

# Tevfik Esenç

**Tevfik Esenç** (1904 – 7 October 1992) was a Circassian exile in Turkey and the last known fully competent speaker of the Ubykh language.

## 1 Biography

Esenç was raised by his Ubykh-speaking grandparents for a time in the village of **Hacı Osman** in Turkey, and he served a term as the *muhtar* (mayor) of that village, before receiving a post in the civil service of Istanbul. There, he was able to do a great deal of work with the French linguist **Georges Dumézil** and his associate **Georges Charachidzé** to help record his language.<sup>[1]</sup> Later Turkish linguist **A. Sumru Özsoy** studied Ubykh with him.<sup>[2]</sup>

Having an excellent memory and understanding quickly the goals of Dumézil and the other linguists who came to visit him, he was the primary source of not only the Ubykh language, but also of the mythology, culture and customs of the Ubykh people. He spoke not only Ubykh, but also the **Hakuchi** dialect of **Adyghe**, allowing some comparative work to be done between these two members of the **Northwest Caucasian** family. He was also a fluent speaker of Turkish. He was a purist, and his idiolect of Ubykh was considered by Dumézil as the closest thing to a standard “literary” Ubykh language that existed.<sup>[1]</sup>

Esenç died in 1992 at the age of 88. The inscription that he wanted on his gravestone read as follows:<sup>[1]</sup>

*This is the grave of Tevfik Esenç. He was  
the last person able to speak the language they  
called Ubykh.*

— Gravestone, inscription

In 1994, **A. Sumru Özsoy** organized an international conference, namely Conference on Northwest Caucasian Linguistics, at **Boğaziçi University** in memory of Dumézil and Esenç.<sup>[2]</sup>

## 2 References


- [1] **Tevfik Esenç's** page in **Circassian World**
- [2] **E. F. K. Koerner** (1 January 1998). *First Person Singular III: Autobiographies by North American Scholars in the Language Sciences*. John Benjamins Publishing. p. 33. ISBN 978-90-272-4576-2.

## 3 External links

- **Sample Sound Files of Ubykh Language**, from the **Lacito Archive**
- **Tevfik Esenç** narrating the story of the two travellers and the fish in Ubykh on YouTube

## 4 Text and image sources, contributors, and licenses

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