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Turkish identity in poetry before and after the 1928 language revolution

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TURKISH IDENTITY IN POETRY BEFORE AND AFTER THE 1928 LANGUAGE REVOLUTION

A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors with Distinction

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TURKISH IDENTITY IN POETRY

This Study by: Angela M. Wrage

Entitled: Turkish Identity in Poetry Before and After the 1928 Language Revolution

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation University Honors with Distinction.

Date

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Date

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Abstract

The 1928 language revolution in Turkey involved the change of the Turkish writing script from the Arabic to the Latin alphabet, as well as the elimination of Arabic and Persian loan words and associated imported grammar. In this study, we assessed the impact this language revolution had on Turkish identity by examining it through the lens of Ottoman and Turkish literature and poetry. To achieve this, we compared literary and poetic themes from before and after the language revolution; we also studied the activity of prolific writers from before and after the transition to determine what effect, if any, the language revolution had on their artistic output. This research has helped to illuminate some of the finer points of Turkish identity that had been largely overlooked in favor of discussion on Islam and secularism, and the results of this study are broadly applicable to other, similar linguistic transitions around the world.

Keywords: Turkish identity, language revolution, Turkish literature, Turkish poetry, Ottoman literature, Ottoman poetry

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Introduction

Istanbul's location along the banks of the Bosphorus Strait makes it the only city in the world to straddle two continents; just like its largest city, the country of Turkey has long been described as a meeting point of East and West, a place where traditional values meet modern ideals. Since the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, this reputation has only been enhanced by the sweeping cultural and language reforms begun by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk after the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923. The complete overhaul of the Turkish language and writing system in 1928, arguably the most significant of these changes, has had far-reaching impacts on the identity of the Turkish people.

In this study, we examined themes from Ottoman and Turkish literature and poetry in an attempt to better understand these impacts. Although there is a large body of extant research on the way that Turkish daily and religious life changed during this time period, surprisingly little investigation has been done into the ways that these changes are reflected in poetry. This study aims to fill in some of these gaps by examining the relationship between the sociopolitical climate in Turkey in the late 19th/early 20th century and the poetry that was being produced there during the same time period.

Literature Review

Late Ottoman Empire

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the Ottoman Empire was on the verge of collapse. This mighty empire had been a formidable presence in the region of modern-day Turkey since Orhan Gazi's 1326 capture of the city of Bursa. At its largest, it expanded from the Balkan states in the northwest to Iraq in the east, also encompassing much of North Africa

(Ahmad, 2003). A rather militant nation, the Ottoman Empire tended to regard education as something of a “necessary evil,” a potential threat to the empire that was nonetheless required to maintain a positive image within Europe (Verschoyle, 1950, p. 59). Most of the education that did occur was done at *medreses*, Islamic institutions that focused on helping students memorize the Quran (Toprak, 1995). At the same time, the Ottomans enjoyed a somewhat paradoxical reputation for tolerance of the various religious and ethnic groups that co-existed within their Islamic empire (Barkey, 2005).

During the late Ottoman Empire, the literacy rate in what is now Turkey was roughly three to eight percent (Aytürk, 2010); despite the fact that the populace was generally uneducated, however, there existed within Ottoman society a class of educated elites. These upper-crust individuals drew on the empire’s varied cultural and faith traditions to produce a stunning volume of literary, poetic, and scientific works whose merit rivaled even that of their Western counterparts (Gibb, 1901). These works were written in the Ottoman language (*Osmanlıca*), which contained a plethora of Arabic and Persian loan words and the imported grammar that came with them.

Indeed, this language was characteristic of academics and was rather far-removed from the vernacular of the people (Ahmad, 2003). Nonetheless, the Ottoman literary and poetic tradition is often regarded among the greatest of history. The Ottoman court poetry of this time period, known as *Dîvan* poetry, featured elegant, highly-regulated forms, extensive use of Arabic and Persian vocabulary and grammar, and a focus on lofty themes such as love, religious philosophy, and longing. This type of poetry was of special interest as a baseline for this research, to which all subsequent types of poems were compared.

Decline of the Empire and Rise of the Republic

With the 1876 ascension of Sultan Abdülhamid II, however, the dynamics of the empire began to change drastically. The new sultan disregarded the existing constitution and ruled as a tyrant, quashing education throughout much of the Ottoman state and casting the empire into a period of ignorance (Verschoyle, 1950). The sultan's dictatorial actions did not sit well with the officers of the Ottoman military, however, and in 1889, they gathered in secret to form the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP); one of the members of this committee was the future founder of the Turkish republic, Mustafa Kemal. In July 1908, an army rebellion led by the CUP resulted in Sultan Abdülhamid conceding to the re-adoption of the old constitution (Ahmad, 2003). Thus began the reform process that would eventually culminate with the fall and fragmentation of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I.

From 1919 onward, the decimated Ottoman region that is modern-day Turkey was faced with the invasion of the Great Powers' armies, who occupied much of Anatolia. General Mustafa Kemal, previously mentioned as an organizing member of the CUP, succeeded in organizing an army to repel these invaders; his efforts on the battlefield culminated with a diplomatic victory in the form of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which recognized the new borders of modern-day Turkey (Ahmad, 2003). This paved the way for the establishment of the Turkish Republic, with Mustafa Kemal at its head, later that year. Thus, Turkey as we know it was born.

Reforms in the Early Days of the Turkish Republic

Mustafa Kemal, the first president of the Turkish Republic, believed strongly in the importance of Westernizing and modernizing Turkey to align more closely with its European

neighbors. He wanted to distance the country from the Islamic influence of the Ottoman Empire, and used his position as a rather authoritarian leader to enact sweeping reforms to this end (Aytürk, 2010). These reforms included the following changes: the sultanate and Caliphate were abolished, women were granted the right to vote and be elected, free speech was affirmed, and religious training was banned from public schools. Istanbul University's Department of Divinity was closed, pilgrimage and prayer sites were shut down, Sufi lodges were closed, the Islamic *fez* (men's hat) was banned and the headscarf discouraged, and the Islamic call to prayer was translated into Turkish. Alcohol was legalized, Western systems of measurement were adopted (the Gregorian calendar and the metric system, for example), and family names became mandatory and replaced the previous use of patronymics (Mustafa Kemal himself took the surname Atatürk, "father of the Turks") (Zok, 2010, p. 3).

Perhaps the most dramatic of Atatürk's reforms, however, was the revolutionary transition of the Turkish writing system from the Arabic script to the Latin script and the accompanying linguistic changes. Although the official reason for this transition was to improve the suitability of the script to the language itself (it *is* unarguably difficult to write an agglutinative language like Turkish using a Semitic alphabet), most scholars agree that a large portion of the motivation for this change arose from Atatürk's desire to distance Turkey from its Ottoman-Islamic past in favor of a new secular identity (Aytürk, 2004). At the same time, Atatürk sought to "purify" the Turkish language of outside influence by replacing Arabic and Persian loanwords with "pure" Turkish equivalents; he accomplished this through the establishment of the regulatory Language Council in 1928 (Aytürk, 2010), which was later

replaced by the better-known Turkish Language Association (Türk Dil Kurumu) in 1932 (Aytürk, 2008).

Language Revolution

Following the official transition to the Latin alphabet, which began in 1928 with the passing of Law No. 1353 on the Adoption and Implementation of the Turkish Letters, Atatürk provided financial support to major print media providers (newspapers, journals, etc.) and implemented a nation-wide literacy campaign in support of the language reforms (Aytürk, 2010). Because such a large percentage of the public was illiterate, this language revolution met with relatively little opposition from the Turkish people *en masse*. However, the educated elite were strongly opposed to the reforms, insisting they would “break their pencils” and not write another word were the reforms to pass (Nuray as cited in Zok, 2010).

The roots of their opposition were essentially two-fold. First, the replacement of Arabic and Persian loanwords with new “Turkish” equivalents impoverished the language, obliterating fine shades of meaning, while at the same time rendering the “new” Turkish language almost unintelligible to the average Turk, who was accustomed to using the Arabic and Persian words in daily speech (Verschoyle, 1950). Second, and perhaps more importantly, the transition from the Arabic script to the Latin one rendered Turks unable to read the Quran, Islam’s holy book, which is traditionally printed only in Arabic (Aytürk, 2010). Similarly, during the remarkably rapid transition between writing systems (the change was completed by June 1930), many highly-educated Islamic scholars became illiterate overnight. These factors combined to contribute to the forced secularization of the country by Atatürk, and they represent the core of much of the criticism against the language revolution.

To date, the Turkish language is still written using the Latin script. Turks are cut off not only from the Quran and their religious heritage, but also from the literary, poetic, and scientific writings of the Ottomans. Imagine reading the original Middle English version of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, but written in the Arabic script; the difficulty you may encounter is somewhat comparable to what today's Turks face when they seek to read Ottoman writings, as they must struggle with both the modified vocabulary and the antiquated, foreign script. This type of drastic change has doubtless had a substantial impact on modern Turkey, and in this project, we sought to explore a few aspects of that impact as they relate to the expression of Turkish identity in literature and poetry. This study provides a significant contribution to research about this time period, as it aims to fill in a few of the gaps related to the ways in which sociopolitical trends in Turkey at the time were reflected in contemporary poetry, a subject which, to date, has received relatively little attention.

Research Questions

As discussed in the literature review above, the transition from the Arabic script to the Latin script and the purging of Arabic and Persian loanwords and imported grammar has had a substantial impact on the Turkish language. The modern language's Latin script serves as a barrier that works to distance the Turkish people from their Islamic heritage. Because the effects of this imposed secularization have already been studied extensively, the current study focused on another aspect of the language revolution. Namely, we examined the effect of this language revolution on Turkish identity as portrayed through the lens of Ottoman and Turkish literature and poetry.

Two research questions guided the study:

1) How do themes in Ottoman/Turkish literature and poetry leading up to the language revolution compare to those from after the transition?

2) How do the themes indicated in Ottoman/Turkish literature and poetry of the time reflect broader ideas of Turkish identity?

By addressing these research questions, we hope to gain a better understanding of an issue that is directly relevant to the Turkish people, yet has received relatively little attention from scholars. In this way, we hope to draw attention to an issue that, to date, has been explored only briefly.

Methodology

The first stage of this project consisted of laying the groundwork for the research. Connections were established with scholars of Turkish literature at Fatih Üniversitesi in İstanbul, with which UNI shares an exchange agreement. Under the guidance of these scholars, an effort was first made to better understand the historical conditions that surrounded the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the founding of the Turkish Republic, and the language revolution.

Next, over 30 poems by more than 15 poets were selected for analysis from among the most widely-known authors of the Ottoman period, the Tanzimat period leading up to the language revolution, and the period following the language revolution. Using modern Turkish transliterations of Ottoman poems, as well as English translations, poets were divided by time period (Ottoman, Tanzimat/transition, and post-language revolution), and their poems were analyzed for common themes. Information on the poet's alignment with different political and literary movements was used to provide context for the analysis.

A partial list of poets whose works were analyzed in this study is as follows can be found below. They have been grouped into categories based on the form and content of their poetry. However, please bear in mind that these groupings are fluid, and that they simply reflect the way the poems were divided for organizational purposes. Often, one poet would experiment with multiple forms over the course of their career. The groupings were performed under the guidance of İbrahim Hakan Karataş, a professor of Turkish Language and Literature at Fatih University in Istanbul (personal communication, February 9, 2015).

19th Century Ottoman Empire

Poets who continued using the form and content of Ottoman Dîvan poetry: Enderunlu Vasıf.

Poets who continued using the form of Ottoman Dîvan poetry, but changed the content: Ziya Paşa, Nâmık Kemal.

Poets who experimented with the form and content of Western poetry: Rezaizade Mahmut Ekrem, Cenap Şehabettin.

Poets who used the form and content of Turkish folk poetry: Erzurumlu Emrah.

Pre- and Post-Language Revolution (1860 and Later)

Poets who continued using Ottoman Dîvan forms: Mehmet Âkif Ersoy, Tevfik Fikret, Yahya Kemal.

Poets who worked within the Turkish folk poetry tradition: Ziya Gökalp, Mehmet Emin Yurdakul.

Poets who experimented with the Western poetic tradition: Ahmet Haşim.

Poets who used poetry as propaganda: Kemalettin Kamu, Nâzım Hikmet.

Other modern poets of note: Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca, Enis Batur.

Results and Analysis

The analysis of these poems revealed two important findings related to our research questions. First, the overarching theme in poetry from before and after the language revolution is a shift from identifying as Ottoman to identifying as Turkish. However, this transition occurred earlier than expected, well before the official 1928 script change and purging of foreign words from the Turkish language. Second, with this shift in identity in mind, several other themes subsequently became apparent. These include ideas of *hürriyet* (“freedom”), *millet* (“nation” or “people”), and *vatan* (“motherland”). Let us now examine each of these ideas in greater detail.

Ottoman or Turk?

When comparing themes present in poetry before and after the language revolution in an effort to address the first research question, one main trend becomes apparent. Throughout the period of the Ottoman Empire, the Ottoman Dîvan poets saw themselves as distinct from the common people, or Turks. The form, vocabulary, and grammar they chose to use in their poetry were reflective of this identity. In the time period leading up to the language revolution, however, this idea was being challenged. Even during the Tanzimat period (1839-1876), stirrings of change were evident.

By the dawn of the 20th century, poets had begun to identify as Turks. This shift in identity was reflected not only in the use of the words “Turk” and “Turkish” in poetry of the period, but also in the poets’ choices about form and vocabulary. During this period, the formal forms of the Ottoman Dîvan poetry gave way to Turkish folk and Western forms. In addition,

poets began to use vocabulary that was more representative of the language spoken by the common people. Surprisingly, this shift occurred well in advance of the 1928 language revolution, a discovery with fascinating implications that we will discuss in more detail later.

“Hürriyet kasidesi” by Nâmık Kemal. In our discussion of the shift from identity as Ottomans to identity as Turks, let us turn first to Nâmık Kemal’s “Hürriyet Kasidesi.” Written in 1860, this poem was rooted firmly in the Tanzimat period. As a poet, Kemal was reluctant to completely distance himself from the idea of Ottoman-ness. He wrote:

Biz ol nesl-i kerîm-i dude-i Osmâniyânız kim

Cihângîrâne bir devlet çıkardık bu aşîretten

Biz ol ulvî-nihâdânız ki meydân-ı hamiyette

Bize hâk-i mezar ehven gelir hâk-i mezelletten

In translation:

We are Ottomans, noble lineage, noble race.

Leavened throughout by the blood of zealotry.

We are a people of lofty purpose, serious, striving;

Who made of a tribe an empire, world-conquering. (Sılay, 2006)

Even at first glance, the poet’s identification as Ottoman is clear—“We are Ottomans.”

However, there is more to this poem than meets the eye. First written in the Arabic script, this poem has been transliterated into the Latin script used in modern Turkish. Let us examine this transliteration, shown above; every word that has been underlined is of Arabic or Persian (non-Turkish) origin. As you can see, fifteen of the twenty-six words in this excerpt are loan words, borrowed from other languages. In addition, Kemal made extensive use of imported Persian

izafet compounds, in which adjectives follow the nouns they modify with a linking “-i” in between. This contrasts with the common tongue of that time and with modern Turkish, in which adjectives generally precede the nouns they modify. These izafet compounds are characteristic of Ottoman poetry.

The form of the poem, too, is typical of Ottoman Dîvan poetry. In this case, the poem is a *mutavvel gazel*. All *gazels* are comprised of rhyming couplets in the form aa/ba/ca/... (Pritchett, 1993). Generally, *gazels* contain 5 to 15 couplets. Because this poem contains 31 couplets, it is known as a *mutavvel gazel*, or an extended *gazel* of sorts. The organization of *gazels* follows strict compositional rules, such as including the poet’s name or alias in the last couplet (Pritchett, 1993). Kemal did not deviate from these rules, instead choosing to follow the conventions of Ottoman Dîvan poetry. In this way, too, he demonstrated his sense of Ottoman identity.

In fact, “Hürriyet Kasidesi” is a typical Ottoman *gazel* in all ways but one: its subject. *Gazels*, and many other Ottoman Dîvan poems for that matter, usually revolved around themes such as love, longing, religious philosophy, or praise of a hero (Prtichett, 1993). This *gazel*, however, was written on quite a different topic: *hürriyet* (freedom). As the Ottoman Empire began its decline under the rule of Sultan Abdülhamid II, the citizens of the empire began to yearn for political reforms and for freedom; this theme will be discussed in more detail later.

“Anadolu’dan bir ses yahut cenge giderken” by Mehmet Emin Yurdakul. In the poem “Anadolu’dan Bir Ses yahut Cenge Giderken” by Mehmet Emin Yurdakul, published slightly later in 1897, as the empire had begun to decline in earnest, we see a shift toward a different mentality. In the first line of his poem, Yurdakul proudly proclaimed:

Ben bir Türküm dinim, cinsim uludur.

Sînem, özüm ateş ile doludur.

İnsan olan vatanının kuludur.

Türk evlâdı evde durmaz; giderim!

In translation:

I am a Turk, my faith, my race are mighty.

My breast, my spirit are full of fire.

All men are servants of the motherland.

The Turkish son does not sit at home; I go! (author's translation)

Here, we begin to see a departure from previous poet's identification as Ottoman, despite the fact that this poem was composed during the time of the Ottoman Empire and using the Arabic (Ottoman) script. The most obvious reflection of this is Yurdakul's plainly proclaiming, "I am a Turk." However, this is not the only manifestation of Turkishness found in the poem. As is evident from the limited number of underlined (foreign) words in the original text, Yurdakul used language that resembled the spoken, "common" Turkish language of the day much more than it did the formal, stately language of the Ottoman court. This reflected one of the early efforts to make poetry and literature more accessible to and reflective of the average Turk, as opposed to something created by and for the Ottoman intellectual elite.

Perhaps more interesting, though, is the form and meter the poet chose for his work. In some ways, the form of "Anadolu'dan Bir Ses" does stem from the Ottoman poetic tradition. For example, Yurdakul composed this poem using a modified *şarkı* (song) form of Divan poetry. The normal *şarkı* form consists of three to five quatrains, in the form abab/cccb/dddb, whereas

Yurdakul's poem was of the form aaab/cccb/dddb; the only departure from the form lies in the second line of the first quatrain. Yurdakul's decision to use an Ottoman Dîvan form for his piece is made more interesting, however, by his choice of meter. He used a 4+4+3 syllable count for each line, a type of syllabic meter which was a form commonly seen in Turkish folk poetry at that time. This stood in contrast with the typical Ottoman use of quantitative meter, in which the poem is composed so that each line takes the same amount of time to read, regardless of the number of syllables (Kaplan, 2006). In this way, Yurdakul combined choices related to form and meter to express a sense of Turkishness that is, all the same, rooted in longstanding Ottoman tradition.

“Altın destan” by Ziya Gökalp. Published in the journal *Genç Kalemler* (“Young Pens”) in 1908, Ziya Gökalp's poem, “Altın Destan,” provided yet another perspective on what it is to be a Turk. Gökalp wrote:

Pekin, Delhi, Kaşgar, İstanbul, Kazan,

Bu beş yerde vardı beş büyük sultan :

Sarı, kızıl, gök han, ak han, kara han,

—Hepsinin üstünde parladı İlhan—

Ak handan hayrisi : il... han nerede?

Gideyim, arayım : İlhan nerede?

In translation:

Pekin, Delhi, Kashgar, Istanbul, Kazan

In these five places, there were five great sultans :

Yellow, red, sky king, white king, black king,

—Above them all shone the *ilhan* (Mongol ruler)—

Beside the white king : where... where is the *ilhan*?

Let me go, let me search: where is the *ilhan*? (author's translation)

These five sultans and their subjects were not the only people mentioned in the poem, however; Gökalp also described the Kyrgs, Kazakhs, Caucasians, and Uyghurs, by name. He took care to portray these peoples as citizens of a grand, forgotten nation of Turks. Gökalp then went on offer a deliberate call for the unification of the Turkish homeland and the rise of the Turkish Nation:

Ulus'u içine girsin her oymak,

Beş ulus budunda birleşsin çabcağ,

Uygur, Kalaç, Karluk, Kangılı, Kıpçak

—*Türk yurdu bir olsun kalmasın kaçak*—

Çıksınlar meydana : merdan nerede?

Gideyim, arayım : meydan nerede?

In translation:

May all of the tribes enter the Nation,

Five peoples quickly come together into one existence,

Uyghur, Kalach, Qarluk, Kangili, Kipchak

—Let the Turkish Nation be one, don't let it remain divided in exile—

Let them come to the square : where are your sons?

Let me go, let me search : where is the square? (author's translation)

Here, we see a further departure from identification as Ottoman; Gökâlp, too, minimized his borrowings from foreign languages and strove to write using words that the Turkish people could understand. In some ways, though, Gökâlp goes even further in his identification as Turkish than did the poets before him.

By listing a multitude of “Turkish” nations throughout the poem, Gökâlp professed the concept of a united Turkish race, once united but now spread piecemeal throughout several empires around the world (Kaplan, 2006). This viewpoint distances the poet even more from any ties to an Ottoman identity; if anything, Gökâlp sees the Ottoman Empire—along with other great empires of the time, such as Russia—as a barrier to the unification of the Turkish people. This viewpoint was known as pan-Turkism (Gibb, 1901).

There is one more point worthy of note here, however, and that is the poem’s form. Despite Gökâlp’s description of a united Turkish Nation whose fragmentation could be partially blamed on the multinational Ottoman Empire, he still chose to write his poem using an Ottoman Dîvan form. The particular form he used is called the *muhammes-i müzdeviç*, and it has a rhyme scheme of aaaaa/bbbaa/cccaa... (Turan, 2008). By choosing to utilize this form, Gökâlp embodied one of the paradoxes inherent in this shift of identity from Ottoman to Turkish; the poets being discussed in this paper were all literate, well-educated men who were afforded a special social status by their level of education. Therefore, in their writing, they were forced to balance their political and social ideologies related to identification as Turkish or Ottoman with their privileged status as Ottoman elite, separate from the common people. Gökâlp’s “Altın Destan” provides a good example of a poet attempting to balance these conflicting forces.

“Artık cihan türküsünü işitiyordu” by Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca. Now that we have examined the ways in which Ottoman and Turkish identity was expressed in poetry before the language revolution, let us move forward chronologically to the time after the 1928 language revolution had taken place. As discussed in the literature review, the language revolution brought about a myriad of changes, especially in the way Turkish was written. Turkish literature and poetry composed after the language revolution was written in the Latin script, and the use of Arabic and Persian loan words in published materials was strongly regulated by the Turkish Language Association. With these changes in mind, let us examine one piece in particular that was composed after the implementation of these changes.

In Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca’s 1945 poem, “Artık cihan türküsünü işitiyordu,” the poet expressed ideas about Turkishness that strongly resemble those from the late Tanzimat period:

–Artık cihan türküsünü işitiyordu.

Ben bir türk, bir beyaz, bir karanlık,

*Ben, yiğit dağlar arasındaki*ki*.*

Büyümüş, şehit olmuş, kahrolmuş,

*Analar, oğullar yasındaki*ki*.*

In translation:

–Now he could hear the world’s song.

I am a Turk, now white, now dark,

I am the one between the sons of Turks and the mountains.

They became men, they became martyrs, they were ruined,

Those for whom mothers and sons grieve. (author’s translation)

Dağlarca followed in the footsteps of earlier poets, proclaiming, “I am a Turk, now white, now dark.” He, like most other authors of the time following the language revolution, had relatively few new ideas to contribute to the idea of exactly what it means to be a Turk; this may be because, after the language revolution and the founding of the Turkish Republic, Turks became better integrated into Europe and the issue of Turkish identity became seen as a less pressing issue. By the time this poem was composed in 1945, we can see that a strong, clear Turkish identity had already emerged: the poet used almost all originally Turkish words, and utilized a simple four-line form that reveals Western influence. However, it seems that the issues related to the transition from Ottoman to Turkish identity had already been well-resolved by the time this poem was written.

Broader Themes of Turkish Identity

Around the time of the language revolution, the people of this region of the world began to move away from viewing themselves as Ottoman and began to identify more as Turkish. This overarching concept represents the central trend in poetry of this time period. In examining the second research question related to broader themes of Ottoman/Turkish identity, it is this finding that grounds our understanding of other key concepts in the poetry of that time period. Within the context of the Ottoman-to-Turkish transition in identity, three other major themes become apparent: *hürriyet* (“freedom”), *millet* (“nation” or “people”), and *vatan* (“motherland”). All three of these themes first appeared in Turkish poetry during the time leading up to the language revolution and reflect ways in which the Turkish concept of identity was changing during that period.

Hürriyet. One of the main themes found in poetry from the period leading up to the language revolution is the idea of *hürriyet*, a Turkish word that translates roughly to “freedom,” “independence,” or “liberty.” As the nation underwent the legal reforms of the Tanzimat period, the people began to turn their attention toward the emerging seats of power, such as the new Western-style courts. The Turkish people began to wonder about the influence of these powers; would they protect and defend the rights of the people, or would they exploit them as had the sultan? We should also note that the word *hürriyet* itself represents a break from the Ottoman language of the past, as it is a new, Turkish word that appears in the Tanzimat period (Kırkılıç & Ulaş, 2003). The concept of *hürriyet* appeared consistently throughout poetry of this period.

“Hürriyet Kasidesi” by Nâmık Kemal. We had previously examined Kemal’s “Hürriyet Kasidesi” as a relatively standard example of Ottoman Dîvan poetry, its vocabulary and form are certainly typical of the period. However, the poem’s theme is quite unexpected. Instead of writing about love, longing, religious philosophy, or other similar topics typical of Ottoman poetry, Kemal chose to write about *hürriyet*. Let us focus first on the poem’s 24th verse:

Civanmerdân-ı milletle hazer gavgadan ey bîdâd

Eriş şemşîr-i zulmün âteş-i hûn-i hamiyetten

In translation:

Unjust ruler, beware contention with the nation’s brave young men.

The sword of your tyranny will melt in the fiery blood of steel. (Sılary, 2006)

Despite Kemal's explicit identification as Ottoman, he also went out of his way to indicate his discontent with the ruling sultan, Abdülhamid II, and to call for a change in the way the nation was being run. The next verse continues:

Ne mümkün zulm ile bîdâd ile imhâ-yı hürriyet

Çalış idrâki kaldır muktedirsen âdemiyetten

In translation:

How can *hürriyet* be erased by tyranny, injustice?

Work, if you're able, to raise it up from annihilation. (Sılay, 2006)

Here, too, we can see the author's desire for reform. He calls the people of the empire to action, asking them to rise up and take a stand against the injustices they were seeing. Despite the fact that Kemal viewed himself strictly as an Ottoman, not a Turk, his writings did not shy away from asking for reform; here, already, we see a threat to the longstanding unity of the Ottoman Empire.

"Süleymaniye Kürsüsünde" by Mehmet Âkif Ersoy. Mehmet Âkif Ersoy's 1912 poem, "Süleymaniye Kürsüsünde," provides another, later example of poetic writing on the subject of *hürriyet*:

Bir de İstanbul'a geldim ki : bütün çarşı, pazar

Nâradan çalkanıyor, öyle ya... Hürriyet var!

In translation:

And so I came to Istanbul : every market, bazaar

Is pulsating with cheers... Freedom! (author's translation)

This is just one example of several verses throughout the poem that emphasize the importance of *hürriyet*. Ersoy viewed freedom as a power for good, a force that lifted up the downtrodden and brought hope to the oppressed (Kaplan, 1977). Like many other authors of this time period, he encouraged the idea of *hürriyet* as a catalyst for change.

“Görünmek” by Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca. This poem, published in 1953, reflects the idea of *hürriyet* in post-language revolution Turkish poetry. Dağlarca handles this theme in a similar way as the poets who came before him, cementing the installation of *hürriyet* as a permanent component of Turkish identity:

*Kişi sevince Hürriyeti
Var olur yeşilden ateşe kadar soylarda
Gerçek olur sevgisi
Her yerinden görünür
Yeryüzünün.*

In translation:

When man loves freedom,
He comes alive in generation from green to fire.
His love comes true
And can be seen from all
Of the world. (Dağlarca, 1969)

By examining these three examples of the idea of *hürriyet* in Turkish poetry, it becomes clear that this concept, which first emerged in the period leading up to the language revolution, was and remains an integral component of the Turkish concept of self.

Millet. A second theme in Turkish poetry of this period that reflects a broader concept of Turkish identity is the idea of *millet*, which refers to a “nation” or “people.” This concept is significant because it applies specifically to the idea of Turkishness; while the Ottoman Empire was a vast, multinational entity, people from within the Ottoman Empire who were ethnically Turkish saw themselves as one united people, and as members of one united nation. One example of this theme in poetry is as follows:

“Anadolu’dan bir ses yahut cenge giderken” by Mehmet Emin Yurdakul. In this 1897 poem, Mehmet Emin Yurdakul emphasizes the need for the Turkish people to be defenders of their nation—the Turkish nation. He does not rally supporters around the Ottoman Empire; instead, he calls for allegiance to the Turkish people:

Tanrım şahid, duracağım sözümde.

Milletimin sevgileri özümde.

Vatanımdan başka şey yok gözümde.

Yer yatağın düşman almaz; giderim!

In translation:

God as my witness, I will keep my promise

With love of my nation in my breast.

In my eye is nothing but the motherland.

The enemy can’t take our mattresses (homes); I go! (author’s translation)

This concept of *millet*, of a unified Turkish people who belong to a single Turkish nation, is one of the main manifestations of changing ideas about Ottoman/Turkish identity in the period surrounding the language revolution.

Vatan. A third concept that arises in Turkish poetry in the time leading up to the language revolution is *vatan*, a word that translates loosely to “motherland.” Here, we see the Turks beginning to define a physical homeland for themselves; this concept stands in contrast to the expansionist policies of the Ottoman Empire, which tended to obscure national borders. One example of the idea of *vatan* in poetry is given below.

“Hürriyet kasidesi” by Nâmık Kemal. Examining this poem once again, we see an early emergence of ideas related to a Turkish *vatan* (here translated as nation, but intended in the sense of “motherland”). Even prior to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the founding of the Turkish Republic, and the language revolution, people were beginning to think about the concept of having their own homeland, their own motherland, and what it means to them. In this verse, Kemal praises the Turkish motherland, oppressed as it may be under the tyrannical rule of Sultan Abdülhamid II:

Vücûdun kim hamîr-i mâyesi hâk-i vatandandır

Ne gam râh-ı vatanda hâk olursa cevri ü mihnetten

In translation:

Though fallen, the nation keeps its glory.

The gem loses no value by dropping to the earth. (Silay, 2006)

The idea of a Turkish *vatan*, or motherland, was the final major theme revealed by this study that was related to a shifting Ottoman/Turkish identity. Again, even before the language revolution had taken place, Turks were using poetry as a means of expressing their ever-evolving sense of self.

Conclusions

An analysis of the themes present in the poems used in this study reveals that the poets' depictions of Ottoman and/or Turkish identity vary in ways that align quite closely with the prevailing political attitudes of the day. Further analysis would be needed to determine whether the poems merely reflected the nation's political climate or whether the poems themselves served as drivers of and vehicles for sociopolitical change.

Several strategies for expressing the authors' identity as Ottoman or Turkish arose consistently throughout the sample of poems analyzed. For example, word choice plays an important role in discussing issues of identity, especially for poetry of this time period. At a time when deliberate purges of Arabic and Persian words were taking place, a poet's decision to write in the lofty court language of the Ottomans or in the earthy, widely-spoken language of the common Turk could reveal a great deal about the poet's degree of self-identification with one group or the other. Similarly, decisions regarding the form of the poem (Dîvan, Western, or folk) and the poem's content proved to be quite revealing, whereas the actual language used in the poem's composition proved to be more an artifact of the publication date than a useful predictor of the author's viewpoints of Ottoman/Turkish identity.

Additionally, it became clear throughout the analysis that language reforms and changes in the way Turks viewed themselves in the world had begun to occur well before the official language revolution of 1928. However, the adoption of the Latin alphabet in 1928 and the systematic, state-sponsored purging of foreign words from the Turkish language pushed poets to expand even further, experimenting more with form and with concepts of Western identity than may have otherwise been possible had the language revolution not taken place.

Over time, the Turks were able to create a new literary identity for themselves, separate from that of the Ottomans before them. Through a combination of Western, traditional Turkish folk, and remaining Eastern influences, Turkish poets crafted a new identity for themselves that symbolizes hope in the Turkish Republic and a sense of brother-/sisterhood between Turks.

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