



SOME LINGUISTIC ISSUES IN TURKISH AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS¹

Yabancı Dil Olarak Türkçe Ders Kitaplarındaki

Kimi Dilbilimsel Sorunlar

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Abstract: In this study, the linguistic issues in the Turkish textbooks used at the universities and other institutions of higher education which provide training in Turkish as a Second/Foreign Language especially in the United States of America are determined and solutions are proposed. Four textbooks

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used commonly in the training of Turkish as a Second Language are selected and evaluated using the systematic criteria developed by Ansary and Babaii (2009). Some aspects of these criteria which can be valid for Turkish are determined by the author of this article in order to evaluate the textbooks in question and the results are presented for discussion.

Keywords: *Turkish textbooks, Turkish as a second/foreign language, textbook evaluation criteria.*

Özet: Bu çalışmada, özellikle Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde Yabancı Dil Olarak Türkçe eğitimi veren üniversite ve diğer yükseköğrenim kurumlarında kullanılan Türkçe ders kitaplarındaki dilbilimsel sorunlar saptanmakta ve çözüm önerileri sunulmaktadır. Yaygın olarak kullanılan dört Yabancı Dil Olarak Türkçe eğitim kitabı seçilerek, Ansary and Babaii (2009) tarafından geliştirilen ve bu çalışmanın yazarı tarafından Türkçe için geçerli olabilecek yönleri saptanan sistematik kriterler kullanılarak söz konusu kitaplar çözümlenmiş ve sonuçları tartışmaya sunulmuştur.

Anahtar sözcükler: *Türkçe ders kitapları, yabancı dil olarak Türkçe, ders kitabı çözümleme kriterleri.*

1. INTRODUCTION AND THE FRAMEWORK

The main goal of this article is to identify the linguistic strengths and weaknesses of some major textbooks used in Turkish as a Second/Foreign Language courses in the US. The framework that has been used in this study consists of the textbook evaluation criteria of Ansary and Babaii (2009) and Tucker (1975) with some modifications and adaptations I have made.

A basic assumption is that one of the major characteristics of foreign language textbooks is linguistic accuracy and consistency. Obviously, one cannot expect to find a single textbook that can serve the requirements and needs of every classroom setting (Williams, 1983,

p.251); however, every textbook should aim to be at least minimally accurate in its linguistic instruction.

A major problem observed in teaching environments of Turkish as a Second or Foreign Language in the US is that the instructors are usually under-qualified in terms of educational background and experience in teaching TFL. At many institutions, a(ny) graduate student whose native language is Turkish is considered a default Turkish instructor. Such instructors rely heavily on the most available textbooks. As noted in Williams (1983:251), "It is ironical that those teachers who rely most heavily on the textbooks are the ones least qualified to interpret its intentions or evaluate its content and method." A properly trained and experienced instructor could make use of any textbook, regardless of its shortcomings, and perform the tasks of a foreign language instructor at an excellent level. However, an inexperienced instructor may have difficulty even with a hypothetical "ideal" textbook. Given these circumstances, the best we can do would be to identify the strengths and weaknesses of commonly used textbooks and make suggestions to make them linguistically accurate.

A systematic evaluation of textbooks would require relevant criteria to work with. Tucker (1975: 355-360) introduces a set of criteria claimed to be "consistent with the basic linguistic, psychological, and pedagogical principles" (355). Two types of criteria are introduced in this scheme: internal criteria which are language-related and external criteria which give a broader view of the book. I will focus on the internal criteria which I have revised as the following for the purposes of this paper:

(1) Internal Criteria for textbook evaluation

(A) Under the Pronunciation criterion, I will pay attention to

- i. completeness in coverage of sounds and suprasegmentals,
- ii. appropriateness: whether or not students assumed come from a specific language or language family, and a specific age group;
- iii. adequacy of descriptions, and quality of practice (practice in context, i.e. sounds practiced in words to include phonological processes that effect phonetic output).

(B) Under Grammar criterion, I will pay attention to

- i. adequacy of structured patterns,
- ii. appropriate sequencing (complex structures built on simpler structures,
- iii. linguistic accuracy and consistency

2. THE TEXTBOOKS / REFERENCE BOOKS

The textbooks under analysis are the following: Öztopçu, Elementary Turkish; Özsoy, Turkish; Bayraktaroğlu & Bayraktaroğlu, Colloquial Turkish; Grammar Modules for Turkish. I will focus on the criteria listed above in section (1) and only briefly comment on the pedagogical nature of the books although there is a lot to say on that issue as well.

2.1. TEXTBOOK 1: ÖZTOPÇU, KURTULUŞ, ELEMENTARY TURKISH:

Öztopçu's textbook is one of the most commonly used textbooks in the US. In terms of a general pedagogical assessment, I should note that it has well organized chapters with a multitude of exercises that can be utilized in the classroom or for self-study. It is methodologically eclectic; however, the variety of exercises serves the purposes of the book well. The language of instruction is English. The

chapters are organized to include a conversation, some cultural points, a grammar presentation, and conventional multiple skill exercises (cloze tests, addition/substitution, translation exercises, role play, etc). The methodology does not include integrated skill exercises, or a content based focus. Some pedagogical strengths of the book include the presentation of verbs with their cases in the glossary at the end; and the introduction to the language at the beginning.

Following is my analysis of the textbook consisting of (A) the pronunciation component and (B) the grammar component.

2.1.1. A) PRONUNCIATION COMPONENT: (Unit 1 is spared for it)

(i) completeness in coverage of sounds and suprasegmentals:

- The presentation of phonemes is accurate.
- Minimal pairs are well-presented for phonemic contrasts.
- All phonetic descriptions are accurate, but they are not described or diagrammed until the following unit.

Inaccuracy is observed in the following:

- International Phonetics Association (IPA) symbols for sounds are missing.
- Linguistic accuracy is compromised for simplification purposes.
- Stress is titled Accent: Accent refers to an unsystematic variation due to a foreign language intervention or a systematic set of minor phonetic variations based on geographical or other demographical differences (See Unit 1 vs. Unit 23).
- Later, focus is referred to as "logical stress" (p.504) which is confusing.
- The term "word focus" (p.608) is used as an undefined term.

Among prosodic features, syllables are stressed within words, and certain phrases are focused if they are in focus positions.

(ii) appropriateness: whether or not students assumed come from a specific language or language family, and a specific age group:

The test assumes English speakers' familiarity with German vowels; assuming even the knowledge of even the basic sound variations in German is not realistic at most US educational institutions.

(iii) adequacy of descriptions, quality of practice:

- "Most Turkish consonants are similar or identical to English consonants" (p.3). This is not linguistically correct. For instance, [t] in Turkish is more dental than the alveolar [t] in English. Major similarities and differences could be noted instead.
- Front round vowels are presented as similar to German: not exactly accurate (French vowels are closer equivalents of the Turkish ones), and pedagogically problematic: it is not customary to include a second unknown in the picture while teaching a foreign language.
- An alternative would be presenting a simple linguistic definition/description, independent of such analogies (e.g. round your lips when you say /i/, etc)

2.1.2. GRAMMAR COMPONENT

In terms of (i) the adequacy of structured patterns, and (ii) the appropriate sequencing, this is a well-written textbook: complex structures are built on simpler structures in a linguistically relevant sequence. Some problematic aspects are due to the lack of a linguistically relevant introduction of the language in terms of its

typological properties. For instance,

- Subject pronouns are marked in parentheses (p.19) without even a note on the pro-drop nature of Turkish. Furthermore, parentheses indicate optionality, and pro-drop is not an optional phenomenon in discourse.
- In Unit 3, the dialogue that starts the chapter includes complex structures presented as colloquial phrases. This may be done to a limited degree but it is done to a pedagogically unmotivated degree: The optative, the imperative structures as well as participial phrases are used in this unit. One could find alternative ways to teach this phrase without getting into complicated syntactic issues. For instance, one can easily teach "Memnun oldum" as a simple phrase for 'Nice to meet you!' without the "Tanıştığımızıza" part.

In terms of (iii) linguistic accuracy and consistency, problem areas seem to be due to taking short cuts; ignoring traditionally described grammar facts of Turkish, and/or recent linguistics/syntactic research on Turkish.

Examples of some major linguistic inaccuracies or errors include the following:

- "The personal suffixes in the present tense of the verb to be in the affirmative are the equivalent of the English (I am, you are, ...) (p.18).

This is an incorrect statement. The phenomenon is a subject-verb agreement one. (This phenomenon is stated much later in a limited context on p.502). Subject markers are NOT instances of the copula in Turkish. The copula is null in Turkish except for epistemic certainty marker -dır. What would be a linguistically appropriate presentation

here is the agreement paradigm for substantive, i.e. non-verbal predicates.

- Cases: The textbook notes that case endings are added to adjectives as well as nouns. (There is a footnote that conflicts this claim, as well) (p. 51)
- A major issue in most textbooks including this one: "Nominal vs. Verbal" agreement suffixes distinction is inaccurate (Aygen, 2004 as well as well other established traditional references such as Banguoğlu):

In some work that surfaced since the 1980's, Subject-Verb Agreement Paradigms are inaccurately presented as two paradigms: Nominal vs. Verbal (George and Kornfilt, 1981; Kornfilt, 1984). It has long been shown both in all traditional Turkish grammars and linguistic research that such a claim is descriptively incorrect for Turkish: What is claimed to be "nominal" forms in the cited work is also observed on *verbal* predicates in the *optative* mood as illustrated below. Similarly, what is claimed to be "verbal" forms are observed on substantive, i.e. *non-verbal* predicates in the *conditional mood*. Compare the so-called "nominal paradigm with the optative verbal agreement forms, and the so called "verbal paradigm" with the conditional substantive forms below:

(2) The incorrect and misleading "Nominal/Verbal" agreement classification illustrated below with the data contradicting that claim:

The so called "Nominal paradigm" on substantives

iyi-(y)im gel-e-(y)im

iyi-sin gel-e-sin

is also observed in Optative agreement paradigm (verbal predicates)

"Verbal paradigm" Conditional paradigm (substantive predicates)

gel-di-m. genç-se-m

gel-di-k genç-se-k

As is observed above and elsewhere (traditional grammars, recent syntactic research, including but not limited to Aygen (2004)), subject-verb agreement paradigms in Turkish are mood-based, i.e. they vary according to the mood of the sentence, not the nature of the predicate.

- Another major linguistic inaccuracy is observed in tense inflections: (p 97) The inflectional material on a verb is given as Verb+tense+mood+ "personal ending"

Further problems in the inflectional properties of Turkish include the following: the inflectional system is incomplete: aspect is never mentioned; derivational vs. inflectional morphology distinction is not made (reciprocal, passive, causative), and such morphemes are presented as mixed list, such as the abilitative, negative, etc.

2.2. TEXTBOOK 2: ÖZSOY, SUMRU, TURKISH/TÜRKÇE

This is an intermediate/advanced textbook. My general pedagogical assessment of this text is that it consists of well-organized chapters; it is methodologically eclectic; the languages of instruction are English and Turkish. In terms of the properties of this textbook for classroom use, suffice it to say that this would make an excellent reference book for teachers and learners of Turkish. It includes a conversation/dialogue, a vocabulary section (with relevant cases), lexical categories, a grammar presentation, and multiple skill exercises (cloze tests, addition/substitution, lots of translation exercises). It lacks integrated skill exercises but includes some content based methodology.

The (A) section of the internal criteria, i.e. the Pronunciation component is not applicable to this textbook.

2.2.1. GRAMMAR COMPONENT

In terms of (i) adequacy of structured patterns, and (ii) appropriate sequencing (complex structures built on simpler structures), this textbook would be ranked very high. However, an introduction to the typological properties of the language is missing.

In terms of (iii) linguistic accuracy and consistency, it has some major strengths:

- verbs are presented with their case properties
- the language of the text is both in English and Turkish (including the terminology)
- the terminology is consistent and linguistically accurate
- coverage of linguistic structures is very good though not without problems: modality is very well defined and illustrated. However, there is no clarification on how to disambiguate them, (p.83)

2.3. TEXTBOOK 3: BAYRAKTAROĞLU & BAYRAKTAROĞLU, COLLOQUIAL TURKISH.

My general pedagogical assessment of this book is that it has well organized chapters, but it is methodologically eclectic. It aims to teach everyday language; therefore, it differs from the previous two textbooks in its scope.

2.3.1. PRONUNCIATION COMPONENT

It has an excellent pronunciation guide including IPA symbols, accurate sound descriptions, efficient practice material, accurate analogy to French vowels with IPA representation of words, not only sound segments as well as well-described stress patterns.

2.3.2. GRAMMAR COMPONENT

In terms of (i) adequacy of structured patterns, and (ii) appropriate sequencing (complex structures built on simpler structures), it is satisfactory, considering its limited scope. As a textbook is written to teach everyday language, it is structured in a needs-based system, which still manages to build more complex structures based on simpler ones.

Titles of the chapters are telling in terms of its aim: giving advice, making recommendations, expressing likes/dislikes, showing appreciation, etc. This function oriented, needs-based textbook for colloquial Turkish is simple, elegant and accurate for the most part.

In terms of (iii) linguistic accuracy and consistency, some major strengths are:

- There is a brief yet concise typological introduction to Turkish.
- Linguistic instructions are mostly accurate.
- The Tense Chart at the end includes stress properties of tense suffixes.

Following are some linguistic problems of this textbook:

- Terminology and accuracy:

- Use of the term "Special" Past tense instead of Hearsay/Evidential/ Perfect {-mİş};
- Conditional is called a "Tense"
- Use of the term "Auxiliary" for clitics *idi, imiş, ise* is an acceptable approximation if not the best;
- Absence of case properties of verbs in the glossary

2.4. TEXTBOOK 4: GRAMMAR MODULES FOR TURKISH

This is not a textbook in the technically sense: it consists of modules that could be utilized by instructors of Turkish as a Second Language. It is available on the AATT website at the members only section: <http://www.princeton.edu/~turkish/aatt/member.htm>

My general pedagogical assessment of the modules is that it has well organized chapters; it is methodologically consistent and mostly content-based. Its specific strengths include the paraphrasing/rewriting exercises in Turkish, and including both English and Turkish as language(s) of instruction. The contexts in the exercises are culturally relevant as well as linguistically sound. There is no direct instruction on grammar points other than illustrated examples. Methodologically, this is consistent with current trends. The pronunciation component of the internal criteria is not applicable.

2.4.1. GRAMMAR COMPONENT

In terms of (i) adequacy of structured patterns, and (ii) appropriate sequencing (complex structures built on simpler structures), it is excellent. The material is presented in context, in increasing complexity not only across modules but also within a given module. For instance, the module on passives (module 4) starts with a mini

dialogue, sample sentences with different passive suffixes; continues with further contextualized exercises. The variety of exercises would allow for multiple integrated skills practices in a classroom setting as well as an individual study (cloze tests, matching exercises, composition, etc). Because it is not a textbook, it does not include any pedagogically relevant instructions.

In terms of (iii) Linguistic accuracy and consistency, I am very pleased to note that I have no observations on inaccuracy. There are, however, some incomplete topics, possibly due to the ongoing nature of the work, including aspectual distinctions and it does not necessarily exhaust all possible structure where a certain grammatical property may be observed.

For instance in Module 6 {miş} is taught under the following headings:

- "reporting" for "Hearsay";
- Inferring and assuming based on evidence for "Evidential";
- Stylistic use in storytelling.

There is no reference to its use as a perfective aspect marker, and its use in an equivalent of past perfect, at least in this module.

Another example would be the following: Modules 21-24 cover conditionals and wish constructions are in Module 25. Probably because there is no explicit grammatical instruction, the distinctions among probable/improbable and impossible conditions are not clear. This could be made clear by contrasting these usages (pairing improbable and impossible ones, etc) in one of the modules. In Module 23, Verb+conditional structure is presented as present

conditionals. Other colloquial usages of the same conditional structures are included as separate items such as *Yapsak iyi olur* "It will be good if we do it" or *Yapsak mı acaba* 'I wonder if we should do it'. However, the fact that this structure is also a "wish" construction could be incorporated here.

3. CONCLUSIONS

In this article, strengths and weaknesses of some major texts used at various institutions in the US are discussed. Major strengths stem from the experience of the authors in teaching Turkish as a Second Language in classroom settings. Major weaknesses stem from the lack of a systematic approach to second language acquisition and overlooking the findings of applied linguistics as well as general linguistics. In general, the pedagogical nature of Turkish textbooks is usually eclectic. Very rarely does one come across a textbook that follows the recent developments in second language acquisition studies and the relevant methodological innovations.

The major areas of problems in terms of linguistic accuracy and consistency are:

- Oversimplification leading to incorrect information.
- Overlooking traditional grammar sources and/or recent linguistic research.
- Terminology inconsistencies/ambiguities/mistakes.
- Lack of sufficient information on the typological properties of Turkish.
- Lack of instructions on how to use the textbook more efficiently (for the instructors and/or students).
- Lack of a systematic choice of methodological and pedagogical

framework as the basis of the textbook leading to an eclectic output.

Ideally, everyone in the field led by experts with backgrounds in both theoretical and applied linguistics should be collaborating to standardize Turkish as a Foreign language instruction materials used in the US and elsewhere. In this endeavor, we must strengthen our dialogue with our expert colleagues worldwide and most importantly colleagues in Turkey. The experience and expertise of our colleagues who have been teaching Turkish as a Second/Foreign Language and training teachers to teach TSL/TFL should be a major source for everyone in this line of business in the US and elsewhere in the world. There is also a huge literature and an accumulation of experience in teaching English as a foreign language that we can tap into. We have the human resources to produce pedagogically efficient and linguistically consistent and accurate textbooks: we have instructors from all relevant fields of Turkish studies, including experts in Turkish literature who can provide the content and linguists with expertise in applied linguistics, particularly ESL/EFL as well as theoretical linguistics who can contribute to such efforts. We can all contribute to better our teaching materials as well as teaching practices. This could be done by providing comments to our author colleagues, producing materials to be used, and also participating in organized projects and workshops to improve the existing textbooks when/if they are reprinted. Most importantly, regardless of the years of experience we have in the field, we need to follow the literature on applied linguistics and theoretical linguistics, and keep training ourselves to better our practices.

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