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Legume Crops in Turkic Languages

AUTHORS: Aleksandar MIKIĆ†, Vesna PERIĆ†

PAGES: 179-182

ORIGINAL PDF URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/158722>

## AN ETYMOLOGICAL AND LEXICOLOGICAL NOTE ON THE WORDS FOR SOME ANCIENT EURASIAN GRAIN LEGUME CROPS IN TURKIC LANGUAGES

Aleksandar MIKIĆ<sup>1\*</sup> Vesna PERIĆ<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Institute of Field and Vegetable Crops, Serbia

<sup>2</sup>Maize Research Institute Zemun Polje, Serbia

\*Corresponding author's email: aleksandar.mikic@ifvcns.ns.ac.rs

Received: 06.07.2011

### ABSTRACT

On their way to both Europe and Caucasus, during the 7th and 6th millennia BC, the most ancient Old World grain legume crops, such as pea (*Pisum sativum* L.), lentil (*Lens culinaris* Medik.) and faba bean (*Vicia faba* L.), passed through the region of modern Turkey but also spread towards the original Altaic, and then, Turkic homeland. The assumption that at least some of these crops were known to the ancestors of the modern Turkic nations is confirmed by attesting the Proto-Altaic *\*būrV*, denoting pea and its descendant the Proto-Turkic *\*burčak*, being responsible for all the words denoting pea in the majority of the modern Turkic languages and the borrowed Hungarian *borsó*. The Proto-Altaic root *\*zjābsa*, denoting lentil, gave the Proto-Turkic, *\*jasi-muk*, with the same meaning and with numerous, morphologically well-preserved descendants in modern Turkic languages.

**Key words:** Etymology, grain legumes, lexicology, Turkic languages.

### INTRODUCTION

Majority of the traditional Eurasian grain legume crops, such as pea (*Pisum sativum* L.) and lentil (*Lens culinaris* Medik.) originated in the Near Eastern centre of diversity, while faba bean (*Vicia faba* L.) originated in the central Asian centre of diversity (Zeven and Zhukovsky 1975). Grain legumes are considered one of the first domesticated plant species, perhaps even predating cereals (Ljuština and Mikić 2010). The numerous sites in Syria, such as Tell El-Kerkh, contain the earliest material remains of pea, lentil and faba bean, along with other grain legumes such as chickpea (*Cicer arietinum* L.), bitter vetch (*Vicia ervilia* (L.) Willd.) and grass pea (*Lathyrus sativus* L.), dating from 10th millennium BP (Tanno and Willcox 2006).

The region of modern Turkey was certainly among the first on the way of the distribution of these crops in all directions, as witnessed by several archaeological sites from the 7th and 6th millennia BC (Zohary and Hopf 2000). Having passed through Anatolia, grain legumes and cereals entered Europe via the Balkans (Marinova and Popova 2008) and quickly reached its central and western parts. At the same time, during 6th millennium BC, they also occupied the easternmost European regions such as Armenia (Hovsepian and Willcox 2007).

Modern Turkish language is the most famous member of the Turkic branch of the Altaic language family, extending mostly over western, northern and eastern Asia and eastern Europe as well (Figure 1). Apart from Turkic, the Altaic language family comprises four more branches, namely Mongolic, Tungusic, Korean and Japonic (Starostin 1991), with the last two initially considered language isolates with

uncertain origin (Georg et al. 1999) and still disputed by some as being true Altaic languages.

The supporters of the existence of the Altaic language family assumed that its five branches had a common ancestor referred to as Proto-Altaic, although the written records on its speakers are extremely scarce and rather late (Miller 1991). It is much more certain that all modern Turkic languages were developed from the Proto-Turkic language, with numerous attested words.

The Turkic branch has about 200 million speakers worldwide (Lewis 2009), thus being the most widely spoken of all the Turkic languages, and has five groups (Johanson 1998), namely (1) Oghuz group, comprising Turkish, Azeri and Gagauz; (2) Kypchak group, represented by Bashkir, Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Tatar; (3) Oghur group, consisting of Chuvash; (4) Siberian group, with almost extinct Shor or Chulym; (5) Uyghuric group, in which Uyghur and Uzbek are mostly used.

Due to a geographic proximity of their centres of domestication, it may be supposed that pea, lentil and faba bean were known to and cultivated by the ancestors of the modern Turks and other Turkic nations. A memory of the earliest crops, since an essential role they played in an everyday's life of the whole mankind, is often fresh enough and may easily be traced back in the words of a similar structure and meaning, despite millennia that have passed (Mikić-Vragolić et al. 2007). By this reason, this preliminary lexicological research was aimed at assessing both diversity and origin of the words denoting traditional grain legume crops such as pea, lentil and faba bean in the Turkic branch of the Altaic language family.

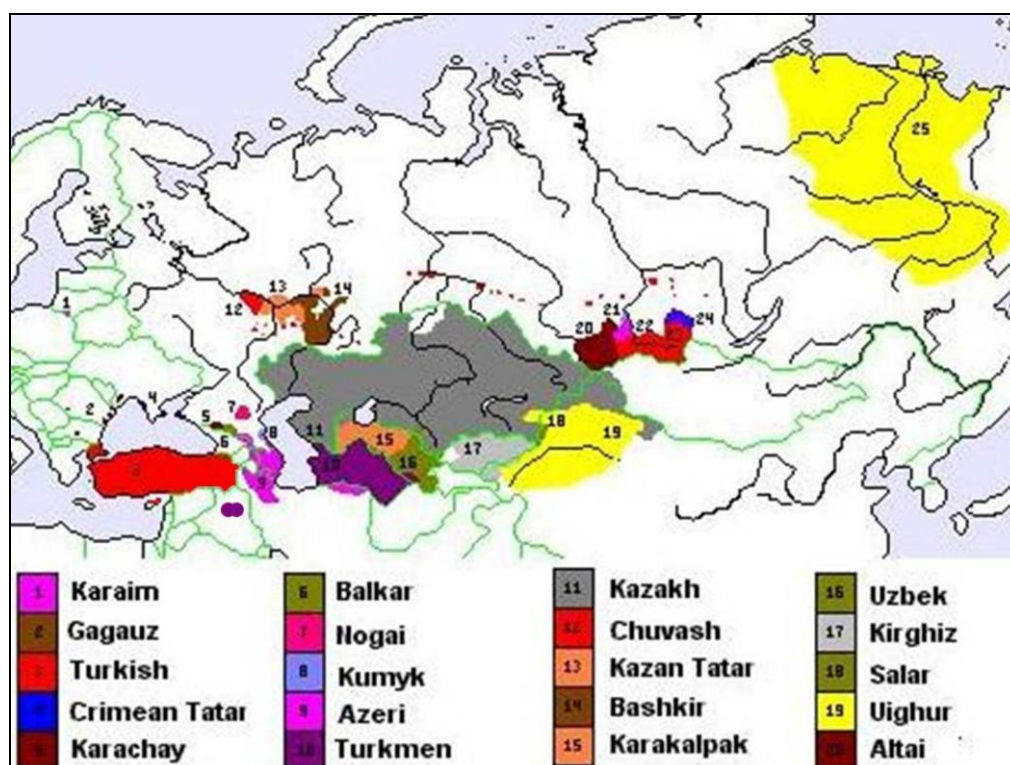


Figure 1. Geographic distribution of the Turkic languages (map kindly provided by University of Michigan)

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The origin and diversity of the words denoting those three traditional Eurasian cultivated grain legume crops in the Turkic languages was carried out in two steps.

The primary one was to collect and record all the words denoting pea, lentil and faba bean in all the available comprehensive dictionaries of all living and extinct Turkic languages.

In the second stage, a thorough exploration of all the available etymological dictionaries and other relevant language history resources related to the Turkic languages was carried out, in order to gather all the root words in the Proto-Turkic and Proto-Altaic languages that denoted these three grain legume crops.

The final stage of the research attempted to merge the results of the first two steps in an integrated and complex analysis, aimed at establishing an obvious and attested connection between the root words and their modern descendants.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Pea.** Most of the collected words denoting traditional Eurasian grain legumes in the Turkic languages refer to pea and lentil, while much less data are available for faba bean.

Most of the collected words denoting pea in contemporary Turkic languages share the same morphology, such as *burchaq* in Karachay-Balkar, Kumyk, Kyrgyz, Turkmen and Uzbek and *borchaq* in Gagauz and Tatar (Table 1). Some underwent slight modifications, such as the

mutation of the initial consonant *b* in the Chulyum *myrçaq* and the Western Yugur *pirçaq*, and the more radical changes, such as in the Chuvash *pārça* and the Uyghur *poçaq*. The words of entirely different morphology are found in Azeri, with *noxud*, and Turkish, with *bezelye*.

Table 1. Words denoting pea in some modern Turkic languages of the Altaic language family

Language	Word denoting pea	Language	Word denoting pea
Azeri	<i>noxud</i>	Kyrgyz	<i>Būrçaq</i>
Bashkir	<i>borsağ</i>	Nogai	<i>Burşaq</i>
Chulyum	<i>myrçaq</i>	Shor	<i>Mirçaq</i>
Chuvash	<i>pārça</i>	Tatar	<i>Borchaq</i>
Gagauz	<i>borchaq</i>	Turkish	<i>Bezelye</i>
Karachay-Balkar	<i>burchaq</i>	Turkmen	<i>Burçaq</i>
Karaim	<i>burchax</i>	Tuvan	<i>čoçak-taraa</i>
Karakalpak	<i>burşaq</i>	Uyghur	<i>Poçaq</i>
Kazakh	<i>noqat</i> ; <i>burşaq</i>	Uzbek	<i>Burçaq</i>
Kumyk	<i>burchaq</i>	Western Yugur	<i>Pirçaq</i>

The origin of the majority of the words denoting pea in modern Turkic languages is one of the two attested Proto-Altaic root words related to grain legume crops, *\*būkrV*, denoting pea, nut and cone (Starostin et al. 2003). One of its direct derivatives is the Proto-Turkic *\*burčak*, denoting both pea and bean. It further evolved first in the Old Turkic *burčaq* and then into the Middle Turkic *burčaq* and became an ultimate origin of the words denoting pea in the most of the modern Turkic languages (Starostin et al. 2003). In Turkish, however, the original meaning shifted from pea to bitter vetch and became *burçak*, while the borrowing of the

Italian *pisello* became the new word denoting pea, *bezelye* (Nişanyan 2002). Due to the geographic proximity in their early history, the Turkic word denoting pea was borrowed by some Uralic languages, such as Hungarian, with *borsó* (Gombocz 1912), and certain Kartvelian languages, such as Laz, with *parzuli* (Mikić 2009).

**Lentil.** The words denoting lentil in the modern Turkic languages share another morphological similarity, witnessed by the Bashkir *jasmyq*, the Kyrgyz *žasimiq*, the Salar *jasmux* or the Turkish *yasmık* (Table 2). There is an alternative word denoting lentil, present in some Turkic languages, such as Azeri, with *mərcimək*, and Turkish, with *mercimek*, as well as in Crimean Tatar where the initial consonant *m* mutated, thus becoming *bercimek*.

**Table 2.** Words denoting lentil in some modern Turkic languages of the Altaic language family

Language	Word denoting lentil
Azeri	<i>mərcimək</i>
Bashkir	<i>jasmyq</i>
Chuvash	<i>jasmak</i>
Crimean Tatar	<i>bercimek</i>
Gagauz	<i>mercimek</i>
Kazakh	<i>jasimiq</i>
Kyrgyz	<i>žasimiq</i>
Salar	<i>jasmux</i>
Tatar	<i>jasmyq</i>
Turkish	<i>mercimek; yasmık</i>
Turkmen	<i>jasmıq</i>
Uyghur	<i>jesimuq</i>
Uzbek	<i>jasmıq</i>

Most of the modern Turkic languages derived their word denoting lentil from the second of the two attested Proto-Altaic roots related to grain legumes, *\*zǝǝbsa*, denoting both lentil and pea (Starostin et al. 2003). This subsequently gave the word denoting lentil in the Proto-Turkic, *\*jasi-muk*, the Old Turkic, *jasimuq*, and the Middle Turkic, *jasmuq* (Starostin et al. 2003). The Turkic word denoting lentil was borrowed by the Uralic Udmurt language, as *jasnyk* and keeping its original meaning. The origin of another words denoting lentil in some modern Turkic languages, such as Azeri and Turkish, is Persian, where *marcumak* had the same meaning (Nişanyan 2002).

**Other grain legumes.** Collecting the words denoting other traditional Eurasian grain legume crops provided significantly less numerous results in comparison to pea and lentil.

The words denoting chickpea were attested in Azeri, with *nokhud*, and Turkish, with *nohut*. Both of them are borrowings of the Persian *nuxūd*, denoting the same and similarly borrowed into the neighbouring Indo-European

languages such as the Romance language Romanian, with *năut*, and the Slavic languages Russian, with *nut*, and Serbian, with *naut* (Mikić et al. 2008).

The names for vetchlings (*Lathyrus* spp.) were found in Azeri, as *güllüca*, and Turkish, as *mürdümük*. The latter shares the same origin as its word for lentil, that is, the Persian word with the same meaning and with an alternative spelling, *mardumak* (Nişanyan 2002).

The Turkish word denoting all vetches (*Vicia* spp.) except bitter vetch, *fiğ*, is a borrowing of the Greek *vikí(on)* and the Latin *vicia* (Nişanyan 2002). From Turkish, it was imported to the neighbouring Slavic language Bulgarian, as *fiy*.

The words denoting faba bean in Azeri and Turkish are rather similar to each other, *bağla* in the former and *bakla* in the latter, and both originating from the Arabic word *baql*, denoting both faba bean, pod and edible legumes in a broad sense (Nişanyan 2002).

## CONCLUSIONS

The wealth of the words that denote pea and lentil and other traditional Eurasian grain legume crops in the Turkic languages, preserved to such extent despite the millennia past, may be considered remarkable. The presented results clearly connect the modern forms for these crops with their ancient resources, ancient Proto-Turkic and Proto-Altaic roots, with an almost same meaning.

Although rather preliminary and highly incomplete, this research offers another precious testimony of how traditional grain legumes, such as pea and lentil, played an important role in the everyday life of the ancestors of all modern Turkic nations. It also invites plant scientists, crop historians and linguists to establish a joint collaboration that could answer important issues from the dawn of the mankind in the Old World.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research is a part of the projects TR-31024 of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Serbia and FP7-supported 168 SEELEGUMES within the European Union programme SEE-ERA.NET Plus.

The author cordially dedicates this paper to the speakers of all Turkic languages and hopes it will contribute at least a bit to their survival and preservation for future generations.

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