

Mongolian Pronunciation

Observations on some peculiar facts

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The phonemic (and phonetic) structure of Mongolian is rather complex, because it also depends on complicated morphophonemic ‘rules’, on the position of its elements in words, and on the presence of vowel harmony peculiarities.

Our observations are simply useful pieces of information that cannot be ignored when dealing with the real pronunciation of modern Mongolian (in its official nation).

Mongolian (Altaic) has *eight* vowel phonemes (not just seven, which is merely the number of its long vowels), both short and ‘long’ (actually narrow diphthongs, in addition to some real /Vi/ diphthongs), as well as five phonemic *diphthongs* (although /ei/ [əi], often merges into /ee/ [əə] for most speakers).

Notice carefully that the ‘long’ vowels occur only in stressed syllables. A further important peculiarity to be noted in the pronunciation of Mongolian is the collocation of its *vowels*, not only as *short* and *long* (actual diphthongs), and as *full* and *reduced*, but also as *word-initial* and non *word-initial* (in words, for evolutionary reasons). These six categories may combine differently according to complex morphophonemic (and diachronic) criteria, which are not quite clear yet.

Word-final unstressed diphthongs are reduced to a single element: /_o-VV[#]/ [-V] [[-VØ]]. In contact with ‘clear’ consonants (that is non-back ones), /uu, oo, ɔɔ, aa/, become /ui, oi, ɔi, ai/, not only in Russian-influenced accents.

Notice that vowels occurring before or after voiceless consonants become (partially) devoiced (in their contact position).

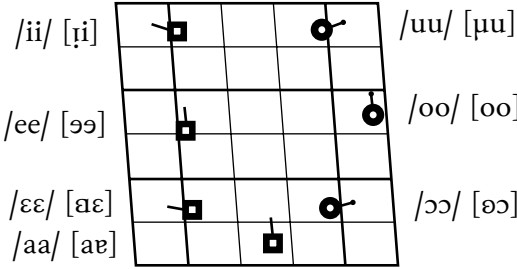
Voiceless stops and stopstrictives are *spirated* (we do prefer to replace the unscientific and absurd term ‘aspiration’ with *aspiration*), while the voiced ones are (partially) devoiced. In consonant clusters, however, all consonants are either voiced or voiceless (and this is also the case between voiceless consonants and pauses). Final stop(strictive)s are fairly distinctively audibly released.

Further: /r, l; rj, lj/ [r, l; r̥, l̥]; we find palatalized versions also with ‘/Ci[#]/’, which is better interpreted as /Cj[#]/: Туул [‘tooł], муул [‘tooł]; in contact with front vowels, /l/ [l] → [ɺ]. Other /Cj/ consonants occur for bilabial, pre-dorsal and back-dorsal places of articulation, in different word-positions, as [Cj], but with different taxophones depending on speakers.

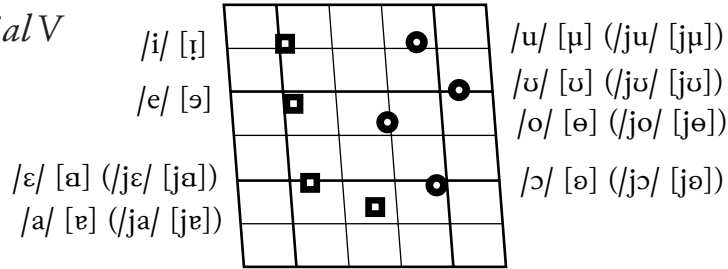
It is decidedly better to be free from absurd and undue Soviet-like influences in seriously dealing with pronunciation facts (obviously, even for Russian itself). Of course, more current and systematic articulatory taxophones are not included here.

The position of *stress* (in words) is not distinctive, so it varies much, even in the official pronunciation. The Mongolian *intonation* patterns are shown below.

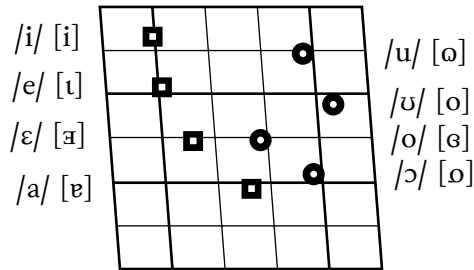
long initial V



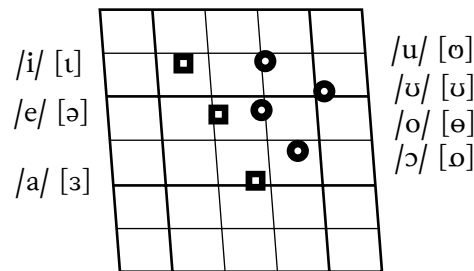
short initial V



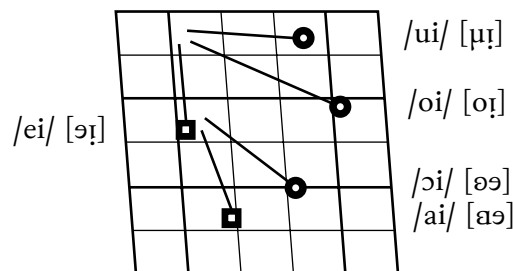
full non-initial V



reduced non-initial V



Vi diphthongs



m	n		ŋ [ŋ]	
p b	t d		g ɣ	
φ β	ts dz	tʃ dʒ	x [χ]	
	s	ʃ	j	[h]
	[r] r [ʂ] ʂ	[ʃ-] ʃ-]		

