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**Titel:** Consonant assimilations: A possible parameter for the classification of Turkish d...

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**Ort:** Wiesbaden

**Jahr:** 2005

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## **Consonant assimilations: A possible parameter for the classification of Turkish dialects**

**Bernt Brendemoen**

Brendemoen, Bernt 2005. Consonant assimilation: A possible parameter for the classification of Turkish dialects. *Turkic Languages* 9, 173-187.

This article poses the question whether preservation of the consonant group *-rl-* or assimilation to *-ll-* can be used as a parameter for classifying Anatolian and Balkan Turkish dialects. The material used is made up of different dialect texts, and also dialect studies from different parts of Anatolia and the Balkans. Aorist (and in some cases, also present tense) 3rd person plural forms constitute the main bulk of the material. The survey is complicated by the weak pronunciation of *-r* in syllable final position over a large area close to the Aegean. In Anatolia, the consonant group *-rl-* is preserved in the Eastern Black Sea dialects (i.e. the dialects in Trabzon except for the westernmost part, and the western parts of Rize) and in the area of Erzurum adjacent to Rize. In addition, preservation seems to be the main rule in an area roughly following the Euphrates (Malatya, parts of Elazığ, Diyarbakır, and Adana), and also in parts of Sivas. Preservation of *-rl-*, which may be interpreted as an archaism, is also found in the most archaic Turkish Balkan dialects, i.e. the West Rumelian dialects. That assimilation of this consonant group is recent in Anatolia and the Balkans also becomes obvious from the fact that it is not found in older (Ottoman or transcription) texts.

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### **Introduction**

Most of the parameters which are generally used in descriptions of Anatolian dialects were suggested by Kowalski, the father of modern Turkish dialectology, (1929-30) and later (1934) used by him not actually for a classification, since he probably thought too little material was available to attempt one, but for a survey of variable features in the Balkan and Anatolian dialects that had been studied by then. These parameters were later developed and discussed by Kral in his unpublished thesis from 1981, which was made known to the world by Boeschoten (1991), who also discusses briefly the significance and usefulness of the parameters. It is basically these parameters which that are used by Karahan in her important attempt to classify the Anatolian dialects (1996). In the present article I am going to take up one possible parameter which in fact was suggested earlier, but which has not been followed

up by any scholars because of certain difficulties it implies, i.e. the parameter of consonant assimilations.

Various kinds of consonant assimilations are found in most languages in the Turkic family to a greater or lesser extent. The most common one is systematic voicedness assimilations at morpheme boundaries, the so-called consonant harmony, but assimilations (and also dissimilations) as to *manner* of articulation are also found, such as the systematic alternations shown by the plural suffix {-LAr} in Kazakh, where the plural of *at* ‘horse’ is *at-tar*, while the plural of *köl* ‘lake’ is *kölder*, cf. the plural of *taw* ‘mountain’ in Bashkir, which is *taw-đar* and of *nom* ‘book’ in Tuvan, which is *nomnar* (see Johanson 1998: 34). What I am especially going to concentrate on here, is the regressive assimilation of *-r+l-* to *-ll-* particularly at morpheme boundaries, which is very well illustrated by the different shapes of third person plural aorist forms, as the aorist stem invariably ends in *-r* and the plural suffix {-lAr} starts with an *-l*. For example, the aorist stem of the verbal root *yap-* ‘to make’ is *yapar*; 3rd person plural is *yaparlar* without assimilation, but with assimilation *yapallar*. In the same way, in the present tense most Turkish dialects have a suffix in *-yor*, so that the stem signifying ‘is doing’ is *yapıyor*; 3rd person plural *yapıyorlar* without assimilation, but with assimilation *yapıyorllar*. However, since present tense formations without an *-r-* are very old and may partly represent an archaism, present tense forms are less suitable as evidence for assimilation or non-assimilation than aorist forms are. Similar assimilations occur frequently within polysyllabic stems, too, e.g. Standard Turkish and some dialects have *tarla*, while other dialects have *talla* ‘field’. That the assimilation *-rl-* to *-ll-* is old at least in some Turkic languages is obvious from the name of the Turkic tribe *Qarluq* cited as *Xallux* by the Persian historian Gardīzī (middle of 11th century, Golden 1992: 198), but as we shall show, it is probably quite recent in West Anatolia.

Assimilation to a following *-l-* is not the only thing that may happen to a syllable-final *-r* in Turkish; in some areas it disappears, giving forms such as *yapa:lar*, *gide:ler*, *gidiyo:lar*, sometimes with lengthening of the preceding vowel, sometimes without. The title of this paper could in fact have been “The destiny of syllable final *-r-* before *-l-* in Turkish dialects”.

Already in 1911 the Bulgarian philologist Gadžanov, who studied the different Turkish dialects of Bulgaria, suggested that the different treatments of *-r-* in syllable-final position should be used as a parameter in Turkish dialectology (passim, especially p. 42). Although the different treatments of *-r-* were listed as possible parameters for a classification by Kowalski in his 1930 study (p. 273, 274-275), Kowalski points out in his 1934 survey (p. 2003) that most consonant assimilations occur only sporadically, and that “eine Bestimmung der Gebiete, auf denen sie auftreten, lässt sich gegenwärtig noch nicht ausführen [it is currently not yet possible to determine the areas where they occur]”. However, his wording “gegenwärtig noch nicht [currently not yet]” implies that he does not exclude that they may have a certain geographic distribution.

If we look at studies on individual dialects, we see that in most of them, examples of assimilation *-r/- > -ll- >* are mentioned, and very often these examples are 3rd person plural forms, but quite rarely does the scholar in question provide us with any information on whether the feature occurs *as a rule* or only *sporadically*. If we go through the text material the different scholars present, we very often find unassimilated forms alongside assimilated ones, which may of course very well be the case even in one and the same speaker; the frustrating point is that this variation is not mentioned or evaluated by most of the scholars. Thus, descriptions of a dialect without texts may not be trusted. Another factor that makes the matter difficult is that because of the weak articulation *-r-* has in syllable-final position, it may be difficult to decide acoustically whether it actually is there or not. Kowalski remarks about consonant assimilations that: “In den Volksdialekten treten sie schon deswegen häufiger auf, weil da die normierende Wirkung des Schriftbildes fehlt. [They occur more frequently in the spoken dialects because of the absence of the normative effect of the written language.]” (1934: 2003). In fact we may turn this statement upside down and say that because of the normative effect of the written language, a dialectologist or would-be dialectologist will tend to transcribe the forms as unassimilated, unless he or she is especially focused on consonant assimilations, which nobody seems to have been up to now.

A third complicating factor is the lack of dialect material from all areas of Turkey; if our intention is to give a survey of a linguistic phenomenon in Anatolia as a whole, there will be quite a number of blank spots on the map, but this is of course a problem that affects Anatolian dialectology in general.

Despite of all these complications impairing the transparency of the picture, I am quite certain that consonant assimilations are an important parameter, based on my Trabzon dialects. In most of the province of Trabzon, *-r/-* is usually not assimilated. However, if we go to the westernmost part of the province, which is inhabited by the so-called Çepnis, an originally nomadic group distinct from the rest of the population of Trabzon, we find examples such as *talla* for *tarla* ‘field’, *tallarmıza* (Brendemoen 2002: 2, text 138/2) and also *billäşmişlär* (133/122), *davalların* (134/3), *yelläşiyorlar* (106/42), and aorist forms such as *dellerde* (135/65), *dellerd-ona* (138/6), etc. Such forms are much more rarely found further to the east in the province of Trabzon. In fact, as I have shown (2002: 1, 226), there is an important isogloss bundle dividing the westernmost parts of Trabzon, which belong to the West Anatolian group, from those spoken to the east of this line, which constitute the Eastern Black Sea Dialect group. However, where assimilated forms are found in the districts further to the east, it is significant that these districts are mountainous areas in the southern part of the province, to which e.g. text 86 belongs, where we also find the form *deller* (86/79). In fact informants such as 86 have other Çepni features in their dialect, too, which are a product of the symbiosis and linguistic convergence between the different dialect groups in the regions close to the summer pastures.

### Survey of Anatolia

Before we proceed to the difficult task of giving a survey of the tendencies we have been able to establish in other parts of Turkey, based on the published studies available, one complicating factor we already have mentioned should be elaborated further, i.e. the weak articulation of syllable-final *-r* in quite a number of Anatolian dialects, which indeed causes systematic dropping of syllable-final *-r* in some dialects. A weak articulation of *-r* is not confined to Turkish of Turkey, but is also found in older stages of development of the Turkic languages, and must be the reason why the syllable-final *-r* has been dropped in forms used especially frequently, such as the Old Turkic copula verb *är-* which has developed into *i-* or *e-* in most languages, and intraterminal or present tense markers *durur* and *yorur*, which have developed into {-*DI-*} and *-yo-* and *-yu-* in various languages and dialects. Even in most spoken varieties of modern Standard Turkish, although under strong influence from the written language, the indefinite article *bir* usually has the form *bi* in front of consonants. (For the weak articulation of *-r* in Standard Turkish, see Bergsträßer 1918: 251.) In our Eastern Black Sea Coast dialects, syllable-final *-r* may be dropped in both Trabzon and Rize, but mostly in absolute auslaut position, especially in the copula suffix corresponding to ST {-*DXr*}. At least there is no *systematic* dropping of syllable-final *-r* in the Eastern Black Sea coast dialects. In East Anatolian dialects, too, dropping of syllable-final *-r* is quite rare, at least in inlaut position, but is found e.g. in Azerbaijani dialects (e.g. Terekeme dialects) in Kars, see Gemalmaz 1978 I: 201, Ercilasun 1983: 174.

Dropping of syllable-final *-r* as a *systematic* feature, however, has its nucleus in western Anatolia, i.e. in the provinces of İzmir, Manisa, Uşak, and Aydın. Sometimes the vowel preceding the *-r* is lengthened as a compensatory device, sometimes it is not, giving aorist forms such as *gideler* and *gide:ler*, *yapalar* and *yapa:lar*, besides, of course, auslaut forms such as *va* (ST *var*), plural suffix {-*IA*} (and not {-*IAr*}), etc. The resulting homonymy with optative forms for verbal stems that get a low aorist vowel does not seem to have prevented the dropping, probably because the optative 3rd person forms are marginal, almost obsolete, in most modern dialects. In her study of the Southwest Anatolian dialects, Korkmaz (1956) has shown that dropping of *-r* is less frequent going south to the southern parts of Denizli, and Muğla. She further states that dropping of *-r* is found also in the Kastamonu region and in some Eastern and Northeastern dialects, especially in the copula 3rd person form {-*DX*} and not {-*DXr*}, plural {-*IA*} and not {-*IAr*} and other auslaut positions; more rarely in inlaut position (1956: 79). For the Kastamonu region her claim is correct if we compare Ergi's little study (1991) of the dialect of Tosya in the province of Kastamonu (*alula, gelüle* p. 5). It should be added that according to my own observations, dropping of *-r* is common also to the north of İzmir all the way up to Edremit, perhaps also further north. Besides, Gülensoy (1988: 65, 105) has established the same fact for Kütahya.

A weak articulation of *-r-* is perhaps a phonetical prerequisite for both dropping it and for assimilating it to a following *-l-*. However, it should be stressed that because consonant length is a phonemic feature in practically all Turkish dialects, it would be difficult to imagine that any of the forms with a simple consonant with or without lengthening of the preceding vowel (i.e. *gideler* and *gide:ler*) could be explained as a secondary simplification of an assimilated form *gideller*. Nevertheless, judging from Korkmaz' material, there seem to be dialects in western Anatolia where forms such as *gideller* and *gide:ler* exist side by side even in one and the same speaker e.g. in the dialects in İzmir and east and south of İzmir (see Korkmaz 1956: 75).

If we disregard the area in West Anatolia where syllable-final *-r* is dropped systematically and start with an area we know especially well, i.e. the Eastern Black Sea coast, we notice that assimilation of *-rl-* > *-ll-* is found frequently, as we pointed out above, in the westernmost parts of Trabzon. This continues in the areas going westwards along the Black Sea coast. The preservation of the consonant group *-rl-*, which we find in most parts of Trabzon, however, continues into the province of Rize, which has been studied by Günay (1978). Further eastwards along the coast we mainly have to do with an East Anatolian dialect with a Kartvelian sub- or adstrate, as languages such as Laz and also Georgian are spoken in the area. Since Turkization of the whole eastern Black Sea coast seems to have taken place mostly from the inland and not from the sea, it is probable that the regions east of Rize have been Turkized relatively recently through the Çoruh and Tortum valleys, which constitute a funnel from the Erzurum area, where consonant assimilations of this kind occur frequently. Thus it is no surprise that we find assimilated forms in the easternmost parts of Rize, e.g. *kuṛal'l'aṛ*, *ḡidelleṛ* (Günay 1978: 130-131). In the dialects south of the Pontic mountain ridge, which belong to the East Anatolian dialect group, assimilation of *-rl-* > *-ll-* is a rule. Most fortunately Gemalmaz, the scholar who has prepared an unsurpassed study on the dialects of Erzurum, explicitly states that there is an isogloss running through the province of Erzurum constituted by the different realizations of the sequence *-rl-*. As illustrated on Gemalmaz' map no. 8 (1978, I: 210-211), the northern part of Erzurum has present and aorist 3rd person plural forms without assimilation, while those in the south have assimilation. It is instructive that the unassimilated forms are found in areas adjacent to (the western and central parts of) Rize, where there is no assimilation either, as we pointed out. A similar picture is found in Gümüşhane, the province immediately to the south of Trabzon, although the statements giving by San (1990) as usual are quite confusing. It seems, however, that assimilation of *-rl-* is found especially frequently in areas bordering the western parts of Trabzon, i.e. Kürtün (San 234, 260), where also a lot of other features are shared with the Çepni dialects of Trabzon. It also seems that the easternmost parts of Gümüşhane have the same feature, which would then be a continuation from Erzurum.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Although San's claim (p. 153) that assimilation is especially frequent in aorist and present tense forms in the regions of Akdağ and Aydoğdu in Kelkit in the southern part of the

Whether the lack of assimilation in the remaining parts of Bayburt should be interpreted as a continuation of the situation in the Eastern Black Sea dialects or of the ambiguous situation in the Central Anatolian dialects, to which we shall return in a moment, is unclear. In East Anatolian dialects, however, assimilation is a rule. The East Anatolian dialects that have been subject to the most thorough research, Erzurum and Kars (Ercilasun 1983: 127), show this clearly (except for the northernmost part of Erzurum close to Rize which we mentioned). Assimilation is most probably typical for East Anatolian dialects further to the south, too, although lack of proper material leaves us somewhat uncertain.<sup>2</sup> At least in Erzincan, which is south of Bayburt and west of Erzurum, (for dropping of *-r-*, see Sağır 1995: 104-105), assimilation of *-rl-* to *-ll-* is very frequent, at least in the aorist 3rd person plural forms (ibid. 184), which are listed only with assimilated forms in the work by Sağır (1995: 117), e.g. *édeller*, *ğırallar* etc. (However, in the present tense conjugation, assimilated forms such as *vèrèyeller*, *yapèyèller* are, for unknown reasons, mentioned as characteristic only of the region of Kemah, while the other regions have unassimilated forms.) Assimilation is also the rule in the continuation of the East Anatolian dialects southwards into Iraq (see Bayatlı 1996: 366), and also the continuation of East Anatolian dialects into Iran and Azerbaijan. In fact, in the Azeri of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which has a rather conservative orthography, the assimilation *-rl-* > *-ll-* is not shown in writing, but is a rule in practically all kinds of spoken language (see Ergin 1971: 128). (Except for some dialects, especially in Iran, which have a wider range of assimilation possibilities such as *addar*, *koyunnar*, *karrar*, corresponding to ST *karlar*, etc., see Dehghani 2000: 47). The same kind of assimilation is a rule also in other Turkic languages of Iran, such as Khalaj (see Doerfer 1988: 164, 200),<sup>3</sup> Kashkay, and Khorasan Turkish.

If we return to Anatolia, or more precisely to the part of Western Anatolia south of the area which constitutes the nucleus for the dropping of *-r* in syllable-final position, we find non-assimilated forms such as *bişirlä*: and *içärlä* alongside forms with *-r* being dropped such as *verilä* in one and the same text from the province of Muğla. (Korkmaz 1956: 100). From Alanya on the southern coast Demir presents some very trustworthy texts in his work on postverbal constructions in the dialect of his village (1993). In this dialect, assimilation of *-rl-* to *-ll-* is a rule, as in the east, as

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province is not developed further in his morphological survey, it is most probably true, as this region is adjacent to Erzincan.

<sup>2</sup> For Urfa, see Edip 1991: 47 (*satallar*, with the confusing footnote that “(r - l) benzeşmesiyle *satallar* şeklinde de kullanılır”), 48 (*geliller*). For Gaziantep, see Aksoy 1945: 55 (“Geniş zaman kipinin üçüncü çoğul şahsındaki “ler” takısı kendisinden evvelki “r”yi çok defa “l”ye çevirir: *gideller*, *geliller*.” etc. It is quite unclear what “çok defa” actually signifies.) For Bitlis, cf. the following forms in the texts given by Zülfikar 1978: *yatelle* p. 311, *gelülle*, *bağelle* p. 312, *annedülle* p. 314, etc. For Mardin, no research seems to have been conducted.

<sup>3</sup> For the dropping of final *-r* in the aorist see Doerfer 1988: 153s.



becomes obvious from forms such as *döwällär* 157/58, *gızıyörüllär* 157/81, and *del-lärmiş* 163, 5/2. The same seems to be the case with the Turkish dialect of Cyprus (see Saracoğlu 1992: 24).

In the Central Anatolian dialects further north, assimilated and non-assimilated forms are often found side by side. There is reason to believe, however, that assimilation *-r/- > -ll-* is quite common also in parts of Central Anatolia which are more or less blank on the dialect map. Especially in the western parts, such as Nevşehir, assimilations are quite frequent, as is also dropping of *-r*, giving forms like *çekeller*, *ekeller*, and *a:nadırlar* side by side (Korkmaz 1963: 128, 174). A similar picture with frequent assimilations is found also in the western parts of Konya (see Gültekin 1994: 39). We then go northwards to the Middle Black Sea coast, where Korkmaz, as mentioned above, has found numerous attestations of dropping of syllable-final *-r* in the dialect of Kastamonu. To the west of Kastamonu, this feature is found alongside assimilation of *-r/-* to *-ll-*. In Eren's 1997 study of the Western Black Sea coast dialects (Zonguldak-Bartın-Karabük), 3rd person plural aorist forms such as *dut-a:-la:* ~ *dut-al-la*, *gid-e:-le:* ~ *gid-el-le:*, *al-u:-la:* ~ *al-ul-la:* are listed as parallel forms without any comments on their geographic distribution (p. 68).<sup>4</sup> In the eastern part of the Middle Black Sea coast (Ordu-Giresun), however, assimilations seem to be the rule. We may deduce this from examples in Caferoğlu's 1946 text anthology from the region, such as *asaller* (p. 9), *getürüller* (p. 10), *ğellüller* (p. 40).<sup>5</sup> Assimilation is stated by Aydın (2002: 33) to be a rule in 3rd person plural present and aorist forms in the dialect of Aybastı in the southern part of Ordu, and also for the whole province of Ordu in general by Demir (2001: 90). This kind of assimilated forms go on, as stated above, until immediately east of the border to Trabzon.

If we go inland from the eastern part of the middle Black Sea coast dialects to Sivas, non-assimilated forms seem to appear more frequently, cf. Räsänen's texts from the area, where forms such as *oxurlar*, *öp'erler*, *Bayramlaşırar*, *Barışırar*, *Dêrler* occur alongside *gılallar*, *atallar*, *gédeller*, and *giyeler* in one and the same text (1933: 50). If we go southeast, we find an area before we meet the East Anatolian dialects comprising at least Malatya, parts of Elazığ, Diyarbakır, Adana, and perhaps also Maraş, where assimilation of *-r/-* is not found to any extent. For the western parts of Elazığ, situated to the immediate east of the Euphrates river, which roughly constitutes the boundary between East and West Anatolian dialects, assimilated forms are found in the Keban dialect investigated by Buran (1997: *gidallar*, *yapallar*, *taxallar* text 1/19), but not in the dialects of the districts Baskil and Ağın: *dêrlardı* (text 40/43, but *göturullardı* text 44/38), *çağırırar* (text 47/34), *saxlırler*, *ğorxırler* (text 47/48), etc. In the same way, in the city of Elazığ, although singular assimilations such as *talla*, *söleller* do occur (Güler 1992: 29), the usual aorist 3rd

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<sup>4</sup> Of these two mechanisms in 3rd person plural forms, only dropping of *-r* is mentioned by Korkmaz in her 1965 study of the Bartın dialects (p. 21, 26).

<sup>5</sup> Assimilation is common outside aorist forms, too, cf. *hatılladı* (p. 6), *veziller* (p. 10), *tal-laya* (p. 35), *zolliyalar* (p. 35), *gattelleri* (p. 36).



person plural forms show no assimilation, e.g. *dinnenürler*, *alurlar*, *açarlar* (ibid., 35-36). The lack of assimilations in Malatya immediately on the west side of the Euphrates is supported by forms such as *ederlär* in a recording I have made in the village of Korucuk, and also plural forms such as *biberler* and not *\*bibeller*. Gülseren's study (2000) of the dialects in Malatya—it is in fact called *Malatya İli Ağızları*, i.e. "The dialects of Malatya", but contains no attempt to draw internal dialect boundaries in the region, so it could just as well have had the title "The dialect of Malatya"—is in fact one of those studies where the grammatical part says one thing but the texts say something completely different: The phonological and morphological sections claim that assimilation *-rl-* > *-ll-* is "very common" in the aorist 3rd person plural (the present tense formation is different in these dialects), and the author gives examples such as *tikellerdi*, *yapallar*, etc. (p. 93). However, if we look at Gülseren's texts, we see at once that unassimilated forms by far outnumber the assimilated ones, e.g. *gëyindirirler*, *atarlar* (p. 258), *getirirlerdi*, *götürürlerdi* (p. 269), *danırlâr*, *dökerler* (p. 283), etc. For the lack of assimilations in Adana, I rely on oral information from my colleague in Mainz, Dr. Christiane Bulut, who knows this dialect very well. It is quite interesting to see that the dialect of Diyarbakır, too, very rarely has examples of assimilation *-rl-* > *-ll-*. This is expressed explicitly by Erten in his 1994 study (p. 16) and confirmed by his texts. He claims on the other hand that present tense forms such as *deyisiz* are examples of dropping of *-r-* (p. 17). This should, however, be taken with a grain of salt because the present tense paradigm usually has no *-r-* in this dialect, thus giving pairs such as *biçiler* 'they are cutting' (present) vs. *biçerler* (aorist).

In spite of the lack of sufficient material, it seems possible to establish a parallel between the Eastern Black Sea coast dialects and the borderland between West and East Anatolian dialects further south, partly along the Euphrates, comprising an area whose size we still do not know, but which comes down to the Mediterranean at Adana.

We should ask if this correspondence has any parallel in other parameters, i.e., if any other isoglosses follow the same path, and they do indeed. In my study on the Trabzon dialects, I have pointed out parallels in the present tense formation between approximately the same districts (2002: 1, 257-262). As the Euphrates roughly coincides with the border between the East and West Anatolian dialects, we may assume for some features the existence of nucleus areas on both sides exerting their influence from the west towards the east and from the east towards the west. Thus, as I have shown in Brendemoen 2005, in the field of Arabic loanwords, Tebriz in the east, the capital of the Akkoyunlu Turks in the latter part of the 15th century, and later of the partly Azeri-speaking Safavid dynasty, must have been a nucleus from which Arabic loanwords in a Persian phonological shape were diffused in all directions, while, at probably a somewhat later date, Arabic loanwords in a more learned shape imitating Classical Arabic were diffused from Istanbul, the capital of the Ottomans. In the case of the present tense formation, however, the picture is somewhat different, but perhaps resembles the case of assimilation *-rl-* > *-ll-* even

more: After a new present tense formation with the auxiliary verb *-yor-* came into being perhaps during the 15th century, it was diffused from the cultural centres in West Anatolia to most parts of the Balkans and eastwards into Anatolia, while the Azeri present tense realization in {-Xr} (*gâfir, yapır*, etc.), which also is developed from the same auxiliary, was diffused westwards from the Azeri cultural centres in Iran. In an area where these present tense formations met, or perhaps did not meet because the force of their diffusion was not strong enough, other present tense formations without an *-r-* exist, most probably as an archaism, i.e., as a relic of an earlier present tense formation which has been lost under the pressure of the new present tense formations elsewhere in Anatolia. In the same way, we may perhaps regard the strong tendency to assimilate *-rl-* to *-ll-* as a feature that was diffused westwards into Anatolia from Azerbaijan in the east. In the west, however, the tendency to drop syllable final *-r-* in Western Anatolia has spread eastwards, possibly preventing the tendency of assimilations to proceed very far west, and accordingly an area where the consonant group *-rl-* has been preserved as an archaism has remained in the middle. Whether this interpretation is correct or not is to some extent dependent on how the situation really is in the blank spots of the map, which partly have not been investigated, partly present a confusing picture.

The desire to avoid homonymy may also have been a factor in the preservation of the consonant group *-rl-* in the area in the southeast: As the present tense is formed with the suffix *-i*, present and aorist 3rd person plural forms of verbal stems that take the aorist vowel *-i* would almost become homonymous, being *geliler* and *geliller* respectively. It should also be mentioned that today's Istanbul dialect usually does not have assimilation of *-rl-*, but this may of course be a secondary feature due to copying from the written language. However, as I shall show, it does not seem that the Istanbul dialect at any point has had assimilation of *-rl-* to *-ll-* as a feature.

### Survey of the Balkan dialects

I think the picture will gain some clarity, especially as to the diachronical aspect of the different treatments of syllable-final *-r*, if we have a look at the Turkish dialects on the Balkans.

Although the areas in the Balkans where Turkish is spoken have diminished dramatically not only because of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, but also as a result of political events in more modern times, the Turkish Balkan dialects are quite well documented thanks to work done in the first and middle part of the 20th century. The classification of the different dialects is still disputable, but at least it is quite certain that an important dialect boundary runs through Bulgaria in a north-south direction not far east of Sofia. The dialects to the west of this line are the so-called West Rumelian dialects, which generally have preserved more archaic features than the ones further to the east. This is especially the case with the dialect spoken along the Danube in places such as Vidin and Lom, which constitute a very isolated corner of the Turkic-speaking world. These dialects, which have been the subject of a famous

study by Németh (1965), do not assimilate *-rl-* to *-ll-*. As for the dropping of syllable-final *-r-*, this does not seem to happen to any greater extent, either. This is also the case in other West Rumelian dialects, such as dialects in Macedonia like the one in Dinler (close to Ovčepole in the sub-district of Štip) and the dialect of Komanova or Komanovo, which both were studied by Eckmann (1960 and 1962); cf. aorist plural forms such as *tanarlar*, *dünerler*, *süylerler* (1962: 122). The same is the case with the dialects of Küstendil to the southeast of Sofia, and Michailovgrad (new name: Montana) between Sofia and Vidin, studied by Kakuk (1961), who does not mention assimilation *-rl-* > *-ll-* at all.

In all these West Rumelian dialects, however, other assimilations, such as *-nl-* > *-nm-* are quite common, see Kakuk 1961: 314. The same lack of assimilation *-rl-* > *-ll-* is found in Gagauz, a variety of Ottoman Turkish which has been transformed thoroughly through its symbiosis with Slavic languages, especially Russian, in a very isolated situation in the northern parts of Romania and Moldavia. In Gagauz, *-r-* is sometimes dropped in syllable final position (see Özkan 1996: 86), but assimilation *-rl-* > *-ll-* does not occur (while *-nl-* > *-nm-* is very common, cf. p. 79), and aorist 3rd person plural forms are *därlär*, *başlarlar*, *alarla*, *bilärlär*, etc. (p. 146).

Another dialect group in the Balkans is the so-called Deliorman dialect group in North East Bulgaria as exemplified by the dialect of Razgrad, which was studied by Eckmann (1950a). This dialect is similar to the ones in West Anatolia in the respect that *-r-* tends to be dropped in syllable-final position (p. 12). Assimilation *-rl-* > *-ll-* also occurs, but in the aorist, 3rd person plural forms with dropping of *-r-* and compensatory lengthening (*kalı:lar*, *geli:ler*, p. 16) seem to be the regular ones. (The present formation does not have an *-r-* in 3rd person plural, either, but this may be due to other factors.) This picture is supported by the later research performed by Dallı (1976, cf. p. 108-110 and forms such as *sürdüre:le*, *indire:le*, *yiye:le* p. 152). If we move a little south down to the wide plain that is confined by the Balkan mountains proper in the north and the Rhodopes in the south, we find dialects such as the one at Kazanlık, studied by Kakuk in 1958. Here, the tendency of *-r-* to be dropped in syllable-final position goes on, but as Kakuk remarks, assimilation, producing a double *l*, occurs quite frequently, too, giving examples such as *götürüler* besides the more frequent *ayırullar*, cf. 178.<sup>6</sup> If we go further to the south, however, up into the Rhodope mountains close to the Greek border, where the dialect of the township of Kırçalı has been studied by Hazai (1959), amongst others, we see that *-r-* tends to be dropped only in absolute auslaut position, but that it is assimilated to a following *-l* as a rule (p. 218), thus giving aorist tense forms such as *gidällä*, *çıkalla* (225).

Thus we see that the three different destinies of syllable-final *-r-* we find in Anatolia, also are represented in the Balkans. The dialects where *-rl-* is preserved are

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<sup>6</sup> The loss of the *-r-* in the present tense paradigm affects all persons; still forms such as *içiyollar* do occur, *ibid.* In Kakuk's texts forms such as *alırlar* occur side by side with *takallar* and *karşılarlar* in one and the same text.

the most remote ones, and are archaic also in other respects;<sup>7</sup> the ones where *-r* is usually dropped, are less remote, and are partly found along the main route of commerce and migration in Southern Bulgaria, alongside the dialects where assimilation takes place.

The Balkan dialects have had a great impact on the shaping of the Istanbul dialect, and most probably did so already at the time the city was conquered in 1453. The Ottoman court that established itself in Istanbul came there from Edirne in Thrace, which had been the Ottoman capital since 1362. By then, the Balkans, although having been in the hands of the Ottomans for less than a century, had started to become extremely important, and because there was no aristocracy in the Balkans that could prevent the Ottomans from establishing their different institutions—in contrast to the case in Anatolia—the Balkans enjoyed top priority from the Ottoman authorities. An important factor in this was the fact that the Ottoman officials to a great extent were recruited from Christian families in the Balkans. The kind of Balkan Turkish that had an impact on Istanbul Turkish most probably was the kind which is today represented by the most remote dialects, i.e. the West Rumelian dialects. It is probable that the dialects having extensive dropping of *-r* represent a later development, perhaps a later wave of immigration to the Balkans from Anatolia, and, as we have already indicated, that the tendency to prefer assimilations represents an even later stage of development. On the other hand, as soon as the Ottoman written language was established, the prestige Istanbul Turkish enjoyed as a codified language would no doubt in itself prevent assimilations and dropping of *-r* from taking place.

### Survey of older texts

Nevertheless it is an astonishing fact that older Ottoman texts written either with the Arabic or other alphabets do not give *any* examples of assimilation *-r/-* > *-ll-*. In the case of texts written by Turks, this could of course be explained as the effect of a graphic convention, but still it is remarkable that no example whatsoever reflects the actual pronunciation if assimilation did take place in the spoken language. Accordingly we are tempted to assume that it did not take place in the spoken language. In the so-called transcription texts, i.e. texts written mostly by foreigners, such as conversation guides, no reflexes of assimilation *-r/-* > *-ll-* are found either. Although most older texts represent Istanbul Turkish, texts known to have been written in Anatolia (such as *Süheyl ü Nevbahâr*, see Banguoğlu 1938: 11) do not provide us with examples of *-r/-* assimilation either. For the transcription texts this could perhaps be explained by the fact that the authors knew Ottoman orthography and transferred the principles of that to their home-made orthography in Latin, Greek, or

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<sup>7</sup> E.g., the dialects in Northwest Bulgaria have a present tense formation without an *-r* not very different from the ones found in Trabzon and in certain East Anatolian dialects, see Németh 1965: 84-86, Brendemoen 2002 1: 259-262.

Armenian script, regardless of how the actual pronunciation was in the spoken language.<sup>8</sup> This is, however, contradicted by the fact that other kinds of assimilations are quite common in these texts, such as *-nl-* > *-nn-* and *-ls-* > *-ss-*, e.g. *bunmar*, *olsunnar*, *günnük*, etc. (in Karamanlidic texts, see Eckmann 1950: 196-197). This kind of assimilations, which all are at variance with Ottoman orthography, are also found in older transcription texts such as the Mühlbacher text from the 15th century (*miskinner*, *ossun*), and in the grammar by Pietro della Valle from the beginning of the 17th century (oral communication from Dr. Heidi Stein), it is stated explicitly that assimilated forms such as *ossun*, and *ossunlar* (for *olsun*, *olsunlar*) are characteristic of everyday speech. The only case where the assimilation of *-rl-* to *-ll-* is attested in older texts, is to my knowledge in Azerbaijani, but not Ottoman manuscripts (e.g. in Foy's 1903 study, where Azeri forms such as *olulla* (corresponding to ST *olurlar*) are mentioned (p. 193)). Thus, in a manuscript of the poems by the Azerbaijani poet Fuzûlî from the beginning of the 16th century, copied in Kerbelâ' in Iraq in 1576, forms such as *söyleller*, *dönderüller*, *açallar* are found (Olçay 1956: 38), showing that this kind of assimilations are quite old in Azeri.

Examples of dropping of syllable-final *-r* are, however, found in other texts, if not very frequently in older texts, e.g. in absolute auslaut position in *durla*, *dirilirle* in the so-called Mühlbacher text with Latin script from the 15th century (see Foy 1902: 241, 272-273). Evliyâ Çelebî's autograph manuscript of his monumental *Seyâhatnâme* from the 17th century has forms such as *deler*, *olular*, and *vadır*; in fact in some cases an *-r-* has been added to the manuscript, indicating perhaps that the forms without an *-r-* are oral forms (see Duman 1995: 26-27). In the same way, Evliyâ himself tells us that "tanners and rebellious artisans" used such expressions as *öldi* 'kill!' where the standard language had, as today, *öldür* (see Dankoff 1990: 89).<sup>9</sup>

### Conclusion

Thus, *one* conclusion of this paper would be that the assimilation of the consonant group *-rl-* to *-ll-*—contrary to the assimilation of other groups—is quite recent in Western Anatolia and the Balkans, and considerably more recent than the dropping of *-r*, and also that it was imported from the east.

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<sup>8</sup> Thus, the so-called Harsány text, which is a conversation book from the 17th century (see Hazai 1973), contains no example of assimilation or of dropping of *-r*. The very few examples of other kinds of assimilations are mostly in learned words whose spelling not everybody would know in Ottoman either (p. 353-354). The case with the so-called Georgievits text from the middle of the 15th century (see Heffening 1942) is exactly the same.

<sup>9</sup> It should be added that the argument that dropping of *-r* in aorist forms would cause homonymy with optative forms in the case of verbal stems that take a low aorist vowel, could be quite relevant as a possible reason why more extensive dropping did not take place in older periods, since the optative was a much more central tense in former times than it is today.

The other conclusion must be that the different destinies of syllable-final *-r-* is a relevant parameter indeed, but that—as with several other of the parameters used—certain difficulties have to be overcome before we can properly take advantage of it.

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