

Politics of National Identity and Language: Turkey, a Case Study

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Abstract

The following article aims to explain the relationship between the nation-building process and language policies, with the case study of Turkey. The historical and political constructions of the national identity have been discussed widely in the sociological literature. Yet, how the politics of language, such as officialisation of a language, changes of alphabets or/and the purist movements have been related and integrated within the nationalist narratives could not receive the attention they reserved. As virtually all nationalisms had language policies in accord with their imagination of the “nation”, Turkey is not an exception.

The seeds of the Turkish nationalism are to be found in the late Ottoman Empire period. Likewise, the debates about language started in the same period. Another linkage between nationalism and politics of “national” languages is their modernity. In this sense, too, the case of Turkish language is a good example, as the referred period had also witnessed the modernisation attempts of the State elites, centralisation of the governing mechanisms, cultural and economical transformation of the urban population and generations of communication and bureaucratic networks.

In the Republican era after 1923, the language was handled in a revolutionary perspective, of which Turkish nationalism and Westernisation became the official ideology. The Alphabet and Language Revolutions had extensive political and social implications with respect to the building of national identity, minorities, modernisation and social change. The essay will try to illuminate these connections with special emphases on the formation of nationalist ideas and national identity, and on minorities.