

# Lesson 2 Handout

Week 1: 7 September 2023

## Basic Vowel Harmony

Many languages (including Turkish, Finnish, and Mongolian) have **vowel harmony**, a system where vowels within the same word tend to match each other in certain features, such as roundness, height, or backness.

Manchu has two kinds of vowel harmony: Advanced Tongue Root (ATR) harmony, and Labial harmony. Today we will just discuss ATR harmony. ATR harmony means that vowels in the same word will often share the same placement of the tongue root (in an advanced +ATR or relaxed –ATR position). Manchu vowel harmony only **strictly** applies to certain derivational and inflectional affixes, and to onomatopoeia.

In Manchu, the classes of vowels are called *a* ‘yang, 阳/陽’ (also: light, back, masculine) and *e* ‘yin, 阴/陰’ (also: dark, front, feminine).

−ATR			+ATR			
<i>a</i>	[a~ɐ]	ᠠ	↔	<i>e</i>	[ə~ʏ]	ᠡ
<i>ū</i>	[u]	ᠤ	↔	<i>u</i>	[u]	ᠤ.
<i>o</i>	[ɔ]	ᠢ		<i>i</i>	[i]	ᠢ

Note that vowel harmony does not match up with the orthography: while *o* and *u* are distinguished by a dot, it is *ū* which alternates with *u* in vowel harmony.










Vowels are not the only things affected by ATR harmony in Manchu: dorsal consonants *k, g, h* alternate between velar and uvular depending on which vowel they appear before!

## The Velar and Uvular Series (*k, g, h*)

Manchu has two different sets of sounds transliterated as *k, g, h*, a set of velar sounds (like English and Mandarin) and a set of uvular sounds (pronounced further back in the mouth, like the Arabic *q*). In most cases, which set is used is predictable: *k, g, h* is velar before +ATR vowels, and uvular before –ATR vowels

ᠠ VELARS: Velar *k, g, h* appear before –ATR vowels *e, i, u*. They are pronounced in the same location as the letter *k* in English; note that *h* in these instances sounds more like Chinese pinyin *h* than typical English *h*.

The letter forms are all similar, with *g* differing from *k* with the addition of a dot (*tongki*) to the right, and *h* differing from *k* with the addition of a circle (*fuka*) to the right.










Möllendorff	Pronunciation Guide	-e	-i	-u
<i>k</i>	[k/kʰ] Like in English or Pinyin			
<i>g</i>	[g/k] Like in English or Pinyin			
<i>h</i>	[ɣ] No English or Mandarin equivalent between vowels [x] Like ch in English <b>bach</b> or Pinyin h elsewhere			

Note that the ‘tooth’ of the *e* and the loop of *u* are incorporated into the velar letters completely, and no dot is used to denote the vowels *e* and *u* after *k, g, h*.






<i>hehe</i>	<i>kulu</i>	<i>gikimbi</i>	<i>mukelu</i>	<i>ukuhu</i>
				
woman	healthy	to fill up	water onion	Chinese lantern plant

☞ **UVULARS:** Uvular *k, g, h* appear before +ATR vowels *a, o, ū*. They are pronounced in further back in the mouth than velar sounds, like Arabic *q*, or French *r*; this may sound like a ‘harsher’ version of *k, g, h* to English and Chinese speakers. Again, the three sounds are only distinguished by the presence of a dot (*tongki*) or circle (*fuka*).

Note that the letter form is different: uvular *k, g, h* have a hook at their top, and come with a ‘tooth’ already, preventing other ‘teeth’ or loops from being incorporated like they are with velar letters.









Möllendorff	Pronunciation Guide	-a	-o	-ū
<i>k</i>	[q/qʰ] English/Pinyin k, but further back			
<i>g</i>	[G/q] English/Pinyin g, but further back			
<i>h</i>	[ʁ] Like a French r between vowels [χ] Pinyin h, but further back elsewhere			

Word medially, uvular *k, g, h* appear simply as two ‘teeth’, with an additional dot for *g* and an additional loop for *h*.

<i>haha</i>	<i>koko</i>	<i>ahūlambi</i>	<i>gūlha</i>	<i>aga</i>
				
man	cluck	to act as an older brother	boot	rain

Using the dot to denote voicing (*k* to *g*) rather than vowel quality (*a* to *e*) is unambiguous because velar and uvular sounds are written differently in Manchu script — it is only the Möllendorff transliteration system which writes them the same.

- **IN CODA POSITION:** only *k* ever appears at the end of a syllable (ie. before a consonant or at the end of a word). The rules for which shape to use are a bit complicated; they may take time to master.

Before a consonant		End of a word	
After <i>ku, gu, hu, hū, e</i>	Otherwise	After <i>e</i> except after <i>te</i>	Otherwise
			
<i>ektembi</i>	<i>hūkjūn</i>	<i>okto</i>	<i>akdan</i>
			
<i>kek</i>	<i>dek</i>	<i>tek</i>	<i>fik</i>
to paw the ground	stork	drug	trust
pleased (ideo.)	furiously (ideo.)	scolding (ideo.)	lush (ideo.)

As can be seen, most words which end in *k* are ideophones (words like onomatopoeia). This will not be important until we begin to learn the grammar, but note that these are a special kind of part of speech which doesn't really exist in English.

## Letters *t* and *d*

Like *k, g, h, t* and *d* have two different forms, depending on the following vowel, but unlike *k, g, h*, they do not differ in pronunciation. The distributions of these different forms of *t* and *d* are slightly different than *k, g, h*.

The letters *t* and *d* have a 'long' form before *e* and *u*, and a 'short' form everywhere else. Like *k* and *g*, *t* and *d* are only distinguished by the presence of a right dot.

Möllendorff	Pronunciation Guide	Word Initially		Word Medially	
		before <i>e, u</i>	before <i>a, i, o, ü</i>	<i>e, u</i>	<i>a, i, o, ü</i>
<i>t</i>	[t/tʰ] English/Chinese pinyin t				
<i>d</i>	[d/t] English/Chinese pinyin d				

Only *t* exists in coda position, and it appears as loop followed by a tooth.

<i>t</i> before a consonant	<i>t</i> word finally

Here are some examples of *t* and *d* in context.

<i>ūlet</i>	<i>tuttu</i>	<i>dodombi</i>	<i>kūtkā</i>	<i>tutaha</i>	<i>tob</i>
Oirat	like that	to squat	Tibetan black bear cub	having lagged behind	upright, just

## The letter *n*

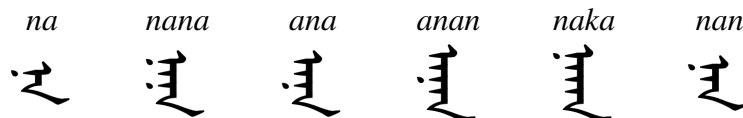
The letter *n* in Manchu is represented by a tooth, like the letters *a* and *e*, but appears with a dot to the left when it appears before vowels.

Möllendorff	Pronunciation Guide	Initial	Medial		Final
			before vowel	before cons.	
<i>n</i>	[n] English/Chinese pinyin n				

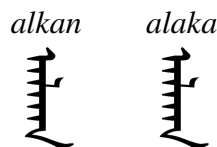
This means that *n* before a consonant, or word finally, is indistinguishable from an *a*.

<i>a</i>	<i>an</i>	<i>aka</i>	<i>akan</i>	<i>akaka</i>	<i>akakan</i>

Luckily, because of Manchu's phonotactics (the rules which govern where sounds can go relative to one another) and because *n* appears with a dot before vowels, there is no ambiguity in the writing system, with one exception.

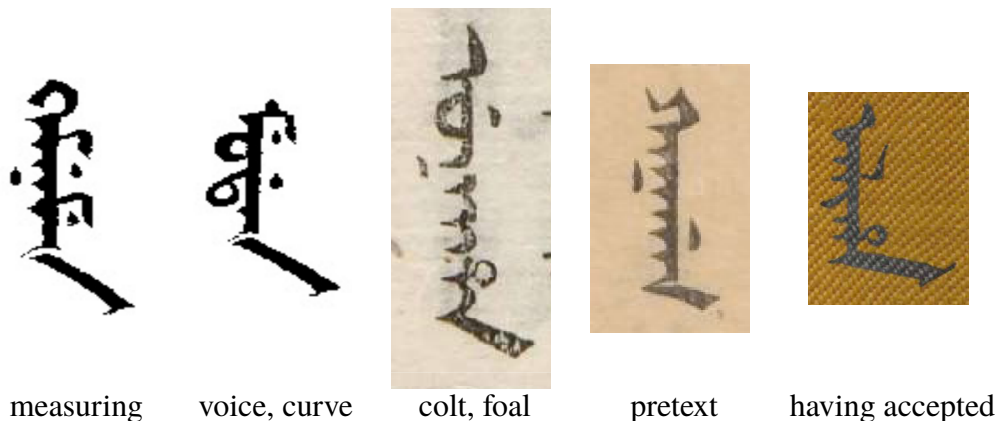


What is the ambiguity? Final *-kan* and final *aka* are indistinguishable — both appear as three teeth and a final stroke. *-kan* is read by reading the teeth as { 2 teeth, 1 tooth, final stroke }, while *-aka* is read by reading the teeth as { 1 teeth, 2 tooth, final stroke }. In other cases, *k* or *n* will be marked in a way to make it unambiguous.



## Practice


Please transcribe the following words into the Möllendorff romanization.



Practice writing the following words in Manchu script.

- (1)
  - a. *uktu* ‘plaintive, sad’
  - b. *elkindumbi* ‘(of a group) to wave (a hand), to brandish (a sword)’
  - c. *iktan* ‘accumulation, piling up’
  - d. *oktolombi* ‘to treat with medicine’
  - e. *pekte pakta* ‘perplexed, dumfounded’

## Extras

 **PALATALIZATION:** An additional note on pronunciation: before *i*, the consonants *k, g, h, n* are pronounced palatally, with center of the tongue on the roof of the mouth (further in front than the velar sound). This difference is subtle and is not contrastive, so it is not as important to emphasize, but it is part of Manchu phonology.

han  
𠂔

han  
定

A khan (of a 'lesser' nation, e.g. Mongol or Turkic khans, the Russian Czar)