

What should be the academic language? Education in Foreign Language or Foreign Language Education? Linguistic Imperialism in Turkey

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Abstract: The purpose of foreign language teaching is to teach students the basic rules of the foreign language, to develop their foreign language vocabulary, to be able to understand what they read and hear in a foreign language, and to express themselves orally or in writing; The purpose of education in a foreign language is to enable graduates of associate, undergraduate and graduate diploma programs to acquire foreign language proficiency in their fields and attracting international students to the programs. One of the essential educational debates in developing countries is whether the language of instruction can be other than the mother tongue. The education in schools whose official language is foreign, except for some private education institutions, is questioned in this discussion. In this article, the problem is discussed in the case of Turkey. Is foreign language learning or education in a foreign language required?

Key Words: Linguistic Imperialism, Education, Education in international language, language education, Turkey

I. INTRODUCTION

Starting to attain an essential international language status in the world from the 19th century onwards thanks to many interrelated factors like British colonialism and later US-Britain cultural policies of expansion, the English language has achieved an unprecedented prevalence in usage in different sectors ranging from education to tourism and art to literature and sports (Ahmad, 2022). Today, it continues as an international lingua franca, reinforcing its position through effective expansion mechanisms such as globalization, academia, media, music, TV, and sports (Yiğit, 2021).

In Turkey, more vital than the use of loan words is the increasing propensity for using English and Turkish phrases together in a style called either “Plaza Turkish,” referring to the language used by white-collar workers at Plazas, or “Turkish,” which is used by all people who mishmash Turkish and English independent of business concerns (Efe, 2019).

English education plays a role in the spread of language imperialism (Phillipson, 1992; Phillipson, 2007). In Phillipson’s words, English linguistic imperialism, however, connotes oblivion and even evanescence of vernacular and the interiorization and hybridization of national languages (Phillipson, 1992).

International mobility is the most visible activity of Internationalization. International mobility is an essential economic commodity for English-speaking countries, but also

increasingly for non-English-speaking countries, particularly in Europe (Rubdy, 2006). Globally, students are flowing towards high fee-charging English-speaking countries, making internationalization a primary global industry. OECD countries hosted approximately 1.6 million international students in 2001, one-third of whom were in the USA and an additional 25 percent in the UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand (Marginson, 2006).

From the mid-20th century onward, Turkey’s political convergence with the US has brought irreversible changes to life and language of Turkish people whose critique, as this paper argues, can be made within the concept of linguistic imperialism.

English is now the most used lingua franca worldwide and has become an international language. Consequently, learning English is an essential objective in the education system in every country, as well as in the EU member countries (Arslan, 2020).

There is widespread acceptance of foreign language learning in the academic career. However, the debate about whether this means that education should be in English is gaining more and more importance.

Historical Information

For the first time in 1839, during the Ottoman period, Sultan Mahmud II opened the Faculty of Medicine to provide education in the French language, and 30 years later, Sultan Aziz changed the language of the medical faculty to Turkish (Hatemi, 1989).

In Turkey, even if the dominant language is Turkish, English is open to dominating all other eastern and western languages and emerging as an outstanding foreign language. Inequality in languages can be seen in Turkey’s language policies, particularly following the 1950s when English stepped forth among other languages taught at schools.

Among varying reasons for the priority changes come first the establishment of close relations with the US in foreign politics, particularly after becoming a NATO member in 1952 for Turkey.

Throughout Turkey, using English for billboard ads, brands, products, cafes, hospitals, shops, stores, malls, and other

workplaces, all of which are placed, can be seen as a factor that accelerates language creolization and cultural imperialism.

Foreign language teaching and principles to be followed in higher education institutes are regulated by regulation published in the Official Gazette, dated 23.03.2016, and Number 29662.

According to this regulation, 30% partial foreign language education and 100% complete foreign language education, the rules to be followed in these fields, and the obligations of preparatory classes are specified. Students who fail in preparatory classes for two years are dismissed from the school according to the regulations, even in %30 or %100 foreign language programs.

Middle East Technical University (METU) was the first university to teach a foreign language during the Republican era in Turkey. It was established in 1957 and 1959 with the laws passed by the Turkish Grand National Assembly. Burhanettin Omat's speech at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey during the adoption of the laws is very interesting. In his speech, Omat says, "It is very costly to send students to the United States, but it is ensured that the United States is brought to Turkey with METU." He also stated that "METU will be a significant stronghold against communism" (Parliamentary Minutes). However, the saddest part is that METU has become the symbol of anti-Americanism in Turkey, like Deniz Gezmiş (a very well-known leftist activist in the Turkish Population) and his friends, the leftist 68-generation. It has been a university where its masters are raised, protected, and even admired. At METU, where students protested American drinks and food, strangely, no one spoke about education language in English. As a result of the anarchy events known as METU events in the recent past, a general approach to the leftist ideology developed by METU has caused a distant approach to leftist ideology among Turkish voters, and ultimately, the goals stated when METU was opened were also achieved.

Education languages other than Turkish in Turkey drew a reaction, but no change could be made due to its implementation as a state policy (Sinanoğlu, 2000; Yaman, 2016). Over time, foreign language education, which started in private schools, gradually spread to universities and became more widespread with the effect of the Higher Education Council (YÖK) law imposed as the law of the 1980 military junta period. English education has become commonplace, especially in Medical Faculties.

The general view accepted in Turkey is that a foreign language is learned very well, but education in the foreign language must be terminated (Yaman, 2016; Yüzgenç, 2016).

Tragedy or Comedy

Although English aims to attract international students, especially medical faculties, international students are in the minority in these programs since it is obligatory to learn Turkish in foreign language programs. If international student fails to prepare in Turkish, they cannot continue the program. Therefore, education in a foreign language does not make

sense, especially if we consider that the foreign language skills of most academics are not very good.

When you scan the web pages of state university programs that teach in English, it is another problem that the information and even the forms to be filled are not in the program's language but in Turkish. How will international students review this information in Turkish and decide to come?

More and more universities are heading toward "Englishizing" their syllabuses and programs; İstanbul University, Marmara University, Anadolu University, Yıldız Technical University, and many others have both 100 % and 30% English programs. In the rise of this rate, among many other factors, the Bologna process and EU student exchange programs like Erasmus and Socrates require English knowledge first.

Hacettepe University, located in Ankara (the Capital City of Turkey), has two Medical Faculty, one in Turkish Language but designed with %30 English language, and the other with 100% Hacettepe English Medical Faculty. One thousand one hundred fifty-six medical students are studying in English Medical Faculty, with only 95 international students who speak Turkish simultaneously. Hacettepe Turkish Medical Faculty has 1602 students and 55 of them international, nearly all of them from the Turkic Republic, such as Azerbaijan, already speak and understand Turkish very well.

In English Medical Faculty, most students do not understand the education and lectures well. Because the same academicians are giving the lesson and there is not any native speaking academician. Most of the courses are taught in Turkish (informal student interviews).

There is no point in asking questions in Turkish and asking for answers in another language in the exams in programs that provide education other than Turkish.

A study conducted in Taiwan showed that although students had difficulty understanding the lessons, they did not have a negative attitude toward English education (Tuncer, 2021).

Another European study revealed that students had severe reservations about studying in a language other than their mother tongue. Notably, there is a more acceptable approach to education in foreign languages, especially in underdeveloped and developing countries that have passed through the colonization period (Tuncer, 2021).

The Effect of Cultural Imperialism

The term cultural imperialism refers most broadly to the exercise of domination in cultural relationships in which the values, practices, and meanings of an influential foreign culture are imposed upon one or more native cultures (Olszewska, 2022).

Turkish streets and cities are turning into the reflection of half-English and half-Turkish combinations, which precariously influences and threatens the future of Turkish acquiescing to alienation in language and culture. In other words, Turkey is

rapidly heading towards linguistic and cultural homogeneity with the native English-speaking world (Chew, 1999).

The most important dimension of cultural imperialism is language. The hybridization of language is an essential prelude to cultural invasion. There is an intense language change in food, entertainment, hotel names, movies, and TV series encountered in daily life. The most critical dimension of the effect results in not producing science and imitating it by affecting academic life (Tomlinson, 1991).

The inevitable consequence of English admiration and random uses is the decrease of productivity in Turkish and the cultural erosion and inferiority complex among the public.

II. CONCLUSION

Institutional patterns related to transnationalization put pressure on higher education systems and institutions to converge their activities. Simultaneously, national higher education policies tend to either conform to these policies or diverge in their directions. Internationalization occurs in an economic, institutional, and political setting, partially promoting outsourcing decision-making to nongovernmental networks and implementing hidden, non-democratic patterns. Policy reforms also tend to produce unintended consequences. International cooperation and collaboration are potentially significant sources of healthy development for higher education systems and patterns. However, consideration is needed when standardization is the aim of cooperation.

Higher education is of primary importance for Turkey, and the national governance and policy mean not only democratic affiliation and responsibility but also opportunities to control policymaking outcomes. However, the current global tendencies are finding nationally meaningful ways to cope with them is a challenge the higher education system will have to tackle from a national perspective.

It has been claimed that the role of nation-states would diminish with increased globalization. However, against earlier expectations, it strengthened the need for solid national systems. The weight of national higher education policy has changed with global tendencies, but this does not necessarily mean that the nation-state would have no role in higher education. Because of the current funding crisis and earlier changes in funding patterns of publicly funded universities, non-public funding is becoming more common (Haapakorpi 2014).

Foreign language learning ought to allow the distortion of Turkish and be more open to English, which is obligatory from the 2nd grade of primary school to university. Some other languages, whether Western or Eastern (languages of the Middle Eastern countries in particular), should be offered as

options and means of opportunities to students, particularly those who are incompetent in English, as an effective way of precluding language discrimination.

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