

## **The Turkish Language Revolution and its Legacy**

With its founding in 1923, the new Turkish republic sought to forge a new identity for itself that was distinct from its Ottoman past. The Turkish language reform, dubbed the Language Revolution, demonstrates an attempt to achieve this goal through language planning and policy initiatives. It represents an interesting case study as it remains one of the few instances in which a new language variety that has been conceived of and promoted by a nation's governing body has, for the most part, been successfully adopted by the nation's citizens. This talk begins with a snapshot of the language pluralism in Istanbul shortly after the republic's founding. This pluralism is juxtaposed with the one-nation one-language policies of the early twentieth-century French and Weimar Republics, which provided inspiration for Turkey's use of language planning as a tool for building a common national identity. The efforts to promote and create a standard Turkish language are chronicled in this talk, and Atatürk, the founder and first leader of Turkey, is highlighted as the most visible agent of this language reform. He started by creating a constitution in which Turkish was declared to be the single official and national language of Turkey. Following this declaration, he solicited suggestions of Turkic-rooted alternatives to the existing Arabic and Farsi-rooted words in the Turkish lexicon, founded and collaborated with the Turkish Language Association (TDK), enacted a law that replaced the Arabic script of Turkish with the Roman alphabet, and travelled throughout Turkey to teach this new script to teachers and students.

The singular focus on the new Turkish language provided no space for minority languages in the young republic. Furthermore, as adoption of the language reforms symbolized an embrace of the new republic's core values, use of non-Turkish languages suggested resistance to these values. Linguistic assimilation became a priority for Turkey's new leaders, who used resettlement as a way to dilute regions that were largely comprised of non-Turkish speaking inhabitants. Groups of Turkish nationalists supported their new government by launching grassroots campaigns to promote the exclusive use of Turkish and to eschew the use of any other language in the land of the Turks. While The Lausanne Treaty stipulated language rights for Turks of Armenian and Greek origins, no such rights were granted to speakers of other existing minority languages, like Kurdish, the most widely spoken minority language in Turkey.

Protest movements by Turkey's ethnic Kurds erupted in reaction to exclusion from the national agenda; these movements, counter-protests, and related military conflicts continue through today. Although Kurdish has been granted increased legal privileges in recent years, it remains stigmatized both for its speakers' perceived opposition to a shared Turkish identity and for its connections to the armed Kurdish nationalist movement. With this history in mind, the talk shifts to present-day Istanbul to explore the legacy of Turkey's language revolution through language policy at the micro-level. The results of investigations into language practices at Kurdish-run eating establishments in Istanbul suggest that managers view exclusion of Kurdish from the language of the workplace as an important strategy for maintaining customers from the mainstream Turkish population, lest they feel alienated by exposure to Kurdish. In this way, societal pressure to project a Turkish monolingual identity appears to remain more than ninety years subsequent to the founding of Turkey and implementation of its single language policy.