

LESSON 4

PHONOLOGY

Modifications of consonants and vowels

To students of other ancient languages, such as Latin, Greek, or Sanskrit, the most disturbing feature of Avestan is the seeming—and sometimes actual—irregularity of the shape of the language. Thus, knowing how to produce the grammatical form of one word does not guarantee the ability to produce the same grammatical form of another word, even if the two words belong to the same grammatical category.

For instance, the accusative and genitive singular forms of *haoma-* are *haomam* and *haomahē*, but of *mašīia-* the same forms are *mašim* and *mašīiehe*. Similarly, the 3rd sing. present indicative of *bara-* “to carry” is *baraiti* “he carries,” but of *yuidīia-* “to fight” it is *yuidīieiti*, compare the OInd. forms:

Avestan	Old Indic	Avestan	Old Indic
<i>haomō</i>	<i>somo</i>	<i>mašīiō</i>	<i>martiyo</i>
<i>haomam</i>	<i>somam</i>	<i>mašim</i>	<i>martiyam</i>
<i>hamahē</i>	<i>somasya</i>	<i>mašīiehe</i>	<i>martiyasya</i>
<i>baraiti</i>	<i>bharati</i>	<i>yuidīieiti</i>	<i>yudhyati</i>

Not only endings vary in shape, even the stem of the word sometimes changes, thus “I am” is *ahmi*, but “he is” is *asti*, and “they are” is *hanti*, and “bad” is *aka-*, while “worst” is *acišta-*.

Not all of these changes can be predicted from within Avestan. Some require knowledge of the history of the language to understand. It cannot be recommended strongly enough that the students learn whatever rules there are and note in what kind of words and stems they occur. “Guessing” forms in Avestan is not a good idea.

1. Palatalization of *a* (*i*-umlaut)

This section describes the palatalization of *a* when **not** followed by a nasal (see Lessons 5, 7):

a > *e* when preceded by *y* or *ii* and followed by *i* or *e* or when in final position after *h*, *n*, *r*, or *s*. This rule affects numerous nominal and verbal forms.

In the table below palatalization is indicated by a raised *-i-*. Frequently the original *-iia* has been reintroduced.

Summary of changes (C = consonant):

<i>*yaCi</i> > <i>yeCⁱi</i>	<i>*yadi</i> > <i>yeiⁱdi</i>
	<i>*yazi</i> > <i>yezi</i>
<i>*yaCe</i> > <i>yeCⁱe</i>	<i>*ājase</i> > <i>āiiese</i>
	<i>*frā-īaze</i> > <i>frāiieze</i>
<i>-Cīa</i> > <i>-Cⁱe</i>	<i>*arīa</i> > <i>aire</i> (not † <i>eire</i> !)
	<i>*-ahīa</i> > <i>-ahe</i>

Notes:

On the “intrusive” *i* in *yeiⁱdi* and *aire*, see below.

yaz- has *yaze*, not **yeze*

2. Labialization of *a* (*u*-umlaut)

A short *a* followed by *r* or *h* is labialized—or “rounded”—into *o* before an *u* (not *uu*) in the following syllable, e.g., *pouru-* < **paru*, *vohu-* < **vahu*, *pouru.sarəda-* “of many species,” *vohu.friiāna-*

“Vohu.friiāna” (a kind of fire), *vohuuərəz-* “who performs good (acts)” (< *vohu* + *vərəz-*).

This change also takes place when the *u* is not an original *u*, e.g., *pourum* < **pa^uruuam* “prior, former.”
In *-aṇhu-* the *a* is never labialized.

Note: On the “intrusive” *u* in *pouru*, see below.

3. Palatalization and labialization of consonants: *i-* and *u-*epenthesis

The most common sound alternations in Avestan are those referred to as palatalization or *i-*epenthesis and labialization or *u-*epenthesis.

“Palatalization” here means lifting the flat tongue toward the palate and touching it while pronouncing the consonant (as in Russian). (“Palatalized” is different from “palatal,” which refers to the palate as point of articulation, with the tip of the tongue or flat tongue.)

“Labialization” means rounding the lips while pronouncing the consonant.

It cannot now be determined when exactly these sounds arose in Avestan. It can have been in the proto-Avestan, the Avestan, or even in the post-Avestan period—at some stage of the later oral transmission of the text.

4. Palatalization of consonants

Palatalization of consonants occurred when *i* or *j* palatalized preceding consonants or consonant groups. In the Avestan orthography the palatalization is explicitly noted in two ways:

1. by special consonant signs: *ń, ĵ, ǰ* (on which see Lesson 3);
2. by writing an *i* before the palatalized consonant.

It cannot now be ascertained whether consonants other than *ń, ĵ, ǰ* were actually palatalized (as in Russian) or—if they were—for how long they remained so during the transmission of the texts. It is reasonable to assume that at some stage of the transmission the originally palatalized consonants lost their palatalization, leaving behind only the epenthetic *i* (which then virtually formed a diphthong with the preceding vowel).

Not all consonants show palatalization by epenthesis. Thus, the palatal consonants *c* and *j* and the sibilants (*s, z, š, ž*), as well as *m* and *h*, never do. Other consonants, however, regularly do, e.g., *aipi* (< **api*), *aīβi* (< **abi*), *aēiti* (< **aēiti*), *aēibiš* (< **aēibiš*), *āhuri* (< **āhuri*).

Occasional exceptions may be attributed to late scribal practice, e.g., *sure*, not *suire*.

Note also that according to the standard editions we have, for instance, *aēibiiō* but *ābiiō* (not *āibiiō*) and *-aiti* but *-atica*, *-rāiti* but *-rātica*, etc.

Consonant groups are rarely palatalized, the only important exception being *ṇt*, e.g., *astuuainti* “in (the world) with bones.” The word *māzdaiiasni-* sometimes shows palatalization: *māzdaiiesniš*, *māzdaiiesnim*, beside *māzdaiiasniš*, *māzdaiiasnim*.

Palatalization is also seen in the group *r* + consonant: *airime* “in peace” (< **armie*).

When the vowel preceding the epenthetic *i* and *u* is *ā* (*āi* and *āu*) it cannot be determined from the orthography alone whether we have an original long diphthong = *āi*, OInd. *ai*, or *ā* + *i*.

5. Labialization of consonants

Labialization of consonants occurred when a *u* labialized a preceding *h* or a *u* labialized a preceding *r*.

A labialized *h* became *x^v* initially, but *ṇ^vh* between vowels. For both these sounds special consonant signs were invented.

We see that *x^v* and *ṇ^vh* are in complementary distribution: *x^v* is used initially, *ṇ^vh* between vowels. Only by analogy or influence from Old Avestan is *x^v* found between vowels.

Labialized *r* is expressed by writing a *u* before the *r*: *ur*.

When the vowel preceding the epenthetic *u* is *ā* (*āur*) it cannot be determined from the orthography alone whether we have an original long diphthong = *āu*, OInd., or *ā + u*.

6. Combined palatalization and labialization

Palatalization and labialization can be combined, as in **paruuia- > paoiria-* “first” and **paruuī- > paoirī-* (fem. of *pouru-* “much”).

The velar nasals

The palatalized and labialized velar nasals *ḡ* and *ḡʷ* appear only before *h*. If *ḡh* is analyzed as a realization of /h/, then these too should probably be analyzed as palatalized and labialized realizations of /h/.

For *ḡh < hḡ*, cf. *vaḡhō* “better” < **vah-ḡah-*, and *daḡhu-* “land” < **dah-ḡu-*, cf. the genitive plural *daḡiiunqm*.

The group *ḡh* seems to be the rule when followed by final *-e* (< **-ai*) in the genitive singular of *a*-stems, the dative singular of *h*-stems (*manāḡhe*), and the 2nd singular middle (*pərəsāḡhe*). Of these only the dative form is regularly spelled with *ḡ* (or *ḡ*) in the manuscripts. In the genitive singular and 2nd singular middle the endings are usually *-ahe*. In the 2nd singular middle *-ḡhe* seems to be limited to the position after long *ā* (*ā*), there being only one example of an ending *-aḡhe* with short *a*. In the genitive singular, *-aḡhe* is common in the pronoun “his, its” beside *ahe*. Note also *vahehī-* < **vah-ḡah-ī-*, feminine of *vaḡhah-*.

Similarly *ḡʷh* is from **hḡʷ*, cf. *aḡʷhe* < **ahḡʷ-e*, dative sing. of *ahḡʷ-* “(state of) existence,” and the 2nd middle imperative ending *-ḡʷha-* < **-hḡʷa*, which has the allomorph *-suua* after dental (*dasuua* “take!” < **dad-sḡa*). In word formation *ḡʷh* alternates with *xʷ*: *xʷara-* “to eat” ~ *fraḡʷhara-* “to eat, consume.”

The velar fricatives

In Young Avestan *ḡ* appears only before *ii* in forms of *daḡhu-* (*daḡiiuma-*, *daḡiium*, *daḡiiunqm*, dual *daḡiiu* ~ *daḡḡhu*) and in the ethnic *ḡiiaona-* “Chionite”(?). It cannot be an allophone of *x*, as it does not appear in paradigms and word formation for *xḡ*, and its paradigmatic relationship to *ḡh* strongly suggests it should be analyzed as an irregular realization of *hḡ*: *daḡiiū-* may have been influenced by Old Avestan, and *ḡiiaona-* may be the local pronunciation of the ethnic.

The case of *xʷ* is similar. It is in complementary distribution with *ḡʷh*: initial ~ intervocalic, but the initial *xʷ* has regularly been restored after “privative” *a* (*xʷarəta-* ~ *axʷarəta-* “eaten, uneaten”). There are only two examples of intervocalic *xʷ* in Young Avestan: *kaxʷarəḡa-* “sorcerer” (cf. Skt. *kākhorda*), and the country name *Haraxʷaiī-*, which may preserve the local pronunciation.

Old **kḡ* also became *xʷ*, as in the act. perf. part. *vaoxʷah-* “having (ever) spoken.”

Consonant changes. Sandhi

The phenomenon of *sandhi* refers to the modification of consonants or vowels caused by preceding or following sounds. There are two kinds of *sandhi*: internal and external.

Internal *sandhi* refers to the changes that occur in the final consonant of the stem of a word before an ending or in the initial consonant of the ending, e.g., **drug + ś > druxś* “the Lie,” *bad + ta > basta* “bound,” **dad-te > daz-de* “is made, given,” as well as in the initial consonants of the second members of compounds, e.g., *raḡaēštā-* “charioteer” < *raḡaē + stā-*.

External (or final) *sandhi* means that the final consonant of a word is modified because of the initial of the following word.

External *sandhi* is a fundamental feature of Old Indic but occurs only sporadically in Avestan and almost exclusively in connection with the enclitic particles *-ca* “and” and *-cit*, a generalizing particle “even, -so-

ever,” occasionally before enclitic pronouns—rarely nouns—beginning with *t-*, e.g., *haomō + -ca > haomasca* “and Haoma,” *kō > -ciṭ > kasciṭ* “whoever, every,” *kaśa θβqm* “who (pressed) you (O Haoma),” *xʹaxiiā tanuuō > xʹaxiiāsā tanuuō* “of (his) own body/self,” *anākāsā tāiiuś* “(if) not in full view, (he is) a thief” (Her.6)

In the paradigms sandhi forms are marked with a raised circle (°), e.g., *kaś°* or *kaśā°* for *kō*.

[In Sanskrit also the initial of a word can be modified because of the final of the preceding word, e.g., *tam śakram > tañ śakram > tañ cakram*.]

NOUNS

Masc. *iia-* and fem. *iiā-*stems

When the ending *-iia* is preceded by consonant, symbolically “*Ciia#*,” the group *-iia* ought to become *-e* according to the rule just given, at least when the consonant allows palatalization. Most often, however, the normal *a-* and *ā-*stem forms have been reintroduced. The masc. *iia-*stems and fem. *iiā-*stems have the following modified forms (paradigms: *airiia-* “Aryan,” *mairiia-* “villain,” *kaniā-* “young woman,” *mairiā-* “roguish woman”).

Examples:

	<i>iia</i> -decl.		<i>iiā</i> -decl.
Sing.			
nom.	<i>maṣṣiiō</i>	<i>airiiō, airiias°</i>	<i>kaine, maire</i>
voc.	<i>maṣṣiia</i>	<i>*aire, maire</i>	<i>*maire</i>
Plur.			
nom.-voc.	<i>maṣṣiia, maṣṣiiāṅhō</i>	<i>aire</i>	<i>kaniā, kaniās°</i>

Notes:

The vocative of nouns such as *mairiia-* should be **maire*, with *-iia > -e*, but no examples are found in the texts (although some are used here in the exercises).

The sandhi form of the plur. nom. masc. is—both in *iia-*stems and other *a-*stems—sometimes *-ā°*, e.g., *maṣṣiiāca* “and men” (cf. *maṣṣiiāka-* “people,” *staorāca* “and big animals”).

I have found no examples of forms in *-e < *-iia* of neut. *iia-*stems, such as **haiṭhe* “true” *< *haiṭiia*. A form such as *vāstriia* “pastures” could probably not undergo palatalization.

Masc. *uuā-*stems

The final ending *-uuā* of various origins occasionally becomes *-uuō*. There seems to be one example of this change in a masc. *uuā*-stem: *Huuōuuō* “the Huuōuuas.”

i- and *ī-*stems

The endings of the nom. and voc. sing. and plur. forms of the *i-* and *ī-*declensions are:

	<i>i</i> -decl.		<i>ī</i> -decl.
	m. f.	n.	f.
Sing.			
nom.	<i>-iṣ</i>	<i>-i</i>	<i>-i, -iṣ</i>
voc.	<i>-e</i>		<i>-i</i>
Plur.			
nom.-voc.	<i>-aiiō, -aiias°</i>	<i>-i</i>	<i>-iṣ</i>

Notes:

Aṣi- has the irregular voc. *Aṣi* (e.g., *Aṣi srīre* “O beautiful Aṣi!”; perhaps in analogy with *Arāduuī Sūre*). In *Arāduuī* the ending is usually long in the manuscripts.

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Paradigms (*gairi-* m., *frauuaši-* f., *āhuiri-* n. “belonging to Ahura Mazda, Ahurian,” *vaŋ^hi-* f. “good,” *baβrī-* “(female) beaver” (note how the palatalization and labialization rules work!):

	<i>i</i> -decl.			<i>ī</i> -decl.
	m.	f.	n.	f.
Sing.				
nom.	<i>gairiš</i>	<i>frauuašiš</i>	<i>āhuiri</i>	<i>vaŋ^hhi, baβriš</i>
voc.	* <i>gaire</i>	* <i>frauuaše</i>		<i>vaŋ^hhi</i>
Plur.				
nom.-voc.	<i>garaiiō, garaiias^o</i>	<i>frauuašaiiō, frauuašaiias^o</i>	<i>āhuiri</i>	<i>vaŋ^hhiš</i>

Note the irregular voc. *zāire* from *zairi-* “tawny,” common epithet of the *haoma-*.

***r*-stems. *ātar-* “fire” and agent nouns**

The extremely common word for “fire” is *ātar-*, a masc. (irregular) *r*-stem. It has no nom.-voc. plur. forms.

Masc. nouns in *-tar-* denoting people who do something, occasionally or professionally, e.g., *pātar-* “protector,” *dātar-* “maker, creator,” are called agent nouns.

The neuter noun *vadar-* “striking weapon” has only the nom.-acc. sing.

These words are declined as follows:

Sing.				
nom.	<i>dāta</i>	<i>pāta</i>	<i>ātarš</i>	<i>vadarə</i>
voc.	<i>dātarə</i>	-	<i>ātarə</i>	
Plur.				
nom.-voc.	<i>dātārō</i>	<i>pātārō</i>	<i>ātarō</i>	

Note: the plur. of *raθaēštā-* is usually *raθaēštārō* after the *tar*-declension.

VERBS

Athematic verbs

Athematic verbs do not have an *-a-* before the ending, as in *jas-a-ta*. Instead the endings are added directly to the final consonant or vowel of the stem.

Examples of imperative active forms of athematic verbs (*daδā-/daδ-* “to give, place,” *naēd-/nid-* “to blame, scorn” *stao-/stu-* “to praise”):

Sing.	2	<i>-di, -di</i>	<i>stuidi</i> “praise!”	<i>dazdi</i> “give!”	
Plur.	2	<i>-ta</i>	<i>staota</i>	<i>dasta</i>	<i>nista</i> “blame!”

Notes:

The athematic ending of the 2 singular is *-di* after consonant, but *-di* after vowel, cf. also *jaiḍi* “strike, smash!” < *jan-/ja-*.

The forms *dazdi*, *dasta*, and *nista* are from **dad-di*, **dad-ta*, and **nid-ta* and provide examples of internal *sandhi*.

Some verbs show ablaut (see Lesson 10) in the imperative, e.g., *stuidi*, plur. *staota* from *stao-/stu-* “to praise,” probably also *mrao-/mru-* “to say.” Note that these verbs have a “short” form before *-di* and a “long” form before *-ta*. Few forms are attested.

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azəm yō Ahurō Mazdā dāta ahmi

𐬀𐬰𐬭𐬀 𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀

“I who (am) Ahura Mazda am the creator.”

azəm bā tē ahmi yā hauua daēna

𐬀𐬰𐬭𐬀 𐬀𐬵𐬀 𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀 𐬵𐬀 𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀

“well, I am the *daēnā* which (is) your own (= your own *daēnā*).”

tum ahi Ahurō Mazdā maniiuš spōništō

𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀

“You are Ahura Mazda, the most life-giving spirit.”

EXERCISES 4

1. Write in transcription and Avestan script the sing. and plur. nom. and voc. forms of the following nouns and adjectives:

mairiia- acišta-, aka- daēuua-, ātar- vohu.friiāna-, pañtā- darəya-, nmāna- āhui-ri-, gairi- spaēta-, kaniīā- huraoδā-;

Aši- vaŋhī-, Sraoša- Ašiiā-, Aži- Dahāka-

2. Write in transcription and Avestan script the sing. and plur. imperative forms of the following verbs:

ae-li-, mrao-/mru-, kərənao-/kərənu-, bara-, jaiðiia-, rāmaīia-

3. Transcribe and translate into English:

𐬀𐬰𐬭𐬀 𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀
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𐬀𐬰𐬭𐬀 𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀
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𐬀𐬰𐬭𐬀 𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬵𐬀

4. Translate into Avestan:

1. O good fravashis, dwell here!
2. Rise, O people, and praise Order!
3. We, O Mazdayasnians, are Aryans.
4. Let the Huuōuuas, the brave charioteers, go about here!
5. O Miθra, come down hither to us for help!
6. This young woman is both beautiful and well-shaped.
7. Let this strong fravashi dwell here!
8. Let not this daēuua be here!
9. Let the villain perish! O villain, run away!
10. May Ahura Mazdā and the fire appear to us!

VOCABULARY 4

aē-/i- < √i: to go	kərənao-/kərənu- < √kar: to do
aīβiθura-: unshakable	mairiia-: villain, rogue
aii- < ai-	mairiia-: villainess
airime: in peace	mašiiāka- (usually plural): people
aora: here, hither, on/to this side	mā, + imperative (injunctive, optative): let not
āhuri-: belonging to Ahura Mazdā, Ahurian	mitaiia- < √maēt/mit: to stay, dwell
āi- < ā + √aē/i: to come	miθnā-/miθn-: to stay, dwell
āiiapta- n.: reward, spoils	mrao-/mru- < √mrao-/mru: to say
āiiasa- < √yam mid.: to harness (only 1st sing. āiiese)	naēd-/nid- (nis-) < √naēd/nid: to blame, scorn
ākā(sə): in full view (of: + loc.)	našiiia- < √nas: to perish
āuuīš adv.: clear, apparent	niš.hiða- < √had: to sit down
baβrī- f.: (female) beaver	nmāna- n.: house, home
basta- < baṇdaiia-: bound, tied up	paiti.auua.jasa-: to come down hither
bā: a particle of uncertain function and meaning	paiti.auua.kərəṇta- < √kart: to cut down (to/upon: instr.)
daḍā-/daḍ-: to give; set in place (“create”)	paiti.mrao-/mru-: to answer
daēuuō.ciθra-: spawned by daēuuas, daēuua brood	paṇtā- m.: road, way (Lesson 12)
daēuuō.fradāta-: brought forth (created) by daēuuas	paoirī- f. of paura-
daēuuō.frakərəsta-: fashioned forth by daēuuas	paoiriia-: first
daiuuī- fem.: deceitful	pauruua-: prior, former
dātar-: establisher, “creator”	pātar-: protector
Druuāspā-: a goddess	pourum < paura-
druxš, nom.-voc. sing. of druj-	raθaēštā- m.: charioteer
frauuaši- f.: fravashi, pre-soul	rāmaiiia- < √ram: to dwell (in peace and quiet)
frāiiaza- < √yaz mid.: to send forth in sacrifice, sacrifice (+ acc. of thing or god)	saḍaiia- < √saṇd: to seem, appear
friθa-: dear	səuuīšta- superlative of sura-: most rich in life-giving strength
haiθiia-: true, real (not only seemingly true)	srira- (srīra-): beautiful
Hukairiia-: name of a mountain	tanū- f.: body
Huuōuuas-: name of a family	tāiiu-: thief
iḍa: here	Tura-: Turanian
im, sing. nom. fem. of ima-: this	uγra-: strong
jaiḍi < √jan	upa.šaē-/ši-: to dwell, inhabit
jaiḍiia- < √gad/jad: to implore	vāstriia- n.: pasture
ka-: who?	vispō.vahma-: containing all hymns (?)
kaniia-: young woman	vī.cara- < √car: to go about, go far and wide
kasciṭ: each and every one	vī.nasiia- < √nas: to (go away and) get lost

LESSON 4

vohu.friiāna-: Vohu.friiāna; name of a fire	yaṭ: that, when, if (etc.)
vohuuəṛəz-: who performs good (acts)	yaza- < √yaz, mid.: to sacrifice (to) (+ acc. of thing or god)
vouru.gaoiiaoitī-: having/with wide grazing grounds (refers either to the vast heavenly spaces that Miθra “grazes” or to the pastures he will give to his worshippers as rewards)	yeiḍi: if, when (conjunction)
xšnuta-, past part. of xšnāuuaiia- < √xšnao: satisfied	yezi: if (conjunction)
	yuidīia-: to fight
	zarənaēna- (zaranaēna-), f. zarənaēnī-: of gold
	zāire, voc. sing. of zairi-: golden, tawny; standing epithet of Haoma