

In Memoriam Lars Johanson (1936–2025)

András RÓNA-TAS

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Lars Johanson, a Swedish-born linguist, played a decisive role in establishing the study of the Turkic languages as a modern linguistic discipline. In addition to his substantial contributions to Turkic linguistics, his general linguistic work, particularly in language typology, is of great significance. The theoretical models he developed to investigate verbal aspect systems and contact-linguistic phenomena have been applied to numerous languages.

Lars Johanson was born on 8 March 1936 in Köping, a town in central Sweden. He studied at Uppsala University, specialising in Germanic, Scandinavian, Sanskrit and Slavic studies, in Turkology and general linguistics. He received his BA in 1959 and his MA in 1961. In 1959–1960 he frequented Oriental studies in Vienna. From 1960 onwards, he finally devoted himself to the Turkic languages.

He obtained his doctorate from the University of Uppsala in 1966, followed by his Habilitation on the basis of his studies in Turkic linguistics in 1971. His 1971 monograph ‘Aspekt im Türkischen’ received widespread recognition in linguistic circles.

Over the following years, he conducted in-depth research and travelled to numerous Turkic-speaking countries, as well as China. From 1979 to 1980, he was a visiting professor at the University of Frankfurt, and from 1981 onwards at the University of Mainz. At the latter, he was appointed a full professor in 1982, in the highest category of professorship in Germany (C4). Alongside his research and teaching at the University of Mainz, he edited the highly successful monograph series *Turcologica* at the Harrassowitz publishing house in Wiesbaden from 1985 onwards. To date, more than 130 volumes have been published in this series. In 1995, he founded and edited the journal *Turkic Languages*, which had reached its 29th volume by the time of his death.

Between 1966 and 2025, he published over 500 works. The most important of the books he published in the last years of his life is *Turkic*, a monumental comparative description of the Turkic languages, which was published by Cambridge University Press in 2021. This unparalleled handbook is due to be released in paperback in 2026. In his 2023 book *Aspect in the Languages of Europe*, Johanson presents his theory of verbal aspect and demonstrates that the theoretical framework he developed for describing the Turkic verbal system is also highly suitable for providing an innovative and adequate analysis of the verbal systems of European languages. His contact-linguistic model is set out in his 2023 book, *Code Copying: The Strength of Languages in Take-over and Carry-over Roles*. As well as presenting the model, this book aims to show that copying from other languages does not 'corrupt' the recipient language, but can instead serve as a means of survival for endangered Turkic languages.

Throughout his career, he was deeply engaged with the linguistic testimony of early Turkic texts written in non-Arabic scripts. His final book, published in 2025 in collaboration with his wife, Éva Á. Csató, is an edition of a seventeenth-century Latin-script translation of the Bible into Azeri.

He continually expanded the online edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Turkic Languages and Linguistics* (Brill), a work that he initiated and edited himself, and which is planned to comprise several hundred articles. In the future, Éva Á. Csató will take over the editorship.

Lars Johanson believed that linguistics and literary studies were closely interconnected. Throughout his life, he wrote numerous articles on literary history, which were collected and published in a single volume in Swedish in 2024. His Swedish legacy also includes a Turkic grammar written with co-authors, scheduled for publication in 2026.

He was an excellent teacher who was much beloved and admired by his pupils. He approached his teaching with great enthusiasm and dedication. This is evident from the fact that most of his doctoral students now hold professorships in various countries, continuing and further developing his work in the study of Turkic languages.

An internationally recognised scholar, he served as a visiting professor or researcher in many countries, including Tokyo, Kyoto, Melbourne, Beijing, Istanbul (at Boğaziçi University), Yakutsk and the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences in Uppsala. However, dearest to him was his rich and enduring relationship with the Department of Altaic Studies at the University of Szeged. It was there that he was awarded an honorary doctorate in 1999 — a distinction of which he was particularly proud.

On 24 November 2025, Lars Johanson laid his head down for eternal rest. His colleagues and pupils around the world will preserve his memory.