sup> This mimetic word derives the verbs *saya-mu* and *saya-gu* and the adjectival noun *saya-ka* which in turn derive the noun *saya-gi* and the adjective *saya-kësi*, respectively. The derivation of words of mimetic origin in Xâkânî, Modern Uyghur, Turkish, 8th, 17th, and modern Japanese is discussed in details in Ido (1997).

<sup>4</sup> *köwörö* is the ‘mimetic stem’ of the reduplicated mimetic word *köwörö-köwörö*.

### 3.2 Internal Vowel Alternation

Internal vowel alternation is the vowel alternation that takes place in the course of reduplication. To account for internal vowel alternation, we can find more appropriate examples in Turkic languages than in Japanese.<sup>5</sup> Let us look at the following examples in the 11th century Xākānī Turkic, which was the official language of the Karakhanids:

<a-u> çar-çur, çart-çurt, şal-şul, qart-qurt, qarç-qurç, yakı:-yukı:

<a-o> çak-çok, çağı:-çoğı:

The pairs of vowels found in English mimetic words may also serve as examples of internal vowel alternation such as, <i-o> ding-dong, tick-tock, flip-flop.

### 3.3 Consonant Alternation

Some mimetic words have consonant alternated counterparts. An example of consonant alternation from 17th century Japanese is shown below.

<φ-b> φoto-φoto ↔ boto-boto

### 3.4 Extenders

A number of mimetic words have a counterpart with an ‘extender’. For instance, in 8th century Japanese, there are such pairs as *tödö* ‘the sound of knocking, the footsteps of a horse/horses’ and *tödörö* ‘a loud sound’. What morphologically differentiates the two is only the occurrence of *rö* in *tödörö*:

<-rö> tödö ↔ tödörö

## 4. Turkish Mimetic Word Formation

In this section, I will attempt to account for some semantically related variations of Turkish mimetic words in terms of the above explained alternation patterns and extenders. English translations of mimetic words are taken from İz and Hony (1993).

### 4.1 The Vowel Alternation <a-ı>

The vowel alternation *a-ı* that produces slight differences between the meanings of mimetic words can be identified in Turkish. The connotations with which *ı* is associated are lightness, smallness and quickness, in comparison with those with which *a* is associated. In other words, *ı* is diminutive compared to *a*.

<b>a</b>		<b>ı</b>	
pat	‘thud’	pit	‘sound of dripping water’
pat-pat	‘thudding’	pit-pit	‘(heart)palpitate rapidly’

<sup>5</sup> In Japanese and Korean, vowel alternation appears to generate new words rather than reduplicated parts with different vowels, which contributes to the extensive and systematic use of mimesis. The Japanese mimetic words with internal vowel alternation are hence small in number. Moreover, many of such mimetic words can be recognised as compounds of two semantically close mimetic stems. Taking *kara-koro* in the chart below as an example, *kara* and *koro* can be identified and the mimetic stem of the mimetic word *kara-kara* and the mimetic word *koro-koro*, respectively.

Japanese <a-o> kara-koro gata-goto gasa-goso gara-goro gatan-goton

<b>patır-patır</b>	‘sound of footsteps’	<b>pıtır-pıtır</b>	‘sound of rapid footsteps’
<b>şap</b>	‘sound of kissing’	<b>şıp</b>	‘plop; a sudden slight noise’
<b>şapır-şapır</b>	‘smacking of lips’	<b>şıpır-şıpır</b>	‘falling in drops’
<b>parıl-parıl</b>	‘ablaze, very brightly’	<b>pırıl-pırıl</b>	‘very brightly, brilliantly, flashing’

#### 4.2 The Internal Vowel Alternation <a-u>

In Turkish *a* and *u* involve in Internal Vowel Alternation. For example:

<b>çar-çur</b>	‘in a wasteful/squandering manner’	<b>hart-hurt</b>	‘munch crunch’
<b>car-cur</b>	‘loud and continuous noise/talk’	<b>fart-furt</b>	‘talking nonsense’
<b>har-hur</b>	‘confusion’	<b>zart-zurt</b>	‘(give orders/talk) in a loud blustering manner’
<b>tak-tuk</b>	‘tack!, tock!’	<b>farta-furta</b>	‘talking nonsense’

In Turkish, as shown in the immediately preceding section, the *a-ı* alternation is used to generate one pair of ‘mimetic stems’ eg. *çatır-çatır* and *çitir-çitir* whereas the *a-u* alternation is used for vowel modification in the reduplicated part, that is in internal vowel alternation eg. *çatır-çutur*. Some examples are shown below.

<b>çakır-çukur</b>	‘chewing noise’	<b>çangır-çungur</b>	‘clink-clank’
<b>çatır-çutur</b>	‘cracking/clashing noise’	<b>langır-lungur</b>	‘random/tactless talk, in a loud voice, with a vulgar accent’
<b>gacır-gucur</b>	‘creaking’	<b>tangır-tungur</b>	‘loud clanging noise’
<b>hapır-hupur</b>	ye- ‘gulp down noisily’	<b>cangıl-cungul</b>	‘ding-dong, noisily’
<b>haşır-huşur</b>	‘crunching, crushing (sound)’	<b>çangıl-çungul</b>	‘of harsh broken speech; foreign/provincial accent’
<b>hatır-hutur</b>	‘harsh crunching’	<b>dangıl-dungul</b>	‘boorish’
<b>katır-kutur</b>	‘crunching’	<b>çarpık-çurpuk</b>	‘crooked, deformed’
<b>şapır-şupur</b>	‘smacking of lips’		
<b>takır-tukur</b>	‘alternate tapping and knocking’		
<b>şakır-şukur</b>	‘rattling, banging’		

When the reduplication of a mimetic stem in the  $C^1V^1C^2V^2+r$  form is asymmetric, interestingly enough, the stem is always  $CaCır$ . Therefore asymmetrically reduplicated  $C^1V^1C^2V^2+r$  stems can only take the form of  $CaCır-CuCur$ . (Most of  $C^1V^1C^2V^2+r$  stems are in either of the following forms due to various phonological constrictions<sup>6</sup> on the form:  $C_1Cır$ ,  $CaCır$ ,  $CoCur$ ,  $CüCür$ .) The  $CaCır-CuCur$  form is though not the result of two different internal vowel alternations, i.e., <a-u> for the first syllable and <ı-u> for the second. In this form, the internal vowel alternation occurs only in the first syllable. This means only *a* in the initial syllable of the stem becomes *u* and the *u* in the reduplicated part in turn requires the

<sup>6</sup> The phonological restrictions are described in details in Ido (forthcoming).

following *u* according to the rules set by vowel harmony. This can be confirmed by looking at the reduplication of stems which are not in the form of *CaCır*, for instance, *çarpık-çurpuk*. The fact that all the reduplicated parts in the mimetic words in the chart have only *us* as their vowels shows the validity of the idea of single internal vowel alternation.<sup>7</sup>

Vowels involved in the external and internal vowel alternations in the mimesis of Turkish (as well as Uyghur and Xâkânî) are, unlike in Japanese and Korean mimesis which have such vowel alternation pairs as *a-i* and *a-e* (see Garrigues 1995), confined to the back vowels *a*, *u*, and *ı*.

### 4.3 The Consonant Alternation <k-t-p>

Consonant alternation is applied in mimetic usage in Turkish to a certain degree. However, it is difficult to present all sets of consonants since the number of Turkish mimetic words is insufficient to detect every relationship between particular consonants. There is a possibility that there could be more sets of consonants involved in Turkish consonant alternation than I propose in this section. Etymological studies and comparative studies between Turkic languages may help finding more sets of consonants. Taking the meanings of mimetic words into account, possible sets would be *f-h*, *s-ş*, *h-k*, and *k-t-p*. The following are examples of the *s-ş* and *f-h* alternations:

<b>faşır-faşır</b> 'splashing, rushing'	<b>fısır-fısır</b> 'hiss (of burning/running water)'
<b>fişır-fişır</b> 'rustling'	<b>hışır-hışır</b> 'rustling'

Among the above possible sets of consonants, *k-t-p* is the only set which can be said with certainty to be involved in consonant alternation. Some examples are shown below.

<b>t-k</b>	<b>tak-tak</b> 'knock knock'	<b>takır-takır</b> 'clippety-clop'
	<b>tık-tık</b> 'ticking'	<b>tıkır-tıkır</b> 'with a clinking/rattling noise'
<b>t-p</b>	<b>tıp-tıp</b> 'tap-tap, pit a pat'	<b>tıpır-tıpır</b> 'drip-drip, pat-pat'
<b>p-t</b>	<b>pat-pat</b> 'thudding'	<b>patır-patır</b> 'sound of footsteps'
	<b>pıt-pıt</b> '(heart) palpitate rapidly'	<b>pıtır-pıtır</b> 'sound of rapid footsteps'
		<b>pütür-pütür</b> 'rough/chapped (skin)'
<b>k-t</b>	<b>küt-küt</b> 'sound of knocking, heartbeating'	<b>kütür-kütür</b> '(eating) with a crunch'
		<b>kıtır-kıtır</b> 'crackling, crunching, gnashing'
		<b>katır-katır</b> 'sound of crunching'
<b>p-t-k</b>	<b>pat-küt</b> 'sound of repeated blows'	<b>patır-kütür</b> 'with the noise of footsteps'
		<b>paldır-küldür</b> 'with great noise and clatter'

<sup>7</sup> This applies also to modern Uyghur, eg. *taqir-tuqur*, *çaqir-çuqur*, *kaldır-kuldur*, *taraq-turuq*, *djaŋgur-djuŋgur*, *ğaras-ğurus*, *şar-şur*, *par-pur*, *yart-yurt*, *paj-puj*, *waj-wuj*, *gaj-guj*, *paŋ-puŋ* etc.

Noticeable is that the consonants *k*, *t*, and *p* are all voiceless plosives. The bilabial, alveolar, and velar voiceless plosives share the same characters in terms of manner of articulation and voicedness. The phonetic characteristics *k*, *t*, and *p* have in common are apparently associated with the semantic implications shared by the members of the group of mimetic words linked with the consonant alternation.

As can be seen in the above table, in Turkish, the alternating phonetic quality among the sets of consonants involved in the consonant alternation is the place of articulation. This sort of alternating phonetic characteristic among semantically related mimetic words can be different in other languages. For example, in Japanese mimesis, generally speaking, it is voicedness that alternates in the consonant alternation.

#### 4.4 The Extenders <-Vr, -Vl, -t>

Turkish appears to have a number of extenders, though the existence of them is not as evident as it is in Japanese. In the above chart we can find the mimetic words in the left column also appearing in the right column with the extender -Vr suffixed to them (V is subject to vowel harmony rules), e.g., *tip-tip* and *tipir-tipir*. Note, however, mimetic stems in the C<sup>1</sup>V<sup>1</sup>C<sup>2</sup>V<sup>2</sup>+r form does not necessarily have the corresponding C<sup>1</sup>V<sup>1</sup>C<sup>2</sup> form. For example, *homur-homur* and *kivir-kivir* exist while *hom-hom* and *kiv-kiv* do not. Nevertheless, by my estimate, 72 per cent of C<sup>1</sup>-C<sup>2</sup> sets that occur in stems of mimetic words in the C<sup>1</sup>V<sup>1</sup>C<sup>2</sup>V<sup>2</sup>+r form also occur in the C<sup>1</sup>VC<sup>2</sup> form. Moreover, 71 per cent of C<sup>1</sup>-C<sup>2</sup> sets occurring in stems of mimetic words in the C<sup>1</sup>V<sup>1</sup>C<sup>2</sup>V<sup>2</sup>+l form also occur in the C<sup>1</sup>VC<sup>2</sup> form. These percentages suggest the existence of the extenders.

Aside from the above mentioned -Vr extender, there are some others such as -Vl, -t. Some examples in which these extenders appear are shown below

har-har	fir-fir	zir-zir	car-cur	gür-gür
harıl-harıl	fırıl-fırıl	zırıl-zırıl		gürül-gürül
hart-hart	firt-firt	zirt-zirt	cart-cart	

It may be possible to assume some infixing extenders such as -mb-, -ng-, -ld-.

fingir-fingir	zingir-zingir	cangıl-cungul	gümbür-gümbür
			güldür-güldür

#### 5. Conclusive Remarks

In the present paper, I have attempted to identify some common patterns in groups of mimetic words which are semantically subtly related. Many of the mimetic words in such a group systematically correspond to one another in terms of phonology. Such correspondences are indicated according to the following four rules:

- |                                   |                |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. The Vowel Alternation          | <a-i>          |
| 2. The Internal Vowel Alternation | <a-u>          |
| 3. The Consonant Alternation      | <k-t-p>        |
| 4. The Extenders                  | <-Vr, -Vl, -t> |

However, it should be noted that these rules apply only to a part of the Turkish mimetic lexicon, but not to its entirety.

## REFERENCES

- BAQI, Abdikerim. 1983. *Hazirqi Zaman Uyghur Tili* [Modern Uyghur Language]. Beijing: Millätlär Näşriyati.
- GARRIGUES, Stephen L. 1995. Mimetic Parallels in Korean and Japanese. *Studies in Language* 19-2. Amsterdam : J. Benjamins.
- IDO, Shinji Ghaeyri. 1997. A Study of the Mimesis of Xâkânî, Uyghur, Turkish, and Japanese (unpublished MA thesis). The University of Sydney Department of Linguistics.
- IDO, Shinji Ghaeyri. forthcoming. (provisional title:) Phonological Occurrence Restrictions on Turkish Mimetic Words in the C<sup>1</sup>V<sup>1</sup>C<sup>2</sup>V<sup>2</sup>+r Form.
- KAŞGARLI, Sultan Mahmut. 1992. *Modern Uyghur Türkçesi Grameri* [The Grammar of Modern Uyghur Language]. İstanbul : Orkun Yayınevi.
- LEWIS, G. L. 1967. *Turkish Grammar*. Oxford : Oxford University Press.
- SCHOURUP, Lawrence L. 1993. Nichi-Ei Onomatope no Taishô Kenkyû. [Comparative Study of English and Japanese Onomatopoeia]. *Gengo* 22-6. Tokyo : Taishûkan.
- TAKEUCHI, Kazuo. 1991. *Gendai Uygurugo Yonshûkan*. [Uyghur in Four Weeks]. Tokyo : Daigaku Shorin.
- TAMORI, I. 1989. Cooccurrence restrictions on onomatopoeic adverbs and particles. *Papers in Japanese Linguistics*. 7.

## SOURCES

- ABDULLA, Mömin. 1989. *Türkçä-Uyghurçä Luyät* [A Turkish-Uyghur Dictionary]. Beijing: Millätlär Näşriyati.
- AMANUMA, Yasushi. 1974. *Giongo Gitaigo Jiten* [Onomatopoeia Dictionary]. Tokyo: Tokyodo.
- CÄFEROĞLU, Ahmet. 1993. *Eski Uyghur Türkçesi Sözlüğü* (3rd edition) [Old Uyghur Dictionary]. İstanbul : Enderun Kitabevi.
- CLAUSON, Sir Gerald. 1972. *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth Century Turkish*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- DOI, T., MORITA, T., CHOUNAN, M. ed. 1981. *Houyaku Nippo Jisho* [Japanese translation of "Vocabulario da Lingoa de Iapam"]. Tokyo: Iwanami.
- INUMA, Eiji. 1992. *Uigurugo Jiten* [Uyghur-Japanese Dictionary]. Tokyo: Hodaka Shoten.
- İZ, Fahir & Hony, H. C. 1993. *The Oxford Turkish Dictionary*. İstanbul: İnkilâp Kitabevi.
- Jôdaigo Jiten Henshû Inkaï. 1967. *Jidaibetsu Kokugo Daijiten-Jôdaigohen* [Pre-8th Century Japanese Dictionary]. Tokyo: Sanseido.
- KURBAN, İklil. 1995. *Yeni Uyghur Türkçesi Sözlüğü* [A Modern Uyghur Dictionary]. Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu. (the Turkish translation of Emir Nejipovich Nejip's Uyghur-Russian dictionary; "Uyghurçä-Rusçä Luyät" (Uygursko-russkij slovar'. 1968))
- MITO, Yûichi, KAKEHI, Hisao. 1981. *Nichi-Ei Taishô Giseigo, Gitaigo Jiten* [Japanese-English Dictionary of Mimetic Words]. Tokyo: Gaku Shobô.
- SINDJON, Danyel (St. John, Daniel). 1993. *Uyghurçä-İnglizçä Luyät* [An Uyghur-English Dictionary]. Ürümqi. Şindjañ Xälq Näşriyati.
- Şindjañ Yaşlar-Ösmürlär Näşriyati. 1989. *Qädimki Uyghur Tili Luyiti* [Ancient Uyghur Language Dictionary]. Ürümqi: Şindjañ Yaşlar-Ösmürlär Näşriyati.
- TAKEUCHI, Kazuo. 1989. *Torukogo Jiten* [Turkish-Japanese Dictionary]. Tokyo: Daigaku Shorin.