Two types of "soft g" in Turkish

Göktuğ Börtlü[1] & Tobias Scheer[2]
[1]Selçuk Üniversitesi, [2]Université Côte d'Azur, CNRS 7320

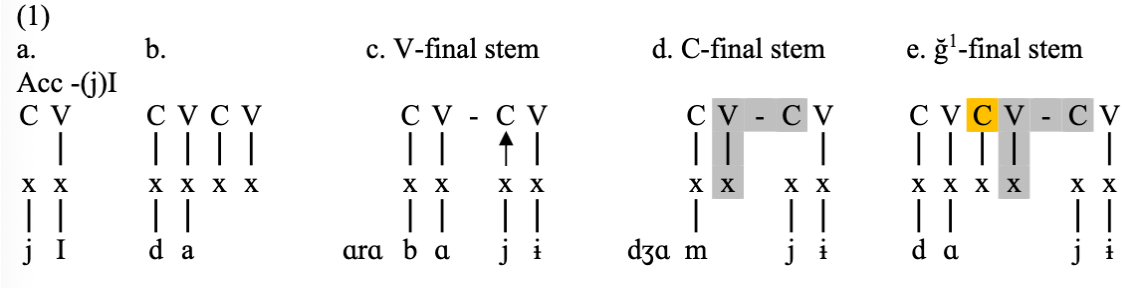
Turkish is known for having an item called soft g, represented as ğ in spelling. We show that there are two types, ğ1 and ğ2. In this talk, we analyze the workings of ğ1 and, depending on time constraints, ğ2.

Synchronically, soft g is only relevant when occurring morpheme-finally, where it produces alternations when suffixes are added. ğ1 never appears on the surface as a segment or a feature, but betrays its existence by i) causing the preceding vowel to lengthen (vowel length is distinctive in Turkish) and ii) preventing suffix-initial consonants from being realized. Thus when a ğ1-final root such as /dağ1/ 'mountain' is realized by itself in Nom case, it appears as [daa] with a lengthened vowel. That the vowel is lexically short is shown by the Acc [da-ɨ]. The Acc marker is -(j)I (where I stands for a harmonizing vowel, note that there are many more suffixes of this kind), and the yod is realized after V-final roots as in [ɑrɑbɑ-jɨ] 'car Acc', while it is absent after C-final roots as in [dʒɑm-ɨ] 'glass Acc'. Note that Turkish allows for CC clusters, and that there are also suffixes where the initial C is stable (like pl. -lAr).

Although V-final on the surface, ğ1-final roots behave like if they were C-final: the yod is absent, as in the aforementioned [dɑ-ɨ] 'mountain Acc'. We conclude that the phonological identity of ğ1 is extra syllabic space, an empty CV unit in the sense of Strict CV (Lowenstamm 1996, Scheer 2004) : thus the lexical shape of ğ1-final roots is shown under (1b). When unsuffixed, the root-final vowel spreads to the empty nucleus, thus producing [daa].

The initial yod of the Acc marker (1a) is floating. When attached to a V-final root (1c), the yod associates to its own C. After C-final roots (1d), a sequence of an empty V followed by an empty C is created (grey-shaded). Empty VC units are known to be removed from the representation, and this is possibly universal (reduction, Kaye & Gussmann 1993). Thus after reduction, the yod has nowhere to go and remains afloat, thus unpronounced. Reduction also occurs after ğ1-final roots (1e), thus the floating yod cannot attach to its own C. It cannot attach to the empty C of the root (in orange) either because this C, like the floating yod, is attached to its own x-slot and an x-slots cannot attach to another x-slot (this is reminiscent of the workings of h aspiré in French, Clements & Keyser 1983). Finally, the root vowel cannot spread because its target, the empty V, is eliminated by reduction.

(1)



The desiderata for this pattern is i) the lexical presence of extra syllabic space in ğ1-final roots, with this space, however, ii) disallowing for the presence of iii) suffix-initial consonants that alternate with zero. i) could be done with moras or other items representing extra syllabic space. The representation of iii) as floating Cs appears to be the obvious solution in an autosegmental environment, and its appearance then needs to be regulated by some mechanism. But ii) begs the question. Other than the solution based on x-slots (in addition to syllabic constituents) shown, one could think of a dummy segment attached to the empty C under (1b), which by its presence will prevent the floating C to attach. This is the solution in the traditional literature (and also mimics the diachronic origin of ğ1 as a consonant), but the segment will somehow have to be muted and, crucially, association lines will cross when the root vowel spreads. Another option is turbidity (Goldrick 2001, Cavirani 2022): a consonant is associated to the empty C under (1b), but remains unpronounced because it only has a belonging association line, the pronunciation line being absent. This improves on the previous solution, but still faces the line crossing issue.

We show that the other type of soft g, ğ2, offers evidence in favor of the x-slot-based analysis. ğ2 is a morpheme-final -k that alternates with zero, the alternation being conditioned by the kind of suffix attached.

Word Count: 675