PTKC. *JĀ- ∼ *JA- ‘TO BE NEAR, …’ AND THE QUESTION OF ALTAIC CORRESPONDENCES

Keywords: Turkic, Proto-Turkic, Proto-Altaic, etymology, reconstruction

Abstract

The paper discusses a group of eleven words with similar phonetic shapes and somewhat similar semantics: jagu-, jak- ‘to come near’; jan- ‘to turn back’; jaguk, jakyn ‘close, near’; jāk, jān ‘side’; jāna- ‘to sharpen’; jaŋak ‘cheek’; jaŋy ‘new’; and jaka ‘edge’. All have been suspected to belong to the same family, at the heart of which, most probably, would be the verbal root *jā-. Some of the problems associated with this idea were known previously, whereas some are newly identified here. The paper considers various constraints and proposes a scheme centred around *jā ∼ *ja- ‘to be near, …’, which may or may not be connected to MaTung. daga ‘id.’ and Mo. daga- ‘to follow’.

1. Introduction

The titular verb *jā- was proposed more than a century ago by Bang to explain Tkc. jāk and jān ‘side’. Since that time, many more words have been found that could potentially be derived from the same root, and though they have been etymologized, or at least mentioned in an etymological context in more than forty works, the discussion of the root itself all but stalled after the publication of a further article by Bang in 1934.

The present paper begins with an overview of the existing research (Section 2), as this has by now become much needed. It then proceeds to identify the main

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1 An extract from this paper was presented at the Türkçe ve Moğolca Çalışmaları. Sir G. Clauson ve Talat Tekin’in Katkıları conference at the Istanbul University, 28–29 November 2022.
problems (Section 3), and to discuss them against a broader background (Section 4). The main points are summarized in Section 5.

The words discussed in this paper appear in a multitude of languages and dialects, and in multiple, mostly inconsequential, phonetic variants. Some authors only mention singular forms, others list several forms as examples of a larger, unspecified family, and others enumerate as many as possible. In order to provide a degree of clarity, I grouped various forms into a few main families, and will mostly only refer to them in this paper by these umbrella forms. Note that this grouping primarily reflects how the individual words have been treated by previous authors, and not necessarily their etymology. The groups are outlined below using single examples from each of the major branches of the Turkic family, cited after DS, DTS, ÈSTJa, GJV, KEWT, KirgRS, R III, TofRS, Zenker (1876), Pekarskij (1925), Egorov (1964), Ölmez (2007), and Roos (1998, 2000):

\begin{itemize}
  \item **jagu-** ‘to come near, to approach’ = OTkc. jagu-, Az.dial. javy-, Trkm.dial. jovu-t-, Kyrg. žū-, Uigh. jagu-, Tlut. jū-, Yak. —, Chuv. —, etc.
  \item **jaguk** ‘close, near’ = OTkc. jaguk, Tksh. javuk, Trkm. jovuk, Kyrg. žūk, OUigh. jaguq, Tuv. čōk, Yak. —, Chuv. šyvāh, etc.
  \item **jak** ‘to come near, to approach’ = OTkc. jak-, Tksh. jak-, Trkm. jak-, Kyrg. žak-, Uigh. jaq-, Tuv. —, Yak. —, Chuv. —, etc.
  \item **jāk** ‘side’ = OTkc. jak, Tksh. jak, Trkm.dial. jāk, Kyrg. žak, Uigh. jaq, WYu. jaq, Yak. —, Chuv. —, etc.
  \item **jaka** ‘edge, border, shore, collar’ = OTkc. jaka, Tksh. jaka, Trkm. jaka, Kyrg. žaka, Uigh. jaqa, Tof. ča”ha, Yak. saya ~ žaya, Chuv. šuha, etc.
  \item **jakyn** ‘close, near’ = OTkc. jakyn, Tksh. jakyn, Trkm. jakyn, Kyrg. žakyn, Uigh. jeqin, WYu. jaqyn, Yak. —, Chuv. jahān, etc.
  \item **jan** ‘to turn back, to return’ = OTkc. jan-, Tksh. —, Trkm. —, Kyrg. žan-, Uigh. jan-, Tuv. čan-, Yak. —, Chuv. —, etc.
  \item **jān** ‘side’ = OTkc. jan, Tksh. jan, Trkm. jān, Kyrg. žan, Uigh. jan, WYu. jan, Yak. —, Chuv. šum, etc.
  \item **jāna-** ‘to sharpen, to whet’ = OTkc. jānu-, Tksh. jāna-, Trkm. jāna-, Kyrg. žany-, Uigh. jonu-, Tuv. čany, Yak. —, Chuv. —, etc.
  \item **jaŋak** ‘cheek, jaw, side’ = OTkc. jaŋak, Tksh. jaŋak, Trkm. jaŋak, Kyrg. žāk, Uigh. jaŋaq, WYu. jaŋaq, Yak. syŋah, Chuv. —, etc.
  \item **jaŋy** ‘new’ = OTkc. jaŋy, Tksh. jenı, Trkm. jaŋy, Kyrg. žany, Uigh. jaŋi, WYu. jaŋy, Yak. saŋa, Chuv. šēnē, etc.
\end{itemize}

Many of these words, in many of the languages in which they appear, have many further derivatives. Indeed, some of these groups themselves derive from one of the others. Most of the derivatives, however, are quite transparent both morphologically and semantically, and so they will not be discussed here, e.g. Chlk. jaktalžāk ‘sticky’ (R III 33), Tksh. janal ‘lateral’ (KEWT), or Yak. sayalā- ‘to furnish with a collar’ (Pekarskij 1925).
2. Previous research

This overview is partly organized by chronology, and partly by topic, i.e. by the groups of our words listed in Section 1. It does not include every work that mentions any of our words in an etymological or comparative context. I followed nearly all the references, but summarized only those which I deemed significant – either for our words as a group, or because of their popularity (hence the inclusion of even those etymological dictionaries which do not discuss them at all). I omitted inconsequential etymologies, such as Vullers’ (1864) derivation of jān from jakmak ‘to burn’, Budagov’s (1871: ياق) derivation of jakyn ‘near’ from jāk ‘side’, but without specifying the suffix, or Munkácsi’s (1900: 157) use of the equals sign between Tkc. jān ‘side’ and NPers. ǯan ‘direction, side’ without any commentary.

To the best of my knowledge, Vámbéry (1878: §§122, 123) was the first to link the words listed in Section 1. He does not link all of them, and he also includes clearly unrelated words such as Chuv. su ‘healthy’. He also fails to provide any decompositions or explanations, with one exception: that the proportion between n in jān ‘side’ and k in jāk id., jaguk ‘near’, etc., is the same as in janmak : jakmak ‘to burn’ and sanmak : sakmak ‘to imagine’.

Subsequently, Gombocz (1905: 268) links some of the words in this study, likewise without decomposition or explanation, but he also adds Mongolic and Manchu-Tungusic parallels. Among the Turkic words, Gombocz mentions only the k-forms: jak-, jakyn, etc., while jān, jan-, etc. are missing from the list. The same is true for a later paper by Gombocz (1912: 23) which, so far as the words addressed in this paper are concerned, is effectively a repetition of the earlier collection.

One of the words with extra-Turkic parallels is jaka ‘edge’, perhaps the least clear one of all. Vladimircov (1910: 171) derives this word, together with the Mongolic forms, from jak- ‘to come near’. Ramstedt (1914–1915) also equates the Turkic and Mongolic forms, and so does Rāşānen (1920: 194) who also adds the Chuvash and Yakut counterparts. This etymology is also supported, though with a certain amount of caution because of the semantics, by Levitskaja 1989 (ÈSTJa 82). Doerfer (1971: 308; see below) proposes entirely separate proto-forms for jaka ‘edge’, jaguk ‘near’, and jany ‘new’. Several years later, Doerfer suggests (TMEN IV §1802) that the Tkc. jaka is the source of the Mongolic words which, in turn, were borrowed to Yakut and the Tungusic languages. This last assertion, namely that Yakut < Mongolic > Tungusic, is supported by ÈSTJa (82).

Returning to our collection as a whole, Bang (1917: §7) mentions in passing that jāk and jān ‘side’ are parallel derivatives *ja-k and *ja-n, and thus introduces the idea of the root *ja- that could act as the common denominator for the words. In the same paper (§43), Bang also adds jakyn ‘near’ to the family when he etymologizes it as the directive-allative form of jāk, and in (1921: §10), he adds jayak ‘cheek’, which is derived from jān ‘side’. The latter etymology is subsequently almost universally accepted, though on occasion with minor modifications (Sevortjan 1962: 166; ED 948b; ÈSTJa 123; GJV: §5.10c; Gülensoy 2007: yanak; KEWT: yanak). Several years later,
Bang additionally entertains the possibility of *jan being indecomposable, or alternatively the instrumental of *ja ‘side’ (1925: 405).

Thus, it is only Poppe (1927: 120), half a century after Vámbéry, who makes an earnest attempt to tie this loose collection of words into a family. Similarly to Bang, Poppe proposes the verbal root *ja-, and from it three derivatives: ják ‘side’, *jag > jagu- ‘to come near’, and ján ‘side’. The structure of the first two seems to be uncontroversial; for ján, Poppe suggests either the -yn suffix as in akyn < ak- ‘to flow’, or a petrified instrumental suffix attached instead to a nominal *ja. Each of these three derivatives has further derivatives of their own, including Tksh.jak+la-š- ‘to come near’, *jagu- > jaguk ‘near’, *jan+a-ja > Tlut. janaj ‘by the side, nearby’; and jakyn as a petrified instrumental form of jak. A family centred around *ja also appears later in Bang (1934: 200), Poppe (1960: 22), Ölmez (1991: 170), ESTJa and KEWT (see below).

Bang and Poppe’s etymologies of jakyn found few supporters but, in an apparent burst of renewed interest, three alternative explanations were proposed for jakyn in the space of three years, that is between 1932 and 1934.

Firstly, Zajączkowski (1932: 79) lists jakyn among formations with the deverbal -yn suffix, alongside Tksh. čakyn ‘spark, flash’, Tlut. tolun ‘full moon’, etc. This idea is independently revived by Räsänen (1955: 135), Tekin (1971: 358; see below), and later also cited after Zajączkowski in TMEN (IV § 1805) and ESTJa (IV 84).

Secondly, Ramstedt (1933: 464) proposes that jag- ‘to be near, to follow, to unite oneself to’ > jaguk ‘near’, and simultaneously jagkun > jakyn id. This is contested by Bang (1934: 200–201) for two reasons, namely that *jagkun would have yielded *jo-qun in Taranchi, and such a form is not attested, and also that the verb *jag- ‘to come near’ does not exist in Turkic, with only jak- and jagu- attested.

Thirdly and lastly, in the same paper, Bang (1934: 200) suggests *jagkyn ∼ *jakkyn. He speculates that the double consonant may have hindered the progress of the Karakhanid umlaut, and so such forms would explain the relative frequency of pre-umlaut forms (jaqin in place of the expected jeqin). Expanding on his 1917 hypothesis (above), Bang proposes the verbal root *ja-, and from it the intensive form jak- ‘to come near’, together with the nouns jàk and jàn ‘side’, as well as *jag ‘sich nährend’. It would appear that Ramstedt concurs with Bang’s arguments because later he too proposes *jaggyn (1949: 250).

The same etymology can be also found in Menges (1968: 102), and it is this iteration that is, in turn, criticized by Tekin (1971: 358). Tekin notes that the initial g- in -gyn is generally preserved in the Oghuz group, and that jakyn itself is attested in Uighur at a stage in which the g- was still present, so the original suffix must have been -yn (as proposed by Zajączkowski, see above), rather than -gyn.³

A similar decomposition is also proposed by Räsänen (VEWT: 180a), but from the noun jàk ‘side’, rather than from the verb jak- ‘to come near’. In addition to this,

2 Poppe (1927: 121) spells the word yanai, probably mirroring Radloff’s notation janaï (R III 82). Most probably, both spellings represent janaj, cf. Stachowski K. / Urban [in preparation].

VEWT features several potentially related words, but fails to suggest how they might be linked. The adjectives jakšy ‘good’ (180b) and jany ‘new’ (185b) are derived from jak- ‘to come near’ (178b) and jān ‘side’ (184b), respectively, the entry for jaguk ‘near’ (178b) mentions jaguk ‘near’ and other derivatives, that for āk ‘side’ (184b) includes a group of verbs meaning ‘to rub, to smear’ (Kzk. āk- etc.), as well as Altaic parallels, but no further information is forthcoming. Indeed, the entry for jān ‘side’ (184b) includes no etymology, only the reconstruction *jān, which may intimate Räsänen believes it is not related to the other forms. The same reconstruction can be found in Tekin (1973: 40; 1995: 175; see below).

An entirely different picture is painted by Doerfer (1971: 308) who derives jaguk ‘near’ from *dëgū-, *dëgūka(n), jaka ‘edge’ < *dak(k)ā, and jany ‘new’ < *danē, i.e. three separate stems (roots?). Doerfer does not expand upon these ideas in TMEN (IV § 1802, 1805, 1816), where he limits himself to rejecting all the Altaic comparisons, and instead proposes borrowing as the mechanism which led to the rise of all the Turko-Mongolo-Tungusic similarities in our words.

Shortly after VEWT was published, Clauson’s own general Turkic dictionary became available with the somewhat generous addition of the word etymological to the title. ED (1972) includes many of the words listed. It lacks a detailed explanation, but the general scheme can be pieced together from the individual entries: jagru ‘near’ (ED 905a), jagu- ‘to come near’ (898b) < *jag which has an “obscure” morphological connection to jak- id. (896b) > jakyn ‘near’ (904a) and perhaps also jaka ‘edge’ (898a). For the main n-forms, jān ‘side’ (940a), jāna- ‘to sharpen’ (944a), etc. no etymologies are provided. However, an etymology is given for jana ‘again’ (943a), and it is explained to be a gerund from jān- ‘to turn back’ (941b), which is the same etymology that Räsänen had previously proposed (1957: 239).

The final general dictionary, ĖSTJa (1989), discusses a number of the words in this study, and does so in such a way that the information disseminated across the individual entries can be combined into an overall scheme (ĖSTJa 62, 63, 81, 82, 84, 111, 113, 115): *ja- ‘to pass by, to come near’ > 1) causative *ja-gur- which was reinterpreted as jagur- > jaguk ‘near’, etc., and jān- ‘to turn back’; 2) *ja- ∼ *jā- > jak- ‘to come near’ > jāk ‘side’, (?* jaka ‘edge, jakyn ‘near’, jakyš- ‘to come near, to approach, to suit, to be appropriate’ > jakšy ‘good’. In addition, jana- ∼ jany- ‘to leave, to return’ is considered to be derived either from jān- ‘to turn back’, or from jān ‘side’, from which also jāna- ∼ … ‘to sharpen (by dragging the side of an object over a whetting stone)’ (cf. also Sevortjan 1962: 382). It is only the origin of jān ‘side’ that effectively remains unexplained.

The verb jany- ‘to sharpen’ also features in Ramstedt (1935: 466b), alongside a verb which has very similar forms but with the meaning ‘to threaten’. Ramstedt separates these into two entries; for the first no etymology is provided but, perhaps rather surprisingly, the latter is viewed as being derived from *jan-ga-, with the meaning ‘to threaten, to shake one’s hand’. It would appear that Ramstedt possibly confused two partially homophonous families in this instance; Clark (1977: 163)

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4 Cf. e.g. Pol. podchodzić, Russ. подходить where the same semantic extension has occurred.
offers a rather clever explanation of how this might have happened. It is remark-
able that Hatiboğlu (1970, after Tekin 1973: 40) also confused these words and she,
in turn, is criticized by Tekin who invokes the original vowel length as an argument:
‎jān ‘side’ : jan- ‘to turn back’ : jān- ‘to threaten’. I believe it follows from this that
Tekin considers jan- ‘to turn back’ and jān ‘side’ to be unrelated, and the latter to be
unrelated to the other words in this study.

Etymological dictionaries addressing only the Turkish language, in the main
count little to the discussion. Eyuboğlu (1988) and Gülensoy (2007; see below)
equate jak- ‘to come near’ with jak- ‘to burn’, which is problematic because of the
semantics, and neither provides a convincing justification. Eyuboğlu also discusses
jany ‘new’, which he derives from Indo-European, as well as jaka ‘edge’, which he
equates with Ar. jāqaṭ ‘collar’ and Pers. jaqqa ∼ jāqa id. but without making a definiti-
ve decision as to the direction of the borrowing (see also Section 3.6).

Gülensoy (2007) discusses other words but these can only be partially combined
into a general scheme. The n-forms are mostly considered to be unrelated: jān ‘side’
< jān, and jany ‘new’ < *jang ∼ *jany ‘something that needs to be hidden’ > Tksh.
yanılmak ‘to err’, etc. However, jan- ‘to turn back’ is derived from ja-n- which ap-
pears to be the same root that Gülensoy identifies in jaka ‘edge’, jakṣmak ‘to suit’,
and possibly also jakyn ‘near’. As was mentioned above, in theory this should also
be the same root that is present in jakmak ‘to burn’ since that verb is equated with
OTkc. jak- ‘to suit, to come near, …’, but ‘to burn’ is reconstructed by Gülensoy
with a long vowel, *jā-.

Eren (1999) only discusses jaka ‘edge’ from the wordlist for this study, deriving it,
following Clauson, from jak- ‘to come near’.

It is perhaps somewhat unfair to consider Kabataş’s (2009) dictionary, as is fo-
cuses exclusively on the specificity of Cypriot Turkish, but I report that unfortunately
it, too, does not cover words from our collection.

Nişanyan ([online]), on the other hand, does discuss several of the words under
consideration but his explanations are often sadly lacking in clarity. It seems that
jaka ‘edge, jakyn ‘near’, and jak- ‘to come near’ are all derived from the Old Turkic
(Old, not Proto-) verb jak- ‘to come near, to touch, to spread (grease, ointment)’
which, in turn, is thought to be created from another Old Turkic verb jagu- ‘to come
near’ through the addition of the denominal suffix +yk-. Rather surprisingly, the
other words were also coined from verbs using denominal suffixes, including such
verbs as “yāk ‘close, near (adjective)’”5. On the other hand, jān ‘side’ and jany ‘new’
are both derived from jan- ‘to turn back’, though with an annotation that this is
not certain. Interestingly, janak ‘cheek’ < OTkc. jan- ‘to turn back’ + +(g)Ak con-
tains no such qualification. I found no indication that Nişanyan believes jan- to
be related to jak-.

5 Cf. e.g. sv. yakın: “Bu sözcük Eski Türkçe yāk ‘yakin (sifat)’ fiilinden Eski Türkçe +In ekiyle
türetilmiştir.[…] Bu sözcük Eski Türkçe yak- ‘yanaşmak, yaklaşımak’ fiilinden Eski Türkçe +Uk
ekiyle türetilmiştir.” (accessed: 9 October 2022; in the original, “Eski Türkçe” was set in bold).
M. Stachowski (KEWT, 2019), while only discussing a few of the words in this study, does so in such a way that the overall scheme emerges quite clearly. M. Stachowski in the main adopts Poppe’s (1927) reconstruction of the root *ja- as the centre of the family, only changing the vowel to a long one, *jā-; for the rationale, see point 1 in Section 5 below. The whole picture is thus as follows: jān ‘side’, jāny ‘new’ < CTkc. *jān ‘side’? < *jā± > *jāk [‘side’] (> jagu- ‘to come near’), jak- ‘to come near’ > *jakgyn > jakyn ‘near’, as well as *jakguk [id.] > Tksh. javuk ‘engagement’, etc. However, jaka ‘edge’ is not viewed as being part of the family as M. Stachowski challenges Vladimircov’s etymology on semantic grounds (see above). An alternative to this scheme is also possible where the central *jā± is replaced with PTkc. *jāŋ ‘side’, which M. Stachowski had proposed earlier (2012: 133–134), whereby the relation between jāk and jān is not derivational but instead phonetic in nature.

Lastly, Tietze (TETTL) includes all the words under consideration but offers no discussion whatsoever, limiting himself to deriving them directly from Old Turkic forms (not Proto-), and referring to the appropriate entries in ED.

3. Commentary

The last century of research has failed to bring much progress. To the best of my knowledge, Bang (1934) was the last author who made a specific effort to consider the collection of words in this study as a whole. Apart from focusing exclusively on individual words, the majority of authors also only consulted a handful of sources, which resulted in certain ideas being developed independently multiple times. Let us recapitulate below what has been established, and what has been questioned, concentrating on the propositions that I consider to be viable to some extent:

1. jagu- ‘to come near’ either < *ja- or *jag- or *jāk ‘side’.
2. jaguk ‘near’ < jagu- ‘to come near’.
3. jak- ‘to come near’ either < *ja- or *jā-. 
4. jak- ‘to burn’ is unrelated.
5. jāk ‘side’ either < *ja- or *jā- or *jāŋ or jynak.
6. jaka ‘edge’ controversial because of semantics.
7. jakyn ‘near’ either < *jak-gyn or *jak-yn.
8. jan- ‘to turn back’ < *ja-.
9. jan- ‘to threaten’ is unrelated.
10. jān ‘side’ either < *ja- or *jā- or *jāŋ or *jāŋ.
11. jāna- ‘to sharpen’ < jān ‘side’.
12. jaŋak ‘cheek’ either < jān ‘side’ jan- ‘to turn back’.
13. jaŋy ‘new’ < jān ‘side’.

I would like to add my thoughts regarding some of these points.
3.1. & 3.2.  *jagu* ‘to come near’, *jaguk* ‘near’

Four partially overlapping hypotheses have been proposed for *jagu*-

*ja-g+u- | ED (904a): *jag+ū- | ESTJa (62): *ja-gur- > *jagu-r- | KEWT (yan): *jâ+k+ū-.

Whether intentionally or not, Clauson’s reconstruction is effectively the same as that of Poppe, with the only actual difference being that it stops one step short of the root *ja-. I will, therefore, treat these as a single proposal. This hypothesis requires the assumption of a noun *jag; generally speaking, every additional assumption diminishes the probability of a scheme but in this case, *jag happens to simultaneously provide a rather effective explanation for *jagru ‘near’ (ED 905a).

The hypothesis presented in ÉSTJa relies on resegmentation which, though a highly irregular phenomenon, is not impossible. However, it is difficult to absolutely evaluate the likelihood of this proposition.

Reconstructions in KEWT assume long vowels in the auslaut of verbal roots as a rule (KEWT 7; GJV § 5.8). Indeed, *jâk ‘side’ which is the intermediary step between *ja- and *jagu-, is attested in dialectal Turkmen with a long vowel (ÉSTJa 82); however, *jagu- itself does not appear to bear any trace of an original length (ÉSTJa 62), and neither does its derivative *jaguk (ÉSTJa 63). This is problematic because if one accepts that all Turkic verbs originally had long vowels in the auslaut, then the other two propositions face the same difficulty. See Section 3.

3.3. & 3.8.  *jak* ‘to come near’, *jan* ‘to turn back’

In essence only two hypotheses have been proposed for *jak*: Gombocz (1905: 268), Bang (1934: 200): < *ja- | ÉSTJa (81): *ja- ~ *jâ- | KEWT (yakin): < *jâ-. Similar to *jak-, *jan- has appeared in many discussions concerning the words in this study, but there have only really been two attempts at etymologizing *jan- itself, both with the same result: ÉSTJa (111), Gülensoy (2007 yan-²): < *ja-. The middle ground is taken by Ščerbak who reconstructs *ϑâk- and simultaneously *ϑan- (1970: 196), unfortunately without any further elaboration.

That is to say, the propositions differ only with regard to the quantity of the root vowel, with the reflexes of both *jak- and *jan- in various languages providing no reason to suspect an original long vowel (ÉSTJa 81, 111). It is only when one attempts to connect them to other words in our collection, and to that end to detach from them the final -k or -n, that such a need arises (see Section 4). We have, therefore, two seemingly mutually exclusive requirements: that *jak- and *jan- be reconstructed with a short vowel, and that they be derived from *jâ- with an original long vowel.

3.5. & 3.10  *jâk, jân ‘side’

The authors who discussed both these words, generally viewed them in a similar way: Bang (1917: § 7; 1934: 200), Poppe (1927: 120): *ja-k, *ja-n < *ja- | M. Stachowski

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6 This derivation is not expressly articulated in KEWT but it can be inferred from the entries for *yakin and *yan.
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(2012: 133): *jäk, *jän < *jäŋ | KEWT (yan): *jäk, (?) *jän < *jäŋ. Furthermore, ĖSTJa (82, 113) derives jäk from *ja- ~ *jä- and considers that it is connected to jän, but does not offer a clear etymology for the latter. Bang (1925: 405), in between the two papers enumerated above, has doubts about jän and speculates that it could be derived from *ja ‘side’, or be entirely indecomposable. It seems that Räsänen (VEWT 184b), Ščerbak (1970: 196), Tekin (1973: 40; see Section 2), and Gülensoy (2007) also consider *jän to be its own primary root, while Nişanyan ([online]) entertains the possibility of it being derived from jan- ‘to turn back’.

The derivations from *ja- (with a short vowel) are problematic because both jäk and jän seem as if they had originally had long vowels (cf. ĖSTJa 82, 113ae solved quite easily by deriving them from *ja-gak and *ja-gan with a subsequent syncope of *-aga- > *-ā-). It should be noted, however, that *jä-gak and *jä-gan (with long vowels) would have resulted in the same jäk and jän attested today. Taking into account the Chuvash reflex sum ‘place near something’ (cf. Egorov 1964), the contraction must have occurred before the Proto-Turkic stage.

The derivation of both jäk and jän from PTkc. *jäŋ (M. Stachowski 2012: 133), while possible, does not solve the problem, but merely shifts it one step back in time. M. Stachowski notes that with this scenario “[t]here is no necessity to introduce a new root *√ja […]” (2012: 134), but then there is also no possibility to elegantly explain our collection of words as a whole.

The proportion of authors who wished to view jän as its own primary, indecomposable root is considerably higher than those who considered jäk in a similar manner. Possibly, this is because many more authors have written about jän than about jäk. There is, however, no need to surrender and proclaim indecomposability, as both words can in fact be easily derived from *ja-*jä-. Potentially, they could be even derived from a nominal *jag (see Section 3.1 above) with the same syncope of *-aga- or *-āga- > -ā-.

The majority of the hypotheses above assume that jäk and jän are sister derivatives but this need not, in fact, be a requirement. One of the anonymous reviewers drew my attention to OTkc. jyŋak ‘side, direction’ (DTS) and suggested that it could be the ancestor of jäk or a descendant of jaŋak ‘cheek’ (see Section 3.12 below). Possibly, it is both; see Figure 1.

3.6. jaka ‘edge, bank, shore, collar’

Only two etymologies have been proposed for this word: Vladimircov (1910: 171), (?) ED (898a), (?) ĖSTJa (82), Eren (1999) < jak- | Doerfer (1971: 308) < *dak(k)ā.

The derivation from jak- ‘to come near’ has only really been accepted by Vladimircov, who in fact proposed it, and Eren, after Clauson. Clauson himself, together with ĖSTJa, was cautious, while KEWT (yaka) outright rejected it. All three cited semantics as the reason.

It is not immediately obvious to me how to interpret Doerfer’s reconstruction. It seems to suggest that the word is not related to jaguk ‘near’ or jany ‘new’ (Section 2), and elucidates no further.
Nevertheless, *jaka* seems to have been borrowed fairly intensively. According to Doerfer (TMEN IV §1802) the Mongolic and Manchu-Tungusic parallels are simply borrowings, but a discussion of this matter is beyond the scope of this paper. The word is also present in Yakut, one of only three of the words in this study (in addition to *saja* ‘new’ and *syñah* ‘cheek’), and it has two phonetic variants: *saja* ‘collar, edge’, and *ţaja* ‘edge’ (Pekarskij 1925). Doerfer is certainly correct in deriving at least the latter from Mongolic (TMEN IV §1802).

Eyuboğlu (1988 *yaka*) also mentions Ar. *jāqaẗ* ‘collar’ and NPers. *jaqqa* ∼ *jāqa* id. (He spells the Arabic word ‹yâka› and ‹yaka›, and the Persian words ‹yeke›; however, see Baalbaki 1995 and Steingass 1892.) Considering the spread and antiquity of *jaka* in Turkic, it seems unlikely that it should be a loanword from Arabic or Persian, but despite this it may still be interesting from the cultural-historical perspective, as to just how readily this word appears to have been borrowed across Siberia and beyond.

Notwithstanding the above, the semantics do indeed seem to pose a serious obstacle with respect to the inclusion of *jaka* in the *"ja-"*/*jā-* family. It seems that the meanings ‘edge’ and ‘shore’ are more likely to have yielded ‘collar’ than the other way round, so it is probably one of these two, or maybe both, that were the original form or forms. Having said that, the expected meaning of *"jak-a"* ought to be *"a place for approaching", *"a tool for approaching"* or maybe just *"approaching"* (cf. Güzel 2019: 291), and it is somewhat puzzling how any of these forms could be used to denote ‘edge’. With enough imagination one could perhaps describe ‘edge, border’ as ‘the place where [two sides] approach [each other]’ but it is not clear that the ancient Turks were so poetically inclined.

3.7. *jakyn* ‘close, near’


Specific issues are repeated across multiple etymologies, so let us address them from a general perspective. Firstly, the attested shapes of *jakyn* give no indication that the root vowel was originally long. It would seem that the hypothesis *"jā-"* > *"jak-"* > *jakyn* could be only feasible if we assumed that the closing of a syllable shortened its vowel. This does not generally appear to be the case, but it may be true for some words, this word included; cf. point 2 in Section 4. Conversely, a derivation from *jāk* ‘side’ would require us to assume that the opening of a closed syllable shortened its vowel. Such a phenomenon did actually occur, but so far as I can tell, only in Yakut, cf. e.g. CTkc. *"ōn"* ten, *"ōnuć"* tenth > Yak. *"ün", onus*.

Secondly, there is the question of *"-k-"* : *"-kk-"* : *"-kg-"* : *"-gg-"*. The final option, *"-gg-"*, can probably be safely eliminated, as it is somewhat unlikely that *VggV* should yield *VkV* in nearly every language (cf. ESTJa 84). The same is true for the previous
two examples, *-kg- and *-gk-, because in all likelihood they would have been simplified to either *-kk- or *-gg-. Thus, the problem is reduced to whether the middle consonant was a single *-k- or geminated *-kk-. If it was the former, we should expect that at least some languages would have *g-, and this is indeed the case (cf. ŠTJa 84); if it was the latter, we should expect that at least some languages would preserve *-kk-, and this does not appear to be the case (cf. DS, ŠTJa 84).\(^7\) Add to this Tekin’s arguments mentioned in Section 2 (preservation of *g- in Oghuz and attestation without *g- in Uighur), and it seems that reconstructions with *-gk-/*-kk- must be deemed as being untenable.

This is unfortunate because dropping the *g- from *-gyn could explain the length in the second syllable of Trkm. *jakyn and Uzb. dial. *jakyjn which otherwise cannot be explained, as in the continuation of *jak-yn both vowels ought to be short (cf. Clark 1998: 524, TrkmRS). This is perhaps not entirely impossible, but also it is not particularly likely that *jak- would have originally had two derivatives, *jak-kyn and *jak-yn, where the former, and only the former was preserved exclusively in Turkmen and dialectal Uzbek, while the latter, and only the latter, in all the other languages.

It is also not clear to which group Turkish ought to belong. On the one hand, we would expect Turkish to preserve the geminated *-kk-, as Tekin (1971: 358) noted, but on the other hand, if the root *jā- originally had a long vowel, we would expect Turkish to have *‘yağım’, not *‘yakin’. It appears that the most feasible combination is a short *ja-, and single *-k-.

3.12. *jaŋak ‘cheek, jaw, side’

Technically speaking, three etymologies have been proposed for this word: Bang (1921: §10), ED (948b), ŠTJa (123), Gülensoy (2007 yanak), KEWT (yanak): < jān ‘side’ + +gak | Sevortjan (1962: 166), GJV (§5.10c): < jān ‘side’ + +ak | Nişanyan ([online]): < jan- ‘to turn back’.

The first two are effectively interchangeable so far as *jaŋak itself is concerned. There is, nonetheless, a single detail that has been glossed over somewhat, namely the length of the root vowel. Not all, but most sources do provide a reconstruction: Bang (1921: §10): *jan+kak, ED (948b): *jānyāk, GJV (§5.10c): *jan+ak, Gülensoy (2007 yanak): *yān[ŋ]+(g)ak, KEWT (yanak): *jaŋak < *jān+gak. None, however, explicitly comments on the vowel length, with the exception of Clauson who merely says that *janāk is a crasis of *jānyāk, without further elaboration.

The word is attested in all three, Turkmen, Yakut, and South Siberian, which is rare for the words in this study. Unfortunately, no conclusions can be reached based on the latter two languages, because Yak. *ā would have been shortened in this position (cf. GJV §4.7), and in South Siberian glottalization would not have occurred (cf. fn. 9). We would, however, expect the vowel length to be preserved in

\(^7\) Unfortunately, the reflexes of the *-aky- sequence do not seem to be entirely regular, cf. akin, akntu, sakinnak, sakiz, sekiz, yukart, and perhaps sakirga, but also korku, saksağan, and yelken in ŠTJa and KEWT.
Turkmen, and yet the Turkmen form has a short \( a \). It would seem the only reason to reconstruct a long vowel, is to accommodate \( \text{jān} \) ‘side’.

In this light, Nişanyan’s derivation from \( \text{jan-} \) ‘to turn back’ appears in a more favourable light, but its semantics remains problematic.

3.13. \( \text{jaŋy} \) ‘new’

There have been three propositions for this word: Doerfer (1971: 308): *\( \text{daŋẽ} \) | VEWT (185b), KEWT (\( \text{yeni} \)): < \( \text{jān} \) | Nişanyan ([online]): ?< \( \text{jan} \).

Disregarding Doerfer’s reconstruction, as in fact it explains very little (see Section 3.6 above), we are left with two possibilities. The derivation from \( \text{jān} \) ‘side’ faces the same difficulties regarding vowel length that we have already encountered in Section 3.12 above. As with \( \text{jaŋak} \) ‘cheek’, \( \text{jaŋy} \) is also attested in both Turkmen and Yakut, has a short \( a \) in both languages, and although the Yakut reflex is not conclusive evidence, the Turkmen reflex is. Nişanyan’s proposition solves this problem, but only for \( \text{jaŋy} \) because the short vowel in \( \text{jan-} \) ‘to turn back’ remains unclear (see Section 3.3 above).

Nevertheless, both proposition test the credulity of the reader with regard to the semantics. Nişanyan claims there is an obvious semantic link between ‘new’ and ‘to turn back’,\(^8\) but he unfortunately fails to elaborate. However, for the etymology of \( \text{jān} \) ‘side’, a cultural explanation exists: when a young horse is being broken in, it is at first not ridden but led alongside a mounted mature horse, so that from the human’s perspective ‘the one by the side’ = ‘the new one’ (M. Stachowski – p.c.). Considering how important horses were in the Turkic culture, perhaps such an evolution is indeed possible.

4. Discussion

Realistically, only two reconstructions could fulfil the role of a root that binds our entire collection together: *\( \text{ja-} \) and *\( \text{jā-} \). Not all the words provide an indication as to the original quantity of the vowel but those that do, point to a short one; see the Turkish, Turkmen, Tuvinian, Western Yugur, and Yakut forms in Section 1.\(^9\) There are only two apparent exceptions: \( \text{jāk} \) and \( \text{jān} \) ‘side’, together with their derivatives such as \( \text{jāna-} \) ‘to sharpen’, but both can be plausibly explained as contractions of forms with an original short vowel, see Section 3.5 & 3.10.

However, there are also three circumstances that preclude a reconstruction with a short vowel.

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\(^8\) “Eski Türkçe \( \text{yan-} \) fiiliyle anlam bağlı barış olmakla birlikte sözçük yapısı açık değildir.” (accessed: 19 October 2022; in the original, ”Eski Türkçe” was set in bold).

\(^9\) Note that in South Siberian languages, glottalization/preaspiration does not occur before nasal consonants (Janhunen 1980: 26; Roos 1998: 30; 2000: 33; Rassadin 2014: 15), so its absence from the Tuv. \( \text{čan-} \) ‘to return’, the WYu. \( \text{jan} \) ‘side’, etc. is of no consequence.
1. It is thought that originally verbs could only have long vowels in the auslaut. This is the situation found today in Yakut, and to explain it as a Yakut innovation would effectively mean to posit that a phonetic change occurred in Yakut which affected verbs but eschewed nomina (GJV § 5.8). The assumption that those lengths are original, however, does not in fact provide a plausible explanation, but merely places the event one step further back in time and, though more or less speculative, other hypotheses can also be devised to explain it. One such scheme is proposed in point 2 below.

2. Tekin (1995: 165; 2003: 63) observed that in all Proto-Turkic roots with the structure \(V\) or \(CV\), the vowel is long. He surmised that this phenomenon is phonotactic rather than etymological in nature. If so, then we must expect that the long vowels in the \((C)V\) roots were of two kinds: those originally long, which remained long in all circumstances, as well as those originally short that lengthened only when they were exposed in the final position of a monosyllabic root. Clearly, at some point between Proto-Turkic and modern Yakut, the verbs underwent a secondary alignment resulting in the state described in point 1 above. It is unclear why nomina apparently did not follow the same pattern. At any rate, if we assume that \(*ja-\) was from the second group, i.e. that it originally had a short vowel, it would remain short in \(jagu-, jăk-\) ‘to come near’, etc., and only become long if the root was used on its own. Unfortunately, it does not seem to have survived in this form so the hypothesis is not possible to verify.

3. Finally, there is the question of the Altaic background. I have tended to avoid this topic thus far but it can be evaded no longer. Multiple authors have cited and discussed Altaic parallels for the words under consideration,\(^{10}\) but I will adduce only two forms here as symbols for entire families: MaTung. \(\text{daga}\) ‘close, near’ (Benzing 1955: 99; Cincius 1975 \(\text{daya}\)), and Mo. \(\text{daga-}\) ‘to follow, to chase’ (ÈSMJa \(\text{daya}\)\(^{-1}\); Nugteren 2011: 311). Regardless of whether they came into being as a result of inheritance or borrowing, there can be little doubt that multiple words which display the same sound correspondences exist across the three families. Certainly, Tkc. \(j\)- : MaTung., Mo. \(d\)- is one such correspondence (e.g. Ölmex 1991). I was, however, unable to find triples, or even pairs, such that Tkc. \(ā\) : MaTung. or Mo. \(\text{aga}\). Similar correspondences, however, are documented, e.g. Tkc. \(ě, ź, ū\) : Mo. \(\text{ège}, Že, ūgu\), etc. (Tekin 2003: 59f.), so a comparison between PTkc. \(*jā-\) on the one hand, and MaTung. \(\text{daga}\), Mo. \(\text{daga-}\) on the other, is not groundless, but it is also not certain. Indeed, Ölmex (1991: 171f.) lists three cases of varying degrees of confidence, in which PAlt. \(*\text{agy}\) would have been preserved in Proto-Turkic: \(*\text{dagy}(n)\) ‘[enemy]’, \(*\text{dagyr}y\) ‘[?] wound’], and \(*\text{dagyr}\) ‘[brown]’.

I should also note that some of the other Altaic parallels that have been proposed for our words display other correspondences, e.g. Tkc. \(jāk\) ‘side’ : Mo. \(žūg\) id. (EDAL: \(\text{di} βα, \text{di} ωκ, \text{άνα, ηἀνα, ζέλων, ςάλος, ςήκε, ςήκε, ςήκε} \), Egorov (1964 \(\text{cēnē, cψa}\)), Miller (1971: 85), Ölmex (1991: 170), Poppe (1924: 310; 1927: 121; 1955: 149; 1956: 210; 1960: 22, 120), Ramstedt (1933: 464; 1957: 51), TMEN (§§ 1802, 1805, 1816), VEWT (180a, 184b, 185b).

žjöke), or Tkc. jany ‘new’ : Mo. sine id. (Egorov 1964 cĕnĕ; Dybo 2013: 404). In order to address this problem, EDAL posits different Proto-Altaic reconstructions (*ž- for jāk, *z- for jany, etc.; see fn. 10), leading to the rather ironic outcome that all the words which I am attempting to combine into a single Proto-Turkic family, EDAL views as unrelated on the Proto-Altaic level.

This situation, disheartening though it may be, is of course not conclusive proof that the words under consideration are unconnected to MaTung. daga or Mo. daga-. If we assume that they are, and further that this means the Proto-Turkic reconstruction must have a long vowel, then I cannot envisage how they can be derived from *jā-. Alternately, if we assume that they are connected but the nature of this connection is such that it does not necessitate an original long vowel at the Proto-Turkic level, then the scheme proposed in point 2 above appears to be viable.

5. Conclusions

For more than a century, at least twenty-six authors in more than forty publications have discussed various words from the collection studied in this paper, yet they have failed to reach a satisfactory conclusion. More than a century ago, Bang proposed to derive those words from the root *ja-, but it seems that twenty years of rather lethargic discussion that followed, exhausted the interest completely. Subsequently, only individual authors proposed etymologies for individual words (Section 2).

The main obstacle to combining our words into a family is vowel length. The majority of examples point to a short vowel in the root, but two words, jāk and jān ‘side’, indicate a long vowel. However, since an alternative derivation can be proposed for this pair, this difficulty can be resolved (Section 3).

Nevertheless, this is somewhat puzzling because the reconstruction suggested by the data, i.e. *ja- ‘to be near, …’ faces three constraints of a more theoretical nature. The requirement for the final vowel of a verb to be long, as well as the requirement for the vowel in a CV root to be long, can both be solved. The purported Altaic correspondences, however, not only indicate a long vowel in our root, but perhaps also different roots for various words (Section 4).

I consider the relation between the words in the study and their hypothetical Manchu-Tungusic and Mongolic parallels to be uncertain. In contrast, the Turkic data appear to be relatively clear. Taking into account all the circumstances summarized above, it seems that the most likely hypothesis for the words addressed in this study can be presented in Figure 1.

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*jā- ‘to be near, to come near, …’

- *jā-k- > jak- ‘to come near’
  - jak-yn ‘close, near’
  - jak-a ‘edge, border, shore, collar’
- *jā-n- > jan- ‘to turn back’
- *jā-g → jag+ũ- ‘to come near’
  - jagu-k ‘close, near’
- *jā-gan or *jag+an > jān ‘side’
  - jān-a- ‘to sharpen’
- *jān-gak > jaŋak ‘cheek’
- *jān-ky > jaŋy ‘new’
- *jā-gak or *jag+ak or *jān+ga+k > jāk ‘side’

Figure 1: A potential family of words centred around PTkc. *jā ~ *ja- ‘to be near, …’
(cf. point 2 in Section 4)

Abbreviations

Alt. = Altaic; Ar. = Arabic; Az. = Azerbaijani; C- = Common; Chlk. = Chelkan; Chuv. = Chuvash; dial. = dialectal; Kyrg. = Kyrgyz; Kzk. = Kazakh; MaTung. = Manchu-Tungusic; Mo. = Mongolic; N- = New; Oir. = Oirrot (Altai); P- = Proto; Pers. = Persian; Pol. = Polish; Russ. = Russian; Tk. = Turkic; Tksh. = Turkish (including Ottoman); Tlut. = Teleut; Tof. = Tofalar; Trkm. = Turkmen; Tuv. = Tuvinian; Uigh. = Uighur; Uzb. = Uzbek; WYu. = Western Yugur; Yak. = Yakut


DTJS = Nadeljaev et al. 1969.


ED = Clauson 1972.


GJV = Stachowski M. 1993.


PTkc. *jä- ~ *ja- ‘to be near,…’ and the question of Altaic correspondences

Pekarskij É.K. 1925. Slovârj yakutskogo jazyka. [vol. 7]. Leningrad: Akademija Nauk SSSR.

Poppe N.N. 1924. Čuvašskij jazyk i ego otnošenie k mongoliskomu i tjurščkim jazykam. – Izvestija Rossiskoj akademii nauk. VI serija 18(12–18)/2: 289–314.


R III = Radloff 1905.


TMEN IV = Doerfer 1975.

TofRS = Rassadin 2005.

TrkmRS = Baskakov et al. 1968.


VEWT = Räsänen 1969.


