

LEXICAL UNITS EXPRESSING THE CONCEPT OF KINSHIP RELATIONS IN 7TH–10TH CENTURY TURKIC TEXTS

Dustmurodov Ma’rufjon Mansur o’g’li¹
 Radjabov Nasir Nasimovich²
 Nurullayeva Oydin Nazirjon qizi³
 Davronbek Abdullayev⁴
 Sarviniso Rozibobo qizi Mamanazarova⁵
 Maxmudov Akram Bobomurodovich⁶

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the semantic and functional characteristics of lexical units expressing kinship and close personal relationships based on the materials of the 7th–10th century Turkic runic inscriptions. Drawing on the texts of the Taryat, Shine Usu, Suji, Khoyto Tamir, Arkhanan, and other Turkic runic monuments, kinship terms are classified into internal semantic groups, and lexical units related to “seniority in relation to an individual,” “juniority in relation to an individual,” and marital relations are analyzed. The study examines the contextual usage, historical semantic development, and functional potential of lexemes such as **qaŋ**, **äčü**, **apa**, **ini**, **urī**, **oʻyul**, **qiz**, **yägän**, **küdägü**, and **yutuz**. Furthermore, it is demonstrated that some of these units were employed not only to denote kinship relations but also to express titles, social status, and political-authoritative relationships. The research also provides a comparative-historical analysis of the phonetic and semantic changes undergone by these kinship terms in later historical stages and in modern Turkic languages. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the formation and development of kinship terminology in Turkic languages and serve as an important source for studying the socio-cultural and genealogical perceptions of ancient Turkic society.

KEYWORDS: kinship terms, Old Turkic language, Turkic runic inscriptions, semantic development, lexical units, historical lexicology.

One of the most substantial lexical groups in the nomenclature of the Old Turkic inscriptions consists of lexical units denoting kinship and close personal relationships. This can be explained by the fact that, on the one hand, governance and administration were largely based on clan and tribal structures, while on the other hand, kinship was regarded as a historical and inseparable social value. This group may be subdivided into the following semantic categories.

Words Expressing the Sememe of “Seniority in Relation to an Individual”

äčü – father, grandfather; ancestor (Tar J 4);

äčü-apa – forefathers, ancestors (Tar Sha 3);

qaŋ – father; grandfather (Tar Ja 4; ShU shi 5, 12; XT 73).

¹ Dustmurodov Ma’rufjon Mansur o’g’li Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Philology, Associate Professor, Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies (TSUOS). E-mail: maruf_dust@mail.ru ORCID: [0009-0003-4954-9504](https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4954-9504)

² Nasir Nasimovich Radjabov. Professor of the Languages-2 Department, Oriental University, Doctor of Philological Sciences (DSc),

³ Nurullayeva Oydin Nazirjon qizi. Senior Lecturer of the Department of Uzbek Language and Literature, Tashkent University of Applied Sciences, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) ORCID: 0009-0004-7613-6817 E-mail: oydinnurullayeva85@gmail.com

⁴ Davronbek Abdullayev Lecturer, Department of Languages–1, Oriental University. ORCID: 0009-0008-6947-5094 Mumarabdullayev@gmail.com

⁵ Sarviniso Rozibobo qizi Mamanazarova, Lecturer of the Languages-1 Department, Oriental University. ORCID: [0009-0003-4954-9504](https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4954-9504) E-mail: maruf_dust@mail.ru

⁶ Maxmudov Akram Bobomurodovich teacher, Department of Languages–1, Oriental University. E-mail: akrammahmudov96@gmail.com ORCID: 0009-0001-4954-9504

In the inscriptions, the lexeme **qaŋ**, which denotes “father,” “grandfather,” or “ancestor,” is used directly in the meaning of “father” in the Taryat and Shine Usu inscriptions:

“... qara bodun toruyan qaŋim qanqa ötünti äcü apa atı” – “The common people stood up and appealed to my father the khagan, saying: ‘The name of our forefathers’” (Tar J 4).

“... qaŋim: kü bilgä qayan” – “My father was Kül Bilgä Khagan” (ShU Shi 5).

“qaŋim qayan uçdu” – “My father, the khagan, passed away” (ShU Shi 12).

In the Khoyto Tamir inscription, however, the lexeme appears not only in the meaning of “father” but also as a reference to the “institution of the common khagan,” which constituted an integral element of statehood:

“älimin törömün qaŋim? öŋrä” – “My land and customs, my father (?) to the east/right” (XT 73).

It should be noted that the lexeme **qaŋ** carries a broader meaning in the inscriptions than that of a simple kinship term. In the Taryat and Shine Usu inscriptions, it directly denotes a biological father, whereas in the Khoyto Tamir inscription it symbolizes state authority and ancestral political heritage. This demonstrates that the lexeme possesses both genealogical and ideological semantic layers.

According to available sources, the etymology of the word **qaŋ** is connected with the Old Turkic root **qa**, meaning “family” or “household.” The lexeme is also etymologically related to **qadaš** (“relative; kinsman; sibling”), indicating that **qaŋ** originally denoted not merely biological kinship but also broader social and clan-based relationships⁷. This semantic connection highlights the significance of kinship structures in the sociopolitical organization of ancient Turkic society.

This word, which reflects the distinctive social and ideological landscape of ancient Turkic society, gradually gave way to the lexeme **ata** (“father”) in Old Uyghur Turkic. The original form of the word has not been preserved in its Old Turkic state in modern Turkic languages. However, the closest formal reflexes of this lexeme can be found in the Khakas language in the derivative forms **qandış** and **qansiq**, which are considered to retain traces of the ancient root⁸. The frequent use of the lexeme in the Yenisei inscriptions with the meaning of “**father**” demonstrates that it was one of the principal and stable kinship terms among the ancient Turkic communities of that region⁹.

In the inscriptions, the author refers to forefathers and ancestors through the compound **äcü-apa**. This expression consists of the components **äcü** and **apa**, whose semantic characteristics should be examined separately. Although the word **apa** in the Orkhon inscriptions is predominantly used as a title or as a component specifying a title, certain contexts reveal its use in the meaning of “**ancestor**” or “**grandfather**.”

In particular, while recounting historical events in the Taryat inscription, the ruling dynasty of the Uyghurs during their eighty-year reign is mentioned as follows:

“... äcüm : apam : säkiz on yıl : olurmiş” – “My forefathers ruled for eighty years” (Tar Sha 3).

“qara bodun : toruyan : qaŋim qanqa : ötünti : äcü apa atı” – “The common people stood up and appealed to my father, the khagan, saying: ‘The name of our forefathers’” (Tar J 4).

These examples indicate that the primary semantic core of **apa** was associated with the kinship meanings of “**ancestor**” and “**grandfather**.” At the same time, the lexeme appears in historical sources as a **personal name**, a **military-administrative title**¹⁰, and also as an indicator of **social status**¹¹.

This lexeme, which appeared in Old Turkic in such phonetic variants as **aba**, **äbä**, and **äpä**, has remained in active

⁷ Erdal, M. (1991). Old Turkic Word Formation. A Functional Approach to the Lexion I-II. Wiesbaden. 161.

⁸ Clauson, G. (1972). An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish. The Clarendon Press. 630.

⁹ Yıldırım, A. (2020). Yenisey Yazıtlarında Akralılık Adları. Journal of History School, 46, 1763-1783

¹⁰ Gabain, (1988, s. 261)

¹¹ Gömeç, S. (2002). Dîvânü Lügât-it- Türk'te akrabalık bildiren terimler. Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Tarih Bölümü Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi, 20/32, 134.

use up to the present day while preserving its core semantic feature of “seniority” or “elderness.” It has come to express a variety of kinship relations and social statuses, including **father, grandfather, grandmother, mother, uncle, aunt, elder brother, elder sister**¹², and **midwife**.

Furthermore, in Old Uyghur Turkic, the lexeme was primarily used in the meaning of “elder sister.” In the Anatolian Turkish dialects, it occurs in the forms **aba, abu,** and **aby,** carrying the meaning of “mother”¹³. In the Kipchak Turkic languages, however, under the influence of the linguistic phenomenon of **taboo substitution**¹⁴, it underwent a semantic shift and came to be used in place of the word “bear”¹⁵.

The **apa** lexeme occupied an important place in the system of ancient Turkic titles and was often used before personal names and nisbas, expressing a high rank and social status. In the inscriptions of the Old Turkic period, the title **apa** was attributed to elderly statesmen who were renowned among the people for their wisdom, experience, and knowledge. In this respect, it functioned not only as a kinship term but also as a socio-political title symbolizing respect, authority, and recognition.

Over time, the semantic scope of this lexeme expanded, and in the later stages of the development of Turkic languages it acquired a variety of meanings. A number of titles and anthroponyms containing the component **apa** are attested in Old Turkic written monuments. Examples include *Apa Tarqan* (in the Toñyuquq and Kül Çor inscriptions), *Baça Apa İcraki* (in the Miran documents), *Çör Apa* (in the Chakul documents), *İnançu Apa Yarqan Tarqan* (in the Kül Tegin inscription), *Kul Apa Uruju* (in the Miran documents), and *Kulug Apa* (in the Chakul documents). These examples demonstrate the widespread use of the title **apa** in ancient Turkic society and highlight its prestigious position within the administrative, military, and social hierarchy¹⁶. Furthermore, its occurrence in combination with various official titles indicates the semantic richness and functional versatility of this designation¹⁷. Aytish lozimki, bitiglarda *apa* istilohi bilan bog‘liq *apatarqan* (apa-tarqan) – “bosh qo‘mondan” harbiy kompozitasi tilga olinadi. Ushbu harbiy-ma‘muriy unvon To‘nyuquq yozuvida quyidagicha tasvirlanadi: “*apa tarqanyaru icrä sab idmish* – Apatarxon (bosh qo‘mondan)ga maxfiy (yashirin) gap (xabar) yuboribdi” (To‘n, 34); “*İnançu apa yarqan tarqan atiy* – Inanchu Apa Yargan Tarxon otini (berdim)” (KT, Ks). S.Klauson *apa tarqanning* xitoylar bergan “bosh qo‘mondan” unvoni ekanini qayd etadi¹⁸. Ushbu birikmada *apa* komponenti mustaqil unvon bo‘lishdan ko‘ra, ko‘proq unvonni aniqlovchi yoki kuchaytiruvchi modifikator vazifasini bajargan¹⁹ deyish to‘g‘riroq bo‘ladi. Bu holat *apa* birligining faqat qarindoshlik atamasi bo‘lib qolmay, balki harbiy-idoraviy tizimda ham faol ishlatilganidan dalolat beradi.

In Old Uyghur, this word underwent a process of semantic narrowing and came to be used in the meaning of “elder sister” or “the eldest daughter in the family”²⁰. This indicates that semantic differentiation occurred during its historical development. In general, **apa** in Old Turkic was used with the meanings of “ancestor,” “grandfather,” “grandmother,” “father,” and “mother.” Furthermore, in Bashkir and Tatar, this lexeme denotes kinship terms such as “elder sister,” “maternal aunt,” and “paternal aunt”²¹.

The component **äcü**, which appears as the first element of the compound and carries the semantic features of social status and respect, belongs directly to kinship terminology²². It is reported to have been used to refer to a close male relative who was younger than one’s father but older than oneself, namely an “uncle” or “elder brother.” The

¹² Clauson, G. (1972). An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish. The Clarendon Press. 5.

¹³ Caferoğlu, A. (2015). Eski Uygur Türkçesi Sözlüğü. Türk Dil Kurumu. 18.

¹⁴ Yavuz, S. (2013b). Divânü Lügâti’t-Türk’teki akrabalık adları ve bu adların Türkiye Türkçesi ağzlarındaki karşılıkları. Ekev Akademi Dergisi, 17/56, 347.

¹⁵ Gülensoy, T. (2007). Türkiye Türkçesindeki Türkçe sözcüklerin Köken Bilgisi Sözlüğü. Türk Dil Kurumu. 72.

¹⁶ Şirin H. *Kül Tegin yazıtı... – S. 149*

¹⁷ Gömeç S. *Kök Türkçe yazılı belgelerde ... – S. 930.*

¹⁸ (ED, s. 5a-b).

¹⁹ Aydın, E. (2015). Yenisey Yazıtları. Kömen.

²⁰ Caferoğlu, A. (2015). Eski Uygur Türkçesi Sözlüğü. Türk Dil Kurumu. – 18.

²¹ Gülensoy, T. (2007). Türkiye Türkçesindeki Türkçe sözcüklerin Köken Bilgisi Sözlüğü. Türk Dil Kurumu. – 72.

²² Aydın, E. (2014). Orhon Yazıtları. Kömen.

occurrence of **äcü** in the Orkhon inscriptions with the meanings “elder brother” and “uncle,” and in the Yenisei inscriptions with the meaning “elder brother,” as well as its use as a personal name, demonstrates that it was one of the important terms marking kinship hierarchy²³. The lexeme is also attested in Khitan, where it was used with the meanings “father” and “grandfather.” Subsequently, this term was replaced by the Mongolic word **aka** (“elder brother”), which emerged as a lexical consequence of the long-term linguistic contact between Turkic and Mongolic languages²⁴.

In some studies, the etymology of the word has been given a mythological interpretation. In particular, **äcü** (“elder brother”) is associated with divine figures known as **Axa Xan** or sometimes **Axağa Xan**, who are depicted as courageous, powerful beings and as protectors of the entire animal world. As a result, the image of the “elder brother” in ancient Turkic beliefs came to be regarded as the protector and guardian of younger siblings as well as parents. In later periods, under the influence of socio-cultural factors, the lexeme underwent semantic generalization and metaphorical expansion. Consequently, forms such as **äci**, **äci**, **içi**, **ädä**, **äcä**, **äcäm**, **äcim**, **äcä**, **ädi** were preserved in various Turkic texts with meanings including “elder brother,” “father,” “uncle,” “brother,” “elder sister,” “aunt,” “paternal grandmother,” “woman,” “friend,” “master,” and “aunt’s child.”

In the fifth line of the eastern side of the Taryat inscription, the word appears in the form **äci** with the meaning “wife”:

“bitigmä: bunı yaratıyma bilgä qutluğ tarqan säñün bunča boduniğ atın: yolın: ayıyma: qanıñ äcisi äki: ayur tädi”
– “This inscription was written and composed by Bilgä Qutluğ Tarqan Sengün. The names and numbers of all these people were recorded, and two spokesmen, who were the husbands of the lady, declared them” (Tar Shi 5).

The use of the lexeme in this meaning continued into the Karakhanid period, where Old Turkic dictionaries explain **äcä** as “elder sister” and **äci** as “old woman” (DLT I, 114). The meaning of **äcä** as “mother” has been preserved in the Shor language, one of the Kipchak-related Turkic languages. For example, in the Shor folk poem *Qan Pergen* (“Khan Bergen”), the lexemes **içä** (“mother”) and **päcä** (“elder sister”) occur:

“Içäzi çoq, abazi çoğul, Čärgän attıy Qan-Pärgän, Qan-Pärgänniñ päcäzi Qan-Arğo abaqqayı” – “He has no mother and no father, Khan-Bergen of the bay horse; Khan-Bergen’s elder sister, Khan-Argo, is beautiful.”

Most notably, in the dialects of Namangan city and district in modern Uzbek, **äcä** is used with the meanings “grandmother” and “mother.” The corresponding lexemes in Uzbek dialects and Shor are phonetically and semantically close, both expressing kinship and respect, such as “mother” and “elder sister.” This similarity appears to have developed from the ancient Turkic lexeme **äcü** / **äci** and reflects historical contact among Turkic languages.

Moreover, in the steppe dialects of Kattaqo‘rg‘on (Samarkand region) and Xatirchi (Navoi region), particularly in the villages of Ko‘mir, Tasmachi, and Yangiobod, this lexeme has been preserved in the forms **äyçä** ~ **oyçä**, meaning “elder brother’s wife” or “a form of address used by younger family members toward daughters-in-law.” These examples demonstrate that the historical development of **äcü** / **äcä** / **äci** involved not only phonetic variation but also significant semantic renewal while remaining connected to its original archisememe. Initially denoting a specific kinship term, the lexeme gradually evolved into a general form of address expressing social closeness, respect, seniority, degree of kinship, and even social status. Such semantic expansion is characteristic of anthropocentric nomination processes in Turkic languages.

Words Expressing the Semantic Feature of “Younger than the Reference Person”

This group includes the following lexemes found in the inscriptions: **yägän** – “nephew; title” (MCh W 8; Su 8; Ar 1; XT VII 3); **atı** – “nephew; grandchild?” (QCh 7; Su 8); **oylan** – “son, younger brother, descendants” (Su 9); **oyul** – “child; person; son” (MCh W 3; Sha 7; Tar Shi 3, 4; Tes W 5, 6, 7; Su 2, 10, 11; QCh 5; QB II 12; Su 6); **uluy**

²³ Erdal M. KITAÑ-TÜRK DİL İLİŞKİLERİ. Bengü Beläk. Ahmet Bican Ercilasun Armağani, Ed. Bülent Gül, Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, Ankara, 2013, s. 194.

²⁴ Clauson, G. (1972). An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish. The Clarendon Press. 20.

oγul – “elder child; son” (Su 10); **ini** – “younger brother” (Su 6; QCh 10; XT XIV 1; XVI 2); **urī / uru** – “son” (MCh W 3; Su 6); and **qiz** – “daughter, girl” (MCh W 3, 4; Sha 3; Su 6, 7).

In the inscriptions, the lexeme **qiz** (“girl, daughter”), which originally denoted an “unmarried woman,” underwent several semantic changes in later historical periods. In the Suji inscription, it is explicitly used in the sense of “daughter”:

“inim: yāti: urum: üč: qizim: üč: ärti: äblädim: oγulimün: qizimün: qalijsiz bärtim” – “I had seven younger brothers, three sons, and three daughters. I married them off. I gave my sons and daughters in marriage without receiving a bride-price” (Su 6–7).

This passage not only illustrates the Old Turkic meaning of the word but also sheds light on the social status of daughters in ancient Turkic society. The fact that the custom of receiving a bride-price when marrying off a daughter already existed suggests that daughters occupied a position in society that was not inferior to that of **urī / uru** (“sons”).

Certain passages in the inscriptions further show that the lexeme **qiz**, originally denoting a girl, underwent semantic expansion and acquired additional meanings such as “valuable property,” “female servant,” “slave,” or “captive woman.” The following examples from the Shine Usu inscription support this observation:

“sünüsdim: šančdim: yilqışın: barimün: qizın: quduzın: kälirtim” – “I fought and slew them. I brought back their horses, wealth, girls, and women” (ShU East 3).

“tabyač qanı... bärmiş... si bir qiz säkiz urī oγlin” – “The Chinese emperor had departed... I captured one girl and eight sons” (ShU West 3).

“ančip: kälti äki qizın” – “Thus he came with his two daughters” (ShU West 4).

These examples indicate that while **qiz** initially referred to biological sex, it later expanded semantically within economic and social contexts. Its contextual usage reflects the close relationship between concepts of people and property in ancient Turkic society and demonstrates how lexical items could undergo metaphorical extension under conditions of warfare and political domination.

This meaning persisted into the Karakhanid period, where the lexeme was used not only in the sense of “valuable, precious object” but also as “female servant,” “slave girl,” and “girl” (DLT I, 315). Particularly noteworthy is its direct use in the meaning “valuable” in the following example from the *Kutadgu Bilig*:

“Qiz ärmäs bu yalhuq kişilik qiz ol, az ärmäs bu yalhuq könilik az ol” – “It is not man who is valuable, but humanity that is valuable; it is not people who are few, but righteousness that is scarce” (QBN 732, 851).

This example clearly demonstrates that the lexeme **qiz** had already developed an abstract meaning of “precious” or “valuable,” extending beyond its original kinship-related sense.^{25,26}

In later periods, due to phonological changes and certain dialectal features, the word was preserved in the forms **qiz**, **hiz**, **hür**, and **hür**. In particular, it appears as **hir** in Chuvash, as **qürqin** (with the suffix *-qin*) meaning “female slaves” in Middle Turkic and Kyrgyz, as **qiz** in Kazakh, Uzbek, Kazan Tatar, and Uyghur, and as **kiz** in Yakut (Sakha). This demonstrates that the word has a Common Turkic origin and has undergone various phonetic and semantic transformations throughout its historical development. In modern Turkic languages, its original semantic core has been preserved, and it is commonly used with positive or neutral meanings such as “young girl,” “daughter,” or “virgin.” This continuity indicates that the word has retained both its phonetic and semantic layers throughout its historical evolution.

Moreover, the fact that the lexeme has evolved from its earliest low-status meanings such as “captive” or “slave”

²⁵ Söng L. Y. (1999). Türk Dillerinde Akrabalık Adları. Simurg yayınları. 131.

²⁶ Gülensoy, T. (2007). Türkiye Türkçesindeki Türkçe sözcüklerin Köken Bilgisi Sözlüğü. Türk Dil Kurumu. 522.

to the neutral sense of “daughter” in modern Turkic languages, as well as its elevated semantic value in paremiological expressions such as “*He who has a daughter has pride*,” “*A house with a daughter is paradise*,” and “*A daughter is the key to paradise*,” reflects the increasing social status and significance of the person denoted by this lexeme within society.

In the inscriptions, the lexeme **ini**, which primarily occurs with the meaning “younger brother,” is mentioned in the Suji inscription specifically in the sense of “younger brother”:

“inim: yāti: urum: üč: qizim: üč: ärti: äblädim: oylümün: qizimün: qalıñsız bärtim” – “I had seven younger brothers, three sons, and three daughters. I married them off. I gave my sons and daughters in marriage without receiving a bride-price” (Su 6–7).

Initially, the lexeme was used to refer to relatives belonging to the khagan’s family. In this context, it is employed to indicate that Prince Qari Chor Tegin was the younger brother of Bögu Bilgä Tengri Khan:

“bögü bilgä täñri qan inisi qarı čor tigin” – “Qari Chor Tegin, the younger brother of Bögu Bilgä Tengri Khan” (QCh 8–12).

The meaning of this word as “younger brother” has been confirmed by a number of researchers. However, Tuncer Gülensoy interprets the lexeme differently, suggesting the meaning “brother-in-law” (the wife’s brother or a male relative by marriage)²⁷. This alternative interpretation reflects the complexity of kinship terminology in historical Turkic languages and the possibility of semantic variation depending on social and cultural context²⁸.

Such an interpretation was probably influenced by instances in historical texts where the word was used by a husband to refer to his wife’s younger brother. It should also be noted that the lexeme has been identified in the Yenisei inscriptions with the meaning “elder brother.” Furthermore, these inscriptions contain the derived lexical form **inilig**, which was formed morphologically by adding the suffix **-lig** to the base **ini**. This derivative conveyed a collective and generalized meaning, denoting “younger male siblings” or “younger brothers” as a group. Such usage demonstrates that kinship terms in the Old Turkic language possessed considerable derivational potential.

In documents from later periods, the word appears in various phonetic forms with affixal expansion, including **ini**, **inäk**, and **inäkä**. Moreover, in modern Turkic languages, the lexeme has undergone significant semantic expansion. It no longer denotes only biological kinship but also expresses relationships established through marriage. As a result, it has acquired a broad and complex range of meanings, including “younger brother,” “husband’s younger brother,” “brother-in-law,” “father’s younger brother (uncle),” “elder sister,” “husband’s younger sister,” “a form of address,” and even “young daughter.”

While the lexeme ini in the inscriptions originally referred primarily to younger brothers within the khagan’s family, its semantic scope gradually broadened to encompass meanings such as “younger brother,” “brother-in-law,” “elder brother,” and various kinship relations established through marriage²⁹. In addition, derivatives such as inilig expressed collective and generalized meanings from a morphological perspective, indicating that kinship terminology in Old Turkic possessed extensive semantic and derivational flexibility. This demonstrates the richness of the Old Turkic kinship system and the dynamic development of its lexical-semantic structure over time³⁰.

It should also be noted that the word **ini** appears as a component of a title in the Khoito Tamir inscriptions:

“ini öz inänčü yılan yıl öz inänčü tarduš küli čor baş baliqa barir” – “Ini Öz Inänčü, in the Year of the Snake, goes to Bešbaliq together with Öz Inänčü Tarduš Küli Čor” (XT XIV 1–4);

“yılan yıl onunč ayqa ini öz inänčü baş baliqa barir män” – “In the tenth month of the Year of the Snake, I, Ini Öz

²⁷ Caferoğlu, A. (2015). Eski Uygur Türkçesi Sözlüğü. Türk Dil Kurumu. 95.

²⁸ Gülensoy, T. (2007). Türkiye Türkçesindeki Türkçe sözcüklerin Köken Bilgisi Sözlüğü. Türk Dil Kurumu. 437.

²⁹ Söng L. Y. (1999). Türk Dillerinde Akrabalık Adları. Simurg yayınları. 154.

³⁰ Çağbayır, Y. (2007). Ötüken Türkçe Sözlük. Ötüken yayınları. 2183.

Inänçü, am going to Beşbaliq” (XT XVI 1–3).

In these examples, the use of **ini** as a title demonstrates that kinship terms in ancient Turkic society could also function as markers of socio-political hierarchy. Originally meaning “younger brother,” the lexeme **ini** underwent semantic expansion and came to denote a member of the ruling dynasty who stood below the supreme ruler in rank but nevertheless possessed a certain degree of authority and independence. The fact that **Ini Öz Inänçü** is mentioned together with precise dates and is described as traveling to an important political center such as Beşbaliq confirms that he was not merely a relative but an individual holding an official status. This reflects the close interconnection between kinship and political hierarchy in ancient Turkic society.

A similar phenomenon can also be observed in contemporary spoken Uzbek. In particular, forms such as *opasi* (“elder sister”), *ukasi* (“younger brother”), and *kuyov* (“son-in-law”) may be used not only to indicate kinship but also to emphasize the social standing and significance of the individuals concerned within society and, at times, within administrative structures.

In the Old Turkic period, one of the principal lexemes expressing the concept of a “male child” was **urī / uru**. Unlike **oyul**, which could be used more broadly for offspring regardless of gender, **urī / uru** specifically denoted a “male child” or “son.” The lexeme occurs in the following inscriptions:

“inim: yāti: urum: üč: qizim: üč: ärti: äblädim: oçulimün: qizimün: qalijsiz bärtim” – “I had seven younger brothers, three sons, and three daughters. I married them off. I gave my sons and daughters in marriage without receiving a bride-price” (Su 6–7);

“... bir qiz säkiz urī oçlin: ... äki bodunuy alip” – “... I captured one daughter and eight sons, and also took two tribes ...” (MCh W 3).

While in Uyghur-period Turkic texts the lexeme not only denoted a “male child” but could also imply youth, social status, or rank, during the Karakhanid period it continued to be used primarily in the meaning of “male child” or “son.” However, the word does not appear to have survived in historical texts after this period³¹. This suggests that **urī / uru** gradually fell out of use and was replaced by other kinship and descent-related terms in the subsequent development of Turkic languages³².

This situation indicates that the word was gradually displaced by other synonymous lexical units. In general, **urī / uru** may be regarded as one of the principal terms denoting the concept of a “male child” in the Old Turkic period. Although it underwent a certain degree of semantic expansion during some historical stages, it eventually fell out of active use and became an obsolete lexical item in later periods.

The following passage containing the lexeme **atī**, which belongs to the kinship terminology group, is particularly noteworthy:

“yäginmin: atimün: körtim: imti: öltüm” – “I saw my nephews (or grandchildren?); now I have died” (Su 8).

In some previous studies, this line has been translated as “I saw the fame and glory of my nephews.” In such interpretations, **atimün** is understood to mean “fame” or “reputation,” deriving from the Old Turkic word **at**, which carried the meanings “name,” “title,” or “renown.” Accordingly, the phrase is interpreted as “their name became known, and I witnessed it”³³.

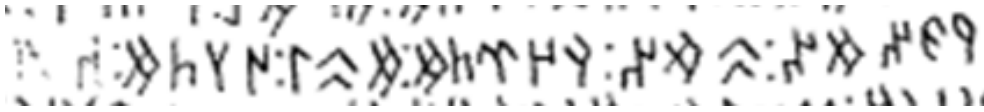
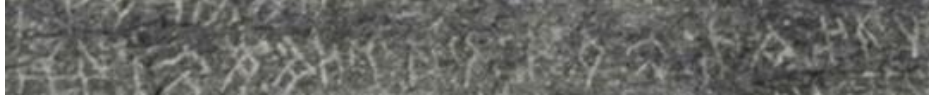
However, if this interpretation were correct, the form should not have been written as **atimün**, but rather as **atisin**, yielding the construction **yäginmin atisin** — “the name, fame, or reputation of my nephew(s).” The inscription, however, clearly contains the sequence **y(ä)g(i)nm(i)n (a)t(i)m(i)n**. This orthographic evidence suggests that **atimün** should not automatically be interpreted as “fame” or “reputation,” and that an alternative reading related to kinship

³¹ Caferoğlu, A. (2015). Eski Uyğur Türkçesi Sözlüğü. Türk Dil Kurumu. 266.

³² Söng L. Y. (1999). Türk Dillerinde Akrabalık Adları. Simurg yayınları. 201.

³³ Сарткожаулы К. Суджинские надписи (новый перевод и толкование). Турк жазба ескерткіштері. – Астана. 2015 – С. 11.

terminology—possibly “grandchild” or another familial designation—deserves serious consideration. Consequently, the passage remains open to philological and semantic debate, illustrating the complexity of interpreting kinship-related lexemes in Old Turkic inscriptions. (Figure 1).



y(ä)g(i)nm(i)n (a)t(i)m(i)n

According to another source, the word **atī(mīn)** in this line should be understood as the very lexeme **atī**, which has already been established in Old Turkic as meaning “nephew.” Some researchers, however, have attempted to interpret the word as “grandchild.”

The following passage is also noteworthy:

“*Uluγ oγulim: s(ükä) bardī*” – “My eldest child went to war (perhaps prematurely?)” (Su 10).

Since the word **oγul** in Old Turkic inscriptions was used in the general sense of “child” without explicitly indicating gender, the reading **oγulimīn** as specifically “my son” becomes less convincing. In the Turkic language of the inscriptional period, whenever the meaning “male child” was intended, **oγul** was regularly modified by **urī** (“male”), as discussed above. This is clearly illustrated in the Kül Tegin inscription:

“*Tabyač bodunqa bäglik urī oγlīn qul bolī*” – “The son who was worthy of becoming a lord among the Tabgach people became a slave” (KT 7).

The use of **urī** specifically to denote a male child continued in later centuries. In particular, in texts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the word occurs independently with the meanings “son” and “young man”:

“*Talīm urī yarīnča yasičīn, yalīm qayaγ yara urupan, yalıñusun yoriyur, tir*” – “A brave young man who split bare rocks in two with a flat arrow wanders about, it is said” (IB 40).

“*Yana yandru kälma ay ärsig urī*” – “Do not come back again, O brave young man” (QBN 2777; QBN 3749).

The word **urī** is also defined independently as “boy” or “male child” in the *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* (DLT I, 115).

Furthermore, the sentence in line 6 of the inscription,

“*inim: yāti: urum: üč: qizim: üč: ärti*” – “I had seven younger brothers, three sons, and three daughters,”

demonstrates that **uru** was deliberately chosen to denote a “male child.”³⁴ According to H. Şirin, however, there is no conclusive evidence that the word **oγul** in the sentence “*uluγ oγulim: s(ükä) bardī*” (“My eldest oγul went to war”) in line 10 was used specifically in the sense of “son.” Therefore, this statement should more appropriately be interpreted as:

“My eldest child went to war.”

Such an interpretation is more consistent with the semantic usage of **oγul** in Old Turkic, where the word could refer generally to a child or offspring regardless of gender, whereas **urī** was the more precise term for a male child. This distinction highlights the importance of contextual and semantic analysis in the interpretation of kinship terminology in Old Turkic inscriptions³⁵. This interpretation appears to have a sound basis, since Mahmud al-

³⁴ Clauson G. *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish*. Oxford: Oxford University. 1972. – P. 40.

³⁵ Hatice ŞİRİN USER. Kan Ağla- Ve Baş Bağla- Deyimlerinin Bilge Kağan Ve Suci Yazitlari Temelinde Açiklamasi. *Türkbilig*, 2008/16. – P. 137-145.

Kashgari also glossed the word as “**great, the greatest of anything**” (DLT I, 95). In this regard, an additional observation may be made: notably, the word **uluy** has not entirely lost its meanings of “firstborn” or “young man” in modern Uzbek. For example, the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language* defines the lexeme **ulugʻ** as “powerful, great, superior, successful in one’s work, leader, guide, ruler, young man” (O‘TIL IV, 280–281).

Therefore, it may be assumed that the phrase **uluy oʻyulim** should be understood not merely as “**my eldest child**” but, perhaps more accurately, as “**my grown-up child**” or “**my young man.**” Such an interpretation appears more appropriate in light of the semantic range of **uluy** and its historical development.

Another possible interpretation should also be considered. In the language of the inscriptional period, **uluy** could indicate not only age or greatness but also a military or administrative rank. Indeed, the symbolic title **uluy**, meaning “great,” “supreme,” or “exalted,” is attested in both Göktürk and Uyghur inscriptions. In the Kül Tegin inscription, it appears in the following passage:

“*Anta kisrä Yär Bayırqu Uluy Ärkin yayı bolı*” – “After that, Yer Bayırqu Ulug Erkin became an enemy” (KT 34).

This example demonstrates that **uluy** could function as an honorific title denoting elevated status and authority.

Furthermore, Chinese historical chronicles record that Qapaghan Qaghan (r. 691–716), the younger brother of Ilterish Qaghan (r. 682–691), was awarded the title **El-Tarish Ulugh Shanyu** (Chinese: *Sye-tye-li-shi Da Shanyu*) by the Tang dynasty. The mention of this title in official chronicles further confirms that **uluy** was employed not only as a descriptive adjective but also as a formal designation associated with high political and military rank.

Consequently, when interpreting the expression **uluy oʻyulim**, one should take into account not only the lexical meaning of **uluy** (“great,” “elder,” “grown-up”) but also its broader socio-political connotations. This suggests that the phrase may have conveyed not merely age seniority but also maturity, prestige³⁶, or a distinguished social position within the family and community³⁷. Therefore, it is quite possible that the first element in the phrase **uluy oʻyulim** was also used in the sense of a military title. The author of the inscription expressed his regret at not having witnessed his son’s military valor, writing: “*körmädim: ir...: oʻyul*” – “I did not see ... my son/child” (Su 11).

The lexeme **yägän**, attested in the sources with the meanings “nephew” as well as “title” (MCh W 8; Su 8; Ar 1; XT VII 3), also appears in some Orkhon Turkic texts in the form **čiqan**³⁸. Notably, a similar form occurs in Old Korean as **cokha**, meaning “nephew.” It may therefore be suggested that the forms **yägän / čiqan** and Old Korean **cokha**, all carrying the meaning “nephew,” point to possible historical and linguistic connections between ancient Turkic and Korean. Their phonetic and semantic similarity allows one to hypothesize either a common ancient lexical layer or the result of long-standing areal and cultural contacts.

Kinship terms that arise after a certain stage in a person’s life—particularly after family relations have been established—include such lexical units as **äči** “wife” (Tar Shi 5), **küdägü** “son-in-law” (Ar 1), **yutuz** “wife, spouse” (XT XIX 1), and **quduz** “wife, spouse” (MCh East 3).

Among these, the word **küdägü** (“son-in-law”) is mentioned only once in the inscriptions of the Uyghur Khaganate, namely in the Arkhanan inscription:

“*täñrikän : qunčuy : yägän : botur? : ärkin : baliq : äri bolı : turdı : yayı küil tarqan : küdägü kälirti : bu ... äkin qaya : täg bäk bolzun*” – “The nephew of the sacred princess, Botur Erkin, remained in the city as a warrior. Yangi Kül Tarqan brought the son-in-law. May these two be as firm as stone” (Ar 1).

According to scholarly studies, **küdägü** derives from the Old Turkic verb **küdä-** and originally denoted “the husband of one’s daughter”³⁹. It has also been suggested that the word originated from the Mongolic form **gürägü**, which was subsequently adapted into Turkic through phonetic changes. S. Li notes that in post-Uyghur Turkic

³⁶ Бобоёров. *F. Фарбий Турк хоқонлиги...* – Б. 176.

³⁷ Togan İ., Kara G., Baysal C. Çin kaynaklarında Türkler. Eski T’ang Tarihi. – Ankara: TTK, 2006. – S. 240.

³⁸ Han-Woo Choi. Eski Korece’de Türkçe Ödünç Kelimeler. *bilig Ê Yaz / 2004 Ê sayı 30*: 87.

³⁹ Söng Lı. Y. (1999). *Türk Dillerinde Akrabalık Adları*. Simurg yayınları. 308.

historical texts the word occurs in numerous forms, including **küzägü, küyägü, güyägü, güyägi, giyägi, küyävü, küyävüw, küyäv, küyöv, güyäg, güväge, and iç güyägü**. These phonetic variations can be explained by sound changes, affixal expansion, and dialectal differentiation throughout the history of the Turkic languages.

For example, the change **-agu > -av** in the second syllable, as observed in the word **yäv**, is frequently encountered in Turkic languages, particularly in Uzbek:

- **birägü > biräv > biräv**
- **küdägü > küyäv > kyyäv**
- **kiragi > kirav > kirov**

According to the *Etymological Dictionary of the Uzbek Language*, the word means “the husband of one’s daughter (from the perspective of the parents and their relatives).” Historically, it was formed from the Old Turkic noun **küd/küg**, meaning “daughter’s husband,” through the addition of the verbal suffix **-a** and the deverbal noun-forming suffix **-gü** (ESTYA III, 45; PDP, 397; DLT III, 18; DS, 324). Subsequently, the consonant **d/z** changed to **y**, the final vowel **ü** ceased to be pronounced, and as a result the final consonant **g** shifted to **v** (SSTN II, 170). In Uzbek, the influence of **v** further affected the preceding vowel, while the palatal quality of **ö** was lost.

Another relatively rare term belonging to the kinship and marital terminology of Old Turkic is **yutuz**⁴⁰. This word is attested only once in the Ötüken Uyghur inscriptions, namely in the Khoito Tamir inscription (XT XIX 1). In Old Turkic, it denoted “wife” or “spouse.” This meaning becomes particularly evident in the following line from the Yenisei inscription *Kyzyl-Chiraa I* (Y 43):

“*bodunum a, oylum a, yutuzum a*” – “O my people! O my children! O my wife!”

This quotation clearly demonstrates that the word consistently expressed a marital relationship. The lexeme also occurs in the Irq Bitig and the Turfan texts:

“*bäg yutuz birlän bolsun*” – “May the ruler be with his wife” (DTS 282);

“*oyli yutuzi qop ögirär*” – “His son and wife were very happy” (IB 44).

Although some scholars mistakenly interpreted the lexeme as meaning “female slave” or “concubine,” it was correctly translated by Sir Gerard Clauson and Ahmet Caferoğlu as “wife,” that is, a woman in a marital relationship⁴¹. The occurrence of the same lexeme in the Yenisei inscriptions with precisely the meaning “spouse” or “wife” confirms that its semantic core was concerned not with class relations but rather with familial and social relationships.

CONCLUSION

1. It has been established that lexical units denoting kinship relations occupy a significant place in the vocabulary of the seventh–tenth century Turkic inscriptions and were formed in close connection with the social structure, genealogical concepts, and family values of ancient Turkic society.
2. According to their semantic characteristics, kinship terms can be divided into three groups: those expressing **seniority relative to the individual**, those expressing **juniority relative to the individual**, and those denoting **kinship relations established through marriage**. Each group constitutes a distinct lexical-semantic system.
3. It has been determined that certain lexemes such as **qañ, apa, äcü, ini, and yägän** possessed multilayered semantic structures, expressing not only biological kinship but also social status, political authority, and rank-related meanings.

⁴⁰ Clauson, G. (1972). *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish*. The Clarendon Press. 703.

⁴¹ Aydın, E. (2015). *Yenisey Yazıtları*. Kömen. 217. Clauson, G. (1972). *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish*. The Clarendon Press. 894. Caferoğlu, A. (2015). *Eski Uyğur Türkçesi Sözlüğü*. Türk Dil Kurumu. 306.

4. The historical development of kinship terminology involved processes of semantic expansion, semantic narrowing, metaphorical transfer, and functional differentiation. As a result, some lexical items acquired new semantic nuances in modern Turkic languages, whereas others gradually fell out of use.
5. The comparative-historical analysis of kinship terms in Old Turkic inscriptions demonstrates their genetic and semantic connections with later Turkic languages and serves as an important scholarly source for understanding the formation and development of the Common Turkic lexical stratum.
6. The findings confirm the anthropocentric character of kinship terminology. Through these lexical units, the social relations, family values, and ethno-cultural worldview of ancient Turkic peoples found expression in language, reflecting their perception of society and human relationships.

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