# **Uyghur-Chinese Code Switching in Xinjiang Urban Areas: Structural Aspects and Social Motivations**

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#### 1. Introduction

Uyghur, a Turkic language, is spoken mostly in the area called today Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, which became part of the People's Republic of China in 1949. This region is populated by two major ethnic groups: the Han Chinese<sup>1</sup> and the Uyghurs. While Standard Chinese can be considered the lingua franca within the different regions of the PRC (People's Republic of China), Uyghur has long been the common language in Xinjiang, in particular for everyday communication between minority groups.

Recently, state organized Han Chinese immigration and Chinese oriented language policies have changed the linguistic panorama of Xinjiang, especially in urban areas, which are most affected by economic, cultural and social changes. Although language policies formally recognize and support the use of Uyghur and other minorities' languages, Standard Chinese is today spread in different domains related to the public sphere such as administration, media, and education. Therefore, the striking presence of the national language in the Uyghur environment is reshaping language habits and the Uyghur language itself.

#### 2. Perspectives: a note on the term code switching

The term code switching is generally related to the use of two or more languages in conversation. Since the first studies, the literature concerning this topic has been divided between what is considered a switch within the same sentence (intrasentential code switching, or code mixing) and a switch in the discourse (intersentential code switching)<sup>2</sup>. The approaches delineated by Heller and Myers-Scotton are the most appropriate for this study, which examines the different episodes and possibilities of the phenomena related to multilingualism. Heller (1988: 1) points out that code switching is "the use of more than one language in the course of a single communicative episode"; the author underlines the languages' irregular nature and how they are influenced by inconstant and unsystematic social and anthropological changes in the speech communities. Myers-Scotton (1993: 24)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The Hans constitute the major group in the PRC.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Distinction applied for example by Gumperz (1982) and Auer (1988).

as well emphasizes the confusion generated by making a distinction between intrasentential and intersentential code switching, as these forms are both present in the oral production of bilingual speakers.

Therefore, the point of view taken in this study sees language production in bilingual and multilingual communities as a dynamic and complex phenomenon, in which spoken languages are resources for new structural possibilities, communication strategies and social meanings.

#### 3. Data collection

Methodologies about data collection can vary according to the context of the fieldwork and the research objectives. In a politically sensitive contexts, such as the Xinjiang region, languages cover ideological values; code switching, even if widespread in oral speech, is often not socially accepted and is seen as an outcome of Chinese cultural and linguistic assimilation. As such, the most pertinent methodology for this case study is the observation of language habits and the analysis of spontaneous and authentic speech. This is also necessary because of another characteristic of Xinjiang's linguistic and communicative landscape: code switching is not a language habit that can be heard in television and radio programs, but exclusively in informal speech.

The data here presented are taken from a corpus collected in Ürümqi, the capital of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous region, between March and July of 2013. The materials employed for this study consist of three different data sets: ethnographic observations about language habits and ethnic relations, field notes about conversations between Uyghurs listened to by the author, and a corpus of audio recordings. The settings of these conversations were public areas of the city of Ürümqi, such as buses, university campuses, parks, and restaurants. In addiction, I made use of Uyghur native speakers' judgments about code switching utterances, language habits, and attitudes towards the use of Chinese in conversation. This study shows some results of my fieldwork, combining a structural with a social perspective, dimensions that at times overlap.

## 4. Ürümgi: demographic and sociolinguistic data

According to the 2000 census, the population of Ürümqi consists of 2,082,000 inhabitants. The majority group is composed of the Hans, which corresponds to 75.4% of the population. The remaining 24.6% of the population is composed mainly of Uyghurs. Unofficial demographic data claim that the population nowadays exceeds three million. This is a result of the strong immigration of the Han population and of the quick economic development of the city, which has become a target for local and foreign investments, due to the effects of the Open Up the West campaign.

Even though the Uyghur language and its related cultural life are very vivid in the city (it is easy to find newspapers, books in Uyghur language, and events about Uyghur culture in music hall and theatres), Chinese is more and more present in the administrational, educational, and professional fields. The implementation of Chinese oriented bilingual education and the importance accorded to the knowledge of Chinese in ethnic minorities' employment are shaping the formation of a Uyghur bilingual community, in which Chinese is becoming the language used for the communication in the public sphere. In Ürümqi, and generally in Xinjiang's urban areas, the majority of the Uyghur speech community learns Chinese by successive acquisition, as the language spoken in the family is generally Uyghur; Chinese is most often learned first at school. Recently, the education reform started in 2000 is bringing revolutionary changes in the learning of Chinese. As such, Uyghur schools are merged with Chinese ones and Chinese instruction for Uyghur schools is required from the first grade (Dwyer, 2005: 38-39). Education in Chinese is

supported not just from the government, but also by Uyghur families. Given the importance of knowing Chinese for the job market, Uyghur parents prefer to send their children to Chinese schools, and teach them Uyghur in the family context. On the contrary, the Han population in Ürümqi barely speaks Uyghur, limiting their knowledge of this minority language to a few words and sentences. According to Fishman's redefinition of diglossia, we can recognize in Ürümqi the situation of diglossia without bilingualism, in which speakers of the High Variety (HV) overrule speakers of the Low Variety (LV). Chinese is becoming a dominant part of the Uyghur communication not only in the public sphere, but also within the in-group conversations. Because of this constant presence of the majority language in cities' environments, working contexts, education, media and private and familiar sphere, the Uyghur language has been changing and integrating elements from Chinese.

## 5. Structural aspect of Uyghur-Chinese code switching

Uyghur and Chinese are typologically different. The first is an isolating Sino-Tibetan language, the second an agglutinative Turkic language. Uyghur has an SOV constituent order and numerous nominal and verbal suffixes, while Chinese has an SVO structure and does not present inflections or marking for grammatical categories.

The language contact phenomena I investigate in this study are those that it is possible to recognize exclusively in Uyghur speech. This study does not concern features of other languages already established in the system in Standard Uyghur, e.g. Chinese loanwords. I will use the hypernym of "code switching" to categorize these phenomena. For each sentence presented here I show a transcription in Uyghur Latin Script and  $P\bar{t}ny\bar{t}n$  (transliterated Chinese Latin, in italics), followed by interlinear glosses, as well as metadata about the setting and the speaker (approximate age, and sex).

## 5.1 Different types of code switching

In Uyghur informal speech it is possible to recognize broadly two types of Uyghur-Chinese code switching<sup>3</sup>:

1. Alternation of Uyghur and Chinese in the discourse as in:

(1). a

A: Nǐ xǐhuan tā dehuà, men dadanggha dimeymen.

You like him if I dad-POSS2s-DAT say-NEG-PRS-1s,

Wŏ gĕi nĭ bàba mánzhe.

I to you dad conceal.from-DUR

"If you like him, I won't tell my dad, I won't tell my dad"

B: Shui? (they whisper into their ears)

Who?

"Who ?"

A: Děng yīxià, shì bù shì tā xǐhuan nǐ háishì nǐ xǐhuan tā?

Wait a.while COP NEG COP he like you or you like he

"Wait a moment, does he like you or do you like him?"

Setting: bus stop, Yán'ān lù (Uyghur area); speakers: females, 15 years old.

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## 2. Chinese insertions, as in:

(1) b.

A: Néme ishlar bolup ketti?

What thing-PL be-CNV leave-PST.dir-3s bu *qún*de dep yéziptu!

this group-LOC say-CNV write-PST.indir-3s

"What happened? he/she wrote in this group!"

B: Men biǎoqíng ewettim.

I smiley send-PST.dir-1s

"I have sent a smiley."

Setting: campus of Xinjiang Normal University; speakers: two females, 20 years old.

As shown in 1) a. and 1) b. Chinese-Uyghur code switching is present in two variants: alternation between the two languages involved, or the insertion of Chinese elements in the Uyghur matrix language. In (1) a. the switch has a clear reiteration function: the speaker emphasizes her willingness to keep the secret. The Uyghur morphosyntactic structure is indeed clear in (1) b: the order of the sentence is SOV and the system morphemes come from Uyghur, while the lexical ones are from Chinese. Chinese insertions are not just related to nouns, but also to other parts of speech such as proper nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and verbs.

## 5.2 Bilingual compound verbs

Verbs play an important role in the structure of code switching. Because of their complexity, languages that borrow elements from other languages develop particular strategies of integration and harmonization. One of the different verbal integration strategies found in code switching is the integration of a foreign element (a noun, an adjective, or a verb) with the help of an auxiliary verb, such as "to do", for action verb constructions, and "to be", for stative verb constructions. A matrix language element, the auxiliary verb, sustains and integrates the foreign element in the language, constituting a new semantic unit. This linguistic phenomenon is present in other cases of code switching, such as English-Panjabi (Romaine, 1995) and Dutch-Turkish (Backus, 1996). In Uyghur- Chinese code switching this is a common integration strategy, as in:

(2) kitabni *fûyîn* qildingizmu? book-ACC photocopy do-PST.dir-2s-INT "Did you make a copy of the book?"

Setting: Xinjiang University; speaker: female, 45 years old.

In (2), the verbal form *fûyìn qil*-, presents the Chinese verb *fûyìn*, but the morphological structure is typically Uyghur. The Chinese verb *fûyìn* does not demand an auxiliary verb to make its meaning complete, as it constitutes already a complete semantic unit. In this case is a former verb, as in this construction is treated as a noun.

The nominal light verbs *qil*- and *bol*- have in code switching the role to sustain and to integrate foreign elements. While the verb *qil*- (to do, to make) is used for action verb constructions, the form *bol*- is used to form stative verbs. This strategy is present also in other compound verbs integrated in the Uyghur system, in which the borrowed elements come from Arabic, Persian, or Russian<sup>4</sup>. This integration strategy includes nouns, verbs,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> For example *remunt qil-* "to fix", and *tekrar qil-* "to review" (respectively borrowings from Russian and Arabic).

and adjectives, as in *jĭnzhāng bol*- (be nervous), and verb phrases, such as *kāi cānguǎn qil*-(open a restaurant)(Yakup, 2007).

Compared to other types of code switching that present this strategy, Uyghur-Chinese code switching shows a peculiarity. Monosyllabic verbal constructions present the additional syllable  $le^5$  between the Chinese verb and the auxiliary, as in  $z\bar{u}$  le qil- (to rent),  $s\bar{o}u$  le qil- (to search) or  $b\hat{a}n$  le qil- (to manage). Here, the syllable le, which reminds to the Turkic verbalizer  $-lA^6$ , makes the Chinese verb more harmonized in the Uyghur prosodic structure<sup>7</sup>.

## 5.3 The use of the speaker's stance particle iken

Inferentiality is a common grammatical category in Turkic languages. In Uyghur, the particle *iken* has different pragmatic extensions: it underlines the fact the speaker is not the witness of a given action or fact (Engesaet, Yakup, Dwyer, 2009:187), and has as well a perceptive use and a mirative connotation, that can be interpreted in new knowledge, discovery, sudden awareness, surprise etc. (Johanson, 2003: 284).

(3) hǎoxiàng zhè biān iken seem.like this side INF "It seems to be on this side."

Setting: Restaurant in *Tiānshān* district (Han Chinese area); speaker: female, 30 years old.

In (3) the inferentiality is shown in two elements, because the two languages mark this linguistic propriety in different parts of speech. The first one, in Chinese, is a verb, hǎoxiàng, which expresses inference or uncertainty; the second, in Uyghur, is a particle, iken, which appears at the end of the sentence. From the syntactic point of view the sentence seems to present the Chinese matrix language; the inclusion of this particle covers a pragmatic meaning, the need to emphasize uncertainty or sudden awareness, a characteristic that Uyghur language marks grammatically in the language, and that plays also an important role in discourse.

## 6. Social aspects

The lexicon is one of the layers of the language that is most sensitive to social changes and cultural influences. Spoken Uyghur is currently experiencing a sort of relexification, in which words belonging to Standard Uyghur (including loanwords from other languages) are substituted with Chinese ones. The use of Chinese as a source for vocabulary acquisition concerns core forms as well as cultural forms.

## 6.1 The influence of Chinese in different semantic fields

I focus here on some semantic fields in which Chinese lexical insertions are most common. In the table below I show some Chinese words that are employed in the Uyghur informal speech, their correspondent form in Standard Uyghur and their translation in English. The words are presented according to the semantic field they belong to.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The syllable le is described by Xialipu (20079 and Mijiti (2012) as the Chinese aspectual particle  $le \ T$ , which in this construction loses its aspectual function.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Although the two forms are phonetically similar, the verbalizer –lA (la-le) transforms in verbs native and non-native nouns or adjectives. Moreover, the verbalizer -lA is followed by Uyghur verbal suffixes; it does not require an auxiliary.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Note that this a particular constraint for Chinese-Uyghur compound verbs. Native and non-native compound verb constructions can be constituted by a monosyllabic element, as *gep qil*- (to talk, Turkic form) and *meshq qil*- (to practice, from Arabic).

Informal Uyghur	Standard Uyghur	English					
Food-related vocabulary							
shŭtiáo	yangyu qelemchisi	fries					
qiǎokèlì	shaklat	chocolate					
dàngāo	tort	cake					
xīhóngshì	pemidur; shaxla	tomato					
Education-related vocabulary							
jiăngxuéjīn	oqush mukapat puli	scholarship					
Shīdà <sup>8</sup>	Pédagogika uniwérsitéti	XinjiangNormalUniversity					
yánjiūshēng	aspirant	graduate student					
běnkē	toluq kurs	bachelor programme					
Administration-related vocabulary							
hăiguān	tamuzhta	custom					
shēnfènzhèng	kimlik	ID					
tèjĭng	alahide saqchi	SWAT police					
Technology-related vocabulary							
diànnăo	kompyutér	computer					
bìngdú	wirus	virus					
tíngjī	toxtap qilish; téléfonning tuget ketti	suspend a mobile prepaid phone					
Names for Ürümqi's streets, bus stops, and neighborhoods							
Yídòng gōngsī	Qochma télégraf idarisi	China Mobile (company and bus stop name)					
Nán mén (south gate)	Aq qowuq (white gate)	An Ürümqi neighborhood					
<i>Èrdào qiáo</i> (literally bridge on two ways)	Döng köwrük (hill's bridge)	An Ürümqi neighborhood					

Table 1. Chinese words employed in Uyghur-Chinese code switching

As shown in the tables above, for every Chinese word here cited there is an equivalent in Uyghur. The words presented here come from different semantic fields, such as food (in particular foreign food), education, administration, technology, and topographical names (e.g. names of the streets or neighborhoods). Looking at this sample, four considerations are worth making, which can explain the reasons why these words are employed in the Uyghur speech:

#### Conciseness

Due to the isolating nature of the language, some words in Chinese are more concise compared to their equivalent in Uyghur, for example:

- *jiǎngxuéjīn* (3 syllables) vs. *oqush mukapat puli* (7 syllables)
- *shŭtiáo* (2 syllables) vs. *yanyu qelemchisi*<sup>9</sup> (6 syllables)
- *Shīdà* (2 syllables) vs. *Pédagogika uniwérsitéti* (11 syllables)
- Yídòng gōngsī (4 syllables) vs. Qochma télégraf idarisi (9 syllables)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Abbreviation for *Xīnjiāng shīfàn dàxué*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Note that this word is a calque of the Chinese *shǔtiáo* (from *shǔ* « potatoes » and *tiáo* « strip »): *yangyu* is a Chinese loanword for "potatoes" and *qelem* is the Arabic loanword for "pen".

In particular, the word  $Sh\bar{\imath}d\dot{a}$  is the result of a productive characteristic of the Chinese language that allows the contraction of a word, keeping the morphemes that are most representative. As such, the proper noun  $X\bar{\imath}nji\bar{a}ng$   $sh\bar{\imath}f\hat{a}n$   $d\hat{a}xu\acute{e}$  can be abbreviated in  $Sh\bar{\imath}d\hat{a}$ .

#### Substitution of Russian loanwords

Some of the Uyghur words present in the table above are of Russian origin, such as *tort*, *shaklat*, *pemidur*, *aspirant*, etc.<sup>10</sup> The Uyghur region experienced a strong cultural influence from the Soviet Union in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As such, Russian loanwords are related to various semantic fields, such as technology, administration, education, western objects, ideas, and habits. After the Sino-Soviet split (1960-1989) and the increase of PRC political and economical interest in Xinjiang since the 1980's, Russian cultural, political, and linguistic influence started to decrease.

The substitution of Russian loanwords with the Chinese equivalents seems to indicate that Russian, which once was as a prestigious variety and a source for modern lexicon, has declined in influence. Moreover, Western-related words that do not have an equivalent in the Uyghur language enter in the lexicon as calques from Chinese (such as the aforementioned *yangyu qelemchisi* "fries") or through the direct use of a Chinese word (as for example the adjective  $k\dot{u}$  "cool" or  $xingg\check{a}n$  "sexy").

## • The spread of Mandarin in the linguistic environment

It is important to highlight that the Chinese words shown in the table are not lexicalized in the Uyghur vocabulary, although they are widespread in the spoken language. This can be the consequence of the recent popularization of the Chinese language in the public sphere and its overwhelming presence in the linguistic environment.

## Specificity of Chinese vocabulary

Chinese insertions are frequent in the institutional and administrative vocabulary. This is probably related to the absence of specific Uyghur terminology in these fields of the lexicon. Even if the institutional and administrative terms are translated to Uyghur by the government's language planning institutions, they are more common in Chinese. According to Matras (2009: 107) some nouns, such as the names of institutions, act as proper nouns, and constitute unique referents. As such, employing the original name is more specific and, using Saussurian terminology, constitutes a direct association between the acoustic image and the mental representation. Using Chinese to name Ürümqi's streets, areas, or bus stops can be supported by this motivation.

Additionally, the name of the streets and neighborhoods in Ürümqi (and in other cities of Xinjiang) are the same as in the other cities in the different PRC's provinces and regions. This is a case of urban assimilation, as the Uyghur traditional names have been replaced by Chinese ones. For example, "aq qowuq" (literally "white gate"), the traditional Uyghur name of an Ürümqi neighborhood, has been substituted with a typical Chinese area name "Nán mén" (literally "southern gate", translated in Uyghur jenubiy qowuq, "southern gate").

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Some loanwords present in the Uyghur lexicon have English, French or Italian origin, but they came to the Uyghur lexicon through the medium of Russian.

#### 6.2 The role of Chinese as a discourse strategy

The presence of Chinese in the Uyghur discourse does not concern only single insertions of different parts of speech, but also the use of Chinese phrases or discourse markers, as in:

(4) a. hazir ish bek aldirash, jiùshì shòubùliǎo! now daily.affair very busy just stand-NEG-RES "I'm very busy now, I just can't stand it"!

Setting: Uyghur restaurant in Èrdào qiáo (Uyghur area); speaker: female, 45 years old.

bir xil (4) b. zuótiān, héliqi chéchini píngtóu qiliwalsa bolup yesterday that.one hair-POSS3-ACC crew.cut do-CNV-COND one kind be-CNV jiùshì nàzhŏng nàzhŏngde! (touching his head) qalidighu, remain-PRS.3s-CONF just.like that-CL that-CL-GEN "Yesterday, he shaved off his hair, just like that."

Setting: Campus of Xinjiang Medical University; speaker: male, 20 years old.

In (4) a. the switch from Uyghur to Chinese can be interpreted as a discourse strategy to emphasize the feeling of the speaker but it is also related to cultural differences in expressing sentiments and opinions present in the two languages. While in Chinese jiùshì shòu bùliǎo is a common expression in everyday conversations, in Uyghur discourse it would be impolite to state these types of feelings. In this context, the use of Chinese offers more communicative possibilities than the Uyghur language allows (in Standard Uyghur the equivalent would be chidep turalmaymen, but it does not have the same semantic nuance and expressive power). In (4) b. the use of the discourse marker jiùshì nàzhŏng nàzhŏngde, followed by the gesture of touching the head, covers a referential meaning and seems to create a direct link to the image the speaker is referring to.

## 6.3 Opposite tendencies: the "desinicized Uyghur"

As languages reflect cultural and ethnic identities, the use of Chinese in the Uyghur discourse is often associated with the loss of the Uyghur language and identity. As such, while the use of Chinese seems to be an efficient choice for its conciseness, specificity, and because of its widespread diffusion in the Uyghur environment, the purification of the Uyghur language from Chinese elements is an ideological operation meant to emphasize the linguistic and cultural distance between the Uyghur and Chinese communities.

In the Uyghur speech community, especially after the 2009 riots, which worsened the Uyghur-Han ethnic relationships, the use of a desinicized Uyghur is a central topic for the Uyghur speech community<sup>11</sup>. Young minkăohàn<sup>12</sup> Uyghurs, who make use of a large amount of Chinese words in their speech, are often called "buzuwan", "broken voices". This shows how Chinese, despite being so common in everyday communication, is not socially accepted by part of the population. Avoiding this language mixing is claimed even by Uyghurs who master both Chinese and Uyghur, and it is especially present in the male discourse. This linguistic operation is common in everyday life and in more complex

employed to indicate Uyghur student who are educated through the medium of Chinese language.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Zohra Ablimit, 2013, personal communication. Avoiding Chinese terms is a phenomenon present also in Standard Uyghur. Dwyer (2013) uses the term "desinicized Uyghur" to indicate the language employed by the Uyghur diaspora that avoids the use of Chinese vocabulary in the radio broadcast. <sup>12</sup> *minkǎohàn* (literally minorities taking the final examination in Chinese) is a Chinese term

actions, such as the formation of neologisms, to designate new products or actions. Words such as QQ, the Chinese chat program, and *Wēixìn* (Chinese name for WeChat, a smartphone chat application), have recently been given an equivalent in Uyghur, respectively "Ch Ch gurup", and "ün didar" (literally voice meeting). A further example concerns the Uyghur term "zelle". In the Uyghur culture, this term indicates the portion of food that is left from a meal and given to the host. Currently, it can also be employed to designate restaurant take away food, covering the same meaning of the verb dăbāo. In this case, the purism involves the change of the semantic field of a word.

This animated linguistic vitality shows how purism concerning Chinese language is central in the Uyghur ethnic discourse, and how it constitutes an instrument to construct and protect the Uyghur identity.

#### 7. Summary

This study combined a structural and a sociolinguistic perspective. The information about the methodology and the sociolinguistic background addressed the need to settle the basis for the understanding of this study, in which social changes and ethnic relations are fundamental elements in the development of language habits.

First, I showed that Uyghur-Chinese code switching is present in two variants: alternation between Uyghur and Chinese, and insertions of different Chinese parts of speech in the Uyghur matrix language. Secondly, concerning the structural aspects, I focused on the formation of bilingual verbs composed of Chinese elements and Uyghur auxiliaries, and on the mark of inferentiality as a pragmatic strategy. Thirdly, in relation to the social aspects, I presented a survey of common words that can be heard in informal Uyghur speech and highlighted the conciseness and the specificity of some Chinese words employed in spoken Uyghur. Moreover, the spread of Chinese in spoken Uyghur in specific domains of the lexicon, and the substitution of Russian loanwords with Chinese ones seems to indicate a change in High Variety. In the discourse, Chinese also covers an expressive and emphatic function. On the contrary, in regards to language ideology, Chinese loses the communicative power that is found in the everyday language and it becomes a symbol of assimilation, which Uyghur speakers have to refrain from.

Certainly, languages are also communication tools, which look at economy and practicality, and Chinese seems to be an efficient interactional medium. The presence of Chinese and "desinicized Uyghur" in Uyghurs' language habits seems to be an example of negotiation between communicative convenience and the need to protect a "threatened" language, lead by an ethnic and linguistic minority.

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## **Glossing conventions**

1s	first person singular	DUR	durative	ACC	accusative
2s	second person	CNV	converb	GEN	genitive
3s	third person	PRS	present	INF	inferential
DAT CONF	dative confirmative	PST.dir COP	direct past copula	INT POSS	interrogative possessive
COND	conditional	NEG	negative	PL	plural
CL	classifier				

#### **Orthography conventions**

Uyghur Latin é: [e], ö: [ø], ü: [y], q: [qh]; zh : [ʒ];  $P\bar{\imath}ny\bar{\imath}n$  x: [ɛ]; q: [tch]

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