SOME FEATURES OF THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC SITUATION IN TURKEY

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a) Introduction, Background and Development of Turkish :

Turkish is a phonemic and agglutinative language having syllable-time rhythm. It is largely agglutinating, to some degree inflecting and is in part analytic. The words are typically composed of a sequence of morphs with each morph representing one morpheme. There is an unchanging root and one or more suffixes are used for derivation; hence the language has great word - building capacity. Turkish uses the Latin or Roman alphabet which was first introduced in 1928. Before that date Turkish was written in the Arabic script. The history of the Turkish people, to a large extent, is reflected in the Turkish Language. The historical contacts between the Turkish people with Arabs, Persians and others modified the Turkish Language. As the natural outcome of such contacts, the Turkish Language contains thousands of Arabic and Persian loan words. The influence of the Arabic loan words is dominant mainly in the field of religion and culture, whereas the Persian ones are mainly influential in the literary field. Like many other languages, the modernization of the Turkish Language implies the deliberate planning and the incidental expansion of its vocabulary in all fields of knowledge. Since time immemorial, the Turkish Language has continued to grow, as all the living languages have, in its vocabulary through trade and other cultural contacts with languages like French and English.

In more recent times, the growth and modernization of the Turkish Language is closely associated with the political ideals and educational policy of the Turkish nation. The political events and reforms in Turkey in the early decades of the twentieth century significantly also focus on the language factor. The reforms brought along the genuine indepen-

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dence and nationhood of the Republic by ridding the Turkish Language of numerous Arabic and Persian words and replacing them by 'pure' indigenous Turkish words. Many words from different Turkish dialects (for examle, 'Kırgızistan Türkçesi', 'Kırım Türkçesi' and some Turkish spoken in many parts of Russia) were reintroduced or repopularized. Many other words were coined from indigenous Turkish root words. These attempts for modernizing which were regarded synonymously as 'purifying' Turkish, were met by objections or resistance mainly from conservative groups. It was argued that the Arabic language, the language in which the Koran was revealed to Prophet Mohammed, must be preserved. Because of this, the Arabic language has managed to maintain a considerable influence on the Turkish Language, as have the Arabic loan words in Turkish.

Traditionally, the intellectual and commercial elites have felt great respect for the Arabic and Persian languages (and more recently for French, English and German). Children from such elite groups were educated in one or more of these languages which may even be counted as a 'second language.' Today most of the population of Turkey is educated in the Turkish medium of instruction. However there are French, English and German schools mainly for the rich. Moslems learn to 'read' the Koran in the Arabic script in mosques. The majority of those who can 'read' the Koran, however, do not understand the meaning of the holy verses which they read in Arabic. In recent years in Turkey, the English language has replaced French as the dominant foreign language. It is interesting to note that in the past when Persian and Arabic were the dominant languages of the courts, the Turkish language was actually excelling in form and function ' as the oral literary medium of the masses. In the literary and religious writings of the Ottomans, the Turkish language used by them contained very many Arabic and Persian loan words; however the peasant folk story tellers and folk poets would use only the indigenous Turkish language to express their art. Recent investigations in the oral tradition of the Turkish people have revealed this phenomenon. The following example illustrates this point:

The folk poet Karacaoğlan wrote in 'pure' Turkish with no Arabic or Persian loan words when his contemporaries produced works which contained a very high percent of foreign loan words. I make no attempt to translate this poem into English, which would do it great injustice :

> Güzel ne güzel olmuşsun
> Görülmeyi görülmeyi

Siyah saçın halkalanmış
Örülmeyi örülmeyi

b) **The Usage and Status of Different Languages, Dialects and Accents :**

In Turkish, there are a lot of phonological variations which we term 'accent'. However when these accents seperate at the lexical, structural or stylistic levels, we consider them to have some importance. To distinguish dialects, we must take phonological, lexical, structural and stylistic differences into account. The Turkish people tolerate the differences of accents in varios regions of the country. In fact, the various accents give rise to hundreds of jokes which enhance Turkish humour. There are, for instance, comic folk characters such as 'Karadenizli' from the Black Sea Coast and 'Hüsmen Ağa' representing an immigrant (originally Turkish) from one of the Balkan countries.

P. Corder defines a speech community as "made up of people who regard themselves as speaking the same language; It need have no other defining attributes. In other words, a speech community is defined in terms of its beliefs, not its language" (1). In Turkey there is one dominant speech community in terms of beliefs and language. Everybody believes he is the part of that speech community. For instance, Caucasian and Crimaen immigrants who speak Circassian and Tartars respectively prefer to attempt to speak standard Turkish. For all that, some Arabic is used by Arab peoples living along the southern border, yet Turkish remains the dominant language.

"Whatever the linguists may say, they do not, in fact, describe languages, they describe dialects. The descriptions of what we call English are, in fact, descriptions of what we have called the standard dialect which has the widest distribution and highest social prestige" (2). As it is in English when we mean the description of Turkish, we mean the description of what is called standard Turkish, that is the Istanbul accent: Turkish used in spoken and written language, Turkish used on radio and TV, Turkish used for academic purposes.

Although an educated Scotsman uses standard vocabulary, good English structure and has a competence in lexical items, he still speaks standard Scottish English. His English is different, but the different items occur only in intonation, accent and sometimes in vocabulary.

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(1)   Corder, P., *Introducing Applied Linguistics*, Penguin 1973, P. 53.
(2)   Corder, P., *Introducing Applied Linguistics*, Penguin 1973, P. 69.

Similar to this, an educated man from the very far end of Turkey speaks standard Turkish but he may experience difficulty with phonological elements of the Istanbul accent.

c) Some of the Register Variations in Turkish and Attitudes :

"We find most clearly a dimension of variability of language use associated with occupational rules... Thus we identify religious language, legal language, medical language or more exactly priest language, lawyer language and doctor language" (3). This judgement is valid for all languages. The register a lawyer uses in his professional role differs from the usage of his mother tongue at home, as a father or as the president of parents - teachers association. The register of his language is in fact role - related te situations. The language one uses shows register variations according to the particular field one is in. One speaks a different register identified mainly by lexical items and meaning markers. The register changes according to the topics specialized in and depending on purposes in every profession and that is why a 'simple minded' villager listens with his mouth wide - open to the conversation of two medical doctors consulting on his ulcer! One can often distinguish what a man is talking on by considering his vocabulary, intonation and the way he conveys himself. "Registers are usually characterized solely by vocabulary differences: either by the use of particular words, (jargon), or by the use of words in a particular sense" (4). The way a schoolmaster talks with his wife or children differs from the way he talks with the pupils in school. The situations in which this schoolmaster uses language are called use - related variations.

Register changes according to the formality, intimacy or seriousness of the speech and this phenomenon seems valid for all languages. Regularites and relationships between the kinds of people and the language they use change in Turkish as they do in other languages. Speech between indivuduals of unequal rank (due to status in a organization, social class, age, or some other factors) is likely to be less relaxed and more formal than that between equals, and in certain languages definite rules may exist as to which linguistic forms may or may not be used. It would definitely be offensive, for instance, in Turkish for a secretary to address her boss as she does her brother at home, because there are 'high' or 'low' status and roles as P. Corder says "Every role in society has a status given to it by society. Thus we speak of the role of a judge

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(3)   Corder, P., *Introducing Applied Linguistics*, Penguin 1973, P. 63.
(4)   Trudgil, P., *Sociolinguistics*, Penguin 1974, P. 104.

as being 'high' status, while the role of a policeman is of a higher status than that of a convict" (5).

d) Failure in Register Variations :

Turkish cannot fully fulfil some of its role, for example the role it has in the commercial, medical and scientific fields without loaning words. Although Turkish can adequately fulfil most of the registers in the national life of the community, its failure is in its role as an international language. Finding itself insufficient in some fields, the Turkish language allows itself to be influenced by foreign loan words. The main reason for this is the negligence of the linguistics policy for centuries. In medical and scientific areas, English being the most important one, some western languages are used a lot, because it is rather difficult to find enough books on technical fields published in Turkish. Scientific and medical Turkish have a large foreign vocabulary. Similarly, political and legislative Turkish have a considerable amount of French words, because the Ottoman Empire was under French influence when these two fields gained importance. This development occured earlier than it did in scientific and medical areas. In all those areas, foreign languages and Turkish are used together but Turkish is necessarily the dominant language used.

Turkish is claimed not to fulfil its duty perfectly in the religious field either though this is not a matter of inadequacy, but is a matter of religious beliefs which will be described in the section concerning government policy.

Parallel to the religious policy of some of the political parties, the press in Turkish falls into three groups roughly: one group uses a lot of Arabic and Persian words. The second group does not bother much about the language issue. The third one prefers 'pure' Turkish and they continuously try to create and add new words into Turkish. There is always a deep gap between the first and the third groups and discussions have continued for years and seem to continue. The following two sentences are taken from one of the history text books which was designed for secondary school pupils.

"Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun dağılması ve yeni bir Türk devletinin teşekkülü üzerine ümmet ideolojisi tarihe karıştı. Artık ne din tarihi, ne de hanedan tarihi öğretim müasseselerinde ön plana geçemezdi. Bun-

(5) Corder, P., *Introducing Applied Linguistics*, Penguin 1973, P. 63.

ların yerini milli tarihin alması lâzımdı. Zaten Türk milletinin mazisi, me·
deni hüviyeti ve insanlık değerleri ile istilâya maruz kalmıştı " In this piece
of writing, there are three words with Latin origin (The ones underlined
with ------), twenty Arabic words (the ones underlined with ———),
and one Persian word (the one underlined with ....). At the present
time the Turkish language has three words for a lot of objects or actions
as in the following example :

Arabic	Latin	'pure' Turkish	
unsur	eleman	öge	which

means 'element' in English.

e) Conflicts Between Official Policy and Actual Usage :

Since Turkish is the main language spoken in Turkey, it is the offical
language. It is a majority language spoken by 99% of the population.
By and by, Turkish destroyed a few unimportant dialects but like most
other languages it could never free itself from the influence of foreign
languages.

"Decisions about what language and dialects to use for what purpose
in the community is a political matter for governments to decide. These
decisions may be based on no more than political or racial prejudice, or
they may be based on a careful survey of the various functions which
the different languages and dialects actually fulfil in the community" (7).
In offical policy, Turkish is the sole offical language. Being the only
dominant language, the Turkish governments have had to consider neither
the racial problems nor the problem of the presence of a colonial inter-
national language. Turkish was accepted automatically as the offical
language. The only discussion that arose between different political
parties and between governments and people was the use of Turkish
in the religious field. Whenever a certain political party takes power, one
of the things that they are concerned with is the language used in the

religious field; must Turkish be accepted as a language to worship in or
must Arabic still continue to be the religious language as it has been
used for centuries? Once, after the Republic was established, it was
decided that worshipping must be done in Turkish, but then social and
political uprising of the Moslems forced the government to withdraw its
policy and to accept Arabic again. Now, the Turkish people still pray in

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(7) Corder, P., *Introducing Applied Linguistics*, Penguin, 1973, P. 59.

Arabic. The Koran is in Arabic. Although it is translated into Turkish, a lot of people consider that by translation it loses its holy meaning. Since most people are strictly bounded by their religious beliefs and are conservative, they object to Turkish being accepted as the language of religion. They believe that religion will lose its meaning if prayers are past or religious knowledge is pursued in Turkish.

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