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Turkish in the European Union – Macro and Micro Perspectives

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1. Introduction

The growing importance of Turkish as a European language can be viewed from a macro or from a micro perspective. In contrast to the speakers of autochthonous languages the citizens of Turkish origin, although they form a rather large group, do not relate with their language to a fixed region inside its territory, but rather to Turkey. Their identity as Turkish community is defined locally, independent from their current nationality. The brand of Turkish they speak also evolves in a local context, although “Istanbul” Turkish in all cases remains their point of reference for a standard. In our paper we propose to give a short overview of these issues.

2. Turkish inhabitants in the European Union

Numerically, nowadays Turkish in the EU can be characterised as a minority language with a sizeable amount of speakers (cf. table 1). In fact, among the migrant groups they form the largest.

| EU countries | Inhabitants of Turkish origin |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| Belgium | 88,302 |
| Denmark | 34,658 |
| Germany | 1,918,395 |
| Greece | 3,066 |
| Spain | 301 |
| France | 197,712 |
| Italy | 3,656 |
| The Netherlands | 202,618 |
| Portugal | 65 |
| Finland | 995 |
| Sweden | 23,649 |
| Great Britain | 41,000 |
| Total | 2,514,417 |

Table 1. Official numbers of inhabitants of Turkish origin in twelve European Union Countries, January 1994, based on the nationality criterion (EuroStat 1997)

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The nationality criterion is of course imprecise. On the one hand speakers are missing from the statistics who have adopted the nationality of the host country (but also, e.g., Cypriote Turks living in Great Britain). On the other hand speakers of minority languages in Turkey itself are not accounted for (roughly estimated 10-15% of Turkish nationals).

These figures do not automatically imply a proportional importance of the language, since the Turks live widely dispersed over and have no regional basis of origin inside EU territory. Also, the fact that Turkey is not a member state of the EU has adverse effects on the dynamics of its institutionalisation. As a case in point, there are very few schools for translators that include Turkish in their package. Most likely, this would drastically change the moment Turkey would become a member. *Qualitate qua* at the EU institutions such as the Parliament, no Turkish translators are employed and there seems to be a remarkable spill-over effect of this at the Council of Europe, where the official status of Turkish seems to lag behind in the light of its population, losing out to, e.g., Spanish and Russian. At least, that is the complaint of one of the translators, Cevdet Akçalı in an article that appeared in *Yenişafak Gazetesi* (September 2001), entitled *Avrupa'nın ikinci büyük dili Türkçe ve onun zavallı hali* ("The sorrowful state of Turkish, second largest language of Europe").

However, the overall situation is not that dramatic. Progress is made especially in the field of education policy. It is recognised by many nowadays, that the nationality of populations and in particular, of school populations is not the best measure to assess the needs of multilingual groups.

3. The vitality of Turkish at home: the case study of The Hague

With a view to the nationality criterion home language use is a complementary or alternative criterion of ethnic identity. Given the relevance of the home language criterion in an educational context, a substantial number of language surveys have been carried out in the Netherlands (see Broeder & Extra 1999). An important target area was the city of The Hague, where 13.703 secondary school children participated in a language survey in 1997 (see Aarssen, Broeder & Extra 1998, 2001). Besides, in the same city 27.900 primary school pupils were included in a survey executed in 1999 (see Extra et al. 2001).

For each pupil a short questionnaire was administered orally and individually by the teacher. First the following screening question was asked:

1. *Is any language other than Dutch ever used in your home?*
Only for those children who gave an affirmative answer additional questions were asked for the following language profile dimensions:
2. Language variety: *Which other language(s) is/are used in your home next or in addition to Dutch?*
3. Language proficiency: *Which language can you understand/speak/read/write?*
4. Language choice: *Which language do you mostly speak with your mother/ father/ elder brother(s) or sister(s)/ younger brother(s) or sister(s)?*

5. Language dominance: *Which language do you speak best?*
6. Language preference: *Which language do you like to speak most?*

The first important outcome of the survey was that at the homes of 13.648 out of 27.900 primary school pupils (i.e., 49%) another language was in use instead of, or apart from, Dutch. In addition in the homes of 5.724 out of 13.703 secondary school pupils (i.e., 42%) another language was in use instead of or apart from Dutch. All in all, more than 88 different home languages, originating from all continents, could be traced and classified. In the top ten of the languages mentioned most frequently Turkish holds the first positions (n=4.789), closely followed by Hindustani (n=3.620), Berber (n=2.769), Arabic (n=2.740) and English (n=2.170). The results on home language use in relation to country of birth among Turkish children in the city of The Hague is presented in Table 2.

| <i>country of birth</i> | <i>total of pupils</i> | <i>only Dutch at home</i> | | <i>own language (only or besides Dutch)</i> | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|-----|---|-----|
| (all speakers of community language) | | | | | |
| The Netherlands | 27.120 | 13.436 | 50% | 13.684 | 50% |
| other country | 5.890 | 419 | 7% | 5.471 | 93% |
| (speakers of Turkish) | | | | | |
| The Netherlands | 3.705 | 202 | 5% | 3.503 | 95% |
| Turkey | 1.408 | 39 | 3% | 1.369 | 97% |

Table 2. Home language use of children from community language groups in The Hague, first and second generations

There is an effect pointing to language shift over generations (those born in The Netherlands use relatively more Dutch at home). However, as is obvious from the table, this effect is (much) smaller for Turkish, than it is in the case of other community languages.

On the basis of the language profile dimensions mentioned before, a language vitality index has been composed for the ten most frequently mentioned home languages in The Hague Language Survey . The relevant parameters for the index are:

- language proficiency: the language is *understood* by the children;
- language choice: the language is *often/always* used with the *mother*;
- language dominance: the language is *best* spoken;
- language preference: the language is *most* preferred to be spoken

The outcomes (with scores in %) are presented in Table 3.

| Language Group | Language Proficiency | Language Choice | Language Dominance | Language Preference | Language Vitality |
|------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Turkish (n=4.789) | | | | | |
| Urdu (n=547) | 96 | 86 | 56 | 50 | 72 |
| Berber (n=2.769) | 94 | 80 | 46 | 51 | 68 |
| Papiamentu (n=893) | 94 | 83 | 43 | 42 | 66 |
| Arabic (n=2.740) | 87 | 58 | 40 | 46 | 58 |
| Kurdish (n=678) | 89 | 60 | 38 | 42 | 57 |
| Spanish (n=588) | 85 | 58 | 31 | 31 | 51 |
| Hindi (n=3.620) | 84 | 53 | 25 | 36 | 51 |
| English (n=2.170) | 89 | 40 | 18 | 30 | 44 |
| Sranan Tongo (n=1.085) | 83 | 29 | 21 | 37 | 42 |
| | 68 | 13 | 15 | 18 | 37 |

Table 3. Language vitality index (in %) derived from four language profile dimensions for children from community languages in The Hague.

The resulting language vitality index is obviously arbitrary in the sense that different language dimensions are equally weighted. None of the home languages need to compete strongly with other languages than Dutch. Arabic and Berber are relatively often used together as home languages within Moroccan families. English functions relatively often as a *lingua franca* in a context in which also other languages are used at home. Literacy is a skill that is typically acquired and enhanced in a school context. It has a relatively weak status compared to oral skills in the home languages. The highest percentages of children who can read in their home language have been found for Turkish (56%), Chinese (55%) and English (51%). Moreover, reliable data on home language use should be considered as prerequisites for answering basic policy questions about home language instruction. Periodically collected home language data amongst school children would provide the basis for a dynamic language policy and for intergenerational trend studies on processes of language maintenance and language shift (cf. Broeder & Extra 1999).

4. The vitality of Turkish at school

Another development bolstering the presence and status of Turkish in the EU is the introduction of Turkish as a foreign language at high schools as a subject in various countries, including some with traditionally quite different policies such as The Netherlands and Bavaria.

Recently Broeder & Extra (1999) carried out a comparative study of immigrant minority language instruction in six Western European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, The Netherlands and Sweden). The comparison includes arguments and objectives, target groups and enrolment and implementation and organization of the pertinent language instruction. Broeder & Extra (1999) report remarkable differences in

the status of IMLI in primary and secondary education. In primary education IMLI (i.e. Turkish) is generally not part of the ‘regular’ or ‘national’ curriculum and, consequently, it tends to become a negotiable entity in a complex and often opaque interplay of forces by several actors, in contrast with other curricular subjects. The higher status of IMLI (i.e. Turkish) in secondary education is largely due to the fact that instruction in one or more languages other than the national standard language is a traditional and regular component of the (optional) school curriculum. Within secondary education, however, IMLI (i.e. Turkish) must compete with languages that, in their turn have a higher status or a longer tradition. Broeder & Extra (1999) discuss a hierarchy of languages in secondary education that is schematically given in table 5 in descending order of status (1-5).

| | English | French German | Danish Dutch Swedish | Finnish Greek Italian Portuguese Spanish | Arabic Turkish | Berber Kurdish |
|--|---------|------------------|----------------------------|--|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Often compulsory subject in the curriculum | XXXX | | | | | |
| 2. Often optional subject as ‘second foreign language’ | | XXXX | | | | |
| 3. National language EU country often supported positive action | XXXX | XXXX | XXXX | XXXX | | |
| 4. Immigrant minority languages, often offered to immigrant minority pupils only | | | | XXXX | XXXX | |
| 5. Rarely offered non-codified immigrant minority languages | | | | | | XXXX |

Table 5. Hierarchy of languages in secondary education, in descending order of status (source: Broeder & Extra 1999).

In the Netherlands, the cause of Turkish and other languages, at secondary schools is boosted by three factors: Firstly, the language can be chosen as a subject for the final examination at all levels (schools for vocational training since 1994; high schools 2000; gymnasium 2001). Secondly, teaching materials have been and are being developed, subsidised by the government, separately both for pupils with a Turkish background and for those starting from a zero level (making it possible for pupils without a Turkish background to participate). Thirdly, a teachers’ seminar has been established in Rotterdam in 1988; certificates for teaching in the upper grades of the gymnasium can

be issued by the teachers' training college at the University of Leiden. Even if so far the participation of autochthonous pupils at the Turkish lessons might be minimal, the Turkish pupils who take the examinations get credit for their knowledge of their own language.

5. *The Turkish language varieties*

In the fairly liberal surrounding in which Turkish is submersed in various countries of the EU, the status and vitality is more defined by in-group attitudes than by those of the majority (cf. Boeschoten 1998). There are two essential factors here: Firstly, there is the relationship with the standard. The speakers feel insecure about their language, because they have not much exposure to the standard language. Although their Turkish is still basically in place, their lexical knowledge is limited. In other words, they have an exaggeratedly low opinion about their own proficiency and hence of their own brand of Turkish. On an entirely different level, it can be noted that as element of self-identification Turkish feels strong competition of (elements of) Islam as the own religion. To take one example: It can be generally observed that Turkish university students generally keep the fast as a form of group solidarity, much more so than their fathers did. The fact that they can do it in wintertime, instead of the rather northern summer of twenty years ago the first generation had to cope with, may play a role in this curious phenomenon. Thus, Turkish mainly functions as a vernacular in local networks. Migrant Turkish might have some features in common, but also differs from place to place. The construct of "the Turkish community in –say- Germany does not share one common homogeneous language. Local brands of Turkish are also shaped in relationship with local majorities (NL, Germany, France). Research so far (see, e.g. Backus 1996) seems to indicate that in this respect the social settings are more important than the structural properties of the majority language.

6. *Perspective*

In this contribution we have addressed the general situation in the EU and offered some insight into the practice of Turkish language teaching in the Netherlands. In the different countries of the EU the picture will vary on this point, but there are strong common tendencies, as you will gather from other contributions in this volume. It will be good if the specialists and the policy makers in the different European countries will keep in close contact on the issue and the conference in Ankara that resulted in the present volume with its proceeding has been most helpful in this respect.

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