



## A Case of Unique Lexical Engineering: Deliberate Etymological Misrepresentation in Turkish Language Reform Halil İSKENDER\*

### Abstract

This study presents the concept of “deliberate etymological misrepresentation.” This distinct framework interprets a paradigm of lexical adaptation consciously developed during the early stages of the Turkish Language Reform in the emerging Republic. While conventional lexical processes like contamination and folk etymology stem from spontaneous interactions, “deliberate etymological misrepresentation” is proposed as a purposefully devised strategy. The Turkish Language Reform is more than just a linguistic shift. It embodies a purposeful initiative, deeply rooted in political and ideological motivations, aiming to align Turkey with Western norms. Through an in-depth examination of thirteen representative lexemes, their strategic usage, and perceptions of the driving socio-political motivations, this study highlights the strategy behind the lexical changes. This exploration reveals the profound link between language and politics. The “Turkish lexical engineering experiment,” as it may be termed, offers a broad perspective into this intricate interplay. It sheds light on the sophisticated interrelation by which cultures and nations mold, and are in turn molded by, the very words they employ.

**Keywords:** Turkish Language Reform, Lexical Borrowing, Lexical Engineering, Deliberate Etymological Misrepresentation

### Benzersiz Bir Sözlükçe Mühendisliği Örneği: Türk Dil Devriminde Kasıtlı Etimolojik Tahrif

### Özet

Bu çalışma “kasıtlı etimolojik tahrif” kavramını merkez itti haz etmektedir. Bu farklı kavramlaştırma, yeni yeni ayaklarının üzerinde duran Cumhuriyet’te, Türk Dil Devrimi’nin ilk aşamalarında maksatlı olarak husule getirilen özgün bir kelime uyarlama yöntemini somutlaştırmaktadır. Sirayet ve halk etimolojisi gibi bilindik sözlüksel süreçler kendiliğinden teşekkül eden temaslardan meydana gelirken, “kasıtlı etimolojik tahrif” bu çalışmada teklif edilen manası ile tasarlanmış bir stratejiyi imlemektedir. Türk Dil Devrimi sadece sözlükçe değişikliğinden ibaret olmayıp kökleri siyasi ve ideolojik itkilere dayanan ve Türkiye’yi Batı ölçütleriyle uyumlu hâle getirmeyi hedefleyen muntazam bir teşebbüstür. Bu makale, itinayla seçilen on üç kelimenin maksatlarına matuf kullanımlarının ve sosyopolitik gerekçelendirilmelerinin arkasındaki algının derinlemesine tahliliyle, sözlükçe değişikliklerinin ardındaki aklı tespit etmeye ve böylelikle dil ve siyaset arasındaki derin bağı ortaya koymaya çalışmaktadır. “Türkçe sözlükçe mühendisliği deneyi” diye adlandırılabilir söz konusu olgu, milletlerin ve kültürlerin haiz oldukları kelimelerle şekillendiği ve yine onlar tarafından şekillendirildiği mezkûr karmaşık etkileşime aleniyet kazandırmakta ve bizlere geniş bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türk Dil Devrimi, Kelime Ödünçleme, Sözlükçe Mühendisliği, Kasıtlı Etimolojik Tahrif

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## Introduction

The 20th-century transformation of the Turkish language weaves a captivating narrative within the annals of language planning and policy. Central to this seismic shift is the Turkish Language Reform of the 1930s, a bold initiative aimed at purging the Turkish vocabulary of Arabic and Persian borrowings, replacing them predominantly with Turkic-derived neologisms and sporadically with scientific terms from Western languages (Türk Dil Kurumu, 1941: pp. 9-12; Lewis, 1999, p. 66; Wright, 2004, pp. 52, 58). These linguistic modifications transcend mere scholastic endeavors; they resonate profoundly with the overarching socio-political goal of steering the country towards Western paradigms (Trudgill, 2000, p. 262; Yazan, 2015, p. 338).

While contamination in linguistics commonly denotes inadvertent linguistic fusion due to persistent interactions (Pijpops & Van de Velde, 2016, p. 547), the Turkish Language Reform represents an intentional, systematic linguistic influence. This paper introduces the concept “deliberate etymological misrepresentation” within this backdrop. This term captures the willful incorporation or crafting of words echoing Western languages, even when occasionally misaligned with the intrinsic morphology and vocabulary of Turkish.

This research anchors on the assertion that the Turkish Language Reform is an emblematic instance of “deliberate etymological misrepresentation.” The discussion pivots on the idea that the reform was a calculated effort to align Turkish with Western linguistic patterns, distinguishing it from the natural ebb and flow emblematic of conventional linguistic influences. To fortify this stance, this research will meticulously scrutinize distinct lexical innovations conceived during the reform, elucidating their socio-cultural and political nuances.

The analysis is systematically structured into five main sections. Section 1 explores the contextual backdrop of this reform, bifurcating its discussion into the origin and dynamics of the language transformation and the socio-political forces propelling the evolution of the Turkish Language Institute. Section 2 offers a keen focus on the craft of resemblance in loanwords, emphasizing a morphological analysis of thirteen selected lexemes. Section 3 embarks on a comparative journey of word origins across three seminal dictionaries, aiming to elucidate deliberate etymological representations. Section 4 provides a comprehensive examination of various lexicographical approaches, with specific insights into the push towards westernizing the Turkish identity, the inclusion of Mongolian words during the language reform, and the quest for linguistic purity. The paper culminates in the conclusion section where findings are synthesized and broader implications drawn.

### 1. Contextualizing the Language Reform

Language reforms, by their very nature, represent critical socio-political events that bring about transformative changes in a society’s linguistic fabric. These

reforms often arise from various catalysts, including political transitions, cultural renaissances, or responses to rapid societal evolution (Cooper, 1989, p. 154). The Turkish Language Reform, in particular, owes its inception and fruition to the overarching socio-political imperatives of the emergent Republic of Turkey. This reform was not solely a linguistic rejuvenation; it symbolized a decisive severance from Ottoman antecedents (Parla, 2008, p. 28).

### **1.1 The Genesis and Dynamics of the Turkish Language Reform**

Embedded in the ethos of nation-building, the fledgling Republic of Turkey embarked on a momentous linguistic recalibration. The first phase entailed an orthographic transition, supplanting the entrenched Arabic script with a Latin alphabet, tailored to reflect the synchronic phonological properties of standard Turkish. The subsequent stage encompassed the ambitious aspiration of substituting Arabic and Persian loanwords with lexemes either anchored in indigenous Turkish roots or sourced from pre-Islamic or at least pre-Ottoman Turkish chronicles. Such a comprehensive lexical initiative was indispensable to the Republic's nationhood blueprint, exerting a transformative influence on the corpus topography (Tachau, 1964, pp. 194-196, Landau, 1993, p. 274).

The Turkish Language Reform succeeded in dramatically and catastrophically reducing the prominence of Persian and Arabic loanwords in the Turkish lexicon (Cüceloğlu & Slobin, 1980, p. 299; Lewis, 1999, p. 4). Envisioned as a pivotal lever of Westernization and modernization, this forceful linguistic policy became an integral component of the burgeoning Republic's strategic architecture. During the first decade of the reform, the chief intention of this ambitious endeavor to resolutely sever the cultural strands tethering the nation to its Ottoman ancestry was explicitly communicated. However, the manifestation of this intent transitioned to a subtler articulation in the ensuing years (Yazan, 2015, p. 335). For the founder elites, "westernization was not an imitation, but rather an identification with the forgotten Turkish Golden Age." (Aytürk, 2004, p. 19). The resulting linguistic chasm between Ottoman Turkish and Republican Turkish, far from being perceived as a predicament, was hailed by the reformers as a triumphant accomplishment. Yücel, a reform advocate, remarked on the significant linguistic divergence between the old Ottoman and the new Turkish, likening it to the difference between French and Italian (Yücel, 1982, p. 22).

### **1.2 Socio-Political Forces and the Transformation of the Turkish Language Institute**

The genesis of the Turkish Language Reform is intricately linked to the broader socio-political agenda of the Republic. The new regime's elites sought a definitive severance from the Ottoman past and a conscious alignment with Western ideals. This era heralded profound transformations that spanned changes in the legal framework and institutional structures, alongside cultural shifts. These shifts

included the adoption of the Gregorian calendar, European-style clothing, classical music, and the introduction of modernized curricula in educational institutions (Landau, 1993, p. 271; Zürcher, 2004, p. 194).

In this context, language was not just a medium of communication, but also a potent marker of national identity. The reform was conceptualized to furnish Turkish with the vocabulary needed to articulate modern scientific, philosophical, and technical concepts, a capability largely attributed to Western languages (Aytürk, 2005, pp. 17-18).

The deliberate selection of Western scientific terms in areas such as medicine, coupled with the creation of new words that mirrored Western counterparts, accomplished two main objectives. It expanded the Turkish lexicon to encapsulate modernity and simultaneously symbolized the Republic's alignment with the West and detachment from the East. To make the lexical shift more systematic, the Turkish Language Institute (Türk Dili Tetkik Cemiyeti and then Türk Dil Kurumu) was founded in 1932, serving as the primary institute to shape the new Republican Turkish.

During its early years, the Institute undertook three significant dictionary projects: the *Tanıklarıyla Tarama Sözlüğü* (1943-1957), which compiled forgotten words from literary texts; the *Derleme Sözlüğü* (1932-1934), which introduced local words from Anatolian dialects into the standard language; and the *Türkçe Sözlük* (1945), a contemporary common dictionary where the language policy can be observed through the preferences for added and deleted entries. While *Tanıklarıyla Tarama Sözlüğü* (TTS) included some words read incorrectly, *Derleme Sözlüğü* (DS) featured words from questionable sources, and *Türkçe Sözlük* (TS) had methodological issues, they were nevertheless significant contributions to their era (Tietze & Tekin, 1989, pp 285-286., Ata, 2000, p. 68).

Importantly, the Turkish Language Institute (TLI) underwent significant transformation in 1983. Without any judicial decision, it was dissolved by the Western-friendly yet fervently anti-communist military coup government, and was restructured as a government department. It became part of the Atatürk Culture, Language, and History High Institute under the auspices of the Prime Ministry (Dil Derneği, n.d.-a). This restructuring, largely viewed as a disregard for Atatürk's legacy, aimed to dismantle the leftist "caste system" within the institute. Post-1983, the newly reformed TLI adopted a more academically oriented stance and became less politically active (Brendemoen, 2021, p. 233).

Before this overhaul, the TLI comprised scholars from various academic disciplines, such as philosophy, sociology, and communication, as well as lawyers and journalists outside of academia. Following the reform, however, the institute's composition shifted dramatically to exclusively include renowned Turkologists. Intriguingly, none of these Turkologists have emerged over the past four decades

as staunch proponents of the Turkish Language Reform. Even some reform-minded Turkologists confess that the pre-1983 TLI had transformed into a “public benefit society” aiming at the purification and development of the language, rather than a scientific institute designed to describe and analyze the synchronic and diachronic tenets of Turkish (Tekin, 1997, p. 188). After it became clear that the old TLI would not return, its former members founded a parallel institution, the Language Association (LA), in 1987, aiming to preserve the aims of the old TLI. The LA continues to publish dictionaries and define orthographic standards, drawing inspiration from the old TLI’s ethos (Dil Derneği, n.d.-a).

## 2. Etymological and Morphological Analysis: Crafting Resemblance in Loanwords

In this chapter, we delve into the etymology and morphology of thirteen prevalent words in modern standard Turkish<sup>1</sup>. Whilst there is often disagreement about their origins in Turkish dictionaries, we will focus on insights from three primary sources. Nine of these words – *belleten*, *evrensel*, *genel*, *imge*, *komutan*, *okul*, *onur*, *simge*, and *terim*– are borrowed or derived from French<sup>2</sup>. The remaining four –*kurultay*, *sayın*, *şölen*, and *yasa*– are borrowed or derived from Mongolian (Schönig, 2000). Below you can find short analyses of the thirteen words:

### (i) *belleten* “bulletin”

The word *belleten* is absent in both TTS and DS. *Belle*– is a frequently used verb in Turkish, denoting the act of memorizing or learning by heart. The suffix –*t* imparts a causative meaning, implying the act of making someone memorize. –(y)*An*, while originally a participle suffix, can also morph verbs into nouns, leading to a literal interpretation as “that which causes someone to memorize or learn by heart”. However, the Turkish Language Institute (TLI) introduces “bulletin” as its lexical equivalent<sup>3</sup>. Remarkably, *belleten* is notable for its transparent root, its structured morphological construct, and its semantic precision.

<sup>1</sup> The inclusion of these thirteen lexemes –suggested as alternatives to Turkish words of Eastern (mostly Arabic) origin “mecmua”, “âlemşümül”, “umumi”, “hayal”, “serdar”, “mektep”, “şeref”, “remiz”, “istilâh”, “şürâ”, “muhterem”, “ziyafet”, and “kanun”, respectively– is preferred due to their widespread use. In contrast, forms such as *diyelek*, suggested instead of “lehçe” which means “dialect” and is derived from *de*– “to say”, and *örgen*, suggested instead of “uzuv” meaning “organ” and derived from *ör*– “to weave”, are either sporadically utilized or remain largely dormant in contemporary usage. Despite this, certain forms such as *örgen* are still listed in both the TLI and LA dictionaries, with annotations predominantly referencing the more commonly used lexemes. Notably, specific invented affixes like –*mAn* and –(A)*l*, absent in Turkish historical linguistic records, seem to have been crafted drawing inspiration from their Western counterparts (Timurtaş, 1979, p. 32). Both these matters fall outside the purview of this study due to constraints in length and scope.

<sup>2</sup> The etymology of certain words, while not inherently French, indicates their transmission into Turkish via French, with their original linguistic origins being overlooked (ATILF, n.d.).

<sup>3</sup> Lewis references *Belleten*, the official journal of the History Institute, which suggests that the French form *bulletin* derived from the Turkish word *belleten*. Yet, Lewis (1984, p. 207) conveys his skepticism toward this proposition. Corroborating Lewis’s bemused skepticism, Aksan, a fervent reformist, concedes the possibility of French influences on the form but underscores the principal

(ii) *evrensel* “universal”

The word *evrensel* is not listed in both TTS and DS. The probable root is *evir-*, another standard verb in Turkish signifying “to turn over and over”. In TTS, *evre* relates to “surroundings”, whereas *evren* corresponds to “dragon” (p. 1574). DS, on the other hand, does not recognize *evre*, but attributes an additional meaning to *evren* which is “time” (p. 1813). The contemporary semantic interpretation and the formation of *evren* could very well be a result of TLI’s input. Constructing *evren* with the *-(y)An* suffix is conceivable. This is because the universe can be perceived as a vast expanse where everything is in constant motion. However, the latter portion of the word remains an enigma. The purported suffix *-sAl* is not recognized in Turkish (Timurtaş, 1979, p. 64). This might be a creative endeavor by the TLI, possibly to make *evren* phonetically resonate with “universal”.

(iii) *genel* “general”

*Genel* is absent from both TTS and DS. The root is likely *gen*, an archaic noun. TTS defines it as “broad” and provides examples from the 15th and 16th centuries (pp. 1630-1631). DS concurs with this definition (p. 1990). The suffix, however, is problematic; the *-(A)l* suffix, which morphs nouns or verbs into other nouns, does not exist in Turkish (Timurtaş, 1979, p. 64). This appears to be another TLI creation.

(iv) *imge* “image”

*İmge* is not listed in either TTS or DS. The likely root is *im*. TTS equates it with the notions of “mark” and “sign” (p. 2066), whereas DS makes no mention of it. Notably, prior to the reform, the suffix *-g(A)* was a rarely used morpheme, evident in only two words, with its exact function remaining ambiguous (Timurtaş, 1979, p. 35). In terms of morphological structure, the form is comprehensible; however, its semantic clarity remains somewhat elusive.

(v) *komutan* “commander”

*Komutan* is not found in either TTS or DS. The likely root is *komut-*, an outdated verb<sup>4</sup>. DS defines it as “to make something move” (p. 2914), while there is no entry for it in TS. The suffix appears to be *-(y)An*. Therefore, *komutan* means “the person (or thing) that compels someone (or something) to move.” The word’s meaning is consistent.

(vi) *okul* “school”

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aim of Turkifying the French word. Thus, Aksan (1976, p.25) contends that *belleten* is not merely an adaptation of its French counterpart but stands as a distinct lexical creation.

<sup>4</sup> Intriguingly, this archaic word is absent in contemporary dictionaries. Yet its altered form *komuta et-*, likely influenced by French loanword *kumanda et-* “to command”, is prevalent and acknowledged in both daily usage and dictionaries despite not adhering to any established rules.

Neither TTS nor DS lists *okul*<sup>5</sup>. *Oku-* is a prevalent verb in Turkish, which signifies reading, reciting, or studying, making it a potential root. However, there is no *-(A)l* suffix in Turkish that forms nouns from verbs, as indicated by Timurtaş (1979, p. 64).

(vii) *onur* “honour”

*Onur* is present in DS (p. 3284) but does not appear in TTS, with the meaning given as “vanity”. This suggests it might have been borrowed from French early on and is found in some Anatolian dialects. Alternatively, the only conceivable root is *on-*, a verb found in both TTS (p. 2994) and DS (p. 3284) that means to recover, improve, or feel happy. The *-(I)r* suffix, primarily aorist, can also form nouns from verbs. Morphologically, this appears appropriate, but there is a distinct difference in meaning between the root and the word itself.

(viii) *simge* “symbol”

*Simge* does not appear in both TTS and DS. The potential root is *sim*, which can be found in DS (p. 3636) but is missing from TTS. This word translates as “mimic” or “sign”. The suffix, as in *imge*, is functionally ambiguous *-g(A)*. Both morphological and semantic structures seem kind of aligned.

(ix) *terim* “term”

Neither TTS nor DS lists *terim*. The sole etymological antecedent appears to be the root *ter-*, an archaic variant of the verb *der-* “to gather”. The affix *-(I)m*, commonly observed in Turkic morphology, would be the logical morphemic addition to this root. Intriguingly, neologisms such as *dergi* “journal”, have been derived from this very verb. Yet, the usage of its *ter-* variant seems devoid of etymological rationale, except for a probable attempt to align it with the French *terme*. While the morphological structure of *terim* remains within the bounds of lexical justification, its semantic underpinnings engender a degree of perplexity. Specifically, the conceptual leap from a root denoting “to gather” to a derivative

<sup>5</sup> The initial rendition of *okul* appeared as *okula* or *okulağ* in 1934 (Balyemez, 2017, p. 122). Given that Turkish does not possess a *-lA* suffix that morphologically converts verbs into nouns, the structural issue persisted. Notably, there were assertions that this particular form was in use in specific regions of Turkey. Renowned grammarian Banguoğlu vehemently refuted this claim, expressing his indignation: “Somebody said that in Urfa, people call a school *okula*. Take note, here the thrust of the reform movement is especially against Arabic. Arabic origin words should be discarded, no matter what replaces them. This is because a generation has grown weary of Arabic’s dominance; they find French perfectly acceptable in its stead. *Schola* is Latin for sure. Some even argue that it is inherently Turkic. Sir, I was an associate professor at the Faculty of Languages at that time. I declared that if this form, *okula*, indeed means “school” in Urfa, I would hang myself on the gate of the faculty.” (Banguoğlu, 1987, p. 303). This discourse highlights a methodological concern for the *Derleme Sözlüğü*. The veracity of the lexicon hinges on the credibility of the individuals documenting the words. Likely stemming from such apprehensions, the *okula* variant was excluded from the *Derleme Sözlüğü*. For an in-depth exploration of *okul*’s integration into the Turkish lexicon, Balyemez’s (2017) dedicated article on the topic is recommended.

signifying “term” appears semantically imprecise, thereby casting doubt on the full lexical coherence of *terim*.

(x) *kurultay* “assembly”

*Kurultay* is listed in TTS (p. 2747) but does not appear in DS. The sole plausible root is *kur-* (to establish), and *kurul-* is its passive form. This seems reasonable semantically. However, the *-tay* suffix does not exist in Turkish<sup>6</sup>.

(xi) *sayın* “honorable, dear”

In both TTS and DS, the lexeme *sayın* is conspicuously absent. The etymological root for *sayın* could plausibly be traced to *say-* “to respect”. This is further compounded by the affix *-(I)n*. Morphologically and semantically, such an interpretation presents a coherent alignment.

(xii) *şölen* “feast”

*Şölen* is listed in TTS with two forms *şölen* and *şilen* and is defined as “feast” (p. 3682) but does not appear in DS. The only conceivable breakdown is the root *\*şöl-* or *\*şil-* with the suffix *-(y)An*. However, the assumed forms *\*şöl-* and *\*şil-* do not exist in Turkish.

(xiii) *yasa* “law”

*Yasa* is present in TTS (p. 4361) but does not appear in DS. The only potential explanation derives from *yasa-*, a verb found in TTS (p. 4365). Morphologically, this is possible only if the root verb has Turkic origins. However, *yasa-* itself is an early loanword from Mongolian (Schönig, 2000, p. 21).

Following the examination of these thirteen words, we have encapsulated the main findings in the subsequent table. This summary aims to offer a concise visual representation, allowing for easier comparison and understanding of each lexeme’s origins and coherences. The words are juxtaposed with their probable original forms, and their morphological and semantic coherences are assessed succinctly. As we delve into the table, it becomes evident how the linguistic journey of each word has been shaped by various factors, be it indigenous evolutions or external influences.

Table 1: Morphological and semantic analysis of the thirteen lexemes

Turkish version	Original form	Morphological Coherence	Semantic Coherence
<i>belleten</i>	<i>bulletin</i>	coherent	coherent
<i>evrensel</i>	<i>universel</i>	partially coherent	partially coherent
<i>genel</i>	<i>general</i>	partially coherent	coherent
<i>imge</i>	<i>image</i>	coherent	partially coherent

<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that through the employment of this hypothetical Turkic suffix *-tay*, several widely-used words such as *çalıştay* “workshop” and *yargıtay* “supreme court” have been formulated.



<i>komutan</i>	<i>commandant</i>	coherent	coherent
<i>okul</i>	<i>école</i>	partially coherent	coherent
<i>onur</i>	<i>honneur</i>	coherent	incoherent
<i>simge</i>	<i>signe, symbole</i>	coherent	coherent
<i>terim</i>	<i>terme</i>	coherent	partially coherent
<i>kurultay</i>	<i>kuraldai</i>	incoherent	partially coherent
<i>sayın</i>	<i>sayın</i>	coherent	coherent
<i>şölen</i>	<i>şölön</i>	incoherent	not applicable
<i>yasa</i>	<i>yasag</i>	incoherent	coherent

The table offers a snapshot of the morphological and semantic journey of the thirteen Turkish words, juxtaposing them with their original counterparts. Each word's morphological coherence illustrates the structural alignment (or misalignment) with Turkish linguistic patterns<sup>7</sup>. The semantic coherence, on the other hand, evaluates the alignment of meanings between the Turkish adaptation and its original form.

For instance, the word *belleten* exhibits both morphological and semantic coherence, suggesting that its adoption into Turkish was seamless, retaining its original structure and meaning. On the flip side, words like *kurultay* and *şölen* display incoherencies, indicating challenges in their linguistic adaptation or the influence of external factors.

From a morphological standpoint, the words *belleten*, *imge*, *komutan*, *onur*, *simge*, *terim*, and *sayın* manifest as structurally plausible within Turkish linguistic norms. Among this subset, the words *belleten*, *komutan*, *simge*, and *sayın* further stand out for their semantic precision and coherence, aligning seamlessly with their intended meanings. Conversely, *evrensel*, *genel*, and *okul* display partial morphological coherence. A critical area of divergence is their historically unattested suffixes. However, when assessed synchronically, these invented suffixes can be integrated as genuine components of the Turkish language. As such, they also meet the established criteria for coherence.

<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the practice of using rhyming derivations is evident, a tactic presumably adopted to encourage quicker integration by speakers. For instance, *boyut* and *gerçekten* were introduced as alternatives to the Arabic loanwords *buut* and *hakikaten*, which translate to “dimension” and “really”, respectively. A particularly intriguing case is *sapta-*, which stems from the Arabic loanword *tespit et-* “to determine”; here, the three root letters from the original word were utilized to shape its new Turkish counterpart (Kubbealtı Vakfı, 2010, p. 1061). It is crucial to distinguish this approach from the one delineated in this paper. In the present context, the lexemes under consideration are already inherent within the language; there is no intent to draw them from an external linguistic source. Instead, the ambition is to supersede them with fresh constructs. Delving into such instances lies outside the scope of the current study.

Given these observations, we can categorize our findings into three distinct groups:

(1) (i) Morphologically and semantically coherent: *belleten, komutan, simge, sayın*.

(ii) Derivations exhibiting a mix of coherence and incoherence: *evrensel, genel, okul, imge, terim*.

(iii) Derivations that are either morphologically or semantically incoherent: *onur, kurultay, şölen, yasa*.

### 3. Comparative Analysis of Word Origins Across Three Dictionaries

To gain insight into the prevailing interpretations of the selected forms, we undertook an examination of their etymological representations across three notable dictionaries. The accessibility of online versions of these lexicons offered the advantage of a holistic and contemporaneous evaluation of word origins.

The first dictionary chosen for this analysis is the esteemed *Türkçe Sözlük* (TS–Turkish Dictionary) by the Turkish Language Institute (TLI). Given its quasi-official stature and authoritative presence in the linguistic domain, its inclusion was imperative (Türk Dil Kurumu, n.d.).

The second dictionary in our study is also titled *Türkçe Sözlük* (TS–Turkish Dictionary). However, this version is a product of the Language Association (LA) and was founded by former TLI affiliates active before 1983. This particular dictionary is invaluable to our study because it embodies the lexical perspective prevalent prior to 1983, offering insights into a phase more detached from the Turkish language reform. In essence, it represents the contemporary version of TLI’s dictionaries before 1983 (Dil Derneği, n.d.-b).

Lastly, our exploration encompassed the *Kubbealtı Lugatı* (KL–Kubbealtı Dictionary) propagated by Kubbealtı Vakfı (Kubbealtı Society). This is one of the most comprehensive and coherent dictionaries outside the tradition of TLI. This illustrious dictionary emerges as a beacon, presenting an alternative, discerning, and arguably more conservative viewpoint on the ideological underpinnings of the Turkish language reform (Kubbealtı Vakfı, n.d.).

The journey of lexical evolution often mirrors a melding of diverse cultural and historical influences. In the context of the Turkish lexicon, this interplay becomes especially pronounced when examining words that have counterparts in other languages. As we embark on this comparative etymological study, it is crucial to consider not only the lexical similarities but also the nuanced interpretations each dictionary presents. Whether a lexeme is labeled as “Turkic origin”, “French-inspired”, or “Mongolian origin” largely depends on the editorial decisions and historical viewpoints of the institutions that compiled the dictionaries. The table

below encapsulates these varied interpretations from our selected dictionaries, underscoring the complex nature of Turkish word origins.

Table 2: Origin of the thirteen lexemes according to the three dictionaries

Turkish version	Original form	Origin in post-1983 TLI TS	Origin in LA TS (and in pre-1983 TLI TS)	Origin in KL
<i>belleten</i>	<i>bulletin</i>	Turkic origin	Turkic origin	French-inspired
<i>evrensel</i>	<i>universel</i>	Turkic origin	Turkic origin	French-inspired
<i>genel</i>	<i>général</i>	Turkic origin	Turkic origin	French-inspired
<i>imge</i>	<i>image</i>	Turkic origin	Turkic origin	French-inspired
<i>komutan</i>	<i>commandant</i>	Turkic origin	Turkic origin	French-inspired
<i>okul</i>	<i>école</i>	Turkic origin	Turkic origin	French-inspired
<i>onur</i>	<i>honneur</i>	French origin	Turkic origin	French origin
<i>simge</i>	<i>signe, symbole</i>	Turkic origin	Turkic origin	French-inspired
<i>terim</i>	<i>terme</i>	Turkic origin	Turkic origin	French origin
<i>kurultay</i>	<i>kuraldai</i>	Mongolian origin	Turkic origin	Mongolian origin
<i>sayın</i>	<i>sayın</i>	Turkic origin	Turkic origin	Turkic origin
<i>şölen</i>	<i>şölön</i>	Mongolian origin	Turkic origin	Mongolian origin
<i>yasa</i>	<i>yasag</i>	Turkic origin	Turkic origin	Mongolian origin

The table provided offers a concise overview of the varied etymological interpretations related to selected Turkish words, as presented by three authoritative dictionaries. Central to this study is the palpable tension between historical authenticity and external influences, notably from the French and Mongolian lexicons. Words such as *belleten* and *onur* exemplify this tension. Some dictionaries attribute their origins to the Turkic language family, while others perceive them as inspired or influenced by French forms or simply as French loanwords<sup>8</sup>. This divergence is even more accentuated in lexemes like *kurultay* and *şölen*, where Mongolian heritage is juxtaposed with Turkic influence. The table stands as a

<sup>8</sup> It is imperative to underscore the salient point that terminologies such as “inspired” are traditionally avoided in erudite discourses focused on the subject of etymological origins. Consequently, the lexical items *belleten* and *onur* must be definitively ascribed to either the Turkish or French linguistic corpus. The act of situating these lexemes within the Turkish lexicon, while not tantamount to an outright fabrication, introduces an element of epistemological ambiguity or misrepresentation. This arises from the selective omission of comprehensive information relating to etymological genealogy. The crux of the issue under examination extends beyond the facile confines of mere etymological categorization. Instead, it delves into a more nuanced modality of misrepresentation, manifesting as a deficiency in transparently conveying the historical underpinnings of the lexical items to the scholarly audience. This paucity of information appears to be guided, if not explicitly orchestrated, by latent political imperatives. Hence, the absence of a fully articulated etymological exposition can be justifiably characterized as a manifestation of politically-driven distortions or obfuscations. Although potential criticisms concerning the invention of the “inspired” lexemes category may be both valid and substantiated, they do not ameliorate the salient issue of politically-motivated misrepresentation in etymological attribution.

testament to the dynamic and at times debated nature of word origins, illuminating the complex interplay of linguistic, historical, and ideological factors that shape the Turkish lexicon.

#### 4. Examination of Diverse Lexicographical Approaches

The Turkish Language Reform stands out as a distinctive example of deliberate etymological misrepresentation. Contrary to prevalent literature which tends to deemphasize this phenomenon or treat it as marginal, this study aims to highlight its significant implications. For instance, Perry (1985, p. 301) points to the creation of *okul* as a phonetic calque based on the French *école*. Perry likens this to the English adaptation of “compound” (referring to an enclosure) from the Malay word “kampong,” seeing both as typical lexical evolutions. However, in this perspective, Perry overlooks an essential differentiation: the gap between the organic, spontaneous folk etymologies found in many languages, and the deliberate, state-driven misrepresentations unique to the Turkish reform. The Turkish language does indeed have its share of folk etymologies, which are organic and unintentional, as demonstrated by:

(2) *Dimdirek eve gittiler.* ‘They went directly home’

*Serzendiği zamanlar var.* ‘There are times when he reproaches’ (taken from Yıldız, 2013, p. 285)

The first word, *dimdirek*, looks like a reduplicated form of the Turkish word *direk*, which means “pole”<sup>9</sup>. However, it acquired an additional meaning under the influence of the French loanword “direct”. The Turkish *direk* integrated with the French word and absorbed its semantic implications<sup>10</sup>. The second word, *serzen-* represents a unique lexical construct in which speakers adapted the Persian loanword *serzeniş* to fit Turkish morphological patterns. This adaptation suggests a subordinating *-(y)Iş* suffix, resulting in an assumed root *serzen-* rather than its standard form *serzenişte bulun-* as listed in dictionaries.

While language purists might frown upon forms like *dimdirek* and *serzen-* and despite their omission from dictionaries, their prevalence cannot be denied. Remarkably, such forms have permeated even into the realm of scholarly discourse,

<sup>9</sup> In the lexicon, if *direk* exclusively means “pole” as asserted by dictionaries, the existence of *dimdirek* would be ungrammatical, not necessarily due to prescriptive dictates but rather the inherent semantic parameters of Turkish. For an in-depth examination of the semantics of partially reduplicated forms in Turkish, refer to Turgay & İskender (2021).

<sup>10</sup> Within the field of Turkish dialectology, the elision of the terminal /t/ in consonant clusters is far from an isolated phenomenon, as corroborated by Tietze's documentation of the lexical shift from *abdest* to *abdes* “wudu” (Tietze, 2002, p. 625). Nonetheless, the lexical status of *direk* diverges markedly from that of *abdes*. While *direk* “pole” bears semantic resemblance to the French loanword *direct* “direct”, it also displays features indicative of its full integration into the lexicon of native Turkish speakers. This is evidenced by the community's perception of *direk*, not as a simplified variant of a French loanword, but as a semantically extended version of the native Turkish word for “pole”.

making appearances in peer-reviewed articles, as demonstrated above with the example from Yıldız (2013). Forms like *dimdirek* and *serzen-* emerge from natural linguistic processes and stand as quintessential manifestations of folk etymology, often encompassing processes of naturalization.

Such spontaneous linguistic contaminations contrast sharply with the deliberate lexicon development in the reform, which was steered by political and ideological imperatives<sup>11</sup>. It is particularly noteworthy that the reform favored borrowings from languages like French (an Indo-European language) and Mongolian (traditionally categorized as Altaic), especially during an era characterized by a conscious distancing from Arabic and Persian influences. As we will explore in the ensuing subsections, this decision was far from arbitrary.

#### **4.1 Reforming identity from *hanım* to *bayan*: The push to westernize the Turkish**

The Turkish Language Reform cannot be isolated from the wider socio-political aspirations of the period. After the loss of World War 1, Turkey, post the Ottoman era, was at a crossroads, aiming to carve a niche for itself on the global stage (Zürcher, 2004, p. 173). The ambition to Westernize and modernize was not restricted to infrastructure or governance; it permeated the realm of language as well. By embedding Western linguistic elements into Turkish, the reformers hoped to foster a sense of kinship with Western civilizations, signaling Turkey's readiness to embrace modernity while asserting its distinct identity.

In the initial phases of the language reform, a predominant thesis emerged positing that Turkish aligned more closely with the Indo-European language family, or more specifically, with European languages (Aytürk, 2005, pp. 7-8). Consequently, words borrowed from non-European languages, such as Arabic (a Semitic language) and Persian (which, while technically Indo-European, bore a stronger affinity to its Indo roots than its European ones), were advocated to be supplanted by lexemes from purportedly sister languages like French and English. The academic curriculum was also reshaped, promoting the study of European languages in lieu of Arabic and Persian. This shift underscored a broader objective: reconceptualizing and restructuring Turkish as fundamentally European in its linguistic essence (Lewis, 1999, pp. 94-95). In pursuit of this goal, there was a push to phase out not just Arabic and Persian loanwords, but also distinctly Turkic words, including *hanım* and *bey*. Proposals emerged to replace these native words with etymologically ambiguous forms like *bay* and *bayan*, counterparts to the English titles "Mr", "Mrs", "Miss", and "Ms". One significant motivation behind this linguistic shift was to change the placement of traditional titles to precede names,

<sup>11</sup> In an intriguing turn, İmer (1976, p. 92) posits that there were attempts to derail the language reform for political motivations in the 1950s. However, she overlooks that the very inception of the language reform was underpinned by political imperatives.

as is customary in Western languages, rather than follow names, as is typical in Turkish syntax (Lewis, 1999, p. 113).

Derivational morphology, a linguistic process that involves the addition of affixes to base words to create new words or adjust word classes, was extensively utilized (Bybee, 2015, p. 99). As discussed in Section 2, there was a conscious effort to emulate Western linguistic attributes. This was evident not only in the phonetic adaptation of words but also in their morphological constructions. Such emulation aimed for phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic alignment with Western languages, resonating with Turkey's overarching aspiration for Westernization.

#### **4.2 Altaic Kinship: How Mongolian Words Found Their Place in Turkish Language Reform**

Lexemes of Mongolian origin, such as *kurultay* and *sayın*, were characterized and described as Turkic, drawing upon Turkish morphological frameworks (Clauson, 1955, p. 129). For the reformists, this classification was inconsequential, largely due to their commitment to the Altaic theory, which postulates a genealogical kinship with Mongolian. They inherently believed Mongolian to be a part of the Altaic corpus. As a result, borrowings from languages, like Mongolian and Manchu, were met with little opposition. This stance contrasts sharply with the treatment of loanwords of Sami origin, which were regarded as alien intrusions necessitating removal from the language. Given the Altaic theory's enduring prominence both pre- and post-reform<sup>12</sup>, there was scant motivation for etymological obfuscation for such lexemes. Noteworthy, the LA TS still ascribes a Turkic origin to these Mongolian-derived words. Similarly, both the TLI TS and KL designate *sayın* as Turkic, while acknowledging *kurultay* as a borrowing. This perspective likely does not stem from political motivations, as we observe with French adaptations. Instead, it might arise from a lack or oversight in rigorous scholarly investigation. Another possibility is a prevailing sentiment that languages like Mongolian, perceived as closely related or kindred, did not require in-depth scrutiny. A potential third explanation will be explored in the subsequent subsection.

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<sup>12</sup> Following the inclusion of Mongolian and Manchu-Tungus languages, certain renditions of the Altaic theory broadened its scope to incorporate Korean and Japanese. To my current understanding, within the discipline of Turkology in Turkey, no scholar has categorically challenged the foundations of the Altaic language theory. Interestingly, even Tekin, who is distinguished for his critiques of Pan-Turkism, entertains the notion of a linguistic relationship between Japanese and Turkish (Tekin, 1993). This near-consensual acknowledgment within Turkish academia may be interpreted as reflecting a cultural yearning, possibly rooted in Turkey's linguistic seclusion during its reform period. A nuanced inquiry into this sentiment warrants its own dedicated study. On the other hand, while the Altaic theory has found a firm foothold in Turkish academic discourse, it has faced rigorous criticisms from a spectrum of scholars over various periods. For a comprehensive historical examination and critique of the theory, Vovin's (2005) extensive article stands as a commendable reference.

### 4.3 Proportions of Purity: The Quest for a “Self-Sufficient” Turkish Language

The former TLI and the LA both extolled the virtues of Turkic-origin words, viewing them not just as a lexicographical preference but as an ideology. This ideology intimated that linguistic purity was tantamount to both progressive and nationalistic vigor<sup>13</sup>. Simplistically yet poignantly put, a language steeped in its indigenous lexicon symbolized a resilient national identity. This perspective, championed by a cohort of linguists and policymakers, molded the lexicon and permeated language instruction and scholarly discourses.

For İmer (1976, p. 95), the Turkish language’s remarkable transformation into a cultural medium within a span of less than fifty years can be attributed to its successful retention of a significant proportion of Turkic-origin words. To many reformists, including Aksan (1977, p. 345), Demircan (2000, p. 27), and İmer (1998, pp. 87-89), a language inundated with foreign words symbolizes decay and vulnerability. These scholars frequently reference varying proportions of foreign to native words across different decades, drawing data from newspapers, textbooks, and other media sources.

According to İmer (1998, p. 159), the hallmark of language modernization is its purification. In this light, the Turkish language reform, by doubling the frequency of Turkic-origin words in daily publications, exemplifies such progressive transformation. However, while İmer (1998, pp. 103-104) lauds the heightened “purification” of Turkish during the 20th century, she simultaneously voices concerns regarding the slower expansion of Turkish dictionaries relative to their English counterparts. Yet, she overlooks the fact that English language expansion does not primarily pursue purification. Balancing purification with linguistic enrichment presents its challenges for sure.

In addressing this dilemma, Yücel presents a divergent viewpoint. He posits that lexical abundance does not necessarily equate to linguistic potency. For him, a robust and functional language is paramount. Echoing Levi-Strauss’s contention that there is no such thing as a “primitive culture,” Yücel argues that languages cannot be categorically labeled as lexically rich or poor, and even if such distinctions exist, they hold little significance. The primary goal for any language should be self-sufficiency (Yücel, 1982, pp. 85-87). This perspective implies that Turkish dictionaries need not be overloaded with entries, especially if it compromises the prominence of Turkic origin words.

This interpretation potentially elucidates the challenges present in the TLI and LA dictionaries. In a similar vein, words with non-Turkic etymological

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<sup>13</sup> For a compelling yet disconcerting examination of lexical preferences employed in the political categorization of Turkish individuals, one might refer to Cüceloğlu & Slobin (1980). Fortunately, while this issue persists in contemporary times, its magnitude is not as severe as in the past.

backgrounds might be integrated into the Turkish lexicon, provided their morphological configurations align with Turkish structures, as outlined in Section 2. While contemporary TLI approaches have evolved away from such rigorous stances, a palpable nationalistic undercurrent persists. The assimilation of foreign loanwords into Turkish is often construed as a lexical fragility<sup>14</sup>. Arabic and Persian loanwords are preferably excluded from these dictionaries. When they are included, they often receive concise definitions<sup>15</sup>. Additionally, there is a notable effort to attribute Turkic origins to words borrowed from French and Mongolian when plausible as shown in this study. All these efforts aim to elevate the proportion of Turkic-origin words.

### 5. Conclusion

In our quest to understand the essence of language, we are confronted with the stark realization that it is not merely a vessel for human thought. Rather, it is a profound tapestry of cultural ethos, historical legacies, and at times, the very marrow of political aspirations. No better is this seen than in the crucible of the Turkish Language Reform, a kaleidoscope of lexical interplays and ideological skirmishes.

Initiated as a transformative attempt to carve out a distinct linguistic identity, the Reform was not merely a simple shift in vocabulary. At its core, it represented a new regime's quest for modernization, motivated both by the allure of a contemporary future and the strategic desire to sever ties from its Ottoman ancestry. The ripples of this endeavor, which engaged deeply with the concept of lexical engineering, inevitably presented a series of challenges and ramifications.

In terms of broader implications, the concept of "deliberate etymological misrepresentation" illuminates the intentional and strategic dimensions of corpus planning and policy that are often overlooked in traditional linguistic analyses. It underscores the potential for linguistic policy to serve as a tool for socio-political engineering, shaping not only the language itself but also the national identity and ideological orientation of a population.

Our analysis of thirteen chosen words shows the varying methodologies of the old TLI, LA, the contemporary TLI, and the KL represent more than just differences in cataloging lexicons. These methodologies articulate distinct visions of the

<sup>14</sup> An intriguing publication by the TLI is the *Türkçe Verintiler Sözlüğü* "Turkish Dictionary of Exported Words" (Karaağaç, 2008). While the presence of loanwords can often be perceived as a linguistic vulnerability or an indication of external reliance, the dissemination of exported words from Turkish might be viewed as a source of linguistic pride and strength.

<sup>15</sup> In this regard, the KL distinguishes itself from the TLI and LA dictionaries, offering more comprehensive definitions supplemented by examples extracted from literary works to elucidate usage across varied contexts. Such an approach precludes the conflation of semantic content across distinct lexemes, thereby enhancing the dictionary's capacity to discern subtle distinctions between semantically proximate lexemes. For a short but intensive exploration of this matter, one can refer to Yayla (2018).



Turkish lexical landscape, sculpted by the interplay of nationalism, academic rigor, and the imperative for authenticity. Each entity, in its trajectory, grappled with the nuances of deliberate etymological misrepresentation, driven either by ideological motives, scholarly oversight, or a combination of both.

However, one pivotal insight emerges from this exploration: there exists no monolithic “truth” in lexicography. Defining and chronicling language is invariably swayed by a plethora of socio-political and scholarly currents. Thus, as we navigate the corridors of lexicographical studies, it becomes paramount to recognize these undercurrents, ensuring that the language’s dynamic metamorphosis genuinely resonates with its speakers’ diverse aspirations.

Ultimately, the lexical evolution of Turkish –interwoven with elements of lexical borrowing and deliberate etymological misrepresentation– serves as a poignant testament to the profound bond between language and politics. As the country’s complicated politics continues its path forward, one can only anticipate the new lexical horizons it will explore, driven by its complex history, global interactions, and the ceaseless evolution of its vibrant culture.

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