

TURKISH LANGUAGE AND ITS PLACE AMONG WORLD LANGUAGES

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There are many descriptions of language. It is started that "Language is a system of indicators showing concepts" (Saussure, 1976). "Language is a means of communication between humans" (Roucek, 1968). "Language is a social system that provides understanding among individuals" (Dilaçar, 1968). "Language is a very developed and multi-sided system, which takes advantage of joint elements and rules in a society, from the points of meaning and sound to express thoughts, feelings and desires" (Aksan, 1977). "Language is a natural means, which provides understanding among humans, has it own rules and is a living creation developed within the framework of these rules, a system of secret pact, the foundation of which was laid down at an unknown date, and a social institution woven with sounds." (Ergin, 1972).

It is possible to increase the number of descriptions mentioned above. Whatever the description may be, language which belongs to society, is the most important element of being a nation. Since the language of each nation carries characteristics of its own culture, it is considered one of the basic stones that gives its own culture to individuals and generations, and is a bridge between ears. According to the German philosopher Humbolt, language is the mirror of thought, and in its broader meaning it is our inner ego, (personality) and the foundation of national existence. Language establisher relations within society and social groups, and strengthens unity and togetherness. Consequently, the most important aim of language is to establish communication among the individuals in society in the most correct, most sound, most dependable means, which will facilitate understanding. Language is an institution which cannot be considered separate from humans and society, and it is related to science, technic, art and all other fields.

It is difficult to give the correct number of languages spoken at present in the world: however, it is known an average of 3000-3500 languages are spoken. (Aksan, 1977 page 101). However, new languages have been determined in various parts of the world and the above number has been increased to 5800, together with dialects. (Gencan, 1979, page 11).

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Scientific work on languages was accelerated in the late XIXth Century and early XXth Century Linguistics has shed light on all the fields of science. Linguists, who studied the origins of language, tried to find similarities among languages, although they are quite different from each other, and they formed the family of languages.

The closeness and similarities among the languages are grouped according to two points:

1. Morphological
2. Geneological

According to information obtained up to now, languages are divided into three groups from the point of form: (Gencan, 1979 page 12).

a. Monosyllabic Languages

The languages under this category contain words with single syllables. There is no conjugation form of the words. In such languages, the meaning attributed by conjugation is understood either by another word or the order of the words. In order to separate words, it is necessary to have a strong accent on words which look alike. Chinese, Vietnamese, Tibetan, and some African languages are among the monosyllabic languages.

b. Flexiomaal Languages

During conjugation the root, and especially the vowel in the root changes. Arabic is a good example of this.

German and Roman languages are also under this category.

c. Agglutinative Languages

There are single and multi syllable words, roots and suffixes in languages under this category. By using suffixes, new words can be formed and conjugational forms can be made. During these additions, the roots never change. Turkish and Hungarian are in this category.

Turkish is in this group of languages, since the roots do not change, and the last additions are made for derivation and conjugation.

Turkish has a very possible expression since it is an agglutinative language, suffixes are varied, and new words can be formed by attributing different missions to many suffixes.

The Turkish language has the facility for derivation because it is agglutinative. The regularity of conjugations, to see the root and suffix at one glance, and the harmony of vowels facilitate learning the language.

Western academics, who studied the structure of the Turkish language, praise the un-failing rules in the language. M. Müller says the following: "Even if there is no desire to speak or write Turkish, it is a real pleasure to read Turkish grammar. The skilful style, the syllogism prevailant in all conjugations, and the transparency seen in the constructions (derivations) make one feel the excellent power of human intelligence," (Gencan, 1979, p. 31)

The well known Turcologist, J. Deny stated the following for the Turkish language: "One may think that this language has come out of discussions at a supreme scientific academia. This language is, at the same time, full of harmonious metaphors and similes, it is an expressive language. Onomatopese, which are used frequently, alliterations in words and interwections give the subject harmony and importance to this language (J. Deny, translated by Ali Ulvi Elöve, 1941, p. III-IV)." As is seen, the Turkish language supprises foreign linguists for its capability of superior derivations.

2. Languages from the Point of view of Families

Languages, which are close to each other, are relatives which come from the same families. These languages form a family. The world languages have different language families. A language family is the name given to a group of languages, formed by languages separated from the main language by way of development and change. It is difficult to give a definite number of language families in the world. The main language families are listed below:

A. Indo-European Language Family

All of the European languages, except Finnish and Hungarian and Farsi and many languages in India among Asian languages, come under this family. This family of languages is divided into two groups, on European branch and the other Asian. The European branch is divided into German languages (German, Flemish, English and Scandinavian), Roman languages Latin, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Romanian). Slavic languages include Russian, Bulgarian and Serbian. Indo-Iranian languages are included in the Asiatic branch.

The main languages in this family are Farsi, Armenian and Sanskrit.

The relations, which indicate the presence of the Indo-European language family are vowel systems, some vowel rules, some forms, formation characteristics, and the composition of words.

B. Semitic Languages

Arabic, and Hebrew come under this family

C. Bantu Language Family

Bantu languages spoken in Central and South Africa are included in this family.

D. Chinese-Tibetian Language Family

The most important in this family are Chinese and Japanese. The Tibetan language also comes under this family.

E. Ural-Altai Language Group

Turkish comes under the Ural-Altai group. The closeness seen in Indo-European languages cannot be observed in languages that come under this group. The closeness between

these come from the structure unity, rather than the same family. For that reason, this group of languages is not called a language family, but a language group. The group is divided into two branches:

- a. Ural branch (Finnish, Hungarian, Uygur language)
- b. Altai branch (Turkish and Mogol Language)

Since the Ural-Altai language theory is not in a proven position, there are some linguists who do not accept it. There are also some views which base the relation in the Altaic language group directly on an exchange of words and cultures.

A history of the Turkish Language and Its Wealth.

The Turkish language is one of the oldest languages in the world. Throughout history it developed and changed. According to Gencan there are three important periods in the history of the Turkish language. (Gencan, 1979, p. 27)

I. Turkish before Islam

This is a period when foreign words were very few, and it was a beautiful and rich poetic language. Orkhun inscriptions, old Uygur texts and Divan-ü Lügat-it Türk are from these periods.

II. Turkish after Islam

This period covers the XIth-XVth Centuries. In the first works of this period, which carry the influence of Islamic culture, it is mainly the characteristics of old Turkish which are seen.

Between the XI-XIII Centuries there were valuable works of art which were mainly Kutadgu Bilik, Divan-I Lügat-it Türk, Atabetü'l Hakayık.

Despite efforts exerted, it has not been possible to save the Turkish language from the effects of foreign languages. From century to century, the appearance of foreign words and rules increased. This is most noticeable in the XVth century. During the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries, although no new words were derived, many foreign words and prepositional phrases were used.

III. Present Day Turkish

During this period there was a trend to simplify the language. From the middle of the XIXth Century, Turkish intellectuals became aware of the damage done to the Turkish language by foreign words and rules and wanted to discard those words and rules and thus save Turkish from the influence of such words.

During the Republican Era national language consciousness started to spread among intellectuals. As a result of this tendency, in 1928 a "Language Committee" was established upon Atatürk's wishes, and with the proposal made by the same Committee, the Turkish Grand National Assembly passed the law on the use of the Latin Alphabet on 1st November 1928. Atatürk, who wished that Turkish should be a national language, with the characteristics of a language of science set up the "Turkish Language Study Association" in 1923. The goal of the Association was to draw a line of development suitable to the structure and characteristics of the Turkish Language to emphasize the richness and beauty of Turkish lan-

guage, so that it would be more valued among other languages; and in order to do this, it was to conduct an in-depth research and study.

The Turkish Language Study Association prepared a program and continued its activities within this program. Anthologies, to have Turkish equivalents of terms the preparation of comparative grammar and dictionaries, etc. were included in this program. The following was the information obtained as a result of work conducted:

- The number of roots and suffixes are more that it was thought
- Our language is very productive from the points of derivation and putting together.

Consequently, the Turkish language is a very rich language. It is necessary to know that the richness of a language does not depend on the number of words. In fact, the real richness changes according to the power of expression, rather than the number of words.

One of the characteristics of our language that provides power of expression is as mentioned earlier, that it takes advantage of possibilities offered by its being agglutinative and thus new words are created, and another characteristic is frequent uniting and modifications on a large scale taking advantage of nature.

“The Atatürk Culture, Language and history Supreme Association which was established in 1983 has started scientific work in this filled, too. The objective of this organization is to preserve Atatürk’s way of thinking, Atatürk’s principles and reforms and also, Turkish culture.”

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