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Europe and the Turkish Language Reform: The Role of European Ideas and Preconceptions in the Quest to Showcase a Turkic Language on the World Stage

Scott Ahearn

A Thesis in the Field of History

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

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Abstract

This thesis examines the European influence on the Turkish Language Reform, a movement peaking in the 1930s in which the new Republic of Turkey set out to purge its language of the many Arabic and Persian expressions that had been borrowed over the centuries of the Ottoman Empire. While the Reform is often seen in the larger context of the many Westward-looking reforms that the new nation embarked upon under President Atatürk, this thesis argues that Western influence on the Language Reform was more adversarial than encouraging. The principal basis for this was a century of prejudicial views that had developed in European linguistics, claiming that inflectional languages such as those found in Europe (though Arabic and Persian were also included) were inherently superior to agglutinative languages such as Turkish.

Nineteenth-century Western linguists such as Friedrich and August Schlegel, August Schleicher, Matthias Castrén, and Max Müller were influential in this European idea, often called the Inflectional Superiority Thesis, and this thesis examines the effect of these European players on the Turkish quest to formalize its agglutinative tongue and establish it as a literary and state language on the world stage. This thesis proposes that the response to this prejudice from the Turkish language reformers often avoided criticism or denial of it. Instead, the reformers sought to change the classification of Turkish itself, deeming it to be either an Indo-European language, or—in a still bolder reconception of prevailing linguistic theory—the ancestor of all human language. Additionally, this thesis presents some of the tangible effects of this quest to establish

commonality with European languages, as seen in the wealth of Turkish neologisms, still in use today, that were constructed to safeguard the seeds of a Western-friendly origin story for the Turkish language.

Author's Biographical Sketch

Scott Ahearn graduated with a BA in Linguistics from Brown University, and he also studied *sciences du langage* at the Université d'Aix-Marseille in France. He then embarked on a career as an actor, singer, dancer, and composer, performing across North America, Germany, France, Austria, Switzerland, and Turkey, where he fell in love with the Turkish language. On the linguistic front, he has studied with Robert A. Leonard of Hofstra University, a leader in the field of Forensic Linguistics. In addition to his continued performance work, he works as a language specialist with the U.S. Department of Defense.

Dedication

For Bob Regan, eternal lover of books and history. His curiosity made our world bigger, and when he saw in me a kindred spirit, he made my world better.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the people of Turkey at a dark moment; in the week that I finalized this thesis, a massive earthquake struck the area of Kahramanmaraş near the Turkish-Syrian border, and the tolls of devastation and lives lost continue to grow. I grieve for the thousands of lives lost and forever changed; there have been inspiring stories of survivors rescued after eighty-four hours, and I will freeze-frame this message in a state of hope that the people of the region will see more such miracles.

I am indebted to my advisors—Professors Ariane Liazos and Cemal Kafadar—for their wisdom and guidance on all aspects of this project, from the formulation of the proposal and the shaping of the topic to the final form it has taken almost a year later. I similarly owe a debt of gratitude to my mentors from my undergraduate days, namely Professors Ed Ahearn (no relation, astonishingly) and Michèle Respaut, who saw in me what I did not see in myself and opened my eyes to a range of new worlds. I have been blessed with heroic parents, who have supported my every decision whether academic or not, even when my professional and academic trajectories took twists and turns not covered in any parenting manual. Finally, I offer my sincere gratitude to the incomparable Jen Regan, brilliant mind and generous soul. Not only did she tell me I could pursue a Harvard degree back before I could even form the idea in my head, but she has been an enthusiastic reassurer and bouncer of ideas all along this journey. There is no language in this work that she cannot discuss with great knowledge, and she is unmatched in her ability to identify a question and get the answer to reveal itself. She

continues to remind me how to learn and how to enjoy learning, and I am so grateful for the front-row seat we have in each other's lives.

.

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Chapter I.

Introduction

In the aftermath of World War I, the seat of the newly dismantled Ottoman Empire began building a new identity as the Republic of Turkey. The original Ottomans, with their Turkic language brought from the steppes of Central Asia, had begun their expansion six centuries prior, building an empire that, at its peak in the sixteenth century, ruled over the bulk of North Africa and Southeastern Europe, as well as the holiest lands of Islam.[1] Yet even at that peak, the Ottoman intellectual class often considered their own Turkic language unrefined and vulgar in comparison with the Arabic and Persian vocabularies of the peoples with whom they had battled. Uriel Heyd (1913–1968) claimed that the Turkic vernacular of the day was "despised by the educated as a barbarous and uncouth jargon."[2] While Arabic and Persian—the languages of Islamic science, religion, and philosophy—bore no relation to the Turkic family, their cachet was so great that elite Ottomans borrowed thousands of Arabic and Persian expressions into their own language, and the result—known as Ottoman Turkish—would sometimes amount to a majority of foreign words linked by only a Turkic sentence structure and a minority of Turkic vocabulary.[3]

Despite various movements that occurred over the centuries to revitalize Turkish vocabulary, the dawn of the twentieth century saw the continued profusion of Arabic and

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[1] Fatma Müge Göçek, *Rise of the Bourgeoisie, Demise of Empire: Ottoman Westernization and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3.
[2] Uriel Heyd, *Language Reform in Modern Turkey* (Jerusalem: Israel Oriental Society, 1954), 9–10.
[3] Louis Bazin, "Une langue littéraire en pleine mutation," *Europe* 61, no. 655 (November 1, 1983): 9.

Persian elements—and the consequent inaccessibility of official Ottoman writings to the average citizen. With the Ottoman Empire now dissolved after World War I, this was the linguistic legacy that the new Republic of Turkey was left with: a vocabulary filled with tribute to languages now outside its sphere, plus a mere shadow of the Turkic vocabulary that had been cast aside for centuries. To remedy this, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the first president of the Republic, spearheaded a massive project to rebuild an accessible and proudly Turkic language for the new nation: the Turkish Language Reform.[4]

The Reform, though incomplete and often controversial, was one of the rare instances of a government substantially changing the language of daily use for an entire population, even while aspects of the new language were still being determined. Many Arabic and Persian words were targeted for purging, while Turkic equivalents were auditioned, scavenged from medieval texts from across Central Asia, or invented altogether.[5] The "language revolution," as it is called in Turkey,[6] was so effective that literature and even famous speeches have had to be "translated" into more-modern Turkish every few decades in light of the turnover in commonly understood vocabulary.[7] The Reform is also significant as part of Atatürk's larger set of Westward-looking institutional changes—a significant move for a people who famously stood at a geographic and cultural crossroads. Arabic and Persian influences, historically linked with spiritual and cultural prestige, now represented for Atatürk holdovers from a bygone

[4] Bazin, "Une langue littéraire," 10–12.
[5] Geoffrey Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 19, 49–50.
[6] Heyd, *Language Reform*, 22. Heyd cites the use of *inkilâb* and, in post-Reform parlance, *devrim*, both corresponding to "revolution."
[7] Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 2–4. Lewis describes how *Nutuk*, a famous 1927 speech by Atatürk, was updated to reformed Turkish in 1963, then again in 1986.

era of greatness, and he saw a need to shake off associations with these languages while looking openly toward secular Western democracies as models of progress.[8]

This thesis looks at the role European thinkers played in the linguistic aspect of Turkey's bold move away from an Islamic model and toward a secular, Western one. Much has been written about the debates and movements among the Turkish reformers themselves as they tried to determine how drastic the changes to their language should be, yet there is relatively little analysis of European influence on a defeated former rival stripping down its very language and rebuilding it in a Western-friendly image. This invites the question of whether the Reform met with European enthusiasm, interest, and even logistical support. Yet it also invites the question of whether European ideas proved influential to the builders of the Turkish Republic. If we look at Turkish sources, can we find an indication that reformers heeded European ideas and responded to them?

This thesis argues that Europe played its largest role not during the Reform years themselves but in the century leading up to them. European scholarship from the prior century had introduced prejudicial ideas that had set up expectations for a Turkic national language to fail; nineteenth-century linguists had built a classification system in which Turkic languages were deemed insufficiently sophisticated to build a great literature or to function as a state language. The philosophy mapped Indo-European languages (as well as Semitic languages such as Arabic) into a privileged position as vehicles for human thought.[9] Friedrich Max Müller, one of the most high-profile proponents of this prejudicial idea, had claimed in 1855 that no Turkic language in history had successfully

[8] Bazin, "Une langue littéraire," 10–11; also İlker Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists Against the West: The Origins of Linguistic Nationalism in Atatürk's Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no.6 (November 2004): 1–2.
[9] Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists Against the West," 3–4.

held a state together for any considerable time.[10] The Reform was a chance for such a mindset to finally be challenged.

In light of this, the decision to elevate a Turkic language into a state language was, in a sense, a rebellious act against European thinking. At the same time, Turkey ultimately hoped to court European approval. Western scholars were invited to the Turkish Language Society's summits.[11] There is evidence that Turkey was strongly responsive to European ideas about their language; this thesis examines how that response affected the Turkish approach to the Reform, and ultimately, how it affected the resulting language itself.

While the pro-Western aspirations of Atatürk's general wave of changes suggest that this would be a story of European scholars and leaders welcoming the Reform, the history described above gives a more complex and adversarial picture. Although the Reform did ultimately follow a track of Westernization—the first step was to drop the Arabic script in favor of the Roman alphabet—much of its intent lay in the centering of Turkish itself at the expense of foreign borrowings. When the Turkish Language Society (*Türk Dil Kurumu*, referred to in this thesis by its Turkish initials, TDK) held their First Turkish Language Convention in 1932 to determine policy and procedures for the Reform, their by-laws included their often-quoted intent: "To bring to light the special beauty and richness of the Turkish language and to elevate it to its rightful level among

[10] Friedrich Max Müller, *The Languages of the Seat of War in the East: with a Survey of the Three Families of Language, Semitic, Arian, and Turanian*, 2nd ed. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1855), 87–88. https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Languages_of_the_Seat_of_War_in_the/pb8ytJpqzq0C?hl=en&gbpv=0.
[11] Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists Against the West," 17.

the world's languages."[12] In light of this, the quest for "pure" Turkish words was arguably a search *Eastward* toward Central Asia and Mongolia, even if it was associated with a plan to build a Western-style democracy. Though the Language Reform coincided with pro-Western changes, scholars such as İlker Aytürk have characterized it as partly Western-defiant.[13] Nicolas Vatin aptly described the Reform as having "a spirit that was at once nationalistic and Westward-looking."[14]

In examining the relationship between Europe and the Reform, much of what emerges is the defiance, rather than the embrace, of European ideas. This is understandable, as the overarching role of Europe vis-à-vis the Reform was the century of entrenched prejudicial notions regarding Turkic languages. However, we will also see that as prevalent as these biased ideas had become, the maturing field of linguistics actually moved away from these prejudices several decades before the peak years of the Reform. While European linguistics had developed more egalitarian ideas on the universal dignity of human language by the turn of the twentieth century, the field's previous ideas had become pervasive, persisting in the realms of religion, general education, and, perhaps most dangerously for the new century, war. Thus, while the reformers of the 1930s had better-informed opinions to rely on from contemporary European linguists, the older, prejudicial ideas lived on and preoccupied the members of the TDK as they tried to assert the value of their language. This thesis presents evidence that the reformers were keenly aware of these nineteenth-century ideas, and that the

[12] *Birinci Türk Dili Kurultayı: tezler, müzakere zabıtları* (Istanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1933), 435. "Türk dilinin öz güzelliğini ve zenginliğini meydana çıkarmak; Türk dilini dünya dilleri arasında değerine yaraşır yüksekliğine eriştirmek."
[13] Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists Against the West," 17.
[14] Nicolas Vatin, "De l'osmanli au turc de Turquie, les aventures d'une langue." *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerrannée* 50 (1988): 68. "…un esprit à la fois nationaliste et occidentaliste."

decisions they made in the effort to come out from under them resulted in a number of unusual and arguably misguided approaches. To explore this complex and adversarial dialogue across the decades, this thesis examines both Turkish and European sources from the pre-Reform and Reform years.

Primary sources for European ideas on Turkic languages begin with the nineteenth-century writings of Western linguists who gave rise to these theories. These linguists include Friedrich von Schlegel and his brother August, Friedrich Max Müller, and Matthias Castrén, among others.[15] On the Turkish side, many of my sources for early language policy come from the speeches and transcripts published by the TDK, including the invaluable compendia of their language conventions (*Türk Dil Kurultayları*).[16]

One of the criticisms of even high-profile scholarship in English, such as *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* by Geoffrey Lewis, is that it does not take into account non-English scholarship.[17] I hope to contribute to filling in those gaps by taking on literature across a variety of languages, which will include, in addition to English and Turkish, French, German, Italian, and Swedish. When I have used quotations from any language other than English, I have included the passage in its original

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[15] Friedrich Schlegel, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier: ein Beitrag zur Begründung der Alterthumskunde* (Heidelberg: Mohr und Zimmer, 1808). New edition by E. F. K. Koerner (Amsterdam: John Benjamins BV, 1977); Friedrich Max Müller, *Languages of the Seat of War*; Müller, *Letter to Chevalier Bunsen on the Classification of the Turanian Languages* (London: A. & G.A. Spottiswoode, 1850).; Matthias Alexander Castrén, *Nordiska resor och forskningar: Ethnologiska föreläsningar öfver altaiska folken* (Helsingfors: Finska Litteratur-Sällskapets Tryckeri, 1857). Readers of German can read a German translation Castrén's Swedish work: *Ethnologische Vorlesungen über die altaischen Völker nebst samojedischen Märchen und tatarischen Heldensagen*, trans. by Franz Anton Schiefner (St. Petersburg: Buchdruckerei der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1857).

[16] For proceedings from the first convention: *Birinci Türk Dili Kurultayı*. The proceedings for the following conventions are listed chronologically in their own section of Primary Sources in the bibliography. Note that the name of the First Language Convention used the word *Dili*; all subsequent conventions used *Dil.*

[17] Wolfgang-Ekkerhard Scharlipp, review of *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Succes*s, by Geoffrey Lewis, *Anthropological Linguistics* 42, No. 2 (Summer 2000): 301–304.

language in a footnote, and I have done the translations myself unless otherwise indicated.

Historical Background

The Ottoman Empire took its name from Osman, a 13th-century tribal leader whose dynasty would come to rule not only much of southeastern Europe, but also a vast swath of Arabic-speaking lands from North Africa to Iraq and onward toward the Persian-speaking peoples of present-day Iran.[18] Osman himself, however, spoke a language that was no more closely related to either Arabic or Persian than English is to Vietnamese. His language constituted the Western edge of the Turkic family, which originated on the steppes of Central Asia and persists into Mongolia and Western China to this day. Over the course of six centuries Osman's Turkic-speaking descendants would come to rule over the holiest sites of Islam. Yet his language would fail to achieve the social or political status held onto by Arabic, the language of the Koran, and Persian, the language of classical Islamic poetry. Lewis cites the 1928 assertion by Turkish sociologist Mehmet Fuat Köprülüzade that this Turkish inferiority complex was entrenched even before the rise of the Ottoman dynasty; Köprülüzade claimed that 11th-century Turkish-speaking poets would ask forgiveness for their work due to the limits of their language, calling it crude when compared with Arabic and Persian.[19]

Thus, the educated circles in Istanbul imported thousands of Arabic and Persian borrowings into their Turkic language, creating the hybrid tongue known as Ottoman Turkish. This language overlaid onto a Turkic sentence structure not only an immense

[18] Fatma Müge Göçek, *Rise of the Bourgeoisie,* 3.
[19] Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 5–6.

amount of Arabo-Persian vocabulary, but also phrases incorporating foreign syntax and grammatical rules, such as those for gender agreement, that did not apply to Turkish.[20] Louis Bazin claims that it was routine for the vocabulary of a given sample of Ottoman writing to be two-thirds to three-fourths Arabo-Persian in origin.[21] Yet there are examples of an even more extreme rate of borrowing; Lewis observes that in classical Ottoman poetry one could read multiple lines in which the only Turkish element was the linking verb "to be," and sixteenth-century Ottoman poet Bakî wrote a six-line stanza in which there was not a single Turkish element.[22]

With the breakup of the Ottoman Empire following their defeat in World War I, Turkey emerged as a new republic. Arabic-speaking lands were no longer under the control of the Turks, who in building their own nation sought an identity that no longer rested on a defeated empire. As president, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk instituted sweeping reforms modeled on the Western nations that had prevailed in the Great War; he abolished the Sultanate, instituted the separation of church and state, and even extended his reach to headwear, banning the wearing of the fez.[23] All of these reforms had the intent of looking Westward and casting off cultural associations with Islamic and Arab states.[24] But it was the disjointed state of Ottoman Turkish that inspired a project so

---

[20] See Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 6–7 for a discussion of both Arabic and Persian structures that had become incorporated into the Ottoman language, such as Persian izafet compounds that linked noun phrases in an order opposite to that of Turkish. Both Bazin and Heyd also point out the incorporation of non-Turkic syntactical structures in addition to a wealth of vocabulary. See Bazin, "Une langue littéraire," 9; Heyd, *Language Reform*, 9.

[21] Bazin, "Une langue littéraire," 10. See also Mehmet-Ali Akinci and Salih Akin, "La Réforme Linguistique Turque," *Glottopol* 1, no. 1 (2001): 83. Akinci and Akin offer more measured numbers that varied by author, but they claim that for certain nineteenth-century writers Turkish would account for only one-third of their words.

[22] Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 7–8.

[23] Jacob M. Landau, ed., *Atatürk and the Modernization of Turkey* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1984), xiii. Also Heyd, *Language Reform*, 37.

[24] Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists Against the West," 1.

complex that it would continue long past Atatürk's 1938 death: The Turkish Language Reform.

I have found that scholarship divides the Reform into three phases, with many scholars devoting themselves to one or two of them. The first was the alphabet reform, which dropped the Arabic script used by Ottomans for centuries and adapted the Roman alphabet to Turkish sounds. This had the Westernizing purpose of making the languages of Europe more accessible to the average Turk.[25] Yet proponents of the change also put forth other arguments in favor of dropping Arabic script—notably that it is poorly designed for the phonetics of Turkish. The Arabic language notates only three vowels, and short vowels are generally not written at all. Turkish, by contrast, must distinguish eight vowel sounds, the choice of which may be the only trait distinguishing two words (or, conceivably, eight). Thus, reformists reasoned that Arabic script made comprehension difficult, and more fundamentally, kept literacy low.[26] The alphabet reform was notable for its swiftness, with Atatürk giving newspapers just 30 days' notice to change their scripts in November 1928.[27] While it is the most visible linguistic change attributed to the early Republican era, being apparent even to those who know nothing else about the Turkish language, this thesis focuses on the vocabulary and structure of the language itself, as that is the aspect of Turkish that was subject to the judgments of European linguists.

[25] Ettore Rossi, "Venticinque Anni di Rivoluzione dell'Alfabeto e Venti di Riforma Linguistica in Turchia," *Oriente Moderno* 33, no. 8/9 (Agosto/Settembre 1953): 379.
[26] Hale Yılmaz, *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey 1923–1945*, 1st ed. (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 141.
[27] Rossi, "Venticinque Anni," 378.

The second phase involved an overhaul of Turkish vocabulary by purging a great number of Arabic and Persian words and finding replacements with Turkic origins. For several decades, Turkish reformers would disagree considerably on the extent to which Arabo-Persian words that had become part and parcel of common language should be thrown out and replaced with outright inventions or with words imported from the Turkic languages of Central Asia, or even from more distant relatives such as Mongolian. Yet the sweeping replacement of vocabulary was remarkable for its effectiveness; it is common for texts less than a century old to undergo a process of intralingual translation—updating their vocabulary so that modern readers will have a chance at understanding them.[28]

The third phase of the Language Reform was the development of Sun-Language Theory, which was the extreme culmination of a theory claiming Turkish as the original human language. This chapter of Turkish language policy was characterized by a fascinating amount of questionable scholarship that concocted bogus etymologies for various international words and claimed that they stemmed from Turkish. Yet the theory also had a curious effect on the vocabulary aspect of the Reform; for moderates who felt the vocabulary reform had gone too far, Sun-Language Theory became a justification for stopping the purge of non-Turkic words, since every word could now ultimately be called Turkic. After the theory was presented to a group of international invitees at the Third Language Convention of the Turkish Language Society in 1936, their awkward reception of the idea took the wind out of the sails of Sun-Language Theory, though its advocates held strong until the death of Atatürk two years later ended its momentum for good.

[28] Özlem Berk Albachten, "Intralingual translation as 'modernization' of the language: the Turkish case," *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 23, no. 2 (2013): 257–271.

Though the theory's tenure was brief, this chapter had a lasting effect by bringing much of the linguistic revolutionary fervor to a slower simmer.[29]

Historiography

While a great deal has been written on the Westernizing motivations of the Turkish Language Reform, there has been less scholarship on the role of the West and its role as either advocate or obstacle in such a movement. It is in the Sun-Language Theory phase of the Reform where scholarship deals most directly with European influence on (and ultimately rejection of) the work of the reformers. This is perhaps due to the dichotomy of the reformers' defiance of European notions on the origin of language while they also openly courted Western approval of the theory.

One of the earliest works analyzing the Reform, from a time when its resolution was still uncertain, is Heyd's 1954 book, *Language Reform in Modern Turkey.* Heyd offers very interesting work relating the Reform to earlier, nineteenth-century whisperings of the need to make changes in Ottoman Turkish, and he specifically discusses the influence of French social movements on literary language trends in Istanbul. Notably, he discusses a phase of simplified Ottoman linguistic style in the mid 1800s as an imitation of the French Romantic and Naturalist movements, followed by a countermovement toward loftier styles as a consequence of French Symbolism in the 1880s.[30] It is interesting that Heyd did not do similar analysis of European influence for

[29] İlker Aytürk, "H. F. Kvergić and the Sun-Language Theory." *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 159, no. 1 (2009): 23–24.
[30] Heyd, *Language Reform in Modern Turkey.*

the twentieth century, when a systematic change in the Turkish language actually did take place.

İlker Aytürk offers the most specific insight into the effect of European actors on the Reform. He traces the ways in which, well before the Reform was in process, nineteenth-century European linguistic theory created an intellectual climate of prejudice against the prospect of Turkish as a player on the world stage.[31] His writings also discuss two crucial points. One is the Turkish reformers' preoccupation with prevailing European theory. This is vital to the discussion of European influence, as any amount of prejudicial thinking would be of limited impact if Turkish thinkers were oblivious to it. The second point is the duality of how the act of codifying Turkish into a proud state language was at once challenging to European sensibilities and appeasing in the quest for European acceptance. He connects this duality to Sun-Language Theory, through which some Turkish linguists sought to prove that Turkish had given rise to Indo-European languages—while others sought to prove that Turkish simply *was* one. I hope to complement his research by looking at the concrete ways in which the reformers' response to European prejudice manifested itself in the vocabulary that they created and the changes they made to their language.

A second area in which Aytürk contributes greatly to the study of European influence is in his examination of one particular European: H. F. Kvergić, an elusive Austrian linguist who is credited with planting the idea for Sun-Language Theory in Atatürk's mind by sending him an essay, "The Psychology of Certain Elements of Turkic Languages."[32] Interestingly, while Aytürk places Kvergić's role as instigator in doubt, he

[31] Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists."
[32] Aytürk, "H. F. Kvergić," 23–44.

elucidates a longer pattern of Kvergić's "commitment to the Turkish cause," working in mysterious conjunction with the secretary of the TDK to devise ways to place Turkish in the most positive light.[33] Furthermore, it is Aytürk who most clearly examines the importance that Turkish reformers (Atatürk included) placed on European acceptance of Sun-Language Theory once they were ready to unveil it; he attributes the theory's demise to its poor reception at the Third Turkish Language Convention by the fifteen invited European linguists.[34]

Geoffrey Lewis wrote one of the most comprehensive and enjoyable works on the Reform with his well-titled 1999 book *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success.* Lewis argues that the overeager and misguided purging of vocabulary during the Reform was ultimately an impoverishment of the language, which might have been avoided through more refined means.[35] He lays out extensive examples of nuances that were lost, and replacement terms that were concocted in violation of the tools for word formation that are natural to Turkish, causing a philosophical and linguistic divide among Turks that lasted for years. His analysis of vocabulary across time is highly effective at illustrating how much the language has shifted, and his commitment to translating every word in his cited passages—whether in Modern Turkish, Ottoman Turkish, or a transitional phase between them—is invaluable even to advanced students of the language. His elegant and thorough translations have also served as inspiration for me to make sure that in this work, all examples and quotations from other languages appear both in English and in their original form.

[33] Aytürk, "H. F. Kvergić," 27–29.
[34] Aytürk, "H. F. Kvergić," 23–24.
[35] Lewis, *Catastrophic Success.*

A few scholars have diverged from Lewis's position on the alphabet reform, namely his assertion that the Arabic alphabet is inherently ill-suited to Turkish. Wolfgang Scharlipp points out that the Arabic alphabet can be and has been adapted to account for non-Arabic sounds just as well as the Roman or Cyrillic might, citing examples in East Turkestan.[36] Pierre Rondot similarly points out that the Arabic script had been experimentally adapted to accommodate Turkish vowels in 1914; while that system failed, Rondot blames its "difficulty to write by hand."[37] Bazin acknowledges that one Sami Bey developed such a system using diacritical marks, but adds only that it was never put into use.[38] Thus, scholars have offered disparate explanations for the decision to abandon Arabic script, most of which might have been resolved with a modification to that same script. This lack of consensus leaves an open question as to whether Romanization was motivated by what was best for Turkish writing *per se*.

Scharlipp also attempts to defend the word-building that Lewis has criticized as arbitrary and amateurish,[39] drawing on Marcel Erdal's thorough work on the full range of techniques of word formation that Turkic languages have organically used for centuries.[40] Lewis is considerably more skeptical of the Reform's word formations, including the spread of such suffixes as *-man* and *-men* (used in the exact same sense as in the English "watchman" and "henchman"); Lewis is sharper than Scharlipp in scrutinizing the reformers' claims that these stemmed authentically from little-known Turkic roots. The

[36] Scharlipp, review of *A Catastrophic Success*, 303.
[37] Pierre Rondot, "Latinisation et réforme linguistique en Turquie," *L'Afrique et L'Asie* 27, no. 3 (1954): 65.
[38] Bazin, "Une langue littéraire," 10–11.
[39] Wolfgang-E. Scharlipp, *Untersuchungen zur Morphologie und Substitution türkeitürkischer Neologismen*, 1. Aufl. (Hamburg: Buske, 1978).
[40] Marcel Erdal, *Old Turkic Word Formation: a Functional Approach to the Lexicon* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1991).

discussion of bogus word formation is significant given the question of ulterior motives; the creation of words such as *imge* to mean "image,"[41] with a claim that they had true Turkic origins, made convenient fuel for Sun-Language Theorists who wished to find natural similarities between Turkish and the Western languages that they claimed sprung forth from it.

Mehmet-Ali Akinci and Salih Akin discuss the impoverishment of Turkish in another aspect: the leveling of dialect diversity that came from homogenizing the new language to match the dialect of Istanbul. Significantly, they note a parallel between the reformers' concept of "pure Turkish" (*öztürkçe*) and the nationalized standard for French that was being enforced for students during the Third Republic (1870–1940).[42] This carries Heyd's ideas of Turkey echoing French trends yet a step further, into the era of the Language Reform itself.

Louis Bazin also focuses on the vocabulary-rebuilding phase of the Reform, exploring the process by which linguists were sent into the far-flung corners of Anatolia, and even onward into Central Asia, recording dialectical words that might become rich fodder for word-building in Istanbul.[43] His work also highlights the complex role of Western borrowings during this time of linguistic change; while the target of the Reform's purge mostly pertained to Arabo-Persian vocabulary, it was not lost on the reformers that loanwords from French and English had also taken hold. While this phenomenon is widely mentioned among authors discussed here, it is Bazin who stands

[41] Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 121.
[42] Akinci and Akin, "La Réforme Linguistique Turque," *Glottopol* 1, no. 1 (2001): 76–86.
[43] Bazin, "Une langue littéraire."

out in highlighting the phases in which Western borrowings were treated quite differently from Arabo-Persian loanwords.

Jens Peter Laut wrote a definitive work on the reformers' quest to establish Turkish as the original human language with *Das Türkische als Ursprache? Sprachwissenschaftliche Theorien in der Zeit des erwachenden türkischen Nationalismus* (*Turkish as the Original Language? Linguistic Theories in the Time of Awakening Turkish Nationalism*). Laut traces the development of the idea that culminated in Sun-Language Theory, though the desire to present Turkish as the ancestor to all human language existed for several years before it was formalized into the unusual theory and presented to the West with great fanfare.[44]

Roadmap of This Thesis

What I hope to contribute with this work is an analysis of the influence of European ideas across multiple aspects of the Reform. I intend to trace the development and persistence of European prejudicial ideas from the early nineteenth century, as well as the Turkish response to these prejudices as the new nation defined its approach to the Reform. I will also look at how that approach manifested itself concretely in the language, namely how it influenced the neologisms that, in many cases, are still commonly used across the Turkish-speaking world today.

Chapter II offers an overview of the prejudice against non-Indo-European languages in Europe over the nineteenth century, and how the ideas behind it were

[44] Jens Peter Laut, *Das Türkische als Ursprache? Sprachwissenschaftliche Theorien in der Zeit des erwachenden türkischen Nationalismus* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000).

applied to Turkish in particular. The chapter tracks this idea's development and apogee in the mid- to late-nineteenth century with the influential linguist Friedrich Max Müller. It also traces how the growing field of linguistics moved on from such prejudicial ideas, and how these ideas nonetheless remained persistent in other fields right up into the peak years of the Reform in the 1930s.

Chapter III discusses the first of two Turkish responses to European bias, which was to find the ways to classify Turkish as an Indo-European language. The chapter presents the impressive efforts on the part of some reformers to prove evidence of kinship between Turkish and the languages of Europe, including ideas that strained the imagination. While the distinctive structure of Turkish may have prevented such attempts from being persuasive, this approach was remarkable in that it did very little to counter the European prejudice; it simply tried to change the perception of Turkish so that such prejudice could not apply to it.

Chapter IV analyzes the second Turkish response to European views, which was an ongoing quest to prove Turkish to be the original human language. This quest culminated in the highly unorthodox Sun-Language Theory, with its bewildering methodology intending to prove that all human speech could be traced back to Turkish. While it was expedient to try to bring Turkish into kinship with any high-status language across the globe, the extreme theory served to moderate aspects of the Reform; extensive language reform no longer appeared necessary when every borrowed word was ultimately Turkish regardless of its perceived origin. This unusual chapter of history that shows a complex interplay between, on the one hand, the reformers' defiance of

European norms, and on the other hand, their deep interest in obtaining European acceptance of the theory.

Chapter V looks at how these two responses to European bias were put into practice when it came to the most tangible effect of the Reform: the widespread reinvention of Turkish vocabulary. While ideas such as Sun-Language Theory were ultimately an academic exercise and a short-lived historical curiosity, I would offer that the ideas behind them also compelled reformers to plant many seeds into the new Turkish lexicon that would be compatible with the new role of Turkish as either Indo-European language or as mother language to all of humanity. This chapter proposes that these seeds led to curious word derivations and rhetorical styles in the early years of the Reform, and many of these elements live on in the Turkish of today, even if the original goal in planting the seeds was neither successful nor necessary.

Chapter VI takes on another attempted step in the Reform that is less well-known and that gained no momentum; this was the prospect of making changes to Turkish syntax to match the syntax of Western languages. This idea was almost entirely fueled by two brothers who openly spoke of the inferiority of Turkish syntax compared to the West. While this chapter introduces the possibility of still more fundamental and drastic reforms to a movement that was already quite sweeping, it illustrates a more mature phase in the TDK's work, when reformers showed evidence of being far less eager to indulge extreme ideas to court Western approval of their language.

Final Notes

A topic such as this one becomes a story of the missteps and misjudgments of various players; some of these errors in judgment may be humanizing and endearing,

while others carry the far more somber weight of ethnic purity movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. European-based ethnic and linguistic prejudices are the catalyst of this story, in an era where such ideas could be boldly stated by the most respected men of letters, and their ideas could get carried across continents via encyclopedias, magazines, and lectures, all legitimized with the stamp of the educated pedigree of their authors. On the Turkish side of this story, we similarly see errors of judgment that stemmed from the determination to come out from under this prejudice. This is ultimately a tale of trying to fight a prejudice using the same mindset that created it. Only rarely did the Turkish reformers' response to prejudice involve a disagreement with it; rather, their response was to assert a European character for Turkish and provide a space for the language on the more valued side of the linguistic divide. The story also shows a good deal of inventive and at times incomprehensible scholarship on the part of the reformers in their quest for a proof for their desired outcomes. The architects of the Reform were by and large not linguists, and they had a massive task before them as they attempted to characterize, defend, create, and use their language all at the same time.[45]

There is much that went right in this story. Turkish has become a major world language—one that continues to use the many resources available to it to build new words as technology and media grow. It has a thriving literature, and has certainly disproven Max Müller's haunting declaration that the languages of Central Asia could never be the tools of a lasting state. On the other side of the dialogue in this story lies the successful evolution of the field of linguistics. What had been a forum for brazen prejudice disguised as scholarship grew into an early place of advocacy for the dignity

[45] Laut is one of several historians who observes that the leaders of the TDK were by and large not trained linguists. See Laut, *Das Türkische als Ursprache*, 91.

and sophistication of all languages. Voices like Edward Sapir lent their expertise at the turn of the twentieth century to rail against expectations of simple-mindedness in the users of any language, and against the hubris of Westerners in believing that their languages were linked with superior thought. This occurred in an era when people in many political, military, cultural, and anthropological fields were not at all ready to embrace Sapir's view.

This difference in growth rate between those who sought to understand the miracle of human language and those who met the twentieth century with nationalist agendas is the fuel for much of the misadventure in this story. I would offer that the overarching misstep in the Turkish Language Reform is in its reaction to an idea from linguistics that was itself obsolete. While the early- to mid-nineteenth century saw incredibly blunt insults to the Turkic family of languages coming from renowned Western philologists, these ideas had been supplanted by more egalitarian ideas long before the Reform years in the late 1920s and 1930s. This is not to say that prejudice was not rampant in many aspects of international relations. But in matters of combatting linguistic prejudice, the reformers could have turned to new, egalitarian voices with expertise in the field of linguistics—European voices, if that was to lend credence. Instead, the reformers remained focused on a harmful, century-old mindset that had since been disavowed in its own field. Positive developments in European scholarship were ignored, while the more atrocious ones became a preoccupation that perhaps set the scene for poor decisions. Sun-Language Theory and attempts to seem Indo-European appear to have been an unfortunate distraction from the goal of highlighting a Turkic language on the world stage. The concept of linguistic prejudice is certainly not gone, nor are debates

surrounding the value and effectiveness of language engineering. This thesis seeks to shed some light on how such prejudice was handled and mishandled in one of the most sweeping and effective linguistic reforms in modern history.

Chapter II.

Europe and the Pre-Reform Years

In the first decade of the nineteenth century, German philologist Johann Cristoph Adelung (1732–1806) undertook the writing of an ambitious survey of world languages, *Mithridates*, which he would not live to complete. Regarding the language of the Ottoman Turks, he had some choice words:

> While they were nothing but a horde of rapacious nomads, they had, along with their related tribes, their own Tatar dialect, which was, however, as poor and crude as the people who spoke it....When, after the conquest of Greece, they had to make some progress in culture and taste, they went on to enrich and refine their language—originally poor and crude—with Arabic and Persian. It was thus with good reason that they carried the name of *muvella* or *mulemma*—a pinto or spotted horse—which they were named because of this mixing. Even now, writers mix in Arabic here, Persian there, when they make any claim of having taste.[46]

It was apparent that Adelung felt a particular hostility toward Ottoman Turks, reserving barbs for them well beyond his many slights against Turkic groups in general. His section on Ottoman Turks began: "Out of all the Turkic peoples, these are,

[46] Johann Christoph Adelung, *Mithridates, oder allgemeine Sprachenkunde* (Berlin: Vossische Buchhandlung, 1806), 459–60. https://www.google.com/books/edition/th_Vorrede_Einleitung_Asiatische_sprache/CTMwAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0. "So lange jene noch weiter nichts als ein Horde räuberischer Nomaden waren, hatten sie nebst ihren Stammesverwandten zwar ihre eigene Tatarische Mundart, welche aber so arm und roh war, als das Volk, welches sie sprach...Als sie nach Eroberung des Griechischen Reiches doch einige Fortschritte in der Culture [*sic*] und im Geschmacke machen mußten, fuhren sie fort, ihr ursprüngliche arme und rohe Sprache durch die Arabische und Persische zu bereichern und zu verfeinern, daher sie den Namen *Muvella* unde *Mulemma*, Buntschecke, ein scheckiges Pferd, welchen man ihr wegen dieser Vermischung beylegt [*sic*], mit Recht führet. Noch jetzt mischen Schriftsteller, wenn sie Anspruch auf Geschmack machen, bald Arabisches, bald Persisches ein."

unfortunately, the ones best known to Europeans."[47] He continued to target them while also elevating European civilization: "By the way, these Turks, while they know Europeans and European culture, have still remained crude and proud barbarians, whereas today's Tatars, who've had far fewer such occasions, surpass them greatly in temperance and openness."[48]

Just two years after Adelung's writings were published, German linguist Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) would also write disparagingly of the Ottomans' language in a more influential work, *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians* (*Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*).[49] In this case the Ottomans were not singled out as such, but were rather lumped into a group due to the larger language family to which they belonged. Schlegel determined that the world's languages could be divided into two major categories, with one of greater value than the other.[50] The superior group of languages consisted of those that modified a word's meaning with internal variations, or inflection (German: *Flexion*), in the root word itself. He called this group organic languages. The second group produced such modifications not through changes within the word *per se*, but by "just mechanically attaching words or particles together, such that the root itself remains stagnant and barren."[51] He referred to these languages as

[47] Adelung, *Mithridates*, 459. "Diese sind unter allen Türkischen Stämmen den Europäern leider an besten bekannt."
[48] Adelung, *Mithridates*, 462. "Übrigens sind diese Türken, so lange sie auch Europäer und Europäische Cultur [*sic*] kennen, immer rohe and stolze Barbaren geblieben, dagegen die jetzigen Tatarn, bey (*sic*) weit weniger Gelegenheit, sie an Milde und Biegsamkeit weit übertreffen."
[49] Schlegel, Friedrich. *Über die Sprache*.
[50] Schlegel, Friedrich. *Über die Sprache*, 44–59. For the English translation by E. J. Millington that is contained within the same book, see 446–53.
[51] Schlegel, Friedrich. *Über die Sprache*, 41–2. "…bloß mechanisch durch angehängte Worte und Partikeln zusammengefeßt sei, wo denn die Wurzel selbst eigentlich unverändert und unfruchtbar bleibt."

mechanical, and it was to this second group that he assigned the entire Turkic language family.

This chapter analyzes the development and staying power of this judgmental European view that was heralded by Friedrich Schlegel's language classification. This theme of the perceived inherent inferiority of Turkic languages would recur throughout the nineteenth century, codified by the German Romantic philologists but also seen throughout Europe. As the twentieth century dawned, the maturing new science of linguistics largely moved away from this prejudice. We will also see, however, that this idea would be slow to loosen its hold on European views from outside the field of linguistics, and that these views remained influential in politics and culture.

Inflection Versus Agglutination: Language Typology

At this point some clarification may be in order, as the term "inflection"—the standard translation of Friedrich Schlegel's *Flexion*—can lead to confusion in English. The word has come to refer to several things, including a strictly phonetic change in intonation or pitch. This may lead some people in casual conversation to refer to a tonal language, such as Mandarin, as having inflection; yet using Schlegel's terminology and classification, Mandarin was quite far from having the trait called "inflection." Similarly, the word "inflection" is often applied to the general tendency of languages to add endings for case, gender, and verb subject. Even the Cambridge Dictionary has an entry for the term "inflected language" that matches this definition, offering a sample sentence that

calls Finnish "highly inflected."[52] This usage is apt to cause confusion as well, since Finnish does not show evidence of Schlegel's definition of *Flexion*, and he relegated the language, along with Turkish, to the mechanical group.

The far more specific definition of "inflection" in this context refers to changes within a root word itself when a modification of its meaning is taking place, regardless of the use of prefixes or suffixes. We see examples of this in many German plurals, wherein a word such as *der Stuhl* ("the chair"), while taking on an *-e* for the plural, also undergoes a sound change within the original root: *die Stühle.* Germanic languages also show this internal change in the phenomenon of strong verbs, such as the English alternation of *sing-sang-sung*, plus the variant *song* when the concept becomes a noun.[53] In this example, we see that, despite the casual definition of "inflection" that is often thrown about, in Schlegel's definition it may not involve the addition of an ending at all.[54] Although Turkic languages use a wealth of endings, Schlegel pointed out that they generally did not experience this phenomenon of root change.

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[52] "Inflected language," Cambridge Dictionary, accessed October 29, 2022. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/inflected-language. "Latin, Polish, and Finnish are all highly inflected languages."

[53] Patrick Sériot, "Enfer ou paradis? Le discours axiologique sur la supériorité ou l'infériorité de la structure agglutinante," *Cahiers du CLSL* 63 (2021): 64. I am indebted to Sériot for the excellent example of *sing/sang/sung/song*. While English offers a range of strong verbs that demonstrate vowel alternation among their three tenses, the elegance of a fourth minimal pair in the noun form of the concept makes the verb *to sing* an ideal example of inflection in English.

[54] While English is frequently cited as an example of an inflectional language that has lost much of its inflection, moving instead toward an isolational structure, the phenomenon of strong verbs, still alive and well in English, remained a powerful illustration of the nature of inflection in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Edward Sapir noted in 1921: "There are linguists that speak of alternations like *drink* and *drank* as though they represented the high water-mark of inflection, a kind of spiritualized essence of pure inflective form." Edward Sapir, *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech* (1921; repr., New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949), 131. https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.32106011236251.https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.32106011236251&view=1up&seq=145.

Furthermore, the languages in Schlegel's preferred category of "inflectional" have a stronger tendency to fuse several pieces of information into a single suffix. In Spanish, an inflectional language, when the root *escuch-* ("to listen") takes on the ending *-ó* to create *escuchó* ("he/she/it listened"), the single sound *-ó* can occur only in the third-person singular preterit tense. It cannot be divided up such that one part of it refers to the third person, another to the singular, and another to the past tense. In the tradition of inflectional languages, it can thus be said that the indivisible unit *-ó* carries the meaning of all three pieces of information at once.

It is these instances of compound information that Schlegel contrasted with "mechanically attaching words or particles together" in his second class of languages. To form the phrase "you (pl.) entered" in Turkish, one adds arguably three separate suffixes to convey three pieces of information. Thus, to the root *gir-* ("to enter"), one adds *-di* (past tense marker), followed by *-n* (second-person subject marker), then finally *-iz* (pluralization of the second person), to form *girdiniz.*

Furthermore, in inflectional languages these phenomena of root change and compound meaning may occur together, so that a root might change to create a new form that carries an indivisible amalgam of information. Looking at Spanish once again, the verb *saber* ("to know") undergoes such a fundamental transformation in the form "I know" that the entire word reduces to *sé*. In this case we see a single utterance, not further divisible, that conveys four pieces of information: the meaning of "to know," the first person, the singular, and the present tense.

These are the linguistic traits that inspired Friedrich Schlegel's hierarchy of language types. While these traits are structurally interesting for the classification of

language groups, it is not necessarily apparent what aspect of these traits lent itself to such value-based preferences for one system over another. It is notable, however, that cultures and literatures whose languages were historically prized in Europe—Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, and, in modern times, Schlegel's native German—all showed a high degree of inflection. Schlegel's praise for the elegance of these "organic languages" was lengthy, if not readily relatable:

> each root is truly that which carries the concept, and does so like a living seed; since, as every grammatical relationship is marked by internal changes, thus is free rein given to its unfolding; the extent of its development can be without limits, and is truly astonishingly rich. It is because of this richness, on the one hand, and then the strength and durability of these languages, that one can rightly say that these languages arose organically, and create expression like an organic fabric.[55]

In the lower group, by contrast, he saw a lifeless string of ideas that limited creativity:

> On the other hand, in languages that have only endings rather than inflection, the root does no such thing; no productive seed, but rather a heap of atoms that are easily blown together or apart by every random current. Their integrity is nothing more than mechanical attachments. In their earliest stage, these languages are lacking any seed of productive development; derivations remain parched, an affectation soon prevails, and rather than accomplishing true beauty and lightness, an unwieldiness appears. Apparent richness is in fact poverty, and the many languages, be they crude or crafted, are always heavy, ponderous, and distinguished by a truly erratic and defective character.[56]

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[55] Friedrich Schlegel, *Über die Sprache*, 51. "ist jede Wurzel wahrhaft das, was der Name sagt, und wie ein lebendiger Keim; denn weil die Verhältnißbegriffe durch innre Veränderung bezeichnet werden, so ist der Entfaltung freier Spielraum gegeben, die Fülle der Entwicklung kann ins Unbestimmbare sich ausbreiten, und ist oftmals in der That bewundringswürdig reich...Daher der Reichtum einestheils und dann die Bestandheit und Dauerhaftigkeit dieser Sprachen, von denen man wohl sagen kann, daß die organisch enstanden sein, und ein organisches Gewebe bilden."

[56] Friedrich Schlegel, *Über die Sprache*, 51–2. "In Sprachen hingegen, die statt der Flexion nur Affixa haben, sind die Wurzeln nicht eigentlich das; kein fruchtbarer Same, sondern nur wie ein Haufen Atome, die jeder Wind des Zufalls leicht aus einander treiben oder zusammenführen kann; der Zusammenhang eigentlich kein andrer, als ein bloß mechanischer durch äussere Anfügung. Es fehlt diesen Sprachen im ersten Ursprunge an einem Keim lebendiger Entfaltung; die Ableitung bleibt immer dürstig, und wird nachher die Künstlichkeit durch immer mehr angehäufte Affixa auch noch so sehr gesteigert, so wird dadurch eher wie Schwierigkeit vermehrt, als wahre einfache Schönheit und Leichtigkeit gewonnen

Schlegel went so far as to say that organic languages were divinely inspired. In this privileged category he placed the bulk of the Indo-European languages, minus a few such as the Celtic group. With Celtic languages originally being excluded, the Indo-European group was often called "Indo-Germanic," denoting the easternmost and westernmost extremes of this large swath of inflectional languages. As for the "lower" category, Schlegel consigned to it not only the Turkic languages but also, initially, the Semitic languages, such as Arabic and Hebrew.[57] This classification is surprising first because, as a man of great faith, Schlegel was part of a religious tradition that saw Hebrew as a divinely inspired language.[58] Yet it is also puzzling on a structural level, since internal changes to root words are quite common in Arabic (e.g., زهرة (*zahra*) "flower" becomes زهور (*zuhur*) "flowers").[59] The phenomenon is so prevalent in Arabic that many of its internal root variations have survived into loanwords in Turkish; contrast *harf* ("letter of the alphabet") with *hurufat* ("typeface").

The Spread of Inflectional Bias

Friedrich Schlegel's conception of the superior and even divine nature of inflectional languages would come to dominate the young field of linguistics for much of

werden. Der scheinbare Reichthum ist im Grunde Armuth, und es sind diese Sprachen, sie mögen roh oder gebildet sein, immer schwer, leicht verworren und of noch besonders ausgezeichnet durch einen eigensinning willkürlichen, subjektiv sonderbaren und mangelhaften Charakter."

[57] Friedrich Schlegel, *Über die Sprache*, 48–9. See also Ruth Römer, *Sprachwissenschaft und Rassenideologie in Deutschland* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlagen, 1989), 106; Sériot, "Enfer ou paradis," 65–6.

[58] Sebastiano Timpanaro, "Introduction: Friedrich Schlegel and the Development of Comparative Linguistics in the 19th Century," trans. J. Peter Maher, in Friedrich Schlegel, *Über die Sprache*, xxiii. See also Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi, "The Status of Hebrew in Friedrich Schlegel's *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*," *German Life and Letters* 60, no. 2: 165–179.

[59] Timpanaro, "Introduction: Friedrich Schlegel," xxvi. Timpanaro cites noted linguist Franz Bopp, who in 1857 took issue with Schlegel's classification of Semitic languages as mechanical, noting that they had more internal root change than Sanskrit—widely held among German Romantic linguists to be the acme of organic linguistic perfection. See Sériot, "Enfer ou paradis," 60.

the nineteenth century. Ruth Römer points out the influence of Schegelian views, tinged with religious justification, on the racist colonial movements of the era.[60] Although these value-based judgments gradually saw resistance from linguists, Schlegel's work did much to define language classification for the century that followed.

His older brother August Schlegel (1767–1845) modified Friedrich's system into a three-part classification. While still using the terminology of "organic" and "mechanical" languages, he envisioned a third group, including Mandarin, that did not make use of endings at all. This three-way classification system for languages became a long-lasting foundational idea for Western linguists, and the elder Schlegel echoed his brother's judgmental bias in favor of the organic (and European) type. His critique for his new third language group gives an idea of the extent to which August Schlegel perpetuated such value-based judgments:

> Such languages must present great obstacles to the development of the intellectual faculties; giving them any sort of literary or scientific culture would seem a hard-fought task; and if the Chinese language does exhibit this phenomenon, perhaps it came to be only with the help of a syllabic writing system that is quite unnaturally complicated, and that somehow compensates for the primitive poverty of the language.[61]

As for the second class of languages, to which the Turkic family belonged, August Schlegel saw them at an intermediate stage of capability, behind the inflectional type: "Those languages whose grammatical system is based on affixes can offer certain

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[60] Römer, *Sprachwissenschaft*, 106.

[61] August Wilhelm von Schlegel, *Observations sur la langue et la littérature provençales* (Paris: A la Librairie grecque-latine-allemande, rue des Fossés-Montmartre, n°14, 1818), 14. https://www.google.com/books/edition/Observations_sur_la_langue_et_la_litt%C3%A9r/lv4vAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0. "De telles langues doivent présenter de grands obstacles au développement des facultés intellectuelles; leur donner une culture littéraire ou scientifique quelconque, semble être un tour de force; et si la langue chinoise présente ce phénomène, peut-être n'a-t-il pu être réalisé qu'à l'aide d'une écriture syllabique très-artificiellement compliquée, et qui supplée en quelque façon à la pauvreté primitive du langage."

advantages, despite their imperfections. Nevertheless, I feel we must assign first place to languages with inflection."[62]

With the example set by the Schlegel brothers, studies of comparative linguistics continued in earnest through the nineteenth century, for most of that time incorporating the Schlegels' prejudicial thinking as well. The German linguistic tradition showed this trend in numerous examples. Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) highlighted the idea of language as a reflection of the spirit of the people that spoke it, and he believed that each language was a revelation that could be quantified on a scale of perfection. Unsurprisingly, he believed that his own language group came closest to that perfection. He was also responsible for assigning names to these three classes of language—names that still have currency to this day.[63] For the "lowest" class of languages that used no endings at all, he assigned the name "isolational." The highest group of languages, to which Indo-European tongues belonged, was called "inflectional." And the middle group, of which Turkish was a part, came to be called "agglutinative."

August Schleicher (1821–1868) was another German linguist who in the mid-nineteenth century combined the Schlegels' entrenched prejudice with both Humboldt's terminology and his equating of language with cultural sophistication: "Only the inflectional languages—Indo-Germanic and Semitic—have been bearers of world history; as they stand in the realm of languages, so do their respective nations stand decidedly at the highest level compared to the rest of humanity."[64]

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[62] August Schlegel, *Observations sur la langue*, 15. "Les langues, dont le système grammatical est fondé sur les affixes, peuvent avoir de certains avantages, malgré leurs imperfections. Je pense, cependant, qu'il faut assigner le premier rang aux langues à inflexions."
[63] Joseph H. Greenberg, 1974. *Language Typology; a Historical and Analytic Overview* (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), 38.
[64] August Schleicher, *Linguistische Untersuchungen II: Die Sprachen Europas in systematischer Uebersicht* (Bonn: H. B. König, 1850), 37.

It was not only German linguists that worked within this idea that Martin Manchester has called the "Inflectional Superiority Thesis."[65] Matthias Castrén (1813–1852) was a Finnish linguist who explored the hostile and remote corners of Siberia and Mongolia to study the relationship of agglutinative languages. As Finnish was itself agglutinative, Castrén might have been a candidate for dispelling notions of the language's inferiority. However, he largely showed agreement with the Inflectional Superiority Thesis. In the following passage he focuses his admiration on the Indo-European trait of prepositions, the meanings of which are generally expressed with case endings in agglutinative languages:

> The presence of prepositions is among the most essential advantages of the Indo-Germanic language family, especially considering, among other things, that by combining them with other words, a limitless number of concepts and nuances can be achieved that in other languages one tries in vain to express. However, we do not consider these, like other advantages of the Indo-Germanic language group, to be ingrained from the outset, but rather a function of this language group's higher development—and we have good reason to believe there was a time when Indo-European languages were at the same low level of advancement that is now the case with Chinese, and that they then underwent the same stages of development as those which the Mongolic, Turkic, and Finnic languages find themselves in right now.[66]

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https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433075915466&view=1up&seq=9. "Nur die flectirenden Sprachen, Indogermanisch und Semitisch waren bisher die Träger der Weltgeschichte; wie diese Sprachen im Gebiete der Sprachen, so stehen die sie redenden Nationen im Vergleich mit dem Reste der Menschheit entschieden auf der höchsten Stufe."

[65] Martin Leroy Manchester, "The Philosophical Foundations of Wilhelm von Humboldt's Linguistic Doctrines" (PhD Diss., University of Toronto, 1980), 181. The term has since been used by other scholars such as İlker Aytürk; see Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists," 3.

[66] Matthias Alexander Castrén, *Nordiska resor och forskningar*, 101. https://www.google.com/books/edition/Nordiska_resor_och_forskningar/H7hoAAAAcAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0. "Tillvaron af prepositioner hör nemligen till den indogermaniska språkstammens väsentligaste företräden så väl i manga andra afseenden, som isynnerhet deri, att genom deras sammansättning med andra ord, en oändlig mängd begrepp och begrepps-modifikationer kunna återgifvas, för hvilka man in andra språk förgäfves söker ett uttryck. Men vi anse dessa, likasom andra den indogermaniska språkstammen tillhörande företräden, icke vara ursprungliga, utan en följd af denna språkstams högre utveckling, och tro på goda skål, att det funnits en tid, då de indo-europeiska språken befunnit sig på samma låga bildningsgrad, som fallet nu är med Kinesiskan, samt att de efterhand genomgått de utvecklingsstadier, på hvilka de mongoliska, turkiska och finska språken för närvarande befinna sig."

He advocated for Finnish only by claiming that of the agglutinative languages, the Finnic and Samoyedic groups had come the closest to inflectional tendencies, and were at such an advanced state of evolution that they could be seen as transitional groups.[67]

Max Müller (1823–1900) was born and educated in German Saxony but worked as a professor at Oxford for many years, and expanded the Inflectional Superiority Thesis to an English-speaking audience. His lectures enjoyed great popularity, receiving translations and commentary in French media as well.[68] He even held influence with the British government through his writings during the Crimean War, designed to help British military officers understand the cultural dynamics in the part of the world where they were fighting.[69] Müller expanded on Castrén's theory of a common Finnish-Hungarian ancestor by incorporating the Turkic family of languages and creating one extensive umbrella of related agglutinative languages; to designate them, he popularized the term "Turanian," a word attested around 800BCE in the *Avesta*, the sacred book of Zoroastrianism, to describe a land in Central Asia corresponding to Turkestan.[70] Müller carried the Inflectional Superiority Thesis further by incorporating ethnological factors into language classification; he claimed that agglutinative languages arose in connection with the nomadic lifestyle of their speakers, and that the features of these languages were

[67] Castrén, *Nordiska resor och forskningar*, 87.
[68] For examples of the French publication of Müller's lectures that were most germane to the Inflectional Superiority Thesis, see: *Revue des cours littéraires de la France et de l'étranger* 1, no. 42 (September 17, 1864): 599–604; *Revue des cours* 1, no. 45 (October 8, 1864): 645–651, *Revue des cours* 1, no. 46 (October 15, 1864): 664–670. All of these sections were translated into French by Odysse Barot.
[69] Müller, *Languages of the Seat of War.*
[70] Arthur Anthony MacDonnell, "Pan-Turanianism" in *Encyclopædia Britannica: The New Volumes Constituting, in Combination with the Twenty-Nine Volumes of the Eleventh Edition, The Twelfth Edition* vol. 32, 12th ed. (London: The Encyclopædia Britannica Company, Ltd., 1922), 30. Castrén entertained the idea of common ancestry for all agglutinative languages across Europe and Asia, yet he rejected the use of Turanian as an umbrella term, citing its kinship with the word "Turkish" and finding it too centered on that group. See Castrén, *Nordiska resor och forskningar*, 21–22.

the reflection of a nomadic psyche. With a nod to Humboldt's determination that a people's language constituted the external expression of their psyche and identity, he recommended classifying inflectional, agglutinative, and isolational languages as "state," "nomad," and "family" languages, respectively.[71] With this proposal he not only tied Turkish to a nomadic identity, but also elevated a limited group of languages to a level that met the needs of an organized state—and excluded Turkish from it. He commented, in a passage that would echo more than half a century later as a direct challenge to the new Turkish Republic, that agglutinative languages had no history of successful state-building: "Among the Turanian nomads no such nucleus of a political, social, or literary character has ever been formed. Empires were no sooner founded than they were scattered again like the sand-clouds of the desert; no laws, no songs, no stories outlived the age of their authors."[72]

In effect, the admiration of inflectional forms among European philologists amounted to an admiration of irregularity. For Müller, it was the departure from predictable forms in inflectional languages that moved the speaker beyond a sequential stacking of ideas (thus evoking the "mechanical" imagery that the Schlegels had assigned to agglutinative languages). In looking at the irregular English plural as an example of inflectional languages, Müller said:

> the suffixes themselves are no longer felt as the sole cause of these modifications....To the reader the *s* has no separate existence (except on scientific reflection); the whole word expresses to him the modified idea, and in his perception the same change is produced by "penny" and "pence" as by "pound" and "pounds."[73]

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[71] Müller, *Letter to Chevalier Bunsen*, 22.
[72] F. Max Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language: Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in April, May, & June, 1861*, 4th ed. (London: Longmans, Green, 1864), 302.
[73] Müller, *Letter to Chevalier Bunsen*, 26.

Not only did Müller reinvoke the Schlegel brothers' mechanical view of agglutination, but in that same paragraph, he also linked the detached sequencing of agglutinative suffixes to nomadism (emphasis added): "In Turanian dialects, *as long as they remain purely nomadic*, the suffixes, whether in themselves intelligible or not, are felt as modifying elements, and as distinct from the words to which they are attached or 'glued.'" In persistently tying agglutinative languages to a nomadic lifestyle, he continued to place them away from the trappings of modern society: "It requires tradition, society, and literature to keep up forms which can no longer be analyzed, and in which the formal elements cannot at once be separated from the base."[74]

Indeed, Müller was not shy in criticizing the state of Ottoman civilization and its place in politics. In his private correspondence he could be brutal, as he wrote to his son: "Constantinople must be a lovely place but for the unspeakable Turk...there is no reason for these Turanians living in Europe, and keeping the old Byzantine Empire in a state of semi-barbarism."[75] Yet even in his published works he revealed a certain disdain for the state of Ottoman civilization: "Four hundred years have since elapsed, and it is now no longer the power, but the weakness of the Turks, which forms the terror of Europe."[76]

Müller saw the three classes of languages as steps in an evolutionary line, with isolational languages being the first step in the advancement of language, progressing through agglutinative and most ambitiously to inflectional.[77] In contrast to Schlegel, Müller joined Schleicher in placing Arabic (and all Semitic languages) firmly in the

[74] Müller, *Letter to Chevalier Bunsen*, 28.
[75] Georgina Adelaide Müller, ed., *The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Friedrich Max Müller*, vol. 2 (London: Longmans, Green, 1902), 294.
[76] Müller, *Languages of the Seat of War*, 107.
[77] Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 344.

inflectional group of languages.[78] With Arabic now settled as an inflectional language, Western linguistic science was now giving Arabic and Persian (an Indo-European language) the same status above Turkish that was already felt within the Ottoman Empire. As Turkish speakers coped with a deep-seated sense of their language's inferiority versus Arabic and Persian, Western linguistics solidly reinforced that message.

Müller did acknowledge that some of the languages in his Turanian group had long since detached from a nomadic lifestyle. He specifically mentioned Hungarian, Finnish, and Turkish as languages linked with literatures and political entities. He also believed that their settled lifestyle had a moderating effect on the disjointed nature of their agglutinative structures. Indeed, he believed that their cultures had brought to their languages inflectional elements that were not seen in the bulk of Turanian languages, which he still thought of as wrapped up in a nomadic culture.[79] He thus set up expectations for Turkish to demonstrate what he thought of as state language potential, though he attributed this not to any inherent sophistication in Turkish, but to the introduction of an Indo-European notion of political nationality and literature.

He even had praiseworthy words for the Turkish language. "It is a real pleasure to read the Turkish grammar," he wrote, "even without the wish to acquire it practically. The ingenious manner with which the numerous grammatical forms are brought out, the regularity which pervades the system of declension and conjugation, the transparency and intelligibility of the whole structure must strike all who have a sense for that wonderful power of the human mind which has displayed itself in language."[80] Yet this emphasis on

[78] Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 299.
[79] Müller, *Letter to Chevalier Bunsen*, 71. See also Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 351–52.
[80] Müller, *Languages of the Seat of War*, 108.

simplicity and regularity had an ambiguous value in the greater conversation about language that nineteenth-century European linguists were engaged in. Regularity had become associated with languages that were non-inflectional and thus at a lower stage of evolution and complexity. "Intelligibility" was for Müller the sign of a nomadic lifestyle devoid of roots, traditions, or culture: "It is an indispensable requirement of every Nomadic language that it should be intelligible to many, though their intercourse be but scanty."[81]

The Phonetic Judgments of Steinthal

While the bulk of negative judgments toward Turkic languages in the mid-nineteenth century revolved around inflectional word structure, German philologist Heymann Steinthal (1823–1899) expanded the conversation into phonetic features as well. He analyzed the complex system of vowel harmony in Turkic languages, whereby all vowels in a native Turkic word belong to one category, and suffixes adjust their vowels to match the placement and color of the vowels in the main root. (Thus, the word *yatak* "bed" takes the plural ending *-lar* to make *yataklar* "beds," but for the word *gece* "night," the ending is *-ler* (*geceler,* "nights").[82] "This law is not based on a requirement that stems universally from the nature of human speech," Steinthal wrote in 1860. "We find in it no sage self-restraint, but rather intellectual inertia."[83] It is not clear why, for

[81] Müller, *Languages of the Seat of War*, 91.
[82] This phenomenon of vowel harmony is quite common among the languages Müller grouped as "Turanian"; it is seen in Finnish and Hungarian as well as Turkish, and is seldom seen in Indo-European languages. It does historically occur in Irish, which may explain why Friedrich Schlegel had excluded the Celtic languages from the inflectional group.
[83] Heymann Steinthal, *Charakteristik der hauptsächlichsten Typen des Sprachbaues*, Zweite Bearbeitung (Berlin: F. Dümmler, 1860), 180. "Dieses Gesetz beruhrt aber durchaus nicht auf einer Forderung, die allgemein aus der Natur der menschlichen Sprache flösse. Es liegt in ihm nicht eine weise Selbstbeschränkung, sondern geistige Trägheit."

Steinthal, root changes in inflectional languages were spared from the same criticism of being "not based on a requirement that stems universally from the nature of human speech." This criticism of Turkic phonetic variations may seem entirely separate from the larger Western criticism of Turkic agglutination, but the two phenomena were not unrelated.

We can see the relationship between the two phenomena if we re-examine the example of inflectional root change mentioned earlier: the vowel change in German when going from "Stuhl" to "Stühle." This root change involves the root vowel changing to match the placement of the added plural "e." More technically, the /u/ vowel, pronounced in the back of the vocal cavity, moves to the front of the vocal cavity in order to assimilate to the newly added front vowel suffix /e/. (The *ü* sound in German is, in essence, the front version of the back vowel *u*.) This process of assimilation to a later vowel is so prevalent in German that English refers to it by its German name, *Umlaut*. Thus, this root inflection is, at its core, a phonetic change, and it is in fact the same process as the vowel harmony that occurs in Turkish, with the only difference being that it happens in the opposite direction; German umlaut consists of a root vowel changing to match a suffix vowel, while Turkish vowel harmony consists of a suffix vowel changing to match the root vowel. Steinthal seemed to be aware that the vowel harmony he criticized had a reverse equivalent in his native language, as he had an explanation for why this sound change was a positive trait in the Germanic direction while negative in the Turkic one: "All forward-moving assimilation...is less organic than the regressive

type, for the latter is the effect of vitality in the anticipatory mind. The former is simply a mark of the inertia of entities not governed by the mind, thus of intellectual lethargy."[84]

Later European Attitudes

As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, the increasingly established field of linguistics strongly questioned the validity of three fixed classes of languages and, more significantly to our discussion, the notion of one type of language structure being superior to another. At the First Orientalist Convention in 1873, Belgian linguist Honoré Chavée (1815–1877) argued against the judgmental views of agglutination. While he did see inflection as a later evolution of what had been agglutination, he saw this evolution as a neutral change that did not imply any advancement or improvement:

> The perfectly banal derivation in the last step, into what has been called *inflection*, is thus in its origin nothing but the addition of words (pronouns, semi-pronouns or adverbs) to a given base. The gradual, more-or-less substantial degrading of these added utterances has no capacity to elevate them to a function superior to the one they originally fulfilled in their integral, organic state. What is more, this lexicological process in no way differs from what has happened to conjugational and declensional suffixes in Manchu, Tongusic, Turkish, and the other Uralo-Altaic languages.[85]

At the Fourth Orientalist Convention five years later, British linguist Robert Cust gave a presentation on the agglutinative languages of India, because he felt they were

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[84] Steinthal, *Charakteristik*, 180–81. "Alle vorschreitende Assimilation...ist weniger organisch, als die rückschreitende; denn diese ist Erfolg der Lebendigkeit des vorausgreifenden Geistes, jene bekundet bloß die Trägheit der vom Geiste nicht beherrschten Organe, also zugleich geistige Schlaffheit."

[85] *Congrès international des orientalistes; compte-rendu de la première session, Paris 1873* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Cie., 1876), 421. https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=gri.ark:/13960/t3qv8555h&view=1up&seq=1&skin=2021. "La dérivation toute banale du dernier degré, devenue ce qu'on appela *flexions*, n'est donc, à l'origine, qu'une addition de mots (pronoms, demi-pronoms ou adverbes) à un thème donné. L'effacement progressif plus ou moins considérable de ces vocables additionels ne saurait les élever à une fonction supérieure à celle qu'ils remplirent tout d'abord en leur état d'intégrité organique. Et cette fonction lexiologique [*sic*] ne diffère en rien de celle qui est dévolue aux mots suffixes dans la déclinaison et dans la conjugaison du mandchou, du tongouse, du turc et des autres idiomes ouralo-altaïques."

neglected in favor of the Indo-European tongues in the region.[86] Regarding the Santali language, he made it clear that agglutination did nothing to inhibit linguistic complexity; he claimed that even without a writing system, the language "has a mechanism for expressing tense and mood that a Greek would have envied…For its verbs have five voices, five moods, twenty-three tenses; they express gender and also three classes of number—practically four."[87]

British linguist Archibald Henry Sayce (1846–1933) was no friend of enlightenment, and gave himself over to racist ideologies; he wrote in 1875 that the people of Africa ceased their intellectual growth at age fourteen.[88] We include him here to note that even those who consoled themselves with racist reading would have been in for a surprise when Sayce explicitly eliminated language structure as an indication of racial sophistication. He wrote, in a passage that would seem enlightened if not for the context of his other views:

> The spirit of vanity has invaded the science of language itself. We have come to think that not only is the race to which we belong superior to all others, but that the languages we speak are equally superior. That inflection is the supreme effort of linguistic energy, that it marks the

[86] Robert Cust, "Report on Anthropological Proceedings at the Oriental Congress Held at Florence, September 12–18, 1878," *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 8 (1879): 288.

[87] Roberto Cust, "Sulle Lingue non Ariane delle Indie Orientali," *Atti del IV Congresso internazionale degli orientalisti tenuto in Firenze nel settembre 1878* vol. 2. (Florence: Coi tipi dei successori Le Monnier, 1881), 125. Cust's speech appears in Italian, the language of the host country; while it is possible that he presented in English and an Italian translation was distributed for publication, the variety of other languages appearing in the documentation of the convention makes it reasonable to think that Italian is the language in which he presented it. "…che ha un mecanismo per le espressioni del tempo, o del modo, che un Greco avrebbe invidiato… poichè il suo verbo ha cinque voci, cinque modi, ventitrè tempi; tre numeri, quattro casi, ed esprime anche il genere."

[88] Archibald Henry Sayce, *The Principles of Comparative Philology* (London: Trübner & Company, 1875), 172. https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Principles_of_Comparative_Philology/7PpYAAAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0.

> highest stage in the development of speech, is regarded as a self-evident axiom.[89]

Sayce's writings had much to offer the Turkish reformers who strove to assert the advanced nature of Turkish civilization, since he posited that the Turks taught the Hungarians "a large part of the elements of civilized life."[90] This stood in surprising contrast to a recurring larger theme of crediting Indo-Europeans with acculturating Altaic/Turanian peoples.[91] Regarding the question of anti-agglutination prejudice, Sayce also cited François Lenormant (1837–1883), who criticized not just the linguistic prejudice but the entire cultural bias against agglutinative language speakers: "The idea of the inferiority of Turanian nations, of their ineptitude in the realms of art and civilization, is an ancient prejudice that has lived out its course and can only be attributed to assertions that are conceited and fixated on the interests of the Germanic nations."[92]

In 1900, British linguist Henry Sweet (1845–1912) showed a conception of language types that was quite removed from the inflection-prizing hierarchy of the early nineteenth century. He referred to inflection as "agglutination run mad," and he also identified a language type that carried inflection still further than the most hallowed Indo-European languages did; he cited the Nahuatl language of Mexico as an example of this

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[89] Archibald Henry Sayce, *Introduction to the Science of Language* vol. 2 (London: C. K. Paul & Company, 1880), 66. https://www.google.com/books/edition/Introduction_to_the_Science_of_Language/02oSAAAAIAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1. See also Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists," 7.

[90] A.H. Sayce, *Introduction to the Science of Language*, 196.

[91] While European scholars often gave the credit for Turanian culture to Europe and the West, that credit could also go to the East, but generally still to inflectional languages. Elias J. W. Gibb (1857–1901), whom we will meet later, wrote of "another Turkish people, the Seljúqs, who had by this time attained a very considerable degree of culture, thanks entirely to Persian tutorage." E. J. W. Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry* vol. 1 (London: Luzac & Co., 1900), 10.

[92] A.H. Sayce, *Introduction to the Science of Language*, 188. "L'idée de l'infériorité des nations touraniennes, de leur inaptitude à l'art et à la civilisation, est un vieux préjugé qui fait son temps et qui ne doit guères [*sic*] son origine qu'aux affirmations vaniteuses, et surtout intéréssées des nations germaniques." Also quoted in Theodore Duka, "The Ugor Branch of the Ural-Altaic Family of Languages," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21 (1889): 583.

extreme process of "incorporation," which adds inflectional changes to indicate not just the subject but the object of a verb.[93] For the nineteenth-century linguists who regarded Native American languages as primitive, this reconceiving of one of them being more inflectional than Europe's most inflectional languages would have been a jarring departure. Sweet also joined the twentieth-century trend of weakening the firewall that nineteenth-century linguists had placed between language types, observing the presence of elements from all language types within a given language: "From a Semitic point of view such formations as English *use-ful-ness*, Latin *com-pōn-er-et-ur* appear half agglutinative, and such inflectional forms as Sanskrit *pad-bhyas* 'to feet' appear as downright agglutinations—which, indeed, they may very well be."[94]

There were, it must be admitted, dissenters within the linguistic field, who continued their barbs, if not against the structure of agglutination itself, at least against the civilizations that used agglutination. In 1918, French linguist Antoine Meillet (1866–1936) depicted the agglutinative languages of Europe as being dependent on inflectional languages for gaining any civilizational prominence: "The Finno-Ugric group has provided actual civilizational languages—Hungarian, Finnish, and secondarily, Estonian—only at the western limit of its sphere, where it has come into contact with Indo-European languages."[95]

Three years later, noted linguist Edward Sapir (1884–1939), born to a Lithuanian Jewish family in present-day Poland and raised in the United States, gave an influential strike against the Inflectional Superiority Hypothesis in his seminal 1921 book

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[93] Henry Sweet, *The History of Language* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1900), 69–70.
[94] Sweet, *History of Language*, 69.
[95] Antoine Meillet, *Les Langues dans l'Europe Nouvelle* (Paris: Payot & Cie., 1918), 58. https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b4016998&view=1up&seq=60.

Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech. Firstly, he was outspoken in rejecting the entire system of classifying languages into three cut-and-dried groups: "The strong craving of a simple formula (if possible, a triune formula) has been the undoing of linguists."[96] While he maintained that concepts such as "isolating, "inflective," and "agglutinative" had value for discussion, he argued that a language could easily show multiple types of these traits.

As important as this was for negating the idea of one language group sealed off in privilege from the rest, Sapir also forcefully criticized these ideas of privilege themselves. He saw how formalized the prejudice toward inflection had become in the mid-nineteenth-century era of Max Müller, and observed that by the early twentieth century linguists had finally let go of it: "It is probably the most powerful deterrent of all to clear thinking. This is the evolutionary prejudice which instilled itself into the social sciences towards the middle of the last century and which is only now beginning to abate its tyrannical hold on our mind."[97]

Sapir's argument stands out in its elegant attack of the hypocrisy that kept these ideas afloat:

> Champions of the "inflective" languages are wont to glory in the very irrationalities of Latin and Greek, except when it suits them to emphasize their profoundly "logical" character. Yet the sober logic of Turkish or Chinese leaves them cold. The glorious irrationalities and formal complexities of many "savage" languages they have no stomach for. Sentimentalists are difficult people.[98]

He also offered an anecdote that perhaps best encapsulates the strong feelings brought on by language classification and the prejudice surrounding it, even if the subject

[96] Sapir, *Language*, 122. Quoted words appearing in parentheses occurred as a footnote.
[97] Sapir, *Language*, 123.
[98] Sapir, *Language*, 124.

of the anecdote remains unfortunately anonymous: "One celebrated American writer on culture and language delivered himself of the dictum that, estimable as the speakers of agglutinative languages might be, it was nevertheless a crime for an inflecting woman to marry an agglutinating man. Tremendous spiritual values were evidently at stake."[99]

Views Outside the Linguistic Field

Yet even if mainstream linguistic theory had moved on from any notion of agglutinative languages being less evolved than inflectional ones, the denigration of agglutinative languages and their cultures continued outside the field of linguistics. Charles de Kirwan (1829–1917) wrote on a variety of religious themes; in his 1899 work *Le déluge de Noé et les races prédiluviennes* (*Noah's Flood and the Antediluvian Races*) he took on the story of Noah's Ark and the origin of man. Not a linguist, he was a forestry inspector by trade.[100] Yet he brought the linguistic views of Müller and the Schlegels directly into his arguments, writing at the dawn of the twentieth century with the science of the first half of the nineteenth. He stated as fact Müller's belief that languages progressed from isolating to agglutinative to inflectional. He declared that each ethnicity made this linguistic progression in proportion to its aptitude for progress. "Those who speak agglutinative languages…have slowly managed some initial progress. It is only the users of inflectional languages who possess the complete instrument of civilization."[101] His belief in inflectional superiority was so secure that it compelled him

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[99] Sapir, *Language*, 124.
[100] François D'Arcy, "Galway Tribes in Bordeaux in the 18th Century: D'Arcy, Lynch, Kirwan, French," *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society* 68 (2016), 47.
[101] Charles de Kirwan, *Le déluge de Noé et les races prédiluviennes*, vol. 1, *Le deluge fut-il universel?* (Paris: Librairie Bloud et Barral, 1899), 18–19. "Ceux qui parlent les langues agglutinatives…ont accompli lentement un premier progrès. Seuls les peoples qui font usage des langues flexionnelles possèdent l'instrument complet de la civilization."

to argue that all the descendants of Noah had to speak inflectional languages. This conviction led him to a non-literal belief in the Biblical flood, since Noah's family could not have been the only survivors of humanity if non-inflectional languages had also managed to survive.

Such prejudicial views also persisted in fields of general knowledge. In the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Sir Charles Eliot (1862–1931), the Commander-in-Chief of the British East Africa Protectorate, wrote in his educational entry: "To the honour of the Turks it must be said that, bad as is their administration when judged by European standards and especially when applied to Europeans, the empires of the Seljuks, Osmanlis and Mongols which they founded rise far above the ordinary standard of ephemeral Oriental dynasties."[102] In the same edition of the *Encyclopedia* we find: "In all literary matters the Ottoman Turks have shown themselves a singularly uninventive people."[103] The author of that entry, British orientalist Elias J. W. Gibb, who had died a decade before the *Encyclopedia*'s publication but whose ideas were not judged to be in need of updating, had written a six-volume work entitled *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, in which he wrote: "That great race to which the Ottomans belong...has never produced any religion, philosophy or literature which bears the stamp of its individual genius."[104]

Notions of Turkic nomadism and cultural inferiority persisted on the eve of World War I. Ayşe Tetik has cited a 1914 writing by German historian Karl Süßheim (1878–1947) that contained the type of derogatory language that was still directed toward

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[102] *Encyclopædia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information* vol. 27, 11th ed. (New York: Encyclopædia Britannica Company, 1911), 469.
[103] *Encyclopædia Britannica* 11th ed., 465. https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Encyclop%C3%A6dia_Britannica/vQAuAAAAIAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1.
[104] Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, 6. See also Victoria Rowe Holbrook, *The Unreadable Shores of Love: Turkish Modernity and Mystic Romance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 17–24.

Ottoman Turks even by their allies: "For the most part, the Turks integrated only slowly and unwillingly to the culture of their superior neighbors and rivals. Always anxious for movement and time in the open air, they felt their best out in the flat countryside, and when they conquered cities, they tended to begin by tearing down the mighty stone walls that suffocated them."[105]

Late into World War I, British Naval Intelligence published *A Manual on the Turanians and Pan-Turanianism*, with the stated intent of offering insight to British intelligence on the growing movement of solidarity among the speakers of agglutinative languages across Europe and Asia.[106] The content was for official use only, and amounted to a lambasting of Turkish civilization that bore the echoes of Adelung'swork from more than a century prior. The manual's criticism furthermore declared Turanian culture inferior to both Arabic and Persian—both cultures of inflectional languages:

> The Turks are imitative rather than original. In all their branches they have to some extent assimilated the nearest civilization with which they came into contact….The Turk, apart from the effect of foreign civilizations, has uniformly been described in earlier times by Chinese, Persians, Byzantines, and Arabs as by nature savage, untameable, faithless, heartless, rapacious, and work-shy. The verdict of modern times endorses this judgment. The course of history shows that no other race has brought such devastations and massacres, such lasting derangements, into the life of other nations. The Turk has, moreover, displayed no power of developing his own civilization, which has consequently remained far behind that of both the Iranians and the Semites. Nor has the Turk ever

[105] Karl Süßheim, "Der Zusammenbruch des türkischen Reiches in Europa," *Veröffentlichungen der Handelshochschule München, III. Heft: Die Balkanfrage*. Edited by M. J. Bonn (Munich and Leipzig: Verlag von Duncker & Humblot, 1914). "Die Türken haben sich meistens nur langsam und widerwillig der Kultur ihrer höher stehenden Nachbarn und Feinde angepaßt. Immer nach Bewegung und nach Aufenthalt in freier Luft sich sehnend, fühlten sie sich vor allem auf dem flachen Lande wohl, und wenn sie Städte eroberten, rissen sie mit Vorliebe zunächst die mächtigen Steinbauten nieder, die ihnen den Atem beengten." Cited in Ayşe Tetik, "The Reception of European Typological Language Classification Among the Turkish Language Reformers of 1932–1936," *Cahiers du CLSL* 63 (2021): 86. https://doi.org/10.26034/la.cdclsl.2021.1961.

[106] Naval Intelligence Division of Great Britain, *A Manual on the Turanians and Pan-Turanianism* (Great Britain: H.M. Stationery Office, 1918), 11. https://www.google.com/books/edition/A_Manual_on_the_Turanians_and_Pan_Turani/hF5BAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0.

> exhibited any political capacity; for he has only succeeded in establishing one single State of any permanence, and that State has been a glaring example of incorrigible misgovernment. Thus he has come to be regarded as the personified opponent of modern civilization, the arch-enemy of Europe, from which he should be expelled at all costs; and the watchword of both past and present has been "Down with the Turk."[107]

This refrain of the inability of a Turkic people to create a lasting state, which echoed the claims of Müller a half-century prior, would have great resonance in the era between world wars. Cemal Kafadar has pointed out the principles of the "new world order" of this period, by which it felt crucial for a people to assert their right to exist as a nation by citing a historical track record of building a stable state.[108] In this environment, the repeated dissociation of Turkic peoples with stable states—which Müller had tied to language and which British Naval Intelligence now also tied to culture and mindset—was not a neutral observation but rather a burden to be answered for on the international stage.

As the interwar period progressed, the information circulating through Europe regarding the Turkic people and their language had scarcely improved. In the updated 1922 version of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Arthur Anthony MacDonnell wrote, "Down to the outbreak of the World War all the Turanian peoples were subject to foreign domination except the Magyars and Osmanli Turks. Only those sections of the Turanians that have come into close contact with the Aryans of Europe have succeeded in rising from their primitive state to a comparatively advanced degree of civilization: the Finns, the Magyars and the Osmanli Turks."[109] Müller's ideas of the impossibility of a lasting agglutinative language–speaking state persisted, as did the crediting of European culture

[107] Naval Intelligence, *A Manual*, 120.
[108] Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 41.
[109] MacDonnell, *Encyclopædia Britannica* 12th ed., 30.

with Ottoman civilization. Furthermore, MacDonnell's tepid praise of Ottoman civilization was undone by overt criticism just one page later: "…the Ottoman Turks, indolent by nature, have never displayed any ability or energy in state-building."[110]

The new Turkish Republic, facing its long-standing linguistic inferiority complex versus Arabic and Persian and entering a phase of Westernizing reforms, was faced with these persistent, denigrating ideas from Europe. Friedrich Schlegel's ideas on language were more than a century old, but had seen a rise in popularity large enough to fill Müller's lecture halls in London. Even though the field of linguistics had outgrown the prejudice of these ideas, the bias persisted in religion, politics, and popular culture. In the next chapter we will look at the Turkish awareness of and response to this prejudice, as the new republic embarked on one of the most ambitious language reforms in history, in a quest to assert Turkish as a state and cultural language.

[110] MacDonnell, *Encyclopædia Britannica* 12th ed., 32.

Chapter III.

The Turkish Response, Part 1: Reclassifying the Language

Max Müller's praise for the logic of Turkish was frequently cited in the new republic's nationalist textbooks and materials, which reveled in a European scholar looking favorably upon the language.[111] Yet an awareness of this sporadic European praise came with an awareness of decades of Western criticism against their agglutinative tongue. TDK member Hasan Reşit Tankut (1891–1980) told of the anger that Atatürk felt whenever he heard Müller's praise of Turkish grammar; this anger came because Atatürk also knew the condescending turns that the praise took, as Müller attributed the grammar to the nomadic Turkish life on the steppes of Central Asia.[112]

A century of Western criticism of agglutinative languages certainly made its mark on the members of the TDK. The organization's first approach to handling this prejudice is perhaps best encapsulated by TDK member Saim Ali Dilemre (1880–1954). When the organization held its first convention in 1932, the title of Dilemre's speech left little doubt about one of the TDK's responses to the Inflectional Superiority Thesis: "Turkish Philology: Turkish Is an Indo-European Language."[113]

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[111] Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists," 7.
[112] Lewis, "Atatürk's Language Reform," in *Atatürk and the Modernization of Turkey*, ed. Jacob M. Landau (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1984), 204.
[113] Saim Ali Dilemre, "Türk Filolojisi: Türkçe Bir Hint-Avrupa Dilidir," *Birinci Türk Dili Kurultayı,* 71–80.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of the Turkish response to European views lies in what was largely missing from it; as Tetik points out, the reformers' response to the Inflectional Superiority Thesis did not involve denying it.[114] This claim may seem astonishing and may initially appear untrue; after all, we will see that many reformers had the explicit goal of undercutting European thinking on the matter. However, Tetik's claim is more specific than it may first appear; what the reformers sought to overturn was the European notion of three set language types and a strict division between them. More importantly, they wished to change where Turkish fit in linguists' view of those three types. Yet in the reformers' desire to distance Turkish from the agglutinative label, most of their responses did not involve a defense of agglutination and of its capacity to show richness, nuance, and sophistication. Their quest to topple European thinking would thus do little to defend the languages that had been labeled primitive in the first place. And while by the 1930s it was already mainstream thinking in the field of linguistics to reject the placement of all languages solidly into one of three types, the fact remained that Turkish was seen as the epitome of an agglutinative language. In 1900 Henry Sweet cited Turkish as a language in which the phenomenon of agglutination was the most advanced. Tetik has referred to it as an agglutinative language "*par excellence.*"[115]

In a still bolder act, the reformers sought to establish Turkish as the ancestral human language, thus by extension giving it access to and inclusion in any high-status category of language that one might conceive of. This aspect of the Reform will be examined more closely in Chapter IV. But this chapter will look at the first way the

[114] Tetik, "The Reception of European Typological Language Classification," 83.
[115] Sweet, *History of Language*, 67; Tetik, "The Reception of European Typological Language Classification," 83.

reformers handled the European bias toward inflection: they simply tried to make Turkish an inflectional language.

Mustafa Celaleddin (1826–1876)

An early response to European prejudice, and consequent attempt to shape linguistic policy, came well before the Language Reform—in 1869—by someone who was European by birth. Konstanty Borzecky (1826–1876) was born and raised in Poland but settled in Constantinople and converted to Islam, changing his name to Mustafa Celaleddin.[116] He authored a book in French, *Les Turcs Anciens et Modernes*, which he explained was an attempt to defend the Turkish people against certain misconceptions.[117] What compelled him was a proposal in the French Senate to change national policy on how history would be taught in light of Turks being excluded from the "Aryan" group. According to Celaleddin, this proposal meant that Turks "would see themselves relegated to the race representing Asian barbarism."[118] He countered this idea by asserting the Aryan nature of Turkish.[119] He noted in this pre–Language Reform era that the people in the provinces of Turkey spoke differently from the people in then-Constantinople, and that their language, far more Turkic than the Arabic- and Persian-influenced speech in the capital, was much more like the languages of Europe. It was this Turkic speech that he proceeded to liken to "Aryan" languages. He highlighted what he perceived as

[116] Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists," 8.
[117] Moustapha Djelaleddin, *Les Turcs Anciens et Modernes* (Paris: L. Tonion & Cie, 1870), 5. https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:44825871$1i. The book was originally printed a year prior at a French printing house in Constantinople, l'Imprimerie du "Courrier de l'Orient."
[118] Djelaleddin, *Les Turcs Anciens*, 229. "…les Turcs avec les Muscovites, rejetés de la famille des Aryas de l'Europe, se verraient relégués dans la race représentant la barbarie de l'Asie."
[119] Djelaleddin, *Les Turcs Anciens*, 236.

similarities between Turkish and Latin conjugations.[120] Furthermore, he gave himself over to claiming Turkish origins for Latinate words. The Latin *Auspicia*, referring to predictions based on the flights of birds, was assigned a relationship with Turkish *av*, a root meaning "hunt." That which is hunted, Celaleddin reasoned, flies or flees away. In a still more strained example, he claimed the Latin *spect-* root, seen in English "spectacle" and "aspect," came from the Turkish *bak-*, meaning "to look." The Latin root for "stepping" that gave English "egress" and "ingress" was *egredi* and *ingredi*, which he claimed stemmed from the Turkish *girdi*, meaning "he/she/it entered."[121]

Celaleddin invoked the term popularized by Müller—"Turanian"—to speak of the Turkic languages; in arguing for his vision of Turanian and Indo-European languages existing within a single family, he used the term *touro-aryanisme*. Similarly, to describe the Turkic influence on Indo-European languages that he was positing, he spoke of *tourisme*, an unusual choice since it is a homophone for the French word for tourism.[122] Citing the influence of *tourisme* on Western languages, he proposed crediting the Turkish *-tir* (a particle that indicates the verb "to be") with the passive *-tur* in Latin words such as *amatur*, meaning "he is loved." By extension, he reasoned, the Turkish particle *-tir* "to be" might have given rise to the Latinate names of professional doers such as *doctor* and *sculptor.*[123] He gave an extensive list of French/Latin words that he believed had Turkish cognates: Turkish *kol* ("arm"), he related to Latinate words such as *column*, *colonel*, and *acolyte.* Latin *aula* ("classroom") he related to Turkish *avlu* ("courtyard").[124]

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[120] Djelaleddin, *Les Turcs Anciens*, 247.
[121] Djelaleddin, *Les Turcs Anciens*, 242.
[122] Djelaleddin, *Les Turcs Anciens*, 250. At several points, Celaleddin uses the spelling "turisme," and also varies between "touro-aryanisme" and "touro-aranisme."
[123] Djelaleddin, *Les Turcs Anciens*, 250.
[124] Djelaleddin, *Les Turcs Anciens*, 252–4.

There is evidence that Celaleddin's ideas were influential on the reformers who did their work a half-century after his book came out. Aytürk concedes that the limited number of copies of the original edition does not give the impression of a very influential book, though it was also printed in Paris the following year, possibly opening Celaleddin's ideas to a different, European audience. Aytürk also points out that Celaleddin's granddaughter would marry a leader in the Language Reform, Samih Rifat Bey (1874–1932).[125] Rifat's colleague Ahmet Cevat Emre (1876–1961) was keenly aware of the kinship of the two men and wrote that they both worked to disprove the separation of inflectional and agglutinative languages, using the comparative techniques begun by French linguist Albert Cuny (1869–1947).[126] Emre's claim is unusual, however, since Cuny was only seven years old when Celaleddin died.[127] Regardless of the accuracy of that claim, we can see in it an awareness during the Reform years of Celaleddin's work from a half-century earlier, and an awareness that his grandson-in-law was continuing research along the same lines. As we will see below, Rifat presented work that showed many similarities to what Celaleddin had done. Furthermore, Aytürk cites the popularity of Celaleddin's book among the Young Turks of the early twentieth century.[128]

Regardless of whether Celaleddin's ideas were popular or well-received, his ideas from the 1860s offered remarkable foreshadowing of the ways in which the reformers of the 1930s would address derogatory foreign attitudes to their language. He worked along the same dual-pronged approach that the reformers would later engage in: attempting to

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[125] Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists," 8.
[126] See Albert Louis Marie Cuny, *Invitation à l'étude comparative des langues indo-européennes et des langues chamito-sémitiques* (Bordeaux: Editions Bière, 1946). Cuny did work on identifying phonological correspondences between Indo-European and Semitic languages.
[127] For Emre's claim regarding Celaleddin and Rifat, see Ahmet Cevat Emre, "Köklerin Değişikliğine Dair," *Türk Dili Tetkik Cemiyeti Bülteni* 5 (April 1934): 56–7.
[128] Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists," 23.

draw a similarity between Turkic and Indo-European languages, while also suggesting Turkish as not just a cousin language but an ancestral language from which Latin and Greek would themselves derive.

Samih Rifat (1874–1932)

Celaleddin's grandson-in-law Samih Rifat was an early and pivotal voice among the language reformers in the attempt to classify Turkish as an Indo-European language. He tried to identify the occurrence of prefixes in Turkish—a phenomenon frequently used across Indo-European languages whereas agglutinative languages use suffixes almost exclusively. Rifat identified families of words in Turkish that he claimed owed their differences to ancient prefixes; he thus saw a relationshp between *almak* ("to take," "to buy"), *çalmak* ("to steal, strike, or play (an instrument)"), *yalamak* ("to lick"), *salmak* ("to release"), and *kalmak* ("to stay"). It is not clear why he felt that this group of words might have something semantically in common, or what their theoretical prefixes might have meant. He created a similar family, with similarly unclear semantic relationships, in *akmak* ("to flow"), *çakmak* ("to ignite," "to understand"), *yakmak* ("to burn"), *takmak* ("to attach"), and *kakmak* ("to push").[129]

Rifat used the same technique to establish the existence in Turkish of that hallmark trait of inflective languages—internal root changes. He identified certain groups of words, differing only by an internal vowel, that he claimed were related. Thus *kasmak* ("to tighten"), *kesmek* ("to cut"), *kısmak* ("to reduce"), and *kusmak* ("to vomit") were all, Sifat claimed, from a common ancestral root that had undergone inflection before

[129] Emre, "Samih Rifatın Dilbiliğinde Mevkii ve Nazariyesi," *Türk Dili Tetkik Cemiyeti Bülteni* 1 (appendix "Samih Rifat Kısmı") (April 1933): 15.

becoming four regular verbs.[130] He similarly claimed a common root for the group that included *kaçmak* ("to escape"), *göçmek* ("to migrate"), and *geçmek* ("to pass"), this time introducing a variation in voicing for the initial "k" and "g." He then went on to another type of root change, metathesis, in which sounds or elements switch places. He used this type of change to explain a common ancestor for *katmak* ("to add") and the aforementioned *takmak* ("to attach"), a pair that does have strong similarity in meaning. Less convincing is another pair he proposed, *sapmak* ("to digress") and *basmak* ("to step").[131]

Rifat was in ill health by the time of the TDK's founding, and he did not live long past their First Language Convention in September 1932. Yet his contributions to the path of the new Turkish language were highly valued; the premiere issue of the TDK's periodical, *Türk Dili*, contained an appendix devoted to honoring his legacy. Emre was one of the TDK members who spoke admiringly of Rifat and his work, though he confessed that his late colleague "sometimes strained the imagination in his conjecture."[132] Nonetheless, Emre opened his remembrance by promising to continue in the footsteps of the work that Sifat had done.[133]

Ahmet Cevat Emre (1876–1961)

Erik Jan Zürcher referred to Ahmet Cevat Emre as "one of the few linguists in the TDK who were somewhat serious."[134] Jens Peter Laut also named him as an exception to

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[130] Tetik, "The Reception of European Typological Language Classification," 91.
[131] Emre, "Samih Rifatın Dilbiliğinde," 15–16.
[132] Emre, "Samih Rifatın Dilbiliğinde," 17. "hattâ tahminlerinde bazen muhayyileyi yoracak derecede varıyor."
[133] Emre, "Samih Rifatın Dilbiliğinde," 13.
[134] Erik Jan Zürcher, "La théorie du «langage-soleil» et sa place dans la réforme de la langue turque," in *La linguistique fantastique*, edited by Sylvain Auroux (Paris: J. Clims, 1985), 88. Zürcher's chapter was

the trend of non-linguists who found themselves in the TDK determining national language policy.[135] Emre had embarked on a military career but was imprisoned then exiled for his revolutionary principles; upon returning to Istanbul in 1908 he cultivated an interest in language, writing an Ottoman grammar book, and during the First World War he was appointed as an assistant to German Turcologist Friedrich Giese, the chair of Uralo-Altaic Studies at Darülfünun, today's Istanbul University.[136] Giese became a mentor who would later reappear in Emre's journey to becoming one of the foremost shapers of linguistic policy in Turkey.

In 1934 Emre wrote an article in *Türk Dili*, the journal of the TDK, entitled "One of the Incorrect Theories to be Righted: The Myth of the Unchanging Nature of Roots in Turkish" ("Düzeltilecek Yanlış Nazariyelerden—Türkçede Köklerin Değişmezliği Efsanesi").[137] In it he voiced his determination to distance Turkish from the family of agglutinative languages:

> A theory has been indulged regarding Turkish that is false, unsound, and downright harmful to scientific investigation. The claim that this theory has borne is the following: Turkish is an agglutinative language; the roots of its words don't change, and it creates words and grammatical forms by arranging endings side by side. By contrast, in inflectional languages the roots transform, be it in their consonants or in their vowels, so much so that it is impossible for roots to present their complete and unadulterated form. In fact, this claim is unsound in every aspect.[138]

published in French, having been translated from English by Nicole Sels. "Emre qui était l'un des rares linguistes un peu sérieux de la Société…"

[135] Laut, *Das Türkische als Ursprache*, 91.

[136] Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists," 10.

[137] Emre, "Düzeltilecek Yanlış Nazariyelerden—Türkçede Köklerin Değişmezliği Efsanesi," *Türk Dili Tetkik Cemiyeti Bülteni* 5 (April 1934): 52–56.

[138] Emre, "Düzeltilecek," 52. "Türkçe hakkında beslenilen yanlış, çürük ve o derecede ilmî mütalealara zararlı bir nazariye vardır; bu nazariyenin güttüğü dava şudur: Türkçe *iltisakî* 'agglutinante' bir dildir; sözlerinde kök değişmez, lâhikalar yanyana dizilerek sözler ve sarfî şekiller türer. Halbuki *tasrifî* 'flexionnelle' dillerde kökleri gerek vokalleri, gerek konsonları değişir, öyle ki asıl kökleri tam ve mücerret olarak göstermek mümkün olmaz. Işte bu dava her yandan çürüktür."

He proceeded to argue against the divide between Turkish and Indo-European languages with two claims; the first was that Turkish showed inflection, and the second was that inflectional languages showed agglutination.

To demonstrate inflection in Turkish, Emre took the word for "water," *su*, and claimed that it appeared in inflected form in a wide variety of words. He saw the "water" root in *sıvı* ("liquid") and *savak* ("floodgate"), and *sıva* ("plaster"). He then claimed the *su* root existed in the interior of the word *ıslak* ("wet"), pointing out that according to his theory Turkish was showing two Indo-European features here: taking on a prefix (of some unspecified sort) and reducing a root down to a single sound (in this case, /s/).

As much as he fervently wanted Turkish to be inflectional, Emre also rejected the strict tripartite division of language classes in his argument for inflectional elements in Turkish; in this sense he was agreeing with his Western linguist contemporaries, as August Schlegel's then hundred-year-old classification system had been under criticism for several years. Most notably, Sapir had rejected the primacy of those divisions more than a decade earlier. Nonetheless, Emre carried his disagreement with the Schlegels' classification still further; he argued that only Semitic languages, which August Schlegel had excluded from the inflectional system, in fact used true inflection—an unusual move as he also argued for Turkish to have inflection. Emre argued that prefixes, that other hallmark of the inflectional system in which Sifat had tried to include Turkish, were in fact simply an instance of compound words in Indo-European languages, and not a separate phenomenon at all.

The Turkish phenomenon of vowel harmony, which Steinthal had assailed as the work of a stalled and backward-looking mind, was presented by Emre as another example

of inflection, beyond anything that Indo-European languages had yet experienced. The appearance of inflection here stemmed from the fact that due to vowel harmony, Turkish suffixes have either two or four variants—each differing only by their vowel—which assimilate to resemble the vowel that precedes them. This merits a more elaborate example than was offered when discussing Steinthal, in order to show why Emre might have been compelled to see in vowel harmony a wealth of inflection.

In Turkish, to create the first-person simple past, for example, the root *yaz-* ("to write") gives rise to *yazdım* ("I wrote"), while *bul-* ("to find") gives *buldum* ("I found"); *ver-* ("to give") yields *verdim* ("I gave") and *sür-* ("to drive") gives *sürdüm* ("I drove"). Furthermore, the *d* that marks the past tense in all of these expressions will assimilate to the voicing of the previous sound; therefore, one can see a variant for all four of these endings in which a *t* is used instead of a *d*: *yaptım* ("I did"), *unuttum* ("I forgot"), *içtim* ("I drank"), and *düştüm* ("I fell"). The phenomenon had never been seen as inflection because it is governed predictably by the phonetic environment of the ending, and thus had nothing to do with the irregularity that Müller had prized. Although Emre's argument also misses the established distinction that inflection involves changes in the root and not the suffix, it does serve to highlight the long-lived arbritary nature of Steinthal's denigration of change in a suffix despite his admiration of it in a root.[139]

Further arguments from Emre on the presence of inflection in Turkish include the fact that Turkish can indeed have suffixes that describe more than one piece of information at once. In this he was correct; in the word *bulduk* ("we found"), the *-k* ending expresses, in a manner that is not further divisible, both the first person and the

[139] For more on Emre's arguments for inflection in Turkish, see Jens Peter Laut, *Das Türkische als Ursprache*, 91–93.

plural. Furthermore, he identified instances where Turkish was more like an inflectional language than many inflectional languages were themselves; he pointed out the causative, expressed in Turkish with additions that united with the root before any other suffixes could be attached. Examples of this include - *tır*- to create *yaptırmak* ("to make (someone) do") and *–t*- to create *temizletmek* ("to have (someone) clean"). Such structures, when translated into French, for example (or in English, as seen above), required multiple words, a feature that did not appear inflectional at all but was more in keeping with isolational languages such as Mandarin. Here also he was correct that many inflectional languages such as English and French have lost much of their inflection and taken on isolational traits, though the Turkish causative endings that he cited are all regularly applied and do not show evidence of inflection.

For all the strained examples of inflection that Rifat and Emre tried to conjure in Turkish, there were simpler examples that they did not resort to. The first-person pronoun *ben* generally takes on case endings in a regular manner; in *beni* "me" (accusative), *benden* "from me" (ablative), and *bende* "on me" (locative), the *ben*- root remains unchanged. However, for the dative "to me," the correct form is *bana.* The root has changed from *ben*- to *ban*- and vowel harmony has taken place in deference to the change. The same holds true for the second-person singular pronoun *sen*, which changes to *sana.* Both instances meet the definition of inflection and occur quite commonly in everyday speech. Though these instances are limited, the fact remains that Turkish is capable of inflection, to the chagrin of anyone whose identity was tied to thinking that only certain languages were capable of it.

Saim Ali Dilemre began this chapter with his 1932 speech that openly tried to get Turkish classified as Indo-European. However, by the Second Language Convention in 1934, he distinguished himself as an exception to the general hesitancy to criticize the Inflectional Superiority Thesis and the prejudice behind it. He railed against the racism that had created such an idea (italics are his):

> They say all languages belong to a group, and since the inflectional system is the newest it is a sign of progress; *they esteem that this language question amounts to the lofty capabilities of the inflectional system. They also say that peoples who use inflectional languages are more developed, more enterprising. And it is astonishing how politics and racism are incorporated into these writings*.[140]

Dilemre took linguists such as Meillet to task for their fixation on ethnic judgments based on language: "As the great professor Meillet talks about Indo-European languages, he writes a similar racial boasting on nearly every page. And wherever the work of an inflectional language appears, its speakers are the ruling class. The *classe dirigeante*. Every European thinks this way."[141]

At this point Dilemre cites the existence of modern linguistic theory that supports his criticism of linguistic prejudice:

> Some other authors say that isolational, agglutinative, and inflectional languages are different stages along one progression, and that the opposite can also be true. That is to say, systems can go from inflectional straight to isolational. The reasons for this are various societal contingencies. When the three systems morph into one another because of these societal contingencies and *accidents linguistiques*, it is not a sign that this transformation is a positive development or a negative development. And

[140] Saim Ali Dilemre, "Dr. S. A. Dilemre'nin Tezi: Eski Dil Mefhumu," *Türk Dili* 12 (1935): 74. "Bütün diller bir familyadandır ve fleksiyon sistemi en yenisi olduğundan bir terakki alâmetidir derler ve *bu dil meselesi fleksiyon sistemile* [sic] *yüksek bir kabiliyet eseri addederler. Ve fleksiyon ile konuşan milletlr* [sic] *ırkan daha mütekâmil, daha müteşebbistir derler. Ve bu kitapların mütealasında nasıl siyaset yapıldığına, nasıl rasistlik yapıldığına hayrette kalır.*"

[141] Dilemre, "Dr. S. A. Dilemre'nin Tezi," 74–5. "Büyük profesör Meillet Hint-Avrupa dillerinden bahsederken…gibi, adeta her sayfada buna mümasil ırk mefahiri yazar. Ve nerede fleksiyon eseri varsa onu konuşanlar hâkim zümre olur. '*Classe dirigeante*' olur. Her Avrupalı böyle düşünur."

> if we look closely, these three systems mix in every language. In fact it is happening right now."[142]

His examples took on the high-status language of French and pointed out its various compound words that had the isolational character more typical of Mandarin, such as *abat-jour* "lampshade," which breaks down to "kills-day."

Dilemre's defense of the dignity of all language types at the Second Language Convention was a great step forward in the resistance against long-standing European ideas that a language had to have a certain structure and heritage if it was to function on the world stage and be a point of pride for its speakers. Unfortunately, the path of the TDK was to take a very different detour. The pressure to conjure kinship with Indo-European languages would provide a major distraction in the years to come—years that were pivotal in the establishment of new vocabulary that would serve as a basis for *Yeni Türkçe*—New Turkish. But before we look at the new vocabulary that was built in the highly productive years of 1935–6, the next chapter will take on another response to European prejudice. This was the quest to establish Turkish as not just a relative to Indo-European languages, but actually their ancestor.

[142] Dilemre, "Dr. S. A. Dilemre'nin Tezi," 75. "Diğer bazı müellifler derler ki izolan, aglütinan, ve fleksiyonel diller ayni bir neşvünemanın muhtelif safhalarıdırlar ve bu iş tersine de olabilir. Yani sistemler fleksiyondan, izolasyona doğru dahi gidebilirler. Bunun sebepleri birtakım içtimaî hâdiselerdir. Bu içtimaî hâdiseler, ve *Accidents Linguistiques* sayesinde bu üç sistem birbirine kaybolurken bu inkilâp müspet bir neşvünemaya veya menfî bir neşvünemaya delâlet etmez derler. Ve yakından bakılırsa bu üç sistem her dilde birbirine karışıktır. Zaten mevcuttur."

Chapter IV.

The Turkish Response, Part 2: Sun-Language Theory

On June 13, 1936, prominent French Turcologist Jean Deny received an invitation from the Turkish embassy to attend the Third Turkish Language Convention at Dolmabahçe Palace in late August. The Turkish government would be defraying the costs for their invited guests.[143] Deny was one of fifteen foreign linguists who received and accepted the invitation, representing a range of European nations as well as Japan and the Soviet Union.[144]

On August 24 of that year, Saffet Arikan, the chief minister of the TDK, declared the convention open. He immediately pointed out the range of countries represented by their guests, followed by a round of applause: "In the name of the Convention I welcome the German, Austrian, Bulgarian, French, Greek, English, Italian, Japanese, Hungarian, Polish, and Soviet intellectuals honoring us with their attendance at this meeting that concerns not just the Turkish nation, but the entire scientific world."[145]

He then laid out the intentions of the event:

> The task for the Turkish language is to introduce to the scientific world the heretofore unknown vast wealth of Turkish, as well as the fact that it is the original source of not just the Uralo-Altaic group, but of all the cultural languages grouped under the names of Indo-European and Hamito-Semitic

[143] Hamit Bozarslan, "Jean Deny et le troisième Congrès de la langue turque (İstanbul, 1936)" *Turcica* 39 (2007): 204, 219, 223.
[144] *Üçüncü Türk Dil Kurultayı 1936; tezler, müzakere zabıtları.* (İstanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1937), vii.
[145] *Üçüncü Türk Dil Kurultayı*, 4–5. "Yalnız yurdumuz değil, bütün ilim dünyasını ilgilendiren bu toplantımızda bulunan şerefini bize veren Alman, Avusturyalı, Bulgar, Fransız, Elen, İngiliz, Italyan, Japon, Macar, Polone ve Sovyet Birliği bilginlerine Kurultay adına hoş geldiniz derim."

> as well…The theme of this Third Convention is the introduction of the Turkish Language Thesis to the entire world.[146]

On that first afternoon, all fifteen foreign guests were nominated—and unanimously elected—to the Sun-Language Theory and Language Comparison Commission. To give an idea of the importance that the TDK placed on their new theory, all the other commissions that dealt with various scientific branches (Grammar/Syntax, Philology, etc.) had eight members, all of whom were Turkish. Administrative commissions had five members, all of whom were also Turkish. The Sun-Language Theory Commission, by contrast, elected thirty-two people, half of whom were foreign guests who had not yet been introduced to the theory that they now in some way represented.[147] What had been made clear at this point was that Turkish would be put forth by their hosts as the original human language. By the end of the convention, all of these international guests would be urged to sign a statement of support for the theory. But that was six days away.

Thus began one of the more unusual weeks in modern historical linguistics. The eager anticipation on the part of the organizers was apparent in the extensive opening remarks such as those quoted above. Yet once the theory was unveiled, the result was characterized by Aytürk as "a barely disguised atmosphere of embarrassment."[148]

This chapter looks at some of the European influences at work in the creation of this theory. In moments where European scholarship appears absent or ignored, we will examine whether these moments constituted a rebellion against European thinking.

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[146] *Üçüncü Türk Dil Kurultayı*, 4. "Türk Dil çalışmaları, bir yandan Türk Dilinin şimdiye kadar tanıtılmamış olan yüksek varlığı ve, yalnız Ural - Altay grubunun degil, İndo - Öropeen ve Hamito - Semitik adları altına alınan bütün kültürel dillerin de ana kaynağı olduğunu ilim dünyasına tanıtmak…Bu Üçüncü Kurultayın konusu, Türk Dil Tezinin bütün dünyasına tanıtılmasıdır."
[147] *Üçüncü Türk Dil Kurultayı*, 29–33.
[148] Aytürk, "H. F. Kvergić," 23.

We will begin with a brief look at the main points of Sun-Language Theory, the boldness of its claims, and the methodology of its application. Such a discussion will inevitably point out the ways in which it is not remotely based in science, or in any of the aspects of linguistic theory that have stood the test of time. The goal of this chapter is to examine European influence on the theory and not simply to mock its most outlandish aspects; however, it is important to appreciate the extent to which the theory amounted to a desired result in search of a proof. The more persuasively it can be shown that the theory grew from that desired result, the more possible it will be to discuss what influenced that desire, and what influenced the decisions made in getting there.

Next, this chapter will look at some of the ways in which the theory rebelled against established European thought. This includes traditional thought on the origin of language and what is knowable about it, as well as the developed best practices in historical linguistics. We will also look at ways in which Sun-Language Theory did not contradict but instead built on European beliefs, namely in the romanticizing of ancestral languages, even when going back to their primordial versions. We will also address the problems of prejudice and racism in the presentation of the theory, and how that too was marked by European influence. Finally, we will look at the interesting case of one particular European, Hermann Feodor Kvergić of Austria, who worked with the (largely anonymous) Turkish creators of Sun-Language Theory, and address the question of whether the theory was in fact sparked by a European collaborator.

The Tenets and Problems of the Theory

Sun-Language Theory arose in near symbiosis with the Turkish History Thesis, which stated in 1935: “The cradle of the world’s first great civilization was the Turkish

homeland in Central Asia, and those who founded that culture and spread it throughout the world were the Turks."[149] Sun-Language Theory was the corresponding linguistic view of this historical phenomenon, claiming that this ancient Turkic people were the originators of all civilizational language and the propagators of that language across Europe and the entire world, including, curiously, the Americas.[150] (As evidence, TDK general secretary İbrahim Necmi Dilmen cited that Atahualpa, the Emperor of the Inca people, bore a Turkish name, and that the language of the Maya in southern Mexico contained several hundred Turkish words.)[151]

The reason for the sun in the name of the theory was the importance, its authors claimed, that all primeval cultures placed on the sun as the source of all life and existence. Dilmen cited archeological digs on the White Sea in Siberia that found sun symbols dating to the hunting and gathering era. So profound and primal was this connection to the sun, according to the theory, that it became the basis for all concepts both concrete and abstract. The need to communicate about the sun was so fundamental, predating all organized language, that the sound used to express it was simply /a/, or as written in Turkish, *ağ*. The basis for primitive man using this sound to denote the sun was that the long /a/ sound was the simplest and most open sound that the human larynx could utter.

Although the Turkish letter "ğ" in this environment (at the end of an utterance) is simply a light guttural that serves to lengthen the vowel, in the Turkish transcription of

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[149] İbrahim Necmi Dilmen, *Türk Tarih Tezinde Güneş-Dil Teorisinin Yeri ve Değeri* (İstanbul: Devlet Basımevi, 1937), 2. "Dünyada yüksek kültürün ilk beşeği Orta Asyadaki Türk Ana yurtları ve o kültürü kuranlar ve bütün dünyaya yayanlar da Türklerdir."
[150] Dilmen, *Türk Tarih Tezinde*, 3.
[151] İbrahim Necmi Dilmen, "T.D.K. nun 1934–1936 Çalışmaları Üzerine Genel Sekreterliğin Raporu," in *Üçüncü Türk Dil Kurultayı*, 13.

this utterance it was treated as a consonant that could then transform into any of the other 20 consonants that are found in the modern form of the language. The original /a/ vowel could likewise mutate into any of the other seven vowels native to Turkish. It therefore followed that literally any permutation of a vowel plus a consonant could be seen as a variation of "ağ" and could refer to some quality linked to the sun, which, in the sample derivations that Dilmen offered, could range from light, clarity, intelligence, strength, and loftiness, to movement, sound, and beyond. In the case of his derivation of "Ankara," the sun was used to mean water.[152]

The second principle of the theory, beyond the central importance of the sun, was the existence of consonant-plus-vowel suffixes that would modify a given aspect of the sun. There were seven categories of suffixes that hinged on which of the 21 consonants was used. The first category (involving the sounds /m/, /b/, /v/, /p/, and /f/) related to the self. Categories 2–4 represented closeness, relative distance, and long distance, respectively, from the principal sun concept. These groups involved primarily alveolar sounds such as /n/, /s/, and /l/. Phonemes /d/ and /t/ indicated the agent, cause, or recipient of the main action; /r/ expressed the repetition or concentration of the given action at a certain point; and /k/, /g/, "ğ," /j/, and /h/ played "the role of taking on the main root meaning, or completing a word's meaning by naming, designating and expressing it."[153]

With this ground laid, Dilmen went on to show sample etymologies of various international words, demonstrating that they had their origins in this original Turkic

[152] İbrahim Necmi Dilmen, "Güneş-Dil Teorisinin Ana Hatları," in *Üçüncü Türk Dil Kurultayı*, 61.
[153] Dilmen, *Türk Tarih Tezinde*, 4. "(K, ğ, y, g, h) konsonlar da ana kök anlamını üzerine alarak temsil etmek, yahut kelimenin manasını tamamlıyarak [sic] onu isimlendirmek, tayin ve ifade etmek rollerinin yaparlar."

language by explaining their meanings using the rules regarding these sounds. His breakdown of the word *Kelt* ("Celt"), for example, was intended to show the Celts to be of Turkic origin. The breakdown went as follows:

Kelt = (1) eğ + (2) ek + (3) eğ + (4) et

Syllable (1) constituted the main root, carrying the sun-related meanings of light, brilliance, intelligence, force, greatness, loftiness, and movement. Although it carried the main lexical concept in this word, the entire syllable failed to survive into the final version of *Kelt*. Syllable (2) was the principal element representing the main root. Recognizing that the main root had disappeared, Dilmen asserted that its meaning was carried onto this element. Syllable (3) expressed, confirmed, and completed the word's meaning. Dilmen noted, without further explanation, that the "ğ" in this element had changed to an /l/. Syllable (4) expressed the agent or cause, or that the word's meaning had been carried out. Dilmen thus concluded that the word *Kelt* referred to a tribe possessing the bold and forceful qualities discussed for syllable (1).[154]

The difficulties with this theory are many. In Dilmen's 1937 speech to the Turkish Historical Society, every word he analyzed—some 43 of them across various languages—was built off the primal utterance for the sun, and literally any vowel-consonant combination consistent with the Turkish language could be labeled as a variation of that single root. Yet the capacity for /a/ to morph into so many forms was obviated by another peculiarity in Dilmen's derivations: in nearly every derivation he showed, the /a/ root meaning the sun simply dropped out of the word altogether, passing its meaning onto the element that followed it. Only in his derivation for the Avestan word

[154] Dilmen, *Türk Tarih Tezinde*, 8–9.

for "Aryan" (*ayriya*) was the all-important primal /a/ thought to still exist in the opening of the word; even other similar words for "Aryan," such as Turkish *ari* and Sanskrit *er*, did not use the primal /a/ as the opening vowel in their Sun-Language etymologies.[155]

There is also the issue of the tremendous abstraction that pervaded the meaning of the theory's possible suffixes. Of the seven categories of suffixes that could modify a main root to build seemingly every word in human language, only categories 2–4, denoting short, medium, and long distance respectively, approached a tangible notion. The remaining categories—conveying such concepts as agency, concentration of an action in space or time, confirmation, or completion of an action through designation of it, and the relationship of the self to the given concept—constituted a highly theoretical block of choices for the first users of language, who, as Dilmen described them, had yet to differentiate themselves from animals.[156]

One final problem worth noting is that the theory suffers from circular reasoning; to find the origin of any word from any language, it must be subjected to this analysis by assigning abstruse meanings to each of its sounds—yet a Turkish word has to go through the same process. The meanings of these seven classes of suffixes would be no more intuitive to a Turkish speaker than to a speaker of any other language. Thus, the protolanguage that was created had no basis for being called Turkish any more than it could be called Icelandic.[157] The fact that the protolanguage appears to have exactly the

[155] Dilmen, *Türk Tarih Tezinde*, 6.
[156] Dilmen, *Türk Tarih Tezinde*, 3.
[157] İlker Aytürk touches on this shortcoming of the theory, indicating that its supporters insisted that Turkish best retained these abstract meanings assigned to sounds. One could argue for the relative consistency in modern Turkish of the first person being marked by "m" and the second person by "n," yet transferring those meanings to "near" and "far" is the most generous extent to which one might say that the sound-to-meaning relationships in Sun-Language Theory are used productively in Turkish. In addition, if one were to argue for the consistent association of "m" with the first person in Turkish, one would need to

same inventory of sounds as modern Turkish is in fact the only thing bonding them together.[158]

This criticism of the theory is presented not to rake it over the coals for sport. The reasons for including it are twofold; first, to reassure readers who may be unfamiliar with historical linguistics—and who find the methodology unwieldy and inaccessible—that they are justified in finding this example of it unintuitive and contrary to how any of us feel about the words we use. Secondly, for our purposes of analyzing the relationship of European thought to Sun-Language Theory, it is necessary to appreciate the boldness of the theory's claims and its departure from Western concepts about language.

Rebellion Against Western Scholarship

While it is clear that the findings of Sun-Language Theory differed from prevailing European thought, the theory in and of itself also constituted a rebellion against contemporary European scholarship in both approach and methodology. In this section we will look at some of the ways in which the ideas that were vital to justifying the theory clashed with Western linguistics, though we will also point out the ways in which a few European thinkers had offered ideas that were more consistent with it.

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also account for the sound's equally consistent use for negation, a fundamental concept that Sun-Language Theory does not account for. See Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists," 17.

[158] As a straightforward example of the traps one falls into by claiming that Turkish matches the phonetics of the original language, Mehmet Uzman asserts that *ğ*, the first consonant according to the theory, is in fact a recent addition to the inventory of Turkish sounds. Mehmet Uzman, "La Théorie de la Langue-Soleil: une entreprise sans espoir aux marges de la science," *Cahiers de l'ILSL* 17 (2004):304.

Monogenesis

Central to the theory's tenets was an acceptance of monogenesis—the idea that all human language families stem from a single source.[159] The monogenetic concept had been steadily falling out of favor in Western linguistic models for over a century. Adelung had already distanced himself from monogenesis in his 1806 writing.[160] Friedrich Schlegel believed in a common ancestor for inflectional languages, but regarding a common ancestor that included agglutinative and isolating languages as well, he had written in 1808 that this approach to linguistics was untenable: "Regarding those who still hope to trace all languages back to a common origin based on their construction and roots, the consideration of the languages of the Americas can be of great use in proving how utterly impossible this is."[161] His resistance may rest in his belief in the divine origin of "organic"/Indo-European languages, making a common ancestor with other languages difficult to reconcile.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the nonviability of monogenesis was a mainstream idea in Europe. August Schleicher agreed in 1865, "it is positively impossible to trace all languages back to one single source language."[162] In 1866, the Société de Linguistique de Paris determined that it was not a topic fit for study, and declared as article 2 of its

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[159] Giorgio Graffi, "Origin of Language and Origin of Languages," *Evolutionary Linguistic Theory* 1, no. 1 (2019): 6–23. Graffi presents an excellent history of the monogenesis vs. polygenesis debate, extending from the Biblical view to the present day, to which I am much indebted.

[160] Adelung, *Mithridates*, xi.

[161] Friedrich Schlegel, *Über die Sprache*, 52. "Die Betrachtung der amerikanischen Sprachen kann übrigens von großem Nutzen sein, um diejenigen, welche immer noch hoffen, alle Sprachen, auch der Materie und den Wurzeln nach, auf einen gemeinschaftlichen Stamm zurückführen zu können, zu überführen, wie ganz unmöglich dieses sei."

[162] August Schleicher, *Über die Bedeutung der Sprache für die Naturgeschichte des Menschen* (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1865), 23. https://www.google.com/books/edition/%C3%9Cber_die_Bedeutung_der_Sprache_f%C3%BCr_die/iqlFAQAAIAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0. "Denn es ist positiv unmöglich alle Sprachen auf eine und dieselbe Ursprache zurückzuführen."

bylaws: "The Society accepts no communication dealing with either the origin of language or the creation of a universal language."[163]

As the twentieth century began, European linguists gained no faith in the prospect of arriving at a universal protolanguage. In the introduction to his 1912 *La philosophie du language*, Albert Dauzat characterized the origin of language as "unknowable."[164] Joseph Vendryes wrote in 1921: "The idea that by comparing extant languages we would arrive at a protolanguage is a fantasy. It is a fantasy that was perhaps touched on back in the day by the founders of comparative grammar, but it has long since been abandoned."[165]

When Italian linguist Alfredo Trombetti offered support for the monogenesis model in his 1905 *L'unità d'origine del linguaggio*, he was met with considerable pushback. Luigi Ceci reproached his lack of rigor:

> But scientific honesty—an ounce of morality is worth more than a universe of knowledge!—imposes, above all, the obligation to say loud and clear that research into the monogenesis or polygenesis of languages enters into that far-off realm of prehistory, in which this or that opinion might aspire to a greater or lesser degree of plausibility, of probability, but not to certainty. Those who think otherwise would reveal themselves to either not appreciate the extent of the problem, or have an inappropriate idea of the power of science.[166]

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[163] "Statuts de 1866," Société Linguistique de Paris, Accessed October 11, 2022, https://www.slp-paris.com/statuts1866.html. "La Société n'admet aucune communication concernant, soit l'origine du langage soit la création d'une langue universelle."

[164] Albert Dauzat, *La philosophie du langage* (Paris: E. Flammarion, 1917), 1. https://www.google.com/books/edition/La_philosophie_du_langage/6EpAAQAAIAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1. "…la science…se heurte plus d'une fois à l'inconnaissable, notamment en ce qui concerne l'origine du langage." https://www.google.com/books/edition/La_philosophie_du_langage/6EpAAQAAIAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1.

[165] Joseph Vendryes, *Le Langage: introduction linguistique à l'histoire* (Paris: La Renaissance du livre, 1921), 6. "L'idée que par la comparaison des langues existantes on aboutirait à la reconstitution d'un idiome primitif est chimérique. C'est une chimère qu'ont peut-être caressée jadis les fondateurs de la grammaire comparée, elle est abandonée depuis longtemps."

[166] Luigi Ceci, "Il fenomeno Trombetti," *La Cultura* 26, no. 1 (1907), 2. "Ma la onestà scientifica — un oncia [*sic*] di moralità vale più del sapere universo! — c'impone soprattutto il dovere di dire alto e forte che l'indagine sulla monogenese o poligenese delle lengue rientra in quel campo lontanissimo di preistoria in cui questa o quelle opinione può aspirare ad un grado maggiore o minore di verisimiglianza [*sic*], di probabilità, non alla certezza. Chi pensasse altrimenti ben mostrebbe o di non avvertire la grandezza del problema o di avere della potenza scientifica una idea [*sic*] non adeguata*."*

There were two levels of skepticism concerning the monogenesis model; one was whether the model was likely, and the other was whether it could ever be feasibly demonstrated. Indeed, of the skeptics of monogenesis listed above, all of them based their protest not on the grounds that monogenesis was impossible, only that it was unknowable. In 1922, the noted Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure united these questions by stating that monogenesis did not pass the tests of being either knowable or likely:

> There has been a desire to find correspondences between Finno-Ugric and Indo-European languages, between the latter and Semitic languages, etc. But comparisons of this sort quickly come upon insurmountable barriers. One must not confuse what might be true with what is demonstrable. The universal relatedness of languages is improbable, but if it should be true—as Italian linguist Mr. Trombetti believes—it could not be proved, due to the excessively large number of changes that have taken place.[167]

The TDK's presentation of Sun-Language Theory succeeded in rebelling against European thought on both counts, by not only putting forth a model of monogenesis but also explicitly stating it could be conclusively determined; "however, with the methodical analysis of languages it is possible to access these secrets again. In the heart of living language hides the history of all the changes it has undergone since its origin. By digging deeper into the available resources of a language we can arrive at its most ancient form."[168]

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[167] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: Payot & Compagnie, 1922), 263. "On a voulu trouver des analogies entre le finno-ougrien et l'indo-européen, entre ce dernier et le sémitique, etc. Mais les comparaisons de ce genre se heurtent vite à des barrières infranchissables. Il ne faut pas confondre ce qui peut être vrai et ce qui est démontrable. La parenté universelle des langues n'est pas probable, mais fût-elle vrai — comme le croit un linguiste italien, M. Trombetti — elle ne pourrait pas être prouvée, à cause du trop grand nombre de changements intervenus*."*

[168] Dilmen, *Türk Tarih Tezinde*, 2. *"*halbuki yine bu sırları bugünkü dillerin metodik analiziyle de elde etmek mümkündür. Yasıyan [*sic*] bir dilin koynunda onun ilk kuruluşundan beri geçirdiği bütün değişmelerin tarihi saklıdır. Bir dilin eldeki varlıklarını derinleştire derinleştire onun en eski sekline kadar varabiliriz."

The reformers demonstrated an awareness of how many European thinkers did not believe in the feasibility of a common origin for human language. When TDK member Agop Dilaçar spoke at the Third Language Convention, he cited many of these European doubters, including Saussure, Vendryes, and Dauzat, as well as psychologist Henri Delacroix.[169] He highlighted their skepticism, with the idea that their science would soon be shaken up:

> Nineteenth-century linguistics abandoned language and took on languages. Instead of looking at the elemental and unchanging factors and principles in language, at its predominant elements, linguistics took on comparisons between languages and language groups, and came up with erroneous judgments. Turkish linguistics of the 20th century, by contrast, will transform the history of language, which depends on these neglected principles, into a single, unified linguistic story, and the guide and key to this great synthesis will be the Turkish language, together with the soaring discovery from Turkish ingenuity.[170]

The Unusual Case of Max Müller. It was not only Trombetti who disagreed with the preeminent European model doubting monogenesis. One notable dissenter was none other than Max Müller. He admitted in 1861 that the concept of monogenesis was already out of favor: "I found the argument used, over and over again, that it is impossible to speak any longer of a common origin of language…"[171] His support for common origin was more tepid than Trombetti's; Müller asked only that the possibility of monogenesis stay in the discussion, calling it "a question which ought to be kept open as long as possible…You will have perceived that in what I have said I only argue for the

[169] Agop Dilaçar, "Günes-Dil Antropolojisi," *Üçüncü Dil Kurultayı*, 229–31.
[170] Dilaçar, "Günes-Dil Antropolojisi," 231. "19 uncu asır lengüistiği dili bırakıp dillerle uğraştı, dilin iptidaî ve ebedî amil ve prensiplerini, hâkim unsurunu nazarı itibara almıyarak dil ve dil gruplarını karşılaştırıp tahlil etti ve yanlış hükümler verdi. 20 inci asır Türk lengüistiği ise ihmal edilmiş olan bu esaslara dayanan dil tarihini tevhit edilmiş birtek dil tarihi şekline sokabilecek ve bu büyük senteze Türk Dili, Türk jenisinin yüksek buluşu ile kılavuz ve anahtar olacaktır."
[171] Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 346.

possibility, not for the necessity, of a common origin of language."[172] Nonetheless, he believed the monogenetic model was the correct one.[173]

Müller also put forth other ideas that, though sometimes quite controversial, were consistent with Sun-Language Theory. In a different sort of monogenetic debate, he suggested a common origin for the various pagan religions of the world.[174] His theory is interesting not only for reinforcing the possibility of a single origin for multiple aspects of humanity—be they religion or language—but also because he laid the precedent, sixty years prior to the TDK's theory, of the sun as man's first significant symbol: "One of the earliest objects that would strike and stir the mind of man, and for which a sign or a name would soon be wanted, is surely the Sun…Was not the Sunrise to him the first wonder, the first beginning of all reflection, all thought, all philosophy?"[175]

The compatibility between Müller's writings and Sun-Language Theory did not slide by unaddressed. Even though Müller's thoughts on the inferiority of agglutinative languages was no friend to the goals of the TDK, when Dilmen presented the main points of the theory at the Third Language Convention, he cited Müller by name to corroborate the sun being the first object of worship.[176]

Western Historical Linguistic Methods

It was not merely the acceptance of monogenesis that clashed with predominant Western thinking; the methodology that Sun-Language Theory entailed diverged

[172] Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 345.
[173] Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 342.
[174] Friedrich Max Müller, "On the Philosophy of Mythology," in *The Essential Max Müller: On Language, Mythology, and Religion*, edited by Jon R. Stone (New York: Palgrave MacMillan US, 2002), 145–166.
[175] Müller, "On the Philosophy of Mythology," 154.
[176] Dilmen, "Güneş-Dil Teorisinin Ana Hatları," 57.

considerably from European scholarship. The theory concerned itself almost exclusively with sounds within a word and how they might determine the origin of a language, without regard for the structure of sentence building—be it in mankind's original language, or in any of the languages that they claimed it had given rise to. Western linguists going back to the Schlegel brothers' time had focused on language structure in order to determine language ancestry.[177] In classifying the dialects of American languages, Friedrich Schlegel said, "though often between certain tribes there are no sounds of similarity to be heard—even when they live quite close together—they still, as far as we understand, follow the same patterns of construction."[178] Olga Amsterdamska points out that Franz Bopp and Jacob Grimm, as well as the Schlegel brothers, considered examination of simple words as unhelpful for tracing relationships between languages, insisting on comparing their morphological structures such as the workings of their declensions and conjugations.[179] This methodology is plainly evident in the Schlegels' division of all languages into inflectional, agglutinative, and isolating families; these divisions have their entire basis in language structure and not in similarities of sounds.

This is not to say that sound was without value in Western historical linguistics; however, linguists were focused on the systematic nature of sound changes if they were to reveal anything about common ancestry.[180] Rasmus Rask and Grimm (widely known as coauthor of *Grimm's Fairy Tales* but an important linguist in his own right) would note, in 1818 and 1822 respectively, the regularity of sound changes across Indo-

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[177] R. H. Robins, *A Short History of Linguistics*, 2nd ed. (London; New York: Longman, 2019), 170.
[178] Friedrich Schlegel, *Über die Sprache*, 46. "…wo oft bei mehren kleinen Völkerschaften, die dicht neben einander wohnen, nicht ein Laut von Aehnlichkeit sich zeigt, folgen sie doch alle, so weit sie bis jetzt bekannt sind, einem und demselben Gefeß des Sprachbaues."
[179] Olga Amsterdamska, *Schools of Thought: The Development of Linguistics from Bopp to Saussure*. (Boston: D. Reidel Pub. Co., 1987), 52.
[180] Graffi, "Origin of Language," 15–16.

European languages. The /f/ in *father* in Germanic languages (German *Vater*, pronounced with an unvoiced initial /f/ sound) corresponded to the /p/ in the corresponding word in Romance languages (Latin *pater*, French *père*; Italian and Spanish *padre*; Portuguese *pai*). This became significant when other words showed this correspondence systematically between Germanic and Romance counterparts, such as English *foot* (German *Fuß*) and its correspondence to an initial /p/ again in the same word in Romance languages (Latin *pede*, French *pied*, Italian *piede*, Spanish *pie*, Portuguese *pé*). Such sound changes could help identify common lineage, provided that they occurred among languages with structural similarities, and that the sound changes occurred systematically.

Sun-Language Theory took a nearly opposite approach to showing commonality; sound was treated as a fairly fixed feature, such that the consonants of a word were treated as nearly unchanged elements since the dawn of human language. Rather than tracing evolutionary sound change paths unique to individual languages, the theory treated each modern word as if it were dipping into a primordial well of unchanged sounds, each conveying a meaning too ephemeral and abstract to be either plausible for primitive man or disprovable for modern man. Grammatical structure, meanwhile—the very feature that provided the basis for August Schlegel and Müller's categorization of world languages into three classes—was not accounted for at all. Western skeptics of monogenesis from Friedrich Schlegel to Saussure cited the diversity of grammars and structures as the obstacle to reconciling a common origin to all languages. Yet Sun-Language Theory made no mention of that central question, taking a sound-based approach and avoiding the puzzle of how a single primeval string of utterances might

naturally branch into the range of structures and grammars that Western academics continued to grapple with.

The Status of Antiquity: Evolution or Decay?

There was, however, another aspect to the methodology of Sun-Language Theory that was more consistent with one of the bolder claims of Western linguistic studies from the previous century. In Dilmen's presentation of the theory, he makes it clear he is capturing the earliest, most basic differentiation of visceral sounds that primordial man directed at the sun. While there is a natural honor in a claim to antiquity, or in a claim to being first, it is worth questioning whether man's first dip into speech would bring the same honor. When speaking of language, does status come with antiquity, or does it come with being a later development, so far past early man in its sophistication that it is unrecognizable from the original form? If Sun-Language Theory were to be believed, would a link to primal man backfire on the TDK's quest for high language status?

Friedrich Schlegel had an interesting answer to the question of whether modern languages represented progress or decay versus their earliest forms. He claimed that both processes were happening, with agglutinative languages evolving while inflectional languages were in decay:

> Regarding just grammatical development, the trajectories of the two main groupings are completely reversed. Language formed by affixes was initially crude, but became more artful as affixes began to meld with principal words; in inflectional languages, by contrast, the initial beauty and artistry of their construction was gradually lost through the decadence of simplification, as we see when we compare various dialects of the

> Germanic, Romance, and modern Indian languages with the older forms from which they arose.[181]

While his assessment may have offered an optimistic future for agglutinative languages like Turkish, his view of their past was not compatible with bestowing high status on their ancestry. Yet his view of the decadent nature of inflectional languages such as his own was consistent with a general tendency to exalt classical languages such as Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit. What is more, his argument for the superiority of earlier forms of inflectional languages did not stop with their classical forms. When he spoke of "the first beauty and symmetry of their construction," he left open the idea of language having superior traits even in its earliest form. The only caveat for the Sun-Language Theory was that agglutinative languages were specifically excluded from this model.

Friedrich Schlegel was not alone in seeing some potential for the superiority of prehistoric language. Grimm also claimed that Germanic languages would show greater perfection if we could look back before available records:

> As the High German of the thirteenth century shows nobler, purer forms than ours does today, that of the eighth and ninth century purer still than that of the thirteenth, and finally the Gothic forms of the fourth and fifth century more perfect still, so does it follow that the language spoken by Germanic peoples in the first century outshone even the Gothic one.[182]

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[181] Friedrich Schlegel, *Über die Weisheit*, 451–52. "Der Gang der bloß grammatischen Kunst und Ausbildung ist in den beiden Hauptgattungen grade [*sic*] umgekehrt. Die Sprache durch Affixa ist im Anfang ganz kunstlos, wird aber immer künstlicher, je mehr die Affixa mit dem Hauptwort zusammenschmelzen; in den Sprachen durch Flexion hingegen geht die Schönheit und Kunst der Structur [*sic*], durch den Hang sichs zu erleichtern, allmählig [*sic*] mehr und mehr verlehren [*sic*], wie wir es sehen, wenn wir manche deutsche, romanische und jetzige indische Mundarten mit der ältern Form, aus der sie abstammen, vergleichen."

[182] Jacob Grimm, *Vorreden zur deutschen Grammatik von 1819 und 1822*, ed. Hugo Steger (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), 18. "Da die hochdeutsche Sprache des dreizehnten Jahrhunderts edlere, reinere Formen zeigt, als unsere heutige, die des achten und neunten wiederum reinere, als des dreizehnten, endlich das gothische des vierten oder fünften noch vollkommenere; so folgt, daß die Sprache, wie sie die deutschen Völker im ersten Jahrhundert geredet haben, selbst die gothische übertroffen haben werde."

Olga Amsterdamska describes Franz Bopp's research into an original Indo-European language, which he characterized as perfect.[183] She also describes August Schleicher's belief that language decay occurs in populations that have achieved full expression and self-determination, as well as in languages that have achieved a pinnacle, which for him was the case in inflectional languages.[184] Müller, a Sanskritist by training who held that language in the highest regard, nonetheless pictured something superior as its predecessor: "As we see the tendency of the Arian languages to reduce the variety of their terminations, we may suppose that even the richest grammatical language, the Sanskrit, was, at a period previous to the Vaidik, and beyond our knowledge, richer still."[185]

Thus nineteenth-century linguists had a range of ideas regarding the rules for when language had evolved and when it had decayed, but a common thread among them was an avoidance of any supposition that the first human language was basic and inferior—a supposition that also would have clashed with the TDK's goals with Sun-Language Theory. On the contrary, each of the linguists discussed above carried some belief in the superiority of early language, even when looking back beyond Ancient Rome, Attic Greece, and other civilizations that had been typical recipients of admiration.

A Somber Note

When, at the Third Language Convention, Dilmen outlined the historic evidence for the primordial language being Turkish, his presentation took an unfortunate turn:

[183] Amsterdamska, *Schools of Thought*, 41.
[184] Amsterdamska, *Schools of Thought*, 48–9.
[185] Müller, *Letter to Chevalier Bunsen*, 73.

> History has proven that the first human society was born of the brachycephalic Turks in Central Asia, and it was propagated through their migrations to Europe, Africa, America, and Oceania. It is also clear that they were at a considerably advanced stage compared to the dolichocephalic people of Africa who lived where the Turks settled....When the culturally superior brachycephalic Central Asian Turks brought their own superior culture to the dolichocephalic people in the places to which they spread, it is impossible for them not to have brought new words born from that culture.[186]

The racism in this statement is evident. Apart from the conjecture regarding the slow societal advancement of African people, the nomenclature of skull shape and its relation to intelligence constitute a haunting echo of the most dangerous ideas found in Europe in that same year (1936). The words "brachycephalic" and "dolichocephalic," indicating the proportions of various dimensions of the skull, date back to the mid-nineteenth century in English, aligning with the attempts of Swedish anatomist Anders Retzius to establish a relationship between skull shape and intelligence, thereby feeding into the idea of a Nordic master race.[187] This movement subsided in Scandinavia before the turn of the twentieth century, but these terms and their explicit link to intelligence would experience a revival in the Nazi era, starting with eugenicist Hans Günther and his 1922 book *Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes.*[188] The earliest attestations of Turkish

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[186] Dilmen, "Güneş-Dil Teorisinin Ana Hatları," 64. "Tarih, ilk insan soysallığının Ortaasyadaki brakisefal Türklerden doğduğunu ve bunların muhaceretleriyle Avrupaya, Afrikaya, Amerikaya ve Okyanusyaya yayıldığını ispat etmektedir. Bunların gittikleri yerlerde bulunmakta olan dolikosefal Afrika insanlarına nispetle çok büyük bir tekâmül safhasında oldukları da anlaşılıyor...Kültürce üstün olan brakisefal Ortaasya Türkünün yeryüzüne yayıldığı ve gittiği yerlerdeki dolikosefallere kendi üstün kültürünü götürdüğü zamanda, bu kültürden doğmuş yeni kelimeleri vermemiş olmasına imkân yoktur."

[187] Jon Røyne Kyllingstad, "Norwegian Physical Anthropology and the Idea of a Nordic Master Race," *Current Anthropology* 53, supplement 5 (April 2012): 547. https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdf/10.1086/662332. For word attestations, see "Google Books Ngram Viewer," Google, accessed October 18, 2022. https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=brachycephalic&year_start=1800&year_end=2010&corpus=0&smoothing=3.

[188] James Dow, *Heinrich Himmler's Cultural Commissions: Programmed Plunder in Italy and Yugoslavia* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2018), 30–31. https://www.google.com/books/edition/Heinrich_Himmler_s_Cultural_Commissions/YE1jDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1.

brakisefal and *dolikosefal* (direct transliterations of the French terms) came in this era, in 1932.[189]

With this use of racist rhetoric that echoed the concepts and terminology that had taken root in 1930s Germany, other aspects of the TDK's presentations take on an unfortunate light. When Dilmen presented the theory to the Turkish Historical Society in 1937, his first practical example consisted of showing the Turkish origin of "Aryan"—not once but across six different languages.[190] Of course, the word's history had been complicated by racist ideologies, as it had historically designated a region in India and Iran, and shares an etymology with the latter country's name. The white supremacist movement co-opted the word and gave it a Northern European meaning that was not historically accurate. In fact, at the first convention of the Turkish Historical Society, Afet Afetinan had similarly talked about "Aryan" being a Turkish word, and cited Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau (1816–1882), a noted white supremacist whose opus included *An Essay on the Inequality of the Races of Mankind* (*Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*). Tetik contends that it was in this work and in this context that the term "Aryan" came into usage by linguists.[191]

One could argue that Dilmen used this word as an etymological example while respecting its original Indo-Iranian association, in order to show kinship with Indo-Europeans to the East—just as he would then go on to show the Turkic origin of *Kelt* and show influence and ties with the West. However, within his discussion of "Aryan," Dilmen gave a description of the term that enabled the false narrative of an Aryan

[189] Sevan Nişanyan, *Nişanyan Sözlük: Çağdaş Türkçenin Etimolojisi*, 3rd ed. (İstanbul: Liberus, 2021), 133; 218–9.
[190] Dilmen, *Türk Tarih Tezinde*, 5–6.
[191] Tetik, "The Reception of European Typological Language Classification," 86.

migration to Europe, thus validating the meaning that some Europeans had given to the word:

> The word Aryan has been suggested as the original name of the Indo-European or Indo-Germanic race. European science has not been able to suitably show who they were—these Aryans who've been called the original prehistoric source of the nations migrated across India, Iran, the Caucasus, and all of Europe—and why they were given this name. It is simply believed that the entire Indo-European race and its languages come from this source.[192]

The corruption of the historic meaning of "Aryan" was certainly not unique to Nazi Germany. In fact, Müller had used it in the mid-nineteenth century as a descriptor for all Indo-European languages.[193] This can be seen in his stinging comment, "The difference between an Aryan and a Turanian language is somewhat the same as between good and bad mosaic."[194] Yet for all his prejudicial views on language class, Müller's later legacy is an attestation of the dangers he saw in the co-opting of "Aryan" for the purposes seen in Dilmen's comments. In 1888, Müller repeated his belief that the class of a language was separate from genealogical classification of its speakers, and he repudiated the train of thought that led to where Dilmen would take such notions a half-century later:

> I have declared again and again that if I say Aryas, I mean neither blood nor bones, nor hair and skull; I mean simply those who speak an Aryan language. The same applies to Hindus, Greeks, Romans, Germans, Celts, and Slaves [*sic*]. When I speak of them I commit myself to no anatomical characteristics. The blue-eyed and fair-haired Scandinavians may have been conquerors or conquered, they may have adopted the languages of their darker lords or their subjects, or *vice versá*....This may seem strong language, but in matters of such importance we cannot be too decided in

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[192] Dilmen, *Türk Tarih Tezinde*, 5. "Âri kelimesi, Hint-Avrupa veya Hint-Germen ırkının ilk adı olarak ileri sürülmektedir. Hindistan, İran, Kafkasya ile bütün Avrupaya yayılmış olan milletlerin préhistorik ana kaynağı denilen Ârilerin kimler olduğu ve bunlara niçin bu isim verildiği Avrupa bilginlerince sarih olarak gösterilmemektedir. Yalnız bütün Hint-Avrupa ırkının ve bunların dillerinin şu kaynaktan geldiğine inanılmaktadir."
[193] Müller, *Letter to Chevalier Bunsen*, 10.
[194] Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 304.

> our language. To me an ethnologist who speaks of Aryan race, Aryan blood, Aryan eyes and hair, is as great a sinner as a linguist who speaks of a dolichocephalic dictionary or a brachycephalic grammar.[195]

Nonetheless, when one considers the events happening in Germany in 1937 when Dilmen made "Aryan" the focus of his proof, in combination with his undeniably racist rhetoric the previous year that incorporated Nazi terms of craniometry, his decision to indulge the racist definition of "Aryan"—and to establish Turkish kinship with it as an opening example of Sun-Language Theory—is an unfortunate legacy. Even if his awareness of the somber significance of "Aryan" in Europe can't be ascertained, Dilmen's brachycephalic paragraph remains a striking example of the worst of European pseudoscience finding its way into the Turkish presentation of its theory.

A European Catalyst to Sun-Language Theory—H. F. Kvergić (1895–1948)

The presenters of Sun-Language Theory at the Third Turkish Language Convention made ample reference to European thinkers, starting with Ancient Greece. More contemporarily, Sumerologist Hilaire de Barenton (1864–1942) had developed a similar theory regarding the Sumerians as the creators of the first human language; not only was he cited in their presentations, but he was also one of the fifteen foreign guests in attendance at the convention. One European stood out for his influence on the theory, however, because his influence was at his own initiative. That person was an Austrian man named Hermann Feodor Kvergić.

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[195] F. Max Müller, *Biographies of Words and the Home of the Aryas* (London: Longmans, Green, 1888), 120. https://www.google.com/books/edition/Biographies_of_Words_and_the_Home_of_the/9GUSAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0.

In early 1935, Kvergić sent a 47-page manuscript to Emre, who was then the chairman of the grammar branch of the TDK. The manuscript, entitled "The Psychology of Certain Elements in Turkic Languages," failed to attract Emre's attention, but Kvergić persisted, and two months later submitted it to Atatürk himself. This time the manuscript was more enthusiastically received, and Atatürk began passing it around to various leaders in the TDK.[196]

These events are often seen as the catalyst for the formulation of Sun-Language Theory. At the end of 1935, nearly a year before Sun-Language's official debut at the convention, the TDK outlined the main tenets of the theory in a pamphlet, in which they credited Kvergić's valuable work.[197] In 1960, A.G. Levend referred to Kvergić's manuscript as "the pretext for Sun-Language Theory's coming into being."[198] While Kvergić's persistence in reaching Turkish thinkers from his home in Vienna was curious, it is not clear how much of the theory was ultimately his doing. Lewis wrote in 1999 that Kvergić's manuscript established Turkish as the earliest language to come into being, while Mehmet Uzman contradicted him five years later, saying that the idea did not appear in the manuscript at all.[199] Furthermore, Uzman and Aytürk concur that the manuscript did not mention primitive man's worship of the sun.[200]

The mysterious manuscript took a psychological approach to the beginning of man and language. According to Kvergić, as primitive man began to differentiate himself from exterior objects, he began to express his relationship to them first through gestures

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[196] Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 57. See also Erik Jan Zürcher, "La théorie du «langage-soleil»," 88.
[197] Jens Peter Laut, *Das Türkische als Ursprache*, 108.
[198] A.G. Levend, *Türk Dilinde Gelişim ve Sadeleşme Evreleri* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1960), 433.
[199] Uzman, "La Théorie de la Langue-Soleil," 303. For Lewis's contention, see Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 57.
[200] Uzman, "La Théorie de la Langue-Soleil," 303; Aytürk, "H.F. Kvergić," 27.

and then specific sounds. Bilabial sounds such as /b/ and /m/ expressed the self, while /n/ expressed another person or object. It was on this point that he saw Turkish compatibility with his theory, since the /b and /m/ sounds are variously used to denote the first person in Turkish, while /n/ is consistently the second-person verbal and possessive ending.[201] From here, the sun imagery, as well as the broader claim of Turkish being the source of all human language, appears to be the invention of the reformers. If Kvergić's legacy is more nuanced than that of the creator of Sun-Language Theory, however, his relationship to the development of the theory nonetheless takes an interesting turn.

In 2009 Aytürk sorted through recently released documents from the TDK, and discovered evidence of ongoing cooperation between Kvergić and Atatürk's government. Kvergić promised them updates on his research, and if he had initially had trouble generating interest in his ideas, he had eventually piqued the TDK's curiosity enough that Atatürk was asking after him when those updates fell behind schedule. There are records of Dilmen, then TDK general secretary, sending money to Kvergić during his research.[202] It is also evident that Dilmen took an interest not only in learning about his research, but in steering it in a convenient direction. In April of 1936, Dilmen wrote to the ambassador who had been functioning as an intermediary with the Vienna-based Kvergić (emphasis added):

> Among Dr. Kvergić's writings we were struck by the words that he was "starting a dictionary from a Sun-Language Theory perspective for Turkic tongues such as Mongol, Manchu and Tungusic." For quite some time, a propensity for drawing a relationship between the Turkish language and these Far-East tongues has been apparent in the writings he has sent. *However, our view, and the intent of Sun-Language Theory, is centered on*

[201] The phoneme /m/ is used for possessive and verbal endings, while *ben* is the first-person singular pronoun. This appearance of /b/ is in the minority however, as it corresponds with an /m/ in the same word for the majority of other Turkic languages: *mən* in Azerbaijani, *men* in Turkmen and Uzbek.
[202] Aytürk, "H.F. Kvergić," 28–29.

> *the idea that Turkish is the original source of the great culture-generating languages classified as Indo-European and Semitic*. When languages such as, in the East, Arabic and Persian, and, in the West, Greek, Latin, French, English, German...are compared with Turkish in the light of Sun-Language Theory, this great truth, gaining a bit more strength every day, reveals itself.
>
> Dr. Kvergić's study on the significance of consonants in suffixes shows that *he does not see languages in the classical European view*. With this in mind, I would like to offer my deep and sincere thanks to you in advance, dear Mr. Ambassador, for *explaining to him in an appropriate way that it would be more proper if the study he is preparing on Sun-Language Theory were aligned with comparing Turkish with the great languages of Europe and Asia, rather than with languages like Mongol, Manchu, and Tungusic*.[203]

It is evident that Kvergić's work was getting steered by the TDK toward a desired result. That result, though certainly respecting certain Eastern languages such as Arabic and Persian as well as European ones, marked inflectional languages for their desirability, while turning a cold shoulder on three agglutinative Altaic languages that are in fact related to Turkish. In addition to showing how deeply Kvergić was enmeshed in Sun-Language Theory, this also serves as a reminder of how much the desire to boost the image of Turkish had deviated from elevating an Altaic language; the reformers' priority in this era was in finding kinship with the Indo-European language group.

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[203] Aytürk, "H.F. Kvergić," 37–38. Aytürk includes a Turkish transcript of the letter, from "Dr. H. Kvergić ile İlgili Güneş Dil Teorisi Konusundaki Yazışmalar," 1.Dosya, Türk Dil Kurumu Arşivi, Ankara. The translation is my own. "Doktor Kıvergiç'in yazdığınız sözleri arasında 'Güneş-Dil teorisi bakımından Moğol, Mançu ve Tunguz gibi Türk ağızlari için bir lûgat yapmaya baslıyacağı' sözü dikkatimizi çekmektedir. Doktorun ötedenberi buraya gönderdiği yazılarında Türk dilini bu Uzak-Doğu dilleriyle bir sıraya koymak meyli görülmektedir. Halbuki bizim görüşümüz ve 'Güneş-Dil teorisi'nin amacı, Türk dilinin bugün İndo-Öropeen ve Semitik diye ayrı serilere konulan büyük kültür yaratmış dillere ana kaynak olduğu merkezindedir. Doğuda Arap ve Fars, Batıda Grek, Latin, Fransız, Ingiliz, Alman...dilleri gibi diller, 'Güneş-Dil teorisi'nin ışığı altında Tûrkçe ile karşılastırıldıkça, bu büyük gerçek, her gün biraz daha kuvvet bularak kendini göstermektedir. Doktor Kıvergiç'in konsonların ek anlamları üzerindeki etüdü, kendisinin de dilleri klâsik Avrupa görüşiyle görmediğini anlatmakta idi. Bu bakımdan 'Güneş-Dil teorisi' üzerine hazırlıyacağı etüdün Mogol, Mançu, Tunguz gibi dillerden ziyade Türk dilini büyük Avrupa ve Asya dilleriyle karşılaştırma yolunda bir araştırma olması daha uygun olacağını, münasip bir yolda kendisine anlatmağa da kayranızı diler, önceden teşekkürlerle içten ve derin saygılarımı sunarım, Sayın Bay Elçi."

Aytürk makes a number of interesting points regarding these new documents he has found. The first is his contention that the TDK was attracted to Kvergić because they saw in him a European who would break with the norms of European linguistics and philology, as he had already done with his theories on /m/ carrying the primal meaning of the first person, etc. In addition, Aytürk asserts the value that a European ally had, at the time, for lending credibility to an idea.[204]

Though the claim regarding the TDK's motives in working with and bankrolling Kvergić is not proven, it is consistent with the earlier sections of this chapter, which attempted to demonstrate that Sun-Language Theory required a multilevel rejection of traditional Western linguistics. Aytürk's claim portrays a TDK that was familiar with the latest ideas in Western philology, and that was intent on breaking with them—either to create a Turkish brand of linguistic science, or simply out of a desire to arrive at a prechosen conclusion. This claim is supported by Dilmen's note that Kvergić "does not see languages in the classical European view," followed by Dilmen's hope that Kvergić will use that perspective to draw kinship between Turkish and inflectional languages, rather than limiting its ancestry to the Far-East agglutinative languages that Europe had already grouped it with.[205]

As for Aytürk's claim that Kvergić added cachet as a European voice, it is interesting to note the possibility that Kvergić stayed involved in the issue for some time for his name rather than for his usefulness as a researcher. Dilmen sent his message redirecting Kvergić's research in April of 1936, several months after the main points of

[204] Aytürk, "H.F. Kvergić," 29–30.
[205] In his article, Aytürk claims that "the classical European view" refers to the nineteenth-century grouping of world languages into inflectional, agglutinative, and isolational. Aytürk, "H.F. Kvergić," 29.

Sun-Language Theory had already been published in the 1935 pamphlet. Thus, while Kvergić's initial manuscript had gotten the ball rolling on the idea of sounds representing abstract concepts, the entire remainder of the theory seems to have been built without him. Nonetheless, he was kept on and paid. The 1935 pamphlet had cited him and his valuable manuscript. It is reasonable to think that in their earnest communication with him in the months after that pamphlet, the TDK hoped that his research would still contribute something. By the time of the convention in August of 1936, however, he was accorded no further credit beyond his original manuscript. If the TDK had kept him involved for a few months in order to give the theory the status of a European creation, they ultimately went in a different direction and branded the theory as a work of Turkish ingenuity. Dilmen introduced the theory at the convention by calling it "a supreme Turkish discovery."[206]

Western Reception of the Theory

The foreign guests received repeated warm welcomes in the opening remarks of the convention. Among the notable foreign attendees, in addition to Jean Deny, was his British colleague Sir Denison Ross. There was Friedrich Giese of Germany, who worked as a professor of Uralo-Altaic linguistics at Istanbul's Darülfünun and had been mentor to Emre. Also attending the proceedings was Kvergić himself. After five days of Turkish presenters laying out the new theory, the sixth day was consecrated to remarks from their foreign guests. It is here that the convention took an awkward turn, as the international guests sometimes worked to come up with something diplomatic to say. Several of them

[206] *Üçüncu Türk Dil Kurultayı*, 56. "yüksek bir Türk buluşudur."

offered but a single paragraph, and many spoke evasively on the honor of attending and their warm regards for the new republic. Ross simply said he followed the TDK's theory with great care, and then used his time to discuss a lexicon of Chinese and Manchu from in the eighteenth century. Deny used his time to revisit a presentation he had given twelve years earlier on the Turkish plural suffix, not mentioning the theory he had been invited to witness.[207] In the meetings of the Sun-Language Commission that the foreign linguists had all been voted into, Deny ventured to say: "However, I feel the theory is something in its preparatory stage; there are quite a few things left to do, and I am hopeful that they will be done."[208]

Giese, former mentor to Emre and now sitting with him in that smaller committee meeting, used stronger words: "On what basis is this done? Is it based on solid evidence, or is it acted on through intuition? While these are very interesting things, one must surely rely on a method. What is that method? Is the desired result of all this work something made up of intuition, or is it a claim that there are rules?"[209]

Kvergić, who of course had an unusual relationship with the TDK's presentations, stood out in this group with his open embrace of the theory. Although he was introduced at the convention without any preamble that would distinguish him as an influence in the formulation of the theory, his presentation in no way pretended to be a spontaneous response to what he had just seen. Given in French, his remarks had a Turkish translation that was prepared and handed out beforehand. He gamely used his time to present an

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[207] Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 62; *Üçüncü Türk Dil Kurultayı*, 287–327.
[208] *Üçüncü Türk Dil Kurultayı*, 456. "Ancak, bence by tez ihzarî mahiyette bir şeydir; daha yapılacak pek çok şeyler vardır; onların da yapılacağından ümitvarım."
[209] *Üçüncü Türk Dil Kurultayı*, 454. "Bunlar hangi esasa göre yapılmaktadır? Kat'î delillere mi istinat ediliyor, yoksa intuition ile mi hareket olunuyor? Bunlar çok enteresan şeyler olmakla beraber, herhalde bir metoda istinat etmek lâzımdır. Bu metot nedir? Bu mesaiden çıkarılmak istenilen netice bir intuition'dan ibaret midir, yoksa bir kanun iddiası mıdır"?

analysis of the Turkish word *unutmak*—the verb "to forget"—according to the principles of Sun-Language Theory. If the original ideas in his manuscript had been developed into a monster outside of his creative control, he faithfully hitched his wagon to this new theory, in front of his European colleagues.[210]

In 2000, Hamit Bozarslan discovered a wealth of personal documents from Deny regarding the experience of attending the Third Turkish Language Convention and its aftermath. The documents reveal a fascinating thread that sheds a very human light on the European reaction to the convention, as well as on the great importance placed by the TDK on that reaction. Firstly, the awkward position of the European delegates did not end when they were called upon to speak. On the final day of the convention, a motion was introduced that stated support for the new theory; all fifteen international guests, who—willing or unwilling—had all been inducted into the Sun-Language Theory and Language Comparison Commission, were asked to sign their names to it.[211] Their signature would constitute an awkwardly specific pledge of support. The motion read:

> At the same time, all foreign members of the Commission promise to publish studies on the topic of "Sun-Language" Theory, and assert that they consider it their duty to make it known to the scientific world that Turkey is undergoing a boom not only in the field of linguistics, but also in matters of general culture.
>
> 6. The Turkish and international members of the Commission agree to communicate their research on "Sun-Language" Theory until such time as they gather for the forthcoming Fourth Convention of the Turkish Language Society.[212]

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[210] Aytürk, "H.F. Kvergić," 27; *Üçüncü Türk Dil Kurultayı*, 328–335.
[211] Bozarslan, "Jean Deny et le troisième," 207.
[212] *Üçüncu Türk Dil Kurultayı*, 342–43. "Aynı zamanda komisyonda bulunan bütün ecnebi âlimleri, «Güneş – Dil» Teorisini mevzu ittihaz ederek etütler nesredeceklerini vadederler ve Türkiyenin yalnız dilcilik sahasında değil, umumî kültür sahasında yepyeni bir hızla mücehhez bulunduğun ilim dünyasına tanıtmağı kendilerine bir borç saydıklarını bildirirler. 6. Komisyonun Türk ve ecnebi âzası gelecek Dördüncü Türk Dil Kurultayının toplanacağı zamana kadar «Günes – Dil» Teorisine ait tetkiklerini biribirlerine [*sic*] bildirmek suretile müşterek mesaide bulunacaklardır."

Deny and Ross had, deliberately or not, absented themselves on the final day when this request was made. Nonetheless, General Secretary Dilmen reached out to both of them after their return home in the hopes of procuring all fifteen international signatures of support. The two men would learn that while twelve of their colleagues had been compelled to sign, Professor Anagastopulos of Greece had also not yet offered his signature. What followed was a fascinating trail of correspondence, in which Deny tried to stave off Dilmen with words of appreciation and requests for TDK publications, while also corresponding with Ross about the best way they could diplomatically escape the pressure to sign without offending their hosts.[213]

"I feel the situation is a very uncomfortable one," Ross wrote to Deny, "and after all the hospitality we received I feel it is somewhat ungracious, but I do not think our colleagues would ever forgive us if we even pretended to regard this theory in a serious light."[214]

It is evident from the letters between Ross and Deny that they had agreed in İstanbul to act together in such matters, and they saw before their departure that there was some unwelcome pressure to agree with what they had seen. With genteel tones they debated the merits of politely declining to sign versus remaining silent and wishing the problem away. Deny finally proposed that their silence was the best way for all parties to save face: "Upon reflection, I find that it is as rude to respond with a refusal to sign, as

[213] Bozarslan, "Jean Deny et le troisième," 207–208. For transcripts of the original documents for this section, see Bozarslan 229–242.
[214] Document 23, "Réponse de Denison Ross à Jean Deny," in Bozarslan, "Jean Deny et le troisième," 234.

with plain silence. Therefore I propose we not write anything, in the hope, which is not impossible after all, that our correspondents would not wish to insist."[215]

His hope was soon dashed, as Dilmen approached them a third time pressuring them to sign, with the news that their fellow holdout Professor Anagastopoulos had relented and given his signature. With Dilmen forcing their hand, the two linguists agreed to diplomatically decline, on the grounds that the origin of language was outside their areas of expertise.

Dilmen's persistence through this awkward episode shows a good deal about the importance the TDK placed on getting approval from the international community. The exchanges were predicated on diplomatic graciousness, but Dilmen was willing to dispense with such etiquette beyond what Ross and Deny predicted was possible. By including in his third attempt the news that the gentleman from Greece had relented, Dilmen displayed an understanding that Ross and Deny were not motivated to sign, yet he continued to pursue it. Dilmen was willing to break social graces to get Western approval for the theory, and the theory was so untenable that Ross and Deny were willing to break social graces to refuse it.

Despite the theory's cold reception in 1936, its demise was not immediate. Much of the sourcing for the key points of the theory earlier in the chapter comes from Dilmen's presentation to the Turkish Historical Society a year after the Language Convention. This presentation incorporated many of the theory's most unusual points, such as the etymologies of forty-three words of which forty-two had lost their original

[215] Document 24, "Letter de Jean Deny à Denison Ross," in Bozarslan, "Jean Deny et le troisième," 235. "A la réflexion, je trouve qu'il est aussi ennuyeux de répondre par un refus de signer que par le simple silence. Je me propose donc de ne rien écrire, dans l'espoir que nos correspondants voudront bien ne pas insister, ce qui, après tout, n'est pas impossible."

syllable referring to the sun. There was little sign of Dilmen reconsidering aspects of his theory. Furthermore, as seen in the next chapter, the Turkish Historical Society would incorporate Sun-Language Theory directly into its first two periodical issues in 1937.

Contrary to the pledge that the TDK drafted, the fifteen international guests did not study Sun-Language Theory upon their return home, and they did not gather to revisit it when the Fourth Language Convention took place in 1942; indeed, not one of them was in attendance.[216] Beyond the chaos of World War II, this was the first convention following Atatürk's passing in 1938, and much of the convention was dominated by honoring what he had done for the Turkish language. With the new focus on remembering his legacy, Sun-Language Theory was quietly dropped.[217]

Intent of the Theory

Uriel Heyd noted a considerable shift in the TDK's flexibility between 1934, when their publication of the *Tarama Dergisi* showed its strict purification suggestions for eliminating non-Turkish words, and the autumn of 1935 when they published the more relaxed *Cep Kilavuzu*. In just two years, the severe purging of foreign words that was characteristic of the *Tarama Dergisi* era had softened considerably, as witnessed by the hundreds of Arabic and Persian words that were deemed acceptable for use in the later *Cep Kilavuzu*. Though Heyd attributes some of this change to the fear of "linguistic anarchy" that had developed from the more hardline approach, he points out another

[216] *Dördüncü Türk Dil Kurultayı 1942; toplantı, tutulgaları, tezler* (İstanbul: Alâeddin Kıral Basımevi, 1943), VIII. One must allow, of course, that the reasons for their absences could be numerous, including the fact that the convention took place in the throes of World War II. Nonetheless, twelve foreign journalists were able to attend the 1942 convention in Ankara. See *Dördüncü Türk Dil Kurultayı*, III; XLV.
[217] Zürcher, "La théorie du «langage-soleil»," 89; Aytürk, "H.F. Kvergić," 23.

motivation for this softening. The work of the TDK's Etymology Committee had determined that a number of words previously thought to be Arabic or Persian in origin were in fact natively Turkish.[218] Some new approach to research was evidently finding unprecedented Turkish origins for foreign words, and this served as a perfect basis for calming the feverish purging by purists, all while placating those who wished for commonly used foreign words to remain.

Upon revealing the full-blown theory, the TDK was quite open about the convenience that these newly theorized Turkish origins offered in calming debates on vocabulary reform. In his opening remarks at the Third Language Convention in 1936, Dilmen proclaimed:

> Sun-Language Theory, by proving that linguistic riches previously thought to be foreign to our language actually have a Turkish origin, has given our linguistic work, on a practical field, much breadth and convenience. The need to sacrifice words that people know and understand due to thinking they come from a foreign language has, with this theory, been eliminated.[219]

Dilmen's immediate next point after this observation was a refutation of the idea that Sun-Language Theory was created only as a justification for preserving certain foreign words. The true goal of the "cleansing" (*temizlenme*) of the language, he said, was to increase language accessibility by narrowing the gap between written and spoken Turkish.[220] Yet if this were entirely true, the type of words that he mentioned in his quote above—words that are commonly used and understood despite a foreign origin—would

[218] Heyd, *Language Reform*, 29–33.
[219] *Üçüncü Türk Dil Kurultayı*, 12. "«Güneş - Dil Teorisi», şimdiye kadar dilimize yabancı sanılan dillerdeki varlıkların Türk kaynağından geldiğini ispat etmekle amelî sahadaki dil çalışmalarımıza da büyük bir genişlik ve kolaylık vermiştir. Halkın bildiği, manasını anladığı kelimelerin yabancı dilden geliyor sanılarak feda edilmesi zarureti bu teoriyle ortadan kalkmış bulunuyor."
[220] *Üçüncü Türk Dil Kurultayı*, 13.

be exactly the type of word that the Reform would have preserved all along. In his own words he attributes their preservation only to the revelations of Sun-Language Theory.

Heyd notes that the 1935 appearance of the more permissive *Cep Kilavuzu* was nearly simultaneous with the vigorous propagation and promotion of Sun-Language Theory that began in November of 1935.[221] Yet if Sun-Language Theory changed the strictness of the Reform, it was merely the formalization of an idea that was not at all new. The main tenet of the theory—that of Turkish as the origin of language—had already been openly stated by the TDK in 1932. At the close of the First Turkish Language Convention in September 1932, just two months after the TDK's founding, a work session laid out the points of a platform to be voted on. Before the reading of the points that were up for debate, there was an explicit preamble: "No one can still doubt that just as the Turks constituted the first civilization, Turkish constituted the first civilization.[222] Many men of science who research the origin of languages have shown that Turkish is the ancestor of the languages called Indo-European and the languages called Semitic."[223]

The idea went even farther back than that, though it was unpopular in its first appearances. Enver Celaleddin (1857–1929)—son to Mustafa Celaleddin and father-in-

[221] Heyd, *Language Reform*, 33–34. See also Dilmen, *Türk Tarih Tezinde*, 3 regarding the promotion of the theory.
[222] The original Turkish phrase "ilk medeniyet Türkçe olduğuna" translates literally to "Turkish was the first civilization," but the use of "Türkçe" in this phrase refers unambiguously to the Turkish language, rather than a Turkish nationality or other quality. In Laut's translation of the phrase into German, he saw fit to add a parenthetical to explain the natural understanding in the Turkish phrase that Turkish was the language of the original civilization: "auch das Türkische (die Sprache dieser) ersten Zivilisation gewesen ist." (Laut, *Das Türkische als Ursprache*, 33)
[223] *Birinci Türk Dili Kurultayı*, 455–456. "Ilk medeniyeti kuran Türkler olduğu gibi ilk medeniyet Türkçe olduğuna da hiç kimsenin süphesel kalmadı. Dillerin kaynağını araştıran birçok ilim adamları göstermişlerdir ki, Türk dili Hint - Avrupa dili denilen dillerle Samî denilen dillerin anasıdır. Türk dili asırlardanberi yabancı dillerle karışarak özlüğü, temizliği bozulmuşken bile Şark medeniyetinin başlıca anlatiş vasıtalarından biri olmuştur."

law to Rifat—tried in 1908 to popularize the idea that Turkish was the language taught to Adam in the Garden of Eden, and that all other languages derived from there.[224] Rifat himself then gave a speech in 1922 at the Ministry of Education that posited Turkish as the world's most ancient language, and also had it published. Despite his eventual leadership on the matter when the idea became popular at the start of the Reform, in 1922 he was largely met with ridicule.[225]

In light of this history, it would appear that Dilmen's protestations above were correct, in fact if not in spirit: the central claim of the theory—that Turkish was the ancestor of all languages—did not exist simply to justify preserving foreign words. That claim, after all, had a life before there was a frenzy of vocabulary purging that might need stopping. Yet it is also curious that the central claim lived in the bylaws of the TDK for several years before conditions lent it a fervent popularity. It is certainly possible that one reason the claim found new energy was the solution it offered to the debates in vocabulary reform. However, it is also worth considering the importance of Kvergić's original manuscript in giving new momentum to an existing claim. Although many of the ideas in the fully developed theory would extend far beyond anything Kvergić had created, his claims on the traces of primal language in Turkish lent themselves to a claim that had been lurking for years at the TDK, awaiting any justification at all.

There is evidence that undermining the premises of European linguistics was a goal in itself. By attempting to poke holes in the tenets of the field, the framers of Sun-

[224] Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists," 12.
[225] Tetik, "The Reception of European Typological Language Classification,", 89–90. See also Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists," 13.

Language Theory were by extension undermining the linguistic prejudices of the previous century, which had placed Turkish on a lower tier of advancement.

We find evidence of this in the lecture notes of TDK member Abdülkadir İnan. İnan was appointed Professor of Turkology at the newly founded Faculty for Languages, History, and Geography in Ankara and prepared textbooks for a newly created professorship of Sun-Language Theory.[226] İnan wrote:

> The Indo-European school of linguistics named Indo-European or Indo-Germanic languages, deemed inflective, as the most advanced and culturally productive languages in the world...this is the romantic side of Indo-Europeanism combined with politics. The scientific side, by contrast, strongly contradicts this view: firstly, the classifying of languages as monosyllablic, agglutinative and inflectional, given the latest findings, is unfounded.[227]

Aytürk cites an instance in which İnan's interest in the toppling of European linguistics was made even more explicit. İnan wrote the introduction to a Turkish translation of a book by Soviet linguist Nikolai Marr, and celebrated Marr for the vital act of rebelling against European language theory. Aytürk's translation of İnan's introduction follows:

> Marr's important service in the field of linguistics is his revolt against the fanatacism of the classical Indo-European language school and against this school's negligence of and condescension toward languages other than those that are related to Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit. "Indo-Europeanism," in Marr's view, is a sickness that hinders the progress of science like the fanatacism of the Catholic priests in the medieval period. It is a vicious circle set by formalists, who refuse to acknowledge the share of the nations who played the greatest role in the cultural history of the world

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[226] Saadet Çağatay, "Abdülkadir İnan: Fünfzig Jahre Wissenschaftlichen Wirkens," *Central Asiatic Journal* 5, no. 2 (1959): 153; Ayşe Tetik, "The Reception of European Typological Language Classification," 97.
[227] Abdülkadir İnan, *Günes-Dil Teorisi Üzerine Ders Notlari: Türkologi II* (İstanbul: Devlet Basımevi, 1936): 55. "İndo-Öropeen dil ekolü bükülgen (flexionnelles) tesmiye ettiği İndo-Öropeen veyahut İndo-Cermen dilini dünyanın en mütekâmil ve kültür yaratan bir dili olarak ileri sürdü...bu, indoöropeenizmin siyasetle karışmış romantik tarafıdır. İlmî tarafı ise bu romantizimle taban tabana zıttır; evvelâ- dilleri tek heceli, bitişik ve bükülgen diye tasnifin, son tetkikler neticesinde esassız olduğu görülmüştür."

> (for instance, the Turks)....It is necessary to demolish the school to its foundations and to establish a new school in place of it.[228]

We have looked at the debate over the primary motivation of Sun-Language Theory, between the status accorded to Turkish as the original human language, and the convenient solution it offered to arguments over vocabulary reform by giving every word a Turkish origin. With İnan's remarks, however, we find evidence of yet a third motivation for the theory, even more fundamental to the issues that haunted the rise of Turkish as a state language: the theory would undermine the Schlegels' century-old classification of agglutinative languages, and the prejudice that came with it. Here was a member of the TDK, writing in a publication guiding the university-level teaching of the theory, no less, emphasizing the importance of unseating this key element of European language theory. The true motivation behind the theory may well lie somewhere among these three ideas.

In many ways this desire to transform linguistic theory echoes the efforts of Emre and Sifat to assert Turkish as an inflectional language in the European tradition. Both stem from an effort to elevate the status of Turkish in light of European prejudice. The two quests—asserting Turkish as an inflectional language and asserting Turkish as the original human language—are so closely linked that modern writers like Aytürk discuss them in a single throughline.[229] Some reformers, such as Sifat, were vocal in both movements. Both movements had precursor ideas before they achieved their full form; Celaleddin in the mid-nineteenth century in the case of the inflectional question, and

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[228] Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists," 16. Aytürk's translation is from Nikolai Marr, *Dillerin ve Ulusların Ayrılması ve Türk Şivelerinin Ana Vatanı Meselesi*. Translated with an introduction by Abdülkadir İnan. Etüt No:68, V–VI. Library of the Turkish Language Institute, Ankara.
[229] Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists," 7–8.

Sifat's 1922 speech in the case of original human language. Yet the two responses, for all their similarities, are in a sense incompatible. The attempted proof of inflection in Turkish delved into a structural study to prove a relation to Indo-European languages. Sun-Language Theory, by contrast, ignored structure completely as a tool for historical linguistics and attempted to find similarity solely through sounds. Therefore, not only did the two ideas find different ways to boost the perceived role of Turkish in European eyes, but they were also predicated on incompatible ideas of what information was useful for understanding language change.

Concluding Thoughts

Sun-Language Theory is widely seen as a non-scientific movement gone awry. Lewis discusses this phase of the reform by marveling at the TDK members who "unblushingly delivered themselves of such drivel in public."[230] Aytürk observes that it is mostly non-Turkish scholars who show interest in the theory today, while Turkish scholars attach little importance to it.[231] To hammer home the non-scientific nature of the theory is to preach to a community that needs little convincing. Yet when considering the importance of European influence on the Reform, it is a moment in history that invites some reflection.

If Sun-Language Theory was an era of poor judgment, it was a function of a complicated relationship with Europe and a series of poor decisions that emerged from it. It is in the Sun-Language chapter of the Reform that the TDK was most overtly concerned with the impression they made on European thinkers. We see this in the

[230] Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 63.
[231] Aytürk, "H.F. Kvergić," 23.

unmatched attention given to inviting European linguists to the unveiling of the theory, and in the efforts made to elicit their approval. The desire to form a sort of club with the West was powerful enough to override authentic scholarship, and even to cozy up to the emerging wave of white supremacist ideas influencing Central Europe in the 1930s. At the same time, the interest in arriving at a desired conclusion led the reformers to ignore elements of European scholarship that showed promise and have stood the test of time even to this day, such as an approach to historical linguistics that looked primarily at structural similarities and systematic phonological changes rather than looking simply at sound. It is perhaps the fixation on prejudicial European ideas, combined with the dismissal of more informed ones, that helped create this awkward phase in linguistic history.

When one considers the outlandish idea of building so many words from a root meaning "the sun," and then letting that root disappear from essentially every one of those words, one of Müller's more unusual observations comes to mind:

> The French *âge*, for instance, has lost its whole material body, and is nothing but termination. *Âge* in old French was *eage* and *edage*. *Edage* is a corruption of the Latin *ætaticum*; *ætaticum* is a derivative of *ætas*; *ætus* an abbreviation of *ævitas*; *ævitas* is dervied from *ævum*....What trace of *æ* or *ævum*, or even *ævitas* and *ætas*, remains in *âge*? Turanian languages cannot afford such words as *âge* in their dictionaries.[232]

As curious as it may be to our mindset that Müller granted high status to a language for eroding an entire root into oblivion, or that he would then turn on a family of languages and accuse it of not being capable of such a feat, it is interesting to note that 70 years after Müller's statement, the architects of this new theory would declare all of

[232] Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 304. This argument also appears in Müller, *Letter to Chevalier Bunsen*, 27.

the world's languages to have performed that very feat innumerable times. If Sun-Language Theory accomplished nothing else, it managed to push back at Müller from across the decades.

Chapter V.

Lexicon

When Dilmen explained the major points of Sun-Language Theory at the Third Language Convention, his speech was significant not only for its content but also for his choice of words. In the following translation from a single paragraph of his speech, several words have been italicized to indicate that I have left them untranslated; the reader may wish to pay more attention to the vocabulary than the content:

> The doubling and merging that caused the *monofonemik* primordial language to develop into a *monosilâp* caused the *monosilâbik* languages to take on *agglütinatif* and *fleksiyonel* forms with time. In the same way that two *fonem* might create a *monosilâp* by uniting to express two ideas that they represent, by attaching one or more *fonem* to a *monosilâp* one can produce *polifonemik* and *polisilâbik* words…finally—as Renan so beautifully explained—many suffixes split into single words to reduce the weightiness of *agglütinasyon*, and *fleksiyon* came into being.[233]

The italicized words are all transcriptions of French words in the new Turkish alphabet. The influence of French vocabulary had been considerable for some time. Louis Bazin pointed out that even in the strictest years of purging Arabic and Persian from Turkish, borrowings from Western languages, at the time largely French, not only were spared by the TDK but actually increased. Bazin attributed this to the status of French as

[233] Dilmen, "Güneş-Dil Teorisinin Ana Hatları," 63–4. "Monofonemik ana dilin monosilâplaşmasına sebep olan ikizleşme ve kaynaşmalar, monosilâbik dillerin de zamanla agglütinatif ve fleksiyonel şekiller almasına sebep olmuştur. Nasıl iki fonem, biri ötekinin mümessili olan iki fikri bir arada ifade için birleşerek bir monosilâp yaratmışsa, bir monosilâba da bir veya birkaç fonem katışarak polifonemik ve polisilâbik kelimeler kurulmuştur…nihayet – Renan'ın da pek güzel izah ettiği gibi – agglütinasyonun ağırlığı azaltmak üzere birçok ekler tek kelimeler şeklinde yeniden ayılarak fleksiyon yoluna girilmiştir."

the language of Western intellectuals, yet also to the compatibility of thought between Atatürk's reforms and the Third Republic in France with its secularist movement.[234]

The Reform strove to defend Turkish against the perception of superiority of Arabic and Persian words, but a new set of inflectional languages had been placed on a pedestal—overwhelmingly French, but also German, English, and Italian. The Inflectional Superiority Thesis, long-since debunked by linguistic science but living on in popular opinion, created a favorable environment for Western loanwords to not only thrive but develop a life of their own. This could be seen not only in the continued high intellectual status given to such languages as French, but also in the ongoing push to prove a relationship between Turkish and Indo-European languages. This push allowed French to not only appear regularly in Turkish but also to bring its various suffixes, roots, and inflections along with it. The result had many echoes of the heyday of Arabic-Persian borrowings, as the attempt to show Turkish as compatible with Indo-European elements distracted from the mission to showcase the richness of a Turkic language on the world stage.

While this passage from Dilmen is an interesting example of the extensive borrowing of Western words during this time, what stands out here is not just the frequency of French loanwords, but the nuances of Western word-building that the listener was expected to follow. It was one thing to understand the French loanword *silâp*, from the French *syllabe* for "syllable." It was yet another to follow along as *silâp* was generated into new words, such as *monosilâbik*, following the rules not of Turkish word formation, but of French.

[234] Bazin, "Une langue littéraire," 13.

This chapter looks at the changes that were the tangible result of the Reform: the replacement of Arabic and Persian vocabulary with words that had a variety of stories behind them; sometimes they were resurrected from Old Turkish, sometimes they were culled from the Turkic dialects of Anatolia and Central Asia, and sometimes they were simply invented. Still, the use of roots and rules that were familiar to Turkic language–speakers would be key to helping the Turkish people gain access to the full resources of a national language. However, there is evidence that this goal was complicated by the separate quest to counter the Inflectional Superiority Thesis by finding commonality between Turkish and Indo-European languages. The desire to highlight instances of Turkish being Indo-European, and of Turkish being the ancestor of all Indo-European tongues, became fixations that led to the presence of French (and other Western languages) in some unusual places.

Pre-Reform Word Productivity in Arabic

A fundamental motivator for the Reform was the fact that the language, especially as it was spoken by the elite in the Ottoman capital, had been flooded with Arabic and Persian words that made Ottoman speech inaccessible to the working-class people of Anatolia. Yet the nature of this foreign vocabulary had an aspect to it that created an additional problem—one based on the dramatically different mechanisms for word-building in Arabic and Persian versus Turkish.

Words in Semitic languages such as Arabic are based on roots consisting usually of three consonants, though sometimes of two or four. Words are generated from each root by adding prefixes, suffixes, and infixes in specific combinations. The Arabic root expressed by SH–K–L (شكل) carries the meaning of "form" or "shape," and has given the

Turkish word for "shape," *şekil*. Yet various Arabic words that have put this root through their own native processes have given rise to a range of Turkish loanwords, including *eşkal* ("appearance"), *müteşekkil* ("consisting of"), and *teşkilat* ("organization"). Those unfamiliar with Semitic word-building may well struggle to see a common root among them. Conversely, they might be compelled to think *müteşekkil* and *müteşekkir* must be related, based on the fact that the first nine of their ten letters are identical, yet the latter word means "thankful." It is only through learning the nature of these patterns—and learning a sufficient number of triconsonantal roots—that this vocabulary becomes more intuitive; it becomes logical that *müteşekkir* should mean "thankful" when one can recognize the Arabic root SH-K-R (شكر), which gives the common word in Arabic for thanks, *Shukran* (شكراً).[235] As another example, three of the best-known Arabic words in English—*Islam*, *Muslim*, and the greeting *salaam*—all stem from the same root, this time S-L-M (سلم), meaning "submission" or "peace." Their commonality often goes unnoticed due to unfamiliarity with how Semitic patterns reveal themselves.

Such similarities and patterns were also not apparent to the average Turkish speaker with no familiarity with Arabic word-building. As such, most Turks were at a serious disadvantage in pre-Reform Turkey. This disadvantage applied not only when trying to learn the many Arabic loanwords that were commonly thrown about, but also when trying to keep up with new loanwords that someone familiar with Arabic could introduce or instinctively understand. E. J. W. Gibb described the situation aptly when he wrote in the first decade of the twentieth century:

[235] See Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 6; Lewis offers a still more challenging word family with the triconsonantal root ʔ-L-M (ءلم), meaning "knowledge," where the first consonant is a glottal stop that is not a part of Turkish.

> It is not too much to say that during the whole of the five and a half centuries covered by the Old School…every Persian and Arabic word was considered a possible Ottoman word. In thus borrowing material from the two classical languages a writer was quite unrestricted save by his own taste and the limit of his knowledge; all that was required was that in case of need he should give to the foreign words a Turkish grammatical form.[236]

Although Gibb was focused on poetry, and he claimed this situation had become less extreme after the middle of the nineteenth century, he alluded to the idea that Ottoman Turkish had gone beyond simply borrowing words and had entered the realm of demanding some level of competence in the rules of the borrowed language. With such a system of constantly importing new Semitic constructions, no amount of rote memorization would help the average Turk stay competent in the Ottoman language if writers were employing Arabic word productivity—generating new words according to principles in the source language. As Heyd assessed in the introduction to *Language Reform in Modern Turkey*, "nobody could write correct Ottoman Turkish without a sound knowledge of Arabic and Persian."[237] Italian linguist Ettore Rossi observed the same in 1935, writing in the throes of the Reform: "Therefore one had to study the grammatical rules of the three languages and, in order to have some level of culture, it was necessary to have at least some rough knowledge of the literature of each of them."[238]

The Reform placed a priority on alleviating this challenge. A major aim of the Reform was making Turkish more accessible and democratic, and this demand of understanding productivity in a non-Turkic language had done much damage in fueling

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[236] Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, 8.
[237] Heyd, *Language Reform*, 10.
[238] Ettore Rossi, "La Riforma Linguistica in Turchia," *Oriente Moderno* 15, no. 1 (January 1935): 45. "E perciò si dovevano studiare…le regole grammaticali delle tre lingue e, per aver un certo grado di cultura, era necessario conoscere almeno sommariamente anche la letteratura di ognuna di esse."

the elitism that had made Ottoman out of reach. Yet while Arabic and Persian words and word families were targeted for elimination, a new wave of loanwords was appearing that echoed many of the traits of the Arabic-Persian situation. This trend—not only of borrowing foreign words liberally but also of demanding a knowledge of word productivity in the source language—was now happening with French.

Reform and Beyond: Word Productivity in French

Let us now return to our extract from Dilmen's 1936 speech. A non-exhaustive list of French words that he used in a single paragraph (ignoring for the moment the range of Turkish endings he added) includes: *monosilâp*, *monosilâbik*, *agglütinatif*, *fleksiyonel*, *fonem*, *polifonemik*, *polisilâbik*, *agglütinasyon*, and *fleksiyon*. The word *fonem* was a Turkish transcription of the French *phonème* ("phoneme" in English), referring to a distinct sound in a language that can be contrasted with other sounds in that language's inventory to create a change in meaning. *Phonème* was a relatively recent coinage in French, first attested in the 1870s with the more general meaning of "speech-sound," but increasing in frequency by a factor of 17 between 1899 and 1936.[239] The Nişanyan Turkish Etymological Dictionary cites the first attestation of Turkish *fonem* in *Felsefe ve Gramer Terimleri*, a handbook of philosophical and grammatical terms published by the TDK in 1942.[240] Yet here, six years prior, Dilmen imported the word into his speech without explanation.

[239] "Google Books Ngram Viewer," Google, https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=phon%C3%A8me&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&case_insensitive=on&corpus=30&smoothing=0. Accessed December 19, 2022. See also Daniel Jones, "The History and Meaning of the Term 'Phoneme,'" Supplement to *Le Maître Phonétique, Troisième Série* 35, no. 72 (July–December 1957): 6.
[240] Nişanyan, *Nişanyan Sözlük*, 292.

Dilmen expected his listeners to understand not just *fonem* but also *monofonemik*, which required an understanding of the Greek prefix *mono-* expressing "one"; it also demanded familiarity with the French adjectival ending *-ik* in order to understand that this word was not a noun meaning "a single phoneme."

He also presumed an understanding of the word *silâp*, the reproduction of the French *syllabe* ("syllable") that gained no currency in Turkish and has been solidly outlived by the Arabic-based *hece.* Here also, understanding Dilmen's speech required familiarity with productive Western suffixes, as well as with the prefixes that were not a feature of Turkish; he used the noun *monosilâp* right beside the adjective *monosilâbik*, again distinguishing them by adding the French *-ique* ending.[241] Before both *fonem* and *silâp* he played with not just *mono-* but also *poli-*, and expected comprehension of the difference. He even combined French word-building with Turkish word-building, creating the verbal noun *monosilâplaşma*, "the act of becoming a single syllable."[242] Just two paragraphs earlier, he had incorporated the French adjectival *-ik* within the word, creating *monosilâbikleşme*, "the act of becoming monosyllabic."[243]

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[241] This is not to say that *-ik* had no meaning in Turkish; Geoffrey Lewis defined it as a "long-obsolete diminutive suffix." The modern diminutive exists as *-cik* (with three variations in the vowel to accommodate vowel harmony). Nurullah Ataç attempted to resurrect the diminutive sense of *-ik* in his creation of *köğük* to mean "line of poetic verse." (See Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 85.) Despite the detour, it is appropriate to say that a nostalgic feel for *-ik* as a Turkic diminutive noun ending would not be what guided a Turkish listener in understanding the French use of *-ik* to productively generate adjectives.

[242] Although the word *silâp* ended in a "p," it restored the "b" of the French word when followed by a vowel in its many possible endings, such as in Dilmen's *bir monosilâba* "to a monosyllable"—or, for that matter, with the addition of *-ik* to give *monosilâbik.* This alternation happens regularly in Turkish, as can be seen in the Arabic *cevap* "answer" (*cevabım* "my answer") and the native Turkish *cep* "pocket" (*cebim* "my pocket"). While this added complexity to the French borrowing, this would not have met the definition for inflection since it was applied regularly and governed completely by the phonetic environment. However, it adds another dimension to Dilmen's fusing of French and Turkish word-building, and his alternation of "b" forms with "p" forms highlighted the existence of a Turkish complexity not present in French.

[243] Dilmen, "Güneş-Dil Teorisinin Ana Hatları," 63.

In his use of *agglütinasyon* he used both the French root for "agglutinate" and the French noun ending *-tion*; to express the adjective, he followed the rules of French and added the appropriate ending even though it demanded yet a different Western building block for adjectives: that of *-if* to give *agglütinatif*. By using *fleksiyon* and then *fleksiyonel*, he added yet a third method of Western adjective building by adding *-el* (an ending that will reenter the discussion shortly).

These examples of the range of Western building blocks that Dilmen threw at his audience are taken from less than one full paragraph of his speech. Elsewhere in the presentation, he added *bi-* to his treasury of prefixes, so that *monofonemik*, *bifonemik*, and *polifonemik* were all in play. He used *abstraksiyon* while also imposing yet a fourth method for adjective building by using *abstre*, a transcription of the French *abstrait*, for "abstract." In his choice to use *préhistorik* and *préhistoir* for "prehistoric" and "prehistory," he lost nearly all loyalty to Turkish transcription; he kept the French *accent aigu* on the *e* even though Turkish gives the correct French pronunciation without it. It seems reasonable that he would have pronounced *-oir* in the French way, even though a Turkish transcription of that syllable would have read *-uar*. Nonetheless, if he had meant to stay true to French spelling, then he should have ended *préhistoire* with an *e*, which he did not. It is also not clear whether he pronounced the *h* in both *préhistoir* and *préhistorik*, thus giving them a Turkish reading, or whether he made them silent as in French. Adding to the mystery is that for "historic" he dispensed with the *h*, writing *istorik*. However he pronounced these words, he maintained some version of the irregular French vowel change (i.e., inflection) between the third syllables of *préhistoire* and

préhistorique.[244] He continued the use of *-ik* with the phrase *klâsik lengüistik*, interestingly maintaining Turkish word order to express the French *linguistique classique*. Though he did not adopt French syntax for the expression, he was showing, after a series of *-ik* adjectives, the French quirk of also using *-ik* for certain nouns when applied to fields of study: *la rhétorique*, *la sémantique*, etc.[245]

Among all of these examples of French morphology, spelling, and inflection finding their way into Dilmen's reformed Turkish, *monofonemik* deserves special attention. Listeners could hardly have been expected to be familiar with the word *monofonemik* as a monolith without dissecting its parts; even the French word *monophonémique*, from which it was built, has shown so little currency that it was not recognized by the *Académie française* in the 1935 edition of its dictionary, nor is it today.[246] A Google Books Ngram shows no instances of the word in its entire French corpus since 1800.[247] The word makes occasional appearances in modern academia, generally describing two-part sounds that are treated as single phonemes in a given language.[248] Yet Dilmen used the word in a different context, describing a language that

[244] Modern Turkish continues to use *prehistorik*, with the Turkicized spelling, and *prehistorya*, opting for a more Greek/Latin form instead of French. However, the terms *tarihten önceki* and *tarihöncesi* are popular, and were available in Dilmen's time; Emre used *tarihtenönceki* (as one word) in 1932. See Emre, "Samih Rifatın Dilbiliğinde," 16.
[245] Dilmen, "Güneş-Dil Teorisinin Ana Hatları," 57–64. All the French loanwords discussed in this section can be found within these pages.
[246] Académie française, "Dictionnaire de l'Académie française," 8th edition (1932–35) and 9th edition (1992–2011), accessed December 13, 2022, https://www.dictionnaire-academie.fr/.
[247] "Google Books Ngram Viewer," Google, https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=monophon%C3%A9mique&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=30&smoothing=3. Accessed December 16, 2022.
[248] See, for example, Cécile Viollain, *Sociophonologie de l'anglais à Boston: Une étude de la rhoticité et de la liaison* (Master's thesis, Université Toulouse-Le Mirail, 2010), 34. "Ainsi, à la diphthongue /ɪə/ de la RP, considérée comme monophonémique, correspond la séquence /ɪr/ du GA, considérée cette fois comme biphonémique, dans les mots *beer* et *fear* par exemple." ("Thus, corresponding to the diphthongue /ɪə/ in Received Pronunciation, considered monophonemic, is the sequence /ɪr/ in General American, in this case considered biphonemic, in the words *beer* and *fear* for example.")

had differentiated only one sound for itself. This usage was, firstly, somewhat paradoxical, but also quite limited in its usefulness, especially since the groundbreaking theory of a language with an undifferentiated *ağ* had been presented to Dilmen's audience only the day before. Given the rarity of the word and the specific variation in meaning that he was assigning to it, it is possible that Dilmen used the building blocks of French to build a Turkish word before French had built the same word.

In analyzing the reasoning behind Dilmen's exceptional sample of French word generating, one must concede the specificity of his audience; as stated in the previous chapter, the reformers placed great importance on the presence of Western linguists at this particular convention. It is true that his audience skewed toward strong familiarity with French roots. Yet one must question whether, given the celebration of the Turkish language that was central to the occasion, the reformers would prefer to be understood by the foreign contingent at the expense of their countrymen. The choice of whom to reach was not a binary one, at any rate; an esoteric idea such as "monophonemic" could be expressed quite efficiently in Turkish as *tek fonemli*; "polysyllabic" as *çok heceli*. Non-natives who could not follow this word-building would have no capacity for following the rest of the day's lectures in Turkish anyway. While it was certainly *de rigueur* in many countries to pepper academic discussions with French, Dilmen was one of the most enthusiastic advocates for the richness and importance of Turkish—a topic that was central to his presentation. It was certainly not in keeping with the tone of his speech to depict Turkish as a language that struggled to express such a range of ideas, and that needed French to come to its rescue.

The amount of French word generation in Dilmen's speech does find an explanation in the throughline of how the reformers had chosen to respond to the Intellectual Superiority Hypothesis. They had given much energy to countering the presumed superiority of Indo-European languages by finding the commonality between those languages and Turkish, and thereby blurring the lines between their two language types. This would mean, firstly, that Turkish facility with Indo-European building blocks would imply facility with whatever perceived higher level of expression those languages claimed to allow. But also, breaking the walls between language types allowed plausibility for the reformers' various etymologies that established Turkish as a cousin or ancestor of Indo-European languages. Some Western building blocks, including several that appeared above, would work their way into the wealth of neologisms that were at the core of the Reform. Yet their appearance would not have the tone of merely peppering the language with French words the way one might do in English to project cachet. These building blocks would be incorporated into Turkish, with seeming plausible deniability, giving them the implication of a native Turkish pedigree.

This is not to claim that Dilmen was the coiner of any of these words; *klâsik*, for example, had been attested since 1887.[249] His paragraph provides a basis for discussion mostly for its rich concentration of French word productivity, and is not intended to suggest his productive use of French terms was unique. However, it is interesting to note a contrasting style from Emre just three years earlier, in which he borrowed French words intact (including their French spelling) yet made adjectives out of them using only Turkish elements: "'*préfixe*'li, '*flexion*'lu ve '*métathèse*'li" ("prefixal, inflectional, and

[249] Nişanyan, *Nişanyan Sözlük*, 481.

metathetic").[250] This earlier style demonstrated a hard division between what was French and what was Turkish. Dilmen's 1936 style shows a Turkification of French elements and vice versa.

Vocabulary Samples

In January of 1937, the Turkish Historical Society debuted its journal *Belleten*, and explained the reasoning for the title in the premiere issue. Atatürk, it claimed, had used the word *belleten* to name the reams of documents that the group used, and he chose the word because he claimed it was the ancestor of the French word *bulletin* (used in the same meaning as the English "bulletin"). In fact, Turkish had borrowed the French word just a few years prior and transcribed it as *bülten*, first attested in 1930.[251] Yet the partisans of Sun-Language Theory had a different idea; they pointed out that the Turkish root *bel-* referred to clarity and teaching, such as in *belli* ("clear"), *belirmek* ("to become apparent"), *bellek* ("memory") and *bellemek* ("to learn by heart"). The present participle of the causative form of this last verb was indeed *belleten*, an adjective meaning "causing to learn by heart." It was this form that grabbed their attention for its similarity in sound structure to French *bulletin*, even if its meaning was several degrees removed. *Belleten* began cropping up in Turkish as a noun meaning "bulletin" in 1936 (first attested in the newspaper *Ulus*), just in time for the claim that it was older than the French word.[252]

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[250] Emre, "Samih Rifatın Dilbiliğinde," 15. Two paragraphs earlier, he did use the French ending and write *flexionnel*, yet he also defined the word, introducing it with the Arabic *mükesser*.
[251] Nişanyan, *Nişanyan Sözlük*, 140.
[252] Sevan Nişanyan, "Belleten," *Nişanyan Sözlük*, accessed December 22, 2022. https://www.nisanyansozluk.com/kelime/belleten. This is an update to the third edition of the print version of *Nişanyan Sözlük*, which attributed the first attestation of "belleten" to Atatürk's *Geometri Terimleri* in 1937. The most recent online update to "belleten" was September 8, 2022.

This premiere issue of the Turkish Historical Society's journal looked at the etymology for *bulletin* that was given in various French dictionaries—from the Italian *bulletino*, which came from the Latin *bulle*, meaning a document's seal or other round object. (The round aspect of this word gave rise to the French *bulle* for "bubble," while its meaning of a document seal gave English the word "bull" when referring to a papal edict.) In response to the idea that the word *bulletin* could come from a word meaning "bubble or other round object," and because one Western dictionary theorized that the word was ultimately Etruscan but could not carry its history further, the journal saw a weakness and tried to debunk the story: "It can be seen that European linguistic resources are not capable of giving us the full range of meanings of this word, nor can they show us the original concepts from which these meanings derive, nor the word's original form."[253]

The first pages of *Belleten* then proceeded to give a full Sun-Language analysis of both Turkish *belleten* and French *bulletin*. Their analysis showed all the inventive and highly abstract elements of other Sun-Language analyses; this included an initial syllable relating to the sun that then disappeared, a sound that manifested and embodied the root, a sound that generalized the meaning, and a sound that indicated a dynamic, active principle.[254]

Lewis pointed out that the journal *Belleten* has an excellent academic reputation, though it unfortunately had this initial phase of its life tinged by the fever of Sun-Language Theory.[255] This episode from early 1937 does serve as another indication that

[253] Turkish Historical Society, "Belleten," *Belleten* 1, no. 1 (January 1937), 4. "Görülüyor ki Avrupa dil kaynakları bize kelimenin bütün manalarının vermekle beraber bu mananın ilk çıktığı ilkel mefhumu ve kelimenin ilk şeklini göstermekten âciz kalmaktadır."
[254] "Belleten," *Belleten* 1, no. 1: 313.
[255] Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 61.

Sun-Language Theory still had some momentum after the debacle of the Third Language Convention three months earlier. In the second issue of *Belleten* in the spring of 1937, the editors persisted in their claim, reprinting it this time in French. An international audience could now read the journal's taunting words: "For the 'testimony' that we've cited on the preceding pages is enough to show how the resources of the Turkish language shine a light on the words whose origin Western linguistics cannot manage to determine or explain."[256]

As for the ultimate outcome of this campaign, the third edition of the *Nişanyan Etymological Dictionary* (*Nişanyan Sözlük*) from 2021 minces no words about the origin of *belleten* as a noun: "It is obvious that it was derived in the framework of Sun-Language Theory through free association with the synonymous French *bulletin*."[257]

The story of *belleten* has been cited by Lewis as well as Vatin as an anecdote of the fever of Sun-Language Theory.[258] Yet I have chosen to include it in this chapter because it illustrates the willingness among reformers to create a word with Indo-European ingredients and cloud the story of who borrowed from whom. One of the "conveniences" of Sun-Language Theory that Dilmen had spoken about was that it allowed all sorts of foreign words to remain in Turkish. This idea was applied mostly to Arabic-Persian words that had made their way into Turkish and were widely understood, thus not fit for removal. Yet the importation of new Western words, which was highly in vogue, could similarly find justification in the idea of all words being originally Turkish.

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[256] Turkish Historical Society, "Belleten," *Belleten* 1, no. 2 (April 1937), 316. "Car les «témoins» que nous avons cités dans les pages précédentes suffisent à montrer de quelle façon les sources de la langue turque éclairent les mots dont la linguistique occidentale ne parvient pas à déterminer ou expliquer l'origine."
[257] Nişanyan, *Nişanyan Sözlük*, 110. "Güneş Dil Teorisi çerçevesinde *Fr bulletin* (aynı anlamda) sözcüğünden serbest çağrışım yoluyla türetildiği açıktır."
[258] Vatin, *De l'osmanli au turc*, 83.

Furthermore, even some reformers who were slow to warm to Sun-Language Theory, such as Emre, were nonetheless working to establish the Indo-European and inflectional elements in Turkish. This idea was also helped by orchestrating as much similarity to Indo-European languages as they could find. In both cases, the subtle incorporation of Indo-European elements into Reform-era words seemed to become an attractive idea.

Prefixes

One of the main Indo-European–friendly innovations during the Reform was the use of prefixes, a move that Lewis agreed was motivated by the TDK's desire to show that Turkish and Indo-European languages were related.[259] As Turkish was, by Henry Sweet's description in 1900, "prefixless,"[260] the reformers resorted to a variety of creations to bring prefixes into the language. *Ast-*, akin to the common Turkish word *alt* "underside," became a prefix meaning "sub-."[261] The prefix did not gain much traction, though both Lewis and Nişanyan cite a pair of military titles that are the exception: *asteğmen* "second lieutenant" and *assubay* "non-commissioned officer."[262] From *ara* "interval" came *arsı-* with the meaning of *inter-*, which similarly had little success.

More successful was the invention of a prefix meaning "pre-," created by using the word *ön* "front." The word proved itself useful as a root, giving a number of neologisms that are in common use today, such as *önem* "importance," *önermek* "to propose/put forth," and *önlemek* "to prevent/preclude," all first attested in 1935. In that same year, the additional use of *ön* as a prefix yielded several words that gained some

[259] Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 94.
[260] Sweet, *History of Language*, 69.
[261] Nişanyan, *Nişanyan Sözlük*, 75.
[262] Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 94; Nişanyan, *Nişanyan Sözlük*, 75.

popularity. *Öngörmek* ("to foresee") is still in existence; its constituent parts match the pattern of the French *prévoir* or, for that matter, the English *foresee*, with *görmek* being the independent verb "to see." *Önyargı* "prejudice" maps somewhat into the French word *préjugé*, with *yargı* meaning "judgment" while the French *jugé* is the past participle "judged."

Önsöz, the neologism for "foreword," placed *ön-* before *söz* "word." This creation maps more readily into the German *Vorwort*, as well as the English "foreword," than it does into the French *préface*, although the French word stems from Latin *præfatio* "words spoken beforehand" and is more similar to the others than it might initially seem. Interestingly, Lewis cites English "foreword" as a nineteenth-century Germanic replacement for "preface" that was intended to counter the flood of Latinate words that were the fashion in English.[263] Regardless of the interesting recurrence of forewords and language reforms, the English, German, and French words all appear to be ultimately based on the pattern set by Latin; the Turkish word is consistent with all of them, and is still in current use.

Önder "leader" has a more complex origin story; it appeared in the 1934 collection of dialectical words culled from across Turkic lands, the *Tarama Dergisi*, with a note that the word was used in and around Polatlı near Ankara. However, Nişanyan notes that the suffix *-der* is doubtlessly taken from the ending of "leader."[264] The hidden English origin may be yet another hidden French origin, however, since French has been using the English word "leader" since 1822, and may ultimately be the inspiration for the Turkish word. *Ön* is technically a root and not a prefix in this case, but the word is

[263] Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 2.
[264] Nişanyan, *Nişanyan Sözlük*, 672. See also Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 123.

included here in the discussion of prefixes because the strangeness of its parts defies easy categorization.

Suffixes

-man/-men. This pair of suffixes was introduced into Turkish with the same meaning as the English suffix that appears in "fireman" and "weatherman." The same suffix appears as *-mann* in German. Although this was a Germanic suffix used in a Germanic construction, it was once again the popularity of French that first brought it into the Turkish lexicon; the word *wattman*—a theoretical English word that gained no life in English—passed into French in 1895 to mean "streetcar operator," then first appeared in Turkish as *vatman* in 1924.[265]

During the Reform, this *-man* suffix was then used in the new word for "expert," *uzman*, which the *Nişanyan Etymological Dictionary* attributes to the example set by the German *Fachmann*.[266] From there, a variety of neologisms followed, including such now-common words as *öğretmen* "teacher," from the root *öğret-* "to teach," and *seçmen* "voter," also regularly formed from *seç-* "to vote." To an English speaker, the alternation between *-man* and *-men* looks exactly like a singular/plural distinction, but the variants have nothing to do with number; they both exist to allow for Turkish vowel harmony. Nonetheless, one of the more curious aspects of this suffix is the number of created words that violate vowel harmony completely: the perfectly singular words *barmen*, *formen*, *rekortmen* ("record-holder"), and *spormen* ("athlete") are all examples of this.[267]

[265] Nişanyan, *Nişanyan Sözlük*, 936.
[266] Nişanyan, *Nişanyan Sözlük*, 922.
[267] For more on *-man*/*-men*, see Nişanyan, *Nişanyan Sözlük*, 576; Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 100–1.

-al/-el/-sal/-sel. It is the suffixes in this family that Lewis calls "the most controversial of all products of the language reform."[268] The adoption of these (mostly) adjectival endings arose from the fact that an Arabic-Persian *-î* suffix had been the standard adjective-maker until the Reform. Coupled with this was the fact that Turkish had less intrinsic need for adjectives, since the language could, like English, use nouns as modifiers, allowing one to say "Language Commission" and have no need for "Linguistic Commission." The fact that French did not allow this noun phrase construction, but instead begged for an adjective—*Commission Linguistique*—may have increased the appetite for adjectives at the same time that the usual Turkish method for making them was marked for banishment. And so, Lewis claims, the reformers adopted the *-el* of French *culturel* (in Turkish: *kültürel*).

In another example of hesitancy by the TDK to acknowledge the origin of its building blocks, the *Türkçe Sözlük* did not acknowledge the French nature of the suffix in *kültürel* until 1983; it cited *kültür* as a French word, but for decades claimed the *-el* was the Turkish use of a Turkish suffix.[269] With the claim of *-el* as natively Turkish, the suffix began to be applied generously. *Ilk* "first" took on *-el* to become *ilkel* "primitive, primordial," first attested in 1935; by the time of Sun-Language Theory presentations in 1936, *ilkel* was appearing frequently in discussions of man's ancestral language.[270] In this environment, Dilmen's use of *fleksiyonel* in addition to *fleksyon* was in fact treading on familiar ground.

[268] Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 101.
[269] Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 101–2.
[270] Nişanyan, *Nişanyan Sözlük*, 392.

Another peculiarity of this phenomenon was that several new words, such as *siyasal* "political" and *ulusal* "national," appeared to take on a *-sal* ending, even though in both cases the *s* was a part of the root word (*siyaset* "politics" and *ulus* "nation"). This *-sal* and its variant *-sel* would soon take on a life of their own. The word *evren* was resurrected from the fifteenth century, when it meant "loop" or "wheel," and became the word for "universe." To create the adjective "universal," *evren* received not *-el* but *-sel*, based on its coincidental similarity to French *universel*.[271] The likeness between *evrensel* and *universel* was striking, even if the *s* was part of the root in the French word and of the suffix in the Turkish one.

The word that Turkish settled on for "historic," despite Dilmen's experiment with *istorik*, is *tarihsel*, using the controversial *-sel* suffix after the word *tarih* "history." *Tarih* survived despite its Arabic origin, meaning that against the best efforts of the Reform, Turkish ended up with an Arabic root and an invented French suffix to describe history.

Roots

Several neologisms from the Reform are worth mentioning for their designed similarity to Western languages. The word *okul* "school" has a solid Turkish base since *oku-* means "to read" or "to study," but the final *-l* gave it a peculiar resemblance to the French *école.* The *-l* was attributed to a dialectical word *okulağ* from the city of Urfa, but the claim of that form giving rise to *okul* without the influence of *école* was unpersuasive to either Lewis or Nişanyan, who asserts that it was inspired by free association with the French word.[272] The same is true for *terim*, a word meaning "technical term" that

[271] Nişanyan, *Nişanyan Sözlük*, 266. See also Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 102–3 and 116.
[272] Nişanyan, *Nişanyan Sözlük*, 657. See also Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 44, 117–9.

reformers like Naim Hazim Onat claimed was from a native Turkic word meaning "gathering." Here again both Lewis and Nişanyan attribute the word to simply spinning off from a French word, in this case *terme.*[273] Like many of these words, *okul* made its first appearance in 1935, with *terim* appearing a year earlier.

The word *genel*, meaning the adjective "general," also bore a remarkable resemblance to its French and English counterparts. Doğan Aksan claimed that the root of this word was the Old Turkish root *gen* "wide," which is alive and well in the Turkish word for "wide," *geniş*. The suffix *-el* makes yet another appearance here, and Lewis points out that Doğan's origin story for the word is suspicious, since it applies an adjective-making ending to a word that is already an adjective. Nonetheless, the same can be said of *ilkel* above, the root of which is legitimately Turkish. Lewis also points out in the expression *genelde*, *genel* suddenly functions as a noun, and this is in fact a direct translation of the English "in general," which has the same linguistic quirk. To this observation I can only add that the same quirk is true in the French version, *en général*, so it is quite possible that French once again is the inspiration for the semantic domain of *genel.*[274]

The use of *gen* gave rise to other Western-looking words as well; Atatürk himself undertook the development of vocabulary for geometry, and he created an astounding number of mathematical terms that are still used today.[275] In Atatürk's notes on the topic of mathematics he wrote that "polygon" was originally a Turkish word. His argument was that *pol-* was derived from Turkish *bol*, still in use to mean "ample/abundant," while

[273] Nişanyan, *Nişanyan Sözlük*, 881. See also Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 122.
[274] Nişanyan, *Nişanyan Sözlük*, 310. See also Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 116.
[275] Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Geometri* (Istanbul: Devlet Basimevi, 1936).

-gon was from that Turkic *gen* meaning "wide." Thus, he said, *poligon* meant "of much width" ("genişliği çok").[276] In the conviction that *gon* was originally Turkish *gen*, he used *gen* for the names of polygons where Western languages used *gon*: "pentagon" was *beşgen* (from *beş* "five"), "hexagon" was *altıgen* (from *altı* "six"), etc. He even used *gen* in the names for three- and four-sided figures, calling them *üçgen* and *dörtgen*.[277] The word *geometri* was also given Turkish pedigree, as he also attributed to *ge-* of that word not to the Greek prefix for "land" but to this same Turkic *gen*.[278]

Looking back at Dilmen's *polisilâbik*, it is interesting to consider the fact that Atatürk himself looked for ways to incorporate *poli-* into the Turkish lexicon. If Atatürk himself was sanctioning *poli-* as Turkish *and* as a prefix, this could justify the productive use of *poli-* across new words, even if their westernness was apparent. Of course, Atatürk's notes about *poligon* appear to be from a year after Dilmen filled his 1936 speech with mentions of *polisilâbik* and *polifonemik*; the timeline does not prove conclusively that Dilmen was building *poli-* words with Atatürk's blessing. But outside of Ataturk's coinages for geometry from 1937, all of the neologisms discussed in this chapter had already been put to use by the time of Dilmen's speech. Western elements had been snuck into New Turkish, and the reformers had shown themselves capable of questionable explanations for some of them that would blur the lines between Western and Turkish words.

[276] Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 63.
[277] While English and many other Western languages do not use the *-gon* ending for "triangle" and "rectangle," reserving it instead for figures of five sides or more, Greek did use the *-gon* ending for these shapes; the Ancient Greek for "triangle"— τρίγωνος (*trigonos*)—survives in the English "trigonometry."
[278] Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 63.

Conclusions

It is fascinating to examine the dramatic changes in vocabulary that the Language Reform brought to Turkish in just a few short years in the mid-1930s. The wealth of new words that came into the language during that time, and that remain in common use today, bear the traces of the TDK's determination to find Western elements living in Turkish. Words as common as "school," "teacher," "national," and "leader" hold the secrets of buried Western roots and suffixes, planted in the name of an agenda to present Turkish as a Western-compatible language. These planned words were incorporated into the language before the grand reveal of Sun-Language Theory in late 1936, which the reformers hoped would fundamentally change the world's perception of Turkish. With the failure of Sun-Language Theory, of course, that change did not happen. Yet the ingredients for the intended revolution live on, in engineered words that are now a natural and effortless part of everyday lives across Turkey.

Chapter VI.

Syntax

In the 1935 edition of the Paris-based *Revue Internationale de l'Enseignement*, an essay appeared on the topic of reforming Turkish syntax. Though the Reform had taken on matters of the alphabet and vocabulary, the authors reasoned, it had not yet examined the question of syntax, and this was where reform was now truly needed.

The authors chose a sentence in French and contrasted the flow of its various elements with that of its Turkish translation. Their assessment was hardly objective:

> But since the order used in the French sentence is, as we've just seen, the logical one—the order naturally followed by the human spirit, which, when both expounding and comprehending, proceeds or likes to proceed from the essential to the secondary—it follows that the order employed by the Turkish sentence is an artificial one, an assault upon logic.

The sentence illustrating this superior French syntax was chosen, the authors claimed, on the basis of its moderate length and complexity. It is difficult to consider only its structure, however, and ignore its content; the sentence was about the importance of French thought in colonial America.

Such claims of French logical superiority over Turkish, in a French journal, using sample sentences that happen to elevate the influence of French thinkers, might align with the most extreme images of a French nationalist agenda. The two brothers who authored the essay, however, were Turkish.[279]

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[279] Sedad and Vedad Örs, "Réflexions sur une réforme de la syntaxe turque," *Revue Internationale de l'Enseignement* 89 (1935): 19. "Mais comme l'ordre adopté par la version française est, ainsi que nous venons de le voir, l'ordre logique, l'ordre suivi naturellement par l'esprit humain qui, dans l'exposition

This chapter examines the crusade of those two brothers, Sedad and Vedad Örs, to fundamentally change the structure of Turkish: the influences on their reasoning, the language models they aspired to, and how they chose to make their case. We will see an almost fanatically pro-Western approach as they threw their own language under the bus, attempting to present Turkish structure to the West in as alien a manner as possible. Finally, we will look at whether a country that had already dared so much linguistic change was receptive to the idea of taking on a still more fundamental reform to their language in order to more closely resemble the West.

"An Assault upon Logic": The Örs Brothers, 1935

Sedad and Vedad Örs were described by Vatin as "distinguished philologists."[280] Vedad, upon his death in 1981, was the subject of a laudatory essay from one of his students, Yahya Akyüz, who cobbled together biographical details out of the 220 letters his professor had written during their two decades of friendship. According to Akyüz, the younger Örs brother was born in İstanbul in 1899 to Mustafa Zeki Paşa (1849–1914), one of Sultan Abdülhamit II's (1842–1918) most trusted field marshals. Though the brothers' pedigree was that of patriotic Ottomans, their education was strongly European from the outset. Their father placed great value in learning French, and procured French caretakers for his children from an early age. Vedad Örs went to elementary school with the French Christian brothers during four years of family exile in Rhodes, and when he returned to İstanbul he attended the French-run Lycée Saint-Joseph. His university studies took him

comme dans la compréhension, procède ou aime à procéder de l'essentiel à l'accessoire, il s'ensuit que l'ordre suivi par la phrase turque est un ordre artificiel, qui fait violence à la logique."

[280] Nicolas Vatin, "De l'osmanli au turc," 76.

to Berlin and then to Bern, where he worked as a translator at the Turkish embassy. He was doing the same work at the embassy in London at the time he wrote the article with his brother in 1935.[281]

The Örs brothers attributed their frustration with their native language to what they termed "the postposition of the principal," meaning that essential units of meaning follow the words that modify them, and are thus pushed later in the sentence—much, the brothers believed, to the confusion and suspense of the listener. They took special issue with relative clauses, which in Turkish also continue "the postposition of the principal" by preceding the nouns they modify. Furthermore, Turkish relative clauses are expressed not with relative pronouns, but by using possessive gerunds or present participles. Thus the Turkish for "the man whom I see," *gördüğüm adam*, is more literally expressed as "the my seeing man." Similarly, "the man who sees me," *beni gören adam*, is structured as "the me-seeing man." The Örs brothers wrote in the *Revue Internationale* that their native structure was an "artifice," labeling it "uncomfortable and dissatisfying."[282] Moreover, they described French word order in general, with its progression from the essential to the secondary, to be like the elegant and predictable construction of a pyramid starting from its solid base and building upward. By contrast, they compared Turkish syntax to "the delusional architect who would start building his pyramid at the apex, projecting it into the air and trying to complete the base before said apex falls to the ground."[283]

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[281] Yahya Akyüz, "Büyük Dil Bilgini Vedad Örs'ün Ardından," *Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi* XXXVII, no. 1–2 (1982): 29–30; Yücel Güçlü, *Zeki Kuneralp and the Turkish Foreign Service* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 66.
[282] Örs and Örs, "Réflexions," 24. "Or cet artifice est incommode et décevant."
[283] Örs and Örs, "Réflexions," 18–19. "…la syntaxe turque ressemble à l'architecte halluciné qui commencerait de construire sa pyramide par la pointe, projetant celle-ci en l'air et essayant d'achever la base avant que la pointe ne retombe."

They conceded that there was little cause for confusion when Turkish sentences were short. As sentences grew longer and more complex, however, the brothers saw a huge impediment to comprehension. To illustrate this, they also composed a whimsical sentence of their own, rich in relative clauses and unpredictable details, and again compared the French version to its Turkish translation. This sentence will serve as a more interesting point of analysis than the strangely chosen sentence about French thinkers, which we will revisit later. The sentence in English: "I see that the child whose father has been working in town for a month is sleeping in my aunt's armchair, which sits in the great room of my house."[284]

Below is the Turkish translation that the Örs brothers offered, followed by a literal translation of it into English. In both languages, I have added parentheses and brackets to delineate modifying phrases; the word that each phrase modifies (thus "the principal" of the phrase, in the Örs brothers' terminology) occurs immediately after the closing of each parenthesis or bracket:

(Babası bir aydan beri şehirde çalışan) {çocuğun, [halamın, (evimin büyük odasında duran)] koltuğunda,} uyuduğunu göriyorum.[285]

(His father since a month town–in working) {child's, [my aunt's, (my house's great room–in standing)] armchair–in,} sleeping see-I.

This literal translation into English is hardly comprehensible at a glance, yet the brothers, who chose to work in French, offered a literal explanation that had still further challenges to it. English syntax is by no means identical to that of Turkish, however it

[284] Örs and Örs, "Réflexions," 27. "je [*sic*] vois que l'enfant dont le père travaille en ville depuis un mois dort dans le fauteuil de ma tante lequel se trouve dans la grande chambre de ma maison."
[285] The modern spelling of the final word is "görüyorum."

employs several structures that, unlike French, do invoke "the postposition of the principal." One of these is the English possessive construction, seen here in "child's sleeping," "my aunt's armchair," and "my house's great room." All of these expressions must be reversed in French so that they begin with the principal noun: "the sleeping of my child," "the armchair of my aunt," "the great room of my house." A French literal translation of this construction that demonstrates Turkish word order meaningfully presents a difficulty that makes the sentence appear alien to a French-speaker. Yet the English possessive, which pushes the principal noun to the end of the phrase, is quite similar to the Turkish construction.

Secondly, English adjectives almost always precede their noun, even when a long list of adjectives may, by the Örs brothers' logic, leave the listener in suspense trying to determine what noun is getting described. English even allows the construction of complex adjectives that still precede what they modify. Thus, an utterance such as "the room-occupying chair" would be considered grammatical, if somewhat inventive. (A complex adjective, such as "room-occupying" above, even shares the Turkish feature of placing the verbal at the end of the modifying phrase.) With this English capacity for complex adjectives, a phrase literally translating a section of the Örses' sentence, such as *"the in-my-house's-great-room–standing armchair," while not grammatical, is merely an overstep of existing English rules. In French, meanwhile, this word order—*"le dans-la-grande-chambre-de-ma-maison–étant fauteuil"—would be incomprehensible.

The phenomenon of the "postposition of the principal," so common in Turkish but also seen in English, is expressed in modern linguistics as "left branching." That is to say, the head of a phrase has modifiers that extend out to the left of it (when writing in Latin

script), thus earlier in the sentence. In the case of a noun, those modifiers could take many forms, including adjectives, adjectival phrases, genitive nouns, prepositional phrases, or relative clauses. In Turkish, all of these elements branch left (i.e., precede their noun). French, on the other hand, is strongly right-branching; of the list above, only a few classes of adjectives (numbers and possessive adjectives, plus a few exceptions as seen in "la grande chambre" above) will precede their noun; the remainder of the list branches rightward.

English is largely right-branching, yet as shown above, it carries considerable left-branching traits like Turkish does. Genitives, adjectives, and simple adjectival phrases branch left, and also like Turkish, English builds elaborate noun phrases, such as "the city council crime prevention committee director," in which the head of the phrase is not the first element but the last.

German carries these left-branching tendencies even further, allowing more complex adjectival phrases to precede their nouns. The strained English phrase used above to approximate Turkish—*"the in-my-house's-great-room–standing armchair"—is acceptable syntax in German: *der im großen Zimmer meines Hauses stehende Sessel.* Furthermore, there are frequent circumstances (subordinate clauses, the presence of an auxiliary verb) in which German engages in the same habit as Turkish of pushing the verb, much to the Örs brothers' frustration, to final position.

In light of this, the Örs brothers' choice of a French forum to critique Turkish syntax is an interesting one. In certain ways it is predictable; the brothers' abilities in the language were widely praised. Cemil Meriç wrote that Sedad's French was better than

any Frenchman's.[286] French was certainly the foremost *lingua franca* at the time, and would grant them an audience beyond a single nation. Yet it is also worth noting that when they made the case for the inferiority of Turkish syntax, they chose to do so in a language that was Turkish's syntactical opposite. Bazin would observe, almost half a century after the Örs article appeared, that French and Turkish are generally structured in diametrically opposed orders, creating a special difficulty in translating between the two while honoring an author's style.[287]

English and German were both also influential *linguae francae* that the Örs brothers used easily. Cemil Meriç said that Sedad had been speaking both languages longer than he could remember, and Vedad had been working as an ambassadorial translator in both London and Bern in the years leading up to their article.[288] If the brothers had made their case in either of these languages, they might have found a similarly broad audience for whom the left-branching concepts would feel more familiar. And there is, of course, the question of why they did not present their critique of Turkish syntax in the Turkish language, addressing the very population that the syntax question affected. Yet the Örs brothers chose to criticize their left-branching language by parsing it in a quintessentially right-branching language, thereby maximizing the alien and unintuitive qualities that they wished to convey in their argument, and putting the critique on display for a right-branching audience preselected to find Turkish word order strange.

With this in mind, let us return to the Örs brothers' original sample sentence, which credited French thinkers with influencing English and thereby American ideals.

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[286] Çemil Meriç and Mahmut Ali Meriç, *Jurnal* vol. 2: 1966–1983 (Cağaloğlu, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, reprinted, 2011), 221. Cited in Yücel Güçlü, *Zeki Kuneralp and the Turkish Foreign Service*, 69.
[287] Bazin, "Une langue littéraire," 9.
[288] Meriç and Meriç, *Jurnal*, 221; Akyüz, "Büyük Dil Bilgini Vedad Örs'ün Ardından," 30.

Aside from the remarkably pro-French concepts in a sentence chosen for grammatical analysis, there are other things to note about their choice of sentence. The first is that the source sentence was originally an English one. It appeared deep within *The Rise of American Civilization* by Charles A. and Mary R. Beard. This need not be surprising, and indeed it might be effective to compare French and Turkish by introducing material from a third-party language and examining how the two languages accommodate its content. Yet while the Örs brothers acknowledged the English-language source in a footnote, they also described this experiment as taking "a French sentence" and comparing it syntactically "with its translation into Turkish."[289] Their exercise was never presented as comparing both languages' ability to express material translated from a third.

Let us now look at the original sentence itself: "Through England also Americans drew French doctrines revamped by various reformers who were trying to reconstruct George III's system in the spirit of Mirabeau if not Danton."[290]

The sentence is syntactically unusual; the principal information (which, true to the Örs brothers' preferences, has been moved to the front) occurs in a prepositional phrase, "through England." The Örs brothers regarded "the principal" as that critical part of a sentence without which the listener is lost, yet they also took for granted that it would take the form of a noun or a verb—hence their frustration for the listener's sake that both these parts of speech would appear after their modifiers in Turkish. Here, they have chosen a sentence that actually illustrates the potential for critical information to appear

[289] Örs and Örs, "Réflexions," 16. "nous allons prendre une phrase française. Nous en analyserons l'agencement syntaxique, puis nous la comparerons avec sa traduction en turc…"
[290] Charles A. Beard and Mary Ritter Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 447. Cited by Örs and Örs, "Réflexions," 17.

in a modifier—one that might easily appear early in the sentence in natural Turkish syntax.

The Örs brothers' French translation highlights another irregularity: "C'est également d'Angleterre que les Américains importaient des doctrines françaises revisées [*sic*] par divers réformateurs, qui essayaient de reconstruire le système de George III dans l'esprit de Mirabeau, si ce n'est de Danton." While the English original highlights the prepositional phrase by putting it at the beginning of the sentence, in the Örs brothers' French version the opening phrase literally translates to: "It is also from England (that Americans imported French doctrines…)." Whereas in the original, the core sentence had been "Americans imported doctrines," all of that was relegated to a relative clause in French, and the new principal sentence—"It is also from England"—emphasized the principal phrase "from England" by placing it *in final position.* Thus, in attempting to prove the intuitive elegance of right-branching Western syntax, the authors managed to demonstrate ways in which a quintessential right-branching language resorts to "the postposition of the principal" in order to communicate more effectively. By using a sentence hinging on a prepositional phrase, they also weakened the assumption that any part of speech has a monopoly on being "the principal" across the range of possible sentences—greatly hampering any discussion of one syntax being universally more effective than another.

Thus the Örs brothers' essay is a fascinating document, using bewildering argumentation to not only declare the inferiority of Turkish syntax to French, but also to appeal specifically to speakers of French, as well as its many international admirers, with that declaration. Yet for all the bold choices they made in their cause, the question

remains, were they simply a pair of outliers in their beliefs regarding Turkish syntax? Was this an idea that they came up with independently? Or did they have company among either Western or Turkish thinkers?

They in fact cited several Western critics of Turkish syntax. They quoted from Steinthal and his criticism of Turkish complex sentences in his 1847 *De Pronomine Relativo*, written in Latin.[291] This was not Steinthal's only criticism of Turkish syntax; thirteen years after *De Pronomine Relativo*, in his *Charakteristik der hauptsächlichsten Typen des Sprachbaues*, he would again condemn the Turkic phenomenon of gerunds rather than relative clauses:

> Furthermore, we know that with the lack of verbs, a certain nominalization, that is to say, a preponderance of the category of nouns, sets in. Expression becomes laggard and dead, for instead of energy proper—the activity that pervades only a verb—what greets us everywhere is a situation of stillness, an ownership of qualities and activities…I must say at this point, it seems unimaginable to me how a people who knows real verbal forms would use, alongside them in their same meaning, truly ungainly noun forms![292]

Though the Örs brothers did not cite this work, they echoed this concept of a loss of activity and vibrancy through the Turkic use of gerunds rather than conjugated verbs. Regarding Turkish, they wrote:

> Subordinate clauses are dead, their verbs locked into gerunds, these mummies of verbs. And like all the parts of the phrase where they lie, these gerunds, which are no longer "verb" enough to animate those parts

[291] Örs and Örs, "Réflexions," 30.

[292] Heymann Steinthal, *Charakteristik*, 186–87, 195. "Wir wissen ferner schon, dass sich mit dem Mangel des Verbums eine gewisse Substanzializirung [sic], d. h. eine Vorherrschen der Kategorie der Substanz, verbindet. Der Ausdruck wird schleppend und todt; denn statt der Energie selbst, der Thätigkeit, die nur im Verbum quillt, begegnet uns überall ein ruhiger Zustand, ein Besitzen von Eigenschaften und Thätigkeiten…Hiergegen bemerke ich: es scheint mir undenkbar, wie ein Volk das wirkliche Verbalformen kennt, neben ihnen in gleicher Bedeutung sehr unbehülfliche Nominalformen anwenden solle!" While Steinthal was speaking directly about the Yakut language, he wrote that he chose it as a typical Turkic-Tartaric language precisely because it constituted a representative center in the swath of Uralo-Altaic languages running from Manchuria to Finland (see Steinthal, *Charakteristik*, 178).

> of the phrase, are yet "verb" enough to follow the general rule for verbs and take the final position…[293]

They also cited their European contemporaries who criticized Turkish syntax. English historian Arnold J. Toynbee had just published *A Study of History* the year prior to the Örs brothers' essay. They quoted a passage of Toynbee's, the larger context of which was his argument that language is evolving away from inflections and toward greater use of auxiliaries (and that English is an advanced step in this evolution). Yet he took a detour in this discussion to lambaste Turkish syntax:

> But the greatest weakness of Turkish is its lack of relative pronouns; and it is in vain that it calls all its gerunds and gerundives into action to do duty for them. The result is a complication of syntax which makes the most ponderous Ciceronian or Miltonian period seem simple by comparison.[294]

The Örs brothers did not extend their citation to include Toynbee's next sentence, which took the unusual step of conceiving an actual change to Turkish grammar: "The Turkish language would be better off if it could drop half its verbal inflexions and acquire a handful of relatives in exchange."

In addition to citing nineteenth-century Europeans and contemporary Europeans, the Örs brothers also claimed that at least one other prominent Turkish thinker shared their opinion:

> We remember hearing (Turkish author) Mr. Yakup Kadri say that in Turkish, it is impossible to think as one composes, and one absolutely must finish composing one's sentence, have it all prepared in one's head, before putting it to paper. Mr. Yakup Kadri had thus felt the dull sensation

[293] Örs and Örs, "Réflexions," 28. "Les propositions subordonnées sont mortes, leurs verbes figés en gérondifs, ces momies de verbe. Et comme dans tous les membres de phrase où ils gisent ces gérondifs, qui ne sont plus assez "verbes" pour animer leurs membres de phrases, le sont encore assez pour suivre la règle générale du verbe et prendre la dernière place…"
[294] Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History* vol. 3, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 178. Quoted in Örs and Örs, "Réflexions," 23.

> of the fatal sterility of our language in its current form, though without being able to diagnose the exact cause of the disorder.[295]

If the Örs brothers were not alone in their criticism of Turkish syntax, they stood apart with their wealth of proposals on how to improve it. They echoed Toynbee's suggestion of procuring some relative pronouns, and began their list of proposals by first encouraging the use of a Persian borrowing—the particle *ki.* The particle had already gained controversial frequency as a right-branching relative pronoun in Turkish, and the brothers sought to, in their word, "legalize" it. To use the Örs brothers' example, the *ki* construction already made possible the Turkish sentence: "Gördüm ki çocuk uyuyor."[296] (Literally, "I saw | that | the child | is sleeping.") This particle creates a more typically Indo-European word order, as compared with the native Turkish structure in "Çocuğun uyuduğunu gördüm." (Literally, "The child's | sleeping | I saw.") Given this rare example of a foreign loanword importing a foreign sentence structure into the language, the Örs brothers took full advantage of it as an entrée into a six-point plan to change the structure of Turkish, complete with a dizzying array of neologisms.

The second point in their plan, following the liberal use of *ki* sentences, was to coin a series of relative pronouns built off *ki*. They fused *ki* with the third-person pronoun *o* (he, she, it) to create the third-person relative pronoun *kô*, and gave this the full declension that *o* already undergoes. *Onun* (his, her, its) yielded *kônun* (whose); *ondan* (from him, from her, from it) yielded *kôndan* (from whom); and *ona* (to him, to her, to it) yielded *kôna* (to whom). Still more creatively, *kôan* would be used to mean "when" (an

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[295] Örs and Örs, "Réflexions," 23. "Nous nous rappelons avoir entendu Bay Yakup Kadri dire qu'en turc il n'était pas possible de penser au fil de la composition, et qu'il fallait absolumment achever de composer sa phrase, l'avoir toute prête dans la tête, avant de la transcrire sur le papier. Bay Yakup Kadri avait donc sourdement ressenti la stérilité fatale de notre langue sous sa forme actuelle, sans arriver pourtant à diagnostiquer exactement la cause du mal."
[296] Örs and Örs, "Réflexions," 36–39.

amalgam fusing *ki* with *o an,* which literally means "that moment" but is not written as one word). They also invented *kôrda* (at which point) and *kôraya* (toward which). For some reason they did not make mention of a natural completion of the series: *kôrdan* (from which).

The circumflex over the "o" in all of these forms represented the palatalization that they reasoned would occur due to the lingering /i/ of *ki*, but they predicted a natural evolution in their unnatural creations and allowed that the palatalization (and circumflex) would eventually disappear. They similarly engineered some natural irregularity by asserting that their own base form *kô* would in fact remain simply *ki*—invariable for both the plural and the accusative, although they could have added regular endings to account for any combination of these.[297]

Jumping momentarily to the sixth point in their plan, they carried this right-branching phenomenon still further, creating more complex *ki* locutions that had no basis in Turkish grammar: *için ki* (because), *umitle ki* (in hopes that), and *şartla ki* (on the condition that), to name a few. Their creation *oanki* (when) took the inexplicable extra leap of fusing three words into one, despite *ki* remaining a separate word in all the other coinages they mentioned in this section.

Beyond this full expansion of *ki* usage, the brothers also delved into a slew of suggested revisions to Turkish grammar. In the third of their six points, they took but one short paragraph to propose throwing Turkish word order on its ear and moving verbs from sentence-final position to a spot between subjects and their complements. For justification, they mentioned yet another nineteenth-century German historian, Theodor

[297] Örs and Örs, "Réflexions," 39–40.

Mommsen, who in their view took similar liberties in the occasionally verb-final grammar of his native German.[298]

In their fourth point, the Örs brothers suggested a new verb "to be," resurrecting an ancient poetic verb *dûrmek*. In sentences with an unemphasized verb "to be," such as in the simple sentence "I am Turkish," Turkish expresses this relationship not with a verb but with a simple suffix, in this case using the mark of the first person singular *üm*: *Türküm*. They pointed out that their revivified verb *dûrmek* was related, according to Jean Deny, to the emphatic particle *-dur* as well as to the modern verb *durmak*, meaning "to stop" or "to stand." They then highlighted the similar development in Latin, wherein *stare* (to stand) gave rise to certain forms of the verb *to be* in various Romance languages, such as *stare* (It.) and *estar* (Sp.). Their reasoning behind creating this verb for even unemphatic uses of "to be" was that the emphatic verb "to be," *olmak*, was sometimes translated into French as *être* ("to be") and sometimes as *devenir* ("to become"). By reanimating *dûrmek* to take on all instances of "to be," *olmak* could become "to become," and Turkish could have two verbs to unambiguously match the French distribution of these two concepts.[299]

In point five, they created still more grammatical distinctions. They found it ambiguous that *o* functioned as the universal third-person pronoun *he/she/it*, yet also as the demonstrative pronoun *that*. The brothers therefore used this occasion to suggest new pronouns to avoid these multiple meanings, reviving the Turkic *ol* to be the third-person pronoun when referring to people. In addition, they invented *osey* to refer to objects, leaving *o* simply as a demonstrative pronoun. The creation *osey* would be a predictable

[298] Örs and Örs, "Réflexions," 43–44.
[299] Örs and Örs, "Réflexions," 44.

neologism if it were *oşey*, which would be a fusion of the words "that thing," yet the brothers gave their invention a stamp of unpredictability.[300]

The list was bold and comprehensive, affecting many of the fundamental elements of literary as well as everyday speech. In making such assertions, the Örs brothers relied on arguments from Western thinkers, and focused their case on a Western audience. The remaining question is whether this essay was an isolated event, or whether the Örses' movement gained any traction. Vedad Örs's mentee Yahya Akyüz pointed out that the volume of the *Revue Internationale de l'Enseignement* containing the brothers' essay was found in Atatürk's personal library.[301]

Akyüz insisted that Atatürk had aligned with the Örs brothers' concerns about Turkish syntax. To support this, he cited Sadi Irmak's remembrances of meetings on language in which Atatürk participated around 1936: "Atatürk moved on to another particularity of Turkish. An idea's true weight needs to be carried by initial words. In Turkish, because the verb comes at the end, the meaning can't be grasped until the sentence finishes, or ambiguous interpretations are possible."

At this point, Irmak narrates, Atatürk turned to him and told him to write "Happy are the countries with worthy leaders at their head." The sentence was dictated first in a left-branching native Turkish structure—roughly "At their heads worthy-leaders–existing countries are happy"—then a second time, making use of *ki*. This version could be translated as "Happy are those countries that at their heads great leaders exist."

[300] Örs and Örs, "Réflexions," 44–45. The word *şey* "thing" is of Arabic origin and created a violation of vowel harmony in their *osey* creation, though the Reform had not come up with a successful alternative for "thing" and *şey* lives on.
[301] Akyüz, "Büyük Dil Bilgini Dr. Vedad Örs'ün Ardından," 41.

Irmak's narration of Atatürk's actions continued: "He opened a discussion around these two utterances. Those prepared to do so defended either the first or the second. He himself was of the persuasion that the second utterance gave beauty and breadth to Turkish. His goal was to bring to Turkish richness, ease, and clarity."[302]

Vedad Örs at the Fourth Turkish Language Convention

In the opening of the Örs brothers' 1935 essay on Turkish syntax, they had explained that they were eagerly awaiting news from the TDK's Second Language Convention, which they hoped would take on the question of Turkish syntax. Seven years later, Vedad Örs procured a slot at the Fourth Language Convention (1942), at which he offered his observations, this time in Turkish, directly to the leaders of the Reform.[303]

Örs once again made his initial criticism by comparing a Turkish sentence unfavorably with a French one, though he dispensed with using a sample that glorified French thought. His sentence once again had a linguistically complicated source: W.H.D. Rouse's English-language *Linguaphone: The Direct Method Applied to Latin*. The original sentence was thus in Latin, and its peculiarities make it clear why Örs would

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[302] Sadi Irmak, *Atatürk'ten Anılar* (Ankara: Güven Matbaası, 1978), 24–25. Cited in Akyüz, "Büyük Dil Bilgini Dr. Vedad Örs'ün Ardından," 41. "Atatürk Türkçe'nin başka bir özelliğine geçti. Fikrin asıl ağırlığını ilk kelimeler taşımalıdır. Türkçede ise fiil sona geldiği için cümle bitinceye kadar anlam kavranmaz veya iki anlama gelen yorumlara imkân verilir. Bana döndü ve yaz dedi: 'Başlarında değerli liderler olan milletler mutludur.' Altına şunu yazdırdı: 'Mutludur o milletler ki başlarında büyük liderler vardır.' Bu iki deyiş arasında bir tartışma açtı. Hazır olanlar ya birinci, ya da ikincisini savundular. Kendisi ikinci deyişin Türkçeye güzellik, genişlik vereceği kanısındaydı. O'nun amacı Türkçeye zenginlik, kolaylık ve kesinlik getirmekti…"

[303] Vedad Örs, "Türk Dilinde Islaha Muhtaç ve Islahı Kolay Bazı Noktalar," *Dördüncü Türk Dil Kurultayı*, 306–19. In the minutes of the meetings for the Grammar and Syntax Commission of the TDK, both Vedad and Sedad Örs are credited with the paper, yet in the transcript of the report only Vedad is cited as an author. I have chosen to treat Vedad as the sole author, as there is some possibility that the minutes of the commission reflected some research into the previous Örs writings on the question of syntax, and an awareness of Sedad as well as Vedad being vocal on the topic. For the minutes of the commision, see *Dördüncü Türk Dil Kurultayı,* 214.

choose it: “Here is the rooster who awakens the priest who unites the young man and the young woman who milks the cow that gores the dog that harasses the cat that eats the mouse that eats the wheat that is in Jack’s home.”[304]

As Latin and French (and, for our own purposes, English) use similar right-branching structures for relative clauses, this absurdist stream of clauses transferred quite naturally to Örs’s French translation. Concerning the Turkish translation, the sentence is clearly contrived in a way that makes a left-branching recreation problematic. After discussing various possibilities for conversationally breaking up the sentence or repeating nouns to turn them into subjects, Örs claimed that the translation most native to contemporary, official Turkish was simply a left-branching reversal of the sentence that made the principal—“the rooster”—the eighteenth word out of twenty.[305]

In his example, French remained his model for the superior clarity of a right-branching language, and he referred to the language as “famous for its clarity and an example to the reformers of the Turkish language.”[306] Yet there was a notable change of tenor here. He labeled the French sentence structure not as being “the correct one,” as he had said in the French essay, but as being representative of a worldwide majority beyond what was European.

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[304] W. H. D. Rouse, *Linguaphone: The Direct Method Applied to Latin, A Handbook for Teachers* (London: The Linguaphone Institute, 1930), 59. “Hīc est gallus, quī vocat sacerdōtem, quī iungit iuvenem et puellam, quae mulget vaccam, quae iactat canem, quī vexat fēlem, quae ēst mūrem, quī ēst frūmentum, quod est in domō Iacchī.” Quoted with errata in Örs, “Kolay Bazı Noktalar,” 307. The English translation is based on Örs’s translation of the passage into both French and Turkish.

[305] Örs, “Kolay Bazı Noktalar,” 308. The sentence he presents in Turkish: “Jak’ın evindeki buğdayı yiyen fareyi yiyen kediyi hırpalıyan köpeği boynuzlıyan ineği sağan kızla delikanlıyı evlendiren papazı uyandıran horoz işte budur.” A literal translation of the structure into English would be “(((((((Jack’s house-in–being wheat)-eating mouse)-eating cat)-harassing dog)-goring cow)-milking girl to the boy)-marrying priest)-waking rooster is here.”

[306] Örs, “Kolay Bazı Noktalar,” 306–7. “Farzedelim, vuzuhiyle meşhur olup Türk dilinin ıslahçılarına bir örnek olan Fransızcanın (bütün kelime…)”

> These two texts [in Latin and French], as they're syntactically almost identical, represent the syntax of all the great cultural languages, living and dead, of the East and West (excluding Japanese and, to an extent, Chinese).[307]

Gone are phrases like "Western syntax," which he and his brother had used to sell their preferred structure in their French essay.[308] To the Turkish reformers of 1942, he sought to sell right-branching syntax by labeling it as widespread, not Western. Even while discussing the French sentence, he made four references to French in which he also mentioned Persian alongside it. By specifying Chinese and Japanese, even as exceptions, he was noting that his concept of "the East" was not limited to Eastern languages that were Indo-European. The argument was a more inclusive one, no longer fetishizing the West, or French as a Western language, but making a point to cite Eastern as well as Western examples of the syntax he favored.

There is little reason to believe that he had personally changed his Western-looking views—views that had led him and his brother to open a section of their French article with "What is missing from Turkish to equal the clarity and versatility of Western languages?"[309] He still turned to Western thinkers for validation of his ideas—he referred again to both Steinthal and Toynbee. He also referred to Mommsen's liberties with German word order, while making his case that Turkish could do the same. Yet this time, he then immediately mentioned Persian as a verb-final language that allowed deviation from that order. It thus appears that something compelled Örs to read the room at the TDK in 1942 and change the way he framed his plea for change. He would not gain

[307] Örs, "Kolay Bazı Noktalar," 307. "Bu iki metin, sentaks itibariyle hemen hemen birbirinin aynı olduğu gibi, (Japonca ve bir dereceye kadar Çince hariç) bütün diri ve ölü Şark ve Garp büyük kültür dillerinin sentaksını temsil etmektedir."
[308] Örs and Örs, "Réflexions," 28.
[309] Örs and Örs, "Réflexions," 23. "Que manque-t-il à la langue turque pour égaler la clarté et la souplesse des langues occidentales ?"

attention for his proposals by selling the West; he would sell the global community—the world stage on which Turkey sought to make its mark.

Reception

Regardless of whether Vedad Örs correctly perceived a changing tone by the time of his proposals at the Fourth Language Convention, he was not successful in persuading the TDK to take on syntactical reform. The TDK Grammar and Syntax Commission considered his report and made the following conclusion:

> After long deliberations determining the lack of grounds for each of these claims, the reasons for which are not well understood, the following decision was made: Our beautiful Turkish, from a syntactic standpoint, is one of the world's expansive and free languages. According to one's needs, just as it is capable of long expressions with compound sentences, so is it concise for oratory and theatrical language, agile, fully appropriate for conversational language, perfectly natural, and fit for enriching and varying one's expression with inverted sentences when necessary. In the hands of the expert, by making use of not just the meanings of words but the machinations of syntax, it is clear that all manner of feelings and thoughts can be expressed. Therefore, as we do not see any need or possibility to change the syntax of our beautiful language with any sort of intervention, such proposals have been deemed unwarranted.[310]

The commission's response, while disappointing to Örs, is a remarkable change of tone from the linguistic adventures of a few years earlier. In comparison with the many attempts to hammer Turkish into an Indo-European model in the early days of the Reform, the commission's response suggests a steadier confidence that they could

[310] *Dördüncü Türk Dil Kurultayı,* 214. "Sebepleri iyice anlaşılmayan bu iddialardan her birinin yersizliğini belirten uzun mütalaalardan sonra şu karara varıldı. Güzel Türkçemiz, sözdizimi bakımından dünyanın çok geniş ve serbest bir dildir. Gereğine göre bağlı cümleli uzun ifadelere kabiliyetli olduğu gibi, hitabet ve sahne dilinde kısa, kıvrak, konuşma diline tam uygun, gayet tabii, icabında devrik cümlelerle sözü zenginleştirmeye ve çeşitlendirmeye elverişlidir. Erbabının elinde kelime anlamlarının üstünde sözdizimi kıvrımlarından faydalanarak her türlü duygu ve düşünceler ifade edildiği meydandadır. Bunun için güzel dilimizin sentaksını herhangi bir müdaheleyle değiştirmeye lüzum ve imkân bulunmadığından bu çeşit teklifler yersiz görülmüştür."

embrace the Turkic identity of the language they had shaped, and appreciate its richness and range without recourse to a Western model. While one must concede that Örs's proposals are drastic even beyond what had been done with replacement vocabulary in the mid-1930s, the thrust of the commission's response was not that his proposals were extreme, but that they were unneeded.

Importantly, neither an array of Western examples nor the allure of worldwide inclusion was sufficient to sway the Reform into taking on changes to Turkish syntax. Perhaps, after the rise and fall of the Sun-Language Theory, the TDK had grown circumspect of losing credibility by taking a movement beyond what popular sentiment would allow. Perhaps the rejection was an indication that "the West" was no longer a buzzword that would allow the reformers to water down what made their language special. Perhaps the keepers of the Turkish language had found a secure footing for their native tongue as a state language, and no longer entertained ideas of changing it to accommodate an external appeal.

In both of Örs's pieces, he made mention of one other nineteenth-century Western linguist: Max Müller himself. In both pieces, the reference was hypothetical. Müller had called the complex rules of English spelling "a national misfortune." If that was the case, both pieces asked, whatever would Müller have said about Turkish syntax?[311] Örs had known a world in which it would be effective to press for change by invoking the disapproval of a European thinker from a previous century. As the peak years of the Reform came to a close, he came up against a republic where perhaps this was no longer true.

[311] Örs and Örs, "Réflexions," 52; Örs, "Kolay Bazı Noktalar," 313.

Chapter VII.

Conclusion

Heyd's *Language Reform in Modern Turkey* is a fascinating read for many reasons, and one of them is the perspective that a book from 1954 offers on the Reform. Written two decades after the most feverish vocabulary change, his book is a snapshot of a time when much of the overhaul in vocabulary had settled, yet most of the people who had experienced this volatile time were still alive and taking stock of what they had lived through. Yet Heyd's book is also fascinating for the perspective it could *not* give.

Heyd classified the TDK's neologisms into four categories, according to how well they had caught on. His lowest category was for words that had already failed; his second-to-lowest category was for words that were seeing limited usage and had uncertain prospects for survival. He gave four examples of words in this ailing category; all four of his examples (*konu* "subject," *sonuç* "result," *görev* "duty," and *olay* "event") are in common usage today.[312]

It is difficult business predicting which way popular opinion will go, and Heyd underestimated the willingness among Turkish speakers to acclimate to new vocabulary even when it still felt uncomfortable after well over a decade.[313] If in Heyd's time these words still felt engineered—which, of course, they were—Turks coming up just a few years later seemed to demonstrate substantially different parameters for what words felt

[312] Heyd, *Language Reform*, 104.
[313] While the first two of Heyd's examples date from 1935, the other two are somewhat newer, coined in 1942. See Nişanyan*, Nişanyan Sözlük.*

organic and natural. If some of the TDK's concoctions had agenda-driven origins to them, Turkish speakers did a remarkable job of incorporating them into their lives anyway. It is doubtful that many Turkish students who call their teacher *öğretmen* ponder that the *-men* came from a theoretical English word for "streetcar operator" that never actually existed.

The origin of the words we use has always captured our imagination, leading not only to fanciful stories and false etymologies but also to false grounds for coming up with new ones. The complex relationship of modern Turkish with the West has continued to offer creative concoctions. While the Turkish word for "university" is *üniversite* (taken from the French *université*), in the 1970s the word *evrenkent* began to appear as well. The *evren* part of the word is the Turkish word for "universe" that we have already seen. "Kent" is a word of Sogdian origin meaning "city," appearing in some form in the names of the Central Asian cities of Tashkent and Samarkand. *Nişanyan Sözlük* attributes the word *evrenkent* to a single chemistry professor, Dr. Oktay Sinanoğlu, who mistakenly believed that the English word "university" was a compound of "universe" and "city."[314] (The false etymology would work even better with the French *université* as a compound of *univers* and *cité*, at least as far as pronunciation is concerned.) Whether the professor was truly mistaken or engaging in word play, it is an eye-opening new way for English and French speakers to see their native word, and it makes the world a bit brighter to think of one's college campus as a "universe city," even if such an interpretation is etymologically false. Heyd quoted an unfortunately unspecified Turkish writer on the subject of the issues that we conjure with our language: "Language problems often have

[314] Nişanyan, *Nişanyan Sözlük*, 266.

an emotional rather than a scientific character; language is, like religion, a matter of belief and attachment."[315]

The quote is an apt one for describing both sides of the story in this thesis. Many linguists in nineteenth-century Europe devoted an astonishing amount of ink to reassuring their countrymen of the inherent superiority of their languages—not just in the quality of the ideas that these languages could express, but in the quality of the ideas they would allow their speakers to conceive of. If the Turkish reformers indulged in pseudoscience with Sun-Language Theory and with Rifat's attempts to create prefixes where there were none, they were preceded by the Western pseudoscience that told of the perfection of Indo-European root changes in the eyes of God. In this case, the pro-Western prejudice persisted in hearts and minds well after it was denied by the linguists who were best positioned to speak on it.

So powerful was this prejudice that it sometimes became internalized even among the victims of it. We see this in the Örs brothers who openly preached the superiority of Western languages to their own. We see this many miles across the continent in Finland, where Matthias Castrén risked his life to study remote agglutinative languages like his own, but ultimately worked within the Inflectional Superiority Thesis and agreed with its tenets. And we see the internalized acceptance of this prejudice in many of the early actions of the TDK, as reformers tried to dissociate Turkish from the disfavored group rather than defend and showcase that group.

For this reason, it is somewhat gratifying to read the TDK's negative response to Vedad Örs's proposals. The quiet confidence that Turkish is not in need of fixing, and

[315] Heyd, *Language Reform*, 4.

that it brings all the tools needed to express the full range of human thought, indicates a quite different mindset compared to what appeared in the earlier approaches of the TDK. Perhaps the internalized prejudice brought on by over a century of dysfunctional European ideas had finally loosened its hold, though not before leaving its mark on the Turkish language.

In 1953, a year before the release of Heyd's book, a Canadian singing group called "The Four Lads" debuted a song that pondered a time when the people of Turkey changed a key piece of their vocabulary:

> Why did Constantinople get the works?
> That's nobody's business but the Turks'.[316]

It may seem absurd to ponder whether Heyd was aware of the lyric as he penned his work the following year, yet he offered a surprisingly precise echo of that sentiment in prose: "In a controversial matter such as this it is not for the non-Turkish observer to take sides."[317] I hope I will be forgiven for going against the guidance of Heyd (and The Four Lads) in an exploration of the ways in which the Turkish reformers might have gone astray. This is ultimately the story of a new nation trying to find its way while being the victim of a prejudice, and it would be poor form to look at such a story and criticize only how the victim emerges from under that prejudice, when history's ultimate judgment should be directed at the perpetrators. It is true that one can marvel at the unscientific ideas that cropped up in the TDK during these early years in the pursuit of a desired conclusion, but the malleability and distinctive character of the Turkish language prevailed, through every pressure to become something else.

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[316] Nat Simon and Jimmy Kennedy, "Istanbul (Not Constantinople)" with The Four Lads, Catalog 40082, Columbia Records, 1953.
[317] Heyd, *Language Reform*, 4.

Müller has been proven wrong; an agglutinative language is a major player on the world stage. It has won a Nobel Prize in Literature. It has certainly not lost all of its Arabic and Persian elements; it has taken on great numbers of French and English words, roots, and affixes. It borrowed much of its vocabulary for commerce and trade from the Venetian dialect of Italian. The notation of its vowels comes from German. It has chosen to import words from Sogdian and Mongolian. The "d" of *önder* comes from the "d" in the English word "lead." And yet it remains, as Ayşe Tetik called it, an agglutinative language *par excellence.*

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