CHAPTER 14

TURKISH DIALECTS

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INTRODUCTION

Within all the scholarly disciplines comprised by the designation Turcology, study of language variation can be regarded as the oldest one. Thanks to Maḥmūd al-Kāšɣarī and his extraordinary work *Compendium of the Turkic Dialects*, we have a remarkably detailed picture of the different dialects and languages spoken by Turkic tribes in the eleventh century. In modern times, however, the study of local variation within one particular language has been a somewhat neglected field within Turcology in the Republic of Turkey. This lack of scholarly activity, or interest, in dialectology is especially striking if we take into consideration that Türk Dil Kurumu, The Turkish Language Society, in the initial years of language reform in the 1930s, searched the different Anatolian dialects for pure Turkish words that could replace words of Arabic and Persian origin. School teachers all over Turkey were encouraged to submit lists of dialect words, and the result is *Der -leme Sözlüğü*, a 12-volume lexicon of Turkish dialects, or, rather, elements believed to be Turkish in those dialects. In fact, this dictionary is today also a gold mine for scholars who want to study words of foreign, e.g. Armenian or Greek, origin in Turkish dialects. However, its compilation had little to do with dialectology.

Even later, tasks such as the compilation of a dialect map have not been regarded as important by the Language Society until recently. One reason for the reluctance to support dialectological work may be that a general dialect survey has often been felt to be politically touchy. Another reason for the rather stepmotherly treatment of dialectology has to do with the low status dialects have in Turkish society. At the same time, the potential contribution provided by dialectological research to diachronic language studies or the use and necessity of dialectological studies within a broader linguistic frame were not fully recognized until recently.

Nevertheless, especially after the 1990s, a number of studies on different dialects of Turkey have been carried out. The work done in dialectology up to now has mostly consisted of collecting dialect material and preparing studies on single dialects. Comparative studies of dialect features aiming at describing variation within a greater area have been attempted to a lesser extent.

Accordingly, it is not yet possible to give an accurate survey of dialect features for all Turkish dialects. Several attempts have been made to establish a geographical classification of the Anatolian dialects; see Kowalski (1934), Caferoğlu (1959), Kral (1980), and Boeschoten (1991).

The book by Karahan (1996) is quite detailed and seems to give a correct classification. The author postulates three main dialect groups in Anatolia, the northeastern group, which comprises the Eastern Black Sea dialects, from Trabzon eastward; the eastern group, which includes the area roughly to the east of the Euphrates; and the western
dialects, which consist of the rest of Anatolia. Within each group, there are several subgroups. Thus, what some scholars call Central Anatolian and Aegean dialects, are, according to Karahan, subgroups within the West Anatolian group. Her classification is based on a detailed set of parameters. In some cases, her explanations of the parameters could have been more compatible with phonological principles.

For the Balkan dialects, Mollova’s classification (1999) is probably the best one. Roughly, she operates with two distinct groups: The West Rumelian group spoken in the western parts of Bulgaria, in Macedonia and Kosovo, and the East Rhodope dialects spoken in South Eastern Bulgaria. The dialects in the rest of Bulgaria and in Western Thrace are a very heterogeneous mixture not easy to classify. The same is the case with the whole Marmara region in Turkey, both north and south of the Marmara Sea.

The only attempt to make a dialect map of Anatolia is the one by Boeschoten (1991), based on Kral (1980). Although the isoglosses Boeschoten postulates are partly conjectural because of a lack of material from all the districts involved, they are indeed amazing because a number of them going in a north–south direction clearly show that there is a continuum from the Aegean coast to Azerbaijan. Thus, going eastwards, the dialects gradually acquire more and more features resembling the ones of Azeri. The easternmost of these isoglosses, which coincides roughly with the river Euphrates and thus constitutes the borderline between the West and East Anatolian dialects postulated by Karahan, are the 1sg and 2sg copula suffixes, which contain a high vowel to the west of this line but a low vowel to the east. The isoglosses that are parallel to the Black Sea coast indicate that the Black Sea dialects constitute a group of their own with the Trabzon and Rize dialects as a nucleus.

The study of the Erzurum dialects by Gemalmaz (1978) should be mentioned especially because it contains several maps showing the geographical distribution of the different features within the province.

From a diachronic point of view, dialect features may be characterized either as archaisms when compared to standard Turkish (ST), or innovations. The innovations may be the result of a spontaneous language-internal development or of contact with other languages or dialects. The dialects spoken in the periphery of the Turkish-speaking areas, i.e. the West Rumelian and the Eastern Black Sea dialects, are the ones that have preserved most archaisms, but also the ones that show most contact-induced innovations. Contact-induced innovations are also numerous in the southeastern dialect group.

The ethnic aspect of Anatolian and Balkan dialects, i.e. the explanation of certain dialect features as due to the presence of different Turkish tribes or groups in the different areas through history, has been vaguely treated by some scholars. The idea that some features may be due to code copying from non-Turkic languages constituting substrates or adstrates in the different areas is almost never mentioned. This is rather strange considering the ethnic diversity of both Anatolia and the Balkans through history.

**PHONOLOGY**

**Vowels**

In large parts of Anatolia, /e/, an unrounded upper-mid-front vowel corresponding to IPA [e], is preserved as a phoneme beside the unrounded mid-front /ä/, allowing the existence of minimal pairs, such as el ‘stranger’, ‘country’ and äl ‘hand’. A wide range of /e/ sounds is also found in standard Istanbul pronunciation but without distinctive functions.
Tendencies toward reduced vowel inventories are common. Thus, Turkish /ö/ and /ü/ frequently correspond to back (/o/ and /u/) or to retracted half-front vowels. The geographic distribution is complicated. In the whole of Central Anatolia, retraction or semi-retraction seems to be almost a rule in initial syllables after front velar stops, e.g. goz ‘eye’ vs. ST göz. In Central Anatolia, the preceding stop usually does not retain any trace of palatalization but is frequently velarized. It characteristically remains strongly palatalized in the province of Rize. In neighboring Trabzon, retraction is very seldom after velar stops, but in word-initial position, retraction is a rule. When preceded by a non-velar consonant, retraction or semi-retraction is quite common, e.g. ordek ‘duck’ vs. ST ördek, uzum ‘grape’ vs. ST üzüm, Tökt-ti ‘X poured’ vs. ST Dökt-tü, yuk ‘burden’ vs. ST yük. In the same way, there is a strong tendency in Trabzon and Rize for /ü/ to be fronted to /i/ in initial syllables, except when preceded by a velar stop, cf. īrmak ‘river’ vs. ST īrmak.

The notion that the backing and fronting processes found in Trabzon and Rize are contact-induced is strengthened by the fact that the verb öl- ‘to die’, which would have got numerous forms overlapping with ol- ‘to be(come)’ if the vowel had been backed, in these dialects has become āl-, and the fact that the initial sequence āi- in a limited area in Trabzon (Tonya) has become ku-, e.g. kuz ‘girl’. These features can be interpreted to the effect that the elimination of /ü/, /ö/, and /i/ is a contact-induced superior aim in this area. The same backing processes of /ü/ and /ö/, also contact-induced, are found in the West Rumelian dialects in the Balkans, especially in the Adakale and Vidin region. But there is no fronting of /i/ except for auslaut position, where most vowels are realized as /i/ in suffixes and stems. In these dialects, raising of /ö/ to /ü/ is also very common: küpri vs. ST köprü ‘bridge’, and, with retraction, Ul-di vs. ST Öl-dü ‘X died’.

Raising of /ö/ to /ü/ is sporadically found in the demonstrative pronoun corresponding to ST o ‘that’, ‘which’ in Central Anatolian dialects, as well as in other stems in the Balkans.

Rounding caused by neighboring labial consonants is frequent all over Anatolia, e.g. bül- ‘to know’ vs. ST bil-. However, words having a rounded vowel in the second syllable in spite of an unrounded vowel in the first syllable because it is preceded by a labializing consonant such as ST karpuz ‘watermelon’, čamur ‘mud’ are subject to labial harmony in the northern part of Central Anatolia, i.e. garpïz, čamïr.

Words of foreign origin commencing with fu-, which have gone through a delabialization process in ST and most dialects, have retained their original shape in the Eastern Black Sea dialects, e.g. fursat vs. ST ţîrsat ‘opportunity’, furtuna vs. ST ţîrtîna ‘storm’, funduḳ vs. ST ţîndîk ‘hazelnut’.

Consonants

The treatment of word-internal and final velar stops in back environments constitutes one of the most conspicuous isoglosses in Anatolia.

Only Western Anatolia, the Black Sea coast to the west of Sinop, and Trabzon and Rize have preserved k, while it has become a fricative χ or y in Central and East Anatolia. Voicedness/non-voicedness of initial velar stops is also an important feature. These stops are frequently voiced in back vowel environments in an area that seems to extend even further west than the previous feature, e.g. ģarqa or ģarya ‘crow’. In the East Rhodope area of the Balkans, initial velar stops are preserved as unvoiced when the following
consonant is unvoiced, e.g. ğara ‘black’, ğuzu ‘lamb’, but kač ‘how many’, kašık ‘spoon’, koğu ‘smell’. In the West Rumelian dialects, the Marmara region, and in the Eastern Black Sea dialects, voicing in front of back vowels does not take place.

In most dialects, the distribution of voicedness vs. non-voicedness before front vowels is approximately the same as in standard Turkish. Initial dental stops are subject to exactly the same voicing variation as the velar ones, e.g. daš ‘stone’ vs. ST taš, but this feature is less comprehensive than with the velars, even in areas where voicing of initial k- seems to be especially frequent, e.g. in East Anatolia. In the East Rhodope dialects, initial dental stops are unvoiced in front of front vowels and voiced in front of back vowels. Voicing variation in labial stops is less frequent. In most areas of Trabzon, initial stops, including the labial ones, are lesser voiced and unaspirated regardless of the quality of the subsequent vowel, at least when the word has a certain emphasis, e.g. dur- ‘to stop’. In some areas of Trabzon, unaspirated lesser voiced stops are also frequently found in word-internal position. This kind of stop is the most striking characteristic of the Trabzon dialects. Palatalization of stops, especially of k and g, in the environment of front vowels, is considerably stronger in Rize and parts of Trabzon than in standard Turkish. Such strongly palatalized stops have been transcribed ď and ĩ, e.g. ďunes ‘sun’ vs. ST gûnäš, aster-e ‘to the military’ vs. ST askär-ä. In the same area, there is also palatalization in words such as dădă ‘grandfather’ vs. ST dădă and ańńä ‘mother’ vs. ST annä, also usually palatalized.

In the Rize and Trabzon areas where strongly palatalized velar stops are found, the affricates ďč and ĭǰ are realized as dental affricates, [ʦ] and [ʣ].

In most of the East Anatolian dialects, but not in the northeastern ones, the originally voiced velar fricative that is mostly written as ‹ğ› and realized as ∅ or y in standard Turkish is pronounced as ɣ in back and as g in front environments, e.g. ayač ‘tree’ vs. ST a:č, ğigär ‘liver’ vs. ST ğiyär. The pronunciation ɣ also occurs sporadically in back vowel environments in Central Anatolia. In the very southeast, the realization in back vowel environment is a voiced postvelar stop. The realization g in front vowel surroundings is found also in the West Rumelian dialects, e.g. dăgănäk vs. ST dă:näk ‘stick’.

The old velar nasal ḷ, which has become n in standard Turkish, is preserved in most West and Central Anatolian dialects but not in the Northeast or East Anatolian ones or in the Balkans. In Trabzon and Rize, it has mostly become n but has disappeared in some cases, e.g. bava, sa:sa, oə, dative forms of bän ‘I’, sän ‘you’, o ‘X’. A different development is observed in other areas, e.g. in Urfa, Amasra, and Bartın, where the old ḷ has sporadically developed into y, e.g. baba-y ‘your father’ vs. ST baba-n.

The liquid r is often dropped in syllable-final position, particularly in Western Anatolia, most frequently in its central or northern parts of the Aegean coast, where it is a systematic feature. This feature diminishes the farther south or east we move.

Consonant assimilations, which mostly affect liquids, are frequent in most Anatolian and Balkan dialects, e.g. tal-lâ ‘field’ vs. ST tar-la, ol-lar ‘they’ vs. ST on-lar. They usually do not occur in the northeastern dialects or in the West Rumelian dialects, nor in the border area between the West and East Anatolian dialect group, on both sides of the Euphrates.

Morphophonology

In parts of Trabzon and Rize, certain suffixes tend to be standardized as invariable front suffixes, e.g. {+lär}, as a third-person plural verbal suffix, less frequently the dative and
locative suffixes. Others are fixed as nonharmonic back suffixes, e.g. the conditional suffix {-sa} and the negative suffix {-ma}. Similar examples are found in the West Rumelian dialects and sporadically elsewhere.

In the southern part of the East Anatolian dialects, low vowel suffixes containing a velar or postvelar consonant, are very frequently realized with a back vowel, e.g. Min-aχ, vs. ST Bin-älim ‘Let us mount’, git-mać, vs. ST git-mäk ‘to go’. In some areas, notably in most districts of Trabzon, labial harmony has been preserved at an archaic stage of development. As in Old Ottoman, most high vowel suffixes are either rounded or unrounded. This feature is complicated by the fact that i and ü tend to become i and u, respectively. Thus, we find forms such as tirän-um-i ‘my train (ACC)’ vs. ST tren-im-i, kol-i ‘its arm’ vs. ST kol-u, Yap-tu-nüz ‘You did’ vs. ST Yap-tï-nïz, but Yap-tï-lâ ‘They did’ vs. ST Yap-tï-lar, gir-du-n-sa ‘if you entered’ vs. ST gir-di-n-sâ. The choice of a suffix vowel is usually decided by the stem and not by an intervening suffix, e.g. kol-i-na ‘to his arm’ vs. ST kol-u-na. Less-strong reflexes of this earlier stage in the development of labial harmony are frequently found all over north Anatolia, in some cases also in the southeast.

MORPHOLOGY

In an area in and around the province of Denizli, the forms of the accusative and dative suffixes are reversed, e.g. Bu älma-ya vur-an-lar-i bahşiş ver-il-ir ‘A reward is given to those who hit this apple’ vs. ST Bu elma-yı vur-an-lar-a bahşiş ver-il-ir. This seems to be an essentially morphological feature. For example, the third-person possessive suffix never appears with a low vowel, and bän-i is found instead of bana, e.g. Bän-i bir çay yap ‘Make me a cup of tea’ vs. ST Bana bir çay yap. The case confusion might have been compensated for by a morphological change {+(y)I} > {+(y)A}, also affecting irregular forms, such as personal pronouns.

The present-tense suffix is one of the most clear-cut isoglosses in Anatolia. The normal form in most of West and Central Anatolia is {-(Ị)yo}, while dialects farther east have forms based on suffixes with near-high vowels, mostly {-(Ị)yi(r)}. Along the Black Sea coast, {-(Ị)yu(r)} and {-(Ị)ye(r)} are also found. Examples: West Anatolia Al-ïyo-n and Al-ïyor-un, Central Anatolia Al-ïyo-m, Gaziantep Al-i-y-m, Diyarbakir Al-iya-m, Erzurum Al-ir-am, Trabzon Al-ây(u)r-um, Al-ây(i)r-um, and also Al-ÿy(i)r-um and Al-iya-m. In the very southwest, present-tense formation with auxiliary verbs such as dur- ‘to stand’ and get- ‘to go’ is common, e.g. Yat-ip-dur-u-yun ‘I am lying’, Ged-ip-ged-är-ik ‘We are going’ (Demir 1993). The first- and second-person forms of the copula also show considerable variation, particularly when suffixed to participial verbal stems. The first-person form, ST {+(y)Im}, is {+(y)In} in most parts of Western Anatolia except the Marmara region, including the Western Black Sea coast, Konya, and Nigde, while it is {+(y)Im} in the Central Anatolian dialects farther to the east. In the easternmost and southeastern dialects, it has the same form as in Azerbaijani, {+(y)Am}. In the west, with about the same distribution as {+(y)Im}, the first-person plural copula suffix is {+(y)Iz}, as in ST, and {+z}, when added to the present in {-(Ị)yo}. In Central and East Anatolia, including the Eastern Black Sea coast, it is {+(y)IK} or {+K} in front vowel environments and usually {+(y)Iχ} or {+χ} in back vowel environments. Examples: West Anatolia Gid-är-iz, Yap-i-yo-z, East Anatolia Gid-är-ik, Gid-är-uk (Rize, Trabzon), Al-i-yyüz (Erzincan), Al-i-yyiş (Diyarbakır). In the second-person singular, {+sin} is the usual suffix in most parts of Western and Central Anatolia, while {+sin} is found in the northeast,
Trabzon mostly as {+sun}. The east and southeast dialects – by and large the ones with {+(y)Am} in the first-person singular – have {+sAn}. With the present-tense stem, most parts of West and Central Anatolia use {+ŋ}, e.g. Gid-iyo-ŋ ‘You are going’ vs. ST Gid-iyor-sun. The present-tense suffix {-(y)i}, found farther east, requires {+sĩŋ} or {+ŋ}, e.g. Elazığ Gid-iy-sigraph, Gaziantep Gid-iy-i. Among the more eastern dialects, Erzincan has Gidi-y-sän. The Black Sea dialects show great variation, e.g. Giresun Gid-iy(i)sin and Gid-iy(u)sun.

SYNTAX

Most dialects tend to prefer less-complex sentences. Hypotactical constructions are not very common. Direct speech is much more frequently used than indirect speech expressed by means of subordinate nominal clauses. However, converbial clauses are quite prolific. Seemingly finite forms are possible, e.g. Bekmäz-i dam-a ser-är-ik. Goyu-läss-ti-yidi tänakā-lär-ā dol-dur-ur-u ‘We spread the grape syrup out on the roof. When it has thickened, we fill it into tin cans’ (Malatya).

Notably in the northeast, constituent order is relatively free. Thus, the postverbal position can be used for focused constituents, particularly adverbial phrases expressing goal or purpose, such as infinitives in the dative, e.g. Trabzon İkī tāne-si gid-iy-i šār-ā et-māk al-maː ‘Two of them go to town to buy bread’ vs. ST ‹İki tane-si şehr-e ek-mek al-ma-ya gid-iyor›.

A characteristic typical of the Balkan dialects is the lack of infinitive constructions. Especially in the East Rumelian dialects, infinitives are found almost exclusively in the dative governed by başla-mak or to express purpose. This is also a tendency in the Eastern Black Sea dialects and in northeast Anatolia.

Infinitive constructions in {-mA} plus possessive suffixes are never found in the East Rumelian dialects and occur very rarely also in the other Balkan dialects. Paratactic constructions are used instead, e.g. İst-iyor-um yan-im-a gāl-ā-sin vs. ST ‹Yan-im-a gel-me-n-i ist-iyor-um› ‘I want you to come to me’. A strong tendency to prefer paratactic constructions is also found in the East Anatolian dialects close to Azeri. In both areas, the phenomenon is contact-induced, from the Balkan languages and Persian, respectively. Another important characteristic of the Trabzon and partly Rize dialects is that anaphoric pronouns are used in cases where ST would normally dispense with them. In the Trabzon dialect, they are placed after the verb, e.g. gardās-um-i dan-iy mi-sun? Answer: dan-iy-um o-ni ‘Do you know my brother?’ ‘I do [literally ‘I know him’]’. Standard Turkish would have ‹Kardeş-im-i tan-iyor mu-sun›? Answer: ‹Tan-iyor-um›, without the pronoun onu ‘him’.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING


Németh, G. 1965: *Die Türken von Vidin* [The Vidin Turks], Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.
