

Nekrologi / Obituaries

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In memoriam Lars Johanson (1936–2025)

Lars Johanson was one of the most outstanding Turkologists. His eminence consists in being one of the few in the field who could successively combine theoretical and empirical linguistics. In contrast to those who applied various models of modern linguistics to Turkic languages, Lars Johanson constructed models himself. In this respect, his studies on aspect, evidentiality and code copying are very important. Another discipline to which he contributed many studies, is language typology. It is difficult to find a discipline of Turkic studies that has not attracted Lars Johanson's attention, from writing practical aids such as dictionaries, grammars, phrasebooks, editing old texts, examining all sub-systems of language to investigating processes of language contact.

Lars Johanson was born in Köping, a small town in Sweden west of Stockholm and Uppsala, on March 8, 1936. In 1956–1959, he studied various subjects of German, Scandinavian, Sanskrit, Slavic, Turkic and general linguistics at the universities of Uppsala and Stockholm. He got his BA in German and Scandinavian languages in 1959 and graduated from Uppsala University in German, Scandinavian and Slavic languages in 1961. However, in 1959–1960, he was a student of Oriental studies at the University of Vienna. After returning to Uppsala, he studied Turkology at the university between 1961 and 1966. He received another MA degree in Turkology in 1963 and PhD degree defending his thesis *Studien zur reichstürkischen Verbalsyntax* ("Studies on Turkish Verbal Syntax") in 1966. Studying in Uppsala, he carried out half-year fieldwork in Turkey in 1963. From 1965 to 1971 he worked at his *alma mater* as a lecturer in Turkish but also



taught at Stockholm University in 1967–1972. In 1971, he received his post-doctoral degree (Habilitation) at Uppsala University on the basis of the post-doctoral dissertation *Aspekt im Türkischen* (“Aspect in Turkish”). In 1972, he received an Alexander von Humboldt Research Fellowship at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz. In 1973, he got the German post-doctoral degree in Mainz and became Professor of Turkology at Uppsala University where he worked between 1973 and 1980. His further career is linked to Germany, although he was associated with Uppsala for the rest of his life. He started his career in Germany at Frankfurt University in 1979–1980 and from 1981 onwards continued teaching and research at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz where he became Professor of Turkic studies in 1982 and head of the Institute of Turkology. He held this position until his retirement in 2001. While working in Uppsala, he travelled to the Soviet Union to visit various Turkic speaking areas and republics in Central Asia, Western Siberia and Azerbaijan, and later in the 1980s, while being in Mainz, he travelled to Xinjiang in China. Lars Johanson did not stop teaching after retirement and was visiting Professor at various institutions, e.g. La Trobe University in Melbourne, the Bosphorus University in Istanbul, the Central University of Nationalities in Beijing, the University of Szeged, which awarded the title of an honorary doctor to him earlier in 1999, and the University of Zurich. He also continued visiting universities and research institutions in the framework of research co-operation and various projects, including the Max Planck-Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Kyoto University, the Russian Academy of Sciences in Yakutsk, Minzu University in Beijing, etc. He died in Mainz, Germany, on November 24, 2025, at the age of 89.

During his professional career between 1966 and 2025, Lars Johanson published a few hundred titles, including books, articles, reviews, reports, editorial notes and other writings.

Regarding theoretical models, his first study is the theory of aspect. It was first presented in German in his post-doctoral dissertation *Aspekt im Türkischen* in 1971, translated into Turkish (*Türkçede görünüş*) by Nurettin Demir, and further developed in several ongoing studies, also in areal and typological perspective, e.g. ‘Viewpoint operators in European languages’ (2000) and *Aspect in the Languages of Europe* (2023). The essence of his aspect model is the viewpoint perspective in which processes, events and actions are envisaged in respect to its limits. Lars Johanson, stressing the complicated aspectual, modal and temporal structure of Turkic, discussed finite verbal forms as intraterminals, terminals and postterminals. Intraterminals are those forms which denote action within its limits, terminals as envisaged at the point of reaching the limits and postterminals as viewed after the limits.

Another theoretical question to which Lars Johanson paid attention in his studies is the category of evidentiality or indirectivity. Although evidential and non-evidential forms contrast in many languages worldwide, this category is crucial to understand Turkic. It consists in expressing knowledge or experience of information certainty or uncertainty contained in a sentence. It is frequently perceived as a modal category and confused with some modal forms. Lars Johanson devoted some important articles to this category, e.g.

‘Turkic indirectives’ (2000), ‘Evidentiality in Turkic’ (2003) and ‘Indirective sentence types’ (2006).

Still another domain of Lars Johanson’s studies and theoretical investigations is language contact and copying resulting from this. It aroused his interest quite early. Language contact was first reflected in his review of P. Sture Ureland’s *Sprachkontakt in der Hanse* (“Language Contact in the Hanse”), published in 1989. His first monograph devoted to this is *Strukturelle Faktoren in türkischen Sprachkontakten* (“Structural Factors in Turkic Language Contacts”) in which he defined the concept of code copying and divided copies into three types, *Globalkopien* (“Global Copies”), *Teilstrukturkopien* (“Selective Structure Copies”) and *Mischkopien* (“Mixed Copies”). Many questions and processes are discussed in this book, such as general and areal trends, Turkic–Non-Turkic convergence, etc. Lars Johanson always avoided the traditional terms used in language contact studies such as borrowing, calque, loan words, loan shifts and loan translations. This monograph is followed by a number of linguistic ‘case studies’, all being crowned by the *Code Copying: The Strength of Languages in Take-over and Carry-over Roles*, published at Brill in 2023, in which he presented his model in English and further developed, extending the scope to many other Oriental languages, both historical and modern.

A very important reference book is his *Turkic* published at Cambridge University Press in 2021. This publication of nearly one thousand pages presents all the Turkic languages in their present states and historical development, their geographical classification with five enclave languages, as well as many aspects of language structure, language use and function, sociolinguistics, literacy (‘orature and literature’), culture and language contact. Although there are several introductions, handbooks and reference books, Johanson’s *Turkic* is unprecedented. No Turkologist has produced a compendium of such an extent, depth and erudition by oneself, and Lars Johanson’s *Turkic* may only be compared to the first volume of *Philologiae Turcicae Fundamenta*, a multi-author classical Turkology reference book published in 1959. There are many novelties in this reference book, e.g. a hitherto neglected question of indicating the status of languages. The linguistic part of *Turkic* contains chapters on lexicon and the basic sub-systems including phonetics, phonology, morphology and syntax.

Lars Johanson tried to examine phenomena of Turkic languages in accordance with modern linguistics. Therefore, he preferred new terms to the traditional ones, e.g. *postverb* for *auxiliary verb*, *participant nominal* for *participle* or *action nominal* for *verbal noun*. He also created new terms to express the concepts of his aspectual and temporal models of the verb.

During his long teaching activity, Lars Johanson supervised dissertations of many doctoral students. Some of them acted or are still acting at different universities in Germany, many as professors, e.g. Claus Schönig (PhD in 1983), Mark Kirchner (PhD in 1989), Michael Hess (1997) and Julian Rentzsch (PhD in 2003), or hold other positions, e.g. Sevgi Ağcagül at Bonn University; some are active at other universities in Europe: Christiane Bulut at the University of Cyprus (PhD in 1997), Birsel Karakoç at Uppsala University (PhD in 2001) and Elisabetta Ragagnin at Venice University (PhD in 2007).

A number of his doctoral students work at various universities in Turkey, e.g. Nurettin Demir at Hacettepe University, Ankara (PhD in 1993), Mustafa Uğurlu at Sıtkı Koçman University, Muğla (PhD in 1994), Mehmet Kutalmış at Abant İzzet Baysal University, Bolu (PhD in 1997), Ahmet İbrahim Aydemir at Hacettepe University, Ankara (PhD in 2003) and Ahmet Şefik Şenlik in Medeniyet University, Istanbul (PhD in 2006).¹ In my opinion, Lars Johanson was the last scholar able to educate so many professors internationally in the field of Turkic studies.

He also hosted many linguists visiting Johannes Gutenberg University in the framework of various fellowships, e.g. Abdurishid Yakup, Andrei Malchukov, Arienne M. Dwyer, Árpád Berta, Tooru Hayashi and others.

Lars Johanson's editorial activity was very fruitful. In 1985, he founded the *Turcologica* series at Harrassowitz in Wiesbaden. Except for the Turkish monograph series *Türk Dili Kurumu Yayınları* which can boast more than 1,500 titles published, this is probably the most successful series devoted to Turkic studies that ever existed, since one hundred and thirty volumes were published during forty years of its existence between 1985–2025. Most volumes were edited or co-edited by Lars Johanson, while some were commissioned to other editors under Lars Johanson's series editorship. Although the primary focus of *Turcologica* was on Turkic languages and literatures, volumes on Mongolic, Tungusic, in other words other Transeurasian or Altaic languages as well as languages being in contact with Turkic were also published. For instance, the first volume, Johannes Benzing's *Kalmückische Grammatik zum Nachschlagen* ("Kalmyk Grammar for Reference"), was devoted to Kalmyk, a European Mongolic language. Later in 1997, also at Harrassowitz, Lars Johanson founded the journal *Turkic Languages* which is regularly appearing. Until he was alive and the editor-in-chief, twenty-nine volumes appeared, two issues a year. This journal basically publishes articles devoted to Turkic linguistics, but occasionally also papers on other aspects of Turkology.

Many articles published in the *Turkic Languages* journal and the *Turcologica* series are very important in the field and are frequently referred to and cited. The third important editorial product of Lars Johanson, co-edited with Éva Ágnes Csató, is the *Encyclopedia of Turkic Languages and Linguistics Online*. It was launched at Brill in 2022 and is now being published at De Gruyter Brill. The ETLLO comprises multiple articles on historical and modern Turkic languages, history of research and various domains of Turkic linguistics. The work on the encyclopedia has not been finished, but a range of entries are available online. Lars Johanson also edited and co-edited numerous books at various renowned publishers. A reference book of this kind is *The Turkic Languages*, first published at Routledge with Éva Á. Csató as co-editor in 1998 and republished in a revised edition in 2022. The first edition included several introductory and general chapters, such as 'the Speakers of Turkic Languages' by Hendrik Boeschoten, 'the Turkic Peoples: A Historical Sketch' by Peter B. Golden, 'the Reconstruction of Proto-Turkic and the Genetic Question'

¹ My best thanks go to Prof. Dr. Nurettin Demir for sharing a list of Prof. Dr. Lars Johanson's doctoral students and visiting scholars at his institution in Mainz with me.

by András Róna-Tas, etc., ‘Old Turkic’ by Marcel Erdal, and selected middle Turkic and Modern Turkic languages, some grouped into one chapter. Lars Johanson contributed to this volume with two general chapters himself, one ‘the Structure of Turkic’ and the other ‘the History of Turkic’. Some chapters were republished with minor changes in the second edition, but some were commissioned to other authors, a chapter on Gagauz was added and Old Turkic was divided into East and West Old Turkic.

There are several volumes and Festschriften dedicated to Lars Johanson. The first, dedicated to his sixtieth birthday, appeared in Stockholm and Istanbul in 1996. It was edited by Berta Árpád, Bernt Brendemoen and Claus Schönig, and it contained various studies in Turkic languages, linguistics, history and related issues. The second one was published on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday in 2002. It appeared in Turkey and was edited by Nurettin Demir and Fikret Turan. In 2006, a symposium dedicated to Lars Johanson’s 70th birthday was held at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz and a book containing the papers presented on this occasion by Lars Johanson’s PhD students, friends and collaborators was edited by Hendrik Boeschoten and Julian Rentzsch as volume 82 of *Turcologica* in 2010. There are also a few other publications dedicated to Lars Johanson, mostly proceedings of symposia and conferences, but not only. Hopefully, his colleagues, pupils and collaborators will compile a full list of his publications soon.

Lars Johanson was buried in his native Köping on February 9, 2026. He had two children and grandchildren. Éva Ágnes Csató, his wife, who co-operated with Lars Johanson for many years, co-edited volumes and co-authored books and articles, is doing her best to edit and publish what has been left unpublished after him.

Publications devoted to or on Lars Johanson

Berta Árpád, Bernt Brendemoen and Claus Schönig, *Symbolae Turcologicae. Studies in Honour of Lars Johanson on his Sixtieth Birthday 8 March 1966*, Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul. Transactions 6, Stockholm 1996.

Demir Nurettin and Fikret Turan (ed.), *Scholarly depth and accuracy. A Festschrift to Lars Johanson*, Grafiker, Ankara 2002.

Boeschoten Hendrik and Julian Rentzsch (ed.), *Turkologie in Mainz. Turcology in Mainz*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 2010.

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Demir Nurettin, ‘Lars Johanson’un ardından (08.03.1936–24.11.2025)’, *Türk Dili* 890/36–41 (2025).

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