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## PHONETIC ADAPTATION OF ARABIC LOANWORDS IN THE DOBRUJAN TATAR

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**Abstract.** As indicated by the title, this study deals with the phonetic adaptation of the Arabic loanwords in the Dobrujan Tatar. This Turkic variety possesses a large number of Arabic lexical borrowings due to the fact that Arabic is the language of the Quran, a language of high prestige for Muslims. Arabic, as a donor language, is closely related to the spread of the Islamic religion among the Turkic populations. Several phonological processes in Dobrujan Tatar apply with regard to the adaptation of lexical borrowings from Arabic.

**Keywords:** Tatar, Arabic, Dobruja, loanword, phonetic adaptation

### 1. Sources of data

The lexical data for my study were taken from several semi-structured interviews with the Dobrujan Tatars I met in the cities of Constanța and Medgidia. I observed that many words they used in the conversations were Arabic loanwords, and they could not avoid lexical borrowings from Arabic. In order to identify Arabic loanwords, I also consulted dictionaries such as *Dobruca Kırmıttatar Ağzı Sözlüğü* (Saim Osman Karahan, 2011) and books written in Dobrujan Tatar, such as *Kaniye* (Kerim 1984). A valuable tool was *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Arabic-English) (Hans Wehr, 1979). The phonological adaptation of Arabic names was the subject of one previous study written by George Grigore and Sevghin Omer – “Phonetic Changes in the Arabic Islamic Names of Dobrudjan Tatars” (2009).

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## 2. The language and its speakers

Dobrujan Tatar is spoken by the Sunni Muslim<sup>2</sup> Tatar minority living in Dobruja, a historical province located in southeastern Romania. Tatar belongs to the Turkic languages, which are included by Robbeets (2020: 31) into the Transeurasian<sup>3</sup> languages, “a group of geographically adjacent and structurally homogenous languages across Eurasia that consists of five uncontroversial families: the Turkic, Mongolic, Tungusic, Koreanic, and Japonic languages”. The Transeurasian term complements the traditional term “Altaic” that is used for the unity of Turkic, Mongolic, and Tungusic languages (Robbeets 2020: 31). Rybatzki (2020: 27) divides the Turkic languages into Common Turkic, Bulgharic (represented by Chuvash), and Arghu Turkic (represented by Khalaj). Common Turkic includes the following subgroups:

- Southern / Southwestern, Oghuz group (Turkish, Gagavuz, Azeri, Turkmen, Afshar, Salar of Qinghai and Xinjiang)
- Western, Kipchak group: Kumyk, Tatar, Karaim, Noghay
- Central group: Kazakh, Karakalpak, Krgyz
- Eastern or Southeastern, Karluk group: Uzbek, Uyghur, with their dialects
- Northern or Northeastern Siberian group: Yakut, Tuva, Khakas, Shor, Chulym, Oirot, Western Yughur of Gansu, Fuyu Kyrghyz of Heilongjiang (Rybatzki 2020: 27).

Johanson (2020: 108) divides modern Turkic languages into six branches based on genealogical affiliations and typological characteristics:

- the Southern or Oghuz branch
- the Northwestern or Kipchak branch
- the Southeastern or Karluk branch
- the Northeastern or Siberian branch
- the Oghur branch represented by Chuvash
- the Arghu branch represented by Khalaj (Johanson 2020: 108).

Johanson (2020: 108) includes Tatar and Noghay into the Kipchak group: Tatar belongs to the Volga-Ural subbranch, and Noghay belongs to the Aralo-Caspian subbranch.

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<sup>2</sup> Islam was spread among the Tatar nomads of Dobruja when a Bektashi mystic from Bukhara, Sarı Saltuk, arrived in this territory in 1261 with approximately 40 clans of Yörük Turcomans (Williams 2001: 203).

<sup>3</sup> Gustaf John Ramstedt is considered the founder of Transeurasian linguistics. He proposed a linguistic framework for Transeurasian comparison from the perspective of regular sound correspondences and morphological cognates (Robbeets 2020: 310).

There are two varieties of Dobrujan Tatar: Crimean Tatar and Noghay Tatar. The two dialects are agglutinative languages and share the same vowel and consonant system, the same vowel harmony rules, the same morphological features (with a few exceptions), and the same syntactic rules. They also share the same Arabic, Persian, Russian, and Romanian loanwords. Some Arabic and Persian lexical borrowings came to Tatar via Turkish (Grigore and Omer 2009: 50).

This study will not distinguish between the two varieties because the differences are irrelevant to my approach.

Dobrujan Tatar is spoken by the Tatar minority, which is formed from the Crimean Tatars and Noghays, who account together for 18,156 people, according to the 2021 census.

The Turkic Kipchak tribes dominated Dobruja from 1064: the Kipchak element in this territory increased following the Mongol conquest of the Desht-i Kipchak plains to the north-east of Dobruja; thousands of Turkic nomads fled the army of Batu Khan (Williams 2001: 203). As Williams (2001: 203) notes, “by the mid 1200s the Golden Horde had extended its way over the Kipchak Dobruja and, as in the Pontic steppes proper, the Mongol elite quickly became Turkified and Islamicized in Dobruja and came to be known as Tatars”. In the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, the ancestors of the European Tatars lived in vast territories located north of the Black Sea, from the Mouths of the Danube to the Urals. Initially, these territories formed a geographical and linguistic continuum, despite the existence, in this area, of a multitude of separate Tatar states resulting from the disintegration of the Golden Horde Empire, namely the Great Horde, the Khanate of Kazan, the Khanate of Astrakhan, the Khanate of Kasımov, the Great and Small Noghay Hordes (Oberländer-Târnoveanu and Adam 2005: 28). The loss of autonomy in the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries led to a strong enclavisation of the Tatar populations and a numerical reduction; the modern period was marked by huge displacements of the Tatar populations around the Black Sea, often followed by the degradation of their social structures (Oberländer-Târnoveanu and Adam 2005: 28).

Nowadays, in Romania, specifically in Dobruja, there are two groups of Tatars: the Crimean Tatars and the Noghays. Sultans Beyazıt “Yıldırım” (The Thunderbolt), 1389-1402, and Mehmed I, 1413-1421, colonized Dobruja with Noghay Tatars from the Budjak (Williams 2001: 204). A few hundred years later, Noghays migrated from the Black Sea steppes: “the Dobruja Noghays came from Crimea but partly consists of West Ukrainian and Bessarabic Noghays, who fled to the Ottoman territory at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century” (Johanson 2021: 69). The Tatar migration to Dobruja accelerated with the fall of Tatar power in Crimea in 1783 and the Tatars’ presence became so dense that Dobruja was known throughout the Balkans as Küçük Tatarstan – Little Tatarstan (Williams 2001: 205). They were known as the Qabail Tatars, “to differentiate them from the mass wave of Tatar emigrants who arrived in Dobruja following the Crimean War” (Williams 2001: 205).

For almost 500 years, Dobruja was part of the Ottoman Empire. In July 1878, the Treaty of Berlin decided that this territory, along with the Danube Delta and the Serpents' Island, would be part of Romania (Oberländer-Târnoveanu and Adam 2005: 38), so the Dobrujan Tatars became Romanian citizens.

### **3. Contact with Arabic**

Dobrujan Tatar possesses a large number of Arabic loanwords. According to Haspelmath (2009: 36), "loanword or lexical borrowing is here defined as a word that at some point in the history of a language entered its lexicon as a result of borrowing (or transfer, or copying)". Haspelmath (2009: 36) also underlines that "...the term borrowing is based on a strange metaphor (after all, the donor language does not expect to receive its words back), so a term like transfer or transference would be preferable". Most of the loanwords came through religion. Contact with Arabic began with the Islamization of the Turkic populations. Kaye (1997: 190) underlines that Arabic

is in wide use throughout the Muslim world as a second language and as a learned, liturgical language. Indeed, among Orthodox Muslims, Arabic is the language of the angels, and the language par excellence in the world since Allah himself is believed to have revealed his Holy Book, the Qur'an, in the Arabic language.

According to Poppe (1965: 171), "Arabic words and grammatical forms penetrated into Turkic after the tenth century, when Islam was beginning to spread among some Turkic peoples". First, Arabic words entered the Turkic languages of the Turkmen group (i.e., Turkish, Azerbaidjan Turkic, and Turkmenian) and those spoken in Turkestan, and then, they were carried to the Tatars and other Turkic peoples (Poppe 1965: 171). On the other hand, Persian served as an intermediary for Arabic loans. In Turkic languages, Johanson (2021: 207) notes that words of Arabic origin are taken from Persian and, therefore, most of them are not the result of direct exposure to Arabic. There are many Arabic-Persian loans in all Turkic languages of the Islamic cultural sphere, which represent abstract concepts and concrete phenomena in Islamic societies (Johanson 2021: 206). As Johanson (2021: 206) mentions, Arabic-Persian loans play an important role in the SW and NW branches. Such lexical borrowings had a great influence on literary Ottoman Turkish and became dominant in the fifteenth-nineteenth centuries; large parts of the native vocabulary were ousted, including Old Ottoman words (Johanson 2021: 206).

#### **4. Phonetic adaptation of loanwords**

Loanwords from Arabic are adapted to Dobrujan Tatar. Weinreich (1968: 14) underlines that “the problem of phonic interference concerns the manner in which a speaker perceives and reproduces the sounds of one language, which might be designated secondary, in terms of another, to be called primary”. Arabic loanwords undergo changes to make them fit into the Dobrujan Tatar. Some vowels are changed in order to follow the Tatar harmony rules. Whereas Dobrujan Tatar has no vowel length distinction, Arabic identifies vowels as either short or long. When adapted to the Tatar spoken in Dobruja, Arabic long vowels are shortened. Arabic consonant clusters are broken up through epenthetic vowels. The stops /b/ and /d/ are changed to their voiceless pairs. The voiced pharyngeal fricative /ʕ/, the voiceless pharyngeal fricative /ħ/, the voiced laryngeal stop /ʔ/, and the voiceless laryngeal fricative /h/, which do not exist in native Tatar words, drop.

##### ***4.1. Arabic and Dobrujan Tatar phonology***

I first present the vowel and consonant systems of the two languages to explain the phonetic adaptation of Arabic lexical borrowings.

##### ***4.1.1. Arabic vowel and consonant system***

In my study, I used Roman letters for transcribing the Arabic loanwords. Transliteration symbols are used for spelling Arabic lexical items. According to Grigore and Omer (2009: 52), the Arabic consonant system is represented as:

Table 1

The Arabic vowel system is represented as (Grigore and Omer 2009: 53):

i      u  
         a

	(Bi)-labial	(Denti)-alveolar	Pharyngelized (Denti)-alveolar	Palato-alveolar	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Laryngeal
Voiceless stops/affricates		t	t̤	ʈ	k	q		
Voiced stops/affricates	b	d	d̤					ʕ
Voiceless fricatives/sibilants	f	s   t̤	ʃ			ħ	ħ	h
Voiced fricatives/sibilants	m	z	ḍ			ğ	ʕ	
Nasals	m	n						
Laterals		l						
Rhotics		r						
Semivowels	w			y				

The vowels may be short: /a/, /i/, /u/ or long: /ā/, /ī/, /ū/ (Grigore and Omer 2009: 53).

#### 4.1.2. Dobrujan Tatar vowel and consonant system

I used as a reference the alphabet used in the Tatar language textbooks from Dobruja (Ziyaeddin and Ahmet Naci 2015: 78) in order to write the Arabic loanwords.

The Dobrujan Tatar consonants are represented as:

Table 2

	Bi-labial	Denti-alveolar	Palato-alveolar	Velar	Uvular
Voiceless stops/affricates	p	t	ç	k	q
Voiced stops/affricates	b	d	c	g	
Voiceless fricatives/sibilants		s	ş		
Voiced fricatives/sibilants		z	j		
Nasals	m	m		ñ	
Laterals		l			
Rhotics		r			
Semivowels	w		y		

The common consonants in Arabic and Dobrujan Tatar are /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /s/, /z/, /c/, /ʃ/, /m/, /n/, /l/, /r/. But word-initial l- and r- are not found in native Turkic words (Johanson 2021: 235). As Grigore and Omer (2009: 54) mention, “the remaining consonants in Arabic that are not to be found in Tatar, they will either disappear, or they will be equated to Tatar consonants sharing the most common features”.

Vowel harmony is one of the main characteristics of the Turkic languages, including Dobrujan Tatar. Depending on the place of articulation, the vowels are divided into two groups: back (/a/, /ɨ/, /o/, /u/) and front (/e/, /i/, /ɛ/, /ö/, /ü/). These two groups are subdivided into rounded (/o/, /u/, /ö/, /ü/) and unrounded (/a/, /e/, /i/, /ɛ/, /i/). If the first vowel in a word is back (*alt-mış* “six-ty”, *doq-san* “ninety”), all the following vowels are back and vice versa (*i-ki* “two”, *yet-mış* “seventy”). Also, if the first vowel is rounded, all the following vowels are rounded and vice versa. Some loans are not adapted to vowel harmony: *insān* “human” ← *insān* “human”, *kitap* “book” ← *kitāb* “book”.

Dobrujan Tatar does not possess long vowels. In terms of length distinction of the vowels, Proto-Turkic had a system of threefold quantity: long, half long, and short; long vowels became short through a gradual and protracted process (Johanson 2021: 331).

Table 3

Front		Back	
Unrounded	Rounded	Unrounded	Rounded
i	ü	ɪ	u
e	ö	a	o
ĩ			

## 4.2. Consonants

### 4.2.1. Arabic consonant dropping

Some Arabic consonants disappear due to the phonetic adaptation to Dobrujan Tatar. According to Grigore and Omer (2009: 54) these consonants are the pairs of pharyngeal fricatives and uvular fricative:

#### a. the voiced pharyngeal fricative /ʕ/:

<i>acele</i> “to rush”, “to hurry”	← <i>ağila</i> “to hurry”, “to rush”
<i>aile</i> “family”	← <i>ā’ila</i> “family”
<i>alem</i> “world”	← <i>ālam</i> “world”
<i>aqaret</i> “piece of landed property that yields a revenue”	← <i>aqārāt</i> “immovable property”, “immovables”
<i>sanat</i> “art”	← <i>şan’a</i> “work, fabrication/ art”
<i>zayıp</i> “weak”	← <i>da’if</i> “weak”

#### b. the voiceless pharyngeal fricative /ħ/:

<i>azır</i> “ready”, “prepared”	← <i>hādir</i> “present”, “ready”, “prepared”
<i>maraba</i> “hello”, “hi”	← <i>marhab<sup>an</sup></i> “welcome”, “hello”
<i>marebe</i> “war”	← <i>muḥāraba</i> “struggle”, “fight”, “battle”
<i>raat</i> “comfortable”	← <i>rāḥat</i> “rest”, “repose”, “recreation”, “leisure”
<i>saba</i> “morning”	← <i>şabāḥ</i> “morning”
<i>zamet</i> “toil”, “labor”, “trouble”, “effort”, “torment”	← <i>zaḥmat</i> “crush”, “jam”
<i>aqq</i> “justice”, “rightness”	← <i>haqq</i> “truth”, “correctness”, “rightness”

#### c. the voiced laryngeal stop /ʔ/:

<i>bina</i> “building”	← <i>binā’</i> “building”, “construction”
<i>pal</i> “fortune telling”	← <i>fa’l</i> “good omen”, “favorable auspice” ( <i>qara’a l-fa’l</i> “to tell fortunes, to predict the future”)
<i>payda</i> “benefit”, “utility”	← <i>fā’ida</i> “benefit”, “utility”
<i>seda</i> “voice”	← <i>şadan</i> “echo”
<i>zekâ</i> “cleverness”, “intelligence”	← <i>ḡakâ’</i> “brightness”, “intelligence”, “mental acuteness”



**d.** the voiceless laryngeal fricative /h/ is subject of syncope in Arabic loanwords:

*muacır* “migrant”  
*müendis* “engineer”

← *muhāğır* “emigrant”  
 ← *muhandis* “architect”, “engineer”

#### 4.2.2. Arabic consonant shift

Some Arabic consonants change when the loanword is adapted to Tatar.

**a.** Final devoicing of the stops /b/ and /d/

-/p/ ← /b/:

*qalp* “heart”  
*mektep* “school”  
*sebep* “reason”, “cause”  
*sayıp* “owner”  
*şarap* “wine”  
*zapt* “taking by force”, “conquering”

← *qalb* “heart”  
 ← *maktab* “office”, “bureau”, “school”,  
 “elementary school”  
 ← *sabab* “reason”, “cause”  
 ← *şāhib* “companion”, “owner”  
 ← *şarāb* “beverage”, “drink”, “wine”  
 ← *ḍabt* “capture”, “arresting”

-/t/ ← /d/:

*adet* “piece”  
*tükyan* “shop”, “store”

← *ʿadad* “number”  
 ← *dukkān* “bench”, “store”, “shop”

**b.** The Arabic voiceless labio-dental fricative /f/

The Arabic voiceless labio-dental fricative /f/ realizes as the voiceless bilabial stop /p/ in Tatar (Grigore and Omer 2009: 55):

*palan* “so-and-so”  
*parq* “difference”, “distinction”  
*petwa* “formal legal opinion”  
*pikır* “idea”  
*sıpra* “dining table”

← *fulān* “(substituting for an unnamed or unspecified person or thing) so-and-so”  
 ← *farq* “separation”, “division”,  
 “differentiation”, “distinction”  
 ← *fatwā* “formal legal opinion”  
 ← *fıkr* “thinking”, “reflection”, “thought”, “idea”  
 ← *sufra* “dining table”

**c. The interdental fricatives**

The inter-dental fricative /ɖ/ shifts to dental fricative /z/ in Tatar / (Grigore – Omer 2009: 56):

<i>müezzin</i> “person who makes the call to prayer”	← <i>mu’adḍin</i> “muezzin”, “announcer of the hour of prayer”
<i>zaten</i> “besides”	← <i>ḍāt</i> “being, essence; self, person”, <i>ḍāt<sup>an</sup></i> “personally” <i>bi-ḍ-ḍāt</i> “none other than..., ... of all things, ... of all people”
<i>zewk</i> “taste”	← <i>ḍawq</i> “gustatory sense”, “taste”
<i>zikir</i> “mention”	← <i>ḍikr</i> “recollection”, “remembrance”, “naming”, “mention(ing)”

**d. The emphatic consonants /ṣ/, /ṭ/, /ẓ/**

The emphatic consonants /ṣ/, /ṭ/, /ẓ/ lose their pharyngeal features, and they are assimilated to the Tatar consonants /s/, /t/, /z/ (Grigore and Omer 2009: 56):

/s/ ← /ṣ/

<i>pırsat</i> “opportunity”, “chance”	← <i>furṣa</i> “opportunity”, “chance”
<i>maqṣat</i> “aim”, “purpose”	← <i>maqṣid</i> “destination”, “intention”, “purpose”
<i>masum</i> “innocent”	← <i>ma’ṣūm</i> “inviolable”, “infallible”, “sinless”, “impeccable”

/t/ ← /ṭ/

<i>sultan</i> “sultan”	← <i>sulṭān</i> “sultan”, “muslim sovereign”, “authority”, “sovereignty”
<i>talebe</i> “pupil”	← <i>ṭālib pl ṭalaba</i> “seeker”, “pursuer”, “student”, “scholar”

/z/ ← /ẓ/

<i>zann</i> “opinion”	← <i>ẓann</i> “opinion”, “assumption”
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### 4.3. Vowels

#### 4.3.1. The long vowels

All Arabic long vowels /a/, /i/, /u/ become short in Tatar (Grigore and Omer 2009: 57):

- /a/:

<i>aywan</i> “animal”, “beast”	← <i>ḥayawān</i> “animal”, “beast”
<i>dünya</i> “world”	← <i>dunyā</i> “world”, “earth”
<i>idare</i> “administration”, “management”	← <i>‘idāra</i> “direction”, “management”, “administration”
<i>imam</i> “imam”, “prayer leader”	← <i>‘imām</i> “imam”, “prayer leader”
<i>mal</i> “goods”, “property”	← <i>māl</i> “property”, “possessions”, “wealth”
<i>mana</i> “meaning”, “sense”	← <i>ma ‘nā</i> “sense”, “meaning”, “signification”
<i>tamam</i> “done”, “finished”	← <i>tamām</i> “completeness”, “wholeness”, “perfection”, “perfect”
<i>zalım</i> “despot”, “tyrant”	← <i>zālīm</i> “unjust”, “unfair”, “tyrant”, “oppressor”

- /i/:

<i>kelime</i> “word”	← <i>kalima</i> “word”, “speech”
<i>manevi</i> “spiritual”, “moral”	← <i>ma ‘nawī</i> “relating to the sense”, “significative”, “ideal”
<i>teklif</i> “offer”, “proposal”	← <i>taklīf</i> “burdening”, “commissioning”, “taxation”, pl. “duties”, “taxes”
<i>teslim</i> “delivery”	← <i>taslīm</i> “handing over”, “surrender”, “delivery”

- /u/:

<i>mecbur</i> “forced”, “compelled”	← <i>mağbūr</i> “forced”, “compelled”
<i>mewcut</i> “available”, “existing”	← <i>mawğūd</i> “found”, “available”, “existing”

#### 4.3.2. The short vowels

##### a. The Arabic short vowels in a consonant environment

In Arabic, the consonant environment affects the pronunciation of the three vowels /a/, /i/, /u/, and this phenomenon is found in Tatar; /a/ does not change when placed near emphatic or very back consonants (Grigore and Omer 2009: 57):

<i>tatıl</i> “holiday”, “vacation”	← <i>ta ‘īl</i> “hindering”, “obstruction”, “interruption”; <i>uṭla</i> (same root) “leisure”, “holidays”
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/i/ becomes /ɪ/:

*ısrar* “insistence”  
*vasıta* “means”

← *’ısrār* “persistence”, “insistence”  
← *wasīṭa* “means”

### b. Imāla

According to Grigore and Omer (2009: 58), in a consonant environment, the vowel /a/ is subject to an *imāla* phenomenon (*imāla* means inclination and it refers to /a/-raising) and it becomes /e/ in Tatar:

*asker* “soldier”  
*memleket* “country”, “homeland”  
*mesele* “issue”  
*meslek* “job”, “profession”  
*niyet* “intention”  
*tecrübe* “experience”, “knowledge”

← *’askar* “army”, “troops”; *’askariyy*  
“military”, “army”, “soldier”  
← *mamlakat* “kingdom”  
← *mas’ala* “question”, “issue”  
← *maslak* “way”, “course of action”,  
“procedure”; *maslakiyy* “professional”,  
“vocational”  
← *niyyat* “intention”  
← *tağriba* “trial”, “test”, “experiment”,  
“experience”, “practice”

### c. The epenthetic vowel /ɪ/

Syllable final clusters which are formed from two consonants, the second one being /r/, are not accepted in Tatar (Grigore and Omer 2009: 60). In the Arabic loanwords, the vowel /ɪ/ or /ĩ/ is inserted between the two consonants, according to vowel harmony:

*aql* “mind”, “reason”  
*pıtır* “alms given at the end of Ramazan”

← *’aql* “sense”, “reason”, “mind”  
← *fiṭr* “fast breaking”

## Conclusions

In this study, I have presented the phonetic adaptation of Arabic loanwords in Dobrujan Tatar. As a donor language, Arabic has exerted a great influence on Dobrujan Tatar. As grammatical category, most of the lexical borrowings are nouns. The phoneme inventories of the two languages are not similar, so the loanwords are not taken over in a form identical to that of the source language. They undergo phonetic modifications due to the integration to the Dobrujan Tatar phonetic system. This Turkic variety lacks the Arabic phonemes such as the voiced pharyngeal fricative /ʕ/, the voiced laryngeal stop /ʔ/, the voiceless pharyngeal fricative /ħ/, and the voiceless laryngeal fricative /h/. The Arabic phoneme /f/ shifts to /p/ in any position. Arabic /b/ and /d/ consonants are

replaced by their voiceless pairs /p/ and /t/. The inter-dental fricative /ð/ shifts to dental fricative /z/ in Dobrujan Tatar, while the emphatic consonants /ʃ/, /t/, /z/ lose their pharyngeal features, being assimilated to the Tatar consonants /s/, /t/, /z/. On the other hand, the long vowels become short in Dobrujan Tatar. In a consonant environment, the vowel /a/ is subject to an *imāla* phenomenon, and it becomes /e/ in Tatar. The vowel /ɪ/ or /ĩ/ is inserted between the two consonants in Arabic loanwords.

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