Turkish Language Reform: An Early Example of Language Planning
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In this paper, I describe Turkish language reform within the framework of a general approach to language planning, and discuss the historical, social and cultural facts which created the basis for language reform in Turkey. Finally, I evaluate the present state of the Turkish language in relation to the goals of the language reform.

Language planning is the general term used to describe linguistic studies which cover a wide range of activities, such as "improving" the phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicology and/or orthography of an existing language, or creating new regional, national or international languages (Tauli, 1968). Language planning can involve every aspect of both oral and written language. There are various political, social and cultural reasons which necessitate language planning, and a variety of approaches to implement the plans and to regulate the processes of change. On the whole, language planning can be considered to be a function of nationalism and modernization, and it is usually carried out by an organization which is established for the very purpose of planning and implementing language change (Rubin and Jernudd, 1971).

The concept of language planning as an aspect of national modernization is studied by Fishman (1971). He characterizes nationalism (i.e. national modernization) by assigning it three main characteristics (which are also reflected in the plans and processes of language change): (1) Unification; (2) Authentification; (3) Modernization. Language planning, by creating an authentic and unified medium and by promoting the nationalistic character of the language of the nation can become one of the tools of modernization. This characterization seems to be an accurate description of Turkish language reform. By changing the script from Arabic characters to Latin characters on the basis of the unsuitability of the Arabic script to the Turkish language, and by extensively purifying the Turkish language of Persian and Arabic morphology, syntax and vocabulary, Turkish
language reform was an attempt at unification and authentification. Since the main impetus behind all political, social and cultural reforms and also of language reform in Turkey was modernization (or westernization) the third characteristic of national modernization (as characterized by Fishman) also describes Turkish language reform.

The Turkish Language Reform, instituted by a law passed on November 3, 1928, and which was put into practice in the beginning of January, 1929, was considered to be a major attempt to lead the Turkish nation into modernization. The law which initiated the language reform was passed about five years after the declaration of Republic on October 29, 1923, following a four-year-war of independence. The nation that passed the law considered itself to be a young nation and wanted to cut its ties with its "prenational and imperial" past. Turkey was a new nation wanting to achieve modernization and wanting to advance culturally, socially, economically within a democratic system. It was assumed that by achieving the goals of language reform the rate of literacy would increase, and that this in return, would accelerate modernization. At that time, the literates made up only about 10% of the population, and these were the government officials, the clergy, the intellectuals etc. of the nation. Although the political step was taken in 1928, the intellectual ground for such a radical change existed long before. The movement had its roots in the intellectual movement which followed the year 1839, a year of major political and cultural changes. This was the year in which contacts with the intellectual movements in France were made and in which the printing press was introduced in Turkey. But before discussing the details of this cultural and social impact on Turkish language movements, it is necessary to examine the stages in the development of the Turkish language, and its characteristics in the late 19th. and early 20th. century.

In the 11th. century the majority of the Turkic tribes, living in eastern Anatolia, and central Asia, accepted Islam as their religion. With the Islamic religion, the Turks adopted the Arabic script as their alphabet. Prior to this, the Turks had used various alphabets, the
oldest known alphabet dates back to the 8th century A.D. The earliest written records of Turkish used a runic alphabet (the Gümüşhane Alphabet) named after the tribe from which the best known examples of political and historical records came. At that time, the Turks were in close contact with the surrounding cultures, and the language had borrowed lexical items from Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese and Mongolian, as these were the languages of the surrounding cultures. But as the Turks accepted the Islamic religion, an unprecedented change took place, and Turkish not only borrowed all the religious literature and terminology, but also, in time, all kinds of lexical items, as well as morphological and syntactic structures. The borrowing began in the 11th century and continued throughout centuries. In the first two centuries, the borrowing was mainly restricted to lexical items. Between the 13th and 15th centuries, lexical and morphological items were borrowed, but Turkish sentence structure was maintained; the borrowed items were fitted into Turkish syntax. In the 15th century, the Ottoman Empire completed her 'initial' stage, and entered into her "imperial" stage. This imperial stage continued until the mid-sixteenth century when the empire began to decline. The last stage of the empire continued until the end of World War I, which also marked the end of the Ottoman Empire. The language of this period takes its name from the empire, and it is referred to as "Ottoman Turkish" (or Osmanlıca as used in Turkish). Ottoman Turkish incorporated three languages, Turkish, Arabic and Persian, into the written language. They served as the source of lexical items, sentence structure, and in the coining of new lexical items. In coining complex verb stems, mostly Arabic and Persian words were used. The three-source language had complex spelling and grammar rules. The Arabic and Persian origin were written as in the original languages. Since both languages used the Arabic script, this practice did not create any problems. But the spelling of words of Turkish origin created various problems. One of the problems involved different spellings of the same Turkish words. The intellectuals in the capital, Istanbul, were assimilating Turkish words to Arabic by using
the characters which represented sounds only found in Arabic but not in Turkish (i.e. pharyngealized consonants). At the same time, the literates in other cities were using the characters which represented only the Turkish sounds (Levend, 1960) with the result that there were different spellings for the same Turkish word.

Arabic script does not have characters to represent vowels, but Turkish requires that the vowels be written. Because it was possible to read any Turkish word which was written only by its consonants in various ways, most of the words were misinterpreted. Arabic has three short vowels which are indicated by using the same diacritic but by putting it at a different place. Since Turkish has eight vowels, the use of the diacritics did not help to differentiate between the Turkish vowels.

As for the grammatical rules, they were very complicated because the structure of the languages were different. Just to give an example, Arabic has grammatical gender whereas Turkish does not. Arabic requires number and gender agreement, Turkish does not. When, in a sentence, only words of Arabic or of Persian origin were used, there was no problem, because Arabic or Persian grammar rules were applied. The problem arose when words of different origins were combined. The rules of concord could not apply (Levend, 1960). Therefore, grammarians had to come up with artificial grammar rules to apply when there were words of different origins in the same sentence. These are only a few examples illustrating the oddities of the language at that stage in its history.

Ottoman Turkish was the official written and literary language of the empire. As a literary language, the art of the user was measured by the complexity of the structure and by the percentage of the words of Arabic and Persian origin: the more complicated the form and the language were, the more successful was the poet. The poets of the period considered Turkish a "crude" language with which it was impossible to produce any literary work of value. This view was a relative judgement of value, because along with divan literature
which used Ottoman Turkish, the folk poets were creating poetry using the "crude" language, which has lived until the present\(^2\).

1839 marks the first important realization of the need for "modernization" by the Ottoman intellectuals and by the ruling emperors and/or governments in the history of the Ottoman Empire. It also marks a period when the Ottoman intellectuals realized that the language in which they wrote was very different from the language used by the masses; they, thus, realized that there was a communication problem. The intellectuals began to discuss language problems.

In the political life of the Ottoman Empire, 1908 is another important date. In this year, the first parliament was elected, and as far as language issues were concerned a literary group was formed, ("Young Pens") which included not only the poets and writers, but also sociologists, historians and others. The most important non-literary figure of this group was Ziya Gökalp, a sociologist, who stressed a NON-OTTOMAN identity for the empire, and advocated language change. He even worked out a plan for change, and his proposals included the purification of the language from all foreign morphological and syntactic elements. Yet he said that the loan words of Arabic and Persian origin were to be kept (and limited) to the areas of religion, morality and philosophy (Heyd, 1954; Levend, 1960).

Gökalp was not the only thinker who worked on the issues of language; other thinkers, poets, writers were also involved, and during this period there was an extensive discussion of language problems which included the issue of the alphabet. Some proposed a 41-letter Arabic alphabet; some a more extensive use of diacritics to mark the vowels of Turkish in the Arabic script. There were only one or two who saw that the only solution was to use a new alphabet based on Latin characters. But in the political structure of those days, it was impossible to decide and then to carry out the decision. Therefore, the "absolute" solution only came in 1928-1929. In 1928-1929, it was the government who initiated the whole process and carried it out. As Tauli (1968) says, authority is an essential factor in
language planning, and the young Turkish government supplied this authority.

The Turkish Alphabet Law was put into application after a two-month period, in which the newspapers were mostly printed using both alphabets. The new 29-letter alphabet, which is highly phonemic, was introduced in short courses to people who were already literate, was used in the newspapers, text-books, documents legal papers, etc., when the two-month period was over; and thus the problem of alphabet was solved.

Romanization of the alphabet was just one part of the Turkish Language Reform. The second aspect of it was the purification of foreign elements. In order to achieve this goal, a linguistic society was set up in 1932\(^3\). The society functioned with two major committees, one of which attempted to achieve standardization of the Turkish language by coining vocabulary, terminology, etc., to substitute for the foreign elements which had been thrown out of the Turkish language. The second committee worked on studies which tried to relate the Turkish language to the world languages. This committee came up with the Sun-Language Theory in 1935: This theory, although not well-known today, was a very important tool for identifying the Turkish people with the western world via the universality of the Turkish language. In those days, the political implications of the theory were more important than the scientific aspect of it. This theory, by trying to show that Turkish is not only related to major European languages, but also to ancient Anatolian languages like Hittite, claims Turkish to be one of the oldest languages, in fact the original language\(^4\). This theory is a perfect example of how language and language planning can be used to assess and enhance national identity.

Purification of the language is still a major linguistic issue in present day Turkey. In the early 1930's, it was a major political issue, because Turkey was changing politically and culturally, from a monarchy where the emperor was the head of the state and the caliph, the highest religious authority, to a secular democracy, and from an
Eastern-oriented culture to a western culture. Turkey was trying to cut her ties with her past, and language was the only means by which it could be achieved. The coinage committee of the Linguistic Society used all the known stems and suffixes to coin the words which would take the places of the Arabic and Persian words. When no derivational suffixes were found, suffixes from related languages, such as Mongolian and Cagatai, were borrowed. Sometimes stems and suffixes were created through analogy. Turkish-origin derivational suffixes were added to assimilated Arabic and Persian words. The loan words which were used by the majority of the people were left as they were. This was the general framework for the activities of the Linguistic Society until 1950.

Between the years 1950-1960, the general principles of the Linguistic Society were not favored by the governments of the period; and, in fact, a contrary attitude was developed. The society went on coining terminology and proposing alternatives to various foreign origin words, but it was up to the individuals and institutions to use the new words. Generally the old and the new words were treated as synonymous.

Political developments in the country have created an almost unique usage of language as an indicator of political choice. That is to say, the choice of the individual (or the institution) between Reformed Turkish (RT) and Traditional Turkish (TT) (Cüceloğlu, 1976) marks the individual's political preference. Cüceloğlu (1976: p. 15) points out that "... TT is preferred by right-wing, traditionalist, and religious sectors of the population, anr RT by left-wing, modernist and secular sectors". In his study "Effects of Turkish Language Reform on Person Perception" Cüceloğlu (1976:p.16) concludes that,"... Given the politicization of the issue of language reform, and the demonstrated differences between readers in their responses to linguistic style, it is clear that pairs of old and new terms cannot be considered synonymous in modern Turkish. Rather choice of terminology communicates important messages about the political and social ideology of the
speaker; and these messages will be interpreted differently on the basis of the political and social ideology of the listener." Çuğel's conclusion gives a very clear picture of the Turkish language as a para-linguistic, social and political marker.

If we take present-day Turkish into consideration as a language which was subject to controlled linguistic changes, we have to ask the question, "Where does Turkish stand now?"

During the westernization process and adaptation of democracy, a large number of French and English words were borrowed into the language. There are some intellectuals who think that it is not possible to create any scientific work in Turkish, and therefore that almost all scientific terminology has to be borrowed from the languages of the cultures which have created the technology itself. This is not the attitude of the majority, and in essence it reminds one of the attitude of the Ottoman writers who thought that Turkish was not suitable for literary work. Today, most of the young scientists are using Turkish terminology, and both the Linguistic Society and the scientists are coining new terminology when necessary. But there was a period in the development of the Turkish language after the heyday of the language reform, when the language was filled with words of English and French origin. Today also, I think, the majority of the intellectuals have realized that extreme purification of the language would lead to a lack of communication with the masses; the masses are using neither the highly purified language nor the traditional language. But this understanding does not change the fact that, today, there are at least two varieties of Turkish; but contrary to other cultures where each variety marks a caste or a class, in Turkey each marks a different political outlook.

The original goal of Turkish language reform in the early 1920's was mainly to use language to create a new national identity. This aspect, as a government policy, does not exist anymore. Turkey does not need to create a new identity, therefore the impetus for establishing identity through language no longer exists. But Turkey continues to change socially and economically. The rapid urbanization of the society is
changing values, and creating a gap between the urban groups and the small town petty bourgeoisie and peasantry, which is itself changing independently of other social and cultural factors because it has taken its place in many major European countries as the foreign labour force. It is inevitable that language would be influenced by all these different factors.

If we go back to the early 1920's and follow the footsteps of the language reform, and come to the present and attempt to evaluate the reform, we see that we can approach the whole affair from two different angles: as an example of language planning, and as an example of social reform. I think, as in every language planning case, we cannot underestimate the social side of the reform, and thus the place and the effect of the Turkish language reform has to be evaluated within the range of all social reforms initiated by nationalist movements. It becomes more meaningful as it stands among the other reforms, but this does not mean that we cannot evaluate the achievements of the language reform within the principles of language planning. But the problem we face here is that the principles set by any theory of language planning could not be taken into consideration as a guiding outline when Turkish language reform was implemented because the theory of language planning is a relatively recent development. All we can do is to determine how well the Turkish language reform fits into the principles of language planning.

Jermuud and Das Gupta (1971) point out that first the problems of language must be recognized, then decision makers must choose an alternative within the limits of resources, and finally judge the effectiveness of the chosen alternative when it accomplishes what it was expected to accomplish. On the whole, the Turkish language reform can be evaluated as an example of an effective language planning. It also serves as a means of modernization. The only area in which it seems to fail is the standardization of the language. Yet it would be very unfair not to take the social factors which play an undeniable role in the whole process into account. This aspect is the only issue of the language reform which still requires evaluation, and, if necessary, re-planning for the coming years.
FOOTNOTES

1 The literature of the period was called the Divan Literature, taking its name from the general name given to a collection of poems. Each divan had to follow a definite form. The poems had a specific meter and rhyme system based on the length of the vowels. Since Turkish lacks long vowels, it did not fit into the system. Both the meter and the rhyme were borrowed together with the form of the poems which made up the divan. Prose, which was a later development, was quite different from the Western examples. There are fewer prose examples and these are mainly the records of the official historians.

2 Folk literature also consisted of poems, but both the content and the form of these poems were completely different than the divan poems. Although folk literature still exists today, it is not as effective as it used to be. But it is interesting that, although the divan poems require a sort of translation, the folk poems are understandable.

3 The Linguistic Society (Türk Dil Kurumu, TDK) has a sister institution: The History Society (Türk Tarih Kurumu). Both were initiated by Atatürk; the former to study the issues of language, the latter to study Turkish history. Today, the TDK is not a government subsidized institution. Being one of the legal heirs of Atatürk, it is financially autonomous. Therefore, it can function independently of the political governments. Yet, since the textbooks used at schools are controlled by the government, the governments have an indirect control of the language used. This means that TDK has its own language policy. The members of the society are mainly the literary people, professors of literature and languages, linguists, and other people interested in the promotion of the Turkish language within the goals set by the society. TDK publishes a monthly literary magazine, and each year gives rewards to novelists, poets, translators, radio and TV script writers, etc., who use the Turkish language within the standards set up by the society.

4 The Sun-Language theory was developed from an unpublished article written by Dr. Phil H.F. Kvergic and sent to Atatürk in 1935. The theory claims that the origin of language has its roots in the interaction of human being with the sun, which developed into the first sound a. Then the other vowels, and then the consonants (of Turkish) followed this first sound. The basic structure of stems is VC, and each stem carries a specific meaning depending on the consonant and the vowel it is made up of. Since the basic structure of the Turkish syllable is VC, this stem structure, and the total 168 stems make up the first Turkish language, and the comparative studies indicate that Turkish is related to most Indo-European languages, it follows that, these languages developed from Turkish. This conclusion was later taken up by those who were opposed to the purification of the language, who argued that, since Turkish is the original language, other
languages borrowed from Turkish, and, in time, just gave back what they got. Therefore, there are no foreign elements in the language (Levend, 1960). One of the major reasons which led Atatürk to accept this theory was that by stressing the long history of the Turkish language, and by showing its relation to other languages, this theory could make the Turks proud of their past and their language. Again, it is a matter of identity.
REFERENCES


