# THE RELATION OF VOWEL POINTS AND PRONUNCIATION IN THE TEXTS OF OTTOMAN TURKISH[*]

**Yavuz KARTALLIOĞLU**[**]

**Abstract:** *In the Turkish texts with Arabic script some signs, called vowel points, were used for correct spelling and better expression of vowels. Vowel points guide the researchers to read the texts correctly by partially displaying rounded and unrounded features of vowels.*

*In Old Anatolian Turkish and Ottoman Turkish texts vowel point system resembles in terms of quality to the letters corresponding with the vowels (This sentence is unclear). That is to say, if we have a letter of "waw" in a syllable or in a word then the vowel point is "damma," if we have a letter of "ye" the vowel point is "kasra," if we have a letter of "alif" the vowel point is "fatha." In some Ottoman Turkish texts "damma" sometimes can be in the letter of "ye" and "kasra" can be in the letter of "waw." This type of usage of vowel point shouldn't be perceived as incorrect spelling. In such usages the vowel points reflect the pronunciation-that is the speech- not the clichéd spelling. Vowel points must be taken into consideration when the above mentioned "ye" with "damma" and "waw" with "kasra" are used to correspond with only one vowel, for vowel points are less clichéd than letters. This system also has a guiding feature in terms of developing labial harmony.*

***Key words:*** *Ottoman Turkish, letters, vowel points, pronunciation.*

### *Osmanlı Türkçesi Metinlerinde Harf ve Söyleyiş İlişkisi*

***Özet****: Arap harfli Türkçe metinlerde doğru heceleme maksadıyla ve ünlüleri daha iyi ifade edebilmek için hareke denilen birtakım işaretler kullanılmıştır. Hareke, ünlünün düzlük-yuvarlaklık niteliğini kısmen ortaya koyarak metinlerin daha doğru okunmasında araştırıcılara yol gösterir.*

*Eski Anadolu Türkçesi ve Osmanlı Türkçesi metinlerinde hareke sistemi ünlüleri karşılayan harflerle nitelik bakımından benzeşmektedir. Yani, hece veya kelimede "vav" harfi varsa hareke "ötre", "ye" harfi varsa hareke "esre", "elif (güzel he)" harfi varsa hareke "üstün" olur. Bazı Osmanlı Türkçesi metinlerinde yer yer "ye" harfinin üzerinde "ötre", "vav" harfinin*

---

Yavuz KARTALLIOĞLU

*altında "esre" bulunmaktadır. Bu harekeleme sistemi yanlış yazılışlar olarak algılanmamalıdır. Bu kullanımlarda harekeler kalıplaşmış imlanın aksine dildeki telaffuzları, yani konuşmayı yansıtmaktadır. Yukarıda bahsedilen "ye" ile "ötre"nin, "vav" ile "esre"nin tek ünlüyü karşılayacak şekilde kullanıldığı durumlarda harekeler esas alınmalıdır. Çünkü, harekeler harflere göre daha az kalıplaşmıştır. Bu sistem aynı zamanda gelişen dudak uyumu konusunda da yol gösterici bir özelliğe sahiptir.*

***Anahtar kelimeler:*** *Osmanlı Türkçesi, harf, hareke, telaffuz.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Turkish alphabet with Arabic script[1] was used by Turks after the adaptation of Islam from the 10th century until the beginning of the 20th century. This alphabet is of vital importance in terms of area and period for Turkish Language (Ergin 1998: 3). The Turkish alphabet with Arabic script was formed through additions of some letters to the Arabic alphabet, which was based on the Phoenician writing [2] (Develi 2000: 28). The alphabets of languages such as Hebrew[3] and Arabic, based upon the Phoenician writing[4], include many consonant sounds. In early times, vowel sounds were not indicated in the Arabic language, like Syriac and Hebrew (Faulmann 2005: 97). In the Arabic alphabet, consonants are indicated more widely than vowels, resulting in some drawbacks in comparison with alphabets that include different symbols for each sound (Tulum 1991:24).

"Alif," "waw," and "ye" letters, called "madda" letters, and "ha" in the Arabic language do not reflect the rich Turkish vowel system completely. In addition to these letters in Arabic writing, some symbols called "vowel points" are used to

---

[1]   The Term "Turkish alphabet with Arabic scripts" is also called in different terms: Arabic Letters (Eren 1991: 3), Arabic alphabet (Eren 1991: 3; Korkmaz, 1991: 14; Hacıeminoğlu, 1991:21); Old alphabet based on Arabic (Tulum 1991: 27); old script (Ergin 1998: 2).

[2]   Turkish alphabet with Arabic script is formed through additions of some consonants to the Arabic alphabet. Vowel symbols widely used are not included in this alphabet. There are some special efforts in this issue. For instance, Semseddin Sami used four different types of "vaw" in writing in order to separate "u,ü,o,ö" (Sami, 2001). However, this was not a widely-accepted orthography system.

[3]   In early times, Hebrew was written through a system including only consonants. Masorets trying to compare texts and preserve the originality of holy texts, during times when Hebrew was used only in books, added points and lines which do not change the structure of words (Faulmann 2005: 80).

[4]   Phoenician alphabet emerged in 1050 BC. It consists of 20 consonants and 2 vowels. (http://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fenike_Abecesi). It is regarded as syllable writing. Only consonants are shown in writing; vowels forming syllables are not shown (Erkman-Akerson 2000: 25).

indicate vowels for correct spelling (Tulum 1991: 25). The 28 letters in the Arabic language are voiced through vowel points (Maksudoğlu 2001: 24). These symbols were designed to facilitate the reading of the Qur'an by non-Arabs (Develi 2000: 24) and used in children's books (Deny 2000: 26) and educational books. Vowel points were used to indicate short vowels in the Arabic and Persian languages. Vowel points[5] and volume weight in Turkish texts with Arabic scripts are: "fatha" ﹷ /a/, /e/; "kasra" ﹻ : /ı/, /i/; "damma" ﹹ : /u/, /ü/, /o/, /ö/ (Timurtaş 1997: 33). Ergin states that vowel points are short vowel symbols; but they are also written over long vowels which are indicated by madda letters. In his opinion, vowel points are vowel symbols that let consonants be read and enable them to shift (Ergin 1998: 13).

Vowel points were also applied during the Old Anatolian and Ottoman periods of Western Turkish Language. The application of vowel points, however, dwindled after the 16th century; but it can be observed in texts from 18th -19th centuries. In the long run, vowel points were not applied, for they decreased the pace of writing and orthography became stereotyped (Kartallıoğlu 2005: 5). Texts in the Old Anatolian Turkish language are usually vowel point-applied ones; therefore, facilitating the phonological and morphophonological studies on these texts. Texts in Ottoman Turkish language are comparatively hard to study on them. Texts with vowel points are not eligible to determine the back and front vowel harmony; however, the labial harmony can be examined on such texts. These texts include stereotypical words and particles through which vowels points are not noted. Vowel points in texts indicate largely the feature of roundness and non-roundness and also help researchers read the texts more correctly.

Vowel points help to indicate vocal features and pronunciation of the texts with or without vowel points. For instance, "Yusuf and Zeliha" by Seyyad Hamza is a good sample text without vocal points, in which Seyyad Hamza or someone else partially applied vocal points. Through such kind of spelling readers could notice the vowel in the word or particle, which is difficult in a stereotyped orthography. As a result, readers could pronounce the correct form of the word. In this work vowel points were applied completely in some words: اَنوُكِلهَ ، يَلْوَارُرْ ، ديكوُبْ (Dilçin 1946: 7, 81). However, they were applied only in particles: وِيرْدُمْ virdüm, كورِمُدُكْ görmedük (Dilçin 1946: 23, 26, 81). This method indicates phonological features of the period, which is of vital importance.

**Analysis**

Vowel points in Turkish texts with Arabic script are applied in two manners: 1. In "madda letters" and "ha" indicating vowels 2. In the letters, not indicating vowels on their own, but only with vowel points. The difference between these two applications is that the first one can also indicate vowels without vowel points. "The

---

[5]  Vowel points correspond to 8 vowels in Turkish "a, e, ı, i, u, ü, o, ö", while they correspond to only 3 vowels "æ, u, i" (Maksudoğlu 2001: 24).

Yavuz KARTALLIOĞLU

Madda letters" and "ha" together with vowel points, put forth vowels in the first feature. In the latter one, vowel point indicates the vowel by itself, urging the consonant to be pronounced. Therefore, in terms of eligibility, vowel point systems resemble *largely* with madda letters indicating vowels in Old Anatolian and Ottoman Turkish. The vowel point is "damma" if the syllable or the word includes "vaw;" it is "kasra" if the syllable or the word includes "ye." It becomes "fatha" if there is "alif (ha)." This, i.e. vowel point-letter harmony, is the main principle of the Arabic language and Turkish texts with Arabic script:

1. waw+damma: اوُجوُ ucu, اوُحوُنْدَه ucunda, اوُحوُنَه ucuna, اوُجوُ üçü, اوُسْتوُنَه üstüne, بوُلوُ yolu, اوُکوُ öŋü, بوُزوُنْ yüzüni, کوُزوُنْ gözün.

2. ye+kasra: ایسِی işi, کوْهَرِیسِنْ gevherisin, بِرْلکِی birligi, تِراشِینِی tıraşını.

3. alif (ha)+fatha: اَوْدَه evde, آوَه ava, بَتاَقْلَرْدُرْ bataḳlardur, اوُتوُرَاقْ oturaḳ, قورْقَرَاقْ ḳorḳaraḳ (Kartallıoğlu 2005).

Like the Arabic language, letters indicating vowels and vowel points do not usually coincide in Turkish language. That is to say, "madda letters" and "ha," "fatha," "kasra" and "damma" do not turn out within a character to cover different vowels. This is a conventional and stereotyped vowel point-letter system. However, there are some orthographic forms wherein the vowel point-letter system does not comply, like vowel structures such as ه ، هُ ، یَ ، ئُ ، اِو ، اَوْ that indicate a single vowel. If this is the case with a Turkish word or particle, this should be seen to readers as the warning of the author or scribe rather than a mistake. Normalizing this way of orthography without interpreting well may lead to an important phonological and morphophonological ignorance of the matter. As a matter of fact, vowel points in some Ottoman Turkish texts are observed to be contradictory to the aforementioned vowel point system. This means, in some words or particles, "damma" is put on "ye;" "kasra" is put under "waw." Moreover, in some texts, "fatha" is put on "ye." Some questions arise at this point: "in such orthographical style, should the reader read to letter or vowel point?" "Were vowel points put mistakenly?" "Is there an objective in this vowel point system?" In order to answer these questions, the following examples should be examined.

The possessive suffix of the third singular person is inscribed with "ye + kasra," "kasra", and even "waw+damma", "damma" in Ottoman Turkish texts. In these examples, spelling of *"ye+kasra"* and *"kasra"* are pronounced as /ı/,/i/ and "waw+ damma" as /u/ or /ü/. However, letter-vowel point harmony cannot be observed all the time:

ى / **+U:** طَنْبُورُنْ ṭanbūrun DN[6]-5a/22, خُضُورِيْنَه huzūruna DN-15b/10, اوُمُوزِيْنَه omuzuna DN-176b/18, يُوزِيْنِى yüzüni DN-261a/12, كُوكْسِيْنْ göğsün DN-339b/30; نُورُيْنِى nūrunı RG[7]-58b/8

While I pronounce the words in the example as *"ṭanbūrun, huzūruna, omuzuna, yüzüni, göğsün, nūrunı,"* another researcher may pronounce them as *"ṭanbūrın, huzūrına, omuzına, yüzini, göğsin, nūrını"* by normalizing the spelling through neglecting vowel points as to the periodical features.

The vowel of third singular and plural person in the perfect tense is noted with *"ye+kasra"*[8], *"kasra"*[9]*;* and sometimes *"waw+damma"* in Ottoman Turkish texts with vowel points. *"ye"* and *"damma"* can be sometimes applied in the same syllable:

 دى / **-DU:** اوُلدِيمِى vāki' oldu mı (8) DN-133a/19, اوُرْدىُ berk urdu (3) DN-201a/23, كوُرْدىُ gördü (2) DN-261a/25, بُيُورْدىُ buyurdu (26) DN-280a/30, كُوندُرْدىُ göndürdü DN-329a/18, سُوُرْدىُ sürdü (4) DN-359b/9

دِيلر / **(-dUlAr):** اُنوُتدِيلَر unutdular DN-60b/25, كوُردِيلَر gördüler DN-108b/1, قوْدِيلر ḳodular (2) DN-108b/2, بُيُوردِيلَر buyurdular (2) DN-128b/24, دوُندِيلَر döndüler DN-329a/19

While I pronounce the words in the example as *"vāki oldu mı, berk urdu, gördü, buyurdu, göndürdü, sürdü..."* another researcher may interpret them as *"vāki oldı mı, berk urdı, gördi, buyurdı, göndürdi, sürdi..."*

The deverbal noun particle, in Ottoman Turkish texts with vowel points, is noted with *"vav+damma"*[10], *"damma"*[11], *"ye+kasra"*[12] and *"kasra"*[13]. In an example, this word is noted with "damma" on "ye:"

ىُ / **{-U}:** اوُلْيِى ölüyi ŞV-14b/3

This word can also be read as "öliyi;" but it is better to keep in mind the superiority of vowel points in such writings. As mentioned above, the term "vowel point" is used for "vowel" in Arabic and Ottoman grammar (Timurtas 1997: 24).

---

[6] *Delâil-i Nübüvvet-i Muhammedî ve Şemâil-i Fütüvvet-i Ahmedî* (DN): copyright by Altı Parmak Mehmed (ö. 1623-24) and copied with vowel points in 1674 (H 1085).

[7] *Râfi'ü'l-Gubûş fî Fażâilü'l-Hubûş* (RG): copyright by Ali b. Abdurrauf İl-Habeşî in 1623 (H 1033).

[8] دِلَدى diledi (Duman, 2000: 4a); طوُرْدى ṭurdı, طوُتْدى ṭutdı (Kartallıoğlu 2005: 150).

[9] كِتِدِ gitdi, يَازْدِ yazdı, اوُرْدِ urdı (Kartallıoğlu 2005: 150).

[10] اَيْروُ aşılu, اَصِلوُ ayru (Kartallıoğlu 2005: 675).

[11] قوُقْلَرْدى ḳoḳulardı (Kartallıoğlu 2005: 675).

[12] جزىَ çizi (Kartallıoğlu 2005: 676).

[13] بَاطِسِى baṭısı (Kartallıoğlu 2005: 676).

Instead of "vowel," "vowel points" should be preferred in writing styles, where the letters and vowel points collide in terms of quality. The reason for this is that Ottoman Turkish grammar defines "vowel point" as "vowel" or "short vowel" symbols. This system gives a hint for labial harmony, and accordingly for the changing pronunciation. In such applications, vowel points reflect the pronunciations in the language, rather than stereotyped orthography.

Duman also attracted attention to this issue beforehand. According to him, Evliya Celebi detected "kasra" in the pronunciation of the word "كتوروب" (Duman 1995: 6). He also indicated both the stereotyped orthography and the changed pronunciation. The following examples by Duman show the collision of letter and vowel points: ... و تاب tāb ı tüvān, بیلِو bili, دكولدر değildür (Duman 1999a: 68). On the one hand some researchers review the usage of vowel points in some words of Turkish manuscripts as a mistake, on the other hand some claim this as a casualness. Indeed, surprising differences can be observed in manuscripts written by authors or in copies whose scribes were careless to stereotyped orthography. What turns these differences into problems is the approach of the researcher to works. In other words, the challenging issue results from the efforts to fit into informative stereotypes, obtained from past experiences (Duman 1999a: 67). For the words indicated with both letter and vowel points, vowel points should be taken into account, as they show developing forms (Duman 1999a :101).

In addition to the applications defined here, there are also examples of stereotyped orthography of the time: يُوزِينْ yüzin DN-351a/1 يُوزِینِ yüzüni DN-261a/12; قُوندى ḳondı DN-329a/1 - قُودِيلَر ḳodular (2) DN-108b/2. Duman states that the first examples indicate the stereotyped orthography; the latter ones indicate the developing forms. It is very natural to see binary forms and even various forms in texts which were written in a period when there were not certain orthography and standard pronunciations, and it is highly possible for these various forms to occur in the same text. (Duman 1999b: 57). In order to highlight the orthographic styles in the latter examples, it is urgent they be used in spoken language. Indeed, the examples which have vowel point-letter inconsistency emerged from the efforts to reflect the features of spoken language, thus these occurred as a result of intentional or unconscious negligence to the stereotyped orthography.

**CONCLUSION**

In texts with Arabic scripts, vowel points should be taken into account in cases where "ye" and "damma;" "waw" and "kasra" and "ye" and "kasra" clash. To consider that this usage of vowel points is wrong implies that some forms hidden by orthography cannot be noticed. In spite of differences in spelling vowels, even in the same line, *orthography based on letters* turns into a form that does not reflect the changing forms. The application of vowel points declined in Ottoman Turkish texts; however it should be taken into account that vowel points are not as stereotyped as letters and also reflect the pronunciation and changing forms well.

## References

DENY, Jean (1941), ***Türk Dili Grameri (Osmanlı Lehçesi).*** Çev. Elöve, Ali Ulvi, İstanbul: Maarif Vekâleti Yay.

DEVELI, Hayati (1998), ***XVIII. Yüzyıl İstanbul'a Dair Risale-i Garibe***. İstanbul: Kitabevi.

DILÇIN, Dehri (1946), ***Yusuf ve Zeliha***. İstanbul: Türk Dil Kurumu.

DUMAN, Musa (1999a), "Klasik Osmanlı Türkçesinde i/e Meselesine Dair". **İlmî Araştırmalar**, 7, İstanbul, 65-103.

DUMAN, Musa (1999b), "Bazı Çeviri Yazılı Metinlerde Çok Şekilli Kelimelerin Değerlendirilmesi", ***Uluslar Arası Sözlük Bilimi Sempozyumu 20-21 Mayıs***, Bildiriler, düzenleyen: DAÜ Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, Gazimağusa.

DUMAN, Musa (2000), ***Vasiyyet-name***. İstanbul: R Yayınları.

EREN, Hasan (1991), "Dilde Birlik, Yazıda Birlik", ***Dil Ve Alfabe Üzerine Görüşler***. Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Dil Ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu Yayınları. 3-10.

ERGİN, Muharrem (1998), ***Osmanlıca Dersleri***. İstanbul: Boğaziçi Yayınları, 20. Baskı.

ERKMAN-AKERSON, Fatma (2000), ***Türkçe Örneklerle Dile Genel Bir Bakış***. İstanbul: Multilingual.

FAULMANN, Carl (2005), ***Yazı Kitabı, Tüm Yerkürenin, Tüm Zamanların, Yazı Göstergeleri ve Alfabeleri***. Çev. Itır Ada, İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları.

HACIEMİNOĞLU, Necmettin (1991), "Türk Dili İçin Arap Alfabesinin Yetersizliği", ***Dil Ve Alfabe Üzerine Görüşler***. Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Dil Ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu Yayınları. 21-22.

KARTALLIOĞLU, Yavuz (2005), Klasik Osmanlı Türkçesinde Eklerin Ses Düzeni (16., 17. ve 18. Yüzyıllar), Gazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü (yayımlanmamış doktora tezi).

KORKMAZ, Zeynep (1991), "Türk Dili ve Arap Alfabesi", ***Dil Ve Alfabe Üzerine Görüşler***. Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Dil Ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu Yayınları. 11-20.

MAKSUDOĞLU, Mehmet (2001), ***Arapça Dilbilgisi***. İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 9.

SAMİ, Şemseddin (2001), ***Kâmûs-ı Türkî***. İstanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 10.

TİMURTAŞ, Faruk, K. (1997), ***Osmanlı Türkçesi Grameri-III***, İstanbul: Alfa Basın Yayım Dağıtım, 8.

TULUM, Mertol (1991), "Alfabe ve Eski Alfabemiz Üzerine", ***Dil Ve Alfabe Üzerine Görüşler***. Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Dil Ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu Yayınları. 23-28.

Wikipedia, Fenike Abecesi. **http://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fenike_Abecesi**