Retroflexion

The use of retroflex sounds to obtain (minimal) contrasts in the lexicon was investigated. Although a distinct retroflex place of articulation was detected in most cases, it was indeed the contrast between alveolar-dental sounds and retroflex (or retracted) sounds with the same manner of articulation that was taken as diagnostic rather than the presence of a very specific tongue shape. For some of the languages, and for some of the subsets, the contrast is probably better described as apical (or subapical) vs laminal pronunciation.

The inventory of Indo-Aryan Khowar has eight retroflex (or apical post-alveolar) consonants (plosive, affricate and fricative), contrasting on the one had with dental/alveolar and on the other with laminal post-alveolar consonants. Some examples of words in Khowar containing retroflex sounds are displayed in ‎(1).

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Khowar [khw]** | **Dental/alveolar** | **Retroflex (apical)** | **Post-alveolar (laminal)** |
| Plosive | t d | ʈ ɖ |  |
|  | tʰ | ʈʰ |  |
| Affricate | ts dz | ʈʂ ɖʐ | tɕ dʑ |
|  | tsʰ | ʈʂʰ | tɕʰ |
| Fricative |  | ʂ ʐ | ɕ ʑ |

1. Khowar [khw] (Indo-Aryan)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| a. | /ʈip/ | ‘full’ (KHW-40listAA:018) |
| b. | /ʈʂʰan/ | ‘leaf’ (KHW-40listAA:012) |
| c. | /uʂak/ | ‘cold’ (KHW-ValQuestAA:060) |

Retroflexion is a strongly areal feature, present in as many as 54 of the sample languages. Turkic is the only phylogenetic grouping in which this feature is entirely absent.

|  |  |  |
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| Feature value | # of varieties displaying it | % |
| Present | 54 | 92 |
| Absent | 5 | 8 |
| Indeterminate | 0 | 0 |