Turkey’s Language Revolution and the Status of English Today

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The question of to what extent Turkey should welcome English into its language ecology has been the subject of both academic and popular debate for some time. On the one hand, there is a need to preserve and promote existing Turkish culture, language and identity; on the other hand, there is a desire for economic development and international integration with the West. Within Turkish culture there is, as Seran Dogancay-Aktuna has described it, an ‘uneasy relationship between the desire to spread a foreign language […] for the instrumental gains it offers nationally and individually, and the desire to keep the national language pure from external influences’ (Dogancay-Aktuna 1998, 38). Over the course of this essay I want to provide an account of this cultural and linguistic anxiety, and to preface it with a brief history of English-language contact in Turkey as well as a more thorough account of early twentieth-century political and linguistic reforms. These reforms are important because they set the stage for what some today would call English’s developing hegemony. By contextualizing twenty-first century language politics within the larger historical narrative of Turkey’s modernization process, I want to suggest a way of viewing the development of English in Turkey as an extension of the earlier Westernization reforms begun after the First World War. The argument implied by this framework is that, while the spread of English may have a negative influence on Turkey’s culture and national language, its effects can be minimized and controlled in the interest of integrating Turkey into the political and economic sphere of the West. Topics for discussion will include the current status of English in Turkey, the effectiveness of new ‘distance’ language programs for teacher training, the development of a Turkish-English phonology, as well as the debate over English-medium education, probably the greatest site of antagonism in the controversy over English in Turkey today.

English in Turkey Today

Although English is currently the second most popular language in Turkey, it is still a rather distant second. Turkish is the country’s sole official language, while minority languages include Kurdish, Arabic, Greek and Armenian (BBC 2009). French and German are often taught in schools and are English’s closest competition within the education system (Konig 1990, 161). Although many English schools have been established in the last fifty years, English is not at all close to becoming a ‘second language’ in Turkey, and is used for the most part only in
education, government, and in private business (Dogancay-Aktuna 1998, 30-31; see also Kirkgoz 2005, 159). This is not rare for a West Asian country: ‘although English is a language of significant and increasing importance in West Asia, and has long had contact with its languages, it has not significantly developed as a language of local use’ (McArthur 2002, 299). Nonetheless, English-language media is quite popular in Turkey. There are, for example, a number of wide-circulation English-language print and online newspapers, the most popular of which is Today’s Zaman. In addition, young people in Turkey sometimes speak a language called Tarzanca, a mix of Turkish and English, and many use English expressions like part-time and full-time, words like art and cool (Kirkgoz 2005, 1-22). Not surprisingly, most Turks who study English do so for the international job opportunities it opens as well as the modicum of social prestige it brings (Konig 1990, 163). Indeed, this has been the case for some time, since English was first introduced into the Ottoman Empire in the mid-nineteenth century.

Early Contact and the Growth of English

English first made its way into the Ottoman Empire via British trade, although traders made little attempt to learn each other’s language and instead simply employed Greek translators (Dogancay-Aktuna 1998, 26). Probably the most significant event in the early history of English in what is now Turkey occurred when the Ottoman Empire first granted Christian missionaries the right to teach within its borders. After a long and drawn-out battle with the government, in 1863 Cyrus Hamlin, financed by a New York businessman, opened a school near the Bosphorus called Robert College. Hamlin chose to teach in English, alongside Arabic, because English would act as a neutral lingua franca among students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (History of Bogazici University 2009). However, Robert College, which has since been renamed Bogazici University and is now one of the most prestigious schools in Turkey, was only unique in the sense that it had government approval. American missionary schools had already been in existence for about two decades prior, and their numbers increasing significantly. The six schools and eighty-four students in English education during the year 1840 became, by 1870, 233 schools and 5880 students (Nuray 2006, 42). The schools were generally popular because English proficiency, more so than any other foreign language, led to high-paying jobs (Nuray 2006, 42). Also, English schools were more efficiently and effectively run than the Turkish mektep, or state school (Nuray 2006, 42). At the time, however, there was no direct government policy pertaining to the proliferation of English schools, though this had less to do with political or linguistic anxiety than with a lack of organization and planning within the government itself (Nuray 2006, 43).

Revolutionary Reforms: Politics, Society, Language

In the years following the revolution of 1923 and the establishment of the Turkish Republic on October 29 of that year, Turkey went through an extremely rapid and painful modernization and secularization process, one that included the creation of a prescriptivist body called the Turkish Language Association to ensure the purity of the national language. The number of
changes that Turkish politics and society underwent in the post-revolution years is astounding.¹ The positions of Sultan and Caliph were abolished and replaced by a parliamentary government; women gained the right to vote and be elected; free-speech was affirmed. The new reformers, led by Mustapha Kemal Atatürk, drew on the ideas and institutions of Western European countries. They established a penal law modeled on the Italian, a secular law structure based on the Swiss Civil Code (to replace Sharia courts), as well as a series of German commercial codes. Nearly every aspect of Turkish society was altered in some way. Religious training was banned from public schools, the Department of Divinity at Istanbul University shut down; traditional pilgrimage and prayer cites were closed, as were religious convents and lodges; the traditional Islamic headgear and dress were banned, with men made to adopt Western dress and women encouraged to discard the traditional Islamic headscarf; all social titles were abolished; family names became mandatory; the Christian calendar replaced the Islamic; the metric system was adopted; alcohol was legalized. In The Clash of Civilizations, Samuel P. Huntington describes the comprehensive nature of the Kemalist reforms: ‘Kemalism involves the difficult and traumatic task of destroying a culture that has existed for centuries and putting in its place a totally new culture imported from another civilization’ (Huntington 1996, 74).

Language was also of great concern to the reformers, although at this point foreign-language planning encompassed Western languages generally and did not privilege English over others. What Luk Nuray calls the ‘Language Revolution’ began in June of 1928. The majority of government officials responsible for the reforms had received their own education in either Western schools abroad or Westernized schools under the Ottoman Empire (for instance, Robert College). Many were influenced by European culture and European values, and many spoke English or French, thus giving language an important role in the reforms, as has usually been the case. Indeed, ‘the cultural and economic modernization of Turkey has [often] rested upon the reformers’ knowledge of a Western language’ (Doran, quoted in Nuray 2006, 71). The most significant reform, and which best symbolized the new direction in which the country was heading, was the adoption of the Latin alphabet.

The Arabic script, which had been used by the Ottomans for over a thousand years, was abandoned on January 1st, 1929 and replaced by the Roman script. Arabic orthography was considered unsuited to the Turkish language, and a phonetic alphabet would be much easier to teach what was still a largely illiterate population (the literacy rate was just under eleven percent [Baki 2003]). The adoption of the Roman alphabet affirmed Turkey’s split with its Islamic heritage and confirmed its will to European integration. The founder of the Republic, Kemal Atatürk, established a committee to decide how best to go about making the transformation. The committee estimated it would take at least five years for the reform to take root; upon hearing this, Atatürk is said to have responded, ‘It will be done in three months or not at all’ (Atkin 2009). To accelerate the reform, Atatürk began touring the country to promote and teach the new script.

¹ The following section is based on a number of sources: Loomis, The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success (University of California, 1984), 30-31 (quoted at length in Nuray); McArthur 2002, 96-107; Niyazi Berkes, The Development of Secularism in Turkey (McGill UP, 1964), 401-2; Borovali and Turan, ‘A Legitimate Restriction of Freedom? The Headscarf Issue in Turkey’ (Toronto: Lexington, 2007), 137.
The reform did meet with significant resistance, especially among university professors, some of whom declared that if it were adopted they would ‘break their pencils’ and not write a single word more (Nuray 2006, 87). Resistance was of course expected to such a fundamental change in language usage. In *Language Policy and Language Planning*, Sue Wright describes the extent of the changes:

That this radical piece of planning was successful was perhaps due to the low levels of literacy among the Turkish population at the same time. It was a change that did not affect the majority, although it was a massive blow to the small class that was literature and that became, in effect, illiterate overnight. (Wright 2004, 53)

Opposition to the impracticality of the reform, like the professors’ threat to discontinue their work, of course no longer exists in Turkey today; but the practical criticism of Westernization is still present in the debate over English-medium instruction, where arguments against its continued presence point often to a general inconvenience in the classroom. The adoption of the Latin script no doubt helped enable the spread of English-medium education today: the change has made learning English, along with other European languages, much easier for Turkish students considering they are not required to learn an entirely new alphabet in order to do so.

Continuing this ‘Language Revolution’, in 1932 the Turkish Language Association (TSA) was established for the purpose of ‘cleansing’ Turkish of Arabic and Persian influences (Lewis 1999, 2). Foreign words were eliminated from the language, as were foreign grammatical constructions, and neologisms created. These changes were actually quite drastic: they were in fact so thorough that, today, literature produced in the early years of the Republic—for instance, the Constitution—must be translated into contemporary Turkish to be understood (Lewis 1999, 3). The prescriptivist tradition continues today, although a committee like the TSA has significantly less authority over language use, and is not so much there to give laws as it is to make general recommendations (Dogancay-Aktuna 1998, 36). During these years all publications had to be in Turkish by law. The numerous dialects throughout the country were melded into a single idiom, that spoken formerly only in Istanbul—all part of an effort to encourage the development of a national culture and language. Foreign language acquisition was not considered important at this time, or even realistic considering the national literacy rate. There was also worry that foreign language teaching would overshadow the mother tongue and ultimately weaken Turkish culture, to this day the main concern of political and linguistic nationals (Dogancay-Aktuna 1998, 27). In what foreign-language programs there were, French was actually given priority over English.

**Globalization and the Growth of English**

After WWII, English in the Mid-East eventually replaced French as ‘the language of international diplomacy to become the lingua franca for trade, banking, tourism, popular media, science and technology’ (Dogancay-Aktuna 1998, 25). If Turkey was to benefit in these areas, language planning was required in order to ensure the spread of English. Accordingly,
English-medium education was officially introduced by the Minister of Education in 1957.

Most scholars accept that the main force driving the spread of English is the phenomenon known by politicians, economists and cultural critics alike as globalization (Tildirim and Okan 2007, 55). With the coming of globalization in the 1980s and the presence of American popular culture via entertainment and advertising, the pace of English growth, particularly the growth of English-medium education, accelerated greatly. By 1987, alongside 15 German-medium, 11 French-medium, and two Italian-medium schools, there were 193 English-medium schools (Dogancay-Aktuna 1998, 28). The growth of English was inextricably tied to financial and economic considerations:

After the 1980s the policies of Prime Minister O’zal, which fostered close political, economic and commercial relations with the West, especially with the USA, were influential in the development of the popularity of English. It was during this period when English started to [mean] a successful career in virtually any field and when the English-medium universities were expected to produce the growing managerial and technocratic class. (Atay 2005, 225)

The development of English and the perceived Westernization of the country has of course met with resistance among conservative portions of the population; and indeed because English has actually started to infiltrate the Turkish language itself, anxiety over its spread has led to the implementation of measures designed to protect and promote the national language and culture.

**English Influence, English Anxiety**

These developments in the spread of English have been cause for alarm among those seeking to preserve Turkish culture and the Turkish language from what they see as the degenerate influence of English. Many nationalists worry that Turkish is being contaminated by English borrowings—for instance, words like *first class koltuk* (seat), *supermarket*, *respect* instead of the Turkish *saygi*, or *legal* instead of *kanuni*. The greeting *selam* is often used in the place of the more traditional *merhaba*. This is said to be due to the prevalence of Turkish-dubbed English-language cinema: the idea is that the mouth movements for *selam* are closer to the English *hello*, and are preferable for that reason. Geoffrey Lewis cites this as an ‘instance of television’s effect on speech’, and includes a similar example of the expression *Vay anasini!* being replaced by the term *vavvvo!*, on account of the second form being closer to the English *wow* (Lewis 1999, 139). This is a prime example of the influence of the globalization of Western commercial culture on Turkish society and language.

Nationalists and linguistic conservatives argue that English words like *supermarket* and *respect* are unnecessary and ought to be purged from the language. Accordingly, the Turkish Language Association has set up a commission whose task it is to find Turkish substitutes for English borrowings and to publish them in a monthly journal. Other measures taken to protect Turkish from foreign influence include those of a prescriptivist group seeking signatures to support a movement to ‘stop the degeneration of the Turkish language’ (Dogancay-Aktuna...
Turkey’s Language Revolution

As well as the banning of the use of English words in business names, which has occurred in some municipalities. These protests are mostly confined to the adult population, and Turkey’s young people seem on the whole less opposed to the spread of English, as the use of Tarzanca among youth suggests.

In 2005, Yesim Bektas Cetinkaya conducted a study on young people in Turkey that sought an answer to the question, ‘How willing are Turkish students to communicate in English?’ Out of the 365 participants in the study, about forty-eight percent said they were willing to communicate in English. The students said they were willing to engage in communication in English with close friends or in small groups, but generally felt that the idea of communication in a foreign language with their Turkish classmates or instructors was ‘absurd’ (Cetinkaya 2005, 16). Similarly, students said they did not purposively seek out magazines, books, newspapers or television shows in English simply for the sake of engaging with the language. Rather, foreign-language-medium resources were consulted only if they did not already exist in Turkish. Whether this suggests cultural conservatism is still an open question. Although students did not seek out English resources over Turkish ones, this may not be the result of globalization anxiety but rather the result of a relatively poor knowledge of English. According to Cetinkaya, even students who had studied English in the education system since early elementary school were not highly competent with the language. This is something she attributes to a teaching approach that focuses too much on accuracy and linguistic structure and not enough on practical communication skills. Ineffective pedagogical methods ultimately ‘hinder students’ willingness to communicate in English’ (Cetinkaya 2005, 118; I deal with this issue in more detail below).

In some aspects of English presence in Turkey there is actually little if any debate at all, as is the case with the issue of English’s cyber-dominance. Many people around the world have taken issue with what they see as the linguistic imperialism of the Internet. An article on CNN.com in 2000 read, ‘Julius Caesar conquered Gaul with the Roman legions, but the U.S. is doing it with Mickey Mouse, and the Internet’ (Flynn 2000), and one Russian Internet service provider called the Net ‘the ultimate act of intellectual colonialism’ (Nunberg 2002). This issue does not, however, appeared to have made its way into the Turkish press. In recent years, there has been an article in Turks.US noting the creation of the first non-English Facebook website (Arellano 2008), as well an article on Turkish on Air about the introduction of an Internet search-engine more inclusive of Turkish and other non-English webpages (Turkish on Air 2007), along with a number of opinion pieces on the recent banning of You Tube throughout the country. On the whole, though, the larger issue of English’s online dominance seems not to have spurred much debate, at least not in Turkey’s English press. Perhaps this can be accounted for by the fact that only about thirty-five percent of Turks have online access (Internet World Stats 2009). This thirty-five percent is probably more or less synonymous with the most financially well-off section of the population—in other words, the people already most inclined toward Western culture and most willing to accept European and North American influences in daily life. It is really with the growth of English-medium education that most linguistic protectionists and purists seem to take issue. The arguments for and against the spread of English seem to swarm around EME, and so I want now to provide a brief account of the politics of EME in Turkey.
The Politics of English-Medium Education

There are a number of private EME schools in Turkey, and out of the country’s seventy-two universities, two offer full EME: Bogazici University in Istanbul and the Middle East Technical University in Ankara, both of which are prestigious schools. Today, English is the most popular medium of education after Turkish, though it is of course plagued by practical problems and public controversies. The two major issues are EME’s influence on wealth distribution and its perceived corruption of Turkish culture.

The socio-economic influence of EME works generally to increase the already large gap between wealthy city-dwellers and those living in poorer parts of the country. Its negative influence on wealth distribution is tied to another issue, that of teacher competence: not surprisingly, the least qualified instructors are usually the ones teaching the poorest students. Dogancay-Aktuna summarizes: ‘Though more and more English-medium schools are being established, both privately and by the state […], there are great discrepancies in the quality and extent of instruction available. It is generally the wealthier, upper middle class children who enjoy access to good quality English instruction’ (1998, 31). Similarly, as Guray Caglar Konig argues, EME schools will contribute to the growing divide between rich and poor by creating a class of English-speaking people who alone have access to the most high-paying jobs: ‘As the children from middle and upper class families have the opportunity and means for attending such schools in general and as the graduates of these schools are more readily employed by virtue of their knowledge of English, a growing social gap will be created in society’ (1990, 174). Already, Turkey’s is among the highest level of income inequality in the world, alongside Mexico and the United States (OECD Factbook 2009).

Another problem with Turkey’s EME is the issue of linguistic and cultural imperialism. Conservatives condemn the use of a foreign language as a medium of instruction, and have attempted to have the number of EME schools either limited or, in some cases, banned altogether. Turkish schools, they argue, ought to teach in Turkish—for what effect is English going to have, in the long run, on Turkey’s language and culture? Some EME students themselves worry that their education is isolating them from the nation. In January 2005, The Guardian published an article on foreign language acquisition in Turkey. It argued that because students spend the vast majority of their time speaking English in school, where most language advancements are made, many are now falling behind in Turkish. Kari Smith, the author of the article, found that

a large number of students in extended programmes notice language attrition in the native tongue; they said that they forget words and expressions in their own language.
They express worries regarding the fact that there is no native language improvement with enriched vocabulary and professional language. (Smith 2005)

The language issue seems inseparable from the culture issue, and indeed probably is: What will the spread of EME end up doing to Turkey’s cultural identity? Educators, teacher trainers and academics with an interested in Turkey are now spending a lot of time thinking through the relationship between language and culture, highlighting the need to maintain a student’s
cultural awareness when learning a foreign language so that the spread of EME does not end up eroding Turkey’s cultural identity. This might be done by the inclusion of an entire course on Western culture within the EME program. The conclusion of one study notes that ‘a culture class is significantly beneficial in terms of language skills, raising cultural awareness, changing attitudes towards native and target societies, and contribution to the teaching profession’ (Genc and Bada 2005, 81). Similarly, one scholar writes of the need for prospective teachers to ‘be asked to demonstrate their understanding of the intercultural perspective in the classroom setting and help their own students to understand the importance of developing an intercultural perspective when learning a foreign language’ (Atay 2005, 223). While concern for the national culture is really the centre of the conservative argument, other reasons to limit EME include social and economic inequality, as well as the influence of EME on students’ learning habits:

Arguments Against English-Medium Education

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<tr>
<th>Argument</th>
<th>Reason</th>
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<tr>
<td>Elitism</td>
<td>EME will create a language unique to intellectuals, thereby increasing the gap between university and public</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic inequality</td>
<td>The rich become richer, the poor poorer</td>
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<td>Classroom participation</td>
<td>Lack of confidence with a foreign language will result in students asking fewer questions; also, since students will write less efficiently, note-taking will suffer</td>
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<tr>
<td>National culture and language</td>
<td>EME will degenerate Turkish culture; reliance on English will prevent Turkish from ever becoming a language of technology</td>
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These arguments can be met by calling attention to the economic and technological benefits that accompany the English language, along with the need among academics for conscious avoidance of elitism:

Arguments For English-Medium Education

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<th>Argument</th>
<th>Reason</th>
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<tr>
<td>Scientific/technologic development</td>
<td>The next generation must have English proficiency in order to keep up with the knowledge economy of the West; Turkey should seek to benefit as much as</td>
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### The Future of English: A Balancing Act

Turkey is a country split between East and West, both geographically and politically. It is a member of organizations like the Council of Europe and NATO, and since 2005 has been lobbying for membership in the European Union. Yet it is also home to a predominately Muslim population, as well as a member of the OIC (Organization of the Islamic Conference) and the ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization). It seems true to say that Turkish EME, along with the presence of English in Turkey generally, will require a similar kind of balancing act. The task over the coming decades will be to allow Turks to benefit from the socioeconomic advantages of the English without allowing neglect of the home culture and national language. There has been resistance to foreign language and culture in Turkey since the years of the Ottoman Empire, and yet there is little doubt that contact with the West has improved the country’s political and economic situation immensely. Language education simply needs to be done in such a way as to ensure that future generations continue Turkey’s political, economic, technological etc., integration with the West, with the goal of eventually joining the EU, and also in such a way as to counteract gross financial inequality. This second goal might be met by encouraging (perhaps financially by way of government subsidy) well-trained English instructors to teach in the country’s less developed areas. Finally, there needs also to be time spent ensuring that teaching programs are turning out competent and qualified instructors, as well as time spent ensuring that EME, and ELT programs generally, are turning out students with competent conversational skills, as Cetinka has pointed out is currently not the case. I want to move now, by way of conclusion, to describe what work is currently being done in these two areas.

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<th>Responsibility of academics</th>
<th>possible from the scientific, technological, and economic development of the Western world</th>
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<td>Overall effectiveness</td>
<td>Academics should be responsible for making knowledge available to the population</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The best way to learn a language is through complete immersion, and therefore EME is the most effective method</td>
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ELT in Turkey: ‘Distance’ Education and Communicative Language Teaching

One problem with ELT in Turkey is that although it has grown over the years, the overall teaching quality has not. New teacher training methods, perhaps like the ‘distance’ education method, have made teachers less competent in the class than they need to be.

A number of studies have been conducted in recent years on the state of teaching-training programs. One study found that students generally had insufficient practice time, and little chance to apply their knowledge in concrete situations:

They [the students] stated that they did not have enough opportunities for micro-teaching and practice teaching. In line with these perceptions, the participants suggested that there should be more opportunities for micro-teaching and practice teaching. (Seferoglu 2006, 376)

The need for practical teaching experience is somewhat lacking in ELT training programs, and students graduate with a thorough knowledge of the language but without much awareness of teaching methodology or how to tailor instruction to suit the needs of particular students. A solution to this might simply be to extend the length of the training program itself in order to include more hands-on training time. This does not, however, seem likely to happen considering the current demand for English teachers. Indeed, the demand for English teachers today is so great that it has led to the implementation of alternative, shorter methods of training. Because of these new approaches there has been an overall decrease in teacher-training standards: one scholar says that the ‘lack of sufficient professional training may leave teacher candidates trained through alternative routes helpless and insufficient in the classroom’ (Seferoglu 2004, 158). One such program is that of ‘distance’ education.

Cagri Biyik’s 2007 study of the Distance English Language Teacher Training Program (DELTTP) did not come to any firm conclusions on the program, though its general influence on the quality of education does not look promising. The goal of DELTTP is to train teachers as quickly as possible, all the while maintaining high standards and professional training. The appeal of distance education is that it is said to have a socially leveling effect, which may help counteract the inequality to which the spread of English has contributed: ‘People of different ages, incomes, and occupations can take advantage of distance education, which has been implemented in many developed and developing countries’ (Ozkose Biyik 2007, 144). The question, however, is whether or not the distance program can actually uphold the quality of instruction and turn out competent teachers.

Anadolu University is the only institution to offer two- and four-year programs entirely through distance learning. Its School of Distance Education is designed ‘to fill the country’s need for qualified workers with various two-year pre-bachelors vocational training, as well as for teachers of English and pre-school teachers, with four-year bachelor’s degrees’ (Ozkose Biyik 2007, 144). Course material is made up largely of English-language textbooks by Oxford, Longman and Heinle & Heinle; these texts are mailed to the many Centres of Distance
Education around the country and picked up by students. Online study modules and quizzes are in use for third- and fourth-year students, and tests are administered via WebCT. Television is now being used in distance programs, although the infrastructure for making digital broadcasting available on a mass scale is not yet in place (Ergul 2007, 64). According to Biyik, on the whole students enjoyed the program, most of them calling it ‘satisfactory’, although there was a perceived lack of personal contact with instructors. While the DELTTP is said to be more difficult than the regular TEFL Program at Anadolu because it does not grade on a bell-curve, it is revealing that the main reason participants chose the distance program was for its comparatively low entrance exam requirements (Ozkose Biyik 2007, 151). As Ozkose Biyik notes, the DELTTP helps turn students into ‘independent individuals and autonomous learners’, but how effective is language acquisition outside of a community of other learners and speakers? This is still a relatively new program, however, and not yet a decade old. Ozkose Biyik states that ‘the results are tentative’ (2007, 158). Indeed, it still remains to be seen whether or not this program will be a solution to Turkey’s ELT problems or merely part of the problem.

Another problem with English education in Turkey is that students are not reaching a level in which conversation in English with any measure of confidence is possible. In the task of making English training more effective, one innovation has been the development of a Turkish-English phonology. The new phonology, as described by Mehmet Celik, is designed to create more realistic and achievable goals for students. Based on the recognition that pronunciation, more than grammar, vocabulary or orthography, is the least likely to ‘achieve native-like accuracy’ (Celik 2008, 160), Celik argues that teachers should not hold non-native learners to native-speaker standards. Rather, they should adjust to a more realistic set of goals by adopting a phonological system reduced from twenty-three phonemes to fifteen. The objective of English instruction should not be perfection, he writes, but rather communicative competence and overall intelligibility. The expectation that non-native speakers will one day speak like natives is simply ‘utopian and unrealistic’, and does not consider that some learners do not even intend to speak with native English speakers but rather with other ESL students within Turkey.

The approach is known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and it has been gaining ground in curricula all over the world. Celik, quoting Alptekin, writes that ‘CLT rests on the recognition of native speakers norms and “considers target-language based communicative competence to be essential in order for the foreign language learner to participate fully in the target language culture”’ (quoted in Celik 2008, 161). One strategy of Turkish-English CLT is to allow the unification or ‘collapsing’ of similar sounds that are found in both languages. For instance, collapsing /æ/ into /e/, man and men can alike be pronounced /men/, while bad and bed simply become /bed/. Similarly, the two consonant phonemes /θ/ and /ð/, which do not exist in Turkish, can be replaced by /t/ and /d/ respectively. Three, pronounced /θrI/, becomes /trI/, and this’s /ðIs/ becomes /dIs/. Other changes include the replacement of the consonant /v/ with the /w/ glide in words like have and very, as well as the collapse of /Λ/ into /a/, allowing a word like but to be pronounced /bat/. While CLT, with its introduction of non-native standards into the classroom, has still to be accepted and put into use by English teachers throughout the country, it seems like the most potentially useful step in making ESL a more practical venture for students of English in Turkey.
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