

TURCOLOGICA

Herausgegeben von Lars Johanson

Band 111

2018

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

Linguistic Minorities in Turkey and Turkic-Speaking Minorities of the Periphery

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2018

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen
Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet
über <http://dnb.dnb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche
Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the internet
at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

For further information about our publishing program consult our
website <http://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de>

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Printed on permanent/durable paper.
Printing and binding: Hubert & Co., Göttingen
Printed in Germany

ISSN 0177-4743
ISBN 978-3-447-10723-5

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Preface

In November 2009, Turcologists and experts on minority languages in Turkey met at a conference organized by the Department of Turkish and Middle Eastern Studies/University of Cyprus. The Cyprus meeting inspired a lot of fruitful discussions; it also pointed to the urgent need for a more comprehensive documentation of the linguistic landscape and its numerous agents, the mutual influences between linguistic identity, political dominance, religious denomination, and the social, political, and historical frameworks in which language choice or maintenance take place. Thus, it seemed worthwhile to include more information related to the conference topic in the proceedings. This has proved a rather time-consuming enterprise. Specialists working on related topics were asked for contributions, and, in cooperation with the authors, a number of articles had to be translated into English, while formal criteria reflecting different approaches and methods had to be aligned.

It goes without saying that even the supplemented version of the conference proceedings still does not do full justice to the complexity of the topic. But it may be an incentive for researchers to tackle related issues from the perspective of different disciplines.

The editor would like to thank her colleagues from Cyprus and abroad for their valuable comments and contributions. Thanks are also due to the University of Cyprus, whose generous support enabled the organization of the conference and the publication of this volume.

The Editor

Nicosia, January 2018

Introduction

Christiane Bulut, Nicosia

The linguistic landscape of Anatolia and the adjacent countries in the Middle East and the Balkans is still a patchwork of different Turkic, Indo-European, Caucasian, and Semitic languages and dialects. Present-day Turkey alone houses representatives of five different language families. Yet, especially during the last century, a number of larger languages with a long tradition in the area have virtually disappeared, while many smaller cultures and their languages are under imminent danger of extinction. The prevailing trend towards an increasing homogenization of humanity has created an urgent need for the description and documentation of the diverse and multi-faceted cultural heritage of this region.

This volume deals with minorities defined primarily on the basis of their use of a language that differs from that of the majority of the population or of politically or socially dominant groups, and often also from the official or national languages of the respective political entity or state in which this language is spoken. However, in most cases language is not the only differentiating feature. Many linguistic minorities are also distinct as regards other key factors, such as religious orientation, ethnicity, or historical background. While minorities may be defined by various external criteria applied by the majority of a state or a region, the members of a minority community may use a totally different set of internal criteria to distinguish themselves from the majority or neighboring minority groups. Thus, the notion of what is crucial in the delimitation of a certain group may vary considerably. Frequently a set of differentiating factors may combine in the identity building of a certain group.

The authors of this volume present different aspects of the mutual influences between linguistic identity, political dominance, religious denomination, and the social, political, and historical frameworks in which language choice or maintenance take place. Consequently, they approach the topic from various perspectives, describing historical developments that facilitated the dominance of certain groups over others, the formation of ethnicity among them, their affiliation to other communities with whom they share certain linguistic, religious or historical features, or to whom they were linked by social contacts, trade, administrative structures etc. Another major issue is the expression of a specific culture or identity as reflected in literature and religious texts, or in the – highly symbolic – choice of an alphabet or writing system.

Examples presented stem from Anatolia and regions in its periphery, such as the Balkans, Greece, the Caucasus, the northern Black Sea region, Cyprus, and Iraq. In these regions, most speakers of minority languages are bi- or multilingual, while often the distribution of spoken varieties does not coincide with political borders, which cut through much older areas of settlement or historical domains.

Across the greater area, the long-lasting and at times extensive contacts of genealogically unrelated languages, representing the Turkic, Indo-European, Semitic, and South and North Caucasian families, have led to considerable structural changes and linguistic convergence. These contacts have also contributed to the formation of characteristic regional traits in the cultures of the different peoples of these regions.

In such a multi-lingual environment, a central question is how Turkic¹ – the relative newcomer to the region and one of the central linguistic agents in the area – interacts with or may have been influenced by other languages spoken in Anatolia, and how this linguistic interaction changes in the peripheral regions, where varieties of Turkic hold a less dominant position. Over time, the conditions that favored language contacts have been subject to considerable changes. Some languages that have been extensively used in the region, such as Aramaic, Arabic, Greek and Western Armenian, are nowadays largely marginalized or extinct. On the other hand, only a few experts have a precise knowledge of the minor languages that are still very much alive in the area. A deeper knowledge of the diachronic and synchronic developments in the language landscape – considering linguistic and extra-linguistic factors alike – is also important for gaining a better understanding of the development of varieties of Turkic in this area.

In order to do justice to the complexity of the topic, more studies are required of the specific historical background of minority groups, their settlement history, social organization, language use, cultural features, oral and written literatures, etc. Traditional historiography deals with the centers of political power, while the conditions prevailing in the provinces or peripheries are rarely ever explored. At the same time, many languages or spoken varieties of the area have been insufficiently described. Consequently, there is a major need for comprehensive descriptions of individual languages and their interaction in various constellations of language contacts. Another major desideratum is the development of a methodological approach to the description of the *Sprachlandschaft* or the ‘language landscape ecologies’ based on interdisciplinary cooperation between linguists, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, demographers, ethnographers, ethno-linguists, geo-linguists, biologists, and other specialists (see *Johanson*, this volume), and a revision of theoretical models explaining the relationships between the languages of the area, such as the concepts of linguistic area, *Sprachbund*, and transitional zone.

1 Turkic is a generic term for Turkic languages in general, while Turkish refers to the Turkish of Turkey.

Thus, the topics treated in this volume center around three thematic areas. The first is the description of the cultural, linguistic and sociolinguistic features of distinct speech communities in a region where Turkish is the dominant language. Among these linguistic minorities in Turkey are the once influential Christian minorities of the Rum and Armenians, Christian and Muslim speakers of various Semitic languages in Southeastern Anatolia, linguistically distinct Muslim minorities, such as Kurmanji-speaking Kurds and Arabophone Alawis, speakers of different Turkic languages and varieties, and marginal groups in possession of a secret language, such as the Posha of Central Anatolia. A second focus is on Turkic-speaking minorities in the periphery. Many of these live in former outposts of the Ottoman Empire such as the Balkans, Iraq, and Cyprus, where Turkish or its predecessor, Ottoman Turkish, used to be the dominant language or the language of administration. Structural changes induced by historical or prevailing language contacts in the larger region provide a third thematic focus. This covers topics related to language contact-induced changes in Intra-Turkic contacts or in contacts between Turkish and genetically unrelated languages, and the development of methodological approaches to the description of complex linguistic situations or theoretical models for the classification of diverse findings. Individual contributions may deal with one or more of these topics.

The traditional approach: Communities defined on the basis of religion

Traditional concepts used to define a political entity or various groups in society mostly relied on religious denomination. Modern nation states, on the other hand, use the idea of the nation, which is delimited on the basis of the supposed unity of cultural, linguistic, and ethnic features of its members, to legitimize their status as political or geopolitical entities. The transition from the multinational and multilingual Ottoman Empire to newly created nation states in the region also changed the status of minority groups in Turkey and its periphery. Many of these groups are relicts of the long gone Empire; looking at their self-definition, one will find that some of the traditional concepts are still alive and occur along with the more recent definitions of cultural or ethnic unity. The criteria which influence identity building – such as literacy, educational systems and media promoting a certain linguistic standard, or the concept of a modern nation state based on a homogeneous population and the promotion or implantation of an official language – are subject to changes in the social or political framework of the respective communities. While religion or shared history used to play an important role in the definition of minorities, nowadays language is considered much more crucial for the identity building of nation states and smaller communities.

Changing status: Minorities in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey

Religion certainly was the most important means of defining various elements of Ottoman society; according to denomination, the subjects of the Sultan were assigned