



## AN ASSESSMENT OF LANGUAGE DOMINANCE AMONG TURKISH-ENGLISH BILINGUALS: THE CASE OF THE AHISKA TURKS IN THE US

Erol SAKALLI\*

### Abstract

Today living in ten different countries, the Ahıska Turks have had to leave their lands and immigrate to different places. As a consequence of these migrations they did compulsorily or sometimes voluntarily as in the case of their migration to the US, they have encountered different cultures and languages/dialects. Some of the Ahıska Turks, today, live in the US. Since they have been living in the US for more than a decade, they have adjusted to the way of life in the US culturally and linguistically alike. Thanks to their previous experiences, they have learned English and become bilingual/multilingual. The aim of this study was to measure the language dominance among the Ahıska Turks. 125 Ahıska Turks ( $n_{female} = 42$  and  $n_{male} = 83$ ), living in the United States of America, Ohio, consisted of the sample of the survey. The Bilingual Language Profile was employed to measure the language dominance and the SPSS was used to analyze the data obtained. According to the findings, the level of education, employment, age, language use, language proficiency, and language attitude of the participants were significant for the dominant language. The results were discussed within the framework of the existing literature on language dominance and suggestions for the Ahıska Turks living in the United States of America were put forward.

**Keywords:** Bilingualism, language dominance, bilingual language profile, Ahıska Turks, linguistic integration.

\* Doç. Dr., Uşak Üniversitesi Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi Çağdaş Türk Lehçeleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü, erol.sakalli@usak.edu.tr, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9596-4686>.



## TÜRKÇE İNGİLİZCE İKİ DİLLİLER ARASINDA BASKIN DİL İNCELEMESİ: ABD'DEKİ AHISKA TÜRKLERİNİN DURUMU

### Özet

Günümüzde on farklı ülkede yaşamlarını devam ettiren Ahıska Türkleri, tarihte yaşanan çeşitli olaylar sebebiyle çeşitli zamanlarda yaşadıkları toprakları terk etmek ve yeni yerlere göç etmek zorunda kalmışlardır. Bu kimi zaman zorunlu, kimi zaman da gönüllü göçler neticesinde de doğal olarak farklı kültürlerle ve farklı dil/lehçelerle karşılaşmışlardır. Farklı kültür ve dil/lehçelere uyum sağlamak zorunda kalan Ahıska Türklerinin bir kısmı ise bugün ABD'de yaşamaktadırlar. On yılı aşkın bir zamandır ABD'de yaşayan Ahıska Türkleri, burada da hem kültürel hem de dilsel olarak yaşama uyum sağlamışlardır. Daha önceki deneyimleri ile zaten birden fazla dile ya da lehçeye hâkim olan Ahıska Türkleri burada da İngilizce öğrenmişler iki dilli/ çok dilli olmuşlardır. Bu çalışmanın amacı ABD'de yaşayan Ahıska Türkleri arasında baskın iki dillilik düzeylerini ölçmektir. Amerika Birleşik Devletleri, Ohio eyaletinde yaşayan 125 Ahıska Türk'ü (*nkadin* = 42 ve *nerkek* = 83) bu çalışmanın örneklemini oluşturmaktadır. Çalışmada verileri elde etmek için İki Dillilik Dil Profili ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Elde edilen veriler SPSS programında analiz edilmiş ve bulgulara göre eğitim düzeyi, çalışma durumu, yaş, dil kullanımı, dil becerisi ve dil tutumlarının baskın dil konusunda istatistiksel olarak anlamlı olduğu görülmüştür. Elde edilen sonuçlar iki dillilik, çok dillilik, baskın dil üzerine mevcut alan yazını çerçevesinde tartışılmış ve Ahıska Türkleri için çeşitli öneriler sunulmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İki dillilik, baskın dil, iki dillilik dil profili, Ahıska Türkleri, dilsel uyum.

The Ahıska Turks are named after the region they used to live in, Ahıska. The Ahıska region, in the borders of present-day Georgia, was a part of the Ottoman Empire until 1829, when it was taken over by Russia. The Ahıska Turks lived in Ahıska until 1944; however, with the order of Stalin, the Ahıska Turks were deported to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Stalin aimed to cleanse the Turkish border of the USSR from the Turks (Khazanov 1992, p. 3). The soldiers “forcibly removed approximately one hundred thousand Muslims from the Meskhetian region, confiscating their belongings and placing them on cattle cars destined for the Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan” (Swerdlow 2006, p. 1834).

Deported to these countries, the Ahıska Turks were able to adjust to the conditions in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan and they were able to lead good lives. In 1989, however, the events, a pogrom against the Ahıska



Turks, in the Fergana Valley of Uzbekistan forced the Ahıska Turks to leave the country, which meant the second migration in their history. The pogrom caused the death of hundreds of Turks and some 17,000 Ahıska Turks were evacuated to Russia. After these events, most of the Ahıska Turks left Uzbekistan for Azerbaijan and other parts of the Soviet Union (Ranard, 2006, p. 8).

The tragedy of the Ahıska Turks was not over yet, especially for those who settled in the Krasnodar Krai region of Russia. The local authorities did not recognize the Ahıska Turks and they were not given citizenship, residential or work permit, which deprived the Ahıska Turks of the most humanitarian and essential needs such as access to education, health services, etc. (Ranard, 2006; Koriouchkin 2009; Kolukırık 2011; Sakallı 2016; Kurt and Açıkgöz 2017). The *Proposed Refugee Admissions for FY 2004 - Report to the Congress* included the Ahıska Turks living in Krasnodar Krai among those who were to be allowed entry to the US in FY 2004 (state.gov). Today approximately 12,000 Ahıska Turks live in over 30 states in the US.

It is obvious that the Ahıska Turks, who have been living in the US for more than a decade, have adapted to the way of life in the US linguistically, culturally, and socially. Their native language, Turkish, is a part of their identity for the Ahıska Turks. They are well aware that thanks to their language, they have not been assimilated all through the tragedies back in the former Soviet Union and Russia alike. Therefore, their language and culture are very important to them. On the other hand, the Ahıska Turks have learned to adjust to new linguistic and cultural environments, which has led to some changes in their customs and traditions (Sakallı and Özcan 2016, p. 236). One aspect of their adaptation to the US is that they have learned English and become bilingual. Preferring to use Turkish among themselves, the Ahıska Turks are able to use English in their everyday lives, at school, at work, and with American friends. Bilingualism is not something new for the Ahıska Turks. Most of them can speak the language or dialects of the countries they have lived in before such as Uzbek, Kazakh, and Russian. This article aims to assess the language dominance among the Ahıska Turks of the US.

### **Theoretical Background: Bilingualism and Language Dominance**

Though Bloomfield (1933, p. 56) defines bilingualism as “native-like control of two languages”, some researchers make a distinction between the terms *bilingualism* and *bilinguality*. Hamers and Blanc (2000, p. 6) state that “the concept of bilingualism refers to the state of a linguistic community in which two languages are in contact with the result that two codes can be used in the same interaction and that a number of individuals are bilingual (societal bilingualism); but it also includes the concept of bilinguality (or individual



bilingualism). Bilinguality is the psychological state of an individual who has access to more than one linguistic code as a means of social communication. Baker (2001, p. 2) prefers similar terms and he uses *individual bilingualism* and *societal bilingualism*.

No matter what the term is, many researchers are of the opinion that there is no single definition as to what bilingualism is. Therefore, many definitions have been put forward. According to Haugen (1953, p. 7) bilinguals produce “complete and meaningful utterances in other languages.” Grosjean’s (2010, p. 4) definition seems more comprehensive: “bilinguals are those who use two or more languages (or dialects) in their daily lives.” With his definition, Grosjean also states that bilingualism is a blanket term for those who use three or more languages. Recently, it has been discussed intensively whether bilingualism and multilingualism can be used interchangeably and many researchers think that they must be used differently for some linguistic, psychological, cognitive, and neurological reasons (De Angelis 2007; Aronin and Britta 2009; Butler 2013). In this article, however, bilingualism will be used as a blanket term as almost all of the Ahıska Turks are already multilingual -most of the adults are competent in Uzbek and other Turkic dialects as well as in Russian. However, the article’s main focus is to find out the dominant language of the Ahıska Turks comparing Turkish and English. On the other hand, there is no single type of a bilingual person. In other words, bilingualism or bilinguality has many different types: early bilinguals, late bilinguals, dominant bilinguals, ambilingual or balanced bilinguals, passive bilinguals or productive bilinguals, etc. (Hakuta 1986; Liddicoat 1991; Baker 2001; Butler and Hakuta 2004; Wei 2005; Karahan 2005; Bican and Demir 2018; Yağcı 2014; Moradi 2014).

Language dominance defines the proficiency level of a bilingual in two languages. That is, a bilingual person, who can use two languages, may be better and more comfortable with one of his/her two languages. With this in mind, balanced bilinguals are also mentioned in the literature. A balanced bilingual “refers to a person who has proficiency in two languages to the extent that his or her skills for each language match those of a native speaker” (psychologydictionary.org). However, according to Romaine (1989, p.18) the “notion of balanced bilingualism is an ideal one, which is largely an artifact of a theoretical perspective which takes the monolingual as its point of reference.” The question whether bilinguals can be fully balanced in their two languages does not have an indisputable answer. Grosjean’s complementarity principle, however, can give an explanatory answer to this question. That is, a bilingual can use different languages in different contexts (Grosjean 2008, p.23) and



that leads to dominance in either language in different environments and with different people.

The measurement of bilingualism, and language dominance as well, is an important issue for researchers. Many scales have been developed to this end. Taura (1996) compares and contrasts the measurements and tries to show the problematic areas, ideal ones and how to use the measurements available. Treffers-Daller (2019, p.378) also states the importance of the measurement tools by saying “because language dominance is a multidimensional construct, it can be operationalized in different ways. Anyone wishing to measure language dominance, therefore, needs to deal with several issues in relation to its operationalization and measurement. The first of these is the choice of the measure.”

### **Method**

In this article, the aim was to assess language dominance and differences between language dominance and some demographic variables. To this end, the hypotheses below were tested:

H1: The level of education is significant for all the sub-dimensions of the language dominance scale.

H2: Language use and language attitude among those who work are significant compared to those who do not work.

H3: Language use and language attitude are significant in terms of gender.

H4: Age is significant for all the sub-dimensions of the language dominance scale.

H5: There is a meaningful difference between language history and language proficiency.

H6: There is a meaningful difference between language use and language attitude.

The universe of the survey consists of the Ahıska Turks living in Dayton, OH. As mentioned above, Ahıska Turks live in approximately 30 states in the US. However, Dayton has the largest Ahıska Turkish population. This is why the survey was implemented in Dayton. As there is no database that gives the exact number of the Ahıska Turks, Mr. Islom Shakhbandarov, the CEO of the Ahıska Turkish American Community Center (ATACC), was met in order to reach the sample of the survey and he was asked for help and permission for the implementation of the survey. He says “There are approximately 800 Ahıska Turkish families in Dayton.” The author made appointments with the participants and they were visited at home, at their workplace together with



personnel of ATACC and some of the participants were given the scales at the ATACC. The sample of the survey was determined using the purposive sampling because according to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006, p. 100) "...based on previous knowledge of a population and the specific purpose of the research, investigators use personal judgement to select a sample. Researchers assume they can use their knowledge of the population to judge whether or not a particular sample will be representative." The sample is 125 ( $n_{female} = 42$  and  $n_{male} = 83$ ) Ahıska Turks.

The necessary meetings and preliminary studies were made in October 2018 and the surveys were implemented in February-April 2019. For this study, the questionnaire technique, a quantitative research technique, was used.

The sample of the survey is 125 Ahıska Turks, whose age groups are categorized as 18& under, 19-25, 26-35, 36-45, and 46& over. Though a good number from each age group were selected, especially those groups of 18& under and 46& over were focused with more participants. That is because it is assumed that the participants of these two age groups will reflect the language change and integrity among the Ahıska Turks saliently as the members of the younger group were mostly born in the US or migrated during their infancy and have had education in English, which leads to their using English more dominantly in their daily lives and the member of the older group did not have any education in English apart from a few months' worth of an English course. This has led to their limited use of English in their daily lives. The questionnaires were given to participants on a one-to-one basis by the author and all the participants were informed about the scientific value and the confidentiality of the survey. All the participants took part in the survey on a voluntary basis.

In this article, the Bilingual Language Profile – BLP (Birdsong et al. 2012) was employed. The BLP is an instrument that assesses language dominance through self-assessment of participants. The BLP contains four modules with 19 items each of which assesses a different aspect of language dominance following the first part, where the participants are asked demographic questions. The first module is 'Language History', which aims to find out the age at which both languages are acquired, the age at which the participants start to use both languages comfortably, the duration of education taken in both languages, the time the participants spend in a country or region where each language is the major language, the time the participants spend in a family atmosphere using both languages and the time the participants spend in a work place where they use each language. The second module is 'Language Use', which aims to find out the percentage of the use of each language on average in a week with friends, in the family, at school or at work besides the use of



each language when the participants are talking to themselves and counting. The third module is ‘Language Proficiency’, which aims to find out how well one can use each language in terms of understanding, speaking, reading and writing. The participants are asked to assess their proficiency between 0 (not well at all) and 6 (very well). The fourth and the last module is ‘Language Attitude’, which aims at finding out the attitudes of the participants to each language by asking how they feel using each language, the culture they define themselves with and how important it is for them to use each language like a native speaker, again, assessing themselves between 0 and 6. (Gertken et al. 2014, p. 2019).

For the present study, the BLP was first translated from its original language into Turkish and then reverse translated from Turkish into English. After the experts’ opinions, the Turkish translation was finalized. The score of the BLP ranges from -218 to +218. Scores close to 0 (zero) show a balanced bilingualism while + (plus) score shows Turkish dominance and – (minus) score shows English dominance.

### Descriptive Statistics

For the present study, the data collected from 125 questionnaires have been analyzed using the SPSS 23.0 program. Before the results of the analysis, Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics to show minimum values, maximum values, means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis.

**Table 1.** *Descriptive Statistics*

Scale	Dimension	Min.	Maks.	Mean.	St. Dv.	Skewness	Kurtosis
BLP Sub-dimensions	Lang. History English	2,72	31,33	16,80	7,273	,366	-1,045
	Lang. History Turkish	14,07	36,32	25,31	4,531	-1,254	1,971
	Lang. Use English	0,00	47,96	21,72	15,938	,096	-1,419
	Lang. Use Turkish	6,54	54,50	30,49	13,798	-,053	-1,192
	Lang. Prof. Turkish	2,27	54,48	43,56	15,014	-1,182	,086
	Lang. Prof. Turkish	18,16	54,48	42,26	10,819	-,654	-,421
	Lang. Att. English	0,00	54,48	36,79	13,848	-,734	-,052
	Lang. Att. Turkish	31,78	54,48	50,61	6,761	-1,694	1,665
Total Score	English	28,60	177,35	118,48	45,861		
	Turkish	87,18	199,78	149,95	27,752		
	General	-69,92	157,56	30,381	68,908		

n=125



According to George and Marley (2010) the coefficient of skewness and coefficient of kurtosis must be between -2 and +2 to test normality. As seen on Table 1, the coefficient of skewness for all variables ranges from -1,694 to ,366; the coefficient of kurtosis ranges from -1,419 to 1,971; the minimum values range from 0 to 31,78; the maximum values range from 31,33 to 54,48; the means range from 16,80 to 50,61; the standard deviations range from 4,531 to 15,938. These results confirm that the data set has a normal distribution. Besides, the scores for English range from 28,60 to 177,35; the scores for Turkish range from 87,18 to 199,78; and the general scores range from -69,72 to 157,56; which suggests that both languages are dominant. In the following part of the article, which language is dominant among which groups will be given and discussed.

### Demographic Information

Table 2 and Table 3 show the demographic characteristics of the participants.

**Table 2.** *Demographic Information*

Gender	N	Percent (%)	Age Group	N	Percent (%)
Female	42	33,6	18& under	42	33,6
Male	83	66,4	19-25	14	11,2
Marital Status	N	Percent (%)	26-35	26	20,8
Married	70	56	36-45	11	8,8
Single	55	44	46& over	32	25,6

The level of education and the yes/no answers to the question “Do you work?” have been given cross-tabulated with the age variable because the participants in the age group 18& under are still at school and so their answers are ‘no’ to the question “Do you work?”. Therefore, it is more appropriate to take this into consideration to explain demographic findings and the data analysis that follows.

**Table 3.** *Level of Education and Age Cross tabulation*

		Education				
		Elementary	High School	Some Uni.	University	Total
Age	18& under	34	8	0	0	42
	19-25	0	7	6	1	14
	26-35	1	5	1	19	26
	36-45	5	3	0	3	11
	46& over	3	9	0	20	32
Total		43	32	7	43	125





According to the cross tabulation results in Table 3, 43 of the participants are elementary graduates or are still at school. As seen, due to the fact that those 18 and under were included in the survey, it is thought to be more appropriate to see the results cross tabulated with the age variable in order not to generalize them with all age variables. The same is also true for the question “Do you work?” because it is not appropriate to generalize the answer ‘no’ given by this group to all participants. To this end, the cross tabulation for the age variable and the question “Do you work?” have been given in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Cross tabulation results of “Do you work?” with the age variable

		Do you work?		
		Yes	No	Total
Age	18& under	0	42	42
	19-25	14	0	14
	26-35	24	2	26
	36-45	11	0	11
	46& over	18	14	32
Total		67	58	125

As seen above, 42 of the 58 participants who gave the answer ‘no’ to the question “Do you work?” are in the age group of 18 and under and because they are still at school they gave the answer ‘no’.

### The Analysis of the Data

H1: The level of education is significant for all the sub-dimensions of language dominance scale.

The ANOVA test has been employed to see whether the level of education of the participants is significant for all the sub-dimensions of language dominance.

**Table 5.** Multiple comparison and ANOVA results

Dependent variable	(I) Education	(J) Education	(I-J) Mean Difference	St. Error	p value	ANOVA F	ANOVA p value
Language History Eng.	University	Elementary	-9,217*	1,332	,000	16,922	,000*
		High Sch.	-4,569*	1,442	,010		
		Some Uni.	-8,716*	2,518	,004		
Language History Tr	Elementary	High Sch.	-5,922*	,801	,000	31,768	,000*
		Some Uni.	-6,049*	1,398	,000		
		University	-6,588*	,739	,000		



Language Use Eng	University	Elementary	-20,862*	2,864	,000	19,200	,000*
		High Sch.	-8,586*	3,101	,033		
		Some Uni.	-20,385*	5,412	,001		
Language Use Tr	Elementary	High Sch.	-9,004*	2,827	,010	13,339	,000*
		University	-16,451*	2,611	,000		
Language Proficiency Eng	Elementary	University	10,188*	3,091	,007	5,015	,003*
Language Proficiency Tr	Üniversite	Elementary	9,773*	2,128	,000	9,329	,000*
Language Attitude Eng	Elementary	High Sch.	12,812*	2,860	,000	12,462	,000*
		University	12,880*	2,642	,000		
Language Attitude Tr	Elementary	High Sch.	-5,407*	1,500	,003	5,406	,002*
		University	-4,064*	1,386	,021		

\* Differences are significant at 5%.

According to Table 5, there is a meaningful difference between the level of education and all the sub-dimensions of bilingual dominance ( $p < 0.05$ ). Post Hoc (Tukey HSD) tests can be used to determine between which groups the difference exists. It is seen that there are meaningful differences between the means of those with an asterisk (\*) in Table 5 at the 0.05 level.

According to these results:

The language history for English is higher among the participants whose level of education is elementary, high school or some university than that of university graduates. When the cross tabulation results of level of education and age are examined, it is seen that the university graduates are those who studied at a university in Uzbekistan and now are at the age of 40 and over. However, the participants whose level of education is elementary are those at the age of 18 or under and who are still at school in the US. These are two important factors that affect the language history of the participants for English. The reverse of this result is true for the language history of the participants for Turkish.

The language use for English is higher among those whose level of education is elementary, high school, and some university than that of university graduates. Similarly, the language use for Turkish among high school and some university group is higher than that among the group with elementary education. A similar explanation to the one given above for language history could also be given here for language use.



The language proficiency for English is higher among the group with elementary education, while the language proficiency for Turkish is higher among the group of university graduates. This, again, could be explained in the same way as we did for language history above.

While the language attitude for English is higher among the group of elementary education, the language attitude for Turkish is higher among the group of university graduates and high school graduates. A similar explanation to the one given above for language history could also be given here for language attitude. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is validated.

H2: Language use and language attitude among those who work are significant compared to those who do not work.

**Table 6.** *Independent Test Results to determine whether Language Use and Language Attitude Differ according to the Question “Do you work?”*

BLP Sub-dimensions	Do you work?	N	Mean	St. Dv.	t value	p value (two tailed)
Lang. Use Eng	Yes	67	16,35	12,12	-4,331	,000
	No	58	27,93	17,60		
Lang. Use Tr	Yes	67	36,67	11,33	6,123	,000
	No	58	23,35	12,99		
Lang. Attitude Eng	Yes	67	33,64	13,60	-2,807	,006
	No	58	40,43	13,34		
Lang. Attitude Tr	Yes	67	52,24	4,57	2,992	,003
	No	58	48,73	8,28		

$p < 0,05$

As can be seen from Table 6, while the language attitude for Turkish is higher among those who work, the language attitude for English is higher among those who do not work. As it has been explained for Table 4, 42 of the 58 participants who do not work are at the age of 18 and under and they are still at school. Because these individuals have had formal instruction in English and they use English in their daily lives more than Turkish, it is not surprising that language use and language attitude scores for English are higher among this group. The reason for higher scores for language use and language attitude for Turkish among those who work is that they are in older age groups and so most of them are more proficient in Turkish as a result of their limited language history for English. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is validated.

H3: Language use and language attitude are significant in terms of gender



**Table 7.** *Independent Test Results to determine whether Language Use and Language Attitude Differ in terms of Gender*

BLP Sub-dimensions	Gender	N	Mean.	St. Dv.	t value	p value (two tailed)
Lang. Use Eng	Female	42	20,11	13,09	-,801	,425
	Male	83	22,53	17,22		
Lang. Use Tr	Female	42	30,30	10,32	-,109	,913
	Male	83	30,59	15,32		
Lang. Attitude Eng	Female	42	34,97	11,64	-1,047	,297
	Male	83	37,71	14,82		
Lang. Attitude Tr	Female	42	46,86	8,98	-4,789	,000
	Male	83	52,51	4,24		

$p < 0,05$

As seen from Table 7, there is a meaningful difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) only in terms of language attitude for Turkish. That is, the scores of male participants for language attitude for Turkish is higher than those of female participants. On the other hand, no significance was found for other dimensions. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is partially validated.

H4: Age is significant for all the sub-dimensions of language dominance scale.

**Table 8.** *Multiple Comparisons and the ANOVA Results*

Dependent Variable	(I) Age	(J) Age	(I-J) Mean Difference	St. Error	p value	ANOVA F	ANOVA p value
Lan History Eng	18& under	26-35	11,332*	,964	,000	79,786	,000*
		36-45	11,969*	1,309	,000		
		46& over	13,279*	,906	,000		
Lan History Tr	18& under	19-25	-6,507*	,978	,000	33,276	,000*
		26-35	-6,507*	,791	,000		
		36-45	-6,961*	1,074	,000		
		46& over	-7,358*	,744	,000		
Language Use Eng	46& over	18&under	-34,357*	1,624	,000	134,287	,000*
		19-25	-29,857*	2,218	,000		
		26-35	-12,739*	1,828	,000		
Language Use Tr	18& under	19-25	-8,097*	2,283	,005	77,805	,000*
		26-35	-17,619*	1,846	,000		
		36-45	-22,833*	2,506	,000		
		46&over	-28,916*	1,736	,000		
Language Proficiency Eng	46& over	18& under	-31,384*	1,828	,000	85,030	,000*
		19-25	-31,709*	2,497	,000		
		26-35	-24,549*	2,058	,000		
		36-45	-18,056*	2,724	,000		



Language Proficiency Tr	18& under	26-35	-11,108*	2,371	,000	10,183	,000*
		36-45	-14,863*	3,218	,000		
		46& over	-10,970*	2,229	,000		
Language Attitude Eng	46& over	18& under	-24,336*	2,152	,000	40,646	,000*
		19-25	-27,362*	2,939	,000		
		26-35	-10,936*	2,422	,000		
		36-45	-9,777*	3,206	,023		
Language Attitude Tr	18& under	36-45	-7,890*	2,012	,001	10,125	,000*
		46& over	-7,749*	1,394	,000		

Table 8 shows that there is a meaningful difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the age variable and all other sub-dimensions of the language dominance scale. Using Post Hoc (Tukey HSD) tests, we can determine between which groups the differences exist. It is seen that there are meaningful differences between the means of those with an asterisk (\*) on Table 8 at 0.05 level.

According to these results;

The scores for English language history among the age group 18& under are higher compared to those of other age groups while their scores for Turkish language history are lower. The younger the participants are, the higher the English language history scores are among the participants.

The English language use scores are lower among the age group 46& over when compared to those of age groups 35 and under; while the Turkish language use scores are lower among the age group 18& under when compared to all other age groups. As the age increases so does the Turkish language use.

The English language proficiency scores are lower among the age group 46& over than those among other age groups. What is noteworthy among other groups is that as the age decreases, the English language proficiency increases. One of the main factors of this is that those in the group of 18& under are school children and most of them, if not all of them, were born in the US. The exact opposite of this is true for Turkish language proficiency, i.e. as the age increases so does the Turkish language proficiency.

While the English language attitude scores among the age group 46& over are lower compared to all other age groups, the Turkish language attitude scores among the age groups 36-45 and 46& over are higher than the scores among the age group 18& under, which suggests that English is the dominant language as the age decreases and Turkish is the dominant language as the age increases. Therefore, hypothesis 4 is validated.

Finally, a Pearson Correlation Analysis has been conducted to see whether there is a meaningful difference between the language history and the language proficiency; and between the language use and the language attitude. Table 9 presents the level of relations and significance between the variables of the current study.



**Table 9.** Correlation Analysis Results

	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)	(H)
<b>D Lang. His- tory Eng (A)</b>	1							
<b>Lang. History Tr (B)</b>	-,615**	1						
<b>Lang. Use Eng (C)</b>	,763**	-,615**	1					
<b>Lang. Use Tr (D)</b>	-,687**	,613**	-,928**	1				
<b>Lang. Prof. Eng (E)</b>	,661**	-,386**	,773**	-,737**	1			
<b>Lang. Prof. Tr (F)</b>	-,502**	,727**	-,509**	,508**	-,244*	1		
<b>Lang. Attit. Eng (G)</b>	,631**	-,429**	,746**	-,686**	,647**	-,346**	1	
<b>Lang. Attit. Tr (H)</b>	-,406**	,717**	-,422**	,438**	-,371**	,736**	-,166	1

n=125, \*p<0,05, \*\*p<0,01

The results of the correlation analysis suggest that as the English language history scores increase, the English language proficiency also increases. Likewise, as the Turkish language history scores increase, the Turkish language proficiency scores also increase. As the English language use scores increase so do the scores of the English language attitude; however, the Turkish language attitude scores decrease. The same is true for Turkish: as the Turkish language use scores increase, the Turkish language attitude scores also increase but the English language attitude scores decrease. These results suggest that hypothesis 5 and hypothesis 6 are validated. As seen from the results of correlation analysis on Table 9, the relations of all variables have been analyzed and it has been found that as the language history scores of the participants increase, their scores of language use, language proficiency and language attitude also increase for both languages.

## Discussion

According to the findings of the analysis of the data obtained using the Bilingual Language Profile, the most important factor that affect the language dominance among the Ahıska Turks in the US is the language history of the participants. The Ahıska Turks migrated to the US in 2005 and 2006, so they



have been in an environment where the majority language has been English for 13 or 14 years. The participants in the age group of 46& over have never been at school in the US and only had English courses for a few months. These individuals can use limited English in their daily lives, hence their dominant language is Turkish. Dominant bilingual is a person “with greater proficiency in one of his or her languages and uses it significantly more than the other language(s)” (Wei 2005, p. 5). Therefore, when compared to those in the age group 18& under, it is not surprising that Turkish is their dominant language. Similarly, English is the dominant language among the age group 18& under. The most important factor here is that most of these people were born in the US or came to the US at very young ages. That is, they have been exposed to English since very young ages and they have been having formal instruction in English for many years. As Grosjean (1982, p. 189) states “the main reason for dominance in one language is that the child has had greater exposure to it and needs it more to communicate with people in the immediate environment.” An example of instances of language dominance is given by Döpke (1992, p. 18) in which she gives the example of parents speaking to their children in German and Spanish in England. Though the children are fluent in all three languages, English (the majority language) becomes dominant over the other languages. This example, again, shows the importance of exposure to the language and as a result the importance of the wider environment in which the language is used. The L1 of all the Ahıska Turks is Turkish but the influence of the time spent in an environment where the majority language is different than L1 on the dominant language is obvious. The exposure to the majority language will increase in parallel to the time spent at school or at work, so schooling and working have a vital effect on language dominance. The medium of instruction at school is English, the children mostly, if not always, use English during the time they spend at school and their use of Turkish is limited to the family. Therefore, the dominant language is English among the individuals in this group because they tend to use the language with which they feel comfortable expressing themselves. A similar situation is also true for the age group 26-35. The participants of this group chose Russian most often as the option of ‘other languages’, for the language use module of the scale apart from Turkish and English. When the ages of this group are taken into consideration, we will see that almost all of the participants of this group had formal instruction in Russian, which shows that Russian has a place among other languages among the individuals in this group. They chose the “other languages” option especially for the question “When you count, how often do you count in the following languages?”. This suggests that the language a person learns something in for the first time will be the most comfortable language later to talk about the thing s/he has learned. “The



crucial factors for becoming bilingual as a child ... are the need for the new language, as well as the amount and type of input, the role of the family and school” (Grosjean 2010, p. 186). That is, when children start school, there is a need for a new language, and because the type of this input is so diverse and the amount is so large, the children will feel more comfortable with that new language. It is true that the time a person spends at school from kindergarten to high school, and most of the time, to university is considerably longer than the time one spends with the family during which the language use is limited. This very truth suggests that the language of education is the dominant language for most, if not all, bilinguals. The present study reveals the importance of the relation between the time spent at school, and so the language of school, and the language proficiency. As the time spent for education in English increases, so does the proficiency in English, especially in reading and writing skills. Similarly, the Turkish proficiency in terms of speaking and understanding among the Ahıska Turks is quite high, while they are less proficient in reading and writing as almost none of them had formal instruction in Turkish. This shows us the importance of the language of education among bilinguals. Similar results have been found by other studies in the literature. For example, according to Flege et al. (2002, p. 591) “an early exposure to the L2 typically results in L2 dominance for bilinguals who learn English as an L2 upon immigrating to North America.” Lim et al. (2008, p. 391) suggest that years of formal instruction, and the number of years of language exposure are the parameters that have been found to influence language proficiency and dominance in bilinguals. Kohnert et al. (1999, p.1410) give a similar result in their study stating that L2 overtakes L1; however, this takes 10-years of formal instruction. Argyri and Sorace (2007, p. 87) found similar results in their study in which they compared Greek and English dominant bilinguals in Britain.

The dominant language of a bilingual has an important effect on the language attitude of the person. It is normally expected that one who can use a language comfortably would not have any negative attitudes or any bias to that language. Another important finding of this study is that the scores of English language attitude of those whose dominant language is Turkish are lower than those of others. The Ahıska Turks usually have positive attitudes to all other cultures and languages since they have been in contact with several languages and cultures. They strongly believe that learning a language is something very important for people. This is proved by the fact that the average scores of the statements ‘I feel like myself when I speak English’, ‘It is important to me to use (or eventually use) English like a native speaker’, ‘I want others to think I am a native speaker of English’ among the age group





whose dominant language is English are higher than those whose dominant language is Turkish. However, the scores of the same statements with Turkish are quite high among almost all the participants. That suggests that no matter how well and dominantly they use English, the young generation have positive attitudes towards Turkish, their L1, and they are committed to their Turkish identity both linguistically and culturally. The language use is another important factor that affects the language attitudes of the participants. The language almost all of the participants use especially at school and at work is English. While the use of Turkish in their daily lives is limited to the family, the rate of the use of Turkish with friends is still high among the participants in the higher age group. However, as the age decreases, the rate of the use of English with friends increases. This is partly because the younger participants' dominant language is English and partly because the younger participants have friends from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, so the common language for communication is English. When the participants in the age group 46 and over were asked whether they had friends from other ethnic groups apart from the Turks, almost all of them answered 'no'. On the other hand, the participants who are still at school and/or who work have friends apart from Turks with whom they speak English. This suggests that the social environments also play an important role in the language dominance. Lanza and Sevendsen (2007) found that the social network including the family, friends and relatives have an impact on the language choice of a bilingual.

### **Conclusion**

The dominant language of bilinguals, and specifically the Ahıska Turks, is mostly determined by the exposure to the language. Formal instruction is perhaps the most important and effective way in which people are exposed to a language. Therefore, as discussed above through the findings of the analyses, the younger generation of the Ahıska Turks in the US are dominant in English, whereas the older generation is dominant in Turkish. That is the very result of the formal education they have had in English. On the other hand, Turkish, Turkish culture and Turkish identity is of vital importance to the Ahıska Turks, who have succeeded in integrating to the way of life in the US linguistically and socio-culturally. Proud to be a part of the US, the Ahıska Turks are well aware of the thin line between integration and assimilation. They think integration is extremely important but keeping their Turkish identity is more important. All of the Ahıska Turks are of the opinion that their language is the key to their identity, and that thanks to their language, they have been able survive all assimilation efforts against them. Therefore, some of the Ahıska Turks, especially the elderly, who wanted to



share their ideas during the employment of the questionnaires stated that they were worried that the new generation might forget and leave Turkish and use English only. Hence, Turkish is the only language used in the family. When children speak English among themselves, the parents or grandparents just warn them to speak Turkish. The only time parents, and mostly mothers, speak English to their children is when they help them with their homework. Since the children are supposed to learn the subject in English, mothers use English. In all homes, children watch, or are encouraged by their parents to watch, Turkish television channels because the parents think that watching Turkish channels help the children improve their Turkish. The worry that most Ahıska Turks have about the future of their language and culture in the US is not groundless. Learning or acquiring new languages and cultures is richness and so bilingualism, biculturalism, and multilingualism should be encouraged; however, this should not mean the attrition of L1 or assimilation with respect to cultures. Planned and systematic language policies may avert this. In the regions where Turks are mostly populated, as in Dayton, Turkish could be added to the curriculum of schools at least as an elective course for the beginning and then immersion programs could be implemented for Turkish. After all, these programs are already conducted for other languages in the US (Genesee, 1985).

In this article, the aim was to assess the language dominance among the Turkish-English bilingual Ahıska Turks. For future research, similar surveys could be conducted and the current results could be compared and contrasted with the findings of the new research so that effective language policies for all minority languages could be made and implemented.

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