

LESSON 6

PHONOLOGY

Form of the text.

The extant text of the Avesta is an edited text. On one or several occasions during the oral transmission of the text editors worked to standardize it. The extant text does therefore not reflect a genuine oral tradition.⁵

One feature of the edited text is the replacement of the ending *-a* with the ending *-ō* in the first members of compounds and fricatives with stops in initial position in the second member, cf., e.g., beside the expected form *ahuraδāta-*, the much more common type *daēuuō.dāta-*, *bayō.baxta*, etc. Another is the restoration of word-final form for the expected sandhi form, e.g., in *xšuuāš.gāiia-* “six steps” instead of **xšuuāžgāiia-*, cf. *dužgañti-* “evil smell.”

Not all non-standard or “incorrect” forms are from the editors, however; many more are probably due to the reciters (transmitters) of the text and the scribes who wrote the manuscripts.

Anaptyxis

The Avestan *ə* is in most positions an allophone of /a/ (see Lesson 5). In addition, it is frequently used as an anaptyctic vowel.

“Anaptyctic” vowels are unetymological vowels inserted between consonants to “ease” the pronunciation. By far the most common anaptyctic vowel in Young Avestan is *ə*; occasionally *a* is used.

Anaptyxis (also called *svarabhakti*, a Sanskrit word meaning “sound-splitting”) is especially common, if not obligatory, after *r* in final position and before other consonants, as well as in the group *nr*. The exception is the group *rš*, although this, too, is sometimes written *rəš* in the manuscripts.

Examples: *arəda-* “side” (cf. Skt. *ardha-*); *arəθa-* “matter” (cf. Skt. *artha-*); *kərəpəmca* “and the form”; *kərəta-* “done” (cf. Skt. *kṛta-*); *varəsa-* “hair,” *parəna-* “feather” (cf. Skt. *parṇa-*); *vadarə* “weapon for striking” (cf. Skt. *vadhah*); *aipiduuənarə-* (for *°dunra-*) “*clouded” (cf. *dunman-* “cloud”)

Note also that the sequence *ərə* is (1) frequently reduced to *rə* after *t*: **ātərəm > ātrəm* (*ātarəm*), sometimes also after *g*; (2) replaced by *ar* (*arə*) before *š*: *bərəzō* but *barš*, *ātrəm* < **ātərəm*, but *ātarš*.

Vowel changes. Dissimilation of *ij > əi > ai/aē*.

In the following cases the vowel preceding an epenthetic *i* was another *i*, and the original *i* was dissimilated to form the diphthong *əi* (*ii > iḷ > əi > ai*): *bərəzaiδiš* < **bərəziδiš* < **bṛzi-diš* [cf. OAv. *hušəiti-* < *hušiti-*].

A similar development is probably the origin of the apparent anaptyxis in the group *ui* (see above) > *ui* > *uəi* > *uai* or *uoi* (*uuōii*), and in the prefix *baē°* instead of *bi°* in *baē.ərəzu-* “two fingers wide” < **bai-ṛzu-* < **biḷ-ṛzu-*.

Consonant changes. Assimilation

When two different consonants come into contact, they may become “similar” to one another or completely identical. This phenomenon is referred to as (partial and complete) assimilation. Some common instances of assimilation in (proto-)Avestan are:

1. Unvoiced + voiced > voiced + voiced, e.g.,
s + d > zd: **mas-dā- > mazdā-*;
š + d > žd: *duš-dā- > duždā-*;
š + b > žb: *niš-bərəta- > nižbərəta-*;

⁵ In this sense it can be compared to the *padapāṭha* of the Vedic texts. The main difference between the Iranian and Indian tradition is that the Indian one has preserved both the original text and its *padapāṭha*, whereas—exaggerating—one might say that in Iran the original has been lost, leaving only the *padapāṭha*.

$\check{s} + z > \check{z}$: *duš-zaotar-* > *dužzaotar-*.

2. Labial stop + labial stop > single labial stop:

$p + b > *b > \beta$: **ap-biih* > *aiβiiō*.

3. Dental stop + *s* > single *s*:

$t + s > s$: *fšuiiant-s* > *fšuiiqs*.

Consonant changes. Spirantization of stops

When *p* and *t* comes before a suffix or an ending beginning with *ii*, *uu*, *r*, *n*, or *m* they change to *f* and *θ*, e.g.: *astuuaiti* “bony,” but *astuuaiθiiā*, *haṭ* “being,” but *haiθiia-* “real,” *āp-* “water,” but **āfuuant-* (> *āfənt-*) “full of water,” *xšapa* “night,” but *xšafnō*. This change did not take place before *ii* or *uu* when the *p* or *t* was preceded by an original long vowel, diphthong, or another consonant (not counting *əṛə*), e.g., *dāiitiia-* “lawful,” *mašiiia-* “mortal man” < **martiia-*, but *mərəθiiu-* “death.”

When a *p*, a *k*, or a *g* come before an ending beginning with original **s* they change to *f* and *x*, and the **s* becomes *š*, e.g., **āp-s* > *āfš* “water” and **vāk-s* > *vāxš* “word, voice,” **drug-s* > *druxš* “deception,” **nap(t)-su* (stem *napāt-*) > *naṣšu* “among the grandchildren.” A final *s* or *z* is lost before the ending, which becomes *-š*: **spas-s* > *spaš* “spy,” **bṛz-s* > *barš* “high.”

NOUNS

Consonant declensions: stems

Stems ending in consonants take more “regular” endings than stems ending in vowels, but their declension is complicated by “ablaut.” Case forms that use the full or lengthened grade are commonly referred to as “strong” cases, while case forms that use the zero grade are referred to as “weak” cases.

The strong cases are the sing. nom., voc., acc., and loc.; the dual nom.-acc.; and the plur. nom. The other cases are weak cases.

In addition to the changes in vowel length, the final consonant of the stem also frequently changes. Pay particular attention to such changes in the paradigms below.

Consonant declensions: endings

Consonant stems can end in almost any consonant. In Indo-Iranian (and Indo-European) masc. and fem. consonant stems formed their nom. sing. (1) by lengthening the last vowel of the stem and dropping the final consonant, (2) by adding the ending *-s* (*-š* after *f* and *x*), or (3) by both lengthening the vowel and adding ending *-s* (*-š*).

As long final vowels were shortened in Avestan, type (1) forms its nominative by simply dropping the final consonant of the stem.

In types (2) and (3) the ending **-s/*-š* combined with the final consonant of the stem to produce various “irregular” form.

The nom.-voc. plural ending is *-ō* (*-as^o*) for both masc. and fem. nouns. Not infrequently, however, the thematic ending *-a* is found in the manuscripts.⁶ The nom.-voc. plural, like the nom. and acc. sing., typically requires the strong stem.

Neuter consonant stems take no endings in the nom.-acc. singular. The nom.-acc. plural is formed variously in the various declensions.

The nominative singular

The nom. sing. ending *-š* is found with masc. and fem. nouns and adjectives with stems ending in labials

⁶ This is not necessarily a genuine linguistic feature of a late stage of Avestan; it can simply be errors on the part of the reciters or the scribes.

(*p*), velars (*k*, *g*), or sibilants (*s*, *z* [historically < **tš*, *dž*]).

Consonant stems ending in velar stops (*k* and *g*), labial stops (*p*), and sibilants (*s*, *z*)

These stems take the nom. sing. ending -š.

The vocative = the nominative.

Paradigms (*vāk-/vāc*- m. “word, speech,” *drug-/druj*- f. “deception, the Lie,” *āp*- f. “water,” *spas*- m. “spy,” *bərəz*- “high”):

Sing.

Nom.-voc. *vāxš* *druxš* *āfš* *spasš* *barš*

Plur.

Nom.-voc. *vācō* *drujō* *āpō*, *apasca* *spasō* *bərəzō*

Notes:

Thematic forms such as nom. plur. *vāca* are also found.

Note the shortening of the long *ā* in *āpō* ~ *apasca* “and the waters.”

r-stems. Relationship terms

Most words denoting family members are *r*-stems. Their declension differs slightly from that of the agent nouns (see Lesson 4) in *-tar*-. The word *nar*- “man” is declined like the family terms. Examples (*nar*- “man,” *pitar*- “father,” *mātar*- “mother,” *duyda* “daughter,” *xʷaṇha* “sister,” *brāta* “brother”):

Sing.

nom. *nā* *pita* *brāta* *māta* *duyda* *xʷaṇha*
voc. *narə* *pitarə* - - - -

Plur.

nom.-voc. *narō* *pitarō* - *mātarō* - -

WORD FORMATION

Compounds. 1

Compounds as well as their individual elements can be all kinds of words (nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and other compounds). Some common types of Avestan adjectival compounds are the following:

noun + noun: *barəsmō.zasta*- “with barsom in the hand” < *barəsmān*- + *zasta*-;

adjective + noun: *tiži.dāra*- “with a sharp blade” < *tiži*° + *dārā*-;

noun + verbal noun or adjective: *vərəθrajan*- “obstruction-smashing” < *vərəθra*- “obstruction” + *jan*- “to smash,” *mazdaiiasna*- “Mazdā-sacrificer, Mazdayasnian” < *Mazdā*- “Ahura Mazdā” + *yasna*- “sacrifice,” *paoiriiō.fradāta*- “first brought forth,” *ahuraδāta*- and *mazdaδāta*- “established (created) by Ahura Mazdā”;

adverb or prefix + noun/adjective: *huraōda*- “beautiful” < *hu*- + *raōda*- “growth, stature”; *huuaršta*- “well done” < *hu*- + *varšta*-; *aiβi.gāma*- “year” < *aiβi*- prefix + *gāman*- “step, going,” *θri.zafan*- “with three mouths” < *θri*- + *zafan*- “mouth,” *θri.kamarəda*- < *θri*- + *kamarəda*- “head”;

verb + noun: *frādaṭ.gaēθa*- “who furthers the world of living beings” < *frāda*- “to further” + *gaēθā*- “world of living beings.”

Note that adjectival compounds whose second member is an *ā*-stem, themselves become regular *a/ā*-stem adjectives, e.g., m. *frādaṭ.gaēθa*-, f. *frādaṭ.gaēθā*- (< *gaēθā*- f.).

The final vowel of the first member usually becomes *ō*, whether it is an *a*-, *ā*-, or *an*-stem (see the examples above).

Some adjectives have a special form when used as the first member of a compound, e.g., *tiži°* < *tiyra-* “sharp.”

Note that *āp-* takes the form *afš-* in compounds, which becomes *aβž-* before voiced consonant: *afš.tacin-* “with running water,” *aβždāna-* “containing water” (Y.42.2).

When a word with initial *h-* is used as second member of a compound, a prosthetic *a* is prefixed and *h* > *ḡh*: *ašō.aḡhan-* “winning *aša*” < **aša-(ḡ)han-*; *airime.aḡhad-* (= *armaēšad-*) “sitting in peace.”

PRONOUNS

Demonstrative, relative, and interrogative pronouns in the nominative

The pronouns and “pronominal” adjectives have several forms that differ from those of the nouns. In the nom. note the neut. sing. in *-t* (cf. Eng. *that*) and the masc. plur. in *-e* (cf. Eng. *they*).

	The demonstrative pronoun <i>ima-</i> “this”:			The demonstrative pronoun <i>auua-</i> “that”:		
	masc.	fem.	neut.	masc.	fem.	neut.
Sing.						
nom.	<i>aēm</i>	<i>im</i>	<i>imat</i>	<i>hāu</i>	<i>hāu</i>	<i>auuat</i>
Plur.						
nom.	<i>ime</i>	<i>imā, imās°</i>	<i>ima</i>	<i>auue</i>	<i>auuā</i>	<i>auua</i>

Note:

aēm < **aīam*, *im* (*īm*) < **iīam* (cf. OInd. *ayam*, *iyam*).

The pronoun *huuō* “he (you) there” (nom. sing. masc.) is only found in quotations from Old Avestan.

	The relative pronoun <i>ya-</i> “who, which”:			The interrogative pronoun <i>ka-/ci-</i> “who, what?”:		
	masc.	fem.	neut.	masc.	fem.	neut.
Sing.						
nom.	<i>yō, yas°</i>	<i>yā</i>	<i>yaṭ</i>	<i>kō, kas°, ciš</i>	<i>kā</i>	<i>kaṭ, ciṭ</i>
Plur.						
nom.	<i>yōi, yaē°</i>	<i>yā</i>	<i>yā</i>	<i>kaiia, caiiō</i>	-	<i>(kā?)</i>

Notes:

The mss. frequently have (wrongly) *yō* for *yōi*.

The form *kaiia* “which?” is thematic (Y.19.18, N., FO.).

The form *caiiō* is also used as neut. plur. (V.2.39, 8.12).

With negation the interrogative pronouns (especially those in *c-*) become indefinite pronouns: *nōiṭ ciš* “no one,” *mā ciš* “(let) no one.”

The forms *kaṭ, ciṭ* correspond historically to Latin *quod, quid*.

Pronominal adjectives

Pronominal adjectives include *vispa-* “all” *aniia-* “other,” nom. plur. masc. *vispe* and *aniie*. Note that *vispa-* has neut. *vispəm*, while *aniia-* has neut. *aniiaṭ*.

Pronominal adverbs

Note the following “correlative” pronominal adverbs (cf. Lesson 17). Note also that, although the forms are symmetric, not all the meanings are:

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<i>iθa</i> “in this way”	<i>aθa</i> “thus”	<i>auuaθa</i> “in that way”	<i>yaθa</i> “as, like”	<i>kθa</i> “how?”
<i>iθra</i> “here”	<i>aθra</i> “here, there”	<i>auuaθra</i> “there”	<i>yaθra</i> “where”	<i>kuθra</i> “where?”
<i>iδa</i> “here”	<i>aδa</i> “then”	<i>auuaδa</i> “there”		<i>kaδa</i> “when?”
	<i>aī, āaī</i> “then”		<i>yaī</i> “when”	
				<i>kuua</i> “where?”

Notes:

The forms in *a-* are the “unmarked” (“neutral”) ones, while those of *i-* and *auua-* point clearly to “here” and “there.”

There is no YAv. **yaδa*, but Old Avestan has *yadā* “when?”

VERBS

The middle

Avestan verbs can be “active,” that is, take the active endings we have already seen, or “middle,” that is, take the “middle” endings.

Verbs can have active and/or middle forms. Some verbs have only active forms, some only middle forms, and some both active and middle forms. Only in the third group can the middle forms have a special function, different from that of the active forms.

Intransitive verbs usually have only active or only middle forms, while transitive verbs can take both active and middle forms. If they do, then most often the distinction between the two forms is “active ~ passive”; more rarely the middle denotes that the action is being performed in the interest of the subject. Occasionally the middle forms of a verb have the same meaning as the active ones, especially in the case of verbs of motion.

Examples:

1. Middle verbs without active counterpart: *manīia-* “to think,” *yaza-* “to sacrifice,” etc.
2. Passive: *aza-* act. “leads, takes (away)” ~ mid. “is led, taken away,” *vaēna-* act. “sees” ~ mid. “is seen,” *bara-* act. “carries” ~ mid. “rides” (lit. is carried), etc.
3. Action performed in the interest of the subject: *paca-* act. “he cooks” ~ mid. “he cooks for himself,” *varədaīia-* act. “increases (something else), enlarges” ~ mid. “increases (by oneself), becomes larger,” etc.
4. Same meaning as active: *fracara-* act., mid. “go forth.”
5. Differentiation of meaning: *hišta-* act. “to stand = take up a position,” mid. “to stand = to be standing”; *daδā-idaδ-* act. “to establish, give,” mid. “to take (on), receive.”

The imperfect-injunctive middle

Paradigms (*aog-* “to speak,” *hunao-/hunu-* “to press (the haoma),” *ā.pərəsa-* “to converse,” *yaza-* “to sacrifice”):

Sing.				
1				<i>-e (-ie)</i> <i>apərəse</i>
2	<i>-ša</i>	<i>*hunuša</i>		<i>-aṅha</i> <i>yazaṅha</i>
3	<i>-ta</i>	<i>hunuta</i>	<i>aoxta</i>	<i>-ata</i> <i>yazata</i>
Plur				
2	-			<i>-aδβəm</i> <i>yazaδβəm</i>
3	-			<i>-ənta</i> <i>yazənta</i>

Note: Very few athematic forms are attested. No 1st plur. forms are attested.

The imperative middle

Paradigm (*dāraia-* “hold”):

Sing.			
2	-aŋ ^ʷ ha	yazaŋ ^ʷ ha	
3	-atəm	yazatəm	
Plur			
2	-aδβəm	dāraiaδβəm	
3	-aŋtəm	yazaŋtəm	

Note: No athematic forms are attested.

SYNTAX

Uses of the middle

1. Exclusively middle verbs

āaŋ Zaratuštrō aoxta “Then Zarathustra said.”

· āaŋ Zaratuštrō aoxta

iθa hō mašiiō maniiata “In this way the man thought.”

· iθa hō mašiiō maniiata

iθa mē tum haṃ.caray^ʷha Aši srire dāmiδāite

· iθa mē tum haṃ.caray^ʷha Aši srire dāmiδāite

“In this way dwell with me, O beautiful Aši ...!”

· iθa mē tum haṃ.caray^ʷha Aši srire dāmiδāite

· iθa mē tum haṃ.caray^ʷha Aši srire dāmiδāite

· iθa mē tum haṃ.caray^ʷha Aši srire dāmiδāite

fra.dauuata vī.dauuata fra.maniiata vī.maniiata

Aŋrō Mainiiuš pouru.mahrkō

Iṅdrō daēuuōSāuru daēuuō

“The Evil Spirit full of destruction chattered this, chattered that, took hope, lost hope (?), (as did) the daēuua Indra (and) the daēuua Sāuru.” (V.19.43)

· fra.dauuata vī.dauuata fra.maniiata vī.maniiata

yaŋ hē tum us.zaiiaŋha tum əṛəzuuō Zaratuštra

“... that you were born to him, you, O upright Zarathustra.” (Y.9.13)

Yimō hē vīsata pātaca θrātaca

· Yimō hē vīsata pātaca θrātaca

“Yima was ready to be guardian and protector for him.”

Kərəsāniš yō raosta yō dauuata

· Kərəsāniš yō raosta yō dauuata

“Kərəsāniš who wept and chattered” (Y.9.24)

2. Middle with passive function

kasciŋ iða nōiŋ vaēnata “Nobody was seen here.”

· kasciŋ iða nōiŋ vaēnata

yaθa Miθrō hubərətō barata (after Yt.10.112)

· yaθa Miθrō hubərətō barata

“When Miθra was well treated.”

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4. Translate into Avestan:

1. Let the priest say forth the Yaθā ahū vairiīō to us.
2. O tawny haoma, be my protector!
3. Thus said Ahura Mazda: Let this earth increase! Let these plants grow!
4. Then that earth increased; it went apart. All went forth, both men and animals, large and small.
5. Then a son was born to him, splendid Yima with good herds. Then a girl was born to him, good, pretty, (and) beautiful.
6. A voice was heard, saying: That is my dear *daēnā*, the Mazdaiiasnian, Zarathustrian (one).
7. That Lie was lost. Those demons howled. Those demonesses ran away.
8. Who is this young woman who came running?
9. Who is that villain who ran away?
10. Which are those acts which are badly done?

VOCABULARY 6

aduuara- < ā.duuara-	running
aða: then	āfənt-: full of water
afraoxšiiieiptī-, fem. of afraoxšiiant-: not growing forth	āpərəiti- f.: clearing of debt, atonement
aiβi.gāma-: year	baē.ərəzu-: two fingers wide
aipiduuənarā-: *clouded	bara- < √bar mid.: to be treated
airime.aṇhaδ- = armaē.šad- < √had: sitting in peace and quiet	barəsman- n.: altar grass, barsom
aog-/aoj- mid.: to speak, say	barəsmō.zasta-: carrying barsom in the hands
apa.jasa- < √gam/jam, mid.: to get away	brātar-: brother
apərəsa- < ā.pərəsa-	ciθā-: fine (penalty)
arəða-: side	daēuuaiiāza-: daēuuā-sacrificer
arəθa- n.: matter	dauua- < √dao (< *daβ “deceive?”), mid.: to speak (used of evil beings)
armaēšad- = airime.aṇhaδ- < √had: sitting in peace and quiet	dāitiia- < dāta-: according to the law
astuuant-: having bones, osseous	dāmiδāta- (dāmi.dāta-, dāmi.dāta-): set in place by the *Web-holder
aṣaṇhāk/c- m.: following Order, in accordance with Order	dāraia- < √dar: to hold
ašō.aṇhan-: winning, earning Order	dārā-: blade
auuaða: there	driyu-, f. driui-: poor
auuaθa: in that way	dunman- n.: cloud
auuaθra: there	duždāh-: who gives evil gifts
aza- < √az: to lead, take (away)	dužgaiṇti- f.: evil smell
ā.duuara- (aduuara-) < √duuar, mid.: to come	dužzaotar-: bad libator
	fracara- < √car act., mid.: go forth
	fra.dauua < √dao, mid.: to chatter

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fraḍāta- < fra.daḍā-: brought forth	raod-: to wail, howl; cf. uruθa-
fra.maniia- < √man mid.: to think ahead, hope, take courage (?)	Sāuru (stem form uncertain): name of a <i>daēuua</i> (cf. OInd. Śarva)
fra.mrao-/mru-: say forth	spas- m.: spy
fra.šauua- < √š(ii)ao: to go forth	sruia- < √srao/sru mid.: be heard
frādaṭ.gāēθa-: furthering the world of living beings	srū- (plur. sruie [sruuī]) n.: nail
haca- < √hak/hac mid.: to follow	star- (plur. stārō) m.: star
hañjasa- < √gam mid.: to come together	tiṅra-: pointed, sharp
Haptō.iringa-: Ursa Major, the Big Dipper	tiži.dāra- < tiṅra-: having/with a sharp blade
ham.cara- < √car mid.: to dwell together (with)	θrātar-: protector, savior
ham.rāzaiia- < √raz, mid.: to straighten, comb; stretch (oneself)	θrisatō.zōma-: a three-hundred-year (winter) period
hubərəta-: well-treated	uitiaojana-, uiti aojana-: thus saying
hunao/hunu- < √hao/hu, mid.: to press	uruθa- < √raod/rud (ruθ) mid.: to wail, howl
Iṅdra-: name of an old god (cf. OInd. Indra)	us.zaiia- < √zā, mid.: to be born
iθa: in this way	vak-/vac- m.: word, speech
iθra: here	varəḍaiia- < √vard: to increase, enlarge
kaḍa: when?	varəsa- n., varəsā- (plur.): hair
kərəsāni-: name of a mythical villain	vərəθrajan-: obstruction-smashing, victorious
kuθra: where?	vərəziia- < √varz: to work, cultivate
kuua: where?	visa- < √vaēs mid.: to declare oneself ready (to be)
mātar- f.: mother	vī.dauua- < √dao mid.: to ramble on (about) (?)
mərəθiiu- m.: death	vī.maniia- < √man mid.: to think better of, lose courage, be distraught (?)
napāt-, napt- (nafəḍr-): grandson	vī.nəma- < √nam, mid.: to bend aside, to spread out, to go apart
nāma, nāma < nāman- n.: by name	xšapan-, xšafn- f.: night
nipātar-: protector, guardian	xšuuas.gāiia-: distance of six steps
niž.bara- < √bar: to take out/away, remove, get rid of	xʷaṅhar- f.: sister
nižbərəta-, past part. of < niž.bara-: taken away, removed	yaθra: where
paca- √pak/pac: to cook	zaotar-: libator; the chief officiating priest
pairi.brina- < √braē/brī: to cut, pare	zasta-: hand
paiṭi.aog- < √aog/aoj mid.: to answer	zā nom. sing. of zam- f.: earth
pitar- (patar-): father	