

SPECIAL ACADEMY LECTURE

THE PRESENT STATE OF THE
TURKISH LANGUAGE

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SEVERAL nations—the Germans and the Hungarians, for example—have at various times and with varying degrees of success campaigned to rid their languages of foreign influences. Nowhere has the campaign been so long sustained and nowhere has it been so catastrophically successful as in Turkey. The best witness is the fact that Atatürk's own account of the end of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Turkish Republic, which he composed in 1927,¹ has for a long time now been growing less and less intelligible to each succeeding generation; so much so that at the beginning of the 1960s it had to be translated into modern Turkish.²

I suppose that not many general lectures have been given in this country on the subject of the Turkish language. I further suppose that in the majority of those that have been given some reference has been made to the famous passage from Max Müller's 1861 *Lectures on the Science of Language*:

It is a real pleasure to read a Turkish grammar, even though one may have no wish to acquire it practically. The ingenious manner in which the numerous grammatical forms are brought out, the regularity which pervades the system of declension and conjugation, must strike all who have a sense of that wonderful power of the human mind that has displayed itself in language. . . . An eminent orientalist remarked 'we might imagine Turkish to be the result of the deliberations of some eminent society of learned men;' but no society could have devised what the mind of man produced, left to itself in the steppes of Tatar, and

¹ Gazi Mustafa Kemal, *Nutuk* (Ankara, 1927). Before its publication in book-form, he had read it, over a period of six days, to the second congress of the Republican People's Party in October 1927. Hence the title, which means 'The Speech'. The first edition in the Latin letters was published in 1934.

² *Söylev* (Ankara, 1963).

guided only by its innate laws, or by an instinctive power as wonderful as any within the realm of nature.

The Turkish language in its present state is largely the result of the deliberations of a society, though not all of its members were particularly learned and most of those who were learned fell out with it sooner or later. Hardly any of those who stayed with the Turkish Language Society to the end were trained philologists. Their spiritual precursor was not the great Professor Max but his less well-known cousin George. In a book about Mentone, George A. Müller tried his hand at explaining the origins of some place-names of the region and delivered himself of the following dictum: 'The change of a consonant is a mere trifle, for in etymology vowels are worth but little, and consonants almost nothing.'¹

Over fifty years have passed since Mustafa Kemal began the series of reforms which changed the battered remnant of an empire into a modern state. Most people abroad who are interested in Turkey are aware that in the 1930s Ottoman law, based on Islamic law, was replaced by adaptations of the Swiss, Italian, and German codes and that enactments such as the Hat Law and the Surnames Law further transformed every aspect of Turkish life. The Language Reform, however, is little known abroad, because it was never incorporated in legislation.

There exists in Turkey a body of lore, transmitted by generation after generation of loquacious guides to generation after generation of gullible tourists. It includes, for example, the story that the Bosphorus shearwaters are the souls of girls that the sultans had tired of and ordered to be drowned. It also includes the story that the Turks spoke Arabic until 1928, in which year they switched to speaking Turkish. This peculiar tale, which I have heard with my own ears, is a conflation of two facts: the change from the Arabic-Persian alphabet to the new Latin-based alphabet in 1928 and the systematic purge of Arabic and Persian vocabulary and its replacement by 'pure Turkish', which began in 1932.

Ottoman Turkish was the official language of the Ottoman Empire and inevitably it became also the literary language of those parts of the Empire where Turkish was the dominant tongue. It was a language of immense flexibility and grandeur. Over the six centuries during which the Turks, under the Ottoman sultans, ruled the Islamic world, it had acquired a vast number of words from Arabic, which was the language of the

¹ George A. Müller, *Mentone and its Neighbourhood: The Past and the Present* (London, 1910), p. 30.

Qur'ān and of Islamic theology and jurisprudence, and from Persian. For Persian was not only the language of Islamic literary culture; it was through speakers of Persian or some other Iranian language that the Turks first learned of Islam, which is why they use the Persian and not the Arabic words for such basic concepts as 'Prophet', *Peygamber*, and 'prayer', *namaz*. But the words which the Turks acquired from those who had preceded them in the Faith were not all naturalized. To use an English analogy, it was as if we said not 'valid' but 'validus', not 'argument' but 'argumentum'. As well as vocabulary, certain syntactic features were adopted, such as the Persian practice of placing qualifying nouns and adjectives after the noun they qualify, as in French, rather than before it, as in English and Turkish; and the Arabic practice of making adjectives agree in gender with their nouns. It should be explained that Turkish makes no distinctions of gender, either natural or grammatical. Many Persian and Arabic plurals were in regular use. To continue the English analogy, it was as if we were to say not 'valid arguments' but 'argumenta valida'.

The net effect was that Ottoman Turkish was not readily understood by the majority of Turks, who had not had the advantages of a classical Islamic education. To make matters worse, all the educated, to a greater or lesser extent, let some of the vocabulary and syntax of their habitual written Turkish spill over into their everyday style. With the beginnings of Turkish popular journalism in the mid-nineteenth century, however, the natural desire to enlarge circulation led to an increasing simplification of the written language. By the end of the century one might see in one's newspaper, if not 'valid arguments', at least 'valid argumenta'. Even so, M. A. Hagopian, in his *Ottoman-Turkish Conversation-Grammar*, published in 1907, while devoting 215 pages to Turkish, still felt the need to spend 161 pages on the grammar of Arabic and Persian.

In 1908 the Young Turk revolution ended the despotism of Sultan Abdul-Hamid. It soon brought a despotism of its own. Two lines of Chesterton come 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.' Nevertheless, there was a feeling in the air that many things previously thought unchangeable were not immune to change.

In 1911 a new journal began to appear in Salonika, *Genç Kalemler*, 'Young Pens', in which some of the most admired and influential younger writers strongly urged that the written and spoken languages should be brought closer together. Yet they

showed a certain ambivalence about whether to abandon such obviously alien accretions as the Arabic and Persian plurals. The most literate were not yet ready to give up their privileged position, but the tide was rising.

The scattered local movements of resistance to the Allied armies which occupied various portions of Anatolia after the 1918 Armistice could never have liberated the country without the boundless energy and organizing genius of Mustafa Kemal. In the same way, it was he who gave effect to the desires of the many intellectuals who were concerned to make their language more truly Turkish. I stress 'intellectuals'; at that period, four-fifths of the population were peasants, who would no more think of tampering with the language than of changing the alternation of the seasons.

Mustafa Kemal's mastery of the Turkish of his time was complete. He was a gifted orator and used to the full all the resources of the language at every level, from the convoluted and sonorous Ottoman to the most free-and-easy colloquial. But, believing as he did that it had been a bad day for the Turks when they came under the influence of Islam, he resented the dominance of the Arabic and Persian elements in the language and was determined to reduce it. In 1924, Yakup Kadri wrote a series of articles for the People's Party newspaper, urging the creation of an Academy composed of the most famous literary figures, 'to solve the language problem'. Mustafa Kemal said to him, 'I am trying to deliver Turkish from the hands of these people; you've gone and started a movement in exactly the opposite direction. As if that weren't enough, you are denying the writers of your own generation. Yet you are the makers of the Turkish of today and of tomorrow. An Academy of the kind you envisage will do nothing but fix our language in the stereotypes of Ottoman.'¹

His first concern was to change from the Arabic-Persian alphabet to the Latin letters. That he achieved in 1928. Two years later, in a short preface which he wrote for a book on the history and potentialities of Turkish, he included the following fateful words:

The Turkish nation, which is well able to protect its territory and its independence, must save its language too from the yoke of foreign languages.²

Already, on 1 September 1929, by order of the Ministry of

¹ A. S. Levend, *Türk Dilinde Gelişme ve Sadeleşme Evreleri* (Ankara, 1972), pp. 490-1.

² Sadri Maksudi, *Türk Dili için* (n.p., n.d. [Ankara, 1930]).

Education, Arabic and Persian had ceased to be taught in schools. On 12 July 1932 Mustafa Kemal founded the Turkish Language Society. Its aim was declared to be: 'To bring to light the true beauty of the Turkish language and to raise it to the level it merits among the languages of the world.' It is no empty metaphor to say that in this cause the nation was mobilized. At the beginning of 1933, in every province and sub-province, a committee was set up, composed of officials of local and central government, school-teachers, and military commanders, under the chairmanship of the governor or lieutenant-governor. Its duty was to organize the collection of Turkish words in local use. By July 1934 130,000 slips had been dispatched to the capital. At the same time, scholars were given the task of reading through dictionaries and old texts in search of obsolete words which might be resurrected. From the more than 125,000 slips they produced, 7,572 words were selected.¹

Meanwhile, lists of a dozen or so 'foreign' words were published every day in the newspapers and on the radio, and the public was invited to submit suggestions for Turkish replacements. This exercise produced 640 new words. When no suitable replacement could be found, in current speech or in old texts, the reformers set about creating words from existing roots and suffixes. The French *şimendifer* for 'railway' was replaced by *demiryolu*, 'iron road'. Mustafa Kemal himself created the word for 'topic', 'subject': *konu*, which has replaced *mevzu*. Now *mevzu* was the Arabic for 'put down' and it was an ancient calque on the Latin *subjectum*. *Konu* is in turn a calque on *mevzu*: it is the verb-stem *kon-* 'to be placed', plus a deverbial suffix which no one had previously thought of using with that particular stem.

Kemal's right-hand-man İsmet İnönü was responsible for the new word for 'tradition'. He took the suffix of *görenek*, 'usage'—compare *gör-*, 'to see'—and attached it to *gel-*, 'to come'. *Gelenek* has superseded the Arabic *an'ane*. If we accept that the language had to change, we may class words of this sort as benign neologisms. At their best, the reformers displayed much ingenuity. I regard as particularly benign the recent neologism for 'computer', *bilgisayar*, literally 'information-counter', which is a great improvement both on *kompüter* and on the earlier *elektronik beyin*, *beyin* being the Arabic for 'brain'. But there were malignant neologisms too.

There was an ancient word for 'manly virtue', *erdem*, formed

¹ Levend, *op. cit.*, pp. 416–18. The sole scholarly account in English is Uriel Heyd, *Language Reform in Modern Turkey* (Jerusalem, 1954).

from *er*, 'man', by the addition of a rare suffix *-dem*. Having been unearthed in several old texts, it was dragged out of its four-hundred-year-long retirement to replace the Arabic *fazilet*. Then there was a word *yön*, meaning 'direction', which had survived in popular speech and was now promoted to take the place of the Arabic *istikamet*. Both may be classed as benign. But then the need was felt for a pure Turkish word for 'method', for which they had previously used the Arabic *usul* or the French *méthode*. So they ostensibly added the suffix of *erdem* to *yön* and triumphantly came up with *yöntem*. I say 'ostensibly' because I am morally certain that the second syllable of *yöntem* is actually the second syllable of the French *système*, English *system*. In case you think my moral certainty is no better than an unworthy suspicion, let me justify it by telling you of what they bodged up in place of the Ottoman *kiyas-i mukassem*, 'dilemma'. It was *ikilem*, made up of *iki*, the Turkish for 'two', and the *lem* of the French *dilemme*. High marks for ingenuity, low marks for linguistic purity. But that is the word they now use: *ikilem*, pure Turkish for 'dilemma'.

Let me try to convey to you the effect of this type of creation on the feelings of those Turks who loved their language. Suppose we were engaged on a campaign to eradicate foreign words from English and were looking for a pure English substitute for *faculty*. We could not use *ease* or *easiness*, both of which are pre-empted. So we might take the suffix of *Godhead* and offer *easehead*. As a substitute for *corporation* we could take the pure English *body* and add the suffix seen in *Christendom*. Then we could announce in the press that the BBC would henceforth be known as the BBB, the British Broadcasting Bodydom.

One new Turkish word that did attract some attention abroad was the word for 'school'. A member of the public suggested that *mektep*, of Arab origin, should be replaced by *okula*, which he claimed to have made from *oku-* 'to read' and the suffix of place *-la*, though in fact that suffix never occurred after verb-stems. I like to think that was why Mustafa Kemal amended it to *okul*; and for the last fifty years *okul* has been the Turkish for 'school'. Were you to question the reformers on its resemblance to the French *école*, they would put it down to coincidence.¹

Words accepted by the Language Society were published and circulated to schools by the Ministry of Education. In 1930 words of native origin made up 35 per cent of the vocabulary of the news columns of the daily press. By 1933 the figure had risen to 44 per

¹ G. L. Lewis, 'Oh! no! we never mention her (Thoughts on Turkish Language Reform)', *Asian Affairs*, xii, part 2 (June 1981), 163.

cent and by 1936 to 48 per cent. People within the reach of schools and newspapers adopted the new words, some with enthusiasm, others perforce, under the pressure of constantly hearing and reading them. Even the most conservative parents could not go on for ever asking their children what they had learned in *mektep* that day if the children were under the impression that they had spent the day at *okul*.

However much lovers of the language may regret some of the consequences of the Language Reform movement, one cannot deny that Mustafa Kemal was right to insist that something had to be done about scientific terminology. This was almost entirely Arabic; what was not Arabic was Persian. Our doctors and, to a lesser extent nowadays, our lawyers, are accustomed to an analogous state of affairs, but while they seem happy enough with their Latin and Greek terms, their 'habeas corpus' and their 'oesophagus', the technical terms of the other branches of learning, though mostly of Latin or Greek derivation, have long been anglicized. In Turkish, however, there had been no naturalization of Arabic and Persian terms; they remained in their original forms.

In the winter of 1936/7, Atatürk (as Mustafa Kemal was now surnamed) decided to tackle the problem in person. He wrote a little book on the elements of geometry, which was published anonymously. It did not use a single Arabic or Persian term. Some terms he borrowed from the Western languages: *silindir*, for example, for 'cylinder'. In his eyes, *silindir* had two advantages over the Persian *üstüvane*, in addition to the paramount one that it was neither Persian nor Arabic. In the first place, unlike *üstüvane*, there was nothing in the shape of the word to show that it was not of native origin. In the second place, it was not unfamiliar in Turkish, having been earlier borrowed in the senses of 'top hat' and 'garden-roller'.

He devised new names for the plane figures, triangles, quadrilaterals, pentagons, and so on, which had been known till then by their Arabic names. *Müselles*, 'triangle', became *üçgen*, from *üç*, 'three', while *müsemmen*, 'octagon', became *sekizgen*, *sekiz* being the Turkish for 'eight'. And the suffix *-gen*? That was his own invention, presumably inspired by the suffix seen in 'octagon', 'polygon', and so on, but with a change of vowel because *o* is rare in Turkish suffixes. It was subsequently given a more Turkish etymology: *gen* is an old word for 'wide'. This may not seem highly relevant. But that word had already been used to justify the creation of one of two replacements for the Arabic adjective *umumi*, meaning 'general' or 'public'.

In the sense of 'general' it was replaced by *genel*. The origin of the second syllable of *genel*, which is now firmly part of the language, is the suffix seen in the French *culturel*. For a great many years, however, successive editions of the Language Society's standard dictionary showed *kültür* as a French borrowing but the adjective *kültürel* as Turkish, being derived from the French *culture* by the addition of the Turkish suffix *-el*. It is only fair to record a sign of grace in the seventh, the 1983 edition, which shows both *kültür* and *kültürel* as French borrowings. Yet the reformers will insist that *-el* is a respectable old suffix, used to make adjectives from nouns, as in so undeniably Turkish a word as *güzel*, 'beautiful'. The trouble is that they have yet to produce an instance of its being suffixed to an adjective. So I am unrepentant about saying that *genel* is simply a turkified echo of the common European word 'general'.

In the sense of 'public', *umumi* has been dispossessed by *kamusal*. The final *-sal* is a weird phenomenon; it was built, on very shaky foundations, as a replacement for the Arabic adjective suffix *-i*, as in *tarihi* 'historical' from *tarih* 'history'. *Tarihi* is now fighting for its life against *tarihsel*; oddly, no one has come up with an acceptable replacement for *tarih*. As for *kamu*, the noun meaning 'public' to which the adjective is *kamusal*, it is long established in Turkish, occurring as early as the eighth century in the form *kamāgh*. But it is a borrowing from Pahlavi. To put the matter plainly, it is a Persian borrowing, just as *umumi* is an Arabic borrowing. In the same way, the reformers dropped *şehir*, once the normal word for 'city', as being Persian, and adopted instead *kent*, as in 'Tashkent', which is no more Turkish than *şehir*, being Iranian; not Persian but Sogdian. I am not saying that I do not approve of *kamu* (though in fact I am not all that keen on *kent*); I take the view, natural in an English-speaker, that what makes a language great is a readiness to absorb words for which a need is felt, from any and every language. What I am saying is that the reformers were carried away by their desire for novelty and, in some cases, the need to justify their existence and the salaries they were drawing from the Language Society.

The grand old slogan of the Republic was *Hakimiyet Milletindir*, 'Sovereignty belongs to the Nation'. *Hakimiyet*, being of Arabic origin, had to go and by way of a pure Turkish word to replace it they cooked up *egemenlik*. This may sound to you suspiciously similar to the Western word *hegemony*, and so it did to many Turks at the time, but the reformers indignantly rebutted the imputation. The final *-lik* is the regular suffix of abstract nouns. As for

egemen, well, they said, there was an ancient word *ege* meaning 'lord'. In fact there was not; the word was *ige*, but let that pass. The *-men* was an ancient intensive suffix; that was true, but the reformers forgot that later, when they decided it was a suffix of agent—by an odd coincidence, just like the *man* in *barman*. But we will let that pass too. *Millet* for 'nation' was also Arabic and also had to go. The replacement they dug up for it was *ulus*. What they ought to have dug up was *ulus*, the original Turkish form, of which *ulus* was the Mongolian pronunciation. So *Hakimiyet Milletindir* gave way to *Egemenlik Ulusundur*.

A more recent victim of the lust for change has been the impeccably Turkish *bütün*, 'all', the new fashion being to use instead *tüm*. For this one, Turkish Radio and Television are held to blame. Now *tüm*, which has existed in Turkish since at least the fifteenth century, is of Arabic origin and does not, or until very recently did not, mean 'all' but 'whole', its original sense being 'mass'. So *tüm peynirler* nowadays is the fashionable way of saying 'all the cheeses', instead of *bütün peynirler*, whereas what it once meant and still does mean in those parts of the country where they make cheese is 'the whole cheeses'. Another good old word which has lost its original sense is *katkı*, 'adulteration', now used for 'contribution'. Even so blameless a word as *istemek*, 'to want', is in danger of being ousted, like *bütün*; smart people prefer *dilemek*, 'to beg, wish'.

A consequence of this policy of change for the sake of change is that the Language Society frequently found it necessary to disclaim certain ludicrous expressions which had been put into circulation by its opponents to parody some of its coinages. Among the best-known are *ulusal düttürü*, approximately 'folkish jingle', for 'national anthem', and *gökgötüren konuksal avrat*, 'sky conducting guestish dame' for 'air hostess'. The reason why some unsophisticated Turks think these are genuine products of the Language Society is that they do not find them different in kind from some of the Society's own creations; how can you tell that a grotesque parody is a parody when the original is itself grotesque?

Opponents of the new language like to call it 'Esperanto'. But in so doing they have in mind solely the artificiality of Esperanto; they overlook its extreme regularity. The pre-reform vocabulary of Turkish was as full of inconsistencies as any other living language; witness the Turkish forms of the three international words 'geography', 'geometry', and 'geology': *coğrafya*, *geometri*, *jeoloji*. And these words are still in everyday use; no one ever tried to rationalize them. There was never a master-plan for the remaking of Turkish. Various schemes were produced for the

manufacture of new words and some of them were well devised, but none commanded general support or was given sustained official support. Everyone wanted to have a go at the great new national pastime of word-making.

The most assiduous and successful word-maker was a man called Nurullah Ataç, who died in 1957 at the age of 59. By profession he was a teacher of French—his French was self-taught—who became a translator in the President's office. Some of his inventions were clever and many have caught on. *İçtenlik* for 'sincerity' is one of his. He made it by taking *içten*, literally 'from the inside', and adding the abstract-noun suffix. An English equivalent would be 'fromheartness'. Another of his is *karabasan*, literally 'black-pressing', for 'nightmare'. These two have taken firm root and relatively few of the people who use them are aware that they are not natural growths. But one of the many of Ataç's coinages which still make some Turks' hackles rise is *doğa* 'nature', which has largely ousted the Arabic *tabiat*. He made it up, from *doğ-* 'to be born', and gave it a matching adjective: *doğal* 'natural'. One of his failures was *devrim*, which he coined from the verb *devir-* 'to overturn' as a replacement for the Arabic *inkılab*. I call it a failure, in full awareness that it is used by 99 per cent of Turks. The trouble is that *inkılab* was ambiguous, meaning both 'reform' and 'revolution', and the new *devrim* perpetuates the ambiguity. I think that if Ataç was going to invent a replacement for *inkılab* he should have gone the whole hog and invented two words.

The period 1940–50 was the Language Society's high noon. In 1945 the Republican Constitution was put into the new Turkish; the revered Kanun-i Teşkilât-ı Esasiye gave way to the Anayasa, a name derived from the Turkish *ana*, 'mother', and the Mongolian *yasa*, meaning 'law'. It is probable that more people could understand the new text than the old, but nothing before this had so infuriated the linguistic conservatives. But the 1950 elections swept the Democrat Party into power, and their policy was to give the mass of the electorate what it wanted. Shortly after the election, the Language Society's state subsidy was reduced and then abolished. This did not mean the end of the Society's activities, because under Atatürk's will it shared much of the income from his estate with the somewhat less controversial Turkish History Society. But it did mean that its busy salaried staff of word-smiths could no longer channel their produce directly into the schools. In 1952 the Ottoman text of the Constitution was restored. The proportion of native words in newspaper language was 57 per cent in 1946. By 1960 it had fallen to

51 per cent. In that year, however, with the overthrow of the Democrats the tide turned. Shortly after the 1960 coup, the Language Society's subsidy was restored. On 28 January 1961 a government circular was sent to all ministries, forbidding the use of any foreign word for which a Turkish equivalent existed. This policy was exemplified in the language of the new constitution of July 1961, which was 'Turkish'.

By the mid-1970s the proportion of Turkish words, real and invented, in the news columns of the press was regularly as high as 70 per cent and in some places, notably the leading articles in *Cumhuriyet*, it rose to 90 per cent and more. At that point, most readers would either reach for the dictionary or turn to the sports page.

The political strife of the 1970s brought an upsurge of animosity against the Language Society. The extreme Right regarded it as a subversive agency whose mission was to increase the differences between the Turkish of Turkey and the Turks of the USSR. Comparisons were drawn between the Society's ceaseless undermining of the language and Trotsky's doctrine of permanent revolution. Others argued—and this is a harder charge to rebut—that the Language Reform had restored precisely what it had been intended to eliminate: the gulf between the language of the intellectuals and the language of the masses.

To what extent has the reform affected the speech of ordinary Turks? Talk to the grocer in Nazilli, the gardener in Çankaya, or the bath-attendant in Safranbolu and the language they use will not be very different from what it was twenty-five or thirty years ago. You will certainly hear some neologisms, often with almost audible quotation marks round them. Sometimes you will hear the neologism used together with the word it was meant to replace, as in the not uncommon locution *meselâ örneğın*, 'e.g. for instance'. I got into conversation in an outlying quarter of Istanbul with an elderly taxi-driver, who wanted to know what I was doing in Turkey. I told him I was particularly interested in the Language Reform, and he replied that he had never heard of it; the language was one and unchanging. For 'language', by the way, he used the old word *lisan* and not the new word *dil*. So I asked him, 'What about the word for "important", *önemli*, which everyone now uses instead of *mühim*?' 'Oh no', said he, 'they're quite different. Suppose the Municipality says that building over there's not safe and it's *önemli* to repair it, that means it may be done in five or ten years from now. But if they say it's *mühim*, that means work will start tomorrow.'

To him, clearly, the old Arabic word was the more impressive of the two and he showed no awareness that *önemli* was an artificial creation. Any language is a set of conventions. Except for those people who are interested in language for its own sake, it makes no difference whether the convention was established a thousand years ago or last week.

The Language Society, as a private body and as Atatürk's heir, had assumed that, though its financial resources other than the income from Atatürk's estate might sometimes be endangered, its perpetual existence was guaranteed—that it could never be dissolved. Nor was it; in due time it was simply taken over. A law was passed on 11 August 1983, which reconstituted it as part of a new Atatürk Cultural, Linguistic and Historical Institution, linked to the Prime Minister's office, and gave it an almost entirely new Council of Management. The debate on the draft legislation revealed the intensity of the hatred it had aroused. One speaker denounced 'the treason which for years has been committed against our language'. Another graphic sentence was: 'They have turned the language into a plucked chicken.'¹

Now, in 1985, the professional reformers are disestablished and discomfited. Yet one only has to look at the near-uniformity of the language of that debate to know that it is never going to be possible to turn the clock back. I know of nobody who would advocate a return to the Ottoman terminology. When it comes to non-technical vocabulary, opinions are sharply divided. And here I wish to state my certainty on a matter over which many Turks will disagree with me. It is that Atatürk, towards the end of his life, decided that while the innovations in technical terminology were fully justified, as was the campaign to encourage the use of plain Turkish instead of circumlocutory Arabic and Persian, the invention of quasi-Turkish replacements for time-honoured items of everyday vocabulary had been a mistake. The evidence is clear and abundant, but time compels me to revert to the present day.²

On the one hand we now have those who maintain that the reforms were justified in their entirety, though the scholarly members of this faction will concede that the formation of many of the neologisms violated the rules of the language. On the other

¹ *Danışma Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi* (Minutes of the Consultative Assembly) for 28 June 1983.

² G. L. Lewis, 'Atatürk's Language Reform as an Aspect of Modernization in the Republic of Turkey' in Jacob M. Landau (ed.), *Atatürk and the Modernization of Turkey* (Boulder, Colorado and Leiden, 1985).

there are those who deplore the whole business, though I do not believe there is a single Turk alive who never uses any of the neologisms. I base this view on the fact that amid all the articles about Language Reform, a perennial feature of the daily and periodical press, I have never seen an anti-reform article containing no neologisms. The reasons for this are twofold. An article exclusively in the old vocabulary, that is to say, in the Turkish of thirty or even twenty-five years ago, would be barely intelligible to younger readers. Moreover, in many cases the writers who use the neologisms to attack the movement that coined them are simply unaware that so many of the words which come naturally to their pens are neologisms.

The opposition usually sum up their argument by saying that children and parents no longer understand one another. This is an exaggeration. I recall my grandson, at the age of seven, telling a complicated story about something that had happened that day at school. It ended with the words, 'So you see it was the other way round. Or, as you big people would say, *vice versa*.' One's recognition vocabulary is always larger than one's working vocabulary. Besides, if one party to a conversation does not understand a word used by the other, he or she will either guess the meaning from the context or ask what the word means and will know it for the next time.

Foreigners often remark that the Turks, having got rid of so many Arabic and Persian words, seem to use a great many French and English words. A tourist agency was recently advertising a vacancy for someone who had to be *genç* and *çalışkan*, that is, young and hard-working. He or she would also have to be *dinamik* and *prezantabl*. There are two reasons, if we leave out of account those few Turks who do it to show off their linguistic knowledge, like the people in England who say 'Farsi' when they mean 'Persian'.

In the first place, now that the Turks are committed to western civilization, it is natural that they should use some western words, just as their ancestors used words borrowed from the languages of Islamic civilization. Though here I would note that *mersi* for 'thank you' has lost currency in the last few years, the Language Reform having polarized the Turks into those who unregenerately adhere to the old *teşekkür ederim* and those who use the once working-class and military *sağ ol*. *O.K.* too has lost currency, the current term being *oldu*: 'it has happened'. But there is a more subtle reason why Turks use western words. It is that they have been persuaded that the Arabic and Persian words they grew up with are now impossibly old-fashioned, but they cannot bring

themselves to use the new words, either because they just do not like the sound and shape of them or because they feel they do not quite express the required meaning. Try to imagine what it would be like to be deprived of the use of, say, the words 'narrate', 'relate', 'recount', 'explain', 'reveal', 'express', 'describe', and have to make do with 'tell'.

I spent a memorable evening in Istanbul with a group of teachers at the Faculty of Political Sciences, who were organizing a symposium on the nineteenth-century reforms. Their chairman, a venerable retired professor, was composing his opening address which, for the sake of the many young students who were expected, he wanted to couch in the most up-to-date language. So in his own archaic and courtly Turkish he told the company what he wanted to say and we suggested the appropriate neologisms. There was a lengthy argument about how to say 'modern'. He knew *asri* was too old-fashioned but did not know the new word. One or two suggested *çağdaş*, but we agreed that that was the neologism for *muasır*, 'contemporary'. The eventual consensus was that he should use *modern*, which he did.

In Ankara I attended a lecture by a social anthropologist, entitled 'Differing Mentalities and Culture'. It was an interesting lecture but I confess I was more interested in the medium than in the message. Right at the start, the lecturer drew a distinction between local cultures and universal culture. For 'universal' he first tried the old word, *külli*, and when, from the stir in the audience, he realized that that was not intelligible—or, if intelligible, not acceptable—to everyone, he tried the neologism *tümel*. An equal but opposite stir in the audience and he said *üniversel*. Later on he tried *genel*. He did not think of *evrensel*, which was subsequently used by a questioner. After a while, the lecturer took to rattling off three words for each concept. So when he wanted to express 'causality' he used the Ottoman/Arabic, the manufactured neologism which may be literally rendered 'fromwhatishness', and the French: *illiyet/nedensellik/causalité*.

Medical terminology is in no less confusion. There is a glossary of recommended 'genuine Turkish' terms, but few doctors seem to use it. 'Endometrium tissue with oedematous stroma' comes out as *Stroması ödemli endometrium dokusu*, in which the only Turkish elements are a couple of suffixes and the word for 'tissue'. For 'diagnosis', the old term was the Arabic *teşhis*. Its manufactured Turkish replacement is *tanı*, which is the stem of the verb meaning 'to recognize'; not, incidentally, a common way of forming nouns

in Turkish. But in a pathologist's report I saw both of these words and one more, all used for the same thing: *teşhis*, *tanı*, and *diagnos*.

And what hope is there for the future of Turkish, if most of the new words are here to stay and most of the old words are dead and gone? I could end by quoting a favourite saying with which the Turks keep their spirits up in the face of adversity: *Bu da geçer yahu!* This too will pass! But I'm not totally sure that it's true in this case. So I shall end instead with some lines from the introduction to a recent book, the memoirs of Zeki Kuneralp:

I should like to say something about the language I use in this book. For this I ask pardon of my readers, but the subject is important to me. It will be seen that I have shown the same regard to the old and the new; I have not shied away from writing either Ottoman or pure Turkish. I have not even refrained from using both forms of language in the same sentence. Nor, where I have been unable to find a Turkish word, have I seen any harm in resorting to a turkicized Western word. Whichever word best expresses my thought, I have used it, whatever its origin may be. . . . Language is an instrument, not an end in itself. We generally fail to realize this. If, for example, we are fanatical proponents of pure Turkish, when we cannot find a pure Turkish word that expresses the meaning we want, we load that meaning on to some other word and, for the sake of our socio-political beliefs, we cast aside the Arabic, Persian or western word that exactly meets our needs. In this way we impoverish our language, we obliterate its nuances, we deprive it of clarity and taste. But the more the sources on which a language can draw, the more expressive, the more colourful, the more ample it becomes.¹

And what can I add to that but Amen?

¹ Zeki Kuneralp, *Sadece Diplomat* (Istanbul, n.d. [1981]), pp. 16-17.