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A REVIEW OF KEY CONCEPTS IN LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE: DIRECTIONS FOR MAINTAINING ENDANGERED LANGUAGES IN TURKEY

DİL DEVAMLILIĞI KONUSUNDAKİ TEMEL KAVRAMLAR: TÜRKİYE'DEKİ TEHLİKE ALTINDAKİ DİLLERİN DEVAMLILIĞINI SAĞLAMAYA YÖNELİK ÖNERİLER

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to review some key concepts in language maintenance, project on some examples of language maintenance efforts from around the world and offer directions for taking precautions against the death of endangered languages in Turkey. First, the paper draws attention to the problem of endangerment of languages. Based on UNESCO accounts, it discusses the endangered languages in Turkey. By referring to existing literature on language maintenance, it introduces the key concepts that play part in language vitality. Later, it offers some examples of language maintenance efforts from around the world. In the conclusion, it suggests ways to maintain endangered languages in Turkey by drawing on the factors involved in language vitality.

Keywords: Language maintenance, language vitality, endangered languages, Turkey

Öz: Bu makalenin amacı, dil devamlılığı konusundaki temel kavramları gözden geçirmek, dil devamlılığını sağlamak için dünyanın çeşitli bölgelerinde gösterilen çabalardan örnekler vermek ve Türkiye'deki tehlike atındaki dillerin devamlılığını sağlayabilecek önlemler konusunda öneriler sunmaktır. Makalede ilk olarak dillerin tehlikede olması sorununa dikkat çekilmektedir. UNESCO kayıtlarına dayanarak Türkiye'de tehlike altında bulunan diller ele alınmaktadır. Dil devamlılığı konusundaki alanyazına atıfla, dil canlılığında rol oynayan önemli kavramlara değinilmektedir. Daha sonra, dünyadaki farklı toplumlardaki dil devamlılığı çabaları örneklenmektedir. Son kısmında ise, dil canlılığında rol oynayan faktörlere atıfla, Türkiye'de tehlike altında bulunan dillerin devamlılığın nasıl sağlanabileceği konusunda öneriler sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Dil devamlılığı, dil canlılığı, tehlikedeki diller, Türkiye

INTRODUCTION

Languages are living beings like an organism. They come into existence at a certain point in time, change, and transform with their speakers. If a language gradually loses its domains of use in a speech community and there remain fewer and fewer people who use it, then the language faces the threat of dying out. A language needs active speakers to keep it alive. Ostler (2011:315) notes that "A language is maintained if speakers effectively pass it on to the next generation." This may not be an issue in monolingual societies where one language, along with its varieties, is actively used in multiple social domains such as education, law, administration, family and daily life, and religion. However, in migrant or multilingual societies, people may not find equal opportunity to maintain their first language if their language lacks a national or official status in the country they live in. Attempts to maintain their language may fail when the majority language dominates almost all domains of communication in a community, when the speakers of a minority language do not find reasons to maintain their language, especially when the minority language lacks prestige, and when they take no conscious attempts to maintain their language. Considering such reasons which play part in the failure to maintain a language, it is important to review and underscore the ways in which languages could successfully be maintained.

In this regard, the aim of this paper is to review some key concepts in language maintenance, project on some examples of language maintenance efforts around the world and offer directions for taking precautions against the death of endangered languages, with a special emphasis on the endangered languages in Turkey.

An overview of endangered languages in Turkey

Grinevald Craig (1997:258) notes that language death refers to the phenomenon of "complete disappearance of a language." She stresses that sudden language death is rare, taking place only after extreme cases such as genocide or massive dying of people due to epidemic or similar factors. More often language death is a gradual process that is preceded by language shift or language replacement. Language shift refers to steady adoption of the dominant language in multiple domains of communication at the expense of one's vernacular language, the native language of the members of the minority community who shift to the dominant language. Shifting to the dominant language may be in individual or group level, the latter signaling in the long run a danger for the maintenance of a vernacular language in a given speech community. When language shift occurs fully, accelerated by the accompanying social forces, a language may become endangered.

According to UNESCO (2003) report on language vitality and endangerment, there are external and internal factors that play role in language endangerment. External factors involve social forces that lead to language shift such as economic, political, military, cultural, and educational subjugation on users of minority languages. Internal factors, on the other hand, consists of a community's negative attitudes towards their own language. These negative attitudes have their roots in the external factors. A community might develop negative attitudes towards its language due to being discriminated on the societal level. The vernacular language may be stigmatized, attributed a lowly status, and lack prestige. It may also not offer advantages based on finding jobs and opportunities in the broad community. Consequently, this community develops negative attitude towards its language and finds no tangible reason to maintain it. If a language faces both

external and internal pressures against its maintenance, language endangerment can be the outcome of this process.

According to UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (2011), the number of endangered languages across the globe is 2,473. Among these, 178 languages have between 10 to 50 speakers. 146 languages have fewer than 10 speakers. 577 languages were recorded to be critically endangered. Finally, 230 languages have become extinct since 1950.

Intergenerational transmission is a vital factor in maintaining a language. It involves passing a language over to the next generations. UNESCO (2003) assesses the intergenerational transmission of a language in six degrees starting from 5 (safe) to 0 (extinct). An explanation of these degrees is provided on Table 1:

Table 1. Degrees of Intergenerational Transmission Based on UNESCO (2003)

5 (safe)	It indicates a continuous use of a language over generations. The language faces no threats and keeps its widespread use across multiple social domains.
4 (vulnerable)	It shows that a language has restricted domains of use. It preserves the status of the first language of a community, but the areas of use are restricted to particular social domains like family and friendship.
3 (definitely endangered)	A language is 'definitely endangered' when it is no longer acquired as the mother tongue by young generations. It means, the language is restricted to the use of older members of the family, especially used by the grandparents and to a certain extent by parents, but not by children.
2 (severely endangered)	It involves the case that a language is only used by grandparents at home. Parents may still be able to understand it, but they do not typically use it among themselves or towards their children.
1 (critically endangered)	When a language is marked as 'critically endangered', its use even by grandparents is very limited. The grandparents retain some knowledge of the language, but because communication with other generations is not possible in this language, the grandparents' competence in the language also deteriorates with time.
0 (extinct)	It shows that a language has no longer any speakers. No member of the generations is able to use and understand it.

According to UNESCO findings (2017), in Turkey 18 languages are categorized between the degrees 'vulnerable' and 'extinct'. The languages that fit in the 'vulnerable' status are 4 in number: Zazaki, Abkhaz, Kabard-Cherkes, and Adyge (Western Circassian). *Zazaki* has an estimate of 2.000.000 speakers nowadays, who live in various cities of Eastern Anatolia Region such as Bingöl, Elazığ, Tunceli, Erzurum, Erzincan, Muş, Diyarbakır, and Şanlıurfa. *Abkhaz* has approximately 125.000 speakers living in Abkhazia, Georgia, Russian Federation, and Turkey. Turkish Abkhaz population consists of diaspora communities in Turkey. Another diaspora language in Turkey with a 'vulnerable' status is *Kabard-Cherkes*, which is spoken approximately by 600.000 people in the Kabard-Balkar Republic and the Karachay-Cherkes Republic in the Russian Federation, along with the limited population in Turkey and Middle East. Finally, *Adyge* has about 300.000 speakers

living in the Republic of Adygea and Russian Federation. It is also spoken by some diaspora communities in Turkey, the Middle East and Western Europe.

There are 7 languages in Turkey that were categorized by UNESCO (2017) as having a 'definitely endangered' status. These languages are Pontic Greek, Western Armenian, Laz, Homshetsma, Abaza, Romani, and Suret. *Pontic Greek* has about 300.000 speakers in Greece, Armenia, Georgia, Russian Federation and Turkey, a small portion of whom reside in part of the Blacksea region in Turkey close to Georgia. *Western Armenian*, a diaspora language spoken in İstanbul and part of Hatay has approximately 250.000 speakers worldwide, including the Armenian population in Turkey and a number of Middle East and Western countries. *Laz* is recorded to have around 130.000 speakers. Laz speakers in Turkey populate some towns and cities in the Blacksea region such as Artvin and Rize. *Homshetsma* is spoken by a limited population in the north-eastern Turkey. The number of speakers is not definite due to the lack of study on this language. *Abaza* population in Turkey is estimated to be a few thousand, and the total number of Abaza speakers is nearly 31.000, comprising the Abaza speakers in Turkey and Russian Federation. *Romani* language, on the other hand, extends relatively over a larger geography with speakers that reside in Turkey as well as many European countries, especially in Eastern Europe and Balkans. The total number of Romani speakers is estimated to be 3.500.000. Finally, the *Suret* language can be mentioned in the 'definitely endangered' category. Although Suret has speakers in the southeast Syrian border of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, the language is now extinct in Turkey. The total number of its speakers is estimated to be 240.000.

Languages that have speakers in Turkey and that were categorized as 'severely endangered' by UNESCO (2017) are 3 in number. *Judezmo* (*Ladino*) is the first of these languages. The language was recorded as the traditional language of the Sephardic Jews of the Ottoman Empire (Bunis, 2011). The speakers of the language are estimated to be less than 10.000 in Turkey, concentrated in Istanbul, especially in Balat and Hasköy region. *Turoyo*, a language spoken in Midyat in Turkey, has approximately 50.000 speakers, including the ones in Syria and emigrant population in some European countries. *Gagauz* is the last language with speakers in Turkey and categorized as 'severely endangered'. The language is spoken in Surguch region of Edirne in Turkey. The exact number of speakers, however, is not known.

Finally, UNESCO (2017) categorized one language spoken in Turkey as 'critically endangered' and 3 languages as 'extinct'. The critically endangered language is *Hertevin*, whose speakers are mostly in diaspora and emigrated from Turkey. The speakers were originally located in Hertevin village in Pervari, Siirt in Turkey. The total number of speakers is estimated to be 1000, but it might now be extinct in Turkey. The remaining three languages that became extinct in Turkey are *Cappadocian Greek,* once spoken in the Capadocia region and in parts of Konya and Kayseri, *Mlahso*, a language that used to be spoken in Lice town of Diyarbakır, and *Ubykh*, a language which used to be spoken by a community in Hacı Osman village close to Marmara Sea and whose last speaker Tevfik Esenç passed away in 1992.

The fact that the aforementioned 18 languages are categorized in the status of endangered languages in Turkey necessitates a look at the factors that have prepared this outcome. The first and the most important factor is an external factor, that is historical and political. Demircan

(1988) notes that before the establishment of the Republic in 1923, minority languages were taught in schools, and in some schools they were used as the medium of instruction. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and with the establishment of the Republic, a monolingual language policy based on Turkish was adopted as a unifying effect for the newly emerging nation state. Monolingual language policy in Turkey was consolidated with the unification of the education system through the declaration of the *Tevhid-i Tedrisat* Law, which banned the use of languages other than Turkish in education, and the establishment of the Turkish Language Association, which took the responsibility of language planning for Turkish (Özfidan, et al. 2018). Although education in foreign languages such as English, French, and German was welcomed, minority languages were removed completely from school curricula. Only recently a number of minority languages such as Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish and Zazaki have been introduced as elective courses in some high schools in the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia Region, where Kurdish population is dense.

The other important factor that initiated the gradual retraction of minority languages from daily life was the social pressure on minority languages in Turkey. Ünver-Lischewski (2018) reminds a social campaign with the slogan "Citizen Speak Turkish!" started by a group of Turkish nationalist university students. The campaign found effective ground in the 1930 and led to a hesitation among minority communities in Turkey to use their mother tongue in public spheres for fear that they would be alienated and excluded from the society. Using only Turkish implied being a proper citizen. Although nowadays the social pressure on using minority languages in the public life has weakened, due to the existing political climate with nationalistic sentiments and the absence of structured institutional support to maintain these languages, the minority languages in Turkey cannot still achieve good progress in intergenerational transmission.

Key concepts in language maintenance

In the early sociolinguistic literature, the factors that could contribute to the maintenance of a language were specified under the concept "ethnolinguistic vitality" by Giles and his colleagues (1977). Ethnolinguistic vitality was defined as "a group's ability to maintain and protect its existence in time as a collective entity with a distinctive identity and language" (Giles et al. 1977: 308). They specified three factors that were involved in a language's vitality: the size of the group, the attitude towards the language, and the institutional support the language takes. Contemporary understandings of language vitality draw on broader components. The following figure depicts the factors involved in language vitality based on UNESCO (2011) accounts. The factors were determined by a group of sociolinguists whose help was asked by UNESCO in order to determine the measures that need to be taken to increase the vitality of languages.

Figure 1. UNESCO Criteria for Assessing Language Vitality and Endangerment (2011)
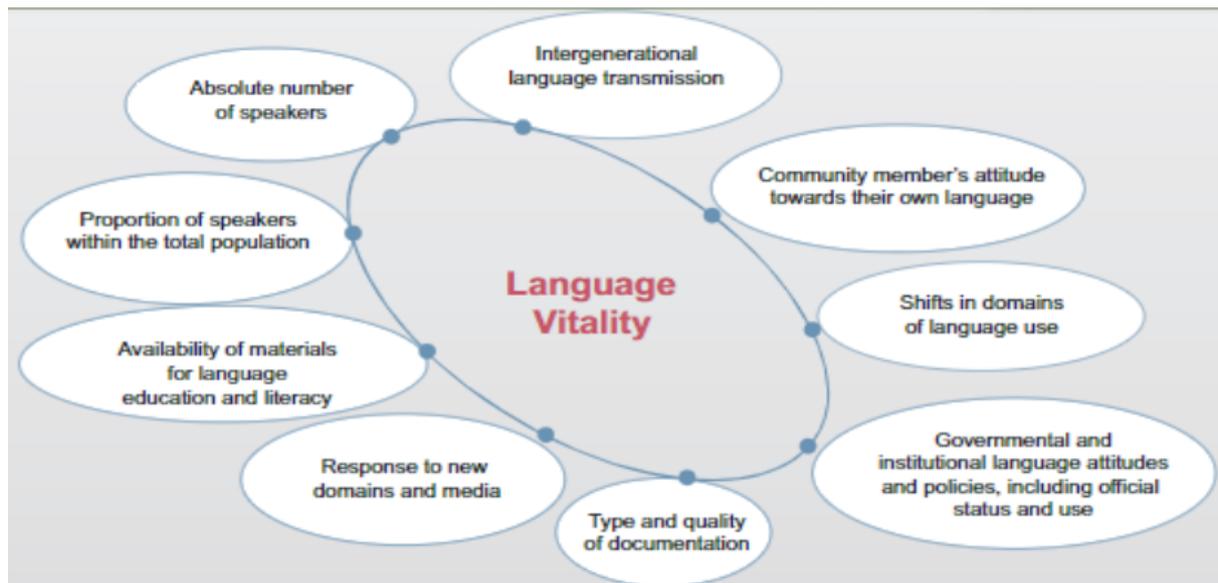
The figure demonstrates that three broad categories can be drawn based on the factors that play part in language vitality: demographic, social, and institutional. As for demographic factors, the absolute number of the speakers and the proportion of speakers within the total population have significance. The larger is the group the greater is the chance for maintaining their language.

Social factors may include the intergenerational transmission, the community members' attitudes towards their language and shifts in domains of language use. The role of intergenerational transmission in maintaining a language was already emphasized above. The extent to which older members of a community are willing to transmit their knowledge of the language to younger generations determines the chance of maintaining that language. If they see their language as an indicator of their ethnic identity and appreciate it, there is increased likelihood that the language will be transmitted to later generations.

This topic is closely related with language attitudes, another social factor of language vitality. As long as the members of a community keep positive attitudes towards their own language, they will be motivated to maintain it. Seeing their language as a binding value for their culture will help them take efforts to use and sustain it. However, if the community has developed negative attitudes towards their language due to social discrimination or absence of social and economic opportunities connected with their language, they may not find valid reasons to maintain their language. At this point, domains of communication gain significance. The multiplicity of domains in which members of a community can use their native language is a good indicator for the potentially successful maintenance of their language. If the dominant language strongly limits the domains in which the native language of the community could be used, it is inevitable that its use will be confined to homes and limited ethnic circles, which will increase the chance of a complete shift to the dominant language in time.

Institutional factors that contribute to language vitality includes governmental language attitudes and policies, type and quality of documentation, introduction of new media and domains, and finally, education. For one thing, institutional support is a crucial need for the success of

maintaining a language. Assigning a national or official status to a language enhances its strong establishment and acceptance in the society. Minority languages tend to lack such statuses in countries that follow a monolingual language policy. However, even in such countries, governments can take various measures to preserve the cultural and linguistic diversity by promoting the widespread use of minority languages in daily life and facilitate the teaching and learning of these languages.

To achieve this end, without doubt, sufficient and proper documentation of these languages is needed, which can be achieved through an informed institutional support. This necessitates collaborative efforts of linguists and institutions. Documenting the languages in the form of grammars and lexicons and keeping records of literature in these languages will create a rich source for the later generations to acquire these languages. Another factor relevant to institutional support is extending the domains of communication for a language. Media can provide an opportunity to achieve this. In order to maintain a minority language, a running media in the relevant minority language is important. In this way, the language will not only be confined to family interactions, but it will be a source of getting knowledge from around the world and entertainment. Consequently, the media may improve the speakers' identification with their own language and increase the likelihood of maintaining the language.

Last but one of the most important factor that increases a language's vitality and that has to do with government support is education. A language is perhaps most efficiently maintained if it is taught and learned at schools. It ensures that new generations keep contact with their language. Governments have an important role in making this happen. If they hold a positive attitude towards the linguistic diversity in their community and see languages as essential elements of human cultural heritage, they are more willing to take measures to incorporate different local languages to school curricula. This certainly necessitates the availability of materials and teachers that facilitate language education. Proper documentation of a language is important especially for this reason. Teachers should also be trained to remedy the need for human resource in language education.

Examples of efforts to maintain minority languages from around the world

In the previous section, I explained the factors that are involved in language vitality based on the accounts of UNESCO (2011). These factors help determine the likelihood and level of language maintenance. Part of the sociolinguistic research worldwide concentrates on monitoring the outcomes of the language maintenance efforts among minority communities. In what follows, I discuss some examples of language maintenance efforts from around the world. They have correspondences with the factors that affect language vitality, which were discussed above.

Jamai, (2008) mentions a number of extra-linguistic determinants of language maintenance among Moroccan community in Britain, among which institutional support and availability of media are worth serious attention. In relation to institutional support for Moroccan community, he mentions two kinds of facilities offered by British government: first concerns advice and advocacy provided in Moroccan Arabic. Translation and interpretation services are available based on health, social benefits and, housing. Second, institutional facility is provided in the area of language education for students after school or at the weekends in and around London. Jamai

notes, however, that given the big size of the Moroccan community in Britain, the institutional support is limited. As for media, Jamai states that Moroccan community have access to various satellite TV channels and radios that broadcast in Moroccan Arabic and its indigenous varieties. Such channels offer cultural programs, too. Moreover, social media helps especially younger population to keep contact with their friends and relatives in Morocco. Regular use of media in the native language enhances the cultural bonding of British Moroccan community, strengthen their identity and in turn could have a positive effect on language maintenance.

Zhang (2008) reports on the language maintenance efforts of Chinese parents in the USA. She states that Chinese parents have strong awareness of their heritage language, Chinese. Therefore, they try to take conscious attempts to maintain it despite the social pressure for language shift. One measure they take to maintain Chinese is to adopt it as the home language at all times. Besides emphasizing the use of Chinese at home and for daily interactions, Chinese parents also teach Chinese to their children. They take the role of a teacher and instruct them about Chinese grammar and vocabulary. They use community libraries to attain material and resources for teaching. Finally, Chinese parents increase their children's contact with the heritage language, they send their children deliberately to Chinese-speaking social groups or circles and Chinese weekend schools. Children are advised and motivated to join ethnic activities that help them maintain their language.

As another example of family influence on language maintenance, Braun (2012) emphasizes the role of grandparents for maintaining native language in trilingual families in England and Germany. He found that in trilingual families, where the mother and father speak two different native languages (such as Japanese and English) and they live in a third country with a different community language (CL) (such as Germany and German as the community language), the factor of the grandparents in maintaining the native language is noticeable. If the grandparents do not reside in the same country as their children who are now parents (e.g. Germany), and thus, do not speak the CL (e.g. German), then they use only their native language towards their children. Accordingly, the parents use their native language towards their children in the presence of the grandparents, serving as a bridge between the grandchildren and grandparents.

The case of Tatar language can be drawn as a last example. Atık (2021) emphasizes the role of education and cultural activities in maintaining the Tatar language in Australia. Although the language does not hold a community language status, and thus, is not included in school curricula, Tatar community takes conscious attempts to transmit the language to younger generations. They produce language materials and send their children to Tatar ethnic schools at the weekends. Tatar community also maintains their language through cultural and social activities where Tatar people come together to organize festivals, celebrations, concerts, and literary activities. The community's bond is enhanced through these gatherings and the importance of their language in cultural transmission is well-recognized.

CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to review some key concepts in language maintenance, and by drawing on some examples of language maintenance efforts from around the world, suggest promising ways to maintain endangered languages in Turkey. Based on UNESCO (2017) findings, Turkey has 18

languages that have endangered status from 'vulnerable' to 'extinct'. Leaving aside the 4 or 5 languages that are now recognized as extinct in Turkey (*Suret, Cappadocian Greek, Mlahso, Ubykh,* and possibly *Hertevin*), there are still things that can be done to help maintain or revitalize the remaining endangered languages.

As long as both minority communities and the Turkish government take the factors involved in language vitality into consideration, there will be increased chance to maintain the endangered languages in Turkey. Institutional support for language maintenance may involve activities such as facilitating the teaching and learning of the languages, providing teaching materials in languages and educating teachers, documenting the language in collaboration with linguists and allowing public and private media broadcasts on minority languages. The community may also take internal precautions to maintain their language. They should have positive attitudes towards their language and take it as an important part of their identity. Grandparents should be more willing to be voluntary teachers and transmitters of their native language to next generations. Maintenance of an endangered language could also be possible by forming or joining community circles in which the native language could be practiced. Social activities that involve sharing among the members of the community are important in this regard. In consequence, languages are very important elements of international cultural heritage. Both individuals and governments have to be aware of this fact and adjust their attitudes and practices accordingly to help preserve this valuable heritage.

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