

A Survey of Vowel Deletion in Turkish

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This paper discusses an irregular sound change in Turkish. In a number of Turkish words, an etymological vowel underwent deletion.

(1) *dakika* > [dakka], *patates* > [pattes], *üzere* > [yzre]

Its irregularity (or more precisely lack of complete regularity) is shown by the fact that vowels occurring in phonological environments very similar to those (1) were not deleted, which also suggests that we are not dealing with a synchronic and currently productive phonological rule, but a (possibly still ongoing) diachronic change in the underlying representation of the words in question.

(2) *hakiki*, *Atatürk*, *mazeret*

Although there does not seem to be an exceptionless environment for this vowel deletion process, some recurring patterns can be observed:

- Deletion only occurs in previously open syllables (e.g., *dakika* > [dakka])
- Deletion only occurs in unstressed syllables (e.g. *üzeRE*)
- Long vowels are never deleted (e.g., *dakika* > [dakka], but *hakiki*)

In order to shed light on the other phonological properties affecting this sound change, a list of words that underwent vowel deletion were created. To that end, four different defining and/or etymological dictionaries were used. The words in the list were classified according to their deleted vowel and its environment, and also their language of origin. In terms of the deleted vowel, the features of height, backness, and roundness were taken into account. Regarding its environment, the preceding and following sounds were noted along with their major phonetic classes (e.g. obstruent, continuant) and their manner of articulation (e.g. glide, nasal).

The results are as follows:

- A vast majority of the deleted vowels are high vowels; deleted non-high vowels are fewer in number.
- There is no significant difference between the number of deleted back and front vowels.
- Most of the deleted vowels are unrounded.

It might be that high vowels are simply more common than other vowels in Turkish, therefore finding more instances of deleted high vowels would not mean that height is a factor. The reason for the difference in roundedness might be an inherent characteristic of Turkish, where round vowels are much less likely to be found in non-initial syllables.

In order to confirm that these results truly affect deletion, these words were compared with other words that do not show deletion. With the aim of determining the factors underlying the deletion process, another list was compiled of such words.

It is necessary to note that such a deletion process was identified also in Old Turkic. Since then, such a change seems to be affecting the words in Turkish. Not only for the words of Turkic origin, this change applies to many words borrowed into Turkish from various foreign languages.

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