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Memory-Based Language Theory: The Case of “Söz” and “Söylemek” in Old Turkic*

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Abstract: While the relationship between language, thought, and culture has long been examined by different scholars, this study re-evaluates this relationship within a holistic framework grounded in social memory and refers to this approach as Memory-Based Language Theory. Focusing on Old Turkic, it compares words meaning söz “word” and söylemek “to speak” with their counterparts in Turkey Turkish to examine whether the underlying linguistic logic has changed over time, and if so, to what extent and why. The findings show that, in cognate structures expressing the meanings “word” and “to say”, Turkish linguistic memory consistently prioritizes söz.

Keywords: Memory-Based Language Theory, Linguistic memory, Old Turkic, Söz, Söylemek.

Bellek Temelli Dil Kuramı: Eski Türkçede “Söz” ve “Söylemek” Örneği

Öz: Dilin, düşünce ve kültürle olan ilişkisi yıllar boyunca farklı araştırmacılar tarafından, farklı başlıklar altında incelenmiştir. Bu çalışmada, söz konusu ilişkiyi, toplumsal belleği temele alan bütüncül bir çerçevede değerlendirerek, bu yaklaşımı Bellek Temelli Dil Kuramı olarak adlandırmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, Türklerin dilsel bellekleri, Eski Türkçenin “söz” ve “söylemek” anlamlarındaki kelimeleri bağlamında Türkiye Türkçesiyle mukayese edilmiştir. Belirlenen kelimelerdeki dil mantığının değişip değişmediği, değişiyorsa bunun hangi sebeplerle ve ne ölçüde gerçekleştiği ortaya konulmaya çalışılmıştır. Bu inceleme, Türkçe dilsel bellekte “söz” ve “söylemek” anlamlarına gelen kökteş yapılarda söz’ün öncelendiğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bellek Temelli Dil Kuramı, Dilsel Bellek, Eski Türkçe, Söz, Söylemek.

Introduction

There has long been debate over the reciprocal relationship between language, thought, and culture, particularly concerning which precedes the other. This relationship has been examined from various theoretical perspectives. The view that

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language is shaped through social and cultural interaction has been discussed in numerous studies, including Sapir's (1921) reflections on the reciprocal relationship between language and culture, Whorf's (1956) principle of linguistic relativity, Vygotsky's (1986) account of the social development of language and thought, Halliday's (1978) conception of language as a form of social semiotic, Tomasello's (2003, 2008) usage-based and culturally grounded approach to language, and Bates's (1976) work on the social context of language acquisition. Despite these significant contributions, the historical and social dimensions of the relationship between language, thought, and culture have not yet been fully clarified. Rather than attempting to establish a definitive priority between language and thought, this study approaches the issue from a different perspective by focusing on how linguistic memory preserves and reflects stable cognitive patterns over time.

Every language is a product of the culture to which it belongs. Words and expressions do not merely denote objects or actions; they also encode culturally specific modes of perception. In Turkish, for instance, the word *ak* primarily denotes "white" as the opposite of *kara* and *siyah* "black", and from this fundamental color opposition it also acquires meanings such as "clean" and "honest" (GTS, 2023). In other words, the moral and evaluative meanings associated with *ak* are not independent of its color meaning but emerge directly from it. For this reason, expressions in Turkey Turkish such as *ak saçlı* and *ak sakallı* do not merely indicate age; they also emphasize purity of heart, moral integrity, and the wisdom associated with aging. The phrase *ak saçlı* attested in Arat (Arat, 1991: 248) and *āk sakal* recorded in *Dīvānū Lüġātī 't-Türk* (Ercilasun ve Akkoyunlu, 2018: 546) demonstrate that these constructions have been in use since the early stages of Turkish. Although in English, an Indo-European language, a beard similarly functions as a marker of age and wisdom, *ak* "white" does not occupy the same position within English linguistic memory. The conceptual domain evoked by *ak sakallı* in Turkish is instead rendered through expressions such as *graybeard* or *wise old man*. In Turkish, however, a phrase such as *gri sakallı* conveys nothing beyond a purely descriptive reference to color. This contrast indicates that while languages may develop comparable semantic fields, they do so within distinct cognitive and cultural boundaries shaped by linguistic memory.

The point of departure of Memory-Based Language Theory is the sign. The sign unifies and symbolizes social thought through sounds. Ferdinand de Saussure did not conceptualize the sign as independent of society: "It is therefore possible to conceive of a science that studies the life of signs within social life; such a science would form part of social psychology and, consequently, of general psychology. We shall call it semiology. Semiology would show what constitutes signs and what laws govern them" (Saussure, 1985: 18). From this explanation of semiology, it can be argued that one aspect of contemporary semiotics remains incomplete. While the life of signs has been examined and signifiers and signifieds have been identified, the relationship between the sign and society has not been fully clarified. Reducing this field to a mere cycle of signs is therefore inadequate. The relationship between signifiers and society must also be taken into account. Not only the etymological roots of signifiers but also their social sources, as well as the modes of social thought that give rise to them, need to be elucidated.

When Roland Barthes discusses the concepts of text and work, he argues that the work closes itself upon a signified. If the signified is explicit, the work becomes the object of philology; if it is concealed, the work becomes the object of hermeneutics (Marxist, psychoanalytic, thematic, etc.). In the text, however, the signified undergoes an infinite movement of withdrawal (Barthes, 2013: 72). This movement may be likened to waves striking the seashore. Although the waves originate from the same point (the signifier), no two waves are identical. Each new wave points to a new signified. Moreover, over time, signifieds transform into new signs and proliferate, thereby sustaining the cycle. This infinite withdrawal—what we term a state of undulation—gives rise to a metaphor that cannot be conceived independently of the reader. In this context, the primary source from which the waves emerge—that is, the zero point of the sign—is our linguistic memory.

Languages undergo phonological, morphological, and semantic change over time; the lexicon is not independent of this process. Nevertheless, the existence of a domain of familiarity that endures across centuries, remains stable, and can be traced across different linguistic levels is noteworthy. This domain of familiarity stems from linguistic memory. Memory-Based Language Theory aims to identify the relationship between language and social thought by taking linguistic memory as its foundation. The theory is currently being developed by the author of this article at the level of a doctoral dissertation. Within Memory-Based Language Theory, the analysis begins with the examination of the etymologies of words. Subsequently, the initial meanings of words and their diachronic developments are identified. Metaphors that emerge in relation to the original meaning and linguistic memory are then explicated. It is further argued that the emergence of collocations is also grounded in linguistic memory. Linguistic memory is thus conceptualized as a domain that “time” cannot alter, or at least one that is highly resistant to change. For this reason, comparative studies across different languages are expected to reveal more clearly the differences in how societies perceive and interpret phenomena.

Linguistic memory assumes different forms across languages, as the modes of thinking of societies are not identical. Wilhelm von Humboldt, noting that languages may change over time, states: “Forms may deteriorate, but not those forms that transmit the original spirit onto new formations” (Akarsu, 1955: 95). Words, then, may deteriorate or even disappear; however, the spirit of language does not perish. If the spirit of language does not readily change, it follows that a society’s way of perceiving the world is not expected to be internally contradictory within the framework of its native language. In particular, words used within the same period and across similar semantic fields are expected to exhibit a consistent structure shaped by linguistic memory. A society cannot, within the same historical moment, perceive a crow both as a type of bird and as a type of cat. Therefore, words used contemporaneously and referring to similar conceptual domains must arise from a comparable mode of thinking, or at least must not contradict one another.

In Old Turkic, there is a verb *ay-* meaning “to say”, from which the noun *ayık*, meaning “promise”, is derived. Thus, the meaning “to say” is primary in this case. However, the situation is exactly the opposite for another pair of words attested in the same historical period and sharing comparable meanings. The Old Turkic verb *sözle-* is derived from the noun *söz*. Likewise, the Old Turkic verb *yarlıka-* is derived from

the noun *yarlıg*. In these examples, the meaning “word” is primary rather than the meaning “to say”. Within the framework of Memory-Based Language Theory, these two opposing configurations cannot coexist simultaneously. In the linguistic memory of the Turkic-speaking community, either the meaning “to say” must be primary or the meaning “word” must be primary. The simultaneous presence of both suggests, at first glance, a conceptual dilemma. Accordingly, determining which of the meanings “word” or “to say” emerged first in Old Turkic, and how the relationship between them was structured, constitutes the central focus of this study.

1. Findings

In Old Turkic, words that belong to the semantic domain of “word” and “to say, to tell” appear in three distinct forms. The first group consists of cognate pairs derived from the same root, exhibiting both noun “word” and verb “to tell” forms. These include *ay-/ayık*, *sav/savla-*, *söz/sözle-*, and *yarlıg/yarlıka-*. The second group consists of independent verbs that exclusively convey the meaning “söylemek.” Examples include *ötün-*, *te-*, and *ün-te-*. The primary focus of the analysis is on root-sharing noun-verb pairs, as these allow for determining the precedence relationship. For the standalone verbs, only usage frequency statistics are provided. Third, there are structures that are used within a semantic field similar to that of “to speak, to tell”, yet whose primary meaning is not “to speak”. These verbs *agzan-* “to recite, to say”, *alka-* “to praise, to laud, to say”, *ata-* “to recite from memory”, *ezüg ezügle-* “to lie”, *ezügle-* “to lie”, *ırla-* “to sing”, *ırlaştur-* “to sing together”, *igid igide-* “to lie”, *igide-* “to lie”, *kırış-* “to shout out”, *kikşür-* “to say provocative things”, *takşut takşur-* “to sing”, *yadın-* “to confess, to state openly”, *yırla-* “to sing” (Wilkens, 2021) are excluded from the analysis.

The examples in this section are limited to the *Orkhon Inscriptions* from the Köktürk period, the *Altun Yaruk* from the Old Uyghur period, and the *Dîvânü Lugâti't-Türk* from the Karakhanid period. In the case of root-sharing word pairs, either all or a portion of the examples from the source texts were included, depending on their frequency. The following subsections are organized around the cognate word pairs that constitute the basis of this study. In each subsection, previously proposed etymological interpretations are presented for the words that are first attested in the relevant text, while discussions of the same words are not repeated in the subsequent subsections. This organization allows the etymological discussions to be evaluated together with the textual evidence while avoiding unnecessary repetition.

1.1. Orkhon Inscription

ay- (7) / *ayık* (0); *sab* (40) / *sabla-* (0); *söz* (0) / *sözle-* (0); *yarlıg* (0) / *yarlıka-* (14); *ötün-* (6); *tê-* (64); *ün-te-* (0)

öd teŋri aysar kişi oğlu koop ölgeli törimiş (KT K 10) “Zaman Tanrısı buyurunca insan oğlu hep ölümlü yaratılmış.” (Tekin, 2020: 38); *süçig sabıŋa, yımşak ağısıŋa arturup üküş türk bodun ölsikiŋ* (KT G 5) “Tatlı sözle, yumuşak ipekiyle aldatıp, böylece uzaktaki halkları yaklaştırmış.” (Ercilasun, 2016: 501); *teŋri yarlıkadı, yañdımız* (T 16) “Tanrı lutfetti, bozguna uğrattık.” (Ercilasun, 2016: 601); *anta ötrü kaganıma ötüntüm* (T 12) “Bunun üzerine kağanıma arzda bulundum.”

(Ercilasun, 2016: 601); *ança tēp tabgaç kaganka yağı bolmuş* (BK D 9)

“Böyle diyerek Çin kağanına düşman olmuş.” (Ercilasun, 2016: 561)

In the *Orkhon Inscriptions*, the words *ayık*, *söz* and *yarlıg*, as well as the verbs *sözle-*, *sabla-*, and *ünte-*, are not attested. In contrast, the word *sab* is attested in 40 instances. The verb *ay-* occurs in 7 instances, *ötün-* in 6 instances, and *tē-* in 64 instances. The verb *yarlıka-* is attested in 14 instances and, in each case, occurs alongside the word *Teñri*, with the meaning “to command”. In light of this data, it appears that there is no cognate word pair in the *Orkhon Inscriptions* meaning “word, utterance” and “to say, to speak, to tell”.

Şinasi Tekin wrote that the verb *ay-* is exclusive to God and is used in the meanings of “to command, to rule” (2020: 198). Tuncer Gülensoy derived *sav* from *sab*, but did not provide an explanation for the origin of this derivation (2018: 741). Clauson derived the verb *yarlıka-* from *yarlıg* (1972: 968). More specifically, both Gülensoy (2018: 1077) and Tietze (2021: C7 408) analyzed the verb *yarlıka-* as *yarlıg+ka-*. Tekin’s explanations regarding the word are as follows: *yarlıka-* < *yarlıg + ka-*, *yarlıg* < *yar* “saliva mucus” + *lıg* “miserable, pitiable” (2020: 203).

1.2. Altun Yaruk

ay- (28) / *ayık* (0); *sav* (162) / *savla-* (0); *söz* (18) / *sözle-* (238); *yarlıg* (79) / *yarlıka-* (450); *ötün-* (261); *tē-* (1427); *ünte-* (1)

amtu men ayayın (AY: 537) “Şimdi ben söyleyeyim.”; *yeme inçip ol savda sözde tepremedin* (AY: 376) “Yine de o sözden etkilenmedin.”; *tetrü sözçilerin tetrü sözlerin utguluk köni oñaru sav yolın ukmak erür* (AY: 310) “Kötü söz söyleyenlerin kötü sözleriyle baş etmenin yolu doğru söz yolunu bilmektir.”; *emgenü sav sözledi* (AY: 615) “Sıkıntılı biçimde konuştu.”; *munçulayu yarlıg yarlıkamışın kamagun barça öritdiler* (AY: 389) “Böylece buyruğunu hep birlikte öğrettiler.”; *...tēp ötünelim sözlelim* (AY: 600) “...diye söyleyelim.”; *...ayu bēriñ tēp tēdi* (AY: 410) “...söyleyin dedi.”; *taşkaru ünüp üntediler kıkırıtlar* (AY: 91) “Dışarı doğru seslendiler, bağırdılar.”

In *Altun Yaruk*, the verb *ay-* is attested in 28 instances. In these examples, the following constructions are observed: *ayu bēr-*, *ayu nomla-*, *ay- körkit-*, *ayıp kılur-*, *ay- söyle-*, and *söyle- ay-*. Across different manuscripts of the *Altun Yaruk*, the verb *ay-* is seen to be used interchangeably with *ötün-*, *sözle-*, and *yarlıka-*. For instance, the sentence *yērtinçülüğ atıg savıg sözüg sözleyürler* in line 10353 of the St. Petersburg manuscript appears as *atl(i)g [sözü]g savıg ayurlar* in the Mainz collection (Kaya, 2021: 415). Similarly, line 10202 in the St. Petersburg manuscript, where the verb *yarlıka-* is used, is rendered with *ay-* in U 586 (Kaya, 2021: 411). The verb *ay-* in line 14125 of the St. Petersburg manuscript corresponds to *ötüg ötün-* in U 895 (Kaya, 2021: 533). In addition, the derivative *ayıt-* is attested in 39 instances. No instances of the noun *ayık* are attested. In the text, the most frequently used word meaning “word, utterance” is *sav*, which is attested in 162 sentences. In these examples, the forms *sav söz*, *sav sözle-*, and *sav söz sözle-* are encountered. The form *savlıg* is recorded in 3 instances, whereas the verb *savla-* is not represented in the text. The noun *söz* appears in 18 instances; in only 4 cases is it used independently, while in the remaining 14 it is attested in the compound forms *sav söz* and *söz sav*. One of

the derived forms of the word *söz*, namely *sözçi*, is attested in four instances. The verbal form *sözle-* is documented in 238 instances. Among these are collocational patterns such as *ay- sözle-*, *sözle- ay-*, *ötün- sözle-*, *sözleyü yarlıka-*, *okı- sözle-*, *sözleyü bër-*, *sakınu sözle-*, *tép sözle-*, *sözle- nomla-*, and *sözle- tè-*. In the text, the noun *yarlıg* appears 79 times, while the verb *yarlıka-* is attested on 450 occasions. The data further reveal recurrent collocational patterns such as *yarlıg yarlıka-*, *yarlıg eşid-*, *yarlıgka teg-*, and *yarlıgın tegin-*. In this text, *ötün-* occurs 261 times, *tè-* 1427 times, and *ünte-* once.

In *Altun Yaruk*, the most frequently used word meaning “word, utterance” is *sav*, while the verbs most commonly employed in the sense of “to say, to speak, to tell” are *ötün-* and *yarlıka-*. The high frequency of these verbs, which are used to describe interactions between God and humans, is closely related to the nature of the work as a religious instructional text containing the sermons of Buddhist clerics. Although *ötün-* and *yarlıka-* appear to be the most frequently used verbs in this text, the frequency of the verb *sözle-* should also be taken into consideration. The cognate word pairs used in *Altun Yaruk* are *söz/sözle-* and *yarlıg/yarlıka-*.

Clauson did not propose an etymological explanation for the origin of *sav*; he merely noted that the word was used in its broadest sense to denote a narrative (1972: 782). İsmet Zeki Eyuboğlu noted that *sav* evolved from *sab*, without providing an explanation of its origin (1988: 283). Nişanyan, on the other hand, derived *sav* from *söz* (Nişanyan Sözlük, 6 Haziran 2023).

Without proposing an etymological explanation for the origins of *söz*, Clauson argued that it was not widespread in the early period. According to him, *söz* referred to shorter utterances or a single word. He further derived the verb *sözle-* from *söz* (1972: 860, 863). Gülensoy explained *söz* as **sö-z* (2018: 810), whereas Nişanyan derived it from the root **sö-* “to say” with the suffix *+Uz* (Nişanyan Sözlük, 6 Haziran 2023). Gülensoy (2018: 809), Hasan Eren (2020: 473) and Nişanyan (Nişanyan Sözlük, 6 Haziran 2023) analyzed the verb *söyle-*, the Turkey Turkish reflex of the Old Turkic verb *sözle-*, as *söz+le-*. Stachowski, however, explained the origin of the word *söyle-* as **sö>söj* “to extinguish”, and while he was not certain about the origin of *söz*, he considered the root **sö-* (2019: 308).

Clauson associated *yarlıg* with the Mongolian root *carlık* (1972: 966), a view later adopted by Nişanyan (Nişanyan Sözlük, 6 Haziran 2023). Eyuboğlu proposed that *yarlıg* is derived from the root *yar* and has undergone a semantic change (1988: 378). Öner analyzed *yarlıg* as *yar-ı* “help” + *lg* (2004: 120, 121), whereas Ata derived it from *yar-* “to cut” + *ıl-ıg* (2006: 227). Gülensoy, in contrast, derived *yarlıg* from the structure **yā* (onomatopoeic root) + *r* “to shout, to announce, to declare” ~ [Mongolian *Car*, *caru*] + *lık* (2018: 1077). Stachowski proposed two alternative etymologies for *yarlıg*. The first is **jarlyk* ~ **jarlyg* < *jar*; the second is **jarly-yg* ~ **jaryl* < **jar-* “to split, to divide” (2019: 353).

1.3. Dîvânü Lugâti’t- Türk

ay- (33) / *ayık* (2); *sāw~saw* (10) / *sawla-* (2); *söz* (96) / *sözle-* (3); *yarlıg* (2) / *yarlıka-* (0); *ötün-* (3); *tè-* (16); *ünte-* (3)

erdi oza erenler / erdem begi bilig tåg / aydı üküş öğütler / köñlüm bolur añar sag “Eski zamanlarda ilim ve hikmetleri dağ yüceliğinde

olan erdem sahibi adamlar vardı. Öğüt verici çok şeyler söylediler. Onları yad edince gönül arınır.” (DLT: 43); *ol maña söz aydı* “*O bana söz söyledi.*” (DLT: 90); *anıñ maña ayıķı bār* “*Onun bana vaadi var.*” (DLT: 40); *awlap meni koymanız / ayıķ ayıp kaymanız / akar köztüm uş teñiz / tegre yöre kuş uçar* “*Beni avladıktan sonra, terk edip gitme. Sözünü tut. İşte gözümden deniz suyu akmakta. Ve diyor ki: Kuşlar göz yaşımın çevresinde dönüp uçuşuyor.*” (DLT: 246)

In Kashghari’s work, the verb *ay-* is attested together with its derivatives, including *ayıķ* “promise; word”, *ayıl-* “to be said; to be spoken”, *ayıt-* “to ask; among the Oghuz, to say, to speak”, *ayıtgan* “one who speaks or asks continuously”, *ayıtğ* “inquiring after someone’s well-being”, *ayıtl-* “to be asked”, *ayıtın-* “to undertake asking; to ask personally”, *ayıtış* “mutual inquiry about well-being”, *ayıtış-* “to reconcile”, and *ayıtur-* “to make someone speak”. *Ayıķ* is recorded in only 2 attestations.

bilge eren sawların algıl öğüt / edğü sawıg edlese özke siner “*Akıllıların sözlerini öğüt olarak al; çünkü insan güzel sözü yetiştirip büyütürse hikmet kalbine siner.*” (DLT: 411); *ol telim sawladı* “*O, pek çok şey söyledi.*” (DLT: 472)

In DLT *saw* occurs in 10 instances and is attested within the collocational patterns *saw tegür-*, and *saw eşit-*. The derivative *sawla-*, formed from the root *saw*, appears in 2 instances; additionally, the derived form *sawlaş-* is also found in the text.

bu söz ukuldı (DLT: 98) “*Bu söz anlaşıldı.*”; *bu söz eştildi* (DLT: 113) “*Bu söz vb. şeyler işitildi.*”; *söz kulakka çakıldı* (DLT: 271) “*Söz kulağa dolduruldu.*”; *Otagka öpkelep sūke sözlemedük* “*Çadırında akranlarına kızdı; sonra da askerle konuşmadı.*” (DLT: 438)

In the text, *söz* is attested in 96 instances, while *sözle-* occurs in 3 instances. Forms derived from the root *söz* include *sözkiye* “a small word, diminutive lexical item”, *sözkiye bër-* “to utter a word, to produce a word”, *sözle-* “to say, to speak, to tell”, *sözlen-* “to speak oneself”, *sözleş-* “to converse with someone”, *sözlet-* “to make someone speak” and *sözğri* “talkative person”.

iðimiz yarlıgı “*Rabbimizin emri*” (DLT: 42)

In DLT, the noun *yarlıg* occurs twice with the meaning “the command of God”, whereas the verb *yarlıka-* does not occur in the work.

Terken Katun kutıña tegür mindin koşug / aygıl sizin tapugçı ötnür yañı tapug “*Sultan Hatun’a benden bir kaside götür ve ‘kulunuz size yeni bir hizmetle armağan ediliyor’ de.*” (DLT: 161); *ol maña andag tēdi* “*O, bana öyle dedi.*” (DLT: 456); *ol meni ündedi* “*O, seslenerek beni çağırdı.*” (DLT: 122)

The verb *ötnün-* is recorded in 3 instances, *tē-* appears in 16 contexts, and *ünde-* is encountered on 3 occasions.

In light of the data outlined above, *Dîvânü Lugâti’t-Türk* emerges as the work in which cognate pairs conveying the meanings of “word, utterance” and “to say, to speak, to tell” are most extensively represented. The text includes the cognate pairs *ay-/ayıķ*, *saw/sawla-*, and *söz/sözle-*. From the perspective of linguistic memory, the pairs *saw/sawla-* and *söz/sözle-* reflect a shared mode of conceptualization, whereas *ay-/ayıķ* display a pattern that diverges from the others.

Clauson does not provide an explicit explanation regarding the root of the verb *ay-*. He stated that the word *ayık* is derived from the root *ay-*. He also mentioned that the word *ayıg*, which is used with the same meaning as *ayık*, also exists. According to Clauson, it is not easy to distinguish between these two words that have the same meaning (1972: 270). Jens Wilkens, however, described the word *ayık* as “probably a misinterpretation in every case” (2021: 89). Clauson derived the verb *savla-* from *sav* (1972: 789). Gülensoy explained the verb *savla-* as *sav+la-* (2018: 742).

2. Evaluation

The etymological approaches above contain some differences regarding the origins of the words. However, researchers agree that the verb derivatives meaning “to say, to speak, to tell” (*savla-*, *sözle-*, *yarlıka-*) are derived from *sav*, *söz*, and *yarlıg*; and that *ayık*, meaning “word”, is derived from the verb *ay-* meaning “to tell”.

The verb *sözle-*, which corresponds to the Turkey Turkish form *söyle-*, is derived from the root *söz* in Old Turkic. From this perspective, *söz* is conceptually prior, whereas the meaning “to speak, to say” emerges only as a derivate of it. The same linguistic logic is observed in the pairs *saw/sawla-* and *yarlıg/yarlıka-*. By contrast, the situation is reversed in another cognate pair attested in the same period and within a comparable semantic domain. In the case of *ay-/ayık*, linguistic memory gives conceptual priority to the meaning “to say”, from which the meaning “word” subsequently emerges. At first glance, the root-sharing word pair *ay-/ayık* appears to be the product of a mode of conceptualization distinct from that underlying the other cognate pairs.

Considering the usage in Old Turkic, it can be seen that *sab*, *sav*, and *söz* are common noun usages, while *tê-* and *ay-* are common verb usages. Another indication that the verb *sözle-* was not yet sufficiently widespread in Old Turkic is the use of the noun *söz* alongside the verb *ay-* (*söz ay-*) instead of *sözle-*. In Kashgari's work, the forms *söz ay-*, *söz ayıl-*, *söz ayın-*, and *söz aytur-* are encountered. Therefore, in Old Turkic, the common noun and verb forms of “word” and “to speak” are not cognates.

In the written language of Turkey Turkish, the verb *ay-* and the words derived from it have fallen out of use. Instead, the pair *söz/söyle-* has become the dominant form. The replacement of *ay-* by *söyle-* in the course of time is significant, as it reflects a particular conceptual preference. This preference indicates that, in the linguistic memory of the Turkish people, the meaning “word” is conceptually prior to the meaning “to say”. However, this should not be interpreted as implying that the meaning “to say” can only be derived from the meaning “word”. As illustrated by *ay-*, *de-*, and *konuş-*, the meaning “to say” does not necessarily originate from a root denoting the meaning “word”. Indeed, the verbs *de-* and *konuş-* do not have root forms meaning “word”. The point to be emphasized is that, whenever the words expressing the meanings “to say” and “word” are cognates in Turkish, the root denotes the meaning “word”.

An examination of the examples of *ayık* shows that the word carries the meaning “promise” directly and that its meaning cannot be extended to “word.” Therefore, the *ay-/ayık* word pair does not contradict linguistic memory. Moreover, in Turkey Turkish, the meaning “promise” is also expressed by the word *söz*. In *Güncel Türkçe*

Sözlük, the fifth meaning of the word is defined as “a firm commitment to carry out an action.”

Wilkens offers an interpretation of the word *ayık* as “possibly misinterpreted in all cases” (2021: 89). The fact that the word appears only twice in the examined work, and that these occurrences are not outside of DLT, initially seems to support Wilkens’ reservations. Although the formal structure of *ayık* may not, at first glance appear compatible with Turkish linguistic memory, the extremely limited number of attestations raises a methodological concern. In both examples in DLT, it is clear that the word does not have any meaning other than “promise.” The likelihood of confusion with another word is low. Therefore, we should at least consider that *ayık* exists, but is not in widespread use.

In the *söz/söyle-* pair, the fact that *söz* appears closer to the root does not necessarily imply that it constitutes the root itself. According to the approach articulated in the tradition of Wilhelm Bang-Kaup and systematized by Annemarie von Gabain, it is assumed that, at an earlier stage, Turkic roots could be reduced to monosyllabic forms, most typically of an open syllable (CV) structure (Gabain, 1974: 32–34). Within this framework, the **sö-* root mentioned by Sevan Nişanyan also appears plausible. Importantly, such a posited root should not be understood as directly meaning “to speak.” Indeed, this possibility does not align with the well-established fact that derivational suffixes tend to alter the meanings of lexical items, or at least are expected to do so. Accordingly, there must be some degree of semantic differentiation between the verbs **sö-* and *söyle-*. One may tentatively propose that the hypothetical root **sö-* referred to the production of “meaningful or non-meaningful sound” as a notional base. In conclusion, the important point is that it cannot be assumed that **sö-* and *söyle-* encode the same semantic content.

In our lexical items, linguistic memory lives on- one that time has not been able to erase, though it has influenced it to a certain extent. Thus, while the lexical components of various word groups have changed (e.g., *bayık söz*, *çın söz* “true word” giving way to expressions such as *doğru söz*, *hak söz*, and *haklı söz* “true word”), the underlying mode of social thought has remained unchanged. A speech community that derived the verb *söyle-* from *söz* also formed the verbs *sāwla-* and *sāwlaş-* from *sāw* “word”, *ūnte-* from *ün* “sound”, and *yarlıka-* from *yarlıg* “command”.

In the Orkhon inscriptions, the verb *ay-* occurs in 7 instances, *ötün-* in 6, *té-* in 64, and *yarlıka-* in 14 instances. The verbs *sözle-*, *sabla-*, and *ūnte-* do not occur. Based on these figures, it is evident that *té-* is the most frequently used verb in the inscriptions. Considering the historical context and the purpose of the inscriptions, the relatively higher frequency of *yarlıka-* compared to *ay-* appears to be natural.

An examination of Altun Yaruk shows that the verb *ay-* displays three distinct patterns of usage. First, it is used interchangeably with the verbs *ötün-*, *sözle-*, and *yarlıka-* across different manuscripts of the work. In parallel passages, one manuscript may employ *ay-*, while another uses a different verb in the same line. This alternation is attested in the cases of *ay-* ~ *ötün-* (AY: 533), *ay-* ~ *sözle-* (AY: 415), and *ay-* ~ *yarlıka-* (AY: 411). Second, the verb *ay-* occurs in collocational patterns alongside *ötün-* and *sözle-*, forming paired or sequential structures.

aydı sözledi ançulayu ok (AY: 449)

kamag kişiler bir yañlıg..sözlediler aydılar (AY: 611)

bu sansartakı tınl(ı)glarnıñ munçulayı ayur ötünmişlerinte (AY: 172)

Third, there are instances in which *ay-* is used in contexts where one would typically expect *ötün-* or *yarlıka-*. For example, although *yarlıka-* conventionally encodes a hierarchical relation and is frequently used in fixed expressions with *Teñri*, certain passages instead exhibit the form *Teñri ay-*, where *ay-* appears in place of *yarlıka-*.

ınçıp azrua teñriniñ aymış (AY: 449)

ulug azrua teñri aymış iliglerke (AY: 534)

It is well established—and has been noted by various scholars—that the verbs *ötün-* and *yarlıka-* encode hierarchical relations, marking, respectively, address from a subordinate to a superior and from a superior to a subordinate. This general observation is also supported by studies on Old Uyghur correspondence, which demonstrate that epistolary formulae are systematically structured according to the relationship between sender and addressee, reflecting patterns of hierarchical address (Moriyasu, 2011: 34–38). In addition, it has previously been pointed out that the verbs *ötün-* and *yarlıka-* are associated with notions of respect and deference both when used as independent verbs and in verb + converb + verb constructions (Polat, 2017: 2015). Within this framework, the verbs *ötün-* and *yarlıka-* can be understood as linguistic markers of upward and downward address, respectively, while the verb *sözle-* is used between interlocutors of equal status and does not signal any hierarchical distinction. The texts examined show that the verbs *ay-* and *tê-* are, at times, used interchangeably (across manuscript variants) with some of the verbs *yarlıka-*, *ötün-*, and *sözle-*; that they occur in collocational patterns alongside these verbs; and that they may also be used in their place. Accordingly, *ay-* and *tê-* function as general verbs of speech that can operate across all levels of hierarchy. According to Gerard Clauson, the verbs *ay-* and *tê-* are also semantically very close: “There is little difference of meaning between *ay-*, *tê-* and *sözle-*, but at any rate in the earliest period *ay-* seems to be to some extent honorific, while the others are not” (EDPT: 266). The scholar’s characterization of *ay-* as relatively honorific is in fact related to its capacity to be used in upward-directed address. Indeed, in some instances, *ay-* indicates horizontal address between interlocutors of equal status, while in others it signals upward address (from a lower-ranking speaker to a higher-ranking interlocutor), and in still others downward address (from a higher-ranking speaker to a lower-ranking interlocutor). In our view, a similar pattern is also observable for the verb *tê-*.

Horizontal Address (Equal → Equal):

Aygıl tedi; ayıgması ben ertim, Bilge Toñukuk (T 5)

In this example, Ahmet Bican Ercilasun states that the verb is used in the sense of “to say” or “to express an opinion” (2016: 642).

Ol sabıg eşidip kaganım, ben ebgerü tüşeyin tedi; katun yok bolmış erti, anı yoglatayın tedi (T 30, T 31)

In this example, the khagan is engaged in self-directed thought and speech.

Ben ança tēr men, ben Bilge Toñukuk (T 37)

In this example, Tonyukuk is engaged in self-directed thought and speech.

Yılan kendi egrisin bilmes, tewe bōynın egri tēr (DLT: 63)

it ısırmaz at tepmes tēme (DLT: 91)

The frequent use of *tē-* in proverbs can be explained by the generalizing nature of proverbial discourse. Since proverbs typically address a broad, non-specific audience, the verb *tē-* is commonly employed within a horizontal (non-hierarchical) relation between speaker and addressee.

Downward Address (Superior → Subordinate):

Sü barıñ tēdi; Altun yıřda oluruñ tēdi; sü başı İni İl Kagan, Tarduş şad barzun tēdi; Bilge Toñukuk(k)a baña aydı: Bu süğ ilt tēdi; kıyınığ köñlünçe ay, ben saña ne ayayın tēdi (T 31, T 32)

When addressing those under his command, the khagan uses the verb *tē-*; when addressing his vizier Tonyukuk, he employs *ay-* and *tē-* interchangeably. These observations suggest that the two verbs function as equivalent forms in this context.

Teñri ança tēmiş erinç (T 2)

inçıp azrua teñriniñ aymış (AY: 449)

uluğ azrua teñri aymış iliglerke (AY: 534)

Since God is the supreme being, any addressee, regardless of who is addressed, occupies a lower position in the hierarchy. Although *yarlıka-* is the verb most typically associated with *Teñri*, certain instances show that *ay-* and *tē-* can also occur alongside *Teñri*.

öd Teñri aysar (KT K 10)

In this context, the verb *ay-* should not be understood as “to say” but rather as “to command” or “to decree” (Tekin, 2020: 96).

idim ne tēr (DLT: 42)

A speaker in a superior position addresses an addressee of lower hierarchical status.

Upward Address (Subordinate → Superior):

Ol iki kiři bar erser sini, Tabgaçığ ölüртеçi tēr men; öñre Kıtanığ ölüртеçi tēr men (T 10)

The Oghuz figure *küreg*, as far as we know, does not hold any authority or official position. Nevertheless, his interaction with the vizier Tonyukuk is expressed with the verb *tē-*.

Based on the examples presented above, the hierarchy of discourse in the Old Turkic period can be identified as follows:

ötün-↑ *yarlıka*-↓ *söyle*-→ *ay*-↑↓→ *te*-↑↓→

In Turkey Turkish, the most commonly used verb meaning “to say” is *söyle-*. This constitutes a significant phenomenon whose traces can be observed in linguistic memory within the framework of contemporary perceptions of hierarchy. In present-day society, hierarchical relations are less strongly perceived than in earlier periods. People generally do not conceive of direct communication with God, nor of God addressing humans directly. There are no longer rulers believed to carry divine *kut*,

and intermediaries between God and humans have disappeared. In upward-directed address from humans to God, the verb *ötün-* is no longer used; instead, verbs such as *yalvar-* “to supplicate” and *dua et-* “to pray” are employed. Likewise, in God’s address to humans, the verb *yarlıka-* is not used in Turkey Turkish. However, through a general verb of speech that can operate across all levels of hierarchy, God may still convey his will indirectly. Speakers of Turkey Turkish have preferred the form *de-* (developed from Old Turkic *tē-*, one of the general verbs of speech) over *ay-*, which likewise functioned as a general verb of speech in Old Turkic. In this context, the use of *de-* rather than *söyle-* (which reflects horizontal address) in expressions such as *Allah yürü ya kulum demiş* “God has said: Go forth, my servant.” and *Allah’ın dediği olur* “What God says comes to pass.” is noteworthy. While *de-* functions as a general verb applicable across all levels of status, *söyle-* does not. These usages in Turkey Turkish reflect the same conceptual framework and linguistic memory as exemplified by the expression *azrua teñrinin aymış* (Kaya, 2021: 449) in the Altun Yaruk.

The *sāw uşak* “rumor” (DLT: 811) pairing attested in DLT constitutes another structure that warrants attention in the context of linguistic memory. In Turkey Turkish, there is the expression *söz/lafaramızda*, which conveys the meaning “let this remain between us; others should not know or hear of it”. How do the *söz* “conversations” between two adult individuals become known to others? One of the idiomatic expressions in contemporary use, *çocuktan al haberi* “Out of the mouths of babes (comes truth).” refers to a situation in which a family issue or something kept secret by the family is inadvertently revealed through a child’s casual remark. In DLT, the word *uşak* is interpreted as “young”, while *uşaklık* is understood as “childhood”. The word *uşak* not only carries the sense of “young” but also refers to the act of “to repeat what someone said (to others)”, that is, relaying information to others who should not know it. *Uşakla-* means “to spread gossip”, *uşak söz* and *sāw uşak* mean “gossip”. Thus, linguistic memory indicates that the person relaying the spoken matter could be a child.

Conclusions

In the Old Turkic period, the cognate word pairs corresponding to the meanings “word, utterance” and “to say, to speak, to tell” appear in the forms *ay-/ayık*, *sav/savla-*, *söz/sözle-*, and *yarlıg/yarlıka-*. In the pairs *sav/savla*, *söz/sözle-* and *yarlıg/yarlıka-* linguistic memory first encoded the product—that is, the “word”—and only subsequently encoded the meaning “to say”, which emerged through the combination of words. By contrast, in the pair *ay-/ayık*, the meaning “word” appears to be derived from the meaning “to speak”. The fact that the word *ayık* occurs in a very limited number of instances—only two contexts in the texts examined—has led some scholars, such as Wilkens, to consider it a product of misreading or misinterpretation. In this respect, the pair *ay-/ayık* does not seem to result from the same process as the other word pairs discussed above. At first glance, this situation may support the view that *ayık* is indeed a misreading. For if *ayık* is a misreading, then the pair *ay-/ayık* does not exist, and only the verb *ay-* remains. In that case, the apparent contradiction between *sav/savla-*, *söz/sözle-*, *yarlıg/yarlıka-* and the pair *ay-/ayık* would disappear. However, the attestations found in the DLT clearly demonstrate that the contexts of *ayık* are indeed related to the semantic field of “word.” The crucial point here is that *ayık* is associated with the meaning “word,” but

does not correspond directly to it. Rather, its primary meaning is “promise.” Since *ayık* is not used directly in the sense of “word,” there is no contradiction with the priority relationship between “word” and “to speak.” In Turkey Turkish, the meaning “promise” has likewise been associated with the concept of *söz*. For instance, the compound verb *söz ver-* is used in the sense of “to promise.” In the *Güncel Türkçe Sözlük*, the fifth meaning of *söz* is defined as “a firm commitment to carry out an action.”

When historical texts and semantic distributions are examined, it becomes clear that, in the cognate pairs *sav/savla-*, *söz/sözle-*, and *yarlıg/yarlıka-*, Turkish linguistic memory consistently gives conceptual priority to the meaning “word”. The pair *ay-/ayık* does not constitute an exception to this pattern. Although *ayık* does not directly denote the meaning “word”, its primary meaning is “promise”. This pattern reflects not a coincidental historical development but a stable cognitive logic grounded in linguistic memory.

Abbreviations

AY	<i>Uygurca Altun Yaruk</i>
B	West Face
BK	Bilge Kağan Inscription
D	East Face
DLT	<i>Dîvânu Lugâtî 't-Türk</i>
EDPT	<i>An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish</i>
G	South Face
GTS	<i>Güncel Türkçe Sözlük</i>
K	North Face
KT	Köl Tigin Inscription
T	Tonyukuk Inscription

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