



УДК 81'272

DOI: 10.37892/2713–2951–2-14-79-97

## THE CONTESTED LEGACY OF BORROWING: ATTITUDES OF TURKISH SPEAKERS TO ARABIC AND PERSIAN LOANWORDS IN TURKISH<sup>22</sup>

**Hasan Berkcan Simsek**  
HSE University, Russian Federation

*This study aims to investigate Turkish speakers' attitudes to Arabic and Persian loanwords in Turkish, as opposed to their "pure" Turkish counterparts that were promoted as replacements throughout a purist language reform in the 20th century. Over the years, the percentage of Arabic and Persian loanwords has gradually decreased, but they still constitute a significant portion of the Turkish vocabulary. Under the hypothesis that deliberate uses of Arabic and Persian loanwords instead of "pure" Turkish equivalents carry distinct identity connotations, a survey-based approach was employed to investigate attitudes toward these loanwords under the current socio-political climate, utilizing a questionnaire consisting of 20 Likert scale items. By exploring the attitudes in relation to age (18-29 / 30-45) and gender (male / female), the findings offer insights into the overall attitudes to Arabic and Persian loanwords across these variables and identify specific aspects of these loanwords that elicit particular attitudes.*

**Keywords:** language attitudes, linguistic purism, loanwords, The Turkish language reform

## СПОРНОЕ НАСЛЕДИЕ ЗАИМСТВОВАНИЙ: ОТНОШЕНИЕ ТУРЕЦКОГОВОРЯЩИХ ЛЮДЕЙ К АРАБСКИМ И ПЕРСИДСКИМ ЗАИМСТВОВАНИЯМ В ТУРЕЦКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ

**Хасан Беркджан Шимшек**  
Национальный исследовательский университет «Высшая школа экономики»,  
Российская Федерация

*Цель данного исследования – изучить, как турецкоговорящие люди относятся к арабским и персидским заимствованиям в турецком языке, вместо их «чистых» турецких эквивалентов, которые были предложены в качестве замены в рамках языкового пуризма в XX в. Доля арабских и персидских заимствований с годами постоянно уменьшалась, однако до сих пор значительная часть турецкого лексикона все еще состоит из них. Исходя из гипотезы, что преднамеренное использование арабских и персидских заимствований вместо «чистых» турецких слов сигнализирует о различных коннотациях идентичности, был применен подход, основанный на опросе с использованием анкеты состоящей из 20 пунктов шкалы Лайкерта. Изучение отношения к арабским и персидским заимствованиям в зависимости от возраста (18–29/30–45) и пола (мужчина/женщина) позволило получить представление об общем отношении к ним по этим группам и выявить специфические аспекты этих заимствований, вызывающие особое отношение к ним.*

**Ключевые слова:** языковые отношения, языковой пуризм, заимствованные слова, Турецкая языковая реформа

---

<sup>22</sup> This paper is based on a chapter from the author's unpublished master's thesis submitted to the Master's Program "Language Policy in the Context of Ethnocultural Diversity", HSE University in 2023.



## Introduction

Following the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the term *Ottoman* was prevented from being used to refer to anything related to the new nation state, even the language [Kerslake, 1998]. In this post-war period under the leadership of Atatürk, the focus of Turkish nationalism was redirected from the external enemies to domestic challenges, such as combating the “backwardness and ignorance” [Mango, 2008: 163]. This *backwardness* and *ignorance* became affiliated with the remnants of the Ottoman period. One remnant standing out, in this case, was the language. Arabic and Persian loanwords (also referred to as “the loanwords” in this study) that had been extensively incorporated into the language were connotating for the reformists the opposite of the new Western-oriented ideology that was being promoted. In 1928, the Latin-based script was officially adopted as a replacement for the Arabic-based script, and as of 1929, the teaching of Arabic and Persian as foreign languages was halted [Gallagher, 1971]. The transition into the new alphabet was not only about a better representation of the Turkish sound system. The reformers saw the former Arabic-based script “as a formidable symbol of the Islamic civilization in which they had lost faith” [Wheeler, 1974: 158].

Arabic and Persian loanwords were the next in line. For their systematic targeting and elimination, a language regulator, Turkish Language Association was established in 1932 by the initiative of Atatürk for conducting further language policies. An important objective of this institution was to emancipate Turkish from Arabic and Persian loanwords and substitute them with *pure* Turkish ones through a purist language reform. This emancipation was stressed by Atatürk on the evening following the first congress of the Association: “We are going to defeat Ottoman [language]. Turkish is going to be a language as free and as independent as the Turkish nation, and with it we shall enter the world of civilization at one go” [Tankut, 1963, as cited in Lewis, 1999: 49]. Atatürk’s presence and the widespread media attention turned the congress into a “great national event” [Tachau, 1964: 196]. Following the congress, the Association initiated a project for finding *pure* Turkish equivalents for the words of foreign origins.

Starting from 1933, the project resulted in the compilation of approximately 130 000 lexical items in 19 months [Levend, 1960: 416]. The results were presented in the first dictionary of the Association in 1934, in which around 30 000 Turkish substitutes were suggested as replacements for around 7000 loanwords [Perry, 1985: 299]. The purist practices gradually lost momentum over the years. Nevertheless, following the political shift in 1950, tensions between the supporters of the purist policies and the anti-purists heightened and persisted well into the 1970s. This conflict was felt in different domains. For instance, media outlets favored the form of Turkish (reformed or pre-reformed)



that aligned with their political tendencies [Dağtekin, 2021]. Disputes over the language reform peaked between 1960–1980, when the extreme political polarization in the society was reflected in the language disputes [Özcan Gönülal, 2011]. It was observed how the *pure* Turkish was more favored by the leftists, and how the use of Arabic and Persian loanwords against the reformed Turkish were more preferred by the right-wing sectors [Cüceloğlu et al., 1980].

Since President Erdoğan and his party came to power, a new socio-political climate concerning Arabic and Persian loanwords started to take shape. In the recent years, Ottoman language courses have been introduced into the high school curriculum. This policy was observed as a neo-Ottomanist move, through which “Erdoğan and the ruling party exert their power, and practice covert discursive control, to reinforce their supporters’ adherence” [Yazan et al., 2017: 265]. These practices align with Erdoğan’s careful selections of Arabic and Persian loanwords. In this regard, his public discourse has introduced Arabic and Persian loanwords to many people, and especially people from younger generations [Ongur, 2015].

Against the backdrop of these, this study aims to investigate attitudes of Turkish speakers to Arabic and Persian loanwords under the current socio-political conditions of Turkey, and to see if there are considerable differences among the respondents from the gender (male/female) and age groups (18–29/30–45) in their attitudes to these loanwords.

### Methods

A questionnaire consisting of 20 Likert scale items was formulated using Google Forms, each proposing a statement which regards the loanwords and expects the participants to rate the extent of their agreement with them through five categories: *Strongly Disagree* (SD), *Disagree* (D), *Undecided* (U), *Agree* (A), *Strongly Agree* (SA). The items were designed in line with insights gained from 20 semi-structured interviews conducted with native Turkish speakers [Simsek, in press]. Throughout discourse-analytic interpretations of the interviews, attitudinal implications on Arabic and Persian loanwords and their frequent users were studied. The revealed various indexical values of the loanwords were incorporated into certain survey items in order to assess their prevalence among a wider population. Collecting 203 responses, the survey data aimed to capture statistical distributions of the attitudes of Turkish speakers to the loanwords within the age (18–29/30–45) and gender (male/female) groups. The responses were treated as non-parametric categorical data, and the chi-square test of independence was used to process the data by using the R software.

### Questionnaire Structure

To mitigate the risk of response bias, a balanced combination of positive and negative items (10 for each) was used, and their orders were mixed. The questionnaire initially informed the participants about the context, study and anonymity of the responses; they were asked to indicate their mother tongue(s), ethnicity, gender (male/female), and the age group (18–29/30–45) they belonged to.

An attitude can be exhibited differently when evaluated in terms of different aspects of the attitude object [Krosnick et al., 2005]. The lexical source consisting of the Arabic and Persian loanwords in Turkish was taken as the *attitude object* and was recognized to have varying connotations when associated with different political, social, historical, or linguistic contexts. Accordingly, the participants were expected to assess this attitude object based on six evaluative dimensions, and each survey item belonged to one of these dimensions:

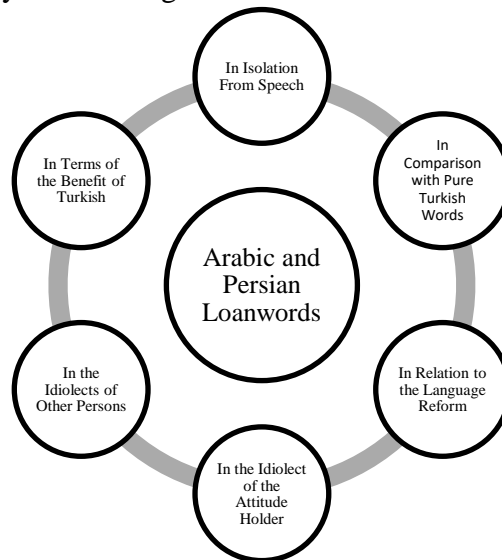


Fig. 1. Evaluative Dimensions of the Attitude Object

### Demographic Distribution

The data collection process included the recording of gender (male/female), age group (18–29/30–45):



Fig. 2. Age and Gender Distributions of Respondents

Also, the respondents were asked to indicate their ethnicity and mother tongue(s). Out of 203 respondents, 161 indicated their ethnicity as Turkish, 21 as Kurdish, 6 as Circassian, 4 as Arab, 4 as Zaza, 4 as mixed, 1 as both Turkish and Kurdish, 1 as Bosnian, 1 as Iranian. Further, 187 indicated their mother tongue as Turkish, 8 as Kurdish, 2 as Arabic, 2 as Zaza, 2 as Circassian, 1 as Iranian, 1 as Turkish, English, and Arabic.

### Results and Discussion

The findings are reported by first presenting the percentual results of the responses given to each question, followed by the presentation of the general results in terms of the categorial distributions of *positive*, *negative*, and *ambivalent* attitudes, and the statistical relationships between the age and gender variables in terms of their overall attitudes. Lastly, the results are presented in terms of the evaluative dimensions accompanied by corresponding discussions.

### Results by Each Question

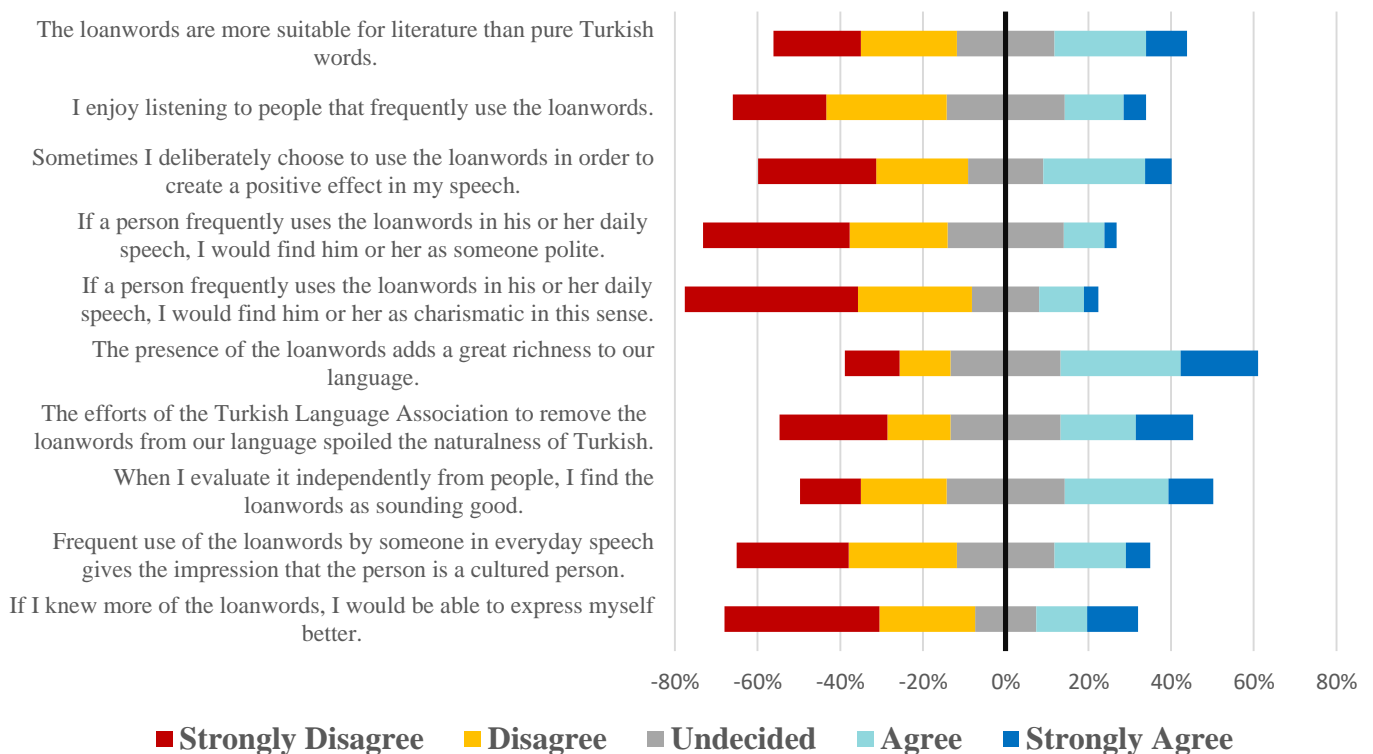


Fig. 3. Results of the Positive Items

Figure 3 shows that there is a rather widespread acknowledgement that the loanwords add a great richness to the Turkish language. In terms of the aesthetic values of the loanwords, the responses are distributed across the range of the available categories, indicating a variety of attitudes. Only a

small percentage of the respondents see the frequent users of the loanwords as polite and charismatic. 53,2 % of the respondents do not get the impression that the speaker is a cultured person from a speech style marked by frequent usage of loanwords. Enjoying listening to people with such a speech style appears to be also not widespread.

The belief that having a better command of the loanwords would enhance expressional abilities is mostly rejected. 50,8 % of the respondents refrain from occasionally using the loanwords intentionally to create a positive rhetoric effect. Despite the political implications of the statement that claims that the purist practices spoiled the naturalness of Turkish, there are no sharp differences in results across the categories.

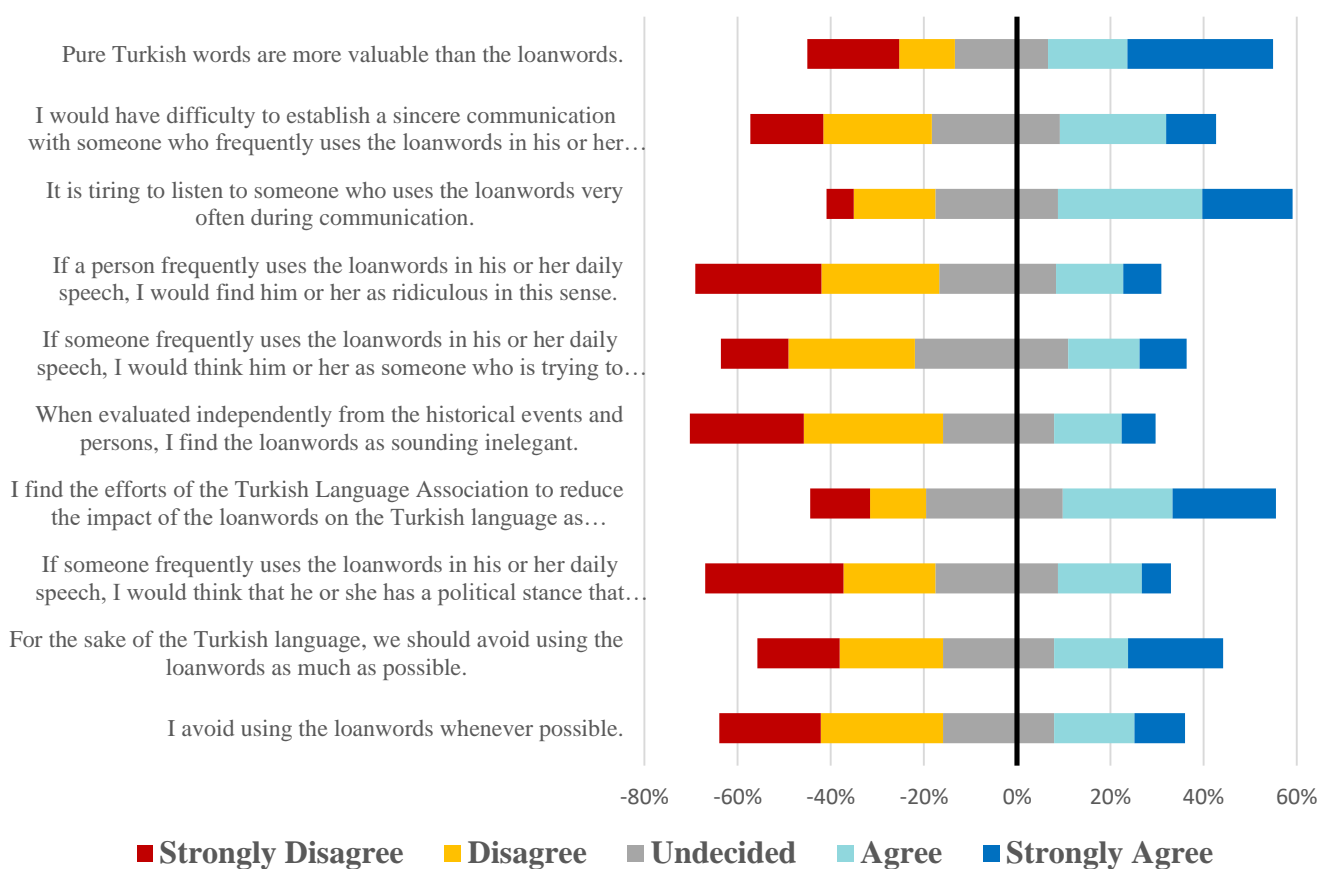


Fig. 4. Results of the Negative Items

It is visible from Figure 4 that a considerable percentage (51,7 %) of the respondents value the *pure* Turkish words over the loanwords, and they mostly endorse the purist language reform. While 50,7 % of the respondents demonstrate their support for the efforts of the language reform to reduce the influence of the loanwords in the lexicon, 27,6 % of them do not find these efforts as necessary.

The majority of the respondents (55,2 %) find it tiring to listen to someone who frequently uses the loanwords, and 36,9 % of them believe that it is hard to establish sincere communication with

them. In general, the respondents do not think of the frequent loanword users as being ridiculous (57,2 %) or as trying to show off (46,8 %). The respondents tend not to judge them as holding a political position that is opposed to their own (54,2 %).

The statement that suggests that the loanwords sound inelegant mostly receives disagreement (59,1 %). 30,5 % of the respondents indicate that they refrain from using the loanwords as much as they could, while 52,2 % of them do not show such a tendency. When it comes to the purist statement which proposes that people should avoid using the loanwords for the benefit of Turkish, the proportion of those who support this statement (39,4 %) is lower than those who disagree (43,3 %).

### General Results

Since the survey is comprised of both positive and negative items, the responses given to the negative items are reversed. The categories SD and D are combined under the attitudinal category of *Negative*, while A and SA are combined under *Positive*, and the category U is transformed into *Ambivalent*.

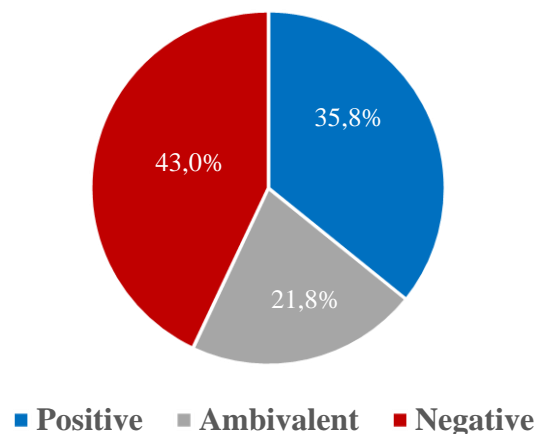


Fig. 5. Overall Attitudes to Arabic and Persian Loanwords (N = 203)

The results reveal that the overall attitudes to Arabic and Persian loanwords in Turkish today are largely unfavorable, as demonstrated by 43 % of the responses expressing a negative attitude. In contrast, 35,8 % of the responses accounts for an overall positive attitude. Attitudinal ambivalence corresponds to 21,8 %.

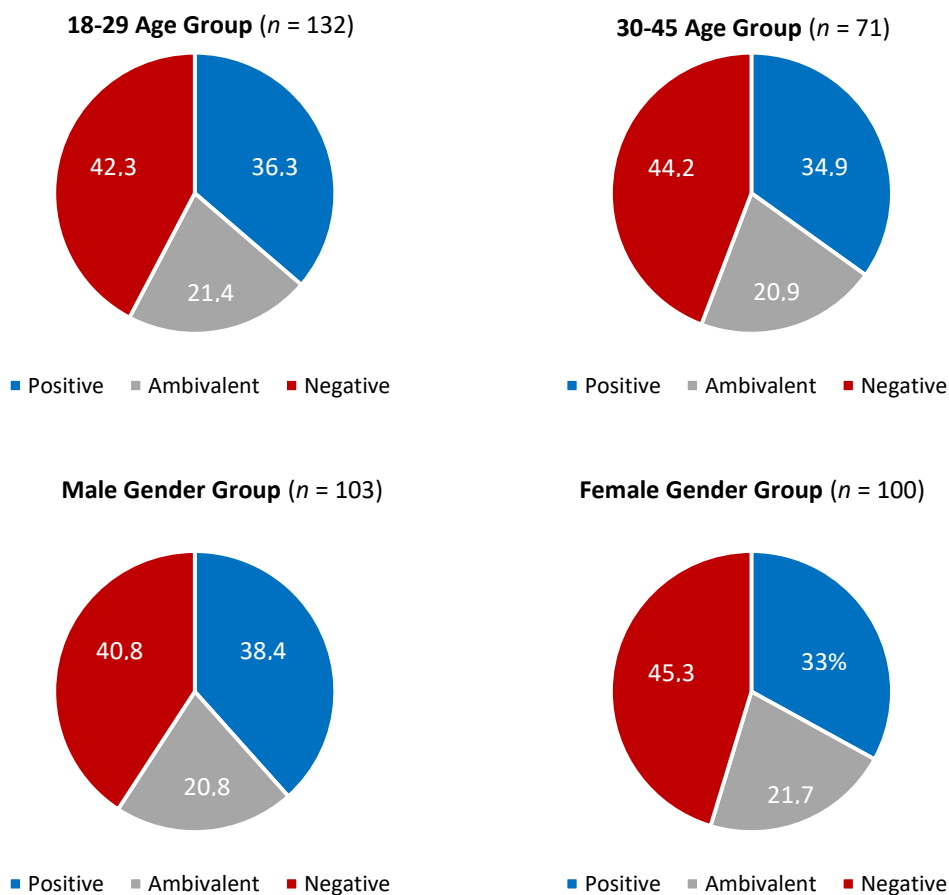
After decades of the purist language reform, these results today can be interpreted as a sign of considerable success of the reform in manipulating attitudes for the long term. Language policies can influence language attitudes [see: Woolard et al., 1990; Bourhis, 1997; Smagulova, 2008]. While language attitudes resulting from language policies may or may not align with the intended goals of concerned policies, Turkey's purist language reform is today observed as, to a large extent, being



backed up by compatible attitudes in society that help the purist movements of the reform to be justified and further maintained.

Together with these, the survey results still point out a considerable extent of positive attitudes (35,8 %) to the loanwords. The resistance to the purist language movement was insufficient throughout its implementation. Nevertheless, it has always existed, since the initial steps to *purify* the language, to this exact day. The qualitative findings [Simsek, in press] show how a wide range of meanings are associated with the loanwords. Accordingly, the loanwords are evaluated in different ways today, and there is no single and common norm with regards to their evaluations and usage. Looking at the present survey results, it is safe to say that despite the focused efforts and widespread influence of the purist language reform, the loanwords are, to a considerable extent, still being evaluated positively in various aspects. Further, the noticeable percentage (21,8 %) of attitudinal ambivalence suggests that there are considerable hesitancy regarding the evaluations of the loanwords. When considered with positive attitudes, it suggests that the sphere of attitudinal influence of the language reform, although has been quite persistent, is not ultimately dominant.

### *Overall Attitudes Across the Age and Gender Groups*



**Fig. 6.** Overall Attitudes to Arabic and Persian Loanwords Among the Age and Gender Groups



Upon performing a chi-square test of independence ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) to see if there is a dependency between genders (male / female) and overall attitudes (positive / ambivalent / negative), it is seen that the correlation between the variables are significant,  $X^2 (2, N = 203) = 13.19, p = .001$ ). Males show more positive attitudes to Arabic and Persian loanwords.

Table 1

**Chi-square Test of Independence Results (Gender Variables)**

Gender	Attitude	.observed	.prop	.row.prop	.col.prop	.expected	.resid	.std.resid
Male	Positive	792.00	0.20	0.38	0.54	737.74	2.00	3.55
Female	Positive	662.00	0.16	0.33	0.46	716.26	-2.03	-3.55
Male	Ambivalent	428.00	0.11	0.21	0.50	436.86	-0.42	-0.68
Female	Ambivalent	433.00	0.11	0.22	0.50	424.14	0.43	0.68
Male	Negative	840.00	0.21	0.41	0.48	885.39	-1.53	-2.88
Female	Negative	905.00	0.22	0.45	0.52	859.61	1.55	2.88

statistic	<i>p</i>	parameter	Method
<b>13.19</b>	<b>.001**</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Chi-square Test of Independence</b>

Against this, when the two generations (18–29/30–45) are put into the same test ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ), the correlation between them and their attitudes are found to be not significant,  $X^2 (2, N = 203) = 1.4296, p = .489$ ). There is no statistically significant difference between the two age groups in terms of the attitudes toward the loanwords.

Together with these, another chi-square test of independence ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) concludes a significant correlation between the combined groups (18–29, male; 18-29, female; 30–45, male, 30–45, female) and their overall attitudes,  $X^2 (6, N = 203) = 27.793, p < .001$ ). Males from the younger generation show more positive attitudes.

Table 2

**Chi-square Test of Independence Results (Combined Variables)**

Age / Gender	Attitude	observed	prop	row.prop	col.prop	expected	resid	std.resid
30-45 / Male								
	Positive	253.00	0.06	0.34	0.17	265.01	-0.74	-1.02
30-45 / Female								
	Positive	242.00	0.06	0.36	0.17	243.53	-0.10	-0.13
18-29 / Male								
	Positive	539.00	0.13	0.41	0.37	472.73	3.05	4.63
18-29 / Female								
	Positive	420.00	0.10	0.32	0.29	472.73	-2.43	-3.68
30-45 / Male								
	Ambivalent	168.00	0.04	0.23	0.20	156.93	0.88	1.10
30-45 / Female								
	Ambivalent	129.00	0.03	0.19	0.15	144.21	-1.27	-1.56
18-29 / Male								
	Ambivalent	260.00	0.06	0.20	0.30	279.93	-1.19	-1.63
18-29 / Female								
	Ambivalent	304.00	0.07	0.23	0.35	279.93	1.44	1.97
30-45 / Male								
	Negative	319.00	0.08	0.43	0.18	318.05	0.05	0.08
30-45 / Female								
	Negative	309.00	0.08	0.45	0.18	292.27	0.98	1.42
18-29 / Male								
	Negative	521.00	0.13	0.39	0.30	567.34	-1.95	-3.14
18-29 / Female								
	Negative	596.00	0.15	0.45	0.34	567.34	1.20	1.94
statistic		<i>p</i>		parameter		Method		
<b>27.79</b>		<b>&lt; .001***</b>		<b>6</b>		<b>Chi-square Test of Independence</b>		

As can be seen in Figure 7 below, there is especially a difference between males from the 18–29 age group and females from the 18–29 age group in terms of the overall positive attitudes. While males and females from 30–45 age group show a close percentage of negative attitudes, this distinction is more remarkable between males and females from the 18–29 age group. Moreover, attitudinal ambivalence is lower among males from 18–29 age group compared to males from 30–45 age group. Against this, females from 18–29 age groups show more attitudinal ambivalence compared to females from 30–45 age group.

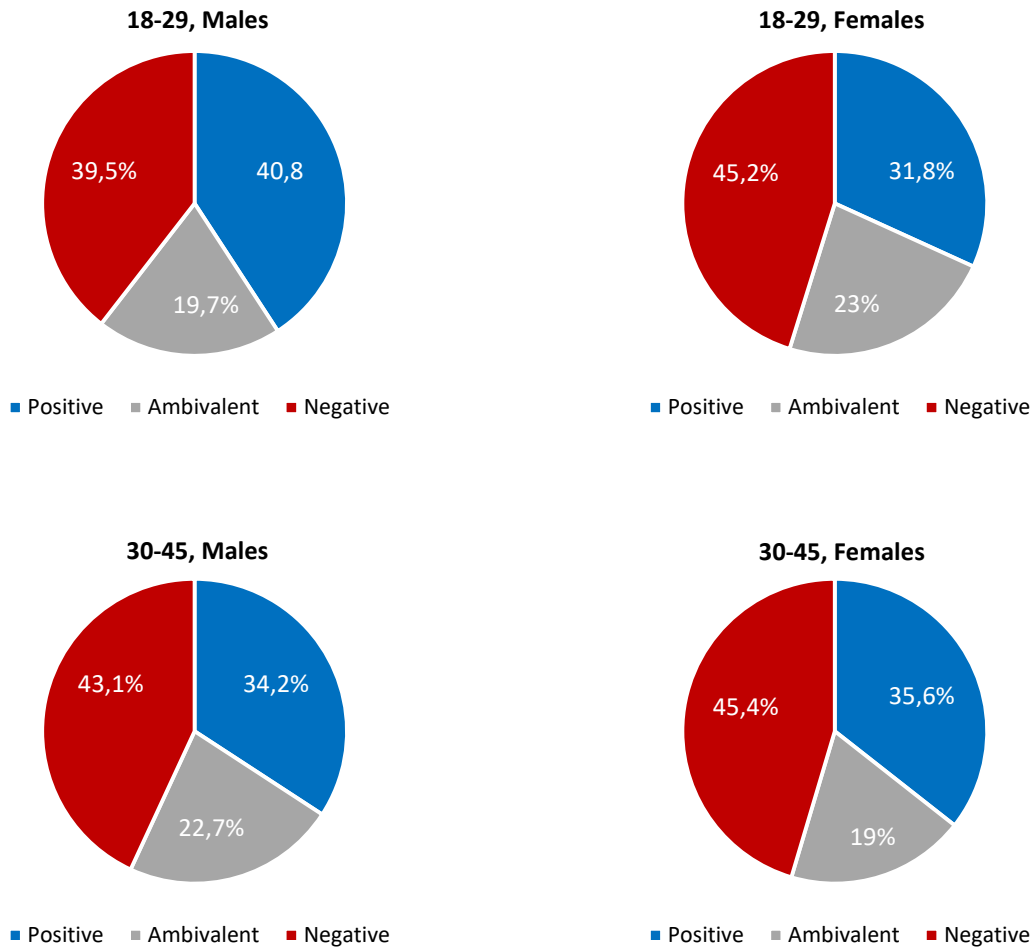


Fig.7. Overall Attitudes to Arabic and Persian Loanwords Among the Combined Groups

### Results by Evaluative Dimensions

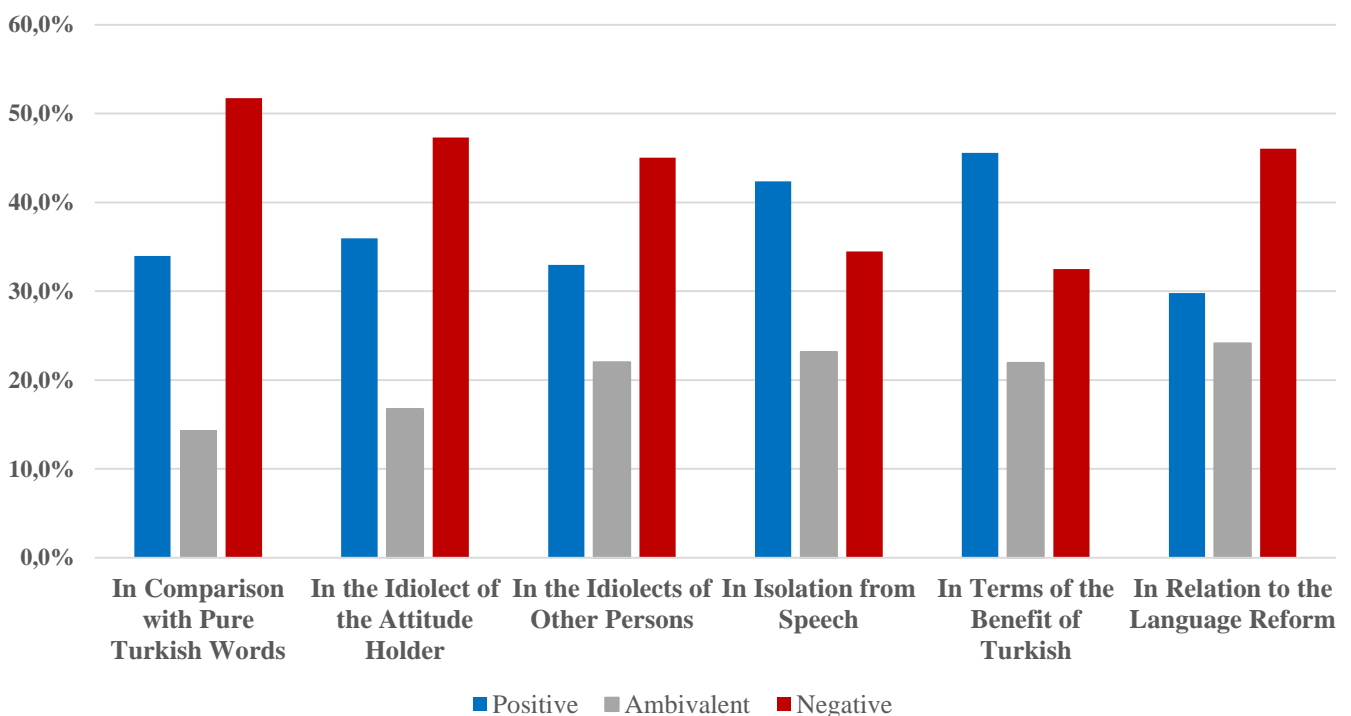


Fig. 8. Overall Attitudes to Arabic and Persian Loanwords by Evaluative Dimensions



### **The Loanwords as a Source of Lexical Richness**

The evaluative dimension *The Loanwords In Terms of the Benefit of Turkish* involved two survey items that sought to shed light on how the loanwords are regarded in the belief systems of the attitude holders when it comes to evaluating their presence with regards to the benefit of the Turkish language. Thus, the survey items focused on cognitive aspects of the concerned attitudes.

Within this dimension, the loanwords receive the most positive attitudes when compared to the other evaluative dimensions; they are regarded more positively (45,6 %) than negatively (32,5 %). Thus, a big portion of the positive evaluations of the loanwords comes from the belief that they enrich the lexical possibilities of Turkish.

However, it should be noted that this situation does not negate the existence of a considerable sense of purism among the respondents. 32,5 % of the responses fall into the negative category within this dimension. Hence, while a greater number of individuals acknowledge the positive contribution of the loanwords to the lexicon, a purist sentiment obstructs this sort of recognition for many others.

### **Aesthetics of the Loanwords**

The evaluative dimension *The Loanwords in Isolation from Speech* involved three survey items that were aimed at inferring implications for the affective components of the attitudes by asking the attitude holders to evaluate the loanwords in terms of their aesthetic peculiarities.

When compared to the other evaluative dimensions, the loanwords receive the second most positive attitudes in this dimension. With 42,4 % of the responses favoring the loanwords in this affective sense, the rate of the positive attitudes is observed as prevalent. Thus, when it comes to showing positive attitudes to the loanwords their aesthetics play a major part.

Further, the loanwords are generally not perceived as lacking refinement as the survey item that defines them as sounding inelegant receives strong disagreement (59,1 %). Nevertheless, it is not possible to come into a conclusion that the loanwords are generally perceived as a lexical source with unique aesthetic characteristics compared to *pure* Turkish words. The survey item *Arabic and Persian loanwords are more suitable for literature than pure Turkish words* draws the attention to the *pure* Turkish words to trigger an affective evaluation of the loanwords in comparison with them. The results show more disagreement with the statement (44,4 %) than agreement (32,1 %) especially among the older age group and in the female gender group.

### **Personal Usage of the Loanwords**

The evaluative dimension *The Loanwords in the Idiolect of the Attitude Holder* involved three survey items that focused on the cognitive and behavioral components of the attitudes. In this regard,



the statements were designed to capture the respondents' tendencies to incorporate the loanwords into their idiolects.

Overall attitude within this dimension is the third most positive compared to the attitudes observed in the other dimensions. However, the prevalent overall attitude is not positive (36 %), but negative (47,3 %). Attitudinal ambivalence is rather low at 16,8 %. It can be suggested that people mostly are not willing to invest effort in acquiring and using the Arabic and Persian loanwords in their speech.

However, the results of the survey item *I avoid using Arabic and Persian loanwords whenever possible* also suggests that people are mostly not in an urge to abstain from using the loanwords, with 52,2 % showing disagreement with the statement. Notably, the younger age group (especially the males) demonstrates greater disagreement (55,3 %) with the statement compared to the older age group (46,4 %), indicating a less stringent attitude to the loanwords in this sense among the younger individuals.

The idea that having a stronger command of the loanwords would improve one's ability to express themselves is largely rejected (60,6 %). Thus, people generally do not see an instrumental value in learning more of the loanwords despite the typical belief that improving vocabulary would enable one to communicate their thoughts more effectively. Although there are a considerable number of people who see potential benefits in using the loanwords, they are in the minority.

While people are generally not strongly motivated to avoid using the loanwords, there are those who are motivated to do so (30,5 %), who might be driven by a desire to maintain the linguistic purism. In this regard, it is once again visible how a purist language reform that was initiated decades ago can still have considerable attitudinal outcomes that are desirable for its own terms.

### **The Loanwords Against the Pure Turkish Words**

The evaluative dimension *The Loanwords in Comparison with Pure Turkish Words* involved one survey item that was simply aimed at bringing the loanwords against the *pure* Turkish words for the respondents to make a comparative evaluation in a general sense: *Pure Turkish words are more valuable than the Arabic and Persian loanwords*. By using the open-ended adjective *valuable*, the statement targeted both the cognitive and affective attitudinal components, as it might trigger the expressions of both objective beliefs as well as emotional reactions on the two of the lexical sources.

When compared to the other evaluative dimensions, the percentage of negative attitudes within this dimension is the highest with 51,7 % and attitudinal ambivalence is the lowest with 14,3 %. Thus, most of the respondents show little hesitation to come into a decision on this matter, and most of them deem *pure* Turkish words as more valuable than the Arabic and Persian loanwords. Positioning the



*pure* Turkish words in a higher position than the loanwords is more common among the females (55 %) compared to the males (48,5 %).

In terms of the age groups, a big proportion of the older group (60,6 %) value the *pure* Turkish words more than the loanwords, while this percentage is 47 % among the younger age group. A similar difference in terms of the younger generation being more flexible about the loanwords than the older generation is also observed in the evaluative dimension that concerns the idiolect of the attitude holders. These differences across the age groups suggest that while there is not a completely new attitudinal atmosphere concerning the loanwords yet, linguistic purism and favoring the *pure* Turkish words over Arabic and Persian loanwords may not be holding much sway with the younger generation as it once did.

Considering the decreased percentage of the positive attitudes within this dimension compared to the percentages in the dimensions that concerned personal usage of the loanwords, their aesthetic values, and their position in the lexicon, it is observed that the loanwords are more negatively evaluated when the *pure* Turkish words come into the play. This situation further supports the idea that the purist language reform, with its products, still hold influence over people's attitudes. When the respondents face an association on the language reform, their evaluation of the loanwords get more negative.

### **The Loanwords When Used by Others**

The evaluative dimension *The Loanwords in the Idiolects of Other Persons* contained nine questions intended at gaining insights from the cognitive and affective attitudinal components by asking the respondents to evaluate the loanwords when they are used by other people.

The loanwords receive the second-lowest percentage of positive attitudes within this dimension at 33 %. The prevailing attitude is negative with 45,1 %, and attitudinal ambivalence corresponds to 22%. The results evidence that attitudes to the loanwords often go well-beyond the lexical items themselves, and result in widespread negative attitudes that are directed at individuals who use these loanwords too. Relying on loanwords does not necessarily confer these positive characteristics upon the speaker and may often elicit negative associations.

A significant number of the respondents (53,2 %) do not link the frequent usage of the loanwords to an elevated level of intellectual sophistication. Despite the typical assumption that a larger vocabulary that is visibly attained through personal effort would signal a higher degree of sophistication, the respondents mostly do not draw such a conclusion from individuals who frequently employ the loanwords.



This situation can be attributed to a desire to uphold the value of *pure* Turkish words over the loanwords, as acknowledging the prevalence of loanwords may diminish the worth of *pure* Turkish words. In this sense, one could argue that there is a form of linguistic capital at play, as it is also the case with the widespread reluctance of the respondents to know more of the loanwords, in which different lexical resources compete with one another, and which manifests itself within the domain of attitudes.

It is more common among the younger respondents to associate frequent usage of the loanwords with intellectual refinedness (28 %) compared to the older respondents (14,1 %). This situation implies that the loanwords receive different evaluations with the younger generation.

### **The Loanwords Against the Turkish Language Association**

The evaluative dimension *The Loanwords in Relation to the Language Reform* involved two survey questions relating to the cognitive attitudinal component by asking the respondents to evaluate the loanwords with regards to the purist language reform.

When compared to attitudinal distributions of the other dimensions, the loanwords receive the second-highest negative attitudes from this dimension (46,1 %) and the lowest percentage of positive attitudes (29,8 %). Attitudinal ambivalence is the highest among all the dimensions (24,1 %). Looking at this high rate of vacillation, it is arguable that the controversial nature of the language reform is still present.

There is a subset of respondents (8 %) who view efforts to substitute the loanwords as flawed actions yet recognizing the purist language reform as a necessary movement, which suggests that commitment to the language reform may be strong enough to override positive evaluations of loanwords. While loanwords may be evaluated positively for various reasons, such as their pleasing sounds or their enhancement of expressive capabilities, the purist language reform triggers a “the enemy of my friend is my enemy” mentality, where the “friend” is not the loanwords, but rather the Turkish Language Association. This scenario exemplifies a case of cognitive-affective attitudinal dissonance, which might result in attitudinal ambivalence or instability.

It has been observed that the respondents from the younger age group show a noticeably lower inclination to deliberately abstain from using the loanwords and to value *pure* Turkish words over them, in comparison to the respondents from the older group. Additionally, it is more common among the respondents from the younger group to perceive frequent usage of the loanwords as indicative of intellectual sophistication, to view them as a significant source of lexical richness, and to consider them to be more suitable for literature than *pure* Turkish words. Against these, the percentage of those





who see the purist practices of the Turkish Language Association as necessary actions is more in the younger age group (51,5 %) compared to the older age group (49,3 %).

Thus, although the younger group tends to evaluate the loanwords in a less stringent and more favorable manner, this sentiment does not extend to their perception of the purist practices, and they exhibit no significant attitudinal difference from the older group in terms of seeing the purist practices as necessary. Therefore, support for the purist language reform does not appear to be diminishing among the younger generation and may even be increasing. This situation can be attributed to the possible correlation between the linguistic purism in Turkey and the nationalistic sentiments. Despite the younger generation's increasing acknowledgment of the loanwords (especially in certain aspects), they remain steadfast in their appreciation of the language reform as a significant component of the broader modernization endeavor that entailed the shaping and promotion of Turkish national identity.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of Turkish speakers to Arabic and Persian loanwords that constitute a long-contested part of the Turkish lexicon under the current socio-political conditions of Turkey. The findings revealed a prevalence of negative attitudes to Arabic and Persian loanwords, alongside lower but still notable percentages of positive and ambivalent attitudes. Considering the importance of language attitudes for the success of language policies, the findings showed that the purist language reform has been mostly successful in shaping enduring language attitudes that show coherence with the intended goals of the language reform, which serve to legitimize its practices and further sustain its effects. Together with these, considering the notable extents of positive and ambivalent attitudes, it was shown that the purist language reform's sphere of attitudinal influence today is, while persistent, not ultimately dominant.

The aesthetic peculiarities of the loanwords played a crucial role in receiving positive attitudes. Also, it was observed that a larger number of people believed that the loanwords had a positive impact on the lexicon compared to those who held the opposite view; people were mostly not in an urge to intentionally refrain from using the loanwords. Paradoxically, the study also showed that with regards to the personal use of the loanwords, people generally did not perceive a pragmatic value in learning more of them, despite the conventional belief that enhancing one's lexicon would facilitate more effective expression of thoughts.

Further, while a larger vocabulary that is visibly attained through personal effort may assumably signal a higher degree of sophistication, the respondents mostly did not attribute such refinement to individuals who frequently employ the loanwords and did not associate it with an increased level of intellectual sophistication. It was posited that the reason for these could be a sense



of linguistic purism and an accompanying belief that a greater command of the loanwords would result in reduced use of *pure* Turkish words, thereby relegating them to a peripheral position and diminishing their worth.

This claim aligns with the fact that when the evaluation of the loanwords required a comparison of them with *pure* Turkish words, the respondents tended to prefer the latter. Overall, compared to loanwords, *pure* Turkish words were largely considered to be more valuable, and the respondents had a low degree of attitudinal ambivalence on this matter. Moreover, relying on the loanwords does not necessarily enhance the speaker's positive qualities and may convey negative connotations. Thus, attitudes to the loanwords often extend beyond their mere lexical usage and result in negative perceptions directed toward individuals who frequently use them.

The findings also revealed a comparatively less rigid and more favorable attitudes among the younger group in contrast to the older age group. They exhibited a markedly lower tendency to deliberately refrain from using the loanwords and to assign greater value to *pure* Turkish words over the loanwords when compared to respondents from the older group. Moreover, it was more prevalent among the younger respondents to perceive frequent use of the loanwords as a sign of intellectual sophistication, to regard them as a key source of lexical richness, and to view them as more suitable for literary works than *pure* Turkish words. Nevertheless, there exists a paradoxical situation wherein the belief that the purist measures implemented during the language reform were necessary was observed to be more common among the younger group compared to the older group.

While overall there is a slow increase in positive attitudes to the loanwords with the younger generation, this trend was observed to be primarily evident among the younger males, with the younger females displaying less positive attitudes. In fact, the younger females displayed positive attitudes even less than older females. Based solely on these findings, it is difficult to draw a definitive conclusion regarding the reasons for the discrepancy in the attitudes toward the loanwords between males and females, and why females exhibit a stronger preference for *pure* Turkish words over the loanwords compared to males. These differences might reflect variations in education, cultural factors, or language use patterns, and further research is necessary to investigate this matter more thoroughly.

### References

- Bourhis, R. Y.* (1997) Language policies and language attitudes : Le monde de la francophonie // N. Coupland & A. Jaworski (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics : A reader*. St. Martin's Press. Pp. 306–322
- Cüceloğlu, D., & Slobin, D. I.* (1980) Effects of Turkish Language Reform on Person Perception // *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*. No. 11 (3) Pp. 297–326. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022180113005>



- Dağtekin, F.* (2021) Türkiye’de dil tartışmaları ve Türk dil kurumu (1950–1983) [Language discussions in Turkey and the Turkish Language Association (1950–1983)] [PhD Thesis]. <http://nek.istanbul.edu.tr:4444/ekos/TEZ/ET002043.pdf>
- Gallagher, C. F.* (1971) Language reform and social modernization in Turkey // J. Rubin & B.H. Jernudd (Eds.), *Can Language Be Planned? : Sociolinguistic Theory for Developing Nations* (pp. 152–169). University of Hawai’i Press.
- Kerslake, C.* (1998) Ottoman Turkish // L. Johanson & É. Á. Csató (Eds.), *The Turkic Languages* (pp. 179–202). Routledge.
- Krosnick, J. A., Judd, C. M., & Wittenbrink, B.* (2005) The measurement of attitudes // D. Albarracín, B. T. Johnson, & M. P. Zanna (Eds.), *Handbook of Attitudes and Attitude Change* (pp. 21–76). Erlbaum.
- Levend, A. S.* (1960) Türk dilinde gelişme ve sadeleşme evreleri [Development and simplification stages of the Turkish language] (2nd ed.). Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi.
- Lewis, G.* (1999) *The Turkish language reform : A catastrophic success*. Oxford University Press.
- Mango, A.* (2008) Atatürk // R. Kasaba (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey : Turkey in the Modern World* (Vol. 4) (pp. 147–173). Cambridge University Press.
- Ongur, H. O.* (2015) Identifying ottomanisms : The discursive evolution of Ottoman pasts in the Turkish presents // *Middle Eastern Studies*. No. 51 (3). Pp. 416–432. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2014.976622>
- Özcan Gönülal, Y.* (2011) Dil-toplum ilişkisi açısından Türkiye’de 1940 sonrası dil tartışmaları üzerine bir değerlendirme [An evaluation about relationship between language and society in terms of discussions on language in the post 1940 in Turkey] // *Turkish Studies*. No. 6 (1). Pp. 1155–1166. <https://doi.org/10.7827/TurkishStudies.1954>
- Perry, J. R.* (1985). Language reform in Turkey and Iran. *International // Journal of Middle East Studies*. No. 17 (3) Pp. 295–311. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/163501>
- Simsek, H. B.* (in press). Attitudes of Turkish speakers toward Arabic and Persian loanwords in Turkish. HSE Working Papers. *Multilingual Urban Space: Policy, Identity, Education*. M.
- Smagulova, J.* (2008) Language policies of Kazakhization and their influence on language attitudes and use // *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. No. 11 (3–4). Pp. 440–475. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050802148798>
- Tachau, F.* (1964) Language and politics : Turkish language reform // *The Review of Politics*. No. 26 (2). Pp. 191–204. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0034670500004733>
- Wheeler, G.* (1974) Modernization in the Muslim East: The role of script and language reform // *Asian Affairs*. No. 5( 2). Pp. 157–164. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068377408729708>
- Woolard, K. A., & Gahng, T.-J.* (1990) Changing language policies and attitudes in autonomous Catalonia // *Language in Society*. No. 19 (3). Pp. 311–330. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0047404500014536>
- Yazan, B., & Üzüüm, M.* (2017) Ottoman Turkish in the high school curriculum: Current language planning discussions in Turkey // *Current Issues in Language Planning*. No. 18 (3). Pp. 264–282. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2016.1264735>

---

**Hasan Berkcan Simsek** – PhD Student in School of Philological Studies, HSE University.  
Address: 105066, Russian Federation, Moscow, Staraya Basmannaya St., 21/4.  
E-mail: [khshimshek@edu.hse.ru](mailto:khshimshek@edu.hse.ru)

---



Для цитирования: *Шимшек Х.Б.* Спорное наследие заимствований: Отношение турецкоговорящих людей к арабским и персидским заимствованиям в турецком языке [Электронный ресурс] // Социоллингвистика. 2023. № 2 (14). С. 79–97 (На англ.) DOI: 10.37892/2713-2951-2-14-79-97

For citation: *Simsek, H.B.* The contested legacy of borrowing : Attitudes of Turkish speakers to Arabic and Persian loanwords in Turkish [online] // Sociolinguistics. 2023. No. 2 (14). Pp.79–97 DOI: 10.37892/2713-2951-2-14-79-97