

ON THE ETYMOLOGY OF THE TURKIC VERB *söylä-* ‘to speak, to say’

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Abstract: In Middle Turkic, there appears the verb *söylä-* ‘to speak, to say’, which partially (but not entirely) supplants the older variant *sözlä-*. Therefore, some scholars are inclined to either believe the idea that the latter is actually a phonological variant of the former or seek a root like **sög*, a hypothetical base on which they can establish their interpretations. In fact, the latter form descends from another verb appearing in the late times of the Old Turkic period, which is *savla-* ‘to talk, to tell’.

Keywords: *Söylä-*, Etymology, Fronting, Dissimilation, Lenition, Consonant shift

Türkçe söyle- ‘konuşmak, söylemek’ fiilinin Etimolojisi Üzerine

Öz: *söylä-* ‘*söylemek, demek, konuşmak*’ fiili tamamiyle olmasa da kısmen daha eski *sözlä-* fiilinin yerini alarak Orta Türkçede ortaya çıkar. Bundan dolayı kimi bilim adamları ya *söylä-* fiilinin *sözlä-* fiilinin fonolojik bir varyantı olduğu düşüncesine yakın durmuşlar ya da *sög** gibi taban arayarak izahlarını bu farazi taban üzerine kurmuşlardır. Aslında yeni sözcük Eski Türkçe döneminin son zamanlarında ortaya çıkan *savla-* ‘*konuşmak, söylemek*’ fiiline dayanmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Söyle-, Etimoloji, Ön sıralaşma, Aykırılışma, Süreklileşme, Ünsüz değişimi.*

The Turkic verb *söylä-* ‘to speak, talk; to tell, say’ appeared in the late Old Turkic period and it survives in most of the Turkic languages along with many other phonological variants, such as Gag. *söle-*, Tat. *süylä-*, Bshk. *hüylä-*, Krg. *siylö-*, Tuv. *sögle-*, Lob. *söylö-* ~ *seile-*, and so on (see ESTY 2003: 340-341). Some scholars have considered the resemblance to *sözlä-* a phonological phenomenon, whereas others have been inclined to explain the palatal glide by the hypothetical base **sög*. However, neither of these opinions has gained ground in explaining its etymology. As shown below, our suggestion depends on another lexical material and its phonological evolution.

Chronological viewpoint

Before directly addressing the appearance of *söylä-* in Middle Turkic, it is necessary to take a look at the Old Turkic period to see what lexeme was then used to refer to ‘to talk, speak’. According to etymological sources, *sözlä-* dates back as far as the Old Uyghur period (Clauson 1972: 863; Erdal 1991: 445), whereas *ay-*, which means ‘to speak, to say’, was first found in Orkhon inscriptions (Clauson 1972: 266); thus, it is much older than *sözlä-*.¹ In short, there were *ay-* (later as *ayt-*)

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¹ *té-* ‘to say’ is also as old as *ay-*, however it does not mean ‘to speak’ as Clauson states (1972: 433), so it has been excluded.

and *sözlä-* verbs during the absence of *söylä-*, and they kept their existence even after appearance of *söylä-*.

The verb in question first occurs in 14th cc. in works of Khorezmian Turkic (see Clauson 1972: 863b) and Old Oghuz (see TTS 1996: 3542). In addition to this verb, the 15th century verbs *sövlē-*² (see Toparlı et al 1999: 123) and *sevle-*³ (see Toparlı 2003: 105) are attested in Mamluk-Kipchak texts. And the existence of a modern form such as *sävlä-* ‘çözlämək’ (the Khorezm dialect of Uzbek) (Abdullaev 1961: 79) corroborates the mediæval forms. Although these latter forms, i.e. *sövlē-* and *sevle-*, appear in use later than *söylä-*, they should have belonged to an earlier phonological phase. This is explained below.

Etymological interpretations

In Radloff’s opinion, the verb was formed as *sös + lä-* (1911: 566). Bang rejects the phonological possibility of *sözlä-* > *söylä-*. Instead, he considers the base as *saw* ‘word’ and offers this following process: **sawla-* > **soğla-* > *soyla-* > **söylä-* (see ESTY 2003: 341).⁴ His approach was reasonable but since *sawla-* appears in the DLT⁵ (see Dankoff&Kelly 1982: 302; Ercilasun&Akkoyunlu 2014: 484), Bang lacked historical data and a phonological explanation. Thus, he preferred to reach *söylä-* through *soyla-* ‘to tell dastan’, which is unique to the text of *Dede Qorqut*.⁶ Clauson is basically in favor of the hypothesis that the verb emerges from *sözlä-*. He, however, finds the reason unexplained for that shift, trying to elucidate it through avoidance of juxtaposition of /s/ and /z/. Though he admits that this juxtaposition is actually not very common (1972: 863a). Räsänen does not provide

2 سُؤْلَدَ (30a, 2), سُؤْلَا (35b, 8), سُؤْلَدَ (40b, 4), سُؤْلَاكُزْدَ (59b, 13) etc. Only the first one has a *sukun*, so the others are doubtful as to whether they should be interpreted as *sölä-* or *söylä-*.

3 سَوَّلَ سَوَّلَتَهُ سَوَّلِي سَوَّلَانِي سَوَّلَانِي سَوَّلَانِي (24a, 2), سَوَّلَانِي (22a, 10), سَوَّلَانِي (22a, 8), سَوَّلَانِي (24a, 4) etc.

4 His other consideration, which suggests that the verb derived from the base **söyā*, is beyond being reasonable.

5 On the other hand, another example of *sawla-* (سُفْلَانُ) in a poem is disputable due to the text. Atalay, the first scholar to publish DLT, transcribes it as *söwlenür*, yet he notes that it should have been *söwleyür* in accordance with the syntactic status of the verb, and with the rhyme (1985: 278-279) Dankoff&Kelly transliterate the datum as SUWLNVR, but transcribe it as *sawlayür* (1984: 293). Ercilasun&Akkoyunlu share the same transcription preference (2014: 479). The lexeme *söwlen-* in *Drevnetjurskij Slovar* (1969: 511) was taken from Atalay’s work, which also is given in ESTY without any criticism (2003: 340).

6 In fact, this work includes also many examples of *söylä-* (see Ergin 1964: 272). And the orthography of *soyla-* and *söylä-* is distinguished within Arabic script (e.g. *soylamış*

سَوِيلَمِشْ (D3-2), *soyladi* سَوِيلَدِي (D33-10), *söylär(i)di* سَوِيلَرْدِي (D1-*söylärseñ* سَوِيلَرَسَن (D6-10) (<http://digital.slub-dresden.de/id280873166>, 02. 22. 2017). On the other hand Old Oghuz *soyla-* does not refer to ‘to tell dastan’ in other contemporary works, but to ‘to examine, investigate; to exalt, glorify’ (TTS V: 3526-3528). Thus, it can be deduced that *söylä-* cannot be a form of *soyla-*, but an individual word descending from another form.

any explanation other than the existence of the cognate *söz* ‘Wort’ (1969: 429b). Hamilton, on a paper dealing with *opla-/yopla-* and *uf-/yuf-*, shares the opinion of Bang given above, in a slightly different manner. He considers the previous form of *soyla-* in three probable ways: *saβla-*, *sawla-*, or **sowla-* (1974: 114). What he does not clearly corroborate is the consonant shift /w/ > /y/, in particular for words with a back vowel. To prove this shift, he only provides oblique forms of *su* ‘water’ in Ottoman (similar to modern Turkish) and the Oghuz Turkic of *Dede Qorqut*, i.e. *suyu*, *suyun/suyun*. But this view remains weak since he does not expand the instances with the same phenomenon, which almost does not exist. Levitskaja et al, firstly state that Sevortjan correlates *söylä-* with a root like **söy*, which has not survived in any modern Turkic language. They add that this **söy* may be the Turkish word *soy*, which means ‘слово, известие; стихи дестана’ (ESTY 2003: 340-41). This opinion, however, cannot explain early forms, such as *sävlä-* and *sövlä-*, or the modern Tuvan form *söglä-*.

Since the verb also survives in modern Turkic languages, scholars studying those languages have dealt with it. Concerning the Turkish variant, Eren asserts that *söylä-* is a result of the shift /z/ > /y/ (1999: 375).⁷ Gülensoy shares the same opinion (2009: 809). Nişanyan attempts to explain the verb as *söylä-* < *söz/*sög* + *LA-*, admitting that the development *sözlä-* > *söylä-* is phonologically difficult (2010: 569). For the Kyrgyz *süylö-*, K. Seydaqmatov, in accordance with the general inclination, explains *süylö-* through phonological development, establishing his hypothesis on *söz* (1988: 208). Neither R. Syzdyqova etc. (1966) for the Kazakh *söyle-* nor R. Äxmät’yanov (2001) for the Tatar *süylä-* examine the verb in their languages.

It seems that aforementioned scholars have missed the point; therefore, an accurate explanation of the etymology of *söylä-* has eluded them. Bang was the one closest to analyzing it properly by establishing his hypothesis on *sawla-*, yet he deviated from the right path with the examination of *soy* ‘dastan, epic’ and *soyla-* ‘to tell dastan’.

What the origin of *söylä-* is nothing but *sawla-* (or *savla-*) ‘to talk, tell’, a denominal verb from *saw* ‘a speech’ (see Clauson 1972: 782), which first appears in Old Uighur texts (see Erdal 1991: 445). It later appears in Qarakhanid texts (see Dankoff&Kelly 1984: 302 and Borovkov 1963: 257) without any phonological change. As mentioned above, the secondary forms *sövlä-* and *sävlä-* appear in Mamluk-Kipchak works.

The following observations solidify our opinion:

I) The semantic connection between *sawla-* and *söylä-*, both of which refer to ‘to speak’,

II) The meaningful disappearance of *sawla-* after the end of Old Turkic period,

III) The possible shift of /w/ or /v/ > /y/.

⁷ In spite of stating that this phonological development has many instances, he does not give any.

The third one, though not quite as common, has been seen in early and modern Turkic languages as the following two types: I) /öw/ > /öy/: *öy* ‘house’ < *öw* < *äw* < *äb* ‘house’⁸ (but Tof. (Karagas) *ög*); *öykä* ‘lung’ < *öwkä* < *öpkä*; *söy-* ‘to love’ < *söw-* < *säw-*; Tat. *döyä* and Kzk. *tüye* ‘camel’ < *täväy* (but Uyg. *tögä*) (Shcherbak 1970: 171-172); Krg. *ayıl* ‘a group of nomad tents’ < *avıl* (Öner 1998: 17); II) /iw/ > (/üw/) > /üy/: Tob. Kzk. Krg. *süyrü* ‘sharpened’ < **sivrüg* (Räsänen 1949: 76).

Conclusion

Evidence that opposes our conclusion is the Siberian (Sayan) form *söglä-* and the fronting of the back vowels of *sawla-*.⁹ The Sayan form (more specifically Tuvan) seems to be a unique proof on which those considering a hypothetical base like **sög* rely. However, in Siberian Turkic languages there are few examples, along with *söglä-*, that make us consider whether there exists a diachronic consonant shift, i. e. the dissimilation of /v/ or /w/ to /g/: Tuv. *ög* ‘юрта; семья’ (TRS 1968: 330) and Tuv. *sug* ‘вода/водяной; водный; река’ (TRS 1968: 389). The former bears the possibility of the shift /y/ > /g/ as a word with front vowels, but *sug* does not, since the shift does not occur on words with back vowels. Thus, at least *sug* alone is a sound proof revealing that *söglä-* does not descend from a base like *sög*. These examples allow us to conclude that Tuvan *söglä-* is just a secondary form, which must have been developed from *sövlä-*. As for the palatalization, there are corroborating examples neither in early Turkic nor in modern Turkic works. There is no triggering phonemes for palatalization in the word either. There might be only explanation for this unusual development that *sawla-* must have been influenced by the analogic effect of *sözlä-*, since it did not cease to exist in Middle Turkic, and it still survives in Turkmen, Uzbek, and Uyghur languages.

Thus, the probable phonological process of the verb must have been *sawla-* > *säwlä-* > *söwlä-* and finally, *söylä-*. This process, with the exception of the fronting, best fits the phonological development of *öy/üy* that occurs in Qarluq and Kipchak languages: OT *eb* > *ew* > *öw* > *öy* (and further *üy*).

Abbreviations

Bshk.	= Bashkir
Gag.	= Gagauz
Krg.	= Kyrgyz
Kzk.	= Kazakh
Lob.	= Lobnor
OT	= Old Turkic
Tat.	= Tatar
Tob.	= Tobol
Tof.	= Tofalar
Tuv.	= Tuvan
Uyg.	= Uyghur

⁸ Clauson’s suggestion as *ew* > *üw* > *üwi* > *üy* (1972: 3-4) cannot be accepted, since *üwi* phase is not reasonable, and /ew/ > /üw/ shift is less probable than /ew/ > /öw/.

⁹ Bang remarks that fronting occurs for the verb either through the influence of *sözlä-* or for another reason.

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