

Signboards in the City Life and Multilingualism¹

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Abstract

The rapid and radical developments in the technology, socio-cultural and scientific research have increased the interactions among the languages in recent years. Due to the fact that these developments are originated especially from America and England, English has become a world language. Taking this reality into consideration, the detection of loanwords entering into a language and the importance of the language purification from these words comes to the fore. There is no language which derives words by only benefiting from its own sources in the world. This study is aimed to investigate the signs used in Osmaniye urban life and scrutinize in terms of multilingualism. It is also investigated that words used in signs have different meaning in Turkish language or meaning in the target language. In this study, fieldwork and photography technique are used. The photographs signs in Osmaniye main districts were taken and by using the content analysis, the choice of words are derived from the Turkish language or English, Arabic and Persian. The findings show that there are numerous words deriving from English language into the Turkish language and these words are widely used in the signs by Osmaniye tradesman. Some words are directly derived from English language and some of them can be seen as in the form of made-up words formed by combining Turkish and English languages. In conclusion, it is observed that the Turkish language has been invaded by numerous foreign words and the language itself is in the process of losing a great amount of its vocabulary items. It can also be stated that besides the loanwords from English language, there are also a great deal of made-up words formed by combining Turkish and English words. Therefore, necessary precautions should immediately be taken and TDK (Turkish Language Society) should play a much more effective role in the resolution of the issue. Furthermore, the media should pay more attention to the use of Turkish language and create awareness among the public about the proper use of the Turkish language.

Keywords: City Life, Osmaniye, Signboards, Words, Multilingualism

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Introduction

No language in the world is able to produce vocabulary by drawing only on its own resources. According to Quirk and Stein (1990), a constant interaction among people results in an interaction among languages. As humans are social beings, they have contacted with each other throughout the history due to reasons such as wars, discoveries, inventions, neighborhood relations and marriages. Thus, they have naturally been influenced by each other's cultures and languages.

Accordingly, the close relationship between language and identity cannot be ignored. The more successfully a language is used, the more stable the identity is established. On the other hand, life consists of encounters, confrontations and transactions among identities both at individual and social scales. On encountering another identity, an individual may consider it strong and feel admiration towards it, question why the new identity is at a better condition, and believe that one must be as good as this new identity in order to cope with it. In other words, an individual may generally be influenced by the new identity and the new culture, which results in imitating the speech and attitudes. However, while pretending to be someone else, one may forget about oneself and be estranged from the self.

The most striking feature of the living languages is that they tend to change constantly. As these changes in languages are slight and take place in time, the modifications cannot be noticed immediately or observed directly. However, they could be noticed in time, or when their impacts increase. Today, the increasing number of words entering into our language from English with each passing day, and the name of the shops at shopping centers, which are part of our daily lives, and even advertisements being in English pose an alarming situation.

It is clear that it is impossible for an individual or a society to keep oneself away from other individuals or societies. A conscious individual or a society is able to develop only through opening its doors to different cultures and opinions. However, in doing this, the acquisitions from other individuals or societies must be harmonized into the self-culture. As a result of the inter-lingual interaction, it is not a new phenomenon that Turkish has 'transferred' words from other languages. Acquisitions of foreign elements into Turkish started with the acquisitions from Arabic and Farsi centuries ago, and continued with acquisitions of various language elements- necessary or not, without making any distinctions- from French in spoken and written language as well as Italian and German during the Ottoman Empire in line with the Westernization movement, and finally the fact that scientific, commercial and technological developments in the 20th century took place in the USA and the UK, and the widespread use of information technology all around the world in a short time led to the transfer of English words into Turkish (Ersoylu, 2009).

As language is one of the most important features making a community into a nation, it is impossible that a language making a lot of adaptations from other languages can survive.

Gökalp (1976:25) asserts that culture and civilization are different concepts. He asserts that culture is national, whereas civilization is international.

Baltacıoğlu (1972:21,357) asserts that culture and civilization, conscience and reason, being Turkish and European have been intermingled since *Tanzimat* Reform Era. Sociology must separate realities of different kind from each other sharply. Culture is national, whereas civilization is international.

Topçu (1961:196) states that Western mimicry started because culture and civilization were intermingled. Civilization is a set of technical works of art produced by human beings through working. On the other hand, culture is a set of value judgments of a society generated within

its own history. They are related to science, art, ethics and religion. Western technique has reached us drop by drop. Technique is the juice leaking from the culture, and the fruit grown in a culture tree. However, our culture has not created its own technique. We have taken it from the West in deposit sacks, and have not experienced the taste of creating it (Topçu, 1970:15).

Having realized the importance of the issue, the founder of Modern Turkish Republic, Atatürk was very sensitive to the Turkish language. One of the problems that he gave priority when founding the Turkish Republic was to restore Turkish back to its self-identity. The following quotes reveal how much attention he gave to the Turkish language.

Atatürk's opinions about language:

'The link between national feelings and language is very strong. Having a national and rich language has great impacts on the development of national feelings. The Turkish language is one of the richest languages, yet needs processing consciously. Turkish nation knowing how to protect its country and high liberty must save its language from the oppression of the other foreign languages.'

'The Turkish language is the most beautiful, the richest and the easiest language in the world. Therefore, every Turk loves this language and works to enhance it. The Turkish language is a holy treasure for the Turkish nation during the times of endless misfortunes because the Turkish nation sees that moral values, traditions, memories, interests, and everything that constitutes its nation are preserved thanks to its language. The Turkish language is the heart and mind of the Turkish nation'.

Atatürk states that language is the leader of national institutions, and national language is related to opinions, national identity and consciousness. National independence is only possible as long as the Turkish language survives and is independent (Sinanoğlu, 2003). Both the concept and the name of the concept must be created on our own in order to be able to improve the opinions through language and language through opinions. This idea constitutes the basis of Atatürk's efforts to purify the Turkish language from the effects of foreign languages.

The aim of this study is to analyze the signboards used in the city life in Osmaniye with respect to multilingualism. Observation and photography methods were used for studying on the signboards in the main avenues and streets to carry out the study. The roots of the words in the photographs taken were studied by the use of a content analysis. The term multilingualism must be used along with multiculturalism. Multilingualism brings along multiculturalism. As a multilingual individual will have the chance to know the culture of the other languages, one will find opportunities for social life, job and education easily.

Multilingualism is the name given to the ability of an individual or a society to speak and express itself in a variety of languages. Multilingualism (French: Plurilinguisme) is sometimes referred to as speaking a diversity of languages (multilinguisme). *According to the language policies project applied by the European Council, multilingualism is to speak the native language and the other acquired languages, whatever their status is, with the purpose of communication among people. Multilingualism is the ability to acquire a language, while speaking a diversity of languages refers to the phenomenon in which people speak to each other in a variety of languages within a specific geographical region. Regardless of the status, it is of great importance that these languages be used as a language of communication* (Saydı, 2013:277).

Multilingualism has brought along the multiculturalism phenomenon. Being multilingual means being multicultural symmetrically. Multilingual individuals recognize and know the

culture of the other languages that they speak or are familiar with other than their own culture. Multilingual individuals do not feel any challenges or inconformity when entering the societies whose language they can speak for the purposes of specific or social conditions, professional life, job opportunities, education, migration or touristic purposes.

As the USA has recently become a superpower in a variety of fields such as technology, music, press, film, sports, and clothing, it has led to many languages making excerpts from English. Besides the linguists who take making excerpts for granted, there are also oppositions to excerpts from other linguists such as Hechuan and Keli. It has been emphasized that the use of foreign vocabulary is harmful both to the language and to the culture. Accordingly, there have been some purification attempts in order to save our language from the impacts of foreign languages. After the World War I, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, made important innovations in the 'language' as he did in every field. The most important innovation was the adoption of the Latin alphabet in 1928. Atatürk, also, founded the Turkish Language Association in 1932 in order to develop Turkish, facilitate learning Turkish, and make it more practical. Accordingly, many words from Arabic and Persian were removed from Turkish, and it became purer. Moreover, words were taken from old Turkish texts and Turkish vernaculars, or new words and expressions (neologisms) were produced. Although these studies provided some advantages, they also resulted in some problems because these words were as difficult as the Arabic words with respect to understanding and grasping.

Purified from Arabic and Persian languages as much as possible at the end of these efforts, Turkish was influenced by French and Italian in the later years. In recent years, however, it came under the influence of English as the USA has a say in every field. As mentioned before, technological and scientific developments are some of the important reasons for this impact.

Research Questions

This study aims to analyze the signboards used in the city life in Osmaniye with regard to multilingualism. In this respect, the word roots will be examined in line with the research questions given below.

- What is the origin of the language used in the signboards in Osmaniye?
- Are the words used in the signboards mostly English or transformed from Turkish into English?

Method

In this study, observation and photography techniques were used in the field study. The signboards in the main avenues and streets in Osmaniye were photographed to carry out the content analysis of the words used on the signboards. In line with the analyses, it was examined whether the words used on the signboards are Turkish or with Arabic, Persian and English roots. It was observed that some words were neither Turkish nor English. It could be commented that these expressions are transformed into English.

Results

The use of foreign words in business names has drawn attention and reaction in recent years. Our negligence to the Turkish language as a society has influenced our businessmen and artisans. The use of words of foreign origin has become widespread in businesses even though they are not brand names. Giving names of foreign origin to the businesses instead of Turkish names has made the streets and avenues look strange. Looking at the names of the

shops while walking in the street, one will not understand if he is in Turkey or in a foreign country. The Turkish Language Association made a poster out of the photographs of the signboards in a street one year ago. There was a single sentence on the poster: Is it Turkey? Do we really live in Turkey? (Akalin, 2001: 590).

In this direction, five different ways of making excerpts are observed when the words are analyzed on the signboards in Osmaniye as follows:

1. Turkish words
2. Words of English origin
3. Words of Arabic origin
4. Words of Persian origin
5. Words constituted by transforming Turkish into English

In this study, the exemplifications were shown in the photographs with the purposes of analyzing the roots of the words used in the signboards under observation.

Turkish Words





Words of English Origin







Words of Arabic Origin



Words of Persian Origin



Words constituted by transforming Turkish into English



Conclusion

Language is not only a body of rules related to the grammar but also a representational system. There are concrete and abstract phenomena representing every language and culture. Multilingualism establishes a representational system, which is impartial and unbiased among societies. When bilingualism and multilingualism refer to learning and using other languages besides one's native language, it means multiculturalism, which removes social, economic, linguistic and religious differences. It is a bridge between cultures.

In this context, the study was conducted by using the signboards in the main avenues and streets to represent the city life in Osmaniye. On analyzing the roots of the words used,

besides the Turkish words, the dominance of English words is followed by the use of Arabic and Persian words respectively. It has also been observed that some words were formed by combining the words of Turkish and English origins. This could be called as transforming Turkish words into English. The reason for this impact is the role of English as a world language. In later studies, more words may be taken as examples to study, and the reasons for the corruption of the language can be dealt with in more detail.

Finally, it could be expressed that Turkish has been invaded by many words of foreign origin. It has also been observed that English influences our contemporary society as a result of the impacts of the USA and the UK. Turkish is at risk of losing an important part of its vocabulary especially due to the impact of the Western societies. It is, therefore, necessary to take important steps and Turkish Language Association must be activated. Written and visual media must act carefully to use pure Turkish words, become conscious, and raise awareness in this respect.

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