

## IS TURKISH LANGUAGE FACING A THREAT?

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### TÜRK DİLİ BİR TEHDİTLE Mİ YÜZLEŞİYOR?

#### Özet

Bu makalede İngilizce'nin Türkçe'ye olan etkisi kelime alımı bakımından ele alınmıştır. Crystal'a (1997: 137) göre 'İngilizce kadar yaygın bir şekilde konuşulan başka bir dil olmamıştır'. Prodromou (1992: 39) ise İngilizce'yi uluslar arası iletişim için şart olan bir dil olarak tanımlayarak, günümüzde kültürler arası etkileşimdeki etkisinin geçmiştekinden çok daha fazla olduğunu belirtir. Buna bağlı olarak, Phillipson'a (1992: 7) göre İngilizce'nin bir dile olan etkisinin bir göstergesi kelime alımıdır. Günümüzde, Türkçe'nin bu etki altında olduğu iddia edilmektedir. Ancak, İngiliz ya da Amerikan kökenli İngilizce kelimelerin Türkçe'deki kullanımındaki artış Türk toplumunda önemli bir çoğunluk tarafından eleştirilmektedir. Bu makale, İngilizce kelimelerin Türkçe'deki bu kullanımından kaynaklanan ve başlıca dil ve milli kimlik arasındaki ilişki ile yaşanan bazı dil sorunlarına dayalı toplumsal kaygıları sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türk Dili, İngilizce'nin Türkçe'ye etkisi, Dil sorunları, Dil ve milli kimlik.

#### Introduction

In this paper, the influence of the English language on the Turkish language is discussed in terms of lexical borrowing. According to Crystal (1997: 137), "there has never been a language so widely spread or spoken by so many people as English". Prodromou (1992: 39) also describes English as a language that is essential for international communication and states that it has a greater influence in mediating a whole range of cultural and cross-cultural concepts today than in the past. In this sense, Phillipson (1992: 7) maintains that one of the symptoms of the influence of English is linguistic borrowing which includes lexical borrowing. Today, Turkish is claimed to be a language that is under this influence. However, the increasing use of English origin words (regardless of whether they are British or American) in a Turkish context is criticised heavily by a considerable number of people in the Turkish society. This paper aims to present the concerns about the Turkish language which basically derive from the relation between national identity and language and also from several communication problems caused by the use of English origin words in Turkish.

**Key Words:** Turkish, The effects of English on Turkish Language, Language problems, Language and national identity.

The first part of the paper defines lexical borrowing and gives some examples of the criticisms about the use of English origin words in Turkish. The second part explains the relation between language and national identity and raises the question of whether this link between the Turkish language and national identity is weakening. The language problems that seem to be caused by the use of English origin words in Turkish are presented in the third part of the paper.

### ***Lexical Borrowing***

Arlotto (1972: 184) defines linguistic borrowing as "the process by which one language or dialect takes and incorporates some linguistic element from another". According to him, lexical borrowing is the most common type of interaction between languages. This may be due to the fact that the vocabulary or lexicon tend to be the most unstable part of any language (ibid.).

In Sapir's (1970: 193) point of view, "the extent to which the vocabulary of a language filters into another language plays a role in the development and spread of cultural ideas." This view shows that lexical borrowing can even be taken as a criterion to estimate the dominance of certain languages in the past as carriers of cultures. Pyles (1971: 322-340) gives some examples of lexical borrowing between languages. According to him, for example, English has borrowed "dervish, mogul, shah, caravan, bazaar, khaki" from Persian. Also, some Turkish words such as "fez, tulbend, turban, kismet and shishkebab" have filtered into English.

While lexical borrowing appears to be taking place in all languages, Osam (1997:3) maintains that the process of borrowing English origin words is observed very frequently in Turkish. Considering the fact that Turkish equivalents already exist for these foreign words such as "showroom, check up, center, hit and rating" leads to the view that popularity can be as important as necessity in borrowing a word.

Sinanoğlu (2002: 76) criticises the increasing use of English origin words in a Turkish context and claims that "Turkey may need another language planning in the future as in the past." Although this claim may sound exaggerated, it reflects how powerful criticisms one can meet about the use of foreign words in today's Turkey.

Today, the Turkish Language Society has been producing new words for foreign words of Western origin including English. Lewis (1999:166) states that the Language Society is clearly determined to fight the use of English origin words for which the Turkish equivalents already exist or can be devised. According to the Society (Turkish Language Society, 2002a), the increasing use of such words can not enrich the language. On the contrary, they prevent the language from developing by its own resources.

Moreover, it is claimed that the Turkish people have got used to hearing half English and half Turkish sentences every day (Turkish Language Society, 2002a: article 8). An example given is the sentence "otomobil **in**, at hırsızlığı **out**". According to the Society, this fact can lead to the possibility that a hundred years later new generations will have forgotten how to speak Turkish at all (ibid.).

Mc Arthur (2002: 306) observes that although English did not use to be a language that has had big influence on Turkish, this has changed greatly in the recent years. He claims this is due to Turkey's links with the West such as the NATO membership. According to him, due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, this influence can be observed not only in Turkey but also in the Central Asia republics such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. He shows the increase in English teaching programmes in all the Turkic regions as an evidence of this influence. (According to the Turkish linguist Aksan (2001: 198), the main reasons of the increasing use of English in Turkish are the spread of English after the second world war, having English medium teaching in schools, the attitude of the Turkish intellectuals towards foreign languages, the bad influence of radios and televisions in Turkey and the lack of Turkish language teaching.)

Lewis (1999: 135) reminds that once French and Italian words had influence on Turkish, whereas nowadays, in the American century, it is mainly English that shows its influence. He (ibid: 133) also claims that the influence of English on French is nothing compared with "Türkilizce". The term "Türkilizce" refers to 'Turkish-English', the language which is a mixture of Turkish and English vocabulary.

The below example is given by the periodical Türk Dili ve Kültürü (2000b) in order to show the increasing number of several underlined foreign words of Western origin used in a Turkish context.

" **Starların**, **mega** starların kol gezdiği programlarda, **cool** tipler, ellerindeki "cep **to** cep" telefonlarla karşı tarafa **mesaj** geçmekte, karşıdaki kişi isterse bu mesajı **printer**'ından print etmeden **riseyv** (resave) etmektedir. **Koordineli** çalışmalar yapılamadığından **organizasyonlar** **milenyumun** gerektirdiği detayları şekülatif bir **perspektiften** **obzerve** (observe) edememektedir".

In the Turkish society, the increasing number of such words causes concerns including nationalistic ones.

### ***The Turkish Language and National Identity***

According to Ruzza (2002: 168), one of the most significant symbols of national identity is language. Language also plays an important role in the maintenance of the cultural identity of a community by carrying the heritage of awareness of a society from one generation to the other. Hence, language can be described as a precondition for the continuity of culture (Plewa, 2002: 183).

It seems that the significant role of language in the construction of national identity can be observed, probably most clearly, in most of the European countries. For example, according to Barbour (2002: 166), there is a close relation between language and national identity in German speaking Europe, although the identity seems to have a diverse basis here. Also, in France, the Ministry for Education, Culture and Francophone Affairs regard the French language as "the cement of our national unity and the fundamental element of our heritage" (Judge, 2002: 46). Moreover, as Vikor (2002: 105) points out, in Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Iceland a discrete language is deemed essential for national identity.

However, it seems that the linguistic and national identities in Nordic societies face several challenges. According to Vikor (2002: 128), one of these challenges is the interference of English due to the Anglo-American linguistic and cultural impact on almost everyone's lives. He (ibid.) claims that this "Anglomania" has shown itself in all the five countries in Northern Europe, most profoundly in Iceland and Norway. In his opinion, in Iceland, this threat against national identity leads to a purist drive with the worry that too many English origin words can cause structural changes in the language. This can be claimed to be similar to the concerns regarding the use of English origin words in Turkish.

In the case of Turkey, according to Trudgill (2002: 263), today Turkey is an example of the increasing relation between language and national identity. Especially the language reform after the establishment of the Turkish Republic seems to have an important role in this. Before that, for centuries, Turks considered themselves as "Muslims first, Otoman citizens second, and Turks hardly at all" (Trudgill, 2002: 261).

However, the increasing domination of the Western culture in Turkey can be regarded as a threat in maintaining the link between language and national identity. According to Azaryahu and Kook (2002: 195), the street names in a country can give a person an idea of its cultural and historical heritage as they function in the symbolic construction of national identity. In this respect, the periodical *Türk Dili ve Kültürü* (2000a) points at the street names in Turkey. Here, it is mentioned that in Eskişehir, a city in Turkey, there was a change in the names of a number of streets and it was observed that the Turkish names were replaced with foreign words of Western origin. When the names of nearly one hundred names were collected, it was observed that they are related to the Western culture deriving from French, Latin and Greek. The examples are "domino, mikado, patent, antrenman, jüri, havyar, kroki, pens, plaj, feribot, aplik, aseton, biblo, emprime, dekorasyon, kakao, korniş, kraker, mayonez, rimel, saten, mitoloji, plasman, rekolte, riziko, etc."

Despite the domination of the Western culture in Turkey, in his study to find out the attitudes of Turkish people towards the use of foreign words in Turkish, Osam (1997) reaches to a conclusion that Turkish people show resistance to the use of foreign words of Western origin. This resistance can be claimed to be originating from the nationalistic concerns of the Turkish people. In order to find out the views of Turkish people about the use of English origin words from the aspects of both nationalism and language, the writer of this paper conducted a survey with 20 surveyors. The results show that 85% of the people stated that it can be very influential to omit foreign words of Western origin from Turkish in order to preserve Turkish national identity (Erdem, 2002). Parallel to this view, 80 % of the surveyors respond they agree with the statement 'a nation's language should have a strong link with its identity'. Besides, all of the surveyors support the Turkish Language Academy for producing Turkish words for the foreign words of Western origin including English (ibid.). These views of the majority reflect the concern of the Turkish people for their language.

The traces of nationalism can also be observed in the motive of the Turkish Language Society to exploit the resources of Turkish from Turkish roots rather than any other language. The Society suggests that it is sensible to make use of the "treasure" of other dialects of Turkish such as the Azeri, the Turkmen, the Kazakh and some others in order to produce new words for foreign words of Western origin (Turkish Language Society, 2002a: article 7). It is also mentioned that Turkey has been improving its relations with the Turkish world and that will cause more interactions between the Turkish nations including their languages. The Society gives the example of the word 'çizgi film' meaning 'cartoon', which is being used in Azerbaijan today.

In the same line of thought, Sinanoğlu (2002: 109) expresses that the improvement of the relations of Turkey with other Turkish nations should be encouraged. He suggests forming the "Turkish Internet" which will enable correspondance between the Turkish people in the world and which will lead to a "common Turkish language". As a matter of fact, the strong link between the Turkish language and national identity appears to have a historical background. The following poem in one of the Turkish Language Society publications after 1934 reflects how national identity was related to language.

"Joy to you, son of Turks, the road to identity has been opened

...

Know that history and language are the mark of identity

A full-length mirror showing the inside and the outside

From this Council blessings and felicity will born pure Turckdom

The Kurultay (Council) will save the pure language from other languages”

(Lewis, 1999: 52)

### ***Language Problems***

The use of foreign words of Western origin including English not only cause nationalistic concerns but also some communication problems in Turkish. Some of these problems are presented below.

### ***Problems with Pronunciation***

Below are some abbreviations (mainly referring to the television channels) used in Turkish which are generally pronounced by people the same way as they are pronounced in English.

<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Disapproved Pronunciation</u>	<u>Correct Pronunciation</u>
TV	/ti-vi/	/te-ve/
NTV	/en-ti-vi/	/ne-te-ve/
HBB	/eɪtʃ-bi-bi/	/he-be-be/
CNN	/si-en-en/	/dze -ne-ne/
BBC	/bi-bi-si/	/be-be-dze/
PVC	/pi-vi-si/	/pe-ve- dze/
FM	/ef-em/	/fe-me/

(Dilimiz, 2002b)

Such kind of disapproved usage can not be claimed to be the mistake of only the ordinary Turkish people, bearing in mind that it is the announcers themselves that pronounce them in this way. This shows the influence of radios and televisions on Turkish. According to Hepçilingirler (2000: 175), this kind of pronunciation has been causing reactions among the Turkish people who are concerned about their language. Despite this fact, there does not seem to be a considerable change. This can be explained by the fact that using the English pronunciation instead of Turkish has been considered to be more prestigious by radios and televisions.

On the other hand, the pronunciation of some abbreviations such as BBC, CNN and FM could be claimed to be universal, as it is questionable whether it would make sense to any Turkish person when the above suggested Turkish pronunciation is used instead. In this respect, Lewis (1999: 138) states that, especially for the abbreviation TV and FM, the English- language domination of the field of electronics shows itself and therefore the pronunciations /ti-vi/ and /ef-em/ are very common among Turkish people.

Another problem that the use of English origin words can be claimed to cause for Turkish is that such words do not allow for vowel harmony which is a characteristic of the Turkish language and makes the language sound harmonious (Hatiboğlu: 2000). According to the rules of vowel harmony, a vowel in a word can not be followed by any vowel but by certain vowels. For example, the word 'simülasyon' in Turkish deriving from 'simulation' does not have vowel harmony as 'ü' should not follow 'i', 'a' should not follow 'ü' and 'o' should not follow 'a'.

### **The Use of English Letters**

The written language in Turkish newspapers, notices on streets, names of shops often reflects the use of English letters although they do not exist in the Turkish alphabet. Such letters can be most frequently observed in words as 'taxi, fax, index, maximum, sex, dublex, show, pasha, flash, cafe', whereas the correct forms are 'taksi, faks, indeks, maksimum, seks, dubleks, şov, paşa, flaş and kafe'.

Negroponete (1995) maintains that the one-for-one correspondance between the sounds and letters in Turkish does not cause pronunciation problems as there are no silent letters and confusing diphthongs. He (1995: 145) also claims that, due to this fact, "Turkish is a dream come true for a computer speech synthesiser". However, as seen in the examples, sometimes 'sh' is used instead of 'ş', 'x' is used instead of 'ks' and 'c' is used instead of 'k'. This is also likely to cause reading problems for ordinary people who do not know English.

The increasing use of internet has a role in the tendency to use such letters instead of Turkish ones, as a specific software is needed to write the Turkish letters 'ş, ç, ğ, ö, ü and ı'. In an online survey, Turkish people were asked if they feel comfortable with not being able to use the letters 'ş, ç, ğ, ö, ü and ı' easily on internet or not. The result shows that among 443 people, 85 % responded that they felt uncomfortable (Dilimiz, 2002a), which actually can be regarded as a resistance for using these letters.

### **The Use of Filmic Expressions**

As one of the influences of English on Turkish, Lewis (1999: 138) also points out at the prevalence of English on television, which results in what is called *dublaj Türkçesi* 'dubbing Turkish'. The direct translation of the expressions without considering if they are actually used in Turkish and whether they are appropriate for the structure of the Turkish language or not leads to the use of such expressions to be gradually placed among Turkish people (Dilimiz, 2002c).

Hepçilingirler (1999: 93) points out to the fact that Turkish youth are speaking a language that sounds "strange" which is a consequence of the 'dubbing-Turkish'. She claims that although there is some resistance by the people to use such expressions, they are being used so widely that in a short time everyone will

start using them as well. Hepçilingirler (1999: 94) quotes fifty such expressions used in Turkish, five of which are presented here with their Turkish translations:

### **Turkish**

- 1- Ciddi olamazsın!
- 2- Senin neyin var?
- 3- Unut gitsin!
- 4- Aman Tanrım!
- 5- Aklından bile geçirme!

### **English**

- You can not be serious!  
 What is wrong with you?  
 Forget it!  
 Oh my God!  
 Don't even think of it!

In relation to the dubbing-Turkish, Lewis (1999: 138) also points out at the lip movements during dubbing. He states that Turkish words are chosen according to the lip movements in the film. Therefore, the word 'selam' is used instead of the Turkish word 'merhaba' as the former one is closer to the lip movements of 'hello' in English. 'Selam' can indeed be heard especially among the Turkish youth instead of 'merhaba'. This shows how dubbing-Turkish is gradually changing the speech of people.

According to Lewis (1999: 139), another influence of television on Turkish is the replacement of 'Vay anasını', an exclamation of showing surprise, with the English 'Wow' or 'Vavvv', its adopted version to Turkish. He calls such changes in the language as "Anglicisms", a term pointing at the words that sound more English than Turkish.

### **Turkish as the Language of Science**

As Downes (1998: 42) reports, it is estimated that nearly two-thirds of scientific research in the world is written in English. Due to this fact, English scientific terminology can be observed in other languages including Turkish. According to Örs (1989: 18), due to the spread of English technical terminology Turkish is not developing as a language of science and there is even a linguistic chaos that affects the education in Turkey.

In the same way, as it can be observed with the use of other foreign words of Western origin, the main concern related to this issue seems to be that although Turkish equivalents for these words actually exist in Turkish, they are not used. In Örs's (1989: 18) opinion, when observed from the field of medicine it can be seen that Turkish doctors have a tendency to use English foreign words in their profession thinking that their knowledge will gain scientific value, and therefore "an incongruous new language is emerging". Several examples of the English words used by doctors cited from Örs (1989: 18) are 'schedule, bowel movement, rounds, background, rule out, fracture, arterial tension, fever, history almak (to record a patient's medical history). According to Lewis (1999: 127), such use of



English words is a consequence of the spread of English in the recent past and the increasing number of Turkish doctors doing their post-graduate studies in Britain or America.

Apart from medical terms, the area of computing has a lot of "Anglo-American words" as well (Lewis, 1999: 129). He also points out at the notices about computers that can easily be seen in magazines or newspapers. Below is an example that he cites from the magazine *Nokta* of January 1993:

*'MACWORLD TÜRKİYE ses yazı grafik animasyon film multimedya demo disketi hypercard üzerinde QuickTime ile hazırlanmış multimedya uygulaması MACWORLD/TÜRKİYE Şubat sayısı ile birlikte tüm okurlarımıza bayilerde'.*

The English translation of the above example is as follows:

*'MACWORLD TÜRKİYE sound, writing, graphics, animation, film, multimedia demo disket, multimedia application prepared with QuickTime on hypercard, for all our readers, with the February number of MACWORLD/TÜRKİYE at the newsvendors'.*

When the Turkish and English texts above are compared, it can be seen that there is not much difference in the technical terms. According to Sinanoğlu (2002) Turkish language can actually produce its own technical terminology. Also, other scientists such as Bozbuğa & Bozbuğa (Bozbuğa, 2002) give their opinion on the subject by stating that Turkish language can produce comprehensible technical terms. They state that the use of English technical and medical words are leading to memorising instead of thinking in Turkish and being creative, which is a barrier in the scientific development of a country. Paralel to this view, the results of a survey carried out by the 'Dilimiz' web site (Dilimiz, 2002a) show that out of 161 Turkish people 65 % state that they do not know the Turkish equivalents of the computer terminology used in Turkish. This result may show that the majority of the Turkish people find the computer terminology incomprehensible.

However, it should be borne in mind that the educational background of people is an important factor influencing such surveys. For example, the small-scale survey carried out by Erdem (2002) with twenty Turkish people shows that all of the university graduates forming 40% of the surveyors know the meaning of almost all of the English words asked such as 'check up, fair play, scoreboard, rating, zapping, trend, background, best-seller, first-lady, timing, full-time, hit, in, '. These words are declared by the Turkish Language Society (2002b) as English words which are in Turkish. On the other hand, it was found that the remaining 60% of the surveyors who were either secondary and high school graduates did not know the meaning of more than half of the words.

### Conclusion

As it is presented in this paper, the concerns that arise with the use of English origin words can be viewed from both nationalistic and linguistic aspects. While lexical borrowing takes place in all languages, the link between national identity and language may not be very strong in all the nations in the world. However, it seems that there is a strong relation between national identity and language in Turkey. This can be observed in the attitudes of Turkish people towards the use of foreign words of Western origin in a Turkish context including English.

On the other hand, the resistance may also be claimed to have linguistic origins when facts such as the problems with pronunciation, the use of English letters, the use of filmic expressions and the current situation of Turkish as the language of science are taken into account. On the whole, the influence of English on Turkish does not seem to be just an ordinary phenomenon of lexical borrowing.

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