11 Multilingualism and the End of the Ottoman Empire: Language, Script, and the Quest for the 'Modern'

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In considering the intricate linguistic situation of the late Ottoman Empire, it is useful to think of layers of language. The empire's many linguistic strata, like its variably polyglot population, frequently overlapped – to the point of piling up many times in multilingual individuals and communities – or remained relatively thin in the case of monolingual majority. Even then, as we shall see, speakers of one language were inherently engaged in a kind of multilingualism, given the extent to which the supposedly discrete tongues were influenced by neighboring vocabulary and even grammar. The situation was even more complex when we consider that Ottoman Turkish contained several linguistic registers, ranging from 'high' or literary Turkish to 'low' or the rough vernacular of everyday life. Yet, broadly speaking, in the late imperial period of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and then much more emphatically in the post-Ottoman era, the trend was in the direction of monolingualism. This was the result of a number of interrelated factors, including technological change, rising literacy rates, and state policies aimed at imposing national unity. Together they militated for linguistic simplification, alphabetic reform, and the reduction of other perceived barriers to popularization. The layers of language that had been the hallmark of imperial culture would soon become thinner and less overlapping, but they would never disappear.

In the opening chapter of his recent book on late Ottoman port cities, Fuhrmann (2020) offers an arresting anecdote that reveals the ways in which individual linguistic layers were formed in the imperial era and then submerged in the period of its national successor states. A Greek colleague described the way her grandfather's dementia had revealed the linguistic strata of his past as his condition worsened. The disease, "a gradual erosion of an individual's personality as it has evolved throughout his or her life," caused the elderly man to lose his memory in stages. The first to go were the most recent memories. It was as if he were traveling back in time to his childhood in the late Ottoman Empire. Two important linguistic ruptures, Fuhrmann notes, "managed to particularly startle his relatives. At some point the man stopped speaking Greek and would only talk in Turkish anymore. But in a later stage,

his use of Turkish came to be replaced by the singing of French Christian and children's songs" (p. 7).

This man's dementia, it seems, managed to reveal the linguistic phases of his life. As a member of the Karamanlı community of Turkish-speaking 'Greeks' (called "Rum" in the Ottoman context) of Anatolia, he had probably attended a French missionary school. When his family was forced to move across the Aegean Sea to mainland Greece in the population exchanges of 1923, organized on the principle of religious and not ethnolinguistic belonging, he would have had to learn modern Greek, perhaps as a beginner. His illness, in effect, revealed the linguistic layers of his life, laying bare but in reverse order the linguistic sedimentation that was laid down in the late Ottoman and nation-state eras. Subsequent nationalist policy on language would attempt to impose rather simplistic but sometimes brutally effective alterations to this accumulated linguistic stratigraphy.

In this chapter I attempt to provide some background on the multilingual situation in the late Ottoman Empire, analyze the ways in which language was increasingly but problematically expected to align with ethno-national identity, and discuss the various attempts to engineer a 'solution' to the 'problem' of linguistic diversity in the late- and post-Ottoman eras. A central theme will be the ways in which technological change, which manifested in the form of such vehicles as the telegraph and movable type, served as an impetus for attempts to 'modernize' language, both its script and its syntax. Stepping back from the mechanics of language and the attempts to change it, we will see that despite the teleology of national historiography, the move from multi- to monolingualism in the late Ottoman Empire and after was an unnatural and messy affair. As an examination of the late Ottoman era from a linguistic perspective reveals, the Ottoman case does not lend itself easily to the nationalist trajectories into which it was made to fit by the dominant political and cultural narratives that became almost sacred in the empire's successor states.[1] By focusing on both the ideological and technological propellants of the period, this chapter attempts to disentangle the main features of the move from predominant multilingualism to an aggressively pursued monolingualism of the nation-state era.

11.1   The Linguistic Situation in the Late Ottoman Empire

The late Ottoman Empire was remarkably polyglot. Even though the borders of the empire had shrunk from their greatest extent, reached in the sixteenth

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[1] For an excellent overview of the Ottoman multilingual scene, see Strauss (2011); for a comparative look at the Ottoman to post-Ottoman transition in the Balkans, Anatolia, and the Arab lands, see Anscombe (2014).
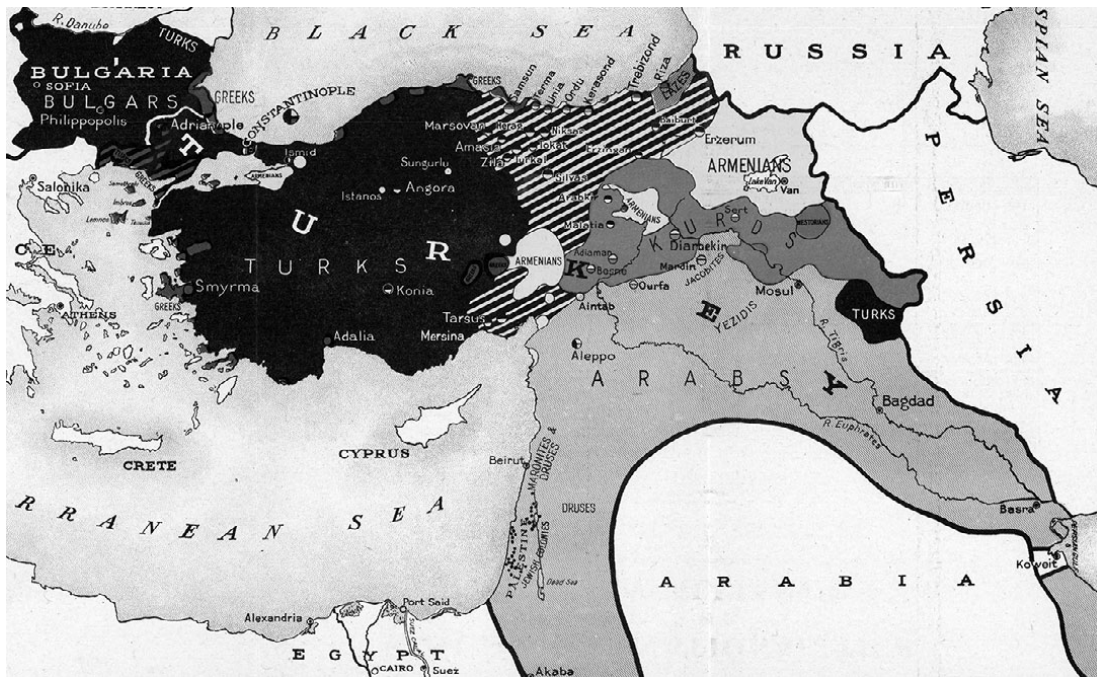
Fig. 11.1 Subject nationalities of the German alliance (detail), 1917. Cornell Library Digital Collections, public domain.

and seventeenth centuries when it ranged from Central Europe in the West to the Iranian plateau in the East and from the Caucasus in the North to Sudan in the South, the languages spoken remained extraordinarily diverse in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reflecting the varied origins of its many ethnolinguistic subjects (Fig. 11.1).

Even as the empire contracted, the number of languages spoken tended to rise due to the mixed origins of the refugees flooding into its diminishing territory as a result of the upheavals in the surrounding regions, including ethnic cleansing and other forms of demographic engineering. Attempts at counting the languages spoken in the Ottoman lands, volatile and frequently contested under any circumstances (cf. Duchêne & Humbert, 2018; Duchêne et al., 2018), were particularly difficult; even more challenging was the aim of mapping those tongues onto space.

Although such linguistic diversity might have been seen as a source of the multiethnic empire's sociocultural strength, it was increasingly considered to be a political weakness. In an era of increasingly strident nationalist fervor, which frequently bore the signs of social Darwinism, such linguistic richness was seen as a sign of vulnerability. While some Ottoman intellectuals encouraged a decentralized approach that would allow for regional differences, others emphasized centralization. The latter tendency ultimately prevailed, since at every key juncture it was the centralizers who triumphed, first under the reform-minded *Tanzimat* [Reorganizations] era (1839–1876) when political

power was transferred from the palace to the newly established ministries of the central bureaucracy, then under Sultan Abdülhamid II (reigned 1876–1909) who reclaimed dynastic control, and subsequently under the rule of the Committee of Union and Progress (1908–1918), a group of revolutionary centralizers who ruled from behind the scenes until just before World War I. Each era had its own desiderata, but centralization was a common objective among all the major rulers of the empire's final decades. When the Turkish Republic was established in 1923, it continued and, in many respects, intensified the drive toward centralization. A unified language policy was, as we shall see, a key component of the new nation-state's approach.

It was hardly surprising that these very different Ottoman rulers, concerned as they were with the notion of unity and the assumed geopolitical weakness that the lack of such unity would entail, aimed to forge an imperial whole out of its varied peoples. The concept of the 'union of the elements' was a frequently hailed aspiration, even if it now looks stunningly impractical in retrospect. To gain a sense of the size of the task at hand – and, indeed, of the irony inherent in such an approach – consider a publication from 1911 urging all Ottoman peoples to form a united front, namely, *İttihad-ı Anâsır-ı Osmaniye* [the union of all Ottoman elements]. Its authors on the Union of All Ottoman Elements Committee considered it necessary to publish their appeal in no less than nine languages and in multiple scripts. Even so, they ignored some of the empire's important tongues, including Albanian, Kurdish, and Rumanian, not to mention the numerous languages of the Caucasus.[2] As Hanioğlu (2008) aptly notes, this publication "gives some idea of the multilingualism of the empire" (p. 33). The elusive search for political unity perforce ran through – and across – the question of linguistic diversity.

The main language of the empire, namely, Ottoman Turkish, was in important respects itself multilingual. While its grammatical frame was Turkish, its vocabulary drew heavily from Arabic and Persian reservoirs (to say nothing of the borrowings from many other languages, a subject to which we return below) and it even borrowed grammatical and syntactical elements from Arabic and Persian as well. The recourse to what was effectively three languages (the term *elsine-i selâse* referred to the three languages whose mastery was required for proper Ottoman literary production)[3] made Ottoman Turkish "one of the richest and most complex languages in the

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[2] The authors of the pamphlet do not indicate the reasons for omitting these tongues, but one can guess that the fact that Albanian and Kurdish are deeply divided by dialect was an important factor. Additionally, Kurdish did not yet have a standard literary form in this period. Rumanian had ceased to be as important for the empire after Romania achieved independence following the 1877–1878 Russo-Ottoman War.

[3] This term illustrates one way in which Ottoman Turkish incorporates Arabic and Persian vocabulary and grammatical structures. Here, two words of Arabic origin, *elsine* [languages]

Fig. 11.2 Baker standing in front of the "American Bakery" that displays signs in Armenian, Ladino (in Hebrew characters), English, Ottoman Turkish, Greek, and Russian with samples of bread attached to the mullions, Ortaköy, Istanbul, Turkey, 1922. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Public domain.

world" (Hanioğlu, 2008, p. 35). There was also a wide gap between the learned and popular registers of Ottoman Turkish, to the degree that it has been considered in retrospect to have constituted a case of diglossia (Strauss, 1995b, p. 233). When we consider that besides Turkish, Arabic, and Persian, the empire's important languages included Greek, Armenian, Albanian, Kurdish, Bulgarian, and Serbian, we can see that the linguistic scene was very rich indeed. In different parts of the empire, certain individual languages were dominant, for example, Arabic in, say, Baghdad, Turkish in the urban areas of central Anatolia, or Greek in several of the coastal cities, such as Izmir/Smyrna (Strauss, 2011, p. 129). In the numerous areas with a high degree of ethnic mixing, numerous tongues were seen (Fig. 11.2) or heard.

and *selase* [three] are connected with the Persian particle *-i* known as the *izafet*, a common feature of Ottoman Turkish.

Compounding the situation even further was the fact that certain groups in the empire crossed the presumptive boundaries separating the population by religion, language, and script. For example, there were the aforementioned Karamanlıs, Greek Orthodox Christians who spoke Turkish, as well as Turkish-speaking Armenian Christians and Muslims who spoke Slavic tongues. As Strauss (2003, p. 39) has noted, because these groups did not fit nationalist expectations, they were often excluded from consideration in nationalist historiography.

Then there are the exogenous languages to consider. In the classical period of the empire the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean, a linguistic medley that included a large number of Italian and Greek terms, served to grease the wheels of commerce, especially the seaborne variety (Kahane et al., 1958). Russian played an important role, especially in the empire's eastern provinces, and left its mark in distinctive loan words that remain extant to this day in modern Turkish, such as *şapka* [hat] and *palto* [overcoat], to name only two (conversely, Russian has a considerable list of Turkish loanwords) (Pelekani, 2014).

The dominant European language of the late Ottoman era was French. Fuhrmann (2020) describes command of French as "the ultimate prerequisite to enter the semi-elitist space within Ottoman urban society" (p. 226). By the nineteenth century advancement in the growing ranks of the imperial bureaucracy, itself modeled in large part on French administration, required a solid command of French. Indeed, the exemplar of the Ottoman state secondary school was the Galatasaray Lycée (*Galatasaray Mekteb-i Sultanisi* or, more commonly, *Galatasaray Lisesi*), an Istanbul institution founded on a French model, whose first directors were French, and in which French and Ottoman Turkish were the joint languages of instruction. Satirical accounts abound in late Ottoman fictional literature of the deracinated Ottoman subject whose speech is so interlaced with French vocabulary that he or she (but usually he) cannot be understood by his fellow Ottoman subjects (Mardin, 1974). (The modern Turkish legacy of this approach can be seen in President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's populist mocking of political opponents and state officials by invoking the term 'monşer,' derived from French *mon cher* [my darling].)

In other words, in its last decades the empire's linguistic scene was rich and getting even richer. Apart from the fact that a Western European language such as French became *de rigueur* for the advancement of state officials, reflecting the growing importance of Western influence even if it never culminated in full-on colonization, the empire's political and territorial retrenchment, far from reducing its linguistic complexity, added to it. As the balance of power shifted from the Ottoman Empire to its rivals in the West, chiefly Austro-Hungary and Russia, it was forced to give up the lands it had conquered in its fifteenth- and sixteenth-century expansions.

To take only two milestones on the route of Ottoman territorial retreat, we can cite the treaty of Küçük Kaynarca of 1774, by which the Ottomans ceded control of the Crimea. Russian occupation of the northern shores of the Black Sea, once an 'Ottoman lake,' followed fairly swiftly. Just over a hundred years later the Ottoman army suffered a disastrous defeat in yet another war with Russia, the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878. The Berlin Congress of 1878 made official the scale of the empire's losses; from Iran to Montenegro the Ottoman borders shrank, ceding, for example, Bosnia-Herzegovina to Austro-Hungary, Thessaly to Greece, Kars and Batum to Russia, and Cyprus to Britain, while creating an autonomous Bulgaria and Crete. In short, the Ottomans lost approximately 230,000 square kilometers of territory and between 5 and 6 million subjects (Fortna, 2008, p. 47).

As the empire's territory contracted as a result of these and other wars lost and treaties signed, the number of languages being spoken inside them increased due to the influx of refugees who sought safety in Muslim territory, as mentioned earlier. Particularly prominent was the mass immigration of peoples from the Caucasus during the last third of the nineteenth century, the result of Russian expulsions and other forms of ethnic cleansing (Strauss, 2016, p. 115). Given the long-standing relations between the largely Muslim population of the Caucasus and the Ottoman Empire, the lands across the Black Sea formed their natural refuge. They brought with them a host of languages that most Ottomans struggled to recognize. As a result, the new arrivals and their language were referred to collectively but inaccurately as 'Circassian' (Çerkes). Conversely, when the empire lost territory, the languages spoken by its inhabitants did not disappear.

But perhaps the strongest, if generally unremarked – perhaps due to the tendency to focus on change and the impact of the new – influence on late Ottoman language was the collective weight and inertia of the Ottoman classical literary tradition. The sheer volume and cumulative heft of the legacy of poetry, the chief genre of the Ottoman and, indeed, of the broader Islamicate literary tradition, was formidable. The range of formal genres and meters, not to mention stylistic conventions, were high barriers to the mastery that was traditionally associated with membership in the Ottoman cultural elite. In an age of growing populism, expanding education, and rising literacy rates, the required fluency of expression in literary Turkish, Arabic, and Persian – and therefore the remove from the everyday language of the street – began to seem oppressive to many, especially those who favored a more popular form of literary expression.

The emerging expectations of the late Ottoman period provoked Ottoman observers to reassess the condition of the Ottoman language in the empire's final decades. Tentative at first, this reevaluation culminated in radical change in the Turkish Republic and its 'Language Revolution' (*dil devrimi*). Two
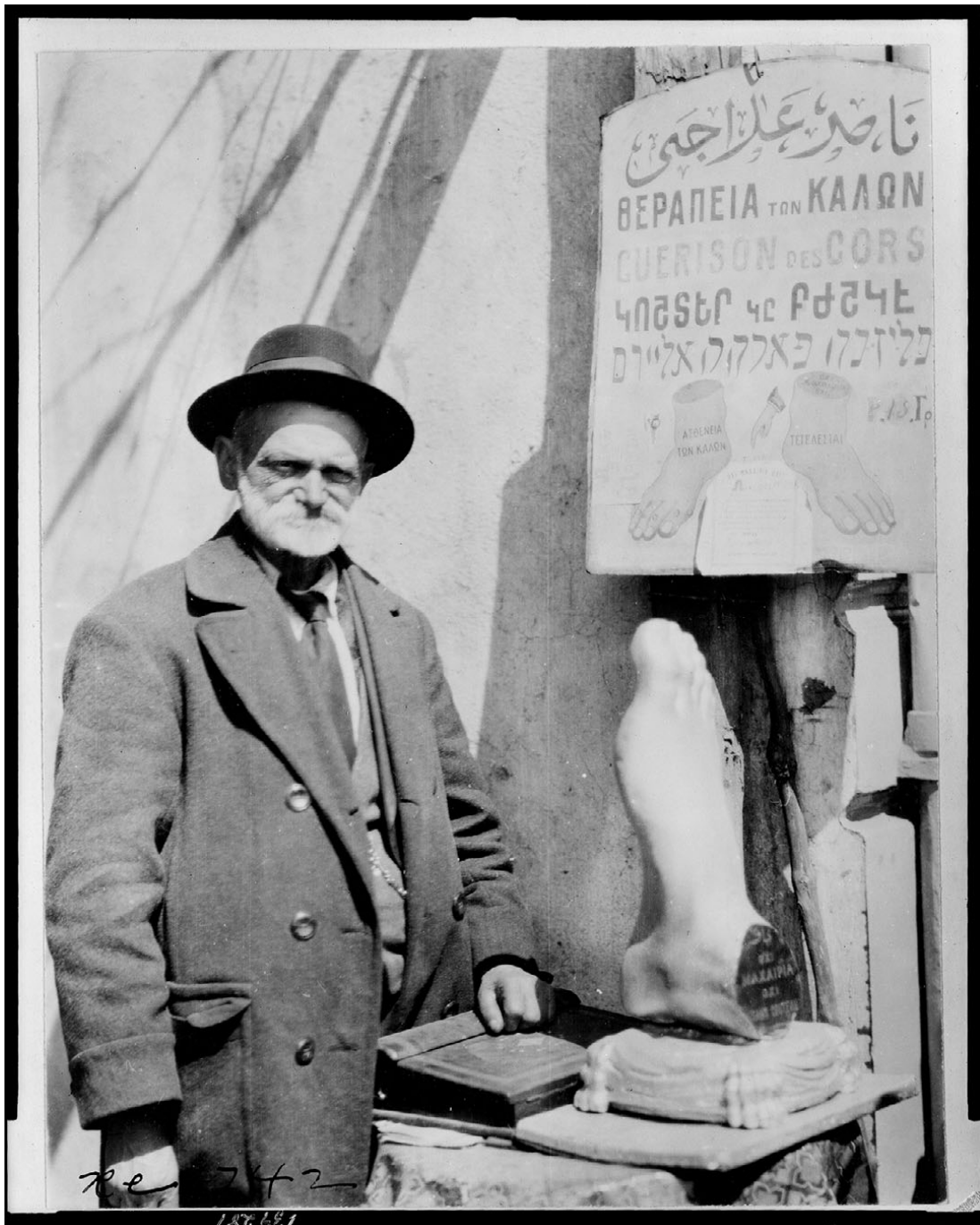
Fig. 11.3 Greek chiropodist in Salonica (Thessaloniki) advertises his services in Ottoman Turkish, Greek, French, Armenian, and Ladino in 1920, three years after the city ceased to be part of the Ottoman Empire. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Public domain.

broad but interrelated areas of concern appeared in discussions concerning Ottoman Turkish in the late imperial era: linguistic complexity and the 'problems' associated with the script in which it was written. Suffice it to say that these newly identified issues were symptomatic of the pressures on and

changes to late Ottoman society effected by the strains of the modern era. Apprehensions concerning, first and foremost, the empire's ability to survive in a rapidly modernizing and increasingly competitive era were compounded by two other distinct but interrelated factors, namely, technological change and nascent populist nationalism.

11.2   Linguistic Complexity

As mentioned above, the cumulative weight of the classical Ottoman literary tradition was heavy. In the late nineteenth century, one symptom of the clash of outlooks between traditionalists and modernizers that was further complicated by the influence of Western literary trends took the form of the 'Decadents controversy' (*dekadanlar tartışması*) in Ottoman letters. This was sparked by an 1897 article critiquing the current trends in literature in which, the conservative author Ahmet Midhat Efendi (1844–1912) opined, linguistic artificiality made it impossible to understand what was actually being said.[4] At a time when the Ottoman press was expanding dramatically, this controversy produced "a moment of collective anxiety about the written register of the Turkish language, now disseminated more widely than before" (Seviner, 2020, pp. 19–20). Ahmet Midhat took particular aim at the "unnecessarily ornate and opaque" nature of the language concocted by some of the younger generation of writers who, in his view, were less than fully versed in classical Ottoman literature but still played with some of its themes and tropes, thereby producing an unsettled – and unsettling – effect. He advised the fictional friend who has been frustrated in trying to read these tortured works that he will have to "read in Ottoman Turkish but think in French" in order to decode the offending prose. As Seviner (2020, pp. 19–20) points out, Ahmet Midhat used the term Decadents to imply both a move toward the immorality of French literature and toward a decontextualized mishmash that borrowed tropes from classical Ottoman literature in nonsensical ways. He was thus engaging in both a form of "verbal hygiene" (Cameron, 2014 (1995)) and policing of literary and sociocultural norms.

The issue of language, both indigenous and exogenous, and the inevitable questions of translation produced by the increasingly complicated linguistic state of the empire were foregrounded in late Ottoman literary production. Translation questions, both textual and cultural, are central to several of the

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[4] The term 'artificiality' is used by Seviner (2020, pp. 19–20) in her analysis of Ahmet Midhat's critique of what he considered to be the vogue for incomprehensible language employed in the literary production of the 1890s. Interestingly for our purposes, Ahmet Midhat Efendi was able to read Turkish in the Armenian script. He is on record as championing the use of the Armenian script as a superior vehicle for rendering Turkish (Cankara, 2015, pp. 6–7). It is likely that Ahmet Midhat mined Armenian literature for use in his prolific writings.

most important late Ottoman novels, which often played on the perceived cultural divide between *alaturka* [Turkish] and *alafranga* [Frankish, i.e. Western] habits, attitudes, appearances, and, of course, utterances. Late Ottoman authors focused on language to highlight the fault lines of the period. The figure of the overly Westernized dandy was a common feature of late Ottoman novels and short stories. He and sometimes she provided the opportunity to critique deracination and cultural loss. A penchant for slavishly aping Western sartorial fashion provided an obvious and visually satisfying target to both writers and cartoonists alike (Brummett, 2000; Şeni, 1995). But a linguistic critique was frequently more cutting. Characters were skewered for over-elaborate phrasing, extended sentences, circumlocutions and, in general, the artificial nature of their language. Reflecting the impact on late Ottoman society of a number of important changes, ranging from the foreign economic and political pressures to changes in thought, taste, and consumption (Levi, 2020), many late Ottoman fictional characters struggled to resolve the challenges of arriving at the appropriate modes of thought, action, and appearance. Cultural anxiety about who the Ottomans were and where their society was headed permeated the literature of the period and was frequently indexed in linguistic and scriptural terms.

11.3   Script 'Problems' and Solutions

In the late Ottoman period, the main script in which Ottoman Turkish was written came to be seen as overly complex and therefore problematic. The language had developed over several centuries into "an admixture of Turkish with Persian and Arabic vocabulary, written in a script combining Arabic and Persian letter forms" (Ertürk, 2011, p. 6). This had worked well for centuries, perhaps mainly because only a relatively small percentage of the population could read and write. Over the course of the nineteenth century, educational offerings in the empire expanded at an unprecedented rate as schools were founded by foreign missionaries, local communities, and the Ottoman state. In these 'new-style' schools, printed materials, textbooks in particular, played an increasingly important role. A secondary effect of the new educational dispensation that replaced erasable slates with individually owned books and increasingly journals and magazines aimed at young readers was the creation of a new market of young readers (Fortna, 2011). In an era of rising literacy, the Ottoman Turkish language and its dominant script increasingly faced calls for reform; what had 'worked' for centuries was now thought to be overly complicated and therefore in need of simplification.

The fact that Ottoman Turkish was at the same time communicated via other scripts, in particular the Greek and Armenian alphabets, reveals an important aspect of the transition from a premodern to a modern conception of the

relationship between language and script. It was increasingly expected that there be a one-to-one correspondence between language and script. This new expectation was as crucial to nationalist fantasies about language as it was awkward in the Ottoman context. To take only one important example, the first 'Turkish novel' was actually written in the Armenian script. The author of *Akabi Hikayesi* [The Story of Akabi] was an Ottoman Armenian named Hovsep Vartanyan. Vartan Pasha, as he was known to the Ottoman establishment, also wrote a history of Napoleon published in both Arabic and Armenian scripts (Strauss, 1995a, p. 211). *Akabi Hikayesi*, published in Istanbul in 1851, is an ill-starred love story featuring the eponymous girl Akabi, from the Armenian Orthodox community, and Hagop, an Armenian Catholic. It is remembered less for its literary merit than for the fact that, uncomfortably for subsequent Turkish nationalists, it was written by an Armenian and in the Armenian alphabet.

The role of the several scripts used to render the Ottoman Turkish language in this period was not inconsequential. It should not be surprising that the first novel in Turkish appeared in a 'non-Muslim' script, such was the propensity for the mixing and matching of languages and alphabets. There was also considerable literary production of Turkish in Greek and Hebrew letters, for example. Ottoman Armenians and Greeks and other non-Muslims were influential in the adaptation of typography, an increasingly crucial factor in the linguistic situation in the empire. Unlike the Arabo-Persian script, the non-Muslim languages all used separate letters, that is, without ligatures connecting the individual letters, a feature that greatly facilitated their adaptation to print. Put another way, the modified Arabic and Persian script used to render Ottoman Turkish was written in a cursive mode that did not allow for the separation of individual letters of the alphabet. For centuries this had not been problematic as scribal and literary culture all depended upon handwritten texts. The advent of printed texts, movable type, and the telegraph placed new and increasingly uncomfortable demands on the Ottoman script.

Script was the operative word; each of the letters deployed in Ottoman Turkish, and Arabic and Persian, for that matter, had multiple forms, depending on its position in a given word, initial, medial, or lateral. Each letter also had its stand-alone version. To make the situation even more challenging for typesetters, various type styles preserved aspects of the calligraphic legacy of handwritten texts. Thus, for example, some favored combining letters vertically as well as horizontally, so that the typesetter needed far more 'sorts' to present the word on the page using the accustomed combination of glyphs and ligatures. By one estimate, Ottoman-language typesetters required at least 500 and in some cases as many as 1,600 to 2,000 signs in their type cases, whereas those working in more simple scripts such as Latin, Greek, or Armenian used less than 100 (Kuzuoğlu, 2020, p. 416). There was thus a

practical impetus that combined with the ideological basis for the reform to militate for a change to the Ottoman script.

Other 'problems' were of longer standing but began to be voiced in the new environment that increasingly sought to spur Ottoman linguistic reform. One set of difficulties centered on the lack of correlation between the vowels of Ottoman Turkish and the letters available for representing them in the Arabic script. Another focused on other 'deficiencies' of the Arabic alphabet (Lewis, 1999, p. 28). For example, the Arabic letter for 'k' (kaf) performs multiple duties in Ottoman Turkish and produces correspondingly different sounds. Another issue raised by would-be reformers of the Arabo-Persian script was the visual similarity that existed between and among consonants, including, for example, the letters 'b,' 'p,' 't,' 'th,' (or 'se') and 'n.' All were designated by placing one or more dots above or below a similar-looking basic letter sign which, the reformers argued, were "susceptible to optical confusion" (Kuzuoğlu, 2020, p. 416). Cumulatively, emphasizing the practical problems newly associated with the existing script resulted in pressure to change it.

11.4   Toward a New Alphabet

Animated by a desire to eliminate such problems with a view to ensuring scientific and literary progress in the Muslim world, literary and bureaucratic figures in the Ottoman and neighboring lands began to call for modifying the existing script from the 1850s onward. As Kuzuoğlu's (2020) recent research has shown, the impact of non-Muslim advocates for change and the role played by non-Muslims in adapting their alphabets to the new technologies of the day provided important stimuli to rethinking the Arabo-Persian script (p. 416). Münif Pasha (1830–1910), founder of the Ottoman Scientific Society and chief interpreter at the Sublime Porte, suggested two solutions in 1862. One was to add diacritical marks to distinguish between the letters by adopting the three diacritical marks used in Arabic as well as five newly created signs to represent the full phonology of Turkish. The other, more radical, recourse was to separate the letters from each other and render them unconnected to each other, with the relevant diacritical marks to appear on the line as opposed to above or below it. The following year brought a proposal from the Azerbaijani playwright and interpreter to the Russian viceroy in the Caucasus Mirza Fatali Akhundzade (1812–1878), who had traveled to Istanbul to present similar ideas. Both reformers were driven in part by technological, that is to say, typographical, concerns. By reforming the Ottoman alphabet, these 'typographic Muslims' aimed to build on the work of their non-Muslim counterparts to reduce the barriers to printing and communication that they deemed to be hindering progress in the Islamic world (Kuzuoğlu, 2020, p. 415).

The passage of time and the spread of technological change, including the telegraph and the insistence it placed on separating letters for rapid communication via Morse code,[5] increased pressure for alphabetic reform in the Islamic world. In the Ottoman lands, the reign of conservative Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909) halted the reformist cause for a time, but the work recommenced after he was deposed. With the heavy-handed censorship of the Hamidian era lifted, there was an explosion of publications in the Ottoman Empire, which seems to have resuscitated the work of rethinking the alphabet. A Society for Alphabet Reform (*ıslah–ı huruf cemiyeti*) was formed in 1911 and soon produced a stand-alone alphabet. This caught the attention of Enver Pasha (1881–1922), the rising figure in the Ottoman military. Enver ordered the use of alphabet with separate letters across the Ottoman military in 1914. Although a number of key publications were produced in this script, it was soon abandoned owing to confusion and a lack of training with the alphabet. Still, the precedent had been set in the Ottoman lands, which would have important implications for the Turkish Republic.

Meanwhile neighboring states persevered with alphabetic change. A revised version of the Latin alphabet was published in Azerbaijan in 1919, and the New Turkish Alphabet was introduced into Muslim regions that fell under Soviet control in 1922. It was formally adopted as the official script of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic in 1924 (Kuzuoğlu, 2020, pp. 428–429), a further sign that the Arabo-Persian alphabet and the religious-cultural world it represented were in retreat.

11.5   Toward Monolingualism

By this point, the Ottoman Empire had ceased to exist. The Turkish Republic had been created in 1923 out of what was left of the central Ottoman lands after the Arab provinces had been captured by the Allies toward the end of World War I. Comprised of Eastern Thrace, Istanbul, and Anatolia, the new Republic was territorially and demographically diminished. Further drastic demographic change was effected by the population exchanges organized by the League of Nations in 1923. This compulsory exchange was, as mentioned above, arranged on the basis of religion and not language or ethnicity. Perhaps four hundred thousand Muslims departed Greece for Turkey while as many as 1.6 million Greek Orthodox traveled across the Aegean in the other direction. Many of them, like the boy who would later revert to his earlier language mentioned by Fuhrmann, spoke the language of the region they were departing but not of their new countries. The net effect was cultural alienation on the

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[5] For an excellent overview of the impact of the telegraph, see Carey (1983).

individual level and a collective blow to the multilingual nature of the old regime.

The new Turkish Republic heartily embraced the cause of monolingualism as it tried to impose a culture of homogeneity on what was still a remarkably diverse population. The linguistic situation in Anatolia had been radically altered by the Great War and its immediate aftermath. Its Armenian population had been deported or massacred during the war and the subsequent population exchanges removed most of the Greek-speaking population, along with the Turkish-speaking 'Greeks,' as already mentioned. Nevertheless, the territory of the republic included substantial numbers of non-Turkish speakers, including most prominently Kurds but also a fair number of Greeks, Armenians, Laz, and a number of Muslim refugees from the Balkans and the Caucasus. Faced with this reduced but still palpable multilingual terrain, the Republic led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk aggressively pursued efforts aimed at monolingualism, epitomized by the "Citizen, Speak Turkish" campaign. Kurdish was suppressed in public, only achieving limited legality in the 1990s. Meanwhile the 'Alphabet Revolution' (*harf devrimi*), imposed in 1928 (Lewis, 1999, p. 27 ff.), revealed the heavy hand of state involvement in linguistic engineering. Whereas, as noted above, late Ottoman efforts at script reform were influenced by the alphabets at work in the empire (many of which were used to convey Turkish), the Republican effort relied on adaptation of a writing system used in one or more other languages, albeit from Western and Central Europe rather than from other former members of the Ottoman imperial linguistic stable. From 1928 onward, with only a period of one year to adapt, only the modified Latin alphabet called the New Turkish Alphabet would be legal in the country. Not content to leave it at that, the Kemalist state set about radically altering the Turkish that it was imploring its new citizens to speak. The Language Revolution (*dil devrimi*), which began in 1932, usually translated by the less radical 'Language Reform,' proceeded to purge Turkish of its 'foreign' vocabulary. This meant eliminating the countless words of Arabic, Persian, and other origin that the language had depended on for centuries and replacing them with 'ancient' Turkish words, many of which were actually neologisms concocted by members of various commissions and societies established with this end in mind.

The enormity of this task was not lost on Western journalists in Turkey. Groping for similes that would allow their readers to grasp the scope and radical nature of the change, American correspondents painted a picture of what a similar overhaul would mean for the English language. Readers of the *Hartford Courant* in September 1932 learned that

[a] language conference will be held the end of September under his [i.e., Atatürk's] leadership, to purify the Turkish vocabulary. Ancient Turkish words, unused for

centuries, will be resurrected to replace the Persian and Arabic words which form a large part of the current Turkish speech. The effect will be comparable to the replacing of Latin and Greek derivatives used in English, with the vocabulary of Beowulf, the early Anglo-Saxon epic poem (N.A., 1932).[6]

Two years later the *New York Times* correspondent remarked that

[a]s great as have been the changes, such as the abolition of the fez and the substitution of Latin for Arabic characters, the purification of the language will affect the Turkish people even more deeply, for they must now forget all except about a tenth of the words they have been accustomed to use in everyday speech and must learn an almost entirely new language. It is as if English-speaking peoples decided to banish from their speech all Norman and Latin words, confining themselves entirely to words of Saxon origin (Kernick, 1934).

Comparing the attempt to strip away the multilingual aspects of Turkish to a similar purging of English was fairly apt. Although the reforms only partly succeeded – many neologisms 'stuck' while others disappeared and much Persian and Arabic vocabulary remains in Turkish today – inevitably the language was greatly diminished, certainly in a quantitative sense but also qualitatively since the ability to draw on a larger vocabulary was reduced. One simple gauge of this is to compare the size of an Ottoman Turkish lexicon with its much more slender modern equivalent.

The impact on Turkish society reached far beyond the realms of lexicography. The "catastrophic success,"to use Lewis' (1999) term for the language reform, was widespread. In the decades that followed, for example, the Arabic vocabulary in Turkish-language newspapers declined from 51 percent in 1931 to 26 percent in 1965 (Lewis, 1999, pp. 158–161). The surname law of 1934 stipulated that all citizens must adopt a surname, not a hitherto common practice, and that the names they chose be of Turkish origin. Place names were similarly Turkified. In Eastern Anatolia the preponderance of Kurdish, Armenian, Arab, and Syriac names was drastically eliminated in favor of Turkish toponyms. In one province in Eastern Anatolia, namely, Mardin, roughly nine out of ten place names were changed (Öktem, 2008, paras. 44–45).[7] The replacements were often unimaginative or generic but served the Republican regime's purpose of marking the territory as part of its drive toward monolingualism.

Conclusion

The monolingual direction pursued by the Turkish Republic has been replicated in many of the other Ottoman successor states. Family and place names

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[6] Thanks to Nicole Crisp for this source.

[7] Interestingly, some names have reverted to their original versions, such as the Dersim where in 2019 the municipal council voted to restore that name in place of Tunceli, which had been imposed after Ankara's brutal military conquest in 1938.

have been changed, and not only in Turkey, but many words and surnames retain vital clues to the multilingual past. Numerous Greek, Armenian, and even Arab surnames contain Turkish elements. Examples include the honorific *Hatzi* or Chatzi of countless Greek names that preserves the Turkish *Hacı*, itself derived from Arabic *hajji* [pilgrim], and the patronymic *-oglou* (Turkish -oğlu). Armenian names frequently preserve Turkish elements, such as trades or other attributes, as in Kuyumciyan (from Turkish *kuyumcu*, son of the jeweler or goldsmith). George Deukmejian (1928–2018), the former Governor of the US state of California, owed his surname to the Turkish term for 'founder' or 'metal worker' (*dökmeci, dökümcü*) and his wife Gloria's maiden name was Saatjian, derived from the Turkish 'watchmaker' (*saatçi*). The outrageously murdered Saudi Arabian journalist and dissident Jamal Khashoggi's family name is an Arabized version of the Turkish term *kaşıkçı*, meaning 'spoon maker' or 'spoon seller.'

Such onomastic evidence of intercultural relations is so widespread as to be generally overlooked, but from time to time the repressed multilingual clues jarringly reappear. In 2007 a controversy developed when a journalist published evidence that the iconic presidential residence of Çankaya in Ankara had been Armenian property before it had become Atatürk's official home (Kezer, 2012, p. 169 ff.). In the face of outrage and vehement denial, the Armenian script adorning a fountain on the property mutely testified to the surname of the original Armenian owners and thus raised the awkward question of how the property had changed hands during World War I. Like the elderly Greek man whose dementia revealed the linguistic history and displacement of his youth, the fixed marble fountain silently evoked a repressed past, one when the empire's multilingualism was both unremarkable and relatively uncontroversial.

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