

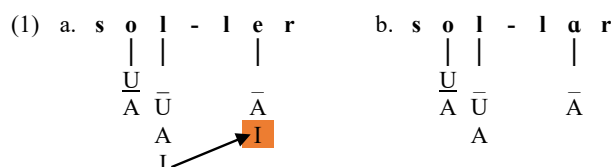
Vowel (Dis)Harmony and Consonantal Influence in Turkish: Revisiting I-Spreading

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This study revisits Turkish vowel harmony (VH) by examining cases where stem-final consonants appear to affect the suffix vowel quality. Rather than treating these as exceptions, we argue they reflect consonant-triggered **I**-element spreading. Building on Pöchtrager’s (2010) rejection of internal disharmony, we develop a constraint-based model of external spreading informed by elemental compositions.

Empirical data from forms such as *kabahat-ler* ‘fault-PL’, *golf-ler* ‘golf-PL’ and *sol-ler* ‘note G-PL’ show that suffix vowels sometimes surface with [e] instead of the expected [a]. We argue that this pattern arises when certain stem-final consonants contain the element **I**, which may spread to the following vowel. A clearer illustration is provided by *sol-ler* (‘note G-PL’) versus *sol-lar* (‘left-PL’): the former surfaces with [e], the latter with [a]. This pattern results from a fundamental difference between /l/ [sol] and /l/ [sol] in their elemental composition: /l/ = $\begin{bmatrix} _ \\ \text{U} \\ \text{A} \end{bmatrix}$ whereas /l/ = $\begin{bmatrix} _ \\ \text{U} \\ \text{A} \end{bmatrix}$. Both lack a head, but **I** can only spread from /l/.



The representation (1a–b) schematizes the contrast between *sol-ler* and *sol-lar*: in the former, **I** spreads from the stem-final /l/ to an empty-headed suffix vowel, resulting in [e]; in the latter, the absence of **I** in /l/ yields default backness harmony. We propose that **I**-spreading is conditioned by three constraints: **(C1)** *I can only spread to empty-headed vowels* (i.e., $\begin{bmatrix} _ \\ \text{A} \end{bmatrix}$ or $\begin{bmatrix} _ \\ \text{ } \end{bmatrix}$), the only such configurations in Turkish; Pöchtrager, 2010); **(C2)** *I must occupy a non-head position in the source consonant*; and **(C3)** *I can only spread to the nearest vowel to the right*. These constraints account for the selective nature of spreading and explain why consonants that contain **I** do not always trigger [e]. For example, in *hatf-lar* ‘cross-PL’ and *aj-lar* ‘month-PL’, spreading is blocked due to **I**-headedness (violating C2).

While previous studies on Turkish phonology have advanced our understanding of consonant-vowel interactions, some areas remain underexplored, particularly in data analysis (İskender, 2021) and theoretical support (Canalis & Dikmen, 2021) regarding the effects of palatalized consonants on VH. Our study builds on Pöchtrager’s analysis by incorporating the elemental composition of consonants (adapted from Balcı, 2006) and proposing a model focused on **I**-spreading, using three key constraints to explore how consonantal elements influence VH, especially in cases of disharmony.

Keywords: Vowel harmony, disharmony, I-spreading.

Selected References

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