

Politics of National Identity and Language: Turkey, a Case Study

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September, 2000

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements of the degree of MSc. in Sociology in the Faculty of Social Science.

word count : 15.856

Abstract

The following article aims to explain the relationship between the nation-building process and language policies, with the case study of Turkey. The historical and political constructions of the national identity have been discussed widely in the sociological literature. Yet, how the politics of language, such as officialisation of a language, changes of alphabets or/and the purist movements have been related and integrated within the nationalist narratives could not receive the attention they reserved. As virtually all nationalisms had language policies in accord with their imagination of the “nation”, Turkey is not an exception.

The seeds of the Turkish nationalism are to be found in the late Ottoman Empire period. Likewise, the debates about language started in the same period. Another linkage between nationalism and politics of “national” languages is their modernity. In this sense, too, the case of Turkish language is a good example, as the referred period had also witnessed the modernisation attempts of the State elites, centralisation of the governing mechanisms, cultural and economical transformation of the urban population and generations of communication and bureaucratic networks. In the Republican era after 1923, the language was handled in a revolutionary perspective, of which Turkish nationalism and Westernisation became the official ideology. The Alphabet and Language Revolutions had extensive political and social implications with respect to the building of national identity, minorities, modernisation and social change. The essay will try to illuminate these connections with special emphases on the formation of nationalist ideas and national identity, and on minorities.

Acknowledgments

Even though I wished to spend more time and energy on this essay, it is constituted as a general analysis. However, I am indebted to several people who helped me to complete the essay as it is presented.

I am indebted to my dissertation adviser Steve Fenton for his useful comments and encouragement. I also want to thank Steve May for his interest in what I was interested and for that it was in the discussions in his course when the ideas developed in the dissertation mostly emerged.

Kumru Toktamış is possibly the most responsible person for my adventure in sociology, from the very beginning. She again gave her support, intellectually and morally, even though she was pretty far away.

And my dear friends back in Turkey are those who deserve a great appreciation. Can Açıksöz, Emek Çelik, Özgür Ergüney, Zeynep Korkman and Pınar Şenoğuz were the main contributors to my interest in sociological understanding, with hours of discussions, common political interests and mutual encouragement in engaging in sociology. But more importantly for being my friends. In the first drafts they helped me to proceed in a better way.

My studies in the academic year 1999-2000 in the University of Bristol were funded by the Chevening Scholarship of the British Council.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree.

Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Bristol.

The dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

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Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, the international political scene seems to be dominated mainly by national and ethnic conflicts. Wars and clashes between nations, ethnic groups and tribes cost millions of lives in Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Mexico, Caucasia, Turkey, Indonesia and elsewhere. However, the nation-states, which have been conceived as the most valid way of political categorisation of the peoples of the world in the modern era, have long before been in trouble with many circumstances, which brought their legitimacy under inquiry. Many ethnic groups are currently struggling for cultural and linguistic rights, or autonomy or independence. All however discloses a common problem, that is the assumptions of nationalism does not correspond to the reality. Most of the nation-states received their justification from their claim of representing a supposedly culturally homogenous nation and the political will of everyone in the country. Ethnic conflicts on the other hand reveal that the histories of nation-states were in fact the histories of the politics of cultural homogenisation and suppression of those who did not feel that they did not belong to the majority linguistic or cultural group.

Along with these developments, the academic world of sociology has also been engaged in ethnicity and nationalism studies with the explosion of countless researches. Beyond different explanations, the assumptions of sociology itself have also been re-examined, as the subject of the discipline, society, has been long conceived as the “nation”. As Bauman comments, “sociology, as it came of age in the bosom of Western civilisation and as we know of it today, is endemically national-based” (cited in May, forthcoming). For that reason, the researches of ethnicity and nationalism have political implications. This is so, not only because the researches calls attention on the origins of the imaginations of the states and their citizens about their societies, but also a sociology infected by nationalist narratives would reproduce the hegemonic understandings. This issue should be borne in mind for a critical analysis. In this sense, the investigation of how and in which social and political conditions national identities and cultural homogeneity had been constructed is essential in understanding how and around which issues the resistances are organised.

The emphasis on that nation and national identities are basically modern social and political constructions is in fact one of the two dominant attempts to explain nationalism. This understanding is named by most of the authors in the area as the modernist approach.¹ Their explanations are closely related with the development of capitalism and its expansion throughout the globe, formation of the modern state, centralisation and social transformation. The other school, also advocated by the

nationalists themselves from different standpoints, has its explanatory focus on the continuation of the ethnic ties like language and culture. This polarisation in the explanation schemes, however, is revealed unproductive as the considerations of the interrelationships between nationalism, national identity and ethnicity were introduced into the nationalism studies by the anthropological perspective.² Nevertheless, it is still true that modernity and modernism – as action towards or against modernity – have been intrinsic to nationalism, and throughout out the essay, this relation will be analysed.

Nation-states, as the case study of Turkey will be explored below, sought to create a cultural and ethnic homogenisation of their populations. These processes, which had to be reproduced continuously because of that they have always been under threat by the actual cultural composition of the society, have been the very politics of constructions of national identities. Language constitutes an indispensable axis of this politics. Language is an essential cultural symbol and it carries in itself sets of traditions, customs, particular ways of conception and perception of the world and the social life constituted by that culture. Thus policies of language are also policies of cultures.

Language undeniably is a marker of a line distinguishing a group from another one. The lack of communication between two groups inevitably draws a border between “us” and “them” (Hobsbawm, 1990: 51). However it should be noted that this national differentiation through language is a modern notion, given that modernity necessitates and bring about far more complex inter and intra-communal social structures, networks and relations. Capitalism, modern nation-states and modern communication systems mould language both as a distinguishing and unifying factor, at the same time. After all, the sociological question is whether, or if so, how, these linguistic differences take part in the politics of nationalism. Although, Eriksen warns against the overgeneralisation of the connection between language, politics and ethnic identity³, it should be noted that the main focus of this study is the integration of language policies within nationalism, especially during the creation and the consolidation of a nation-state. This is so, mainly because the language policies are more determined and more striking during the power struggles within a country during that period.

Noting all the above, a study of language in nationalism should include two main interrelated questions. First is where language fits in nationalism. Similarly this theoretical account leads to concerns about to what extent language is central in the nation-state building and nation building processes and what is the relation between language and national identity in the assumptions of nationalism. The second

question covers the empirical aspect; how has the states and the leading elites of these building processes been working out the issue of language?

In this essay, while we are departing from the case study of Turkey, especially from the politics of language comprehended in the birth of Turkish nationalism and in its consolidation as the State ideology, the theoretical implications that this historical evidence would reveal will be explained.

In accord with this intention, there are four theoretical arguments, which would be also re-examined throughout all the sections.

First one is that the presumptions of nationalism and the politics of national identity is constituted by the imagination of a homogenous nation, common in language, culture and history. Nationalist ideologies, mostly, sought to establish a political sovereignty, namely a nation-state that was claimed to be the ultimate political reflection of the will of a nation. Gellner states rightly: “Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent” (1983: 1). Nation has always been conceived as *a unit*.

Secondly, in contrast with the imagination of nationalisms, the territories of the nation-states had always been involved different linguistic and cultural groups. Comparing the exceeding number of spoken languages in the world with the number of existing states would clarify this fact better. As Eriksen informs “there are between 3,000 and 8,000 distinctive languages in the world, the exact number depending on the definition used” (1991). Moreover, it should be considered that many local languages were assimilated or done away with by the dominant states within the last two centuries.

Thirdly, the gap between the assumptions of nationalisms and the reality, to which the leading nationalists were no way alien after all, is the one that should be closed as much as possible. Thus acting on language and attempts to homogenise the society linguistically is common in the creation and consolidation of nation-states.

A generally accepted idea is to distinguish two related language policies, as they might be practiced by nation-states favouring the dominant ethnic group or by the minorities resisting against the dominance of the former; status planning and corpus planning.

Status planning involves the officialisation of a particular language or a political struggle to improve the position of language with regard to others and “the rejection of the insults and injuries – in terms of unjustifiably restricted or denigrated statuses – which have been visited upon. Such restrictions and denigrations are viewed as injurious to the survival not only of the language but also of the

community that it identifies with” (Fishman, 1997: 334). Moreover, as an evidence for the modernity of nationalism, politics of status of language is closely associated with the debates of modernity. The language is either claimed to be superior to its rivals within the country regarding its capability of conducting modern social relations, or in response to this implication, that the language is not a fit instrument of modern pursuits is rejected. Thus there is the struggle for the modern status of language within nationalism, together with its defence of the traditionality and antiquity, as well. Status aspirations, as Fishman notes, also include the postulation of the beloved languages in terms of moral obligations and natural right, as “it does not only deserves to be protected and fostered, but this is one’s duty to do so (1997: 335).

The status planning of languages produce some direct and indirect results, which also contributes to the power of the nation-state. Officialising a language and making it the language of the compulsory national education services, not only promotes a culturally homogenous society as a project to be realised but also favours the language of the ethnic group in majority against the minorities, which means the exclusion of the minority groups’ cultural domains as potential threats to the dominance of the nation-state. This policy at the same time toughens the social mobility of the members of the minorities. The status planning is not only bounded to the language that is encouraged. There are many examples of banning the speaking and using of any language other than the official one. Homogenisation of the national identity goes hand in with suppressing all other potential or actual oppositions.

From a functionalist point of view or as a post-facto rationalisation, a nation-state needs to have linguistically homogenous society for its efficient operation; thus it has a drive to strengthen the language of the *nation*, beyond the officialisation of it. The bureaucratic functioning, the communication services, education, courts and the whole sphere of economy would be national and would represent the independence and the uniqueness of one nation, marked with the use of one language, that of the nation.

On the other hand language policies might have their peculiar objectives, such as facilitating Westernisation and the modernisation of the society as it was in Turkey.

The politics of language status is closely related with the second kind of language policies, corpus planning, both in nationalistic and in modernist terms. Corpus planning includes the purification of the language by eliminating foreign words, phrases and grammatical rules for the sake of the independence of the language and its existence on its own, as the representative of the independence of its community. Corpus planning also covers the modernist intervention to the language, “with outer investments (the

nomenclature, standardised spellings, grammars and stylistic conventions) that the modern pursuits and institutions require” (Fishman, 1997: 337). The language debates are, hence, also political debates and each standpoint in the debates of language corresponds to a political perspective envisioned for the future of the community. Each adventure of nationalism, without an exception, included a politics of language accordingly, be it in the form of purification and standardisation of language or as a struggle to conserve the minority language.

The fourth theoretical assumption of this study, is that the process of modernisation is immanent in these processes. As it will be shown below, in Turkey and in other countries, this involves both the actual modernisation (of the state, the nation and the language) and the advocating “being modern” against the languages and the cultures of the minorities which are stigmatised to be pre-modern, traditional and backward.

Hobsbawm comments, “National languages are ... almost always semi-artificial constructs and occasionally, like Modern Hebrew, virtually invented. They are the opposite of what nationalist mythology supposes them to be, namely the primordial foundations of national culture and the matrices of the national mind” (1990: 54). Similarly Billig states that it is “nationalism [which] creates ‘our’ common sense, unquestioned view that there are, ‘naturally’ and unproblematically, things called different [national] ‘languages’, we speak” (1995: 30). The idea of a national language as an essential element of national identity is thus cultivated by the nationalist ideology and nationalist elites. The case of Turkey will be discussed in this study within this framework.

It is intended in this essay to underline the constructed nature of the Turkish national identity, as an exclusive modernisation project, constituted by the utilisation and the manipulation of actual cultural and linguistic elements, as well as of an invented history. Language is examined as one of the main elements of this nation-building process, which was named as the Language Revolution. However it should be noted that the object is neither to get involved in a linguistic discussion nor to tell the whole story of the Language Revolution. Although a general sketch of this history will be delivered, the priority of the essay is to present the relationship of the Revolution with nationalism and national identity.

This study will cover a time period of nearly 80 years, from the last decades of the Ottoman Empire (1800s) to the first two decades of the Republic of Turkey (1920s and 1930s). However such a periodisation is not unproblematic. Firstly, a widely debated issue is whether to divide the history into two by taking the proclamation of the Republic in Turkey in 1923 as the turning point. As supported by

most of the Turkish historians and their supporters, the proclamation is indeed critical in the change of the state politics, in social transformation and the consolidation of the nation-state. However a counter argument states that the general ideological framework was formed before 1923, in fact it was seeded during the attempts of change during the 19th century Ottoman Empire. As it will be reviewed in detail in the next chapter, the birth of the Turkish nationalism starts in a period in which the Ottoman State fell into crisis being under pressure by the imperialist expansion of the Western states and by its weakening financially, losing its territories in separatist nationalist movements, especially in Balkans and the notion of modernisation is introduced in the Empire. The debates on language, of both Ottoman and Turkish also began in mid 1800s. In this sense, the second approach, which refers to a continuation of the state and revolutionary tradition, will be adopted here.⁴ However, the chapters are separated as “Before the Republic” and “After the Republic” both because it enables an analytical simplicity and also because most of the idea of reforms and modernisation of the state and the society was realised more decisively and Turkish nationalism became the ideology of the State.

The second problematic might be questioned about the periodisation of the story of the language reforms. It is true that the demand for the reconsideration of the language both in its content and its alphabet began in mid 1800s. Nevertheless, the Language Revolution was practiced by the Republican State a long-term project. The reasons for the preference of choosing the year 1938 as the end point of the period under investigation are several. First, it is the date of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s death, the leader of the Independence War, since 1919 and of the Republic throughout rest of his life. He was also the one who mastered all revolutions and reforms, including the alphabet change and the purification of the language. The attempts to purify the language suspended for a while after his death. This date hence might be considered as the close of the first period of the Language Revolution. The date also refers to the end of the Sun-Language Theory, of which main argument was briefly that the Turkish language was the mother of the languages of most of the high ancient civilisations, like Greek, Sumerian, and Hittite. However the main reason for setting the period until 1938 is that the idea of a change in the language is much more related to the nation and nation-state building process in this period, in which the consolidation of the state authority and ideology is at stake, than decades to come.

Before the Republic: Birth of Modernisation and Nationalism

Late 18th century is generally conceived of as the period in which the birth of modernism in the Ottoman Empire took place, both as the attempts to modernise the state mechanism and the society, and as the conservative reaction against this modernisation. After 500 years of domination on vast lands in three continents, Asia, Europe and Africa, the decline of the Empire began with fiscal problems and the loss of the military power. The period also coincides with the time of the heydays of the Western colonisation, which also supplied the capital and the human resources for fostering industrial capitalism. The imperialist states were seeking to enlarge their hegemony, create new markets and sources of raw material to the lands that were governed by the Ottomans, as well. With respect to religion, the leadership of the Islamic community, the Caliphate was under threat.

The period of reform, in fact, exhibits an interesting character, when a state had been forced to change its political orientation, exemplifying the West in order to prevent the dissolution. This period involved reforms interrelated with each other that brought centralisation and the modernisation. First important developments include the establishment of the print house and the connections at the political level with the Western states through embassies, which also had the mission of observing the education systems and the methods of governing in the states of European countries and report back. An intelligentsia apart from the state was also forming. The first attempts to stop the withdrawal began from the army at the end of the 18th century and a new military academy was founded in which foreign army officials were training the Ottoman soldiers.

1800s was the century of centralisation at the same time which brought the whole Empire under an extensive direct control. Establishment of ministries, bureaucracy, communication systems, especially telegraph lines and networks of transportation were the important developments of 1830s and 40s. The attempts to form a general secular education system and the standardisation of primary and secondary schools took place during mid century. However, as Behar notes, for the processes of modernisation and centralisation, the Ottomans had to rely on an intellectual past that is unlike to that of the Western societies. Whereas bureaucrats and high ranked military officers rise as the power holders (Ahmad, 1993: 32), the path followed by the reformists was not that clear, either in terms of ideology or materially (Behar, 1992: 47).

The extension of the bureaucracy for the central state made the members of this network the executors of the reforms. Such a bureaucracy mainly intended the better functioning of the state and it did not have the public support. These, especially the officials in the modernising army, were would form the cadres of the Republican revolutions and their background would be decisive in the way Turkey was transformed.

Nationalism was also coming into the scene. The nationalist movements in Europe, the condensing relations of the intellectuals of the Empire with these countries, separation of Ottoman provinces like Greece, Serbia, and others by influential nationalist struggles and nationalist riots elsewhere could be counted as the main waves of ideological and political developments effective in the formation of a nationalist idea (Bosworth, 1965b: 117). However, there was an uncertain attitude towards nationalism, because the social organisation of the Ottoman Empire was not like the European countries. It was formed of *millets*, which means nations literally, but had a religious connotation more than an ethnic one. Thus there were the *millets* of *Rums* (Orthodox Greeks), Armenians, and others. The Ottoman social culture was not defining a homogenous culture for the “nation”, and this was not a fertile ground for the development of a Turkish nationalism (Behar, 1992: 49).

Ağaoğulları remarks that “Turkish nationalism developed among Turks living in Russia much earlier than those of the Ottoman Empire primarily because of the different economic structure prevailing in the areas populated by Turks in the Russian Empire, such as Crimea and Caucuses. The Turkish-Tatar bourgeoisie in these regions had sufficiently matured to use nationalist ideology against the Russians” (1987: 180). On the other hand, in the Ottoman Empire, the burgeoning bourgeoisie was formed mainly by the Greeks, Jews and Armenians. The majority of the Turks were peasants in Thrace and Anatolia. Turks in İstanbul were mainly officers and soldiers.

Ziya Gökalp mentions about that the studies and the activities of European Turkologists in the 19th century were the first ones pronounced the Turks as a nation (1997: 3-6). These were referring to the antiquity of Turks. The idea that a Turkish culture with its distinctive culture and language exists came from these Europeans before the Turks themselves.⁵ Ağaoğulları affirms that the intellectuals of the Turkish population in Russia “were in much closer contact with European thinking and were therefore more easily influenced by the European Turkologists” (1987: 180). Continuing, the author writes that literary figures of the *Tanzimat*⁶ period can be considered the first Turkists within the Ottoman Empire.

The language became an important issue within these circles, “they did not take part in political activities, limiting themselves instead to developing a national language by purifying Ottoman.

Debates on Language

By the advance of the Empire, by the 15th century, and the acquiring the Caliphate, a decisive influence of the languages of Persian and Arabic, the language of the Holy Quran, increased. High-culture, arts and literature produced by the circles around the Palace appropriated many grammatical rules, vocabulary and phrases from these languages. The writers were also making new words by adding Turkish suffixes to words from these classical languages and mixing up rules, mainly for aesthetic purposes. Ottoman turned out to be a complicated and untidy mixture of the three languages, Turkish, Arabic and Persian. The alphabet was Arabic and it was written from right to left without separating the letters and spelling the vowels.⁷ With the pressure from the proto-nationalists against those who demanded Arabic to be the official language, in 1876 Constitution it was stated that “for those, who have Ottoman nationality, to be employed in State’s services, it is conditional that they know Turkish, which is the official language of the State.”⁸

However, the language of the State bureaucracy and the intelligentsia was far from being intelligible for the ordinary people (*avam*), of course with regard to Turkish language.⁹ It was the administrative and the language of literature. The distinction of the languages within the Empire, the Ottoman and the local Turkish in fact reflects the social structure of the Empire, where the state was not concerned with the commoners as long as they pay their taxes and make their contributions to the army.¹⁰

Furthermore, although, Ottoman Empire has been known as a Turkish empire, within the ruling circles there appeared the idea that Turks and Turkish language are limited, crude and inexpressive, compared to the well developed Islamic civilisations of Persians and Arabs.¹¹

The debates on the languages of Ottoman and Turkish began with the modernisation attempts and were born simultaneously with the debates about nationalism. The debates were about the change of the alphabet, simplification of the language and linguistic Turkification (purification). Among these long and detailed discussions, supporting of the change and the defence of the status quo have important historical and theoretical connotations.

As exemplary instances will be given below, the language debates were turning around the issues like public education, literacy, communication, journalism and publishing, Westernisation, which were all loaded with the implications of modernisation and nationalism.

Münif Paşa, who served as the Minister of Education in the Ottoman Empire for a long time, was the first to indicate the need for a reconsideration of the alphabet. In 1862, in a speech, he stated that the Arabic letters were hard to learn, thus was the low level of literacy. He also said that the high number of characters needed to print Ottoman (around 500) causes publishing laborious, while the Latin alphabet needs only around 30 (cited in Paçacıoğlu, 1990: 13).¹²

As the traditional education system could not produce cadres able to deal with the crisis and as the advance of the Western countries became more evident and observable, the education system was also under inquiry. The origins of the idea and practices of a secular public education for development lie in this period. The high rate of illiteracy was seen as a great problem and preventing the progress, and there were intellectuals concerned with the solution to the problem.¹³ Demand for the change of the language came from those who asked for a simpler alphabet and language, which would be more understandable by the common people. These came especially from journalists, writers, and some bureaucrats, especially those engaged in education and science services.

The journalism too was starting to flourish meanwhile. Journalism, had two major effects both on language and nationalism. Firstly, as Hobsbawm states, when language was “forced into print” (1990: 61), it had been fixed, and facilitated the standardisation. The idea of a printed language is much more powerful and political than the daily usage and it has stronger emphases on a language of a people, the language of a state and those who cannot understand that language. As the printed publication set a much more effective base for the circulation of ideas and information, it brought about standardisation and struggle for domination over the language, as well. Secondly, as publishing for an audience inevitably anticipates as many readers as possible, it also embodies the imagination of a larger number of people, beyond the literate.¹⁴ Hence Sultan Mahmut II stated that “the publications should be understood by *all*”, referring to the first newspaper published by the State in the mid 1830s (my emphasis, cited in Yücel, 1982: 24). İbrahim Şinasi, who has been regarded as the father of Turkish journalism, made one of the first non-official declarations of the notion of “publishing in a way that is understood by the public at large” in his first editorial in *Terceman-ı Ahval* (Interpreter of the Condition), the second newspaper in the country (G. Lewis, 1999: 13).

Similarly a journalist from the newspaper *Terakki* (Progress) wrote an article in 31 July 1896, titled “Public Education”, and claimed that the progress is impossible unless the letters are changed. He suggested making a revision in writing in the subjects other than religion, considering the value for the

public of the Arabic script, by which the Holy Quran was written. He received an answer by Ebüzziya Tevfik who wrote that the progress has nothing to do with the *Frenks'* letters but with the education system. He also said, "The civilisation enlightening the whole world came out of our [Arabic] letters"¹⁵. There were other discussions going on in other journals and newspapers like *Ruzname*, *Musavver Malumat* and *Mektep* (Paçacıoğlu, 1990: 14-15).

It seems that the need was popular around the Empire; a writer from Azerbaijan, Mirza Fethali Ahundzade and Melkon Han from Iran proposed changes in the script. However, Melkon Han was replied, probably by Namık Kemal, the famous poet of the time, that, although it is true that the Arabic script is hard, the change would prevent to make use of the books written since the 13th century.

Nationalism was also getting involved in the discussions. Ağaoğulları gives a brief picture regarding the discussions on the nationalist side (1987: 181). Ahmet Vefik Paşa was the first to take up Turkish as an entity distinct from Ottoman in his 1876 *Lehçe-i Osmani* (Ottoman Lexicon). He argued that the history of Turks did not started with Ottomans and should be regarded as including all Turkic peoples. Ali Suavi energetically argued for the use of Turkish words.

In 1878 Namık Kemal made a striking statement, "we must try to annihilate all languages in our country except Turkish... Language... may be the firmest barrier – perhaps firmer than religion – against national unity (Mango, 1999: 537). Later on, Şemseddin Sami published his *Kamus-i Türki* (Turkish Lexicon) in 1899-1901.

Mektep, in the same period, prepared a questionnaire about the issue (Paçacıoğlu, 1990: 14-17). The responses were gathered around four ideas on the issues of alphabet and language: refrain from any change either in the language or the alphabet; simplification of the language and closing the gap between the written and the spoken language; revise the script so that it could show the vowels and write the letters separately, and that it could ease reading and printing; and changing the alphabet with the Latin and eliminating the Arabic and Persian words from the language.

There were also reactions against the demands for changes in the language. The supporters of the status quo were mainly arguing that the change in the alphabet would break the society from its past and it would be impossible to make use of the literature written in Ottoman. There were also disputes about that the Latin alphabet would also be incapable of showing the sound in Turkish. Even writing from left to right as opposed to writing from right to left as it was in Ottoman would be absurd, some authors claimed. However most of the reactions had a religious connotation and they were arguing that the debates on the

language and alphabet were aimed at religion via attacking on Arabic script and language, by which the Holy Quran was written. An Ottoman nationalism, which conceived “nation” with respect to religious groups was also forming. Namık Kemal for example argued that the Arabic alphabet would be a unifying element between the Muslims of the Empire, which is threatened by the successions of Christian, groups (Şimşir, 1992: 26).

Language, as it could be surveyed in all these debates was such a vital and a social issue, so that any discussion about how it should be referred to a certain political standpoint. Thus it is not surprising to find those who asked for simplification in the lines of modernisation and Westernisation, those who asked for purification in the fronts of nationalism, and those who resisted the changes as the ones who supported the status quo and wanted to retain their relatively advantageous conditions in the higher steps of the hierarchy of the society – intersections within these crudely described ideas were notwithstanding. This of course does no way means that the debates on language are merely practical and functional derivatives of the political struggle. On the contrary, it is claimed here throughout the essay, it reveals how language is itself conceived as a political issue.

At the same time another occasion for the reconsideration of the Ottoman language was the use of telegraph. Technically telegraph had to use Latin alphabet.¹⁶ As a standard and a single language within the territories became necessary, together with the Ottoman, but also the superiority of the Ottoman and its social representatives, the ruling elites came under inquiry.

In connection, becoming of the notion of common people important should be regarded as a marker of a political need of the reality of common people, first, for the reconstruction of the legitimation of the state, whose hegemony was being shaken; second, for a target community of the Western modernist and rationalist ideas to be realised and thirdly, for the drive to include the commoners in order to mobilise them for both military and nationalist purposes. The discussion was mainly among the elites and the intellectuals and the “people” was only an image that debate was touching upon frequently. A detailed study of the 19th century of the Ottoman Empire in this framework would be useful, not only for understanding how “common people” became of consideration as a concept, but also the discursive invention of the common people and consequent politics of nationalism in the forthcoming years, to realise the concept.

Following these intellectual debates some committees were gathered for the revision of the alphabet and the language but except a few changes in writing, no radical change was undertaken.

“The proclamation of the *Meşrutiyet* (constitutional monarchy) on 23 July 1908 by the *Jön Türkler* (Young Turks) and the defeat of Abdulhamid’s despotic regime [let] the Turkish nationalist thinkers move out of the academic realm and begin to articulate political ideas, systematise them into an ideology” (1987: 182). More strikingly they had the opportunity for the practice of these thoughts. Their organisation *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (Committee of Union and Progress – CUP) was in power.

The debates on language then turn on to a more nationalistic focus. In Thessaloniki, there formed the first organised attempt for Turkish language with the publication of the journal *Genç Kalemler* (Young Pens). A simpler language triumphed over conservatives by the First World War, at least politically (Bosworth, 1965b: 118).

After the Republic: State, Elites and the Society

The period in which the CUP was in power, World War I and the Independence War took place, from 1908, the proclamation of the constitutional monarchy until 1923, the proclamation of the republic, deserves much more than it is possible to discuss here. This period was not only important as it was an intense interval of time in sense of development of nationalism and modernisation, it was also the time in which the international conjuncture and the imperialist wars constrained to a very considerable extent the way the Republic and the revolutions afterwards was carried.

On the other hand, for convenience it is required to give a very brief history of the period, of which details will be reported below as it is necessary in the discussion of nationalism and language.

Ottoman Empire participated in the First World War on the side of Germans and despite defeating the French and British Armies in the fronts, it was in the losers’ group. The division of Thrace and Anatolia among the British, French, Greek and Italians was signed with Alliance Powers by the İstanbul government. British and French forces occupied İstanbul and many nationalists and intellectuals, seen as potential dangers, were exiled to Malta. However a significant number of members of the CUP flee to Anatolia to establish local resistance organisations under the name of *Müdaafa-ı Hukuk Cemiyetleri* (Societies for the Defence of Rights). The Independence War carried from 1920 until 1922 was organised throughout the Anatolia by these local organisations. The congresses in Erzurum and Sivas in 1919 aimed to unite these local forces and in 23 April 1920, National Grand Assembly met for the first time Ankara. Gradually the Assembly under the lead of Mustafa Kemal Paşa took over the authority from İstanbul and

built its power as the only representative of the Anatolian peoples. The Independence War was mainly with the Greeks who occupied İzmir on 18 May 1919 and proceeded to the very close of Ankara. Within two years after the foundation of the Grand Assembly, Anatolia was under the control of Turkish army, and on 24 July 1923 Treaty of Lausanne was signed after months of negotiations. After three months came the declaration from the Assembly that the republic was proclaimed and the name of the new state was the Republic of Turkey.

The background of the Republican State

The aftermath of the Republic is was the period in which Kemalism, named after the founding father of the Republic Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, established itself as the ideological hegemony and the political program of the State. Kemalism was defined in the 1935 program of the Peoples Republican Party: “All of these principles, which are the fundamentals of the Party, constitute Kemalism”. (Webster, 1939: 307)

Within the framework of nation-building, Sunar comments;

“Kemalism was the specifically Turkish response to underdevelopment and traditionalism. What lies at the core of this experience are its charismatic and ideological qualities. The ideological components of what we call Kemalism such as secularism, nationalism, rationalism and republicanism are in fact profoundly modern. And yet Kemalism was a charismatic-heroic ethos initially forged during the War of Independence and eventually directed against the underdevelopment as the “enemy” and towards the mission of national reconstruction” (1996: 142)

This useful definition involves a critical tension between modernity and myth, which will be revisited through the chapter.

After the Republic, the modernist and Westernist State sought to transform the society in which, it is claimed here, the nation-building process was its primary concern. The revolutions followed each other, from dressing rules, to the new alphabet, to the abolishment of the Caliphate and granting women the right of voting and election. “After 1920s the state regulated the social and cultural life of the population with an increasing intensity” (Uyar, 1995:52).

The most important ideological attempt was to re-write the history for supporting the national independence of the country. The crucial part of this story was related to the times of Independence War. This war which took place as a Muslim alliance between different representatives of the peoples of the country against the “Christian enemies”, in the official discourse, was interpreted as the revival of the Turks as a nation which reacted against the imperialist powers to free itself and its land. However, as Pekdemir (1997) comments widely in his book, which he reviews many critical historians analysing the

period, the War was in fact not a storm of nationalism mobilising a “nation”. The number of those executed by the Independence Tribunals, which had extensive authority, for they did not join the army were much more than the losses in the War. The peasants as the majority of the population and the main pool of recruitment for the army were not that much eager to join another war, after years of devastation. In many provinces the people celebrated the entrance of the foreign occupying forces. This kind of historicising of course did not only come into being as a need of a “national” history. Much of it owes its content to the authors of the history.

The social economic positions of the first nationalists before the Republic were incomparable to those of the common peasant Turkish population. Being mostly middle class bureaucrats, teachers and army officers, the politicisation of these was more possible. Having the heritage of the previous generations which tried to save the Empire, these groups were more effected by the occupations of foreign forces. The political and economic dominance of the European countries was threatening the social spheres of these urban classes while it had a relatively slight effect on the peasants’. Their class position made the production of a nationalist ideology possible, especially under the rule of Young Turks, CUP. Many of these individuals were brought up and educated in the European style and because of their acquaintance with the European culture, they were also familiar the nationalist movements in Europe. They were able to utilise modern instruments and organise resisting agencies against the imperialist powers militantly, and they had the conscience to do so. They were the ones who coordinated local resistances against Greeks, especially in the Aegean Region. These also became the agencies of the modernisation and Westernisation processes during the Republican revolution.¹⁷

These middle class nationalists were the writers of the history of the republic, as well. It was in their imagination, which was charged by nationalism, that the Turkish nation has been fighting against slavery and for its independence. It was a similar image of the Turkish “nation” in the aftermath of the Republic, during the revolutions, that the Turkish “nation” is struggling to take her part in the war of civilisations.¹⁸ The reality was different however, while there were many counter-revolutionary riots all around the country, especially from the Kurds and the Islamists, all suppressed violently by the army. The State never ceased to refer to a united nation, its Turkishness, and its unstoppable urge for modernisation and Westernisation.¹⁹

Nevertheless, the role of the elites in nation-building should not be exaggerated because another parallel project was the inclusion and the mobilisation of the people into the modernisation project. The

rulers of the Republic knew well that unless the support of the common people is gained, the revolution would not long much.²⁰

The army was the leading actor of the revolutions. The role of the Turkish army had its historical background since it was the first element of the state to be modernised in the Ottoman Empire. In this sense, the army was the executor of the process of nation-state building, as it was in most of the non-European countries. Harris notes that “it was the military and not the party that became the fountainhead of progressive practices; an organ for the spread of the reforms considered vital. Further it was the ultimate base of power for the regime, the guardian of its ideals” (cited in Trimberger, 1978: 107).²¹ Many influential members of the parliament in the first decades were mostly the victorious commanders of the Independence War.

A social positivism marks the Turkish Revolution at the discursive level. Emphasis on science and the belief in scientific and rational methods was prevailing in every attempt of the Revolution. Science had been seen as the compelling factor of modernity. The project of modernisation, hence, would include the ‘scientific’ approach in every social issue. As Atatürk said: “[A Progressed life] is only possible with science. Wherever the science is, we will take it from there and *place* in the mind if every individual of the nation” (my emphasis, cited in Kantarcıoğlu, 1998: 104), progress and the enlightenment of the society was conceived in a positivistic manner. It was the West, no doubt, where the science was. Progress, Westernisation, modernisation and the path shown by the science virtually revealed the same meaning in the official discourse. This positivist discourse was unsurprisingly trapped within the nationalist ideology, as appears in the notion of ‘science for the nation’: “Only with science the Turkish nation, Turkish art, economy, poem and literature could be developed with all their beauty” (cited from Atatürk in Kantarcıoğlu, 1998: 103).

Nationalism in the first Republican decades: Turkification

The ideas of change, reform and development, as it could be observed through the Ottoman heritage, were limited to the military and bureaucratic servants in Turkey. These elites had no rivals, neither as a form of powerful bourgeoisie nor aristocracy (Sugar, 1969: 176). This kind of formation constituted the nature of the revolutions; revolution from the above. However, a highly strong populism was not absent.²²

The nationalist discourse for the active participation of the state in nation-building had its references from the Turkist movements prior to the Republic. The imagination of the Turkish nation, not

only as an honoured being, but also as a project to be transformed in its essence (Westernisation) put the new State and its intellectual circles into a kind of schizophrenic mood.

The social project was to exemplify the West, at all cost. In contrast it was also to cultivate the notions of Turkishness and the Turkish culture. Such a two-faced discourse of a culture that was needed to be transformed on the one hand, and a beloved culture with its “thousands of years of genuine civilisations” on the other, reconciled with the emphasis on that this praised culture could only realise itself as long as it conforms to the necessities of the age, that is modernisation. The Language Revolution was critical on this path. The project involved the idea of replacing the shameful history where the Turkishness was governed poorly by the Ottomans and denigrated by the “developed” cultures, with a bright future where Turkey would take its place among the civilised countries. This would also prove that the Turkishness had a respectful culture inherently.

The second aspect of this conflicting proposal needs a closer investigation. In the nationalist imagination the nation was assumed to be a unity and, according to the State discourse, the latter took its authority from the representation of the nation’s will. In this respect the nation was claimed to have its glorious past and genuine social customs, which helped the national characteristics to survive even under the corrupted Ottoman rule. With what Smith calls as the politicisation of the native culture, the Turks, *as a unity*, were re-invented in their arts, literature, crafts, songs and dances, food and dress, of which all inspired from the “yearning spirit of the people and demonstrated their native genius” (1995: 68-69). Deriving from the positivist understanding, this idea was to be supported theoretically to provide the “scientific” evidence for the nationhood of the Turks with the Turkish History Thesis and the Sun-Language Theory in the 1930s. Here language was involved as an important factor supplying the discursive legitimacy of the reforms.

Again Smith, right on the point, states that the politicisation of the popular culture went in hand in hand with the purification of the people (1995: 69). This purification was not only confined to the homogenisation of the society by the exclusion or assimilation of the non-Turkish elements, it also meant to return to the origins of the Turks themselves. Regarding of the homogenisation of the society, it is worth to remind that the population composition of the Anatolia and Thrace changed dramatically during the years of the World War I and the Independence War. In this respect, Keyder notes a striking picture: “Before the WWI, one was non-Muslim in every five (20%) who were living within the territories of today’s Turkey, the ratio fell well down to one in twenty after the [Independence] War” (cited in Aktar,

2000b: 24).²³ Beyond the devastating effects of the wars in and around the Ottoman Empire this change was especially created by some important losses of the non-Muslim groups, namely Armenians, Greeks and Jews.²⁴ By 1923, the land was more than 95 % Muslim, only two large linguistic groups were left, Turkish and Kurdish, and some other small groups, Greek, Armenian, Syriac-speaking Christians, Spanish speaking Jews, and Circassian, Laz and Arabic speaking Muslims (Zürcher, 1997: 172). The non-Muslim groups were less threatening to the nationalist elites' imagination of unity after the Republic, however the large Kurdish population was to distract this project to a considerable extent.

The young Republic followed a common characteristic of nationalisms in the aim of assimilation of the remaining minorities; a blur definition of citizenship. May states (forthcoming) “the *ethnic* interests of the majority group are legitimised and naturalised as *civic* ones which in turn, are equated with modernity” (original emphases). A similar discourse was at work during the 1920s and 1930s Turkey. The issue of naturalisation of bonds of citizenship and of being Turkish was where the nation-building exhibits itself in the most striking manner.

On the one hand the relationship of the people within the territories were officially described as a civic one, as one of citizenship, notwithstanding contradictory phrases. The 1924 constitution, which was in force until 1960, an unchanged article refers to the “word ‘Turk’ as a political term, not one of race or religion”.²⁵ However, in the 1931 program of RPP, the Party of the State, the nation was defined as a “political unit composed of citizens who are bound together with bonds of *language*, culture and ideal” (my emphasis).²⁶ Similarly, ‘Civil Knowledge’, the book prepared by Atatürk in 1931 to be taught in the schools, defined the nation as a community formed by the unity of the individuals who have a common history, who are sincere in their wish to live together and who are determined to protect these memories in the future. In the same book, another definition stated that the Turkish nation is the people of Turkey who founded the Republic of Turkey. The next article denotes that “The language of the Turkish nation is Turkish” (Afetinan, 1998). In all these definitions, the underlining of the culture and language was where the idea of “civic nation” is fractured. Assuming and taking as granted that the language is “naturally” Turkish in Turkey, the ruling elites were in fact clearly favouring the Turkish ethnicity as the core element of the nation, against, non-Turkish speakers.

The same book mentions about the Muslim minorities by facilitating a similar contradictory discourse:

“Today, within the Turkish political and social community, there are our citizens and nationalities who were propagandised with the ideas of kurdishness, circasiannes, and even

bosnians and laziness. Nevertheless, these wrong thoughts, which are the products of despotic periods of the *past*, could not affect any individual of the nation except some instruments of the enemy, brainless reactionaries. Because the members of this nation [the others] are having the *same common history, ethics and principles like the general Turkish community.*” (my emphases, ethnicities written with the lower case letters in the original text, Afetinan, 1998: 18-24).

The unclear use of the concepts, like Turk, Turkish, nation, community and citizenship, with the consciousness of that Turkishness mainly refers to the ethnic group, was intentionally used to include not only that ethnic group but all the people. As it was described above, the concept of nation (*millet*) was basically referring to the religious groups in the Ottoman period and during the Independence War. After the Republic, the emphasis on the Muslim and Turkish speaking group dominated the concept. In this sense, the official discourse had had its conceptual background for making use of an uncertain definition. Since, for example, the language of the State is noted as Turkish in the constitution, it is clear that in the minds of the Revolutionary elites non-Turkish elements, linguistically or religiously, are to be assimilated. Relatedly, Insel argues that the unity of the nation has been a foundational mythos: “The uncertainty build over the use of the adjective Turk as a ethnic identity where it is appropriate, or as with a civic connotation in other instances, feeds this mythos. This mythos needs to have its roots in pre-history as every mythos tends to. A search for an ethnic identity which goes beyond the depth of human history with the claim that the Hitites were also Turks, would also count Kurds as Turks” (2000).

Kurds, as the main discontented non-Turkish element of the peoples in the country in the Republican era, were the “allies” during the Independence War. However, soon after the Republic was proclaimed, the traditional Islamic institutions like Caliphate, religious courts and schools were abolished and this meant, not only the ambition of a construction of a modern, secular and a Westernised Turkey, but at the same time “a break with the period when Muslim identity and common Muslim interests had united the Kemalist movement” (van Bruinessen, 1997: 118). This was a period in which the relations with the “allied” Kurds would take a different pace. Due to the centralisation, secularisation and Turkification attempts of the government, Kurds organised 16 revolts until 1938. Tunçay states that the Sheikh Said’s revolt in 1925, one year after the Caliphate was abolished, was seen as the most dangerous one and costed more than the Independence War, financially and in terms of human loss (cited in Kirişçi and Winrow, 1997: 105). During the revolt a law was passed in the Parliament, named *Takrir-i Sükun* (The Law on the Maintenance of Order) which “empowered the government for two years to ban by administrative measure any organisation or publication which it considered to cause disturbance to law and order” (Zürcher, 1997: 179).²⁷ In addition to the law, two Tribunals of Independence were re-

established which had extensive authority, one in the southeast region where the revolt took place, the other one in Ankara. This was the turning point where the State ceased to be tolerant to any opposition and whereafter with the power of these legal arrangements the most radical reforms could be carried out, especially against the traditional Islamic institutions and representations.

Following the reforms the emphasis on Turkishness increased. On the issue of claiming that Kurds are, 'in fact', Turks, 1930s were the years which greatest efforts made to prove the statement scientifically. Kurds were regarded as the mountain Turks who deviated from their origins linguistically (Kirişçi and Winrow, 1997: 108; Uyar, 1995: 55).

It is beyond the scope of this essay to explain the complex relationship between the modernisation and secularisation, and the nation-building. However it should be emphasised that the rulers of the Young Republic sought to transform the society wholly from its foundations by a revolution from the above. An extensive propaganda was not absent either. The agencies of the Revolution, which would be carried to every part of the country were basically the Army, the organisations like *Türk Ocakları* (Turkish Hearths), replacing them *Halkevleri* (People's Houses), the radio and the branches of RPP.²⁸ The press was eliminated of opposition by the Law on the Maintenance of Order. Moreover many newspapers, national and local, were owned by the members of the Parliament or local leaders of RPP, were continuously valuing and supporting the ongoing changes. Many conferences around the country were organised to inform the public about the Revolution (see Uyar, 1995). A thorough ideological bombardment hence was going on hand in hand with these Reforms.

The language in the project of nation-building

“Turkish state was based on territorial nationalism and Turkish people was defined as the inhabitants within the territory, but in reality Turkishness became a linguistic category” (Gülalp, 1996: 94).

As the Turkish official nationalism were increasing its emphasis on the Turkish ethnicity²⁹, and the definitions of Turkishness included the Turkish language, the long standing discussions on the alphabet and the language would reach at its peak during the mid 1920s. The transformation of the culture was rather seen as the engineering of a new culture, and this would be reflected on the language as “language engineering” (Mango, 1999: 494).

The Alphabet Revolution of the 1928 and the Language Revolution, which began in 1932, were the two interrelated consequences of the intervention in language by the nationalist elites. Hence, with an

additional sub-section on the officialisation of the Turkish, discussions on and the processes of these two will be examined below.

Status planning: Officialisation of the language

With the proclamation of the Republic, the 1921 Constitution was also changed and 1924 Constitution, which was in force until 1960 coup, included the article stating that “the official language of the Turkish State is Turkish” (Webster, 1939: 297). In 1927 census, the figures for the languages as mother tongues were as follows.

TABLE 1
Population Composition by 1927, by Mother Tongue ³⁰

<i>Language</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Turkish	11.777.810	86.41
Kurdish	1.184.446	8.68
Other (including “not reported”)	183.591	1.35
Arabic	134.272	0.98
Greek	119. 822	0.87
Circassian	95.901	0.70
Jewish	68.900	0.54
Armenian	64.745	0.47
<i>Total Population</i>	<i>13.629.488</i>	

Atatürk stated that “everybody accepts that the use of Turkish language in official business is *natural*” (my emphasis, cited in Özgü, 1963: 33), facilitating a naturalising discourse, ideologically disguising the historical and political circumstances. The idea behind was that, because the land was proved to be of Turks, the language of the land would be “normally and naturally” Turkish. This inevitably excludes all non-Turkish speakers from the nation, and counts them as the outsiders.

The status planning of Turkish was not confined to the officialisation of the language.³¹ The intensifying Turkification policies were reflected in the language at the meantime. The high percentage of the Turkish speaking population was also supporting the idea of linguistic Turkification. There were several instances in contrast to the civic definition of citizenship in the constitution that presents the tendency of nationalism favouring an ethnic Turkishness rather than a civic one.

Referring to the *Türk Ocakları*, Atatürk said: “It would not right to believe in one who does not speak Turkish and claims his membership of Turkish culture and community...The unique mission of *Türk Ocakları* is to make these elements real Turks who speak our language” (cited from Üstel in Yeğen, 1999: 177).³² Atatürk in another speech said, “Turkish means the language. Language is one of the most

significant characteristics of nationality. Those who says that they are from the Turkish nation ought, above all and absolutely, to speak Turkish” (cited in Turan, 1998: 19). Concerning the ban of the use of Kurdish language, Turkish was not only the official language of Turkey, it was also becoming the only permissible language other than those of the Greeks, Armenians and Jews, whose linguistic rights were under protection by the Article 40 of the Treaty of Lausanne. However they were also to be discouraged from using their languages by campaigns. It was explained above how these populations shrank before the Republic.³³ In 1937, some municipalities decided to ban to speak any languages other than Turkish within their borders. These campaigns were organised under the slogan “Citizen! Speak Turkish!” and the citizens (Turks) were invited to *warn* those who do not speak.

The *Tarih* [History] book prepared for the high schools along with the lines of Turkish History Thesis, stated “We see that the Turkish race always impresses one as expressing a unity...with the common tongues which are the strongest product of the brain...and at the same time is today a great society in strictest conformity with the definition of a nation” (cited in Webster, 1939: 47). As Insel states “the official language [was becoming] the symbol of the unique official identities of the citizens” (2000). In the discussions on the Turkish language and its prevalence, the civic definitions were changing their faces: “Unless our language Turkish, our thoughts cannot be Turkish and unless our thoughts are Turkish, a Turkish culture cannot exist” (Gültekin, in a public meeting, 1935: 8)

The increasing dominance of the Turkish language as the ‘language of the land’ also aimed at the exclusion of potential threats against the national unity. Especially Kurdish was outlawed on the one hand, and it was claimed to be a degenerated dialect of Turkish, on the other hand. The ideal of national language was also in consistency with the idea of a classless society where no one had a privilege or priority.

Saying all that, in words of Eriksen (1991), the “power asymmetry” was decisive in the language policies. The State, having extensive military organisation, policing and legal authority thus had the power to define what is language, who is Turk, who is a citizen and who is not.

Corpus planning

Fishman underlines the interconnected nature of the status planning and corpus planning, noting that for “a language to be used in school and by government, it requires a writing system, spelling system, nomenclatures... in short dictionaries [and] grammars” (1997: 339). It was the case in Turkey too that the status planning of Turkish followed the corpus planning.

Alphabet Revolution

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk seems to have the idea of the change of the language for a long time before he guided the Revolutions.³⁴ With the extension of the period that the Law on the Maintenance of Order was in force, a radical reform, alphabet change could be done without a remarkable opposition. It was a suitable timing because before the action was taken, there were a considerable objection against the change of the alphabet. As early as 1924, a member of the parliament was nearly attacked by the reactionaries while he was addressing about the subject (Ertop, 1963: 64). However he was widely supported by the press.

The Teachers Union made surveys in 1925 and 1926 about the adaptation of Latin letters, which revealed that majority of the teachers were against the change. In 1926 the daily *Akşam* prepared a questionnaire for the intellectuals and most of them stated that they were not agreeing with the propositions to change the alphabet (Küçük, 1997: 14). One of the opponents was Avram Galanti, of Jewish origin. He was arguing that if the change would take place, science and humanities would be narrowed with the poor Turkish. He also held that such a change would bring about “alienation from those who uses the Arabic writing” and that “the new generations will not know anything about the literature and history of intellect and science of one thousand years” (Galanti, 1996). He was actually right in his worries, because the rationale behind the Alphabet Revolution was specifically this.

In 1926 in Baku, a Turkology Congress was organised and changing the existing alphabets of the Turkic Republics to the Latin alphabet was excitedly discussed. The tide of secularisation and modernisation was rising; in April 1928, the article stating that the official religion of Turkey was Islam was changed and all other religious terms and phrases were eliminated from the constitution. Next month, the “international” numerical systems were adapted. In May, the Committee of Language was formed for the investigation of the Latin characters. In August, the new alphabet was ready for presentation to Mustafa Kemal, for his approval.

In 9th August, he gave his famous address and announced the new alphabet for Turkish.

An energetic camping was started to teach the new alphabet first to the state officials and teachers, then to the public. Mustafa Kemal went on a tour covering many visits to different parts of the country in order to encourage the learning process and to control by himself how it was going on. There are many memories and picture of him examining how the people, from governors to porters, had been learning the alphabet. Many members of the parliament were also out in their provinces to encourage the studies of the

new alphabet. (Ertop, 1963: 63) Hundreds of courses were organised all around the country. It was announced that after the 1st October the communications between the official institutions would be with the new letters.

On the 1st November, the Law for the Approval and the Use of the Turkish Letters (no. 1353) was passed in the parliament. However the interesting point is that until the Parliament passed the law, the public offices already began to use the new alphabet. It *de facto* became the alphabet of Turkish. It is quite a remarkable occasion for the illustration of the power of Atatürk over the Parliament. His approval was enough and probably more decisive.

In November also the organisation of the *Millet Mektepleri* (Folk Schools) to teach the public to write and read was planned and they were opened in many cities on the very first day of the forthcoming year, 1929. The schools were to teach to those who are illiterate and who knew the Arabic script. The courses were for two and four months, respectively.³⁵

The role of the army was again so discernible. More than 10 percent of all literate male population were trained to read Turkish in Military service literacy classes. This makes the 350.000 of all literate population of 3.161.159 (cited in Webster, 1939: 223). Beyond that, those who were educated during their military services returned back to their villages and were employed as “educators”.³⁶ The army not only played one of the leading roles as a modernising agent, it also produced individual agents, who would carry modernity into the provincial regions with their experiences of modern ideas, organisation, agriculture and national identity.

After this short history, theoretical and political implications of the Alphabet Revolution might be discussed.

Webster comments rightfully on the Alphabet Revolution that “One of the greatest economies effected by the Kemalists is the saving of time in the educational process made possible by the change from the Arabic Alphabet” (1939: 223). This was true, because unlike the Arabic alphabet, the new adopted Latin alphabet was corresponding one to one to the sounds of words. So it was pretty easy, after one learns which letter is for what sound, to learn how to write and read. However beyond its functional profit, the Revolution was a part of the modernisation and nation-building project.

İsmet İnönü, who was the second man after Atatürk,³⁷ commented on the issue: “The Alphabet Revolution cannot be related to the ease of reading and writing...The effect and the profit of the revolution for us is that it facilitated the change of culture...In our period, adaptation of the Latin letters

was an essential factor in saving the national language and culture” (cited in Paçacıoğlu, 1990: 25-26). However in contrast, he was addressing to the public in the month of the introduction of the new Alphabet in Malatya and was talking about how it would help to reduce illiteracy (Paçacıoğlu, 1990: 78). This dual narrative would have been employed not because the latter idea was just a tactic. It was clearly not seen as the main reason behind the change of the alphabet, nevertheless, such a proposition also aims to ease the conservatist reactions.

Bernard Lewis argues similarly on the issue of modernisation: “The basic purpose of the change was not so much practical or pedagogical, as social and cultural... The way was now clear to the final break with the past and the East – to the final incorporation of Turkey into the civilisation of the Modern West” (1961: 273). On the other hand, as it was discussed above about the dual quality of Turkish nationalism, the emphasis on the authentic Turkish culture was also adopted in the Alphabet change. As Fishman concludes, “no nationalist movement can continue to push modernisation without regard for authenticity” (1989: 314), the change was justified with the claim that the old alphabet was unsuitable for the requirements of the authentic Turkish phonology.

Another aspect is that, as Billig argues “writing down a way of speaking should not be underestimated, it provides material evidence for the claim that a separate language exists” (1995: 34), the new Turkish alphabet with its own spellings and special characters such as *ç, ş, ğ, ı and İ* would also prove that Turkish had *really* been a language of its own, thus Turks as a separate nation is a justifiable concept. This was a status which it could not assert with the same emphasis had the Arabic script had been conserved.

It was discussed that publishing facilities were effective in the birth of Turkish nationalism during the *Tanzimat* era. Similarly the press and the literature circles were promoting the Alphabet Revolution.³⁸ The ease for the publishing sector was another force for the dominant ideology to reach more people and to sweep out other potential rivals.

The success of this radical change is basically effected by that there were a small number of people who were literate by the old characters, as well as that the majority spoke Turkish with slight dialectical differences.

The change of the alphabet as well heated the discussion of the content of the Turkish language. Zürcher argues that extreme purists became dominant after the Alphabet change, because of three reasons. In the first place, the idea that reform on language “by decree” might become successful was

verified. In the second place the Alphabet Revolution itself played a catalysing role. Written with the Latin letters, “most of the Arabic and Persian words looked alien and unintelligible”. In the third place the radical purism – to eliminate all non-Turkish elements from the language – was in accordance with the extreme nationalism of the 1930s. (1989)

Language Revolution

The First Language Congress History was gathered in 1932 and it was “a showdown between the purists and the moderates”. The latter were arguing that language could not be altered in a revolutionary fashion, and as Zürcher states, this opposition was held as a counter-revolutionary mentality (1997: 198). The concluding work plan included phrases emphasising that “everybody is concerted in that the first language of civilisation was Turkish, as well as the first civilisation was of Turks” (cited in Ertop, 1963: 77). The attempt to prove the antiquity of the Turkish nation was thus finding its support in the studies of language.

After the Congress, as a sister organisation of the Turkish Historical Society [Türk Tarih Kurumu –TTK], Society for the Study of Turkish Language [Türk Dili Tetkik Cemiyeti], whose name would change to Turkish Language Society later [Turkish Dil Kurumu – TDK] was founded to purify and Turkify the Turkish language. It was envisioned as an independence struggle, as Mustafa Kemal set the aim: “The Turkish nation, who has proved its ability to defend its country and its full independence, should also free its language from the yoke of foreign languages” (cited in Özgü, 1963: 33). A unique and pure Turkish language, which had no dependence to any other language, would support the idea of the uniqueness of the Turkish nation, having its own original national identity.

Mustafa Kemal led the purification process. In the 1930s, *Çankaya* (the Presidential House) hosted long dinners organised by Atatürk. It was the centre of the discussions about the language, finding new words, historical and anthropological debates. The attendants of these dinners were mainly the leading advocates of a pure Turkish.³⁹ Researchers of language were not only contributing to the language, but also, probably more importantly, they were seen as the actors of the construction of the nation-state.⁴⁰

İstanbul Turkish was taken as the ‘clean’ and ‘real tongue’ of Turks which was distinguished from what the Turkish peasants as the majority of the population spoke and which inherited both Ottoman and French linguistic influences due to its cosmopolitan social life. Gökalp was one of those who demanded the working on the İstanbul tongue (1997: 98-121).⁴¹ With respect to this, what Hobsbawm argues is meaningful: “given that the dialect which forms the basis of a national language is actually spoken, it

does not matter that those who speak it [correctly] are a minority, so long as it is a minority of sufficient political weight” (1990: 60). Similarly, with its special form, dominance of İstanbul Turkish reflects the political prevalence of the nationalist elites who were previously based in İstanbul. As it might be recalled from the discussion made above about the socio-economical statuses of the nationalists, although the local dialects were detected for nationalising suitable words to be replaced by the eliminated foreign words, the accents were adapted in İstanbul Turkish and were written with the invented alphabet. This is another illustration of the supremacy of the urban nationalist elites and their nation-building project.⁴²

After the First Language Congress, members of TDK started to collect words from local tongues, ancient sources and “even Turkic languages from Central Asia to replace Ottoman vocabulary” (Zürcher, 1997: 198).⁴³ Committees were organised in every province. Newspapers were organising campaigns and contests for finding out new words, integrating people in a lively and intense public mobilisation, which facilitated people’s internalisation of the national identity, of the idea of belonging to a nation. Atatürk changed his first name Kemal, to be Kamal for conformity to the Turkish grammar rule of vowels (Ertop, 1963: 85). The Law for Surnames, which was passed in 1934 also contributed to the language revolution, as the surnames would be chosen from pure Turkish words (Ertop, 1963: 84).

The purist action was getting into difficulties. The extremists began to create words, which had no public response, although new words were promoted in many instances. The new language was also incomprehensible by most, like Ottoman was (Zürcher, 1997: 198). It had been always claimed that the Language Revolution mainly attempted to close the gap between the written and spoken language, the language of the rulers and intellectuals and the language of the common people. However, the invented supposedly pure Turkish words were to be used in official language and the language of the elites was once more becoming alien to the common people. For example, when the Swedish Crown Prince Gustav Adolf was greeted by Mustafa Kemal in Ankara in October 1934, the latter gave a generally incomprehensible address, full of invented new words (cited in Mango, 1999: 495).⁴⁴ The pure Turkish was also used in local meetings, of the People’s Houses for example, in which not many of the audience presumably understood much (Gültekin, 1935). In 1935, the controversial theory of the Turkish language came about.

Sun-Language Theory

In 1935, a linguist from Vienna, Dr. Hermann Kvergić sent a paper in which he proposed a psychoanalytic explanation of the birth of the human linguistic faculty. The article was examined by

Atatürk himself and with his encouragement, the proposition was made the official theory of language. It was widely supported in the Third Language Congress in 1936. The key argument of the theory was that ancient Turkish was able to present the origins of the first language. It was claimed that the European linguists were not able to solve the problem of “glottogony” since they had ignored Turkish. It was a challenge to the existing linguistic theories.

Anthropological and archaeological findings were utilised to support the theory. The attempt was to explain how all “languages derived originally from one primeval language, spoken in Central Asia, that Turkish was closest of all languages to this origin and that all languages had developed from the primeval language through Turkish” (Zürcher, 1997: 198). Led by Atatürk, most of those interested in the Language Revolution, be them linguists or not, were trying to explain how virtually every word of the known languages were “nationalised, through a “fake” etymology.⁴⁵ After the First Language Congress, Turkish had been claimed to be the mother of the Indo-European language family, now it became to be the mother of languages of high civilisations, such as Sumerian and Hittite (Ertop, 1963: 72-78). The Theory was also taught in the Language and History-Geography Faculty of the Ankara University on the order from Atatürk.

The theory was a part of a supposedly scientific endeavour to explain how the Turkish nation, with its national identity, civilisation and language persisted throughout the history. This was an attempt of proving that Turks are “a real nation” to the people of the country, before justifying the existence of the Turkish nation ideologically in the international community. Behar, in her detailed study of the Turkish Historical Thesis (1992), shows that a historical mythology is essential for the national identity. Hence these pseudo scientific theories should be understood in the framework of nation-building.

Mostly discussed aspect of the Sun-Language Theory was whether it was prepared to stop excessive purification, which at the end created a strange language, a “pure” Turkish. Zürcher argues that there was a very practical reason for the theory: “if all the words came from Turkish originally, there was no need to purge them” (1997: 198). However, the supporter of the theory had opposed to this claim. In the Third Language Congress, the General Secretary of TDK stated: “Those who think that the sun language was defended to protect the foreign words as they are Turkish in origin are deceived and wrong.”⁴⁶

With Atatürk’s death, Sun-Language Theory lost its master and faded.

Evaluation of the Politics of Language

Again, after a short story of the Language Revolution until 1938, an overall assessment of the language politics of the Kemalist period might be clearer. Four main aspects of this could be described.

In the first place, the politics of language are related with the modernisation and secularisation project of the new nation-state. The elimination of both the Arabic alphabet and the Arabic words was part of the plan of eliminating any Arabic influence, which had the Islamic and Eastern implications. Within the Westernising and modernising Turkey, there was no room for any social or cultural reference of the “old” life. Education system was modernised in 1924 with *Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu* (the Law of Unification of Education), by which the religious schools, the transmitters of the Islamic culture where Quran and Arabic were taught were closed. Turkish was made the language of education. Teaching Arabic and Persian, which was compulsory before was banned (Heyd, 1954: 23).

Another radical change in religious affairs concerning language was the translation of worshipping prayers and Quran into Turkish (Heyd, 1954: 22). In 1933 in Bursa, protesting this, reactionaries attempted a revolt, which was suppressed in a short time. Atatürk, after the protest, said: “It must be assured that the national language and national identity of the Turkish nation will be the essence and dominate in the entire life.” (cited in Ertop: 1963: 86). This was a clear and decided manifesto stating that the Turkish national identity would replace any other identity.

With the Alphabet and Language revolutions, not only the connection with the East and the Islam was destroyed but also the power of the religious elites, which were locally influential was threatened.

In the second place, language policies were also related with the official nationalism of the Kemalist elites. Ideologically the new State positioned itself in contrast with the Ottoman rule, which was claimed to be corrupted and dangerous for the Turkish nation. The whole debate on Turkish language had its revolutionary and nationalist way that was distinguished from both the attitudes of the Ottoman elite towards the language of the “nation” and the Ottoman language of the elites. In the First Language Congress, Atatürk particularly asked for presentations about “how Turkish was preserved in the people’s tongue during the Ottoman Empire in which the Ottoman intellectuals led to the corruption of the language and how the language revolution is aiming at the unification of the languages of intellectuals and the people in the new Turkey, which is a *state of the people*” (Ertop, 1963: 78). The nationalist rulers were well aware of how the common people were alien to the intellectual and ruling elites. To maintain the discursive populist approach, which would justify the existence of the Kemalist regime that was

acting in behalf of the nation, the comparisons between the “bad” Ottomans and the “good” nationalists of the Republic was essential. The Ottomans had been backward, traditional and Eastern compared to the progressive, modern and Western Republic, it was declared. An interesting comparison between the Ottoman and Turkish languages was made by Gültekin in 1935: “This language will be the language of the people, not the language of the poets who smell wine and bed, sleep and snuff and stinking of cheap oriental scents, dressed in robe and turban, carrying worry-beads, speaking with an Islamic clerical tongue” (1935: 15).⁴⁷

Ottoman Empire was always under attack by Atatürk. With respect to illiteracy he said: “But it is not our fault... It is the fault of those who bound the head of the Turk in chains, without understanding his *natural* disposition” (my emphasis, cited in Ahmad, 1993: 81). As naturalisation was mentioned above, here is another example. The new rulers were thus claimed to be those who can understand the *natural* dispositions of the nation. The revival of the Turkish civilisation would come with this cadre. Narratives about the language policies and the revolutions were woven into the nationalist discourse. Construction of the national identity, hence, had the linguistic nationalism as one its principal axes.

The characteristics of the nationalism were also prevailing in the language policies. Most striking one was the discursive tension between the praise of people’s Turkish and the attempt to Westernise and purify the language. On the one hand the idea of the “language of the people” was inherited from the birth of the Turkish nationalism and the gap between the language of the rulers and the common people should be diminished. The idea of that the language of the “people” should be used for any public relations, so that the education and national unity could be effective, was already in the government programs.⁴⁸ On the other hand, the language was seen as it needed intervention and it has to be revised in accord with Westernisation. It also had to be purified and become more Turkish, as an idea parallel to the changing face of nationalism into an ethnic one. And this tension would be summarised and attempted to be reconciled by Atatürk in a similar way in which the tension between the discourses of an honoured nation and of a society that has to be transformed and Westernised entirely was eased: “Our language will display itself with the new letters” (cited in Özgü, 1963: 24). Similarly he claimed “With its *own* script and its *native* intelligence, our nation will take its place by the side of the civilised world” (my emphases, cited in Ahmad, 1993: 81).

Heyd mentions about the three steps of the language revolutions (1954: 109-110), which corresponds one to one to the three stages of the development of nationalist ideas. The first period was

Tanzimat in which a discontent about the Ottoman language came about *and* the nationalism was introduced in the intellectual life. The second period was of Young Turks', in which an attempt for simplification of the written and official language took place *and* Turkish nationalism was experiencing its institutional and ideological consolidation. The last period was the Republican era, where a determined language policy both in alphabet and in structure was practiced *and* the Turkish nationalism became the official ideology of the State. This kind of relationship does not entail a dull and direct causality between language policies and nationalism, nevertheless, the case of Turkish is a good example how each foster the other.

In the third place, the politics of language was marked with the revolutionary spirit of the Kemalists. The nation-building and modernisation project was carried out by politicians and soldiers. As Zürcher state signifies, for example, those who were excitedly supporting the Sun-Language Theory were not the linguists but the politicians (1997: 199). The ruling elite also established an extensive network of institutional agencies, like People's Houses. These, as their mission was to substantiate the national unity as popular education units, were organising local committees for the studies and facilities in the are of language, besides others.⁴⁹ The high rate of illiteracy, an unorganised public sphere (Sunar, 1996: 142), the State's control of the mass media communication and its overarching hegemony surrounding the society were the leading factors contributed to the success of the Alphabet and Language Revolutions. Army was another essential establishment of the State, which was effective in the implementation of the reforms.⁵⁰ What was seen as an obstacle to the Revolution was relentlessly attacked and suppressed. A memory, narrated by Özerdim (1998: 27), presents the decisiveness of the Revolutionaries in the politics of language, as well: Right after the new Alphabet was announced, a telegraph was delivered to Atatürk, asking whether the manuscripts in the mosques, which were used as decorations, would be written in Turkish or in Arabic. Atatürk angrily said "Nobody can resist to the work that is done by the will of the nation", and Şükrü Kaya, the Minister of Interior Affairs, added "The language and script in Turkey is Turkish. Even Arabs cannot ask it to be Arabic".

In the last place, the language policies were supporting the nationalisation and homogenisation of the society in terms of cultural and ethnic identity. Another useful aspect of the policies on and about language for understanding its articulation into the nationalism is to investigate its attitude towards what was not-Turkish.

Another quotation from Atatürk reveals how he was keen on Turkish language as it should be the unique means of communication: “Those people who speak another language could, in a difficult situation, collaborate and take action against us with other people who speak other languages” (cited in Meiselas, 1997: 145). This sentence not only reflects the nightmares of the nationalists of the times when non-Muslim minorities were in close relations with the imperialist powers, but also illustrates how the nationalists were sensitive to any foreign element to threaten the new State. This idea would shape the hostile attitude towards the minorities throughout the Republican era.

Besides others, Kurds were the largest non-Turkish group, which deserves a detailed exploration. The space allowed here is not enough for such an investigation, nevertheless their situation should be summarised.

Kurds should be considered within a different framework apart from other minorities, not only because they exhibited a resistance having both religious and ethnic characteristics with their tribal social organisations (see van Bruinessen, 1995c), but also because their social change has been the mirror of Turkey’s.

The alliance between the Kurdish leaders and the Turkish nationalists was broken after the Independence War. The new Republic was undertaking an exclusive nationalisation project, on the way of which Kurds were a major obstacle with their large population and separate language.

In 1924, 5 fugitive Kurdish soldiers from the Turkish army reported to the English authorities in Iraq about the reasons of the Kurdish discontent: “The Turks forbade the institution of primary schools... They refused to allow the Kurds to learn their own language, and, since they did not wish to learn Turkish, education became practically non-existent... In addition they closed down pious institutions – the only source of education left to the Kurds. The word ‘Kurdistan’ has been deleted from all books of the education and Kurdish geographical names were replaced by the Turkish ones” (cited in Meiselas, 1997: 124, also in Mesut, 1992: 144). McDowall makes a similar argument of that the closure of the religious schools removed the last remaining source of education for most Kurds (1997: 192).

Enrolment for the primary schools in 1930’s was at the lowest percentage in the eastern and the southeastern regions according to the national figures; between 7.3 and 18.5 percentage.. Again, with the percentage of 2.4 and 5.8, the same region was exposed the lowest ratio in the country of the adults becoming literate in *Millet Mektepleri* [Folk Schools], between the years 1928 and 1935 (Webster, 1939:

222). McDowall reports that “only 215 of 4875 schools in Turkey were located in Kurdistan, providing education for 8400 pupils out of Turkey’s 382.000 enrolled” (1997: 192).

The reason that there was such a picture has two aspects. Without any order of priority; the first reason was that the central State was not willing to transform the region completely and always preferred to establish alliances with some tribes, by which the large number of members of the tribes would be under control. The second was the Kurdish resistance against any State intervention. Meiselas (1997: 147) quotes a news from the Times, dated 16 June 1937: “In his address to the [Parliament] yesterday, the Prime Minister, General İnönü, referred to recent disturbances among Kurds in the Dersim [a Kurdish city], about which no official announcement had previously been made. He explained that they had been due to the hostility of the local population towards the introduction of compulsory education and other reform and had become sufficiently serious to make it necessary for the Government to send troops to the affected area.”

The secularisation and nationalisation of the education system was threatening the traditional Kurdish social structures, which was mainly dominated by local religious leaders and landlords. Hence, the Kurdish revolts of the time needs a careful scrutiny, because the religious and ethnic discontents were both present.

Kurdish, both as a language and cultural-ethnic expression was banned in the last years of 1930’s, after a series of uprisings in the region (van Bruinessen, 1995b: 197). With the resettlements and forced migration into the cities in which Turkish population was in majority, the ratio of speaking Turkish increased; showing the state was successful in what it aimed (van Bruinessen, 1984).

The Turkish authorities were starting express their ideas representing how the official ideology was tending to an ethnic, sometimes racist nationalism:

“Only the Turkish nation is entitled to claim ethnic and national rights in this country. No other element has such right.” (by İsmet İnönü, cited in Entessar, 1992)

“We live in a country called Turkey the freest country in the world... I believe that the Turks must be the only lords, the only master of this country. Those who are not of pure Turkish stock can have only one right in this country, the right to be servants and slaves.” (by Mahmut Esat Bozkurt, Minister of Interior Affairs, on 16th September 1930, cited in Entessar, 1992)

Language Revolution was disturbing Kurdish cultural world in every sense. The Law on Surnames made it compulsory to choose a surname from Turkish words. Many Kurds were given surnames, such as *Öztürk* [Pure Turk], by the local registrars.

Another attack against the Kurds came again from the fronts of language. According to an English report, a Turkish general commented on the Kurds: “The racial differences between Kurds, Turcomans, Circassians and Armenians are unclear. To be an evidence, the Kurdish vocabulary exhibits many similarities with the Turkish dialect spoken in the region, and most of the words had been taken from other languages” (in 1931, cited in Mesut, 1992: 244). Beşikçi, too, wrote that after the Sun-Language Theory, Kurds were assumed as they forgot their Turkish origins and their mother language [Turkish] as a result of their insulation in high mountains and the influences of Persian language” (cited in Hassanpour, 1997: 54). The Kurdish discontent was claimed by the official discourse to be the result of the backwardness, traditionality and the tribal social organisation as a resistance against the modern government (see Yeğen, 1999). Contrasting was, hence, not with the “old” Ottomans, but also with the “backward” Kurds. This kind of exclusion is one which is thought to be legitimising the existence of the modern State and its nation. Such narratives were inseparable elements of the Turkish nationalism.

International Comparisons

Turkish language and Turkish nationalism are not exceptional cases when compared to other nation-building processes. Although, Turkey was introduced to the nationalist ideas by previously nationalised cultures, there are still similar patters in the way in which the nationality and language were considered to have a close relationship, language had been attempted to be nationalised and standardised, and the cultural homogenisation of the “nation” were sought through the hegemony of the official language.

Although it is impossible here to trace the relations of kinship of nationalisms, giving a very general picture of examples of language policies and how language was conceived as the essential “national” characteristic during the nation-state formations would guide to a clearer conclusion about the relationship between nationalism and language.

Latin, as the classical language, was of the literate and the church during the Medieval Europe. Writing down local languages, which facilitated the invention of alphabets, mainly began with missionaries of religions, especially Christianity.⁵¹ The connection of vernacular languages with nationality however is a modern idea. For the first time, Herder, Humboldt and Fichte, from the German romantic tradition, were “to advocate an ‘organic’ or ‘linguistic’ nationalism where culture –and, particularly language – were viewed as central to the essence or character of the nation” around the end of

the 18th century. (May, forthcoming). From the very beginning, as the idea of nation emerged, the dominant *etnies*, to use Anthony D. Smith's term, urged their own cultural peculiarities to be the core of the national identity, even in the so-called civic nationalism of France. Language had been recognised as the primary element of cultural identification. As Kedourie suggests, deriving from Fichte, the idea had two main conclusions, "first, that people who speak an original language are nations, and second, that nations must speak an original language" (1966: 67).

Along with these ideas, newly forming nation-states long before begin seeking linguistic standardisation and homogenisation. As discussed in the case of Turkey, these also had their profound effects in the construction of national identities and suppression of minorities. In Germany, *Allgemeiner Deutscher Sprachverein* was founded in 1885 for the elimination of foreign linguistic intrusions, which was enabled more effective with the inclusion of public offices to the campaign, The State actively supported the purist movement (Kessler, 1952: 120; Heyd, 1954: 108). In Italy, as early as 1582, *Accademia della Crusca* started to clean the Italian language of foreign elements (TDK, 1967: 281). In France, as a typical example, *Académie Française* since its establishment in 1635 was a "milestone for the corpus planning [of French]" (Schiffman, 1996: 85). Heyd quotes Barère of the French Revolution who said: "We have revolutionised the government, the laws, the habits, the customs, commerce and thought; let us also revolutionise the language which is their daily instrument" (1954: 21). The Science Academy in Hungary included the purification and developing language in its program in 1825. The language has been officially protected since. The priority for the new Israel State was the foundation of a Hebrew Language Society for the revival of the ancient language (TDK, 1967: 284-285). The decolonisation of Norway from Denmark, Billig argues, "was marked by a struggle for language. First, the state of Norway was to declare its own language, creating a spelling to match so-called Norwegian patterns of talking, rather than Danish ones" (1995: 33). Edwards mentions about the Spanish *Real Academia Española*, founded in 1713, emphasised the desire to clarify, purify and glorify the language. The author also gives similar examples from Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, Ethiopia, and Sweden (1985: 29).

Concerning the minorities, the linguistic boundaries and identities were always debated within the states and in the international arena. With respect to this, the claim that the official language is more advanced has always been prevailing against the minor local languages. May reminds (forthcoming), after the French Revolution, "regional languages were increasingly regarded as parochial vestiges of the ancien régime [and] in contrast French was seen as the embodiment of civilisation and progress". One of the

quotations May underlines is nearly identical in content with Atatürk's: "The unity of the Republic demands the unity of speech...Speech must be one, like the Republic".

Franco's fascism banned the Catalan language, not only as an attack on a political opponent, but also to dissolve the religious and cultural difference which was a thread against Madrid's authority. Irish had been discouraged, both by decrees and by exclusion from the education curriculum in Britain (May, forthcoming).

Hobsbawm states "language had begun since 1840s to play a significant role in international territorial conflicts". He exemplifies the dispute about Schleswig-Holstein between Denmark and Germany. The thought of that "natural social frontiers are determined by language" was also openly expressed in this period (1990: 98). In the post-Soviet and Yugoslavian experiences, to refer more recent occasions, status planning of the language of the alleged nation has been a priority, among Serbs, Croats, Czechs, and Slovakia. Ethnic resistances has always been included a linguistic factor, generally by rejecting the claim of the backwardness and pre-modernity of their language by the dominant states, as seen in Tamils, Kurds, Welsh, Irish, Basque and others.

Anderson and Lutz analyse the language claims in the recent ethnic resistance of East Timor, which was an effective facilitator of the differentiation and resistance movements (Anderson, 1993; Lutz, 1991). Fishman, in his extensive researches and analyses on the subject of language and linguistic policies from virtually every country, gives numerous examples of how language has been a major issue in ethnic and nationalist movements (see, Fishman, 1989 and 1997).

The situation in Iran might be most revealing concerning the language policies in Turkey. Iran went under a similar modernisation project in the same period as Turkey. Kia (1998) states that Persian nationalists waged a similar battle against the Shiite religious hierarchy, in which they believed that they would be successful only by emphasising Iran's pre-Islamic history, culture and language and by denying the existence of non-Persian identities. In the area of language an academy was established for an attempt clean the language of the Arabic words (Bosworth, 1965b: 122). As Perry observes, "[the language reform movements of Turkey and Iran] sparked an active interest in questions of the national language and language and society in general" (1985: 309).

Conclusion

To conclude, it is worth to emphasise once more that politics of language should be interpreted “as a substantive –rather than as a functional – hub of nationalism” (Fishman, 1989: 274). As long as the nationalism had modernity as its essential characteristic, so did the language policies and discourses about the national language. Languages as the constitutive of cultural spheres were favoured, transformed, purified, banned, or discouraged along with the construction of nation identities.

Officialisation of a language, national education systems and the extensive bureaucratic network of the nation-states established a linguistic hegemony, which was not only the means of ideological hegemony of the national narratives, but also the contributed to the elimination of any social and political categorisations other than that of nations.

The concept of nation presumes, besides others, a monolingual society, in which the common culture is produced and reproduced and the history is told with this standard language.

So, the Turkish Language Revolution was not an exception in this framework, though having its originalities, not only deriving from its particular historical background, but also for its objective of modernisation and Westernisation. Conceiving the Language Revolution as the constitutive of the nation-building process, and understanding how the Turkish national identity was historically and politically constructed might help us to reconsider the “nationness” of the populations of Turkey, thus might contribute to the transformation of the political and social spheres so that it could enjoy the existence of different cultural and linguistic groups. Deconstructing the official discourse, in which the Turkish nation was assumed to be an ahistorical and timeless and homogeneous entity is crucial in this sense. That is actually what was aimed in this study. True, such a claim necessitates a more complex and longer investigation, however, given the time and space we were allowed for the preparation of this essay, I tried to give a general explanation of how politics of language were vital in the nationalisation and modernisation project in Turkey.

Endnotes

¹ see Smith (1998)

² for a detailed discussion see May (forthcoming), especially chapters 1 and 2; and Eriksen (1993).

³ “First, there are nationalisms (notably in Africa and in South and Central America) which cannot propose an intrinsic relationship between the official language and the national *mythos*. The Argentine and Ivorian nations can for obvious reasons neither distinguish themselves from the Uruguayan and Senegalese nations, nor present their nationhood as an ancient community, through an emphasis on their national language. Their nationalisms can be effective as mobilising ideologies no less. Secondly, there are many examples of ethnic groups, which have retained important aspects of their cultural distinctiveness after losing their original language and adopting that of dominant linguistic groups. A good example could be the Indian diaspora populations in Guyana, Trinidad and Mauritius. These groups, the large majority of whom have switched from Bhojpuri to the local English or French lexicon creole, remain strongly committed to their Indian identities.” (1991)

⁴ Assuming the first periodisation in fact corresponds to a nationalist perspective in the sense that this idea is always coupled with the thought of rejecting the Ottoman history as the “evil” in contrast with the Republican period which is claimed to be modern, Western and independent.

⁵ also see, Bosworth (1965a), Bosworth (1965b: 117-118).

⁶ *Tanzimat* (reformation) is not only the name of the political changes introduced by the *Tanzimat-ı Hayriye* (Beneficial or Propitious Reforms) of 1839, but also of the era until 1871.

⁷ for the detailed analyses of the Ottoman Language and its condition see Karal (1978); Lewis (1999), chapter “Ottoman Turkish” (pp. 5-26); Heyd (1954), Introduction (pp. 9-18); Yücel (1982: 24); Bosworth (1965a); and Şimşir (1992).

⁸ The Law of Municipalities, which was passed next year also had the same condition for those to be employed (Turan, 1998: 13-14).

⁹ With respect to the distinction of the languages of the elites and the Turkish community, two points should be indicated. First is that it should not be forgotten that the Turkish Muslims were not the only members of the Ottoman population. Noting that the Ottoman Turkish was far from being the language of the common people, discursively takes for granted that it was all about Turks in the Ottoman Empire, which is not right. Second, as Belge informs rightly, the gap between the languages of the elites and the Turkish people should not be interpreted as the elites employed Arabic and Persian words and grammatical rules into their language while the “common people” were resisting against this linguistic invasion. Belge states that the main reason for the less “pollution” of the Turks’ language is that the educational facilities were not reaching down to those people, who were mainly peasants (Belge, 1983: 2589).

¹⁰ The traditional shadow theatre, *Karagöz*, is a good example in which this gap is represented with irony, where Karagöz speaks Turkish and his friend *Hacivat* speaks Ottoman. The play is based on the jokes and misunderstandings of *Karagöz*. See Bosworth (1965a: 62), Lewis (1999: 8), and Dilaçar (1962: 18). For how *Karagöz* was used as an ideological apparatus, delivering revolutionary messages, after the Republic was established see (Erdoğan, 1998). This article presents a comprehensible account of how popular elements were utilised for ideological purposes.

¹¹ Feroz Ahmad states that “in the late Ottoman Empire the very term ‘Turk’ was a term of derision used for the unsophisticated and coarse peasant, tribesman and small-town-dweller.” It was basically Europeans who referred the Empire and the people as Turkey and Turks. (1993: 78) The name of the country of *Türkiye*, in Turkish comes from Italian *Turchia*. Bernard Lewis also argues similarly. (1961: 1-2), also see Heyd (1954: 10).

¹² Paçacıoğlu also denotes that, before Münif Paşa, a French writer, Volney (1757-1820), recommended Turkish to be written in Latin alphabet, in his book “L’Alphabet Européen Appiliqué Aux Langues Asiatiques”.

¹³ An interesting point about the word intellectual is that it is met by the word *aydın* (enlightened) in Turkish more than a more literate translation *entellektüel*. The idea of enlightenment and the mission of intellectuals are expressed in a single word.

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- ¹⁴ In this sense, a distinction should be made between the situation in the Ottoman Empire and the discussion of print-capitalism of Benedict Anderson (1991). In the Ottoman Empire the publishing house was initially under the control of the central State and first attempts to utilise printed work came from the rulers, as the first newspaper in İstanbul was an official one. On the other hand, Anderson has a more economic emphasis in his argument. Nevertheless, during and after the *Tanzimat*, an expanding civil publishing facility contributed to the development of nationalist ideas, and deserves much more research than it had been received so far.
- ¹⁵ “*Frenk*” basically used for naming the Europeans in general and French in particular.
- ¹⁶ See Şimşir (1992: 30-38).
- ¹⁷ Journalist Georges-Gaulis (1999) observes the nationalists in İstanbul in 1919, and presents an interesting description from a foreigner’s eye, see especially pp. 23-69.
- ¹⁸ The amount of information about the “social history” of the revolution, nevertheless, is too tiny. The scarcity of these kind of resources might result from that it was not documented at the time or what was written was destroyed. How the majority of the population in the provinces met these changes which aimed at their traditional social lives, for example, is an important question to seek for its answer which is crucial in explaining how this revolution from above reached a relative success and how the nationalism of the state dominated the society and internalised. The historical development of the Turkish nationalism is a partial story unless if it is unanswered how the people were made into a “nation”.
- ¹⁹ Another interesting word is *çağdaş*, which literally means contemporary, but has long been used as a synonym of modern. “*Çağdaşlığın gereklerine uymak*” (to follow the necessities of the contemporariness/modernity) was the motto of the Turkish nationalism.
- ²⁰ This discussion is also related with sociology and history as academic disciplines, with regard to the standpoint of the researcher. It is crucial to see how official histories are written, as in the case study of Turkey, where historians and ruling elites not only wrote such a history of the “nation” because they pragmatically found it utilisable, but also as they believed in that. Thus for a critical historical sociology, one should have concerns about which resources had been utilised for an official history, what were or are the other alternative explanations and how the struggle for power took place between these rival histories.
- ²¹ The party that is mentioned is the *Cumhuriyetçi Halk Partisi* (Republican Peoples Party) that ruled until 1950, which was also the only political party until 1945, with the exception of several attempts to shift to multi party politics which all failed very soon.
- ²² James Mayall states that populist nationalism is one of the three strands of nationalist thought that can be identified in many third world countries. The others are, according to him, radical and reformist nationalisms, which have different approaches to the international and capitalist world orders. Populist nationalism, in his words, “manifests itself in ethnic agitation... It is populist in that it seeks to mobilise a community, which is perceived to be hard done by in the existing political and economic dispensation (either because of relative deprivation or lack of proper reward). Populists exploit the political potential inherent in a shared folk culture, religion or ethnic identity and use whatever arguments are ready to hand without resort to anymore general intellectual defence” (Mayall, 1990: 128)
- ²³ Zürcher makes a similar statement in (1997: 172).
- ²⁴ First one was the death of up to one million Armenians, during their forced relocation from their mainland on the East of Anatolia to the Syrian deserts. This relocation was carried out between 1915-1916, during the Ottoman-Russian War by the CUP government, due to –as the Government announced then, and Turkish State defends now- the potential of the betrayal of the Armenians by allying with the Orthodox Christian Russian army against the Ottomans. The Armenian Relocation is still a disputable international issue, whether the CUP committed genocide against Armenians or it was a warfare necessity. There is a great discrepancy about the numbers of the losses, while Turkish historians and their supporters give a low number of 200.000, while Armenian supporters estimate, sometimes ten times higher (Zürcher, 1997: 120). Kurds’ playing an important role in the deaths of Armenians during the deportation, which was taken as a critical factor in allying with the Muslim Turks during the Independence War, in fear of that the Armenians would be back if the Christians would dominate Anatolia. (see Pekdemir, 1997, volume 2).

In 1919 Armenian Republic of USSR reported that in 1914 there had been 193.000 Armenians in Turkey-in-Europe and 1.403.000 in Turkey-in-Asia (approximately current map) (Webster, 1939: 50; Metz, 1995). 1927 census gives the number of only 64.745 people who had Armenian as their mother language.

On the side of the Greeks, the loss of the population began with the separation of Greece from the Empire and the Balkan wars. During and after the Ottoman-Russian war, thousands of Pontus Greeks were relocated from their homeland on the shores of the Black Sea into the inlands of Anatolia. The declaration of the formation of a Greek Pontus State in the region after the Russian invasion was also effective in this relocation. Many of them died on the mountains during the winter. The rest fled to Greece. Another massive migration took place with the Exchange of Populations agreed on by the Greek and Turkish governments right after the Treaty of Lausanne. The plan covered the Greeks in the Black Sea Region and the Turkish speaking Greeks in Karaman, Central Anatolia. The number of Muslims migrated from Greece to Turkey was around 600.000. The overall population of Greeks that migrated to Greece from the beginning was between 1.200.000 and 1.500.000 (Aktar, 2000b: 17; Webster, 1939: 50; Zürcher, 1997: 171).

Ladas states that before the war there were 600.000 Greeks in Turkey-in-Europe, 1.500.000 to 1.750.000 in Turkey-in-Asia (cited in Webster, 1939: 50). The estimated number of Greeks who were permitted under the provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne to remain in Turkey following the Population Exchange was 200,000 (Metz, 1995). In 1927 census, it was found to be that there were around 120.000 Greeks according to their mother tongue.

It was estimated that in Asia Minor, Kurdistan and Armenia, there were around 250.000 Jews by 1896. In 1923, Dr. Rıza Nur, a member of the Parliament in Ankara said that there were Jews only in İstanbul, with a number of 30.000 (cited in Aktar, 2000b: 42). However, Metz states that “during the first half of the twentieth century, the Jewish population remained relatively stable at around 90,000” (Metz, 1995). The number given by the 1927 census seems more plausible, 68.900.

²⁵ The complete article is as the following:

Article 88: The word “Turk”, as a political term, shall be understood to include all citizens of the Turkish Republic, without distinction of, or reference to, race or religion. Every child born in Turkey, or in a foreign land of a Turkish father; any person whose father is a foreigner established in Turkey, who resides in Turkey, and who chooses upon attaining the age of twenty to become a Turkish subject; and any individual who acquires Turkish nationality by naturalisation in conformity with the law, is a Turk. Turkish citizenship may be forfeited or lost in certain circumstances specified by law.

(complete Constitution with the amendments until 1938 could be found in Webster, 1939).

²⁶ The complete program of the Party is in Webster (1939).

²⁷ For a journalistic account of the Sheikh Said’s Revolt and the discussion within the State circles about the preparation of the *Takrir-i Sükun* Law, see Tokar (1998). For an academic discussion of the Revolt see van Bruinessen (1995c).

²⁸ The establishment of the *Türk Ocakları* goes back to 1912. The objective of the organisation was to “improve the national traits, scientific, economical and social statuses of Turks and to labour for the accomplishments of the race and the language”. In a short period of time, the organisation led the extension of Turkish nationalist discourse. It had an organic relationship with the CUP (see Yeğen, 1999: 173-180). *Halkevleri* were established replacing the *Türk Ocakları* in 1931, under the RPP in the aim of re-establish the relationship of the State with the citizens and work for the internalisation of the Revolution. (see Yeğen, 1999: 180-188)

²⁹ The strengthening accent on Turkishness might also be referred as a racist tendency. As mentioned in the second section, the nationalist ideas were triggered mainly by the works of European Turkologists in the 1800s. Development of racist ideas began at that time. After the Republic, the rise of European fascism was influential in Turkey, during the 1930s and 1940s. The attempts to explain the origins of the Turkish nation with the Turkish History Thesis and of the Turkish language with the Sun-Language Theory were containing racist inclinations, as well. However, as Yeğen argues, the ideal of populism was effective in precluding the Turkish nationalism to turn into a racist path. Nevertheless, the unclear definitions of the nation, citizenship and Turkishness resulted in that the “ghost” of racism is sometimes revisited, though rarely (1999: 97). For detailed studies of racism in Turkish nationalism see Özdoğan (1996) and Ağaoğulları (1987)

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- ³⁰ from Başvekalet İstatistik Umum Müdürlüğü [Prime Ministry Directorate General of Statistics], publication no. 77, pp. 160-161, quoted in Webster, p. 48. It is also worth to point out that statistics, which were nearly impossible to find before, begin to appear gradually after the declaration of Republic. Being one of the most effective tools for the nation-states in order to sort out, measure, calculate, classify and act upon the population and the economics, statistics seems to have its place in the new nation-state, Republic of Turkey.
- ³¹ Related to the officialisation of Turkish; on the April 10th, 1926, the Parliament passed a law, which made the use of Turkish compulsory in all companies in any transaction, contract, accounting and communication. The corporations with foreign investments would also use Turkish with their relations with Turks and in their official connections (Aktar, 2000a: 117). The 1931 program of RPP required “being speaking Turkish and affirming Turkish culture” for the membership to the Party (cited from Tunçay in Yeğen, 1999: 95).
- ³² The 1926 congress of the *Türk Ocakları* severely criticised those who speaking languages other than Turkish and demanded from the government to penalise those who insist on that. 1927 congress of the organisation was also overwhelmed with the discussion of Turkish speaking. A delegate from Mardin, mainly a Kurdish and Arab city, stated that they had difficulties in “persuading Kurds for speaking Turkish”. Therefore, the organisation decided to have a closer interest in the Kurdish region and its mission was set as “to help the physical and intellectual development of the Turkish youth, in the regions other than the east of Anatolia, and to realise the national ideal by imposing Turkish culture and language in the eastern regions” (Yeğen, 1999: 177-178).
- ³³ One reason for this decrease in number was the Exchange of Populations agreed after the Treaty of Lausanne, between Turkey and Greece. In addition to that, concerning the language, another interesting detail is that most of the Muslims that migrated to Turkey did not know Turkish, and many insisted on speaking Greek even after they came. Another useful study might be to investigate how these people were handled by the local and central authorities and how they became speaking Turkish. This would, I assume, illustrate another aspect of the local history of the nation-building, since this population was also from “us” being Muslim, but at the same time they were not, because they were not speaking Turkish.
- ³⁴ In 1906, Mustafa Kemal, who was then an officer in the army, told the Bulgarian Turkologist Manolof that in order to pass into the Western civilisation, adaptation of a Latin based alphabet is inevitable. Also in the to-do list that he dictated to Mazhar Müfit (Kansu) during the Erzurum Congress in 1919, to accept the Latin alphabet was the fifth article (both cited in Paçacıoğlu, 1990: 21). When he was suggested to change the alphabet in 1923, he was thinking that it was too early for such an attempt. (for other cases see Ertop, 1963: 64)
- ³⁵ In these schools, more than 1.300.000 people received their certificates for their success until 1935. see Albayrak (1994) and İnan (1979).
- ³⁶ see Ahmad (1993: 82-83). For a personal account of the organisation and the education of the “educators”, see Balkar (1998).
- ³⁷ He served as one of the successful generals in the Independence War. He was the Prime Minister for most of the time until Atatürk’s death, and the second President after him. He was the leader of the Republican Peoples’ Party until 1970s. He had been one of those who did not have faith in the change of the Alphabet and was thinking that the change would weaken the state mechanism. However he became one of the advocates of the Alphabet change.
- ³⁸ The circulation of the newspapers fell with the adaptation of the Latin alphabet, however the government subsidised some of them. Eventually the circulation began to rise again and soon went well beyond the old sales limits of papers in Arabic letters (Yalman, 1956: 176).
- ³⁹ An interesting note is about one of the supporters of the Language Revolution, Agop Dilaçar. The writer was of Armenian origin. His surname might be translated as “one who uncovers the language”. He has written extensively on the language reform. While he was frequently referred as Agop Dilaçar in the articles of other writers, he preferred to sign his article as “A. Dilaçar”, not writing his first name, which reveals his Armenian origins. I could not find a direct source about the subject. See Dilaçar (1962, 1963, 1969, and 1974).
- ⁴⁰ for a similar statement for the historians working for the Turkish history thesis see Behar (1992: 13).

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- ⁴¹ for detailed studies on Ziya Gökalp and language see Timurtaş (1965), Cunbur (1969) and Öztürk (1952).
- ⁴² for a discussion on the İstanbul dialect in the First Language Congress, see Hatiboğlu (1963: 17).
- ⁴³ The search for new or “original” words from the “origins” of Turks were fed by the Turkish Historical Thesis, which was claiming that the Turks were a nation of ancient history born in the Central Asia, from where all the civilisations spread.
- ⁴⁴ For Atatürk’s other speeches in which he used pure Turkish, see (Ertop, 1963: 83)
- ⁴⁵ The Theory has been discussed extensively since it was launched. About how the theory was supported or rejected and how foreign words were proved to be Turkish in origin see Zürcher (1989), Dilaçar (1963), Ertop (1963)
- ⁴⁶ However most authors agree on that, whether this was aimed or not, purist studies came to a halt after the Theory. For discussions see , Zürcher (1989), Yücel (1982: 37), Bosworth (1965b: 121), Ertop (1963: 89), Belge (1983: 2601).
- ⁴⁷ I am indebted to Kumru Toktamış for the translation. It is worth to note that this quotation is from a speech made in Samsun, a northern province, in a local meeting organised by the *Halkevi* (People’s House) Language, Literature and History Division. There were many local meetings, seminars and conferences organised by the local *Halkevi* to propagandise the Revolution. The House’s were also the local centres where the people were aimed to be integrated into the nationalisation and modernisation project. For some other books by Peoples’ House on language see Dokuzoğuz (1934), Gültekin (1935), Aksoy (1937), and German (1938).
- ⁴⁸ The 1923 program of the fourth government had the phrase “books are to be written for the education of the people, in the language of the people” (cited in Kantarcıoğlu, 1998: 32).
- ⁴⁹ It was reported that the branch in Mardin, mentioned in the note 32, was so successful in teaching Turkish to the people. (Yeğen, 1999: 182-183)
- ⁵⁰ Perry also indicates that, “as in the case of social and political reforms, the impetus for concerted government action in the field of language came initially from the military”. After the Independence War, the needs of the army were seen as paramount. The modernisation of the hardware, “together with the terminology and simplified language for the manuals. Thus certain Arabic loanwords having to do with warfare, transportation and administration were definitely replaced by Turkish terms even before the official language reform institutions came into existence” (Perry, 1985: 297). Also see Erkilet (1967).
- ⁵¹ Even the some of the very early alphabets of the Turkic tribes were invented by Christian missionaries. See Şimşir (1992).
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