

THE RECEPTION OF EUROPEAN TYPOLOGICAL LANGUAGE CLASSIFICATION AMONG THE TURKISH LANGUAGE REFORMERS OF 1932-1936

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Abstract

The fact that the Turkish language was classified as an agglutinative language by the traditional European linguistics was accepted, but also challenged by the Turkish language reformers of the 1930s. The underlying reason was that most classifications of the language families were influenced by harsh judgments about the cultural and intellectual level of its speakers as well as on the capability of those languages. Interestingly, the Turks did not question this kind of prejudices towards non-Indo-European languages and their speakers, but they tried to solve this “problem” at a linguistical-theoretical level. There were diverse attempts to deal with this issue, especially between 1932 and 1936.

Keywords: Turkish language reform, agglutination, language classification

The publications of the Turkish Language Society during the years 1932-1936 reveal that the theoretical work of these reformers was both informed and influenced by the work of 19th century European linguists. With that they absorbed the associated judgmental conclusions related to the agglutinative languages – of which Turkish was an example *par excellence*. And this judgment was that Turkish was an inferior language.

Already with the first attempts to classify languages in the early 19th century, European linguists were heavily judgmental¹. Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) and his brother August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767-1845) were among the founders of modern scientific language classification. They categorized languages into those

¹ For the typological language classifications see Römer 1989, especially chapter 7: “Klassifikation und Wertung von Sprachen”. See also Röhrborn 1987 and 1991; Laut 2000: 60-61; Aytürk 2004: 3-6.

which were organic and those which were mechanical. The first group were noble and of divine origin, the latter were primitive².

Subsequently, August Wilhelm Schlegel devised a tripartite classification of languages – which is still significant today – grouping languages into those which had no grammatical structure: the isolating languages; the languages with affixes: the agglutinative languages; and the inflecting languages which had two further sub-classes: the analytic inflecting languages and the synthetic inflecting languages. Languages within these three groups were also classified as either noble or primitive³.

Even in the more moderate iterations of these judgmental classifications the Indo-Germanic languages were always placed at the pinnacle of linguistic development, superior to all other languages. In the second half of the 19th century linguists were increasingly occupied with the task of linking race with linguistic classification. The basic problematic of ethnology and linguistics at this time is described by Römer as follows:

“The first mistake was that one assumed a ‘blood relationship’ between related languages and related persons; the next mistake was the assumption that one could establish the development of languages from a lower to a higher and highest form in the languages which are presently extant; the third mistake was related in that one confused the level of linguistic development with the level of culture of those who spoke this language”⁴.

In two publications Röhrborn has demonstrated, first, how the theory concerning “lacking word unity” in the agglutinative languages was noticed by the Turkish language reformers and, second, what influence this had on the creation of neologisms that were introduced by the Turkish Language Society⁵.

² Friedrich von Schlegel (1808 [1849: 51-52]) explains that, in languages “in which the declensions are formed by supplementary particles, instead of inflections of the root [...], their roots [...] seem like an agglomeration of atoms, easily dispersed and scattered by every casual breath. They have no internal connexion beyond the purely mechanical adaptation of particles and affixes. [...] Its apparent richness is in truth utter poverty, and languages belonging to that branch, whether rude or carefully constructed, are invariably heavy, perplexed, and often singularly subjective and defective in character”.

³ Römer 1989: 106-107.

⁴ *Ibid.*: 41.

⁵ See Röhrborn 1987 and 1991. According to Röhrborn the theory of “lacking word unity” in the agglutinative languages was in reference to “theory that grammatical elements are derived from what were originally independent words [and that it] came in its developed form from Friedrich Schlegel and Wilhelm v. Humboldt” (see Röhrborn 1991: 315). This theory is accepted by Heymann Steinthal (1823-1899) who holds that the agglutinative languages “have no sense for grammatical forms” and are not

Here we will investigate the ways in which the Turkish language reformers of the Turkish Language Society dealt with typological language classifications and the theme of agglutination in their theoretical works of the early years (1932-1936). How did they approach and resolve these “problems”?

Of primary concern is the theoretical assumptions developed by members of the Turkish Language Society during these years in dealing with issues of the origins, evolution, and interrelationships of language⁶. This theoretical discussion was – along with “corpus planning”⁷ – the Society’s most significant work during these years. The work of the Turkish Language Society was directly linked with the formation of the Society for Research of Turkish History and the resultant First Congress of Turkish History which propagated a thesis of Turkish history⁸. According to the conclusions reached already in 1930 and published as the Turkish History Thesis, the Turks were already established with a highly developed culture in Central Asia in the 8th millennium B.C. From there they spread in waves to China, India, Asia Minor and Europe. In these regions they were the cultural inspiration of the Sumerian, Elamite, and Hittite civilisations. Also, according to this thesis the Ligurites, Celts, Gauls, Etruscans, Cimmerians, and Scythians were all Turks⁹.

We know from the information provided later by confidants of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), the supreme Turkish leader at this time, that he personally supported the Turkish History Thesis. A significant personal motivation of Atatürk’s – but surely not only of Atatürk – was to counter the derogatory views

capable of developing into “inflected languages”. The nature of agglutination stems from a “weak intellectual connection” between the semantic unit and grammatical elements. This thesis is also accepted by other prominent European language typologists in the second half of the 19th century, such as Max Müller (1823-1900) and Friedrich Müller (1834-1898). According to Franz Misteli (1841-1903) “the Altaic intellect is marked by a certain reluctance and has the characteristic to move step by step in dealing with one category after the other”. By contrast the Indo-Germanic languages formulated a number of categories within one presentation in a less logical but more productive way because completeness is retained with which more can later be worked out rather than in the case of succinct elements which are fragile. Misteli proposed that the “agglutinative languages” are “lacking word unity because there is a lack of combination in thought” (*ibid*: 317-318).

⁶ See Laut 2000: 34-36.

⁷ Laut 2000 investigated among other things the Turkish reception of European linguistic theories, concentrating, however, mostly on works which dealt with hypotheses of a Sumerian-Turkish or Indo-European-Turkish link in support of the thesis that Turkish was the original language. The issue of the Kemalist language reformers’ relationship to the judgmental typological language classifications is dealt with only peripherally.

⁸ For the First Turkish History Congress, see Beşikçi 1991; Ersanlı 2003; Laut 2000: 28-30.

⁹ See Beşikçi 1991: 44-46; Laut 2000: 7.

of European scholars which were also voiced in the popular press. According to these views the Turkish role and position in the development of mankind were inferior. According to his adopted daughter, Afet Afetinan (1908-1985), “Atatürk began working on the Historical Thesis in 1929 when he was offended by a geography book in which the Turks were classified with the ‘yellow races’ [*sarı ırk*] and as a ‘secondary species’ [*ikinci ‘secondaire’ nevi bir insan tipi*]”¹⁰.

Atatürk’s supporters, the Kemalists, dealt with the theories of many 19th century European ethnologists and linguists. For example, at the First Turkish Historical Congress Afet Afetinan presented as evidence that the word *ari* was of Turkish origin the work of the most influential European racist of the 19th century Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau (1816-1882)¹¹. Gobineau introduced the word “Arian” used by linguists¹² into his main work *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*¹³ in which he understood the Arians to be the purest and therefore most noble members of the white race¹⁴. For Gobineau the “white” people were those of “Caucasian and Semitic race”. The white race spread from Central Asia in all directions. The Arians, the best of the white race, migrated to India, other Arians conquered Europe and settled as Germans in relatively pure racial form in Scandinavia¹⁵. Gobineau differentiated people into three races: the whites, the yellows, and the blacks. These three races were genetically different with the

¹⁰ See Laut 2000: 7, note 24. See also Aydemir 1985: 427-428. Illustrating these thoughts is the following extract from a 1914 German publication which I came across by chance: “Turks are members of the Mongolian race. They first appear in history in the third century before Christ as a herding people with their homeland in steppe and desert and for whom warfare provided opportunity for improvement. For centuries and millenia the historical horizon of a portion of the Turks (in Siberia, Russian and Chinese Turkestan) has remained the same. Turks have only slowly and reluctantly integrated themselves into the cultures of their more developed neighbors and enemies. They long for movement and open spaces and feel best when on flat land. If they conquer cities, they prefer to first tear down the massive walled constructions which constrain their breathing space. [...] Being little prone to idealisation or abstraction, they also have felt comfortable with the Islamic abhorrence of art” (Süßheim 1914: 67).

¹¹ See Beşikçi 1991: 131-132. The Frenchman Gobineau was largely influential in the formation of modern German anti-Semitism. He was a friend of Richard Wagner and became very famous through the Bayreuth circle around Wagner (see Römer 1989: 31-32).

¹² The adjective “*arya-*” means in Sanskrit “noble, correct, lovely, standing in honour” and was the honourable self-designation of an Indo-European people which settled in India in the 2nd millennium. In that the term “Iran” is derived from this adjective most linguists employed the term “*aryan*” when referring to the Indo-Iranian languages. Some linguists, however, extended this term to cover the entire Indo-European family of languages. It was especially Max Müller, a Sanskrit specialist, who supported this extended use of the term (see *ibid.*: 55).

¹³ Published in two volumes in 1853-1855. See *ibid.*: 21.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 23.

white race being the superior one having developed all the great cultures of history¹⁶.

The Kemalists derived their History Thesis from these mid-19th century views with only one significant change: The Arians were in fact Turks who had lost their Turkish identity once they settled in Europe and other parts of the world¹⁷. One of the main proofs of this thesis was the code word “Brachycephaly” (short-headedness) introduced by the Kemalists. According to them the brachycephalic-alpine race originated in Central Asia. Thus, the Arians who migrated from Central Asia could only be this brachycephalic type.

With this argumentation the Kemalists attempted to counter the European racists aligned with Gobineau. The debate hinged on the divisions of the European race. For a long time, the population of Europe and Western Asia were considered to be racially homogeneous, but towards the end of the 19th century there were an increasing number of attempts to differentiate within the European race¹⁸. Especially popular was the use of the skull index¹⁹. According to this index humanity could be divided into the dolichocephalic, the mesocephalic and the brachycephalic. Finally, the anthropologists and race theorists of the 19th century turned increasingly to only one type as typical of the white race: blond, blue-eyed, and white-skinned, tall, and dolichocephalic, that is, the Nordic type. The cult of blondness had two consequences. The use of the term Caucasian race lost its significance; the concept that the origin of the Indo-Europeans was in Asia was no longer tenable²⁰.

The Turkish Historical Thesis was fundamentally opposed to this turn in the development of European racist theory. They continued to insist that Central Asia was the origin of the superior race and that the brachycephalic Turks along with the other brachycephalic Europeans were the heirs of this race.

As far as Turkish language was concerned there were negative judgements about the formation and capabilities of the Turkish language which were widely accepted, and not only in Europe. The Kemalist reformers were well aware of this.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*: 30.

¹⁷ Beşikçi 1991: 82-84.

¹⁸ Römer 1989: 23-25.

¹⁹ The skull index was introduced by the Swedish anatomist Anders Adolf Retzius (1796-1860) in 1842. It was a quantified expression of the relationship between the width and length of a skull, i.e. width x 100 divided by length. The lower the index, the longer the human skull (see *ibid.*: 22).

²⁰ *Ibid.*: 23.

One of the prominent participants in the Turkish Language Society Hasan Reşit Tankut (1891-1980) related an experience in his youth while he was attending a secondary school in Damascus (a provincial capital when still under Ottoman rule) where he noticed the growing Arabic nationalist sentiments among his Arab classmates.

“One day we saw a few lines written on the blackboard in the classroom. The title read: ‘What is the Turkish language?’ We read the text in silence. There was not a single word in Turkish. It was written in the Ottoman style and according to the rules of the Ottoman language. The text ended with [the Turkish copula-suffix] ‘dır’. The Arabs had repeated this five to ten times and underlined this ‘dırdır’. Beside that was written: ‘This is Turkish’, i.e. ‘dırdır’ [as in ‘dırdır etmek’ which means in Turkish ‘complain, whine’] is Turkish. On that day we four or five Turkish students broke with the rest of the class and became ‘Turkists’ [i.e. Turkish nationalists]. When we studied in the Faculty of Political Science my friend Basri Konyar wanted to replace the word for history: ‘tarih’ [a word derived from Arabic] with the word ‘dümbilik’ [Turkish word for history taken from an old Turkish source]. The other students, who were all Turks, reported this to the professor who then announced in class that the word ‘tarih’ is the correct term for history. He added: Don’t try to use the word ‘dümbilik’ because one would then be called ‘dümbelek’ [i.e. bongo/hand drum, the word for empty-headed in the dialect]. Other professors at this time were of the same opinion”²¹.

Tankut and his generation grew up during a period when the image of Turkishness was very contradictory. On the one hand they were confronted with the assumption among Europeans and among Ottomans themselves²² that the Turks and their language were “inferior”. On the other hand, many educated Turks were propagating an exaggeratedly superior view of Turkishness and the Turkish language. This dilemma is recognizable in most of the writings of the early period in Turkish language reform.

The close connections between the Turkish Historical Society and the Turkish Language Reform Society are clearly demonstrated in the person of Samih Rifat (1875-1932). He was Vice President of the Turkish Historical Society and was

²¹ Tankut 1963: 113.

²² It should be mentioned that the term “Turk” was long an expression used by the Ottoman elite to indicate the uneducated peasants. The educated Ottoman elite was of the conviction that the Ottoman language would not be a culturally superior language without the inclusion of numerous Arabic and Persian terms, as one can see in the anecdote related by Tankut above.

instrumental in the development of the Historical Thesis. Despite his very poor health he was named by Atatürk to be the first president of the Turkish Language Society²³. Vecihe Hatiboğlu (1917-1996) even described Samih Rifat as Atatürk's spokesman and emphasized that Rifat's addresses to the Language Society's first Congress (1932) largely reflected the views of Atatürk on the place of the Turkish language among the world's languages²⁴.

But Samih Rifat was – as most of the others in the Turkish Language Society – neither a trained linguist nor an historian. He came from an Ottoman military family and during Ottoman times pursued a career as an administrator, rising to the rank of a governor²⁵. He published a series of articles in 1918 in the *Atı* newspaper with the title “Iranian History and the Turks” [*İran Tarihi ve Türkler*]²⁶. These articles were in response to an article published by Süleyman Nazif (1870-1927) in which the influence of Iranian literature on Ottoman literature was emphasized and in which the opinion was voiced that Ottoman literature could not have emerged without Persian literature²⁷.

Samih Rifat was strongly opposed to the opinion that Persian culture was superior to that of the Turks. His position was that the Iranians and Turanians shared a common origin²⁸ and that the Turanians (that is, the Turkic peoples) were members of the white race²⁹. Most of all his belief that Zarathustra was a Turanian on his mother's side was to remain vivid in the memories of members of the Turkish Language Society³⁰.

Samih Rifat was heavily criticized in the wake of a series of articles and his publication in 1922 of “The Rules of Sound Change in Turkish and the Origin of Speech” [*Türkçede Tasrif-i Huruf Kanunları ve Tekellümün Menşei*]³¹. Many of

²³ See Ertop 1963: 73; Atay 1969: 475. Samih Rifat died on 3 December 1932, two months after the end of the First Turkish Language Congress, which was held in Istanbul from 26th September to 5th October 1932 (see Ergun 1934: CXVIII).

²⁴ Hatiboğlu 1963: 13. Aytürk points to the important role Samih Rifat played in the genesis of the Sun Language Theory (see Aytürk 2004: 15).

²⁵ For the life and work of Samih Rifat see Aytürk 2004: 13-15; Ergun 1934; the journal *Türk Dili* 1(1933) (appendix “Samih Rifat Kısmı” [the Samih Rifat section]): Dilmen 1933; Duru 1933; Emre 1933; Ertem 1933.

²⁶ See Rifat 1918 [1934].

²⁷ Ergun 1934: LX-LXIV.

²⁸ *Ibid.*: 186.

²⁹ *Ibid.*: 169.

³⁰ *Ibid.*: 174-175. See Ertem 1933: 38; Dilmen 1933: 31.

³¹ The literal translation of the title would be “The Rules of the Inflection of Letters in Turkish and the Origin of Speech”, but from the content one may assume that Samih Rifat meant “the rules of sound

his later collaborators did not take him seriously at that time. The latter of the two publications proposed the thesis that Turkish was the “original language”. Kâzım Nami Duru (1875-1967) wrote in 1933:

“He [Samih Rifat] wrote an essay with the title: ‘The rules of sounds in Turkish and the question of the original language’. He presented this essay to the commission and also had it printed. This aroused an uproar. I think that many readers misunderstood the issue. At that time, one did not know that language is primarily biological and only secondarily historical. But those who held him to be mistaken then later assisted him at the [Turkish Language] Congress”³².

“The Relationship between Turkish and Other Languages” [*Türkçe ve Diğer Lisanlar Arasında İrtibatlar*]³³ was the title of Samih Rifat’s presentation at the First Turkish Historical Congress in 1932. He was one of a group of speakers who held that Turkish is by and large the “origin” of the Indo-European and Semitic languages. Rifat presented a large amount of “evidence” for this conclusion by tracing numerous words in Indo-European, Semitic and Hamitic languages to a Turkish origin³⁴. With these assertions Rifat is, as Büşra Ersanlı has established³⁵, quite removed from linguistic science. Yet one can say that with this presentation and the one at the First Turkish Language Congress the direction was set for the members of the Turkish Language Society. The developments at the First Turkish Historical Congress gave a clear signal that rather than science or scholarship a desired “result” was to take precedence. The criticisms from a few participants were on the whole sharply rejected³⁶. It is of special note that it was Atatürk himself who had Samih Rifat transported from his sick bed to the speaker’s

change”. İlker Aytürk (2004: 13-15) gives a summary of this publication and also points out: “Samih Rifat’s theory attracted criticism and ridicule, even within the nationalist circles. Samih Rifat did, however, manage to get an extended version of his lecture published thanks to his influential position at the Ministry of Education. This small book, *Türkçede Tasrif-i Huruf Kanunları ve Tekellümün Menşei* [*The Rules of the Declension of Letters in Turkish and the Origin of Speech*], is by and large forgotten today, in spite of its importance for the study of Turkish nationalism and the little-known riddle that it contains. Samih Rifat stated his aim in writing this book in the introduction: He wanted to prove that ‘Turks are the oldest race in the world’”.

³² Duru 1933: 35.

³³ See Rifat 1932 [1934].

³⁴ Rifat claims for example that the names for mother in the Aryan, Semitic and Hamitic languages originate from the stem “im” in the Old Turkish word “imi = woman”. See *ibid.*: 210.

³⁵ Ersanlı 2003: 162. See Laut 2000: 58 with reference to the law professor Yusuf Ziya (Özer) (1870-1947), who reacted “methodologically” in a similarly untroubled and inconsistent way.

³⁶ See Ersanlı 2003: 163-165. Ahmet Caferoğlu (1899-1975), Avram Galanti (1873-1961) and Fazıl Nazmi (1875-1949) were critical of Samih Rifat’s lecture.

podium at the First Turkish Language Congress so that he would oppose Hüseyin Cahit (Yalçın) (1875-1957) who represented the only dissenting opinion³⁷.

Even members of the Language Society with linguistic training such as Ahmet Cevat (Emre) (1878-1961) praised Samih Rifat in the highest terms after his death. In a eulogy he wrote³⁸ that Rifat was competent beyond any “western philologist” to compare the Turkish language with the Semitic and Indo-European languages and that he had thereby established the significance of the discipline of linguistic paleontology³⁹.

Samih Rifat, according to Emre, had discovered that in the “roots of Turkish” there was a pre-grammatical edifice of forms with prefixes, inflection and metatheses. This edifice was later adopted by the Semitic and Indo-European languages. As some examples of forms with prefixes Emre cites from Samih Rifat’s presentation the following: *almak* ‘to take’, *çalmak* ‘to steal’, *tal(a)mak* ‘to loot’, *yal(a)mak* ‘to lick’, *salmak* ‘to let go’, *kalmak* ‘to stay’⁴⁰.

Samih Rifat supports his theory of the earlier existence of inflected forms [*Flexion’lu teşekkül*] by citing such terms as *kasmak* ‘to tighten’, *kesmek* ‘to cut’, *kısmak* ‘to reduce’, *kösmek* (*köskü*) [=küskü? ‘crowbar’], *kusmak* ‘to vomit’. And finally, he cites examples such as *katmak/takmak* ‘to add’/‘to attach’ and *sapmak/basmak* ‘to diverge’/‘to tread upon’ as proof of the existence of forms with a metathese in pre-historic Turkish⁴¹.

Emre holds that Samih Rifat’s etymological analysis of the word for water, *su*, was especially “brilliant” [*parlak*]⁴². With it he had discovered that the form “s+vowel” – as with the meaning of water – could be found in the “roots” of several languages. Though Emre admits that Rifat’s list of the words with

³⁷ See Atay 1969: 475; Landau 1993: 282. Compare also *Türk Dili* 8 (1934), 54: At the Second Turkish Language Congress in 1934 Ahmet Caferoğlu started a presentation on “The first Turkish memorials in the Russian language”, but Atatürk was disgusted and left the hall after which the Congress President demanded that Caferoğlu leave the lectern.

³⁸ Emre 1933: 13-18.

³⁹ *Ibid.*: 14. The term “linguistic paleontology” can be traced to the German philologist and folklorist Adalbert Kuhn (1812-1881). The term was also used by Adolphe Pictet (1799-1875) in his work *Les origines indo-européennes ou les Aryas primitifs. Essai de paléontologie linguistique*, 2 volumes, Paris, 1859-1863. The “method” was widely disseminated through philologist Otto Schrader (1855-1919). See Römer 1989: 73-74.

⁴⁰ Emre 1933: 15.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*: 16.

“s+vowel” may have moved into the realm of fantasy, yet he considered these comparisons to be very comprehensive⁴³.

At the beginning of his eulogy Emre promises to follow in Samih Rifat’s footsteps. Indeed, Emre publishes an article in the journal *Türk Dili* in April 1934, in which he uses some of the examples for the formula “s+vowel” as proof that there is a vowel alteration in the Turkish language as in Indo-European languages. The examples he gives for that are: *su* ‘water’, *sıvık* ‘highly fluid’, *sıva* ‘plaster’, *savak* ‘drainage’ (in dialect), *savum* ‘?’, *ıslak* ‘wet’⁴⁴. We must note, however, that though these words all have meanings associated with water, and some of them most likely have the same etymological root, they of course do not prove that Turkish has synchronically applied changes of its radicals to form certain grammatical categories.

Since this article provides an insightful view on how the Turkish linguists dealt with the typological language classification and “the problem of agglutination”, I will briefly sum up the other arguments of the author.

Emre finds the tripartite typology of languages faulty. He points explicitly to the fact that this typology prevents the further investigation of the relationship between Turkish and inflected languages. He holds that as long as one does not cut through this Gordian knot there will be no progress in linguistics.

Emre’s deals at first with the characteristics of inflection⁴⁵. Here he finds that inflection in the Indo-European languages is completely different from inflection in Arabic. The use of prefixes, infixes and vowel changes exists only in Arabic and does not occur in the European languages. Inflection in the European languages involves changes only at the end of the words. The so-called prefixes are nothing more than compound words. He detects that the problem for Turkish linguists is that they have internalized the concept of inflection as it exists in Arabic and not as it exists in the European languages.

After having stated that inflection means the changing of the end of the word stem, he turns to the question whether Turkish uses inflection and, if it does, where and to what extent it uses inflection⁴⁶. For this purpose, Emre compares the

⁴³ *Ibid.*: 17.

⁴⁴ Emre 1934: 65.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*: 67-70: “What is Inflection?” [*Tasriflik Nedir?*].

⁴⁶ With that the “lacking word unity of the agglutinative languages” is meant, as discussed by Röhrborn 1991.

following sentences in Turkish, Greek and French: “Birini ayaklarından tuttu” [He/she/it grabbed someone by the feet], “Tina pod.on laven”⁴⁷, “Il a saisi quelqu’un par les pieds”⁴⁸.

He compares the Greek and Turkish sentences and establishes that, analytically, they have an identical verb inflection⁴⁹. Beyond that the Turkish inflectional ending *-tu* is more absorbed into the word than the Greek ending as it produces seven further variants. For him the vowel harmony and the assimilation of consonants occurring in Turkish is a proof of a more developed level of inflection in the Turkish language; a level which the Indo-European languages obviously could not have reached yet.

Emre argues further that the word *birini* ‘somebody’ resembles an Indo-European declination type as much as the Greek *tina*. According to Emre it is not a valid argument to say that Turkish has no gender and therefore cannot be related to the Indo-European languages; English, for instance, has also lost gender distinction. In fact, when compared to French, Turkish is far more flexible: He considers the word *quelqu’* in French very rigid and argues that such rigid words turn French into a very unflexible language, more similar to Chinese with its empty word forms.

His next argument deals with the claim that “in the Turkish inflection the morpheme does not unite with the word stem in a very tight manner” [*Türk tasrifindeki sondan değişimlerde morfem (lâhika) kökle pek te sıkı bir surette birleşmezmiş*]⁵⁰. For him the vowel harmony in Turkish completes the unity of the word stem and the morpheme. He also refutes the argument that in Turkish for each category there is one suffix, while Indo-European languages can express two or more categories with one suffix only. Finally, he agrees that in Turkish the suffixes are attached successively, but he holds that European languages also have this type of suffixes. His examples for this are the following words: “Gen+er+al+e+ment” [*sic*] and “Na+tion+al+ism+e”⁵¹. But he gives no further explanation of the elements which he presents as suffixes. Instead of that he recognizes that this kind of suffixes occurs more often in Turkish than in the Indo-

⁴⁷ The dot in *pod.on* stands for an aspirated *d* – *AT*.

⁴⁸ Emre 1934: 70.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*: 71.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*: 72. With that the “lacking word unity of the agglutinative languages” is meant, as discussed by Röhrborn 1991.

⁵¹ Emre 1934: 72

European languages. But according to Emre this happens due to the fact that Indo-European languages use periphrases and auxiliary words to express certain grammatical categories. While for example the Turkish causative verb forms “*söyletmek*” or “*söylettirmek*” ‘to let say’ are “short and flexible words”, in French one has to apply either a compound verb like “*faire parler*” or a long expression like “*avoir recours à des intermédiaires pour faire parler*”⁵².

His conclusion is that there is no essential feature which mitigates against the assumption that there is a relationship between Turkish and Indo-European and Semitic languages. He argues that once the wrong-minded tripartite typology is suppressed there is no further obstacle to demonstrating how Turkish played a role in the development of these other languages and that, as the Turkish national concern dictates, Turkish was, indeed, the proto-language of the others⁵³.

In this first stage of the work of the Turkish Language Society we find contradictory approaches co-existing. Naim Hâzım (Onat) (1889-1953), for example, argues in several articles that in very ancient times for many centuries Arabic has taken over a great deal of Turkish word material because of the cultural superiority of the Turks and Turkish⁵⁴. These Turkish loanwords have been “semitized”, i.e., transformed into inflected words in Arabic, and therefore one can say that “the Semitic tribes [...] have literally created an inflected Turkish”⁵⁵. That would mean “that Arabic is no more than a deformed variant of Turkish”⁵⁶. Interestingly, however, Onat even quotes a statement of Nikolay Marr (1864-1934)⁵⁷, who argued that Turkish is the proto-language of Arabic, but then rejects this claim, because for him the conformity between Turkish and Arabic does not come from the same origin⁵⁸. For him Turkish is agglutinative and Arabic an inflected language, but dominated by Turkish, a complete reversal of what was the dominant view about the relationship between Turkish and Arabic.

A presentation by Saim Ali (Dilemre) (1880-1954) is especially interesting because he explicitly rejects the “racist” linguistic classifications of the

⁵² *Ibid.*: 73.

⁵³ *Ibid.* At the Second Turkish Language Congress in August 1934 Emre uses very similar arguments to prove the affinity of Turkish and the Indo-European languages (see Laut 2000: 91-93).

⁵⁴ See for example Onat 1933 and 1934.

⁵⁵ Onat 1933: 2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ See *ibid.*: 1. On the influence of Marr on the work of the Turkish Language Society, see Tetik 2002.

⁵⁸ Onat 1933: 2.

Europeans⁵⁹. The title of his presentation is “Eski Dil Mefhumu”, literally meaning “The Conception of the Old Language”⁶⁰. Probably by “old language” Dilemre meant proto-language. He accuses (European) linguists of having political motivations in their approach to the issue. Though he does not question the tripartite division of languages, yet he notes that the association of each of these groups with a particular level of cultural development is faulty. He accuses those linguists to be racists who consider the peoples who have an inflected language to be more advanced.

“They say that nations with inflected languages are more developed, vibrant and enterprising. When one reads these books, one is astonished by the racism and politics expressed there”⁶¹.

He cites Antoine Meillet (1866-1936) as an example of a linguist who holds the Indo-Europeans to be the superior race with his observation that everywhere where an inflected language is spoken there is a ruling people⁶². Dilemre’s argumentation cites the Japanese as a people who have accepted European culture although they speak an agglutinative language. He argues that if it were true that some linguistic systems really are more capable of assuming “higher competence” and others are not capable of this, this would not have been possible:

“Language systems [linguistic types] neither promote nor hinder the development of culture. Culture develops as needed. Language follows the industrial development, grows with it and is dependent upon it. Language is the means by which industry/technical progress is disseminated, not its source”⁶³.

Dilemre is especially vehement in his opposition to authors who assert that each social group was autonomous and had developed independently with a linguistic system having a unique spirit [*ruh*]. With such thinking an attempt was being made to link the cultural ability of a race and its linguistic system [*dil sistemi*]. From all that was being said he concluded that the question of an original language cannot be solved internationally because each nation harbored egotistical interests in the problem:

⁵⁹ Dilemre 1935: 74.

⁶⁰ See Dilemre 1935.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*: 74.

⁶² *Ibid.*: 74-75.

⁶³ *Ibid.*: 75.

“This wide-spread arrogance by which each nation makes these efforts will probably prove to be detrimental to humanity in a few centuries. Yet, it would be nonsense if we today focused on the distant benefits or disadvantages of these trends. It will take time till all societies are able to resolve their issues on an international level”⁶⁴.

Yet, following these remarkable and thoughtful conclusions Dilemre turns to his etymological experiments, and these are not at all different from the already-mentioned Turkish etymological experiments in their absence of science. On the basis of his “paleo-linguistic” investigations Dilemre posits that many productive suffixes in the Indo-European languages are “Turanian”. He holds that agglutination exists in the European languages, as do expressions of the isolating type. These Indo-European languages were not initially inflected. After all, he argues, the Turkish verbs are more inflected [*fleksiyonel*] than the German verbs. He then lists the many “Turkish” prefixes and suffixes found in the Indo-European languages. Taking one example, Dilemre posits that the prefix *co-* is a derivative of the Turkish verb *ko-* (= *ilave etmek* = ‘to add’). All these “Turkish prefixes and suffixes” bring Dilemre to the following conclusion:

“The suffixes and prefixes were themselves separate words in the old languages. This is a generally accepted fact. That in Turkish they are still separate words proves that Turkish is the oldest European language”⁶⁵.

Drawing a conclusion on developments up to this point, it seems fair to say that up till 1935 many varieties of problematic argumentation dominated the theoretical work of the Turkish Language Society. As for the actual practice of language reform there were also many obstacles. The extreme form of linguistic purification would only have succeeded in rendering them virtually speechless. Things then reached a crisis. In the autumn of 1935, the Sun-Language Theory was officially declared. Though there is much to say about this theory and its hypothesis on the origin of human language I will confine the discussion here to its treatment of agglutination⁶⁶.

The Sun-Language Theory posits the origin of all human language to have been Turkish. This concept is founded on the contention that human awareness of the sun resulted in the first phoneme *a* which when repeated required the

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*: 77.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*: 81.

⁶⁶ Türk Dil Kurumu (ed.), 1935.

introduction of the guttural consonant ğ. Then, from *ağ* all other phonemes came into being. With increasingly sophisticated thinking in humans more morphemes developed, all of which can be detected in the Turkish language.

The Sun-Language Theory was a magical way to prove that the whole of the world's lexicon is actually Turkish. The theory no longer deals with the troublesome problems of agglutination. The theory's evidence is rather "mechanical", with mathematical calculations to explain the way in which suffixes developed with the addition of vowels and consonants. Some of such suffixes closely resemble existing Turkish suffixes such as the causative. The "methodology" of the Sun-Language Theory is strongly influenced by Nikolay Marr's method of the four elements⁶⁷.

In January 1936 the Faculty of Languages, History and Geography was founded and within the Institute for Turkology a professorship for the Sun-Language Theory was created. Several textbooks were published about it including one by Abdülkadir İnan (1889-1976) who held the chair for etymology⁶⁸. In the second volume of this work, Chapter VII deals with "Language Families and the Problem of the Proto-Language" [*Dil Aileleri ve Ana Dil Meselesi*]⁶⁹ as follows:

"For this reason the Sun-Language Theory gives no particular value to the division of the world's languages into separate language families. Now that the question of the origin of language has been solved, and that the element *ağ* is known as the origin of all languages, these linguistic classifications have lost their scientific value. The main thesis of the **Sun-Language Theory** is proof that the Turkish language is the origin of all the languages of the globe. The analysis of this theory demonstrates that words with the same meaning all have the same origin though they are not at all in similar forms. This emancipates linguistics from formalism and etymology with their comparisons of form. Thus, the classification of the languages of the world is today nothing more than an issue of historical interest"⁷⁰.

With the Sun-Language Theory the Turkish linguists didn't have to deal any more with troublesome arguments with the so called "classical linguists" – a term

⁶⁷ See Tetik 2002.

⁶⁸ İnan published two volumes on the Sun-Language Theory: İnan 1936a and 1936b.

⁶⁹ İnan 1936a: 52-56.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*: 56; emphasis in the original.

which was also taken from Marr for the traditional European historical linguists. Naim Hâzim Onat states on the Third Turkish Language Congress in 1936:

“Dear friends, the changing of the words throughout countless centuries, their taking one meaning after the other could have astonished us in former times; but the rays of the methods of the Sun-Language Theory shorten the distance between the meanings of the words and untangle easily the most difficult knots with its methods”⁷¹.

The Sun-Language Theory was an episode in Turkish linguistics which lasted only three years. It was very closely related to Atatürk who, we know from those around him, most likely believed in its validity. It is significant that following his death in November 1938 the Sun-Language Theory suffered a quiet death. İbrahim Necmi Dilmen (1887-1945), who held the professorship for Sun-Language Theory at the newly founded University of Ankara, is quoted as answering the question why he was no longer teaching the Sun-Language: “After the sun has died, how can the theory survive?”⁷².

After this short episode of the Sun-Language Theory the Turkish Language Society continued coining new words and terms to purify the Turkish language. Thanks to the work of Klaus Röhrborn⁷³, we know that many of these linguists were still troubled by the problem of agglutination. They preferred to employ irregular unproductive suffixes with the intention of de-glutinating the new words. They also introduced prefixes into the Turkish language as, for example, *önyargı* ‘prejudice’, *önkoşul* ‘precondition’, *asteğmen* ‘sub-lieutenant’, *üstteğmen* ‘over-lieutenant’, etc. The decision to write the interrogative suffix separately so that it would appear as a separate word, (i.e. *Fransız mısınız?* ‘Are you a Frenchman?’ instead of *Fransızmışınız?*) was obviously also due to the fact that it looks less agglutinative.

⁷¹ Onat 1937: 188.

⁷² Cited in Lewis 1999: 73.

⁷³ Röhrborn 1987 and 1991.

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