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The Turkish Language Reform

A Catastrophic Success

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Ottoman Turkish

By the beginning of the eleventh century, most of the ancestors of the present Turks of Turkey had become Muslim. It is evident that their introduction to Islam was due to peoples of Iranian speech, because the basic religious terms in Turkish come not from Arabic but from Persian or other Iranian languages: *namaz* 'prayer', *oruç* 'fasting', *peygamber* 'prophet'. The apparent exceptions, the Arabic *hac* or *ziyaret* for 'pilgrimage', are no exception, because those are the words used in Persian too. Once settled within the civilization of Islam, the Turks took into their language as much of the Persian and Arabic vocabularies as they needed, and more. As the perception that they were Turks was supplanted by an awareness that they were members of the Ümmet-i Muhammed, the Community of Believers, so the tide of Arabic and Persian flowed. It was not just a matter of borrowing foreign words for foreign concepts. They had a perfectly good word for 'city', *balık*, as in Marco Polo's name for Pekin, Cambaluc—i.e. *Hānbalık* 'Emperor's City'. By the fourteenth century they had abandoned it for *şehir* (Persian *šahr*), and *kend* (Sogdian *knd*), which forms the last element of the names Tashkent, Yarkand, and Samarkand. They had two words for 'army', *çerig* and *sü*, both of which were ousted from general use by *asker*, Arabic *askar* (originally the Latin *exercitus*), though *çerig* was preserved in *Yeniçeri* 'New Troops', whence *Janissary*. Even the word for 'fire', *od*, gradually fell out of use; it survived in poetry until the early twentieth century but had hardly been used in prose for four hundred years, its place having been taken by *ateş*, Persian *āteš*. This process had begun in the empire of the Seljuk Turks (1040–1157). Mehmet Fuat Köprülüzade (1928: 10–11) wrote:¹

Anadolu'da . . . klâsik Acem şi'rini model ittihaz eden 'Saray şairleri'ni daha Selçukîler sarayında görmeğe başlıyoruz . . . İran tesiratinin mütemadi kuvvetle nemasına ve Acem modellerinin taklidinde daimî bir terakki gösterilmesine rağmen, Türkçe yazan şairler ve müellifler, eserlerinde hemen umumiyetle: 'Türkçe'nin Arapça ve Acemce'ye nispetle daha dar, daha kaba, ifadeye daha kabiliyetsiz olduğunu, ve binaenaleyh kendi kusurların bakılmamak lâzım geldiğini' söylüyorlar, hatta bazan zımnî bir mazeret şeklinde 'Arabî ve Farsî bilmeyen halkın anlaması için Türkçe yazmağa mecbur olduklarını' ilâve ediyorlardı.

Already at the Seljuk court in Anatolia we begin to see the 'Palace poets', who took classical Persian poetry as their model . . . But almost all those poets and prose-writers who

¹ This great historian of Turkish literature (1890–1966) changed his name to Mehmet Fuat Köprülü in compliance with the Surnames Law of 1934, which required every family to choose a Turkish surname; the *zâde* ('-son') in his time-honoured patronymic was Persian.

wrote in Turkish despite the continuing vigorous growth of Persian influences and a steady advance in the imitation of Persian models, used to say in their works that Turkish, in comparison with Arabic and Persian, was limited, crude, and inexpressive, and that their own shortcomings must therefore be overlooked. They would sometimes even add as an implicit excuse that they were obliged to write in Turkish in order to be understood by the common people, who were ignorant of Arabic and Persian.

Huge though the influx of Persian words was, a bigger invasion came from Arabic, and not only because as the language of the Koran it naturally became the language of religion and theology and because the Persian vocabulary was itself replete with Arabic borrowings, but also because when an Arabic word was borrowed it brought its whole family with it. This calls for a brief explanation, which Arabists may skip.

Arabic words generally are based on trilateral roots—that is, roots consisting of three consonants, for example, *K–T–B* and *J–B–R* expressing the concepts of writing and compulsion respectively. These consonants are fitted into patterns of short and long vowels, sometimes with a doubling of the second or third consonant, sometimes with prefixes or infixes. Each pattern has a specific grammatical function: *KaTaBa* ‘he wrote’, *KāTiB* ‘writer’, *maKTūB* ‘written’; *JaBaRa* ‘he compelled’, *JāBiR* ‘compelling’, *maJBūr* ‘compelled’. Once one knows the patterns, learning a new root can increase one’s vocabulary by as many as a dozen new words.

It was natural that the Turks should borrow so fundamental a word as *‘ilm*: ‘knowledge’, more particularly ‘religious knowledge’. So along came *‘ālim* ‘scholar’ with its plural *‘ulamā*, *ma‘lūm* ‘known’, *mu‘allim* ‘teacher’, *ta‘līm* ‘instruction’, *istīlām* ‘request for information’, and lots more. And every new importation of a foreign word meant that the corresponding Turkish word was forgotten or became restricted to the speech of the common people. A good example is *sin* ‘grave, tomb’, found in popular poetry from the thirteenth to the twentieth century and still widely used in Anatolia, but hardly ever found in elevated writing, having long ago been supplanted by *mezar* [A].

But there was more to the rise of Ottoman than the suppression of native words. With the Arabic and Persian words came Arabic and Persian grammatical conventions. Turkish was born free of that disease of language known as grammatical gender; Arabic was not. Further, whereas Turkish adjectives precede their nouns, Arabic and Persian adjectives follow them.² Nor is that the whole story. When Persian took nouns over from Arabic, it usually took their plurals as well: with *‘ilm* ‘knowledge, science’, came its plural *‘ulūm*, which is grammatically

² While students of Turkish may be cheered to find the occasional similarity with English, they should remember that Turkish adjectives *invariably* precede their nouns. In English, however, besides the locutions exemplified in ‘He is well versed in matters archaeological’ and ‘The boiler is in an out-building, not in the house proper’, we have such anomalies as ‘court martial’, ‘time immemorial’, ‘Princess Royal’, ‘Heir Apparent’, and ‘President Elect’, while ‘law merchant’ and ‘rhyme royal’ still figure in the vocabularies of experts in jurisprudence and literature respectively.

feminine. Moreover, in Persian an *i* (termed 'Persian izafet', from *idāfa* [A] 'attachment') is interposed between a noun and its qualifier. *Āb* is 'water', *sard* 'cold', *hayāt* 'life'; 'cold water' is *āb-i-sard* and 'the water of life' is *āb-i-hayāt*. The Arabic for 'natural' is *ṭabīʿī*, the feminine of which is *ṭabīʿiya*. So in Persian 'the natural sciences' was '*ulūm-i-ṭabīʿiya*', and this became the Ottoman Turkish too (in modern spelling, *ulūm-i tabiiye*). The New Literature movement at the end of the nineteenth century was known as Edebiyat-ı Cedide; *edebiyat* 'literature' was feminine in Arabic, so *cedid* 'new', the Arabic *jadīd*, was given the Arabic feminine termination, and noun and adjective were linked by the Persian izafet. One of the names of what we call the Ottoman Empire was 'The Guarded Dominions'. 'Dominion' in Arabic is *mamlaka*, plural *mamālik*, which again is feminine. So *maḥrūṣ*, the Arabic for 'guarded', was put into the feminine form, *maḥrūṣa*. In Arabic, 'guarded dominions' was therefore *mamālik maḥrūṣa*, but in Ottoman Turkish it became *memalik-i mahrusa*, for that was how it was done in Persian.

Persianization continued unabated under the Ottomans. Although they did not go as far as their Seljuk predecessors in despising their mother tongue enough to make Persian their official language, the fifteenth century saw a huge increase in the Persian influence on Turkish writers of prose and poetry. They took Persian writers as their models and filled their works with Persian borrowings. Latîfî (1491–1582) of Kastamonu relates that the poet and historian Leâli was sufficiently proficient in the Persian language to pass as a Persian. He moved from his native Tokat to the capital, where he became a literary lion and won the favour of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror, but immediately lost it when it transpired that he was not a Persian but a Turk (Latîfî 1314/1898: 289–90). True, Latîfî was writing in 1546, almost a century after Leâli's time, and there is no guarantee that his account was factual, but it shows how depreciated at least one Turkish literary man, Latîfî, felt *vis-à-vis* the Persians.³

The situation is thus summed up by Gibb (1900–9: i. 8):

It is not too much to say that during the whole of the five and a half centuries [fourteenth to mid-nineteenth] covered by the Old School [of poetry], more especially the Third Period [the seventeenth century], every Persian and every Arabic word was a possible Ottoman word. In thus borrowing material from the two classical languages a writer was quite unrestricted save by his own taste and the limit of his knowledge; all that was required was that in case of need he should give the foreign words a Turkish grammatical form.

By this he meant that Turkish suffixes could be added to foreign words. As indeed they were, but not always in profusion; in classical Ottoman poetry one may see whole lines where the only indication that they are in Turkish and not Persian is

³ Of interest in this context is an observation on language in fourteenth-century England in the introduction (signed 'H.M.') to Maundeville (1886: 3): 'In the days of Maundeville Latin, French and English were the three languages written in this country. Latin was then and long afterwards the common language of the educated, and it united them into a European Republic of Letters; French was the courtly language; English was the language of the people.'

a final *-dir* 'is' or *-di* 'was'. Sometimes even that much is wanting. The three following couplets, containing not one syllable of Turkish, form part of an ode in honour of Sultan Süleyman by Bakî (1526/7–1600), the most highly esteemed poet of the classical age:

Bālānişin-i mesned-i şāhān-i tācdār
 Vālānişān-i ma'reke-i 'arşa-i keyān
 Cemşid-i 'ayş ü 'işret ü Dārā-yı dār ü gīr
 Kistrā-yı 'adl ü re'fet ü İskender-i zamān
 Sulţān-ı şark u ğarb şehinşāh-i baħr u berr
 Dārā-yı dehr Şāh Süleymān-ı kāmran.

Seated above the thrones of crownèd monarchs,
 High o'er the fray of battlefields of kings,
 Jamshid of feasting and carousing, Darius of war,
 Chosroes of justice and clemency, Alexander of the age,
 Sultan of east and west, King of Kings of sea and land,
 Darius of the time, King Süleyman, of fortune blessed.⁴

The mixture of Turkish, Arabic, and Persian, which Turks call *Osmanlıca* and we call *Ottoman*, was an administrative and literary language, and ordinary people must have been at a loss when they came into contact with officials. But while they must often have been baffled by Ottoman phraseology, they were capable of seeing the funny side of it. In the shadow theatre, the running joke is that Karagöz speaks Turkish while his sparring partner Hacivat speaks Ottoman. In the play *Salıncak*, Karagöz keeps hitting Hacivat. Hacivat asks him why, but receives only nonsensical answers sounding vaguely like his—to Karagöz—unintelligible questions. Eventually he asks, 'Vurmanızdan aksâ-yı murâd?' (What is your ultimate object in hitting me?). To which Karagöz replies, 'Aksaray'da murtad babandır' (The turncoat at Aksaray is your father) (Kudret 1968–70: iii. 54.) A rough English parallel would be, 'Explain your bellicose attitude.'—'How do I know why he chewed my billy-goat's hat?'

Following in the footsteps of Karagöz are today's taxi-drivers who refer to their battery-chargers not as *şarjör*, the French *chargeur*, but as *carcur* 'chatter'.⁵ They are displaying not ignorance but a sense of fun, like those who in the days of the Democrat Party pronounced 'Demokrat' as 'Demirkırat' 'Iron-Grey Horse'.⁶ The British sailors who served on the ship taking Napoleon to St Helena knew very well that her name was not *Billy Ruffian*; in calling her that, they were just cutting the fancy foreign *Bellerophon* down to size, like those people in England who used to Anglicize *asparagus* as *sparrow-grass* and *hysterics* as *high strikes*. In fact the

⁴ A translation of the whole ode will be found in Gibb (1900–9: iii. 147–51).

⁵ According to Erkilet (1952), soldiers were already saying *carcur* instead of *şarjör* in the 1920s, though this was another kind of *şarjör*, an ammunition-belt for machine-guns. (See p. 101 of the 1967 reprint.)

⁶ When the party was outlawed (see Chapter 12), its reincarnation, the Justice Party, chose as its logo the figure of a horse.

Turkish vocabulary still includes not a few originally foreign words that the tongue of the people has converted into more Turkish shapes: from Persian, for example, *çamaşır* 'linen' (*jāmešūy*), *çerçeve* 'frame' (*čarčūba*), *gözde* 'favourite' (*guzīde*), *köşe* 'corner' (*gūša*), *çarşamba* 'Wednesday' (*čāršanbih*), and *merdiven* 'staircase' (*nardubān*); and, from Arabic, *rahat lokum* 'Turkish Delight' (*rāḥat al-ḥulḳūm* 'ease of the gullet'), now abbreviated to *lokum*, *muşamba* 'oilskin' (*muşamma*'), and *maydanoz* 'parsley' (*maḳdūnis*). *Maydanoz* was transformed by some into *midenüvaz* [AP] 'stomach-caressing', a Persian compound that cannot be called a popular etymology; one is reminded of the English people who turned 'Welsh rabbit' into the more genteel-seeming 'Welsh rarebit'. The essayist and novelist Peyami Safa (1899–1961) must have taken *midenüvaz* to be the correct form, for he wrote:

Geçenlerde de bir muharrir arkadaşımız, gazetesinde, türkçeleşmiş bir fransızca kelimeyi türkçe imlâ ile yazdığım için bana tariz etmişti. 'Çikolata' kelimesine 'şokola' ve 'şimen-difer' kelimesine 'şömendöfer' diyenler arasında bulunmaktan çekinirim. Bu yolun sonunda maydanoza 'midenüvaz' demek vardır. O çıkmaza girmek istemem ben. (Safa 1970: 47)

A writer friend recently took me to task in his newspaper for spelling a Turkicized French word in the Turkish way. I am reluctant to join the ranks of those who pronounce 'çikolata' as 'şokola' and 'şimendifer' as 'şömendöfer' [*chemin de fer*]. What lies at the end of that road is pronouncing *maydanoz* as *midenüvaz*, a dead end which I have no wish to enter.

On the theme of the bewilderment of ordinary people when confronted by speakers of Ottoman, there is the tale of the *sarıklı hoca* (the turbanned cleric), who, wishing to buy some mutton, addresses a butcher's boy with the words 'Ey şāgird-i ẓaṣṣāb, laḥm-i ḡanemden bir kıyye bilvezin bana 'itā eyler misin?' (O apprentice of the butcher, wilt thou bestow on me one oke avoirdupois of ovine flesh?). The perplexed boy can only reply 'Amīn!' (Amen!). On the other hand, there is the story of one occasion when the uneducated were not baffled by someone who spoke differently from them. It is said to have happened in 1876, at a time of rioting by the *softas* (students at the *medreses* (religious schools)), when the police were chasing a crowd of them. Despairing of outdistancing the pursuit, one *softa* had the bright idea of sitting down on the pavement. When the police asked him, 'Which way did they go?', he replied, giving full weight to the Arabic pronunciation of his words, as was second nature for a *softa*: 'Ba'dısı şu tarafa, ba'dısı o tarafa' (Some went this way, some that)—and was quite surprised to find himself in custody.

Tahsin Banguoğlu, having mentioned (1987: 325) that the poet and sociologist Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924) had wanted the new Turkish to be Istanbul Turkish as spoken by the intellectuals, adds a comment containing an interesting piece of information that the author has not seen recorded elsewhere:

⁷ Turkish for 'in the eye', an obvious popular etymology.

Evet ama, o zaman aydınların konuştuğu Türkçe eski yazı dilinin çok etkisinde kalmış bir Türkçe idi. Onu da halk pek anlamıyordu. Halk buna *istillâhi konuşma* derdi. Meselâ ‘müdür bey, kâtibe bir şey soyledi, ama anlayamadım. İstillâhi konuşuyorlar.’

Yes, but the Turkish spoken by intellectuals at that time was a Turkish still very much under the influence of the old written language. And this the people did not understand very well. They called it ‘talking istillâhi’. For example: ‘The manager said something to the clerk, but I couldn’t understand it. They’re talking istillâhi.’

İstillâhi is another example of the phenomenon discussed above: giving a more familiar shape to high-flown words with which one does not feel at home, the word in this case being *ıstilahî*, the adjective of *ıstilah*. *Istilah paralamak* (to tear technical terms to pieces), once meant talking over the heads of one’s hearers. The meaningless but Arabic-looking *istillâhi* is made up of familiar elements: the first two syllables are in imitation of words such as *istiklâl* ‘independence’ and *istikamet* ‘direction’, while *llah* is from the Arabic name of God. As we might say, or might have said a generation or two ago, ‘They’re parleyvoing.’

Even before the rise of the Ottomans there had been expressions of dissatisfaction with the dominance of Arabic and Persian.⁸ In 1277 Şemsüddin Mehmed Karamanoğlu, the chief minister of the ruler of Konya, decreed that thenceforth no language other than Turkish would be spoken at court or in government offices or public places. Unfortunately he was killed in battle a few months later.

Few Turks who write about the history of their language can forbear to quote the two following couplets from the *Garipnâme* (‘Book of the Stranger’) of the Sufi poet Âşık Paşa (1272–1333).⁹ The purpose of the work is to illustrate Sufi doctrine through discourses on passages from the Koran, tradition, and the sayings of Sufi masters.

Türk diline kimesne bakmaz idi
Türklere hergiz gönül akmaz idi
Türk dahi bilmez idi bu dilleri
İnce yolu, ol ulu menzilleri.

None had regard for the Turkish tongue;
Turks won no hearts.
Nor did the Turk know these languages,
The narrow road, those great staging posts.

It is doubtful, however, whether every reader of these lines has a clear idea of their meaning. Of which languages was the Turk ignorant; what are the narrow road and those great staging posts? One scholar (Sılay 1993) translates the fourth line as ‘these styles of elegant and elevated discourse’, which does no more than raise another question: what styles? The context makes it plain that Âşık Pasha is not talking about literary style. He has been discussing Koran 14. 4: ‘We have sent no messenger save with the language of his people.’ The Koran was revealed to the

⁸ A valuable source on this topic is Yavuz (1983).

⁹ The relevant portion of the text is most readily accessible in İz (1967: i. 584–5).

Arabs, in Arabic; neither Persians not Turks have had a prophet bearing them the revelation in their own tongues.

Bu *Garipnâme* anin geldi dile
Ki bu dil ehli dahi mânâ bile.

Therefore has this *Garipnâme* been uttered
That those who speak this tongue may also know the hidden wisdom.

The identity of the languages in question is shown in a previous couplet:

Çün bilesin cümle yol menzillerin¹⁰
Yirmegil sen Türk ü Tacik dillerin.

To know all the staging posts of the road,
Do not despise the Turkish and Persian languages.

The languages of which the Turk was ignorant are Turkish and Persian, the implication being that so far the language of religion has been Arabic, but Arabic is not the only language through which spiritual knowledge can be attained. Persian is the language of the *Mesnevî* of the great Sufi poet Jalâl al-Dîn Rûmî; the Turk should learn to read that language and his own, so that he can make use of the *Mesnevî* and of the *Garipnâme*. The road is the progress towards enlightenment, the staging posts are the stages in that progress.

To Mîr 'Alî Şîr Nevâî (1441–1501) of Herat in Afghanistan belongs the distinction of having raised the Chaghatay dialect of Turkish to the status of literary language of Central Asia. In his *Muḥākamat al-Luġateyn* ('The Judgment between the Two Languages') he sets out to demonstrate that Turkish is in no way inferior to Persian as a literary medium. At one point he says:

Ve hünersiz Türknîñ sitem-zarîf yigitleri âsânlıkka bola Fârsî elfâz bile nazm ayturğa meşġûl bolupturlar. Ve fi'l-ḥakîka kişi yaḥşî mûlâḥaza ve te'emmûl kılsa, çün bu lafzda munça vûs'at ve meydânıda munça fûşat tapılır, kirek kim munda her sūḥan-güzârlıġ ve faşîḥ-güftârlıġ ve nazm-sâzlıġ ve fesâne-perdâzlıġ âsânraġ bolġay, ve vâķî' âsânraġdur. (Levend 1965–8: iv. 203)

Among untalented Turks, would-be artistic young men have occupied themselves with verse composition using Persian vocabulary, as being the easy course. Truly, if one considers and reflects well, since such scope and range are found in our own language, it follows that all eloquence and expression, all versification and story-telling, are bound to be easier in it and are in fact easier.

Like seventeen others of the thirty-six Ottoman sultans, Selim I (1512–20) wrote poetry. Most of his was in Persian. On the other hand, his arch-enemy Shah Ismail of Persia (1501–24) wrote poems in Turkish, some of which, set to music, may still be heard today on Turkish radio. It has been suggested that his purpose was to endear himself to the Turcomans in his territories, but the simpler explanation is that he was a Turk by birth and that writing in his mother tongue came naturally to him.

¹⁰ In modern Turkish, the *-in* at the end of this line and the next would be *-ini*. See Lewis (1988: 41) and, for the *-gil* of *yirmegil*, *ibid.* (137).

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries came the school of *Türki-i basit* ('plain Turkish' poetry), associated with the names of Aydınlı Visâlî, Tatavlı Mahremî, and Edirneli Nazmî, whom it did not outlive. Readers of poetry expected it to be in Ottoman, not *kaba Türkçe* (crude Turkish), whereas those whose everyday language was indeed *kaba Türkçe*, while they might enjoy listening to poetry that they could understand, were not generally readers. Yet even such a dyed-in-the-wool Persianizing poet as Nabî (c.1630–1712), whom Gibb (1900–9: iii. 325) speaks of as 'writing verses which can by courtesy alone be described as Turkish', was moved to write:

Ey şî'r miyanında satan lafz-ı garibi
Divan-ı gazel nüsha-ı kamus değüldür.

(Levend 1972: 78; Korkmaz 1985: 388)

O you who sell outlandish words wrapped in poetry!
A book of odes is not a copy of the dictionary!

It will be seen that only three—*ey*, *satın*, *değüldür*—of the eleven words in which Nabî expresses this laudable sentiment are Turkish. Indeed, long after Ottoman chroniclers had taken to writing in Ottoman instead of Persian, they persisted in using pure Persian for their chapter headings.

The political changes introduced by the Tanzimat-ı Hayriye, the 'Propitious Regulations' of 1839, and even more by the reform charter of 1856, gave hope that the manifold grievances of various sections of the Sultan's subjects might be rectified. Some were, but by no means all. For our purposes it is enough to say that the spirit of the Tanzimat (the term applied to the period as well as to the reforms) gave rise to the first serious stirrings of Turkish nationalism and to a flowering of journalism, and from then on the tide of language reform flowed strongly. A newspaper proprietor or editor does not have to be as devoted to the ideal of a well-informed public as the pioneers of Turkish journalism were (most if not all of them were driven into exile at some time in their careers), or indeed devoted to any ideal at all, to see the necessity of making the language of his paper understandable by as many people as possible; if he fails to see it, he will soon be enlightened by his circulation manager.

The father of Turkish journalism was the writer and poet İbrahim Şinasi (?1824–71), co-founder in 1860 with Agâh Efendi (1832–85), a civil servant and diplomat, of *Terceman-ı Ahvâl*, founded in 1861, the second non-official newspaper to be published in the country (the first was the weekly *Ceride-i Havâdis*, started in 1840 by an Englishman, William Churchill).¹¹ Şinasi declared the paper's policy in his first editorial (Levend 1972: 83):

¹¹ For a concise history of the Turkish press, see *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1960), ii. 465–6, 473–6. As for Churchill, see Koloğlu (1986), an entertaining account of how, despite being *miyop* (short-sighted), he went out pigeon-shooting one Sunday afternoon in May 1836 and wounded a shepherd boy and a sheep. There were diplomatic repercussions. An earlier account was Alric (1892).

Ta'rif hacet olmadığı üzere, kelâm, ifade-i meram etmeğe mahsus bir mevhibe-i kudret olduğu misillü, en güzel icad-ı akl-ı insanî olan kitabet dahi, kalemle tasvir-i kelâm eylemek fenninden ibaretdir. Bu i'tibar-ı hakikate mebni giderek, umum halkın kolaylıkla anlayabileceği mertebede işbu gazeteyi kaleme almak mültezem olduğu dahi, makam münasebetiyle şimdiden ihtar olunur.

There is no need to explain that, while speech is a divine gift for the expression of thought, writing is the finest invention of the human intelligence, consisting as it does in the science of depicting speech by means of the pen. Proceeding from a regard for this truth, editorial notice is hereby given that it is a bounden duty to write this newspaper in a way that will be easily understood by the public at large.

Among the other pioneers were Namık Kemal (1840–88), a selfless patriot and distinguished writer in many fields, and his friend the great statesman Ziya Pasha (1825–80). This is from Namık Kemal's article 'Observations on Literature in the Ottoman Language':

İstanbul'da okuyup yazma bilenlerden dahi belki onda biri, sebk-i ma'ruf üzere yazılmış bir kâğıddan ve hattâ kâfil-i hukuku olan kanun-ı devletten bile istifade-i merama kaadir değildir. Çünkü edebiyatımıza şark u garbın bir kaç ecnebî lisanından müstear olan şiveler galebe ederek ittirâd-ı ifadeye hâlel vermiş ve edevât ü ta'birât ü ifâdat-ı takrirden bütün bütün ayrılmış olan üslûb-ı tahrir ise bayağı bir başka lisan hükmüne girmiştir . . .

Elfazda garabet o kadar mu'teberdir ki, meselâ Nergisî gibi milletimizin en meşhur bir te'lif-i edibânesinden istihrac-i meal etmek, bize göre ecnebî bir lisanda yazılmış olan *Gulistân*'ı anlamaktan müşkildir. Türkçenin eczâ-yı terkibi olan üç lisan ki, telâffuzda oldukça ittihad bulmuşken tahrirde hâlâ hey'et-i asliyyelerini muhafaza ediyor. Akaanîm-i selâse gibi sözde gûya müttehid ve hakikatte zıdd-ı kâmindir.¹²

Even of literates in Istanbul, perhaps one in ten is incapable of getting as much as he would like from a normally phrased note or even from a State law, the guarantor of his rights. The reason is that our literature is swamped with locutions borrowed from several foreign tongues of east and west, which have damaged the flow of expression, while the style of composition has become totally detached from the particles and terms and forms of discourse and has fallen, to put it plainly, under the domination of another language.

So prevalent is foreignness in our vocabulary that it is harder, in my view, to extract the meaning from one of our nation's best-known literary compositions, for example that of Nergisî, than to understand the *Gulistân*, which is written in a foreign language. While the three languages of which Turkish is compounded have attained a certain unity in speech, they still preserve their original forms in writing. Like the three persons of the Trinity, they are said to be united but are in fact the reverse of integrated.

The poems of Nergisî (d. 1635) are more intelligible than his prose works. Gibb (1900–9: iii. 208–9) refers to him when speaking of Veysî's *Life of the Prophet*: '[It] is written in the most recherché Persian style, and shares with the prose Khamsa of Nergisî [*sic*] the distinction of having been gibbeted by Ebu-z-Ziyâ Tevfîq Bey, one of the most stalwart champions of the Modern School, as a composition the continued study of which will land the nation in disaster.' The *Gulistân* of Sa'dî

¹² *Tasvir-i Efkar*, 416, 16 Rebiyülâhır 1283/29 Aug. 1866; Levend (1972: 113–14).

(?1213–92), in a mixture of verse and rhymed prose, is regarded as one of the masterpieces of Persian literature. One might think that Namık Kemal was exaggerating, but in his day Arabic and Persian were a regular part of secondary education (and remained so until 1 October 1929). Anyone who has learned Persian, which is not a challenging language, can understand the *Gulistân*, but Nergisî's convoluted Ottoman prose presents much greater difficulty.

Ziya Pasha wrote the following in an article in *Hürriyet*, the newspaper he and Namık Kemal founded while exiles in London:

Elyevm resmen ilân olunan fermanlar ve emirnâmeler âhâd-ı nas huzurunda okutuldukta bir şey istifade ediliyor mu? Ya bu muharrerat yalnız kitabette melekeleri olanlara mı mahsustur? Yoksa avâm-ı nas devletin emrini anlamak için müdür? Anadolu'da ve Rumeli'de âhâd-ı nâstan her şahsa, devletin bir ticaret nizamı vardır ve a'şarın suret-i müzayede ve ihalesine ve tevzi-i vergiye ve şuna buna dair fermanları ve emirnâmeleri vardır deyü sorulsun, görülür ki biçarelerin birinden haberi yoktur. Bu sebebdendir ki hâlâ bizim memâlikte Tanzimat nedir ve nizâmât-ı cedide ne türlü islâhat hâsıl etmiştir, ahali bilmediklerinden ekser mahallerde mütehâyizân-ı memleket ve zaleme-i vülât ve me'murin ellerinde ve âdetâ kable't-Tanzimat cereyan eden usûl-i zulm ü i'tisaf altında ezilir ve kimseye derdini anlatamazlar. Amma Fransa ve İngiltere memâlikinden birinde me'murun birisi nizâmât-ı mevcude hilâfında cüz'î bir hareket edecek olsa avâm-ı nas derhal da'vâcı olur.¹³

Today, when decrees and orders are read out in the hearing of the common people, can anything be made of them? Are such compositions meant exclusively for those with a mastery of the written word, or is it intended that ordinary people should understand what the State commands? Try talking to any commoner in Anatolia and Rumelia about a commercial regulation, or the decrees and orders relating to the auctioning and awarding of the right to collect tithes, or establishing the amount of tax due from each household, or any matter at all; you will find that none of the poor creatures knows anything about any one of them. This is why dwellers in our territories still do not know what the Tanzimat is and what kind of reforms the new regulations have given rise to, and in most places therefore suffer oppression at the hands of local dignitaries, tyrannical governors and officials, under the same bullying system and with all the injustices that prevailed in pre-Tanzimat times. Nor is the population able to tell anyone its troubles, whereas if an official in any of the French or English realms were to infringe the current regulations in the slightest degree, the commoners would immediately have the law on him.

Two lines from Chesterton's 'The Secret People' come irresistibly to mind:

We hear men speaking for us of new laws strong and sweet,
Yet is there no man speaketh as we speak in the street.

Ali Suavi (1837–78) was one of the first to take a nationalist stand in the matter of language: he urged the avoidance of non-Turkish words for which there were good Turkish equivalents and, like Süleyman Pasha and Şemsettin Sami after him,

¹³ *Hürriyet* (London), 20 Cemâdi'l-ülâ 1285/7 Sept. 1868; Levend (1972: 119).

spoke out against calling the language Ottoman. He went further than Şinasi, who did not explicitly advocate the use of Turkish in preference to non-Turkish words. This is how he ended the introductory editorial he wrote for his newspaper *Muhbir* (1 (1867); Levend 1972: 115): 'Tasrihi câiz olan herşey'i, Âsitâne'de kullanılan âdî lisan ile ya'ni herkesin anlıyabileceği ifade ile yazacaktır' (Everything which can legitimately be expressed, [this journal] will write up in the ordinary language used in the capital; that is to say, in terms that everybody will be able to understand).

Although the new newspapers and magazines frequently carried articles urging the use of simple Turkish, they tended to urge it in very complicated language. The domestic news sections of the newspapers went on for many years under the heading *Havâdis-i Dâhiliye*, because *havâdis* 'news' is an Arabic feminine, so *dâhilî* 'internal' had to be in the feminine too, not forgetting the Persian *-i*. As late as 1896, a contributor to the newspaper *İzmir* wrote an article appealing for the use of straightforward Turkish, one paragraph of which should suffice to prove this point (Levend 1972: 275). The Persian *izafet* compounds (which is what the writer meant by 'unfamiliar and ponderous foreign locutions') are identifiable in the modern transcription by the *-i* or *-ı*. Words in italic are of non-Turkish origin. '*Safvet-i ifademizi ihlâl eden elfaz-i gayr-ı me'nuse ve sakile-i ecnebiyyeye mukabil servet-i mevcude-i lisaniyyemizden istifade etmiş olsak, daire-i safvet-i ifadeyi, binaenalyh daire-i terakkiyi tevsî*' etmiş oluruz' (Had we made use of our existing linguistic wealth instead of the unfamiliar and ponderous foreign locutions that corrupt our purity of expression, we would have broadened the compass of purity of expression and consequently the compass of progress).

Ahmet Midhat (1844–1912), most prolific of Turkish journalists,¹⁴ wrote this in 1871, with not a single Persian *izafet*:

En evvel kalem sahiblerine şunu sormak isterim ki, bizim kendimize mahsus bir lisanımız yok mudur? Türkistan'da söylenmekte bulunan Türkçeyi gösterecekler, öyle değil mi? Hayır, o lisan bizim lisanımız değildir. Bundan altı yedi asır mukaddem bizim lisanımız idi, fakat şimdi değil. O Türkçe bizim lisanımız olmadığı gibi Arabî ve Farisî dahi lisanımız değildir.

Amma denilecek ki, bizim lisanımız her halde bunlardan haric olamıyor. Haric olamadığı gibi dahilinde de sayılamıyor. Türkistan'dan bir Türk ve Necid'den bir Arab ve Şiraz'dan bir Acem getirsek, edebiyatımızdan en güzel bir parçayı bunlara karşı okusak hangisi anlar? Şübhe yok ki hiç birisi anlıyamaz.

Tamam, işte bunlardan hiç birisinin anlıyamadığı lisan bizim lisanımızdır diyelim. Hayır, anı da diyemeyiz. Çünkü o parçayı bize okudukları zaman biz de anlıyamıyoruz . . .

Pek a'lâ, ne yapalım? Lisansız mı kalalım? Hayır, halkımızın kullandığı bir lisan yok mu? İşte anı millet lisanı yapalım . . .

¹⁴ Ahmet Midhat's work was more remarkable for its extent than for its originality. His output, of close on 200 books and countless articles, won him the appellation 'kırk beygir kuvvetinde bir makina' (a forty-horsepower engine). Nevertheless he was an effective and widely read popularizer of new ideas. Over half of *Türk Dili*, 521 (May 1995) was devoted to him.

Arabça ve Farsçanın ne kadar izafetleri ve ne kadar sıfatları varsa kaldırıversek, yazdığımız şeyleri bugün yediyüz kişi anlıyabilmekte ise yarın mutlaka yedi bin kişi anlar. (*Basiret*, 4 Apr. 1871; Levend 1972: 123)

The first thing I should like to ask our writers is, don't we have a language of our own? They will point to the Turkish spoken in Turkestan, won't they? No, that is not our language. It was, six or seven centuries ago, but not now. That Turkish is not our language, nor are Arabic and Persian our language. But some will say, surely our language cannot lie outside these? It cannot lie outside them and it cannot be considered as inside them. If we were to bring a Turk from Turkestan, an Arab from Nejd, and a Persian from Shiraz, and read in their presence some exquisite passage from our literature, which of them would understand it? There is no doubt that none of them would. All right, let us say that this language which none of them can understand is our language. No, we cannot say that either, because when they read that passage to us *we* cannot understand it . . .

Very well, what are we to do? Are we to be left without a language? No! There is a language that our people speak, isn't there? Let us make that the national language . . . If we were to sweep away all the izafets and all the adjectives there are in Arabic and Persian, if seven hundred people today understand what we write, tomorrow it will surely be seven thousand.

Ahmet Midhat lived to see his wish well on the road to fulfilment. People who had been used to calling the natural sciences *ulûm-i tabiiye* came to see that there was no harm in using the Turkish plural instead of the Arabic, dropping the Persian *i* and the Arabic feminine ending of the adjective, and putting the adjective first: *tabii ilimler*. Even so, M. A. Hagopian found it necessary to devote over 40 per cent of his *Ottoman-Turkish Conversation-Grammar* (1907) to the grammar of Arabic and Persian.

Süleyman Pasha (1838–92) deserves the palm for being the first Turk to publish a grammar of Turkish and to name it accordingly: *İlm-i Sarf-i Türkî* (1874). Credit is also due to Abdullah Ramiz Pasha, whose *Lisân-ı Osmânî'nin Kavâ'idini Hâvi Emsile-i Türkî* ('Paradigms of Turkish, Containing the Rules of the Ottoman Language') had appeared in 1868. In 1851, Ahmed Cevdet Pasha (1825–95) and Fuad Efendi, later Pasha (1815–68), had published *Kavâ'id-i Osmâniye* ('Ottoman Rules'), a grammar that went through a number of editions. The 1875 edition was named *Kavâ'id-i Türkiye* ('Turkish Rules').

Article 18 of the Constitution of 1876 named the official language as Turkish, not Ottoman: 'Tebâ'a-i Osmâniyenin hidemât-ı devlette istihdam olunmak için devletin lisân-ı resmîsi olan Türkçeyi bilmeleri şarttır' (A prerequisite for Ottoman subjects' employment in State service is that they know Turkish, which is the official language of the State).

Şemsettin Sami (1850–1904), famous for his excellent dictionary *Kamus-i Türkî* (1316/1901) (though it is not as comprehensive as Redhouse (1890)), was of Süleyman Pasha's way of thinking. The following extracts are from his article 'Lisân-ı Türkî (Osmânî)', published in an Istanbul weekly in 1881.

Osmanlı lisanı ta'birini pek de doğru görmüyoruz . . . Asıl bu lisanla mütekellim olan kavmin ismi 'Türk' ve söyledikleri lisanın ismi dahi 'lisân-ı Türki' dir. Cühelâ-yı avam indinde mezmum addolunan ve yalnız Anadolu köylülerine ıtlak edilmek istenilen bu isim, intisabiyle iftihar olunacak bir büyük ümmetin ismidir. 'Osmanlı' ile 'Türk' isimleri beynindeki nisbet, tıpkı 'Avusturyalı' ile 'Alman' isimleri beynindeki nisbet gibidir. 'Avusturyalı' unvanı Avusturya devletinin taht-ı tâbiyyetinde bulunan kâffe-i akvâma ve onların biri ve ümmet-i hâkimesi olan Avusturya Almanlarına ıtlak olunduğu halde, 'Alman' ismi bu ümmet-i azîmenin gerek Avusturya'da, gerek Prusya ve Almanya'da ve gerek İsviçre ve Rusya ve sair taraflarda bulunan kâffe-i akvam efradına ıtlak olunur. Devlet-i Osmaniyyenin zîr-i tâbiyyetinde bu lunan kâffe-i akvam efradına dahi 'Osmanlı' denilüp, 'Türk' ismi ise Adriyatik denizi sevhilinden Çin hududuna ve Sibiryâ'nın iç taraflarına kadar münteşir olan bir ümmet-i azîmenin unvanıdır. Bunun içün, bu unvan, . . . müstevcib-i fahr ü mesâr olmak ıktıza eder. Memâlik-i Osmaniyye'de söylenilen lisanların cümlesine 'elsine-i Osmaniyye' denilmek caiz olabilirse de, bunların birine ve hususiyle ekseriyyet-i etrafı bu memâlikin haricinde olup bu devletin teessüsünden çok daha eski bulunan bir lisana 'lisân-ı Osmanî' denilmek tarihe ve ensâb-ı elsineye asla tevafulk etmez . . .

Bana kalırsa, o aktâr-ı ba'ideki Türklerin lisanıyla bizim lisanımız bir olduğundan, ikisine de 'lisân-ı Türki' ism-i müştereki ve beyinlerdeki farka da riayet olunmak istenildiği halde, onlarınkine 'Türkî-i şarkî' ve bizimkine 'Türkî-i garbî' unvanı pek münasibdir . . .¹⁵

I do not think the term 'the Ottoman language' is quite correct . . . The name of the people who speak this language is really 'Turks' and their language is Turkish. This name, which is regarded as a reproach by the ignorant masses and which some would like to see applied only to the peasants of Anatolia, is the name of a great community which ought to take pride in being so termed. The relationship between 'Ottoman' and 'Turk' is just like that between 'Austrian' and 'German'. 'Austrian' is applied to the totality of peoples who are subjects of the Austrian State, among them the Germans of Austria, the dominant community. 'German' is applied to all members of this great community, both in Austria and in Prussia and Germany, as well as in Switzerland, Russia and elsewhere. So, too, members of all the peoples subject to the Ottoman dynasty are called Ottomans, while 'Turk' is the title of a great community extending from the shores of the Adriatic to the borders of China and the interior of Siberia. This title, therefore . . . should be a reason for pride and joy. Though it may be permissible to give the name 'the Ottoman languages' to the totality of languages spoken in the Ottoman dominions, it is quite inconsistent with history and the relationships of languages to apply the name 'the Ottoman language' to one of them, particularly one whose boundaries for the most part lie beyond those dominions and which antedates by far the foundation of this State . . .

As I see it, since the language of the Turks in those distant regions is one with ours, it is perfectly proper to give them the common name of Turkish and, in cases where it is desirable for the difference between them to be observed, to call theirs Eastern Turkish and ours Western Turkish . . .

Part of the reaction to the repressive regime of Sultan Abdülhamid (1876–1909) was manifested in the imitation of Western, particularly French, literary works, their content as much as their form, notably by the *Servet-i Fünun* school. Despite its modernist pretensions, this famous journal ('The Riches of Science')

¹⁵ *Hafta*, 12, 10 Zilhicce 1298/4 Nov. 1881. Full text in Levend (1972: 130–4).

represents a blind alley, even a U-turn, on the road to making the written language more accessible to the general public. It began its career in 1891 as the weekly magazine of the Istanbul evening newspaper *Servet*. Between 1895 and 1901, when the government closed it down, it was the hub of a circle of young French-oriented writers who became known as the Edebiyat-ı Cedideciler, the exponents of the new literature. The precious style adopted by many of them repelled the common reader. Persuaded as they were that Turkish was incapable of being a literary medium without the aid of Arabic and Persian, they were wedded to the Persian *izafet* compounds and, not content with those current in the literary language, created new ones. Among their favourites were: *şebnem-i zevk u tesliyet* 'the dew of pleasure and consolation', *hadika-i sükûn* 'garden of tranquillity', and *melâl-i mesâ* 'evening melancholy' (Levend 1972: 349). At the same time they liked to show how Westernized they were by using calques, literal translations of French expressions, such as *ilâç almak* 'to take medicine' instead of the normal *ilâç yemek*. One of their number, the novelist Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil (1866–1945), wrote this in his memoirs forty years on:

Bu maraz hâdisesi, refiklerimin affedeceklerine, hattâ benimle beraber i'tiraf eyliyeceklerine kanaatle söyleyeceğim, zînet ve san'at ibtilâsıydı . . . öyle ki o tarihten uzaklaştıkça hele bugün ben bizzat bunları tekrar okurken sinirlenmekten hâlî kalmıyorum. (Uşaklıgil 1936: iv. 141; Levend 1972: 238)

This disease—and I shall say this in the conviction that my old colleagues will forgive me and may even join in my confession—was an addiction to ornateness and artifice . . . so much so that the further I am removed from that time, and especially at the present day, the more irritated I become on re-reading what I wrote then.

During the 1897 war with Greece, the poet Mehmet Emin [Yurdakul] (1869–1944) published his *Türkçe Şiirleri*. The title is significant: these were Turkish poems, not Ottoman poems. The first, 'Anadoludan bir ses yahut Cenge giderken' ('A Voice from Anatolia, or Going to War'), began:

Ben bir Türküm: dinim, cinsim uludur:
Sinem, özüm ateş ile doludur:
İnsan olan vatanının kuludur:
Türk evlâdı evde durmaz; giderim!
I am a Turk, my faith and my race are great;
My breast and soul are full of fire.
He who serves his native land—he is a man;
The sons of Turks will not stay at home; I go!

It won him the appellation *Türk Şairi*, meaning not just 'the Turkish poet' but 'the "Turk" poet'. The language of the poem, for the most part simple Turkish, the words 'Ben bir Türküm', and above all his use of the syllabic metres of popular verse rather than the Arabo-Persian quantitative metres of classical poetry, were a slap in the face for the intellectuals who saw themselves as Ottomans, in

particular for the élitist Edebiyat-ı Cedideciler. They retorted that he was no poet but a mere versifier and that not all the words he used would be intelligible to the common people. There was some justice in these criticisms: *ceng* [P], for example, was a distinctly high-flown way of saying 'war'. But the common people admired him as a literary man who was not too proud to declare himself a Turk like them.

Türk Derneği, the Turkish Association, was the first nationalist cultural organization to be formed, in January 1908, one of its founders being Ahmet Midhat (Tunaya 1984: i. 414–15; Levend 1972: 301). Its sixty-three members were far from having a shared view about the future of the language. Some of them were Simplifiers (*Sadeleştirmeçiler*), who favoured eliminating non-Turkish elements and replacing them with native words current in speech. Some were Turkicizers (*Türkçeciler*), who believed that new words should be created by means of the regular Turkish suffixes and that Arabic and Persian words current in popular speech should be counted as Turkish. Then there were the Purifiers (*Tasfiyeciler*), who did not object to the Turkicizers' view on the latter point but advocated borrowing words and suffixes from other dialects. Their leader Fuat Köseraif was not averse to inventing where necessary; according to Ziya Gökalp, he favoured taking suffixes over from Kirghiz, Uzbek, or Tatar, or even creating them from whole cloth ('büşbütün yeniden yaratılacak'): the adjective suffix *-î* could be replaced by *-kı/ki/gı/gi*, so that *hayatî* 'vital' would become *hayatkı*, and *edebî* 'literary' would become *edebgi*. Unfortunately for anyone trying to sort out the various groups, their contemporaries outside the Dernek tended to call them all Purifiers, which Gökalp (1339/1923: 114–15) found confusing.¹⁶

Others could not stomach the idea of abandoning even the Persian *izafet*, and came out strongly against those who would turn Ottomans into *Buharalı* (people of Bukhara). Two prominent members, Mehmet Emin and Halit Ziya, held diametrically opposite views on the course the language ought to take. While the Association was being established, the latter contributed an article to *Servet-i Fünun* in which he poured scorn on those wishing to expel from the language words of non-Turkish ancestry for which Turkish synonyms existed. The first word or phrase in the first two pairs in the following quotation is Arabic, the second Persian; in the others the order is reversed:

Yök, maksud, zaten bizde Türkçe olarak müradifleri mevcut olan kelimeleri atmaksa, meselâ lisanda güneş var diye *ufk-ı edebîmizden* 'şems ü hurşid' i silmek, yıldız var diye 'nücum u ahter' i söndürmek, göz var diye 'çeşm ü dide' yi, 'ayn u basar' ı kapamak, yol var diye 'râh u tarik' i seddetmek, su var diye 'âb u mâ' yı kurutmak kabilinden ameliyati tahribe karar vermekse, buna bir israf-ı bîhude nazarı ile bakmak tabiidir.

Bu mütalâaya serdedilen yegâne i'tiraz: lisanı sadeleştirmek, onu seviye-i ırfan-ı halka indirmek için bu fedakârlığa lüzum var sözünden ibarettir. Fakat lisan seviye-i ırfan-ı halka inmez, seviye-i ırfan-ı halk lisanı yükseltmeğe çalışılır. (Levend 1972: 305)

¹⁶ He always spelled his second name as two words: Gök Alp (Sky Hero).

No, if the purpose is to discard the words we have with Turkish synonyms, and to decide on such destructive surgery as effacing *şems* and *hurşid* from our literary horizon because we have *güneş* 'sun', extinguishing *nücum* and *ahter* because we have *yıldız* 'star', closing *çeşm u dide* and *ayn ü basar* because we have *göz* 'eye', blocking *râh* and *tarik* because we have *yol* 'road', drying up *âb* and *mâ* because we have *su* 'water', one cannot but regard it as wanton waste.

The sole objection raised to this observation consists in the assertion that this sacrifice is necessary in order to simplify the language, to lower it to the cultural level of the people. But the language does not descend to the cultural level of the people; one endeavours to elevate the cultural level of the people to the language.

The majority of the membership must have been of Halit Ziya's way of thinking, for this was how the Association's official attitude was set forth in its journal, which shared its name:

Osmanlı lisanının Arabî ve Farsî lisanlarından ettiği istifade gayr-ı münker bulunduğu ve Osmanlı Türkçesini bu muhterem lisanlardan tecrid etmek hiçbir Osmanlının hayalinden bile geçmiyeceğinden, Türk Derneği, Arabî ve Farsî kelimelerini bütün Osmanlılar tarafından kemal-i sühuletle anlaşılacak vechile şâyi' olmuşlarından intihab edecek ve binaenaleyh mezkûr Derneğin yazacağı eserlerde kullanacağı lisan en sade Osmanlı Türkçesi olacaktır. (Levend 1972: 301)

Since the benefit that the Ottoman language has derived from the Arabic and Persian languages is undeniable, and since no Ottoman would even dream of dissociating Ottoman Turkish from these revered languages, the Turkish Association will select Arabic and Persian words from among those that have gained currency enough to be understood with total ease by all Ottomans. Consequently, the language that the Association will use in works it produces will be the simplest Ottoman Turkish.

All very fine for the Ottomans, but not much use to those inhabitants of Turkey who, not presuming to lay claim to that designation, humbly thought of themselves as Turks. Mehmet Emin for one could scarcely have approved. Clearly the disparity of opinions did not augur well for the prospects of the Association, which by 1913 had indeed ceased to exist.

The exponents of simple Turkish still had far to go, not having yet grasped the principle expressed in St Luke's 'Physician, heal thyself.' At this range it is impossible to say whether or not the drafter of the following 'Decision on the Purification of the Language', quoted in the press in November 1909 (Levend 1972: 313), had his tongue in his cheek. Again, the words in italic are of non-Turkish origin:

Levazimat-ı umumiyye dairesi ta'yinat kısmı ma'rifetiyle terkim ve tevzi' edilmekte olan matbu' pusulalara envâ'-ı muayyenatı mübeyyin olmak üzere dercolummakta olan 'nân-ı aziz', 'güş't', 'erz', 'şa'r' ve 'hatab' kelimelerinin yerlerine, ba'demâ 'ekmek', 'et', 'pirinç', 'arpa' ve 'odun' yazılması karargir olmuştur.

It has been *decided* that the words '*nân-ı aziz*' [PA] 'precious bread',¹⁷ *güş't* [P] 'meat', '*erz*' [A] 'rice', '*şa'r*' [A] 'barley', and *hatab*' [A] 'firewood', which are *included* on the *printed slips*

¹⁷ The adjective 'precious' does not denote a particular type of loaf; it was a stock epithet of bread.

drawn up and distributed by the rationing section of the Department of the Commissariat-General to indicate the various kinds of rations, shall henceforth be replaced by 'ekmek', 'et', 'pirinç' [P], 'arpa', and 'odun'.

But one doubts that members of the Ottoman Parliament had their tongues in their cheeks one month later, when stating their objection to the proposed wording of their response to the Speech from the Throne: '*Arıza-i teşekkürîyyenin üslûb-ı tahriri pek edibane ve Meclis-i Millî'ye yakışmıyacak derecede teşbihat ve elfaz-ı rengin ile mahmul*' (*The style of composition of the Grateful Submission is very literary and laden with similes and ornate locutions to an extent unbecoming the National Assembly*) (Levend 1972: 313).

On the other hand, the poet Mehmet Âkif was not happy with the results of purification as exhibited in the newspaper *İkdam* in 1910:

bir takım makaleler görülüyor ki Türkçe kelimelerin yanibaşlarında Arapçaları olmasa zavallı ümmet-i merhume hiçbir şey anlamıyacak! Meclis yerine 'kurultay',¹⁸ meb'us yerine 'yalvaç', a'yan yerine 'aksakal', hal yerine 'idemük', can yerine bilmem ne! . . . Gazetelerde zabita vukuatı öyle ağır bir lisanla yazılıyor ki avam onu bir dua gibi dinliyor: 'Mehmet Bey'in hanesine leylen fûrce-yâb-ı duhul olan sârik sekiz adet kalîçe-i giran-baha sirkat etmiştir' deyüp de 'Mehmed Bey'in bu gece evine hırsız girmiş sekiz halı çalmış' dememek âdetâ maskaralıktır. Avâmın anlıyabileceği meânî avâmın kullandığı lisan ile edâ edilmeli . . . (*Sîrât-ı Müstakim*, 4/92, 9 Apr. 1910; Levend 1972: 311–12)

One sees many articles of which the unfortunate public—God have mercy on them—would understand nothing were it not for the Arabic equivalents given alongside the Turkish words! *Kurultay* for *meclis* 'Parliament', *yalvaç* for *meb'us* 'Deputy', *aksakal* 'grey-beards' for *a'yan* 'notables', *idemük*¹⁹ for *hal* 'situation', and I don't know what for *can* 'soul'! . . . The police reports in the newspapers are couched in language so abstruse that ordinary people listen to them as if they were religious formulas. To say 'Depredators who nocturnally effected an opportunist entry into Mehmed Bey's domicile purloined costly tapis eight in number', and not to say 'Last night burglars broke into Mehmed Bey's house and stole eight rugs' is not far short of buffoonery. Concepts for ordinary people to be able to understand should be expressed in the language used by ordinary people . . .

By the end of the nineteenth century some, and by the First World War most, Turkish writers were making a conscious effort to avoid Persian constructions except in stock phrases. They were also ceasing to think of their language as Ottoman, and after 1918 few went on thinking of themselves as Ottomans. Article 7 of the 1908 political programme of the Society for Union and Progress ('the Young Turks') ran: 'Devletin lisan-ı resmîsi Türkçe kalacaktır. Her nevi muhaberat ve müzakeratı Türkçe icra olunacaktır' (The official language of the State will remain Turkish. Its correspondence and deliberations of every kind will be conducted in Turkish) (Tunaya 1952: 209). In 1920, while the War of Independence was still raging and the Sultan's government still ruled in

¹⁸ In Levend, *kurultay* is misspelt *kurultay*.

¹⁹ The author has so far failed to track down this word, even in that wonderful ragbag *Tarama Dergisi* (1934).

Istanbul, schoolteachers had been instructed by the Ankara government's Ministry of Education to collect pure Turkish words in colloquial use that had so far eluded the lexicographers.

But the non-writing classes took a good deal longer to adjust to the new situation. The author was told by Fahir İz that, during his military service in the neighbourhood of Erzurum just before the Second World War, he had got into conversation with a shepherd, whom he shocked by using the words 'Biz Türkler' (We Turks). 'Esağfurullah!' was the reply, 'Ben Türküm, zat-ı âliniz Osmanlısınız' (Lord have mercy! I'm a Turk; Your Excellency is an Ottoman).

Somewhat more effective than Türk Derneği was the literary group that called itself and its journal *Genç Kalemler* (The Young Pens), formed in Salonica (Selânik) in April 1911 (Levend 1972: 313–30). Its members were also known as *Yeni Lisancılar*, the exponents of the new language. Most influential among them were Ziya Gökalp and the short-story writer Ömer Seyfettin (1884–1920).

The latter was the author of an article entitled 'Yeni Lisan' and signed only with a question mark, attacking the *Edebiyat-ı Cedide*, the 'new literature' of the Servet-i Fünun group, and the even shorter-lived group known as *Fecr-i Âtî* (the Coming Dawn), which formed round *Servet-i Fünun* on its reappearance after the Young Turk revolution of 1908. 'Bugünkülerin dünküleri taklid etmekten vazgeçtikleri dakika hakikî fecir olacak, onların sayesinde yeni bir lisanla terennüm olunan millî bir edebiyat doğacaktır . . . Millî bir edebiyat vücuda getirmek için evvelâ millî lisan ister' (The true dawn will break at the moment when today's people stop imitating yesterday's. Thanks to them a national literature will be born, hymned in a new language . . . To bring a national literature into being requires first a national language). He went on to give his recipe for that future national language. In something of a purple passage, he stated his objections to replacing current words of Arabic and Persian origin with native words or with borrowings from further east:

Derneğin arkasına takılıp akîm bir irticaa doğru, 'Buhara-yı şerif'deki henüz mebnâî bir hayat süren, müdhiş bir vukufsuzluğun, korkunç bir taassubun karanlıkları içinde uyuyan bundan bir düzüne asır evvelki günleri yaşıyan kavimdaşlarımızın yanına mı gidelim? Bu bir intihardır. Bu serî' ateşli toplarımızı, makineli tüfenklerimizi bırakıp yerine; duşmanlarımız gelince—kavimdaşlarımız gibi—üzerlerine atacağımız suları kaynatmağa mahsus çay semaverleri koymağa benzer. Hayır. Beş asırdan beri konuştuğumuz kelimeleri, me'nus denilen Arabî ve Farsî kelimeleri mümkün değil terkedemeyiz. Hele aruzu atup Mehmed Emin Bey'in vezinlerini hiçbir şair kabul etmez. Konuştuğumuz lisan, İstanbul Türkçesi en tabîî bir lisandır. Klişe olmuş terkiplerden başka lüzumsuz zinetler aslâ mükalememize giremez. Yazı lisanı ile konuşmak lisanını birleştirecek, edebiyatımızı ihya veya icad etmiş olacağız . . .

Lisanımızda yalnız Türkce kaideler hükmedecek; yalnız Türkce, yalnız Türkce kaideleri. (*Genç Kalemler* (Apr. 1911); Levend 1972: 314–15)

Are we to tag along behind the Türk Derneği and head for a sterile reaction, joining our fellow members of the Turkish community who still lead a basic existence in 'Bukhara the

Noble', slumbering in the darkness of a dreadful ignorance and horrendous fanaticism, living the life of a dozen centuries ago? That would be an act of suicide. It would be like abandoning our quick-firing artillery and machine-guns and instead, when our enemies arrive, doing as the fellow-members of our people do and putting on the samovars expressly intended to boil the water we're going to throw over them. No, it is impossible; we cannot forsake the Arabic and Persian words, the words we call familiar, that we have spoken for five centuries. Certainly no poet will renounce the classical prosody and accept Mehmet Emin Bey's metres. Istanbul Turkish, the language we speak, is a most natural language. Stereotyped *izafet* compounds aside, the unnecessary trimmings can never enter our speech. If we unify the language of writing and the language of speaking, we shall have revived our literature or produced a new literature . . .

In our language, only Turkish rules will hold sway; only the Turkish language and only the rules of Turkish.

The spectre of Türk Derneği's failure must have been before his eyes as he wrote that equivocal statement, which in no way justified the term 'new language'. Şemsettin Sami had been far more radical thirty years before.

Most of the literary establishment were less receptive than Ömer Seyfettin to suggestions that the language needed to be reformed; this may have been due to their love of Ottoman for its own sake or as a badge of rank distinguishing them from the commoners. Süleyman Nazif (1870–1927), editor of *Yeni Tasvir-i Efkâr*, published an open letter by way of a rejection slip to a writer who had sent him an article on language. Having said that, if he were the proprietor of the newspaper, he would never open its pages to an article that advocated simplifying the language, he went on:

Lisanını seven bir Osmanlı Türk'ü, hiçbir vakit 'hatavât-ı terakki' makamına 'ilerleme adımları'nı ısrâd edemez, böyle yaparsak lisanın kabiliyyet ve letafetini elimizle mahvetmiş oluruz . . . Lisanı sadeleştirmek, bizi yedi asır geriye ve dört beş bin kilometre uzağa atmaktır . . . Tekrar ederim ki biz bugün Buhârâlı değiliz ve olamayız. O maziye iadeye çalışmak mühlik bir irtica'dır. (*Yeni Tasvir-i Efkâr*, 12 July 1909; Levend 1972: 305–6)

An Ottoman Turk who loves his language can never elevate *ilerleme adımları* [going-ahead steps] to the status of *hatavât-ı terakki* [progressive paces]. If we do that, we thereby destroy the capacity and subtlety of the language with our own hands . . . To simplify the language is to throw us seven centuries back and four or five thousand kilometres distant . . . I repeat: today we are not and cannot be Bukharans. Trying to bring back that past is a destructive piece of reaction.

Interestingly, the cudgels were taken up on behalf of simplification by an easterner; not a Bukharan but a man from Kazan, Kazanlı Ayaz.

Bizim mesleğimiz avam tarafı bulunduklarından, biz bütün efkâr-ı siyasiye ve ictimaiye avâma anlatmak tarafındayız. Bizce bu meslek bir lisan için değil, bütün mesâil-i hayatiye içündür . . . Memleketin ıslâhı, milletin teceddüdü bütün efrad-ı millet efkârının teceddüdü ile hasıl olacağından bizim nokta-ı nazarımızdan milletini seven her Türk

yazdığı her makaleyi Anadolu Türklerinin anlayacağı bir lisanla yazması lâzım gelir. (*Servet-i Fünun*, 9 July 1325/22 July 1909; Levend 1972: 307)

Given that our vocation is to take the side of the common people, we are for acquainting them with all political and social thinking. In my view this vocation does not relate to a language but to all vital problems . . . As the reformation of the country and the renewal of the nation will come about with the renewal of the thinking of every member of the nation, from our point of view every article written by any Turk who loves his nation must be in a language that will be understood by the Turks of Anatolia.

One of the few who joined him was Celâl Sahir [Erozan] (1883–1935), a poet of the *Fecr-i Âtî* school, who followed Mehmet Emin in making the transition from Arabo-Persian prosody to Turkish syllabic metre, in which he produced some attractive love-poetry:

Şimdi lisanda teceddüd husulü için çalışmak isteyenlerin ilk adımı bu kavaid-i ecnebiyyeyi tard ve imhâ olmalıdır. Bizim kelimeye ihtiyacımız var. Peki, fakat yalnız kelimeye, müfred kelimelerle müfredlerinden ayrı, müstakıl bir ma'nâ ifade eden cemi' kelimelere, her kelimenin cem'ine, tesniyesine değil, hele terakibe hiç değil . . . Hele lisanı sadeleştirmenin bizi yedi asır geriye atmak olduğunu hiç kabul edemem. (*Servet-i Fünun*, 27 May 1326/9 June 1910; Levend 1972: 309)

The first step taken by those wishing to work for renewal in the language should be to cast out and eliminate these foreign rules. We need words. Very well; but *only* words: the singular forms of words and those plurals which express independent meanings, distinct from their singulars,²⁰ but not the plural or the feminine of every word and above all not izafet compounds . . . In particular I cannot accept that simplifying the language means throwing us seven centuries back into the past.

To leave for a moment the views of established literary figures of the old days, here is a reminiscence of the economist Fuat Andic about his generation's view in the 1940s of what the language of the future ought to be. It centres on a verse by Kemalpaşazade Sait, alias Lâstik ('Galoshes') Sait, who held several senior posts in government service but was best known as a writer of articles on literature for the newspapers *Tarık* and *Vakit*, and as a minor poet. The reason for his nickname was that he was reputed never to take off his galoshes even in summer.²¹ He engaged in often vitriolic polemics on literature and language with Namık Kemal, Ahmet Midhat, and the poet Abdülhak Hâmid (1851–1937). The language of his writings was pure Ottoman; does the verse express his real opinion or was it meant sarcastically? Probably the former; he habitually wrote in Ottoman, because in those days it was the only way to write formally, but this time he was rebelling. At any rate, the boys of Fuat Andic's generation took it seriously. And here it is:

²⁰ The reference is to words like the Arabic *ajzâ*, plural of *juz* 'part'; its Turkish form *ecza* means not 'parts' but 'chemicals, drugs', whence *eczacı* 'pharmacist'. See Lewis (1988: 27).

²¹ I am indebted to Professor Andic, both for drawing my attention to Lâstik Sait and for explaining the origin of his nickname.

Arapça isteyen urbana gitsin
 Acemce isteyen İrana gitsin
 Frengiler Frengistana gitsin
 Ki biz Türküz bize Türki gerek.

Let the one who wants Arabic go to the Beduin;
 Let the one who wants Persian go to Iran;
 Let the Franks go to their own land.
 For we are Turks; we must have Turkish.

The class used to add a fifth line: 'Bunu bilmeyen ahmak/eşşek demek' (Anyone who doesn't know this, it means he's a silly fool/donkey).²²

To revert to the grown-ups: Ziya Gökalp believed that, if the Turks were to equip themselves with the vocabulary necessary for coping with the advances of science and technology, the natural way was to follow the example of the Western nations. Just as they had recourse to Greek and Latin, the classical languages of their culture, so the Turks should go back to Arabic and Persian. In practice, he based his creations on Arabic, less frequently Persian, while using the Persian *izafet* to make compounds. From *rûh* 'soul, spirit' he made *ruhiyat*²³ for 'psychology'; from *badî* 'floweriness of style', *bedîi* for 'aesthetic' (though in Arabic *badî'i* means 'rhetorical') and *bediiyat* for 'aesthetics'. From the Arabic *ša'n*, 'matter, affair', he made *şe'nî* 'pragmatic' and *şe'niyet* 'reality'. These two never won much currency, partly because 'pragmatic' does not figure in everyone's vocabulary, and mostly because Turks in general did not distinguish between Arabic *ayn*, the pharyngeal gulp, and *hamza*, the glottal stop, or attempt to pronounce either of them, so that except to a few pedants Ziya Gökalp's *şe'nî* 'pragmatic' sounded exactly like *şenî*, the Turkish pronunciation of the Arabic *šanî* 'abominable'.

His most successful coinage was a word for 'ideal'. Until his time, the dictionary equivalent had been *gaye-i emel* 'goal of hope' or *gaye-i hayal* 'goal of imagination', though probably most people who talked about ideals used the French *idéel*. He invented *mefkûre* (together with *mefkûreviyat* for 'ideology'), based on the Arabic *fakara* 'to think', which was enthusiastically adopted, surviving long after *Tarama Dergisi* (1934) came up with *ülkü*; indeed, recent dictionaries still use it to define *ülkü*. It survives in another aspect too: in Turkish cities you will see apartment blocks named *Mefkûre*, as well as *Ülkü* and *İdeal*.

'After all that, Gökalp (1339/1923: 28) might be accused of inconsistency for writing: 'Lisanın bir kelimesini değiştiremeyiz. Onun yerine başka bir kelime icad edip koyamayız' (We cannot change a word of the language. We cannot invent and substitute another word for it). His creations, however, were intended to express concepts for which no words yet existed.

²² Andic writes, 'The fifth line may or may not belong to him. When I was in high school it was a pastime among us to add one or two lines to well-known poems. I do not know for sure whether the fifth line belongs to me or to Lâstik Sait' (Letter to the author, 13 Apr. 1997). The student should bear in mind that *eşek* is more offensive than 'donkey', and that *eşşek* is more offensive than *eşek*.

²³ For the *-iyat*, sometimes transcribed as *-iyat* or *-iyyat*, see Lewis (1988: 27).

He tells how deeply impressed he was in 1897 at hearing how private soldiers coped with the Ottoman terms for first and second lieutenant. 'Lieutenant' in Arabic was *mulâzim*, 'first' was *awwal*, and 'second' was *tânî*. Put together in accordance with the rules of Persian and pronounced in accordance with the rules of Turkish, that made 'mülâzim-i evvel', 'mülâzim-i sani'. The soldiers, however, put the adjectives first, saying 'evvel mülâzim', 'sani mülâzim'. This led him to the following conclusion: 'Türkçeyi ıslâh için bu lisandan bütün Arabî ve Farsî kelimeleri değil, umum Arabî ve Farsî kaideleri atmak, Arabî ve Farsî kelimelerden de Türkçesi olanları terkederek, Türkçesi bulunmayanları lisanda ibka etmek' (The way to reform Turkish is not to throw all the Arabic and Persian words out of this language but to throw out all Arabic and Persian rules and abandon all the Arabic and Persian words which have Turkish equivalents, letting those with no Turkish equivalents survive in the language) (Gökalp 1339/1923: 12).

A line from his poem 'Lisan',²⁴ 'Türkçeleşmiş Türkçedir' (What has become Turkish is Turkish), has often been quoted by those unwilling to see the loss of any Ottoman word. Later on in the same book he states his first principle of *Lisanî Türkçülük* (Linguistic Turkism): 'Millî lisanımızı vücade getirmek için, Osmanlı lisanını hiç yokmuş gibi bir tarafa atarak, halk edebiyatına temel vazifesini gören Türk dilini aynıyla kabul edip İstanbul halkının ve bilhassa İstanbul hanımlarının konuştukları gibi yazmak' (For the purpose of creating our national language, to accept as it stands the Turkish tongue, which serves as the basis for popular literature, and to write as Istanbul people speak, especially Istanbul ladies, discarding the Ottoman language as if it had never been) (Gökalp 1339/1923: 121).

The word *halk* is ambiguous nowadays and no doubt was in Gökalp's time too; whereas in political speeches it connotes the citizen body, the sovereign people, in common parlance it means the proletariat. Gökalp was certainly using it in the first sense, but the question is, what then did he mean by 'hanımlar'? Female residents of Istanbul, or Istanbul ladies as distinct from Istanbul women? We must assume the latter; at all events, his first principle was never put into effect. Nor was another of his pronouncements: 'İstanbul Türkçesinin savtiyatı, şekliyatı ve lûgaviyatı,²⁵ yeni Türkçenin temeli olduğundan, başka Türk lehçelerinden ne kelime, ne sıyga ne edat, ne de terkeb kaideleri alınamaz' (As the basis of the new Turkish is the phonology, morphology, and lexicon of Istanbul Turkish, neither words nor moods and tenses nor suffixes nor rules of syntax may be taken from other Turkish dialects) (Gökalp 1339/1923: 122). While later reformers did not adopt moods and tenses or rules of syntax from other dialects, they adopted words and suffixes in full measure, as we shall see.

²⁴ Published in *Yeni Hayat* in 1918, reproduced in Levend (1972: 332-3).

²⁵ The three preceding nouns were coined by Gökalp from Arabic roots.