

THE EFFECT OF FRENCH ON TURKISH IN THE PROCESS OF WESTERNIZATION

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Abstract: The linguistic relationship between French and Turkish is fascinating, shaped by centuries of cultural exchange, trade, diplomacy, and modernization efforts. While these languages belong to different families - French is a Romance language (Indo-European), while Turkish is a Turkic language (Altaic) - they share a significant number of borrowed words. Westernization has considerably impacted Turkish language and culture. This article explores the origins and history of similar words in French and Turkish.

Keywords: westernization, language, French, Turkish, interaction, linguistic heritage, influence, words, process, culture, literature, world wars

Introduction

The Turkish language has been influenced by various languages throughout its historical development. This process started with Sogdian and Chinese influences during the Uyghur Turkish period, and continued as Turkish speakers received many new words as a result of religion and migration over the centuries. When Turks accepted Islam, they encountered a large number of words coming from Arabic and Persian, and this process continued increasingly until the westernization movement that began to develop in the eighteenth century.

During the westernization process, foreign influence became quite obvious in the fields of science, technology, military affairs, and social life. Among all the languages that influenced Turkish during this period, French had the most substantial impact. According to Battal Oğuz (2019), Ottoman administrators who recognized Europe’s superiority in science - despite some resistance from janissaries and religious scholars - began to adapt their lives to Western cultural and social norms. The cultural and artistic influence of France lasted heavily until the Second World War, affecting technology, language, and literature. After that period, French influence gave way to English and American cultural interaction, particularly following Turkey’s entry into NATO.

Over approximately 150 years (1800-1950), nearly 6,000 French-origin words entered the Turkish language. The most important channels for this transfer were intellectuals sent to France as students (*les jeunes turcs*) and schools such as Mekteb-i Sultani (Lycée de Galatasaray), which used French as the language of instruction. This paper examines the effect of French on the Turkish language during this long and significant period, and also looks at the words that traveled in the opposite direction - from Turkish into French.

Methods

This study is based on a review of existing academic sources on French-Turkish linguistic exchange, including works by Battal Oğuz (2019), Arslanhan (2009), and Allaw et al. (2022). Loanwords identified in the literature were organized by semantic category - such as fashion, food, science, and politics - to show how broadly French vocabulary spread across different areas of Turkish life. The reverse exchange, from Turkish into French, was also examined using the same sources.

Results

French Loanwords in Turkish by Category. The influence of French on Turkish vocabulary covers almost every area of daily life. The tables below present loanwords organized by topic.

Everyday Life and Fashion

Turkish	French	English Meaning
şapka	chapeau	hat
pantolon	pantalon	trousers
ceket	jaquette	jacket
bluz	blouse	blouse
kravat	cravate	tie
mont	manteau	coat
çanta	(It. cianta → Fr. influence)	bag
parfüm	parfum	perfume
manikür	manucure	manicure
pedikür	pédicure	pedicure

Food and Drink

Turkish	French	English Meaning
restoran	restaurant	restaurant
kafe	café	café
menü	menu	menu
çikolata	chocolat	chocolate
krem	crème	cream
bisküvi	biscuit	biscuit
sos	sauce	sauce
likör	liqueur	liqueur
büfe	buffet	buffet
şarap (directly from Persian)	-	wine (but French influenced wine culture)

Technology and Science

Turkish	French	English Meaning
telefon	téléphone	telephone
telgraf	télégraphe	telegraph
radyo	radio	radio
televizyon	télévision	television
bilgisayar (Turkish coined)	Ordinateur	computer
makine	machine	machine
motor	moteur	motor
fabrika	fabrique	factory
enerji	énergie	energy
kimya	chimie	chemistry (via Arabic, but French influence)
fizik	physique	physics

Art, Music, and Culture

Turkish	French	English Meaning
müzik	musique	music
tiyatro	théâtre	theatre
sinema	cinéma	cinema

Turkish	French	English Meaning
film	film	film
dans	danse	dance
bale	ballet	ballet
opera	opéra	opera
konser	concert	concert
enstrüman	instrument	instrument
sanatçı (Turkish)	artiste	artist (French influence on concept)

Politics, Law, and Administration

Turkish	French	English Meaning
demokrasi	démocratie	democracy
cumhuriyet (Arabic)	république	republic (French concept adopted)
parlamento	parlement	parliament
senato	sénat	senate
bakan (Turkish)	ministre	minister
vali (Arabic)	gouverneur	governor
memur (Turkish)	fonctionnaire	civil servant
pasaport	passeport	passport
vize	visa	visa
protokol	protocole	protocol
diplomasi	diplomatie	diplomacy

Transportation

Turkish	French	English Meaning
otomobil	automobile	automobile
otobüs	autobus	bus
taksi	taxi	taxi
tren	train	train
vapur	vapeur (bateau à vapeur)	steamship/ferry
gar	gare	train station
bilet	billet	ticket
şoför	chauffeur	driver
garaj	garage	garage
lastik	(Fr. élastique → lastique)	tire

Sports

Turkish	French	English Meaning
spor	sport	sport
futbol	football	football (soccer)
basketbol	basketball	basketball
voleybol	volley-ball	volleyball
tenis	tennis	tennis
golf	golf	golf
yüzme (Turkish)	natation	swimming (Turkish native)
koşu (Turkish)	course	running (Turkish native)
jimnastik	gymnastique	gymnastics

Turkish	French	English Meaning
antrenman	entraînement	training
şampiyon	champion	champion
kupa	coupe	cup (trophy)

Education

Turkish	French	English Meaning
okul	école	school
üniversite	université	university
fakülte	faculté	faculty
enstitü	institut	institute
laboratuvar	laboratoire	laboratory
kütüphane	bibliothèque	library (Arabic + French)
öğrenci (Turkish)	étudiant	student
profesör	professeur	professor
doktor	docteur	doctor
diploma	diplôme	diploma
sınav (Arabic)	examen	exam

Turkish Words Borrowed into French. The exchange was not one-way. French also borrowed words from Turkish, mainly related to food, Ottoman culture, and military and administrative life.

Food and Drink

French	Turkish Origin	English Meaning
café	kahve (Turkish ← Arabic)	coffee
yaourt	yoğurt	yogurt
kebab	kebab	kebab
baklava	baklava	baklava
sorbet	şerbet (Arabic/Turkish)	sorbet

Military and Administrative Terms

French	Turkish Origin	English Meaning
horde	ordu	army/horde
odalisque	odalık	odalisque (harem servant)
janissaire	yeniçeri	janissary (elite Ottoman soldier)
turquoise	Türk + French -ois	turquoise (Turkish stone)
tulipe	tülbent (turban) → tulip	tulip (named for turban-like shape)
divan	divan	divan/couch
sofa	sofa	sofa
caïque	kayık	caïque (small boat)

Other Borrowed Terms

French	Turkish Origin	English Meaning
bey	bey	bey (Ottoman title)
pacha	paşa	pasha
effendi	efendi	effendi (title)
vizir	vezir	vizier
khan	han	khan (title)
minaret	minare (Arabic/Turkish)	minaret

French	Turkish Origin	English Meaning
bazar	pazar	bazaar/market
kiosque	köşk	kiosk
caravane	kervan	caravan

Discussion

The scale of French influence on Turkish vocabulary is remarkable, especially when we consider how different the two languages are from each other. French is an Indo-European language, while Turkish belongs to a completely separate language family. Despite this, political and cultural closeness proved to be more powerful than linguistic distance.

An important development in this story is the founding of the Turkish Language Association (TDK) in 1932. The TDK was established to replace foreign loanwords - including French ones - with Turkish equivalents. This effort had some success; for example, *bilgisayar* was created as a Turkish alternative to the French *ordinateur*. However, many French loanwords were already so deeply embedded in everyday speech that they survived the reform period and remain in use today.

It is also worth noting that after the Second World War, French influence was gradually replaced by English, particularly following Turkey’s joining of NATO. The same debates about language purity that once surrounded French loanwords are now being raised about English ones, making the French-Turkish case a historically useful comparison.

Conclusion

The lexical relationship between French and Turkish reflects a rich history of cultural, political, and economic exchange. While Turkish belongs to a completely different language family, its vocabulary was deeply shaped by French during the Ottoman and early Republican periods. French loanwords cover almost every domain of modern life, from fashion and food to science, politics, and the arts.

At the same time, Turkish contributed words related to Ottoman culture, food, military organization, and administrative titles to French. These words entered French mainly during the centuries of Ottoman-European contact. Today, while English has become the dominant source of new loanwords in Turkish, French-origin words remain firmly established in the language. This linguistic heritage is a clear sign of the deep and lasting connections between the French and Turkish-speaking worlds - connections that continue to develop in the twenty-first century.

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