

Measuring Assimilation: ‘Mother Tongue’ Question in Turkish Censuses and Nationalist Policy

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ABSTRACT This article aims to examine how the Turkish census measures, classifies and interprets the languages spoken in Turkey. By examining the non-standardised relationship between ‘mother tongue’, ‘domestic language’ and ‘ethnicity’, the article analyses the ongoing and dynamic milieu that surrounds the fixed questions and clear-cut classifications of data. This article argues that the ethnic measurement is not a ‘fixed’ measurement, because the wording of the linguistic question and the data categorisation as well as the interpretation of the data has been changing.

How sensitive, objective and scientific is it to measure social identities? Every answer to this question is equally incomplete, subjective and non-scientific. The answer is as problematic as the question itself. Measurement itself is, or ought to be, a fixed process, but society and social identities present a boundary problem, i.e. they are blurry and non-fixed. The census, which is a common method of measuring social identity, is itself a political activity, subjective in nature. Because the census is a sign and declaration of the sovereignty of a state, it is a necessary, even mandatory, act and an inseparable part of modern state hegemony. For this reason, the whole census process—deciding which social identity should be measured, how the census should be conducted and what the classification/categorisation of social identity should be—is a hegemonic construction. Therefore, it is difficult to find an ‘absolute’ consensus on the data obtained from a census. Even though it does not capture a perfect snapshot of ‘reality’, this measurement process provides this article with an eminent opportunity to ‘frame’ the (ethnic and ideological) character of the modern state.

The literature on the census emphasises that to measure ethnicity/nationality through the census is a questionable issue. Ethnicity is a social construction, which develops over time as groups share common social and political experiences. Moreover, ethnicity is an undetermined ensemble, which has changeable frontiers, and which needs to be constantly reaffirmed.¹ Ethnicity, as Peter Skerry argues, is

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¹ According to Ann Morning, 11 terms/concepts are used to define ethnicity in the censuses of around 134 countries: (by order of frequency) Ethnicity, Nationality, Indigenous Group/Tribe, Race, Ancestry/Descent/Origin, Cultural Group, Community/Population, Language Group, Caste, Colour/Phenotype, and Religious Group. See Ann Morning, ‘Ethnic Classification in International Context: A Cross-National Comparison of 1995–2004 Census Items’, New York University, 2004, <http://iussp2005.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=50331>, accessed

by construction a vague concept constituted by unstable and multiple factors such as birthplace, language, cultural lines, religion, nationality, colour, ancestry and, covering all these attributes, the sense of common belonging.²

However, despite this ethnographic and political approach, statisticians have been measuring ethnicity in line with their country's political structure. According to detailed research, the desire (or lack of desire) to measure ethnic identity arises from four different political goals. Firstly, it arises for political control. Such cases were observed in apartheid-era South Africa, the Soviet Union and Rwanda. In these cases, ethnic categories form the basis for exclusionary policies. Secondly, in the name of national integration, countries such as France and Spain have refused to measure ethnic identity. Thirdly, in Latin America, in the name of 'national hybridity' some countries have also refused to measure ethnicity, yet others have measured it for the same reason. Finally, in countries such as the UK, Canada and the US, measurement has been conducted for the sake of anti-discrimination policies.³

Linguistic questions, or 'mother tongue' questions, are very common census questions to capture ethnicity/nationality because they are seen as a proxy of nationalism, mostly by nationalist groups and statisticians, and also as the most concrete element of ethnicity. These questions are far from a mere technical procedure, but are rather a strongly political procedure. Measuring the 'mother tongue' is a questionable measurement due to the close relationship between language and ethnicity/nationality.

In general, the concept of the 'mother tongue', in Arel's terms, has a 'backward-looking' character and implies a more 'ethnic and nationalist' question, especially relative to the 'spoken language (or language of use)'.⁴ The 'mother tongue' is the first language learned from the parents, while 'language spoken (at home or in public life)' is the language spoken by the time the census is conducted. However, this classical definition changes according to the ethnic and linguistic composition (i.e. equilibrium) of a country, as well as the state's ideological and ethnic identity, especially in the case of political and historical problems between the state and minorities. For example, in Ukraine the mother tongue question cannot provide the best picture of ethnic group size because in Ukraine there is the fact of

Footnote 1 continued

December 2011. For a later version of this paper, in which Morning enumerated seven terms/concepts in censuses, see Ann Morning, 'Ethnic Classification in Global Perspective: A Cross-National Survey of the 2000 Census Round', *Population Research and Policy Review*, 27(2) (2008), pp. 239–272. For a very rich discussion among French statisticians on the ethnic categories in censuses, see <http://olivier.ammam.free.fr/imports/user-ined/contributions/fevrier-1999.html>, accessed September 2011.

² Peter Skerry, *Counting on the Census: Race, Group Identity, and the Evasion of Politics* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000). There is a huge literature on these issues. Other significant studies include: D.I. Kertzer and D. Arel, *Census and Identity: The Politics of Ethnicity, Race, and Language in National Censuses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Patrick Simon, 'La statistique des origines. "Race" et ethnicité dans les recensements aux Etats-Unis, Canada et Grande-Bretagne', *Sociétés Contemporaine*, 26 (1997), pp. 11–44; Margo Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988); Juliette Cadiot, 'La constitution des catégories nationales dans l'Empire de Russie et dans l'Union des Républiques Socialistes Soviétiques (1897–1939): Statisticiens, ethnographes et administrateurs face à la diversité du "national"' (Unpublished dissertation, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales [EHESS], 2001); Alain Desrosières, *La politique des grands nombres: histoire de la raison statistique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1993).

³ J.L. Rallu, V. Piché and P. Simon, 'Démographie et ethnicité: une relation ambiguë', in G. Caselli, J. Vallin and G. Wunsch (eds), *Démographie: analyse et synthèse VI: population et société* (Paris: Institut National Études Démographiques [INED], 2004), pp. 481–516.

⁴ For details, see Dominique Arel, 'Language Categories in Censuses: Backward- or Forward-Looking?', in Kertzer and Arel, *Census and Identity*, pp. 92–120.

generational assimilation: most Ukrainians whose parents and grandparents speak Russian feel that their nationality is Ukrainian. The ‘mother tongue’ question can give rise to a high margin of error in those countries where there is—whether voluntary or involuntary—a state of multiculturalism.

In some countries the ‘spoken language’ question can be evaluated as ambiguous, such as with regard to Czech workers in Austria.⁵ Thus this question is differently formulated in some countries, as either ‘language spoken at home /in family (that I call domestic language)’ or ‘language spoken in the public sphere’.

Measuring ethnic identities and language is a questionable practice because it aims to capture a fluid reality through fixed questions, with different wordings in each census and of which the data are not fixedly categorised. Moreover, it becomes more problematic in countries where a historical ethnic and linguistic problem exists, especially where nationalisms are based on language. The linguistic questions on Turkish censuses, analysed in this article, present a typical example of the above-mentioned problem. For this analysis I will mainly use the Turkish census data, and the publications of the Turkish State Institute of Statistics (*Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü*, henceforth TSIS) and Turkish demographers’ opinions.

The main argument of this article is that the linguistic question on the Turkish census was asked to measure assimilation, as has been the case in the US censuses,⁶ and to survey the dominance of the Turkish language ‘between four walls’ rather than count ‘mother tongues’. With this aim, the article summarises the nationalist-political context in which the linguistic questions were asked, to discover to what extent language is secular Turkey’s ‘religion’, and to what degree linguistic assimilation is a basis for Turkish nationalism. After classifying the Turkish political context, the article will examine the change in wording of linguistic questions, and their data, and the change in categorisations/supracategorisations. Then, the article will look for the reasons why the publication of linguistic data ceased and why linguistic questions were later totally removed from census questionnaires. Finally, perhaps the most original issue for census literature is the question of how various actors interpreted the data. In sum, this article will demonstrate the existence of a fluid process (before data and after data) that surrounds the clear-cut questions, clear-cut categories and absolute statistical data of censuses.

Turkish Nationalism and ‘the Language Cause’ (*Dil Davası*)

Linguistic questions (‘mother tongue’ and second language) have been asked on 12 Turkish censuses (from 1927 to 1985). However, the minorities neither requested that they be counted according to their languages, nor was there a state aim to provide social services to its minorities. Turkey has recognised only three religious minorities, but no linguistic minorities. In all other cases, it has ignored or forbidden the languages spoken by other minorities.

⁵ A Czech nationalist might argue that this question could ‘refer to the language one had to speak publicly, rather than one’s identity language’. A Czech servant working in a German-speaking household, who would spend his days speaking German to his employers, could have German registered as his language of use. For more details, see Arel, ‘Language Categories in Censuses’, pp. 100–102.

⁶ In US censuses the use of a language question is primarily to measure assimilation, and not to serve as a proxy for race or ethnic background. See D. Swanson and J.S. Siegel, *The Methods and Materials of Demography* (San Francisco, CA: Elsevier, 2004), p. 186.

Why did a state politically, judicially and administratively refuse to ‘recognise’ a social ‘fact’ but, at the same time, measure it? As will be portrayed below, since the language was/is a central pillar of Turkish nationalism, this article argues that the ultimate reason was that the Turkish Republic wanted to measure the success of their minorities policy and to survey the domestic sphere, and it was considered necessary to measure this for the nation-state-building process.

Under the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923, Turkey recognises religious minorities, but only three (Armenians, Jews and Orthodox). Other non-Muslim populations (such as the Assyro-Chaldeans, Nusayris, Nestorians, Yezidis) and especially Muslim non-Turkish populations (Kurds, Circassians, Albanians, Laz) are not recognised as minorities. To my knowledge, no central or local institutions/administrative units have been organised according to the multicultural or multi-linguistic character of the population. In contrast to Belgium, Switzerland or Quebec, where the state social services were organised according to the linguistic data, no state institution in Turkey has had any desire or intention to use linguistic data for social services, to determine the number of teachers, schools, and so on.

Following the Treaty of Lausanne, the Turkish Republic accepted Turkish as the state language and abolished the Caliphate through its 1924 constitution. Starting particularly from this date, the centre of gravity of Turkish nationalism lapsed from an Islamic discourse, transforming into a secular and ethnic one. In 1926, the Ministry of Education decreed that ‘ethnic names such as Kurd, Laz or Circassian should not be used, as they harmed Turkish unity’.⁷ For the newly founded Turkish Republic, the language question was clearly situated within a political, ideological and nationalist framework. In the 1930s, as an enormous literature emphasises, the linguistic cause (*dil davası*) was the heart of Turkish nationalism. There were two main axes of the linguistic cause, ‘Turkicising language’ and ‘Turkophonising (i.e. Turkification) of the population’. ‘Turkicising language’ was a large-scale project that included purifying Turkish of foreign vocabulary and grammar (especially Arabic and Persian), changing the script from Arabic to Latin, creating a new Turkish vocabulary and so on.⁸

Turkophonising/Turkification involved, first and foremost, the spread of the Turkish language among non-Turkish speakers, and was a part of large-scale social engineering.⁹ In the eyes of Turkish nationalists, Turkification, before all, meant Turkophonising the non-Turkish population, mainly Muslims. They believed that once the non-Turkish Muslims spoke Turkish, they would feel and think like Turks. Şükrü Kaya, the Interior Minister, justified the ‘[*Mecburi*] *İskan Yasası*’ (Forced Settlement Law), which aimed to change the ethnic composition of the Anatolian population by forced migration and forced settlement. He stated that ‘this law is to create a country . . . that speaks only one language’ (*tek dille*

⁷ Andrew Mango, *Atatürk* (London: John Murray, 1999), p. 428.

⁸ Geoffrey Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Clémence Scalbert-Yücel, ‘Conflit linguistique et champ littéraire Kurde en Turquie’ (Unpublished dissertation, Paris IV-Sorbonne, 2005); Hüseyin Sadoğlu, *Türkiye’de Ulusçuluk ve Dil politikaları* (Istanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2003), especially chapter 4.

⁹ For literature that analyses Turkish nationalism in early Republican Turkey, see an excellent study by Ahmet Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene: Türk Ulusal Kimliğinin Etno-Seküler Sınırları (1919–1938)* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2001). See also Yeşim Bayar, ‘The Trajectory of Nation-Building through Language Policies: The Case of Turkey during the Early Republic (1920–38)’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 17(1) (2011), pp. 108–128; Yılmaz Çolak, ‘Language Policy and Official Ideology in Early Republican Turkey’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 40(6) (2004), pp. 67–91.

konuşan ... bir memleket yaratmaktır).¹⁰ As formulated by a Turkish deputy in the 1930s, Celal Nuri, being a ‘real’ Turk meant that ‘Turkish should be the person’s only language [mother tongue]; the person should speak Turkish in his home and in his family; he should think in Turkish; he should count in Turkish. He should talk in Turkish in his sleep’.¹¹

State in four walls: the use of ‘mother tongue’ data for assimilationist policies

The first censuses were conducted in a highly nationalist atmosphere, under state-centred propaganda. The Turkish press, especially some months before the census, called all citizens to participate in the census as a national duty. This census-centred propaganda increased the sensitivity of intellectuals regarding non-Turkish language and non-Turkish populations. The main aim of the propaganda was to mobilise the population to be counted with the aim of finding out the real number of Turks in Turkey.¹² In the following censuses, the main mobilising slogan encouraging the population to participate in the census was that it aimed to find out how much the number of Turks had increased since last census.¹³

Following the temporary results (which were obtained within a month) of the first census, which demonstrated that around 13 per cent of the population was non-Turkophone, intellectuals argued that the ‘main mission of the new republic’ was to ‘protect’ and ‘spread’ (*koruma ve yayma*) the Turkish language, especially in the Kurdish-populated regions where the non-Turkophones were a majority.¹⁴

The main consequence of census-centred propaganda was the campaign ‘*Vatandaş Türkçe Konuş!*’ (Citizen, Speak Turkish!). The propaganda before the census and publication of data mobilised intellectuals and academics to protect the Turkish language.¹⁵ This campaign became almost a ‘reign of linguistic terror’, and resorted to tactics such as attacking Jewish non-Turkish speakers and preventing their access to public transport.¹⁶ Despite the decline of this campaign in the western regions and urban areas due to international reactions, it was persistently continued in rural (and non-Turkophone) regions (i.e. among the Kurds, Arabs, Laz and so on).¹⁷ After the second census of 1935, which showed

¹⁰ Haluk Karabatak, ‘1934 Trakya Olayları ve Yahudiler’, *Tarih ve Toplum*, 146 (1996), pp. 4–16, at p. 6. For an analysis of this law, see Erol Ülker, ‘Assimilation, Security and Geographical Nationalization in Interwar Turkey: The Settlement Law of 1934’, *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 7 (2008), <http://ejts.revues.org/index2123.html>, accessed January 2009.

¹¹ Celal Nuri (İleri), ‘Örf ve Kanunlara Göre Milliyet’, in *Devlet ve Meclis Hakkında Musesabebeler* (Ankara: TBMM Matbaası, 1932), pp. 94–98, cited by Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene*, p. 302.

¹² For instance, just 10 days before the census, Falih Rifki, in his editorial in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, declared that the preliminary result of the census proved that the vast majority of Turkey’s population are Turks. See ‘Başyazı: 14 Milyon’, *Cumhuriyet*, 7 November 1927.

¹³ See the issues of these newspapers before the censuses (from September to November): *Cumhuriyet*, *Tan*, *Akşam*. See also A.Ç. Bozbeyoğlu and A. Tamer, ‘1927 Nüfus Sayımının Türkiye’de Ulus Devlet İnşasındaki Yeri: Basında Yansımalar’, *Nüfusbilim Dergisi/Turkish Journal of Population Studies*, 26 (2004), pp. 73–88.

¹⁴ For instance, in 1933 Kadri Kemal wrote that the 1927 census demonstrated that the ‘numerical presentation of data on the languages of our people living in the Eastern and South Eastern regions, demonstrates how the language issue is one of the most important issues of our country’. Kadri Kemal, ‘Anadolu’nun Doğusunda Dil Meselesi’ [Language Problem in Eastern Anatolia], *Ülkü*, 1(5) (June 1933), pp. 404–407.

¹⁵ For an excellent analysis of this campaign, see Senem Aslan, ‘Citizen, Speak Turkish! A Nation in the Making’, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 13(2) (2007), pp. 245–272.

¹⁶ Yıldız notes that the access of Jews, Arabs, Bosniacs, Greeks and Armenians to ferries (*vapur*) was forbidden, because they spoke their own language. Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene*, pp. 286–290.

¹⁷ For details, see İsmail Beşikçi, *Türk tarih tezi-Güneş dil teorisi ve Kürt sorunu* (Ankara: Yurt, 1991). In the regions where the Kurds were the majority (especially in the eastern regions of Turkey), the Turkish state banned

the concentration of non-Turkish speakers in certain regions, A. Emin Yalman, a fanatical partisan of the Turkish Republican People's Party, considered this fact an 'ugly' demographic distribution which he invited the government to 'liquidate in the shortest period of time'.¹⁸

The second major consequence of the census was the Forced Settlement Law¹⁹ which divided Turkey into 'ethnic zones' and mandated forced migrations and settlements with the aim of mixing the non-Turkish population with the Turkish population.²⁰ Some articles of the law were particularly nationalist and even racist (articles 2.7 [a., b.], 10 [c., ç.], 11, 12, 13 and 14), in that they divided people and geography racially and ethnically, and legitimised the forced migration, settlement and expulsion of that part of the population that was not connected to Turkish culture (*Türk kültürüne bağlı olmayan*) and did not belong to the Turkish race (*Türk soyuna mensub olmayan*).

In the secular Turkish Republic, where language has become a 'religion', the language question on the censuses plays a role in increasing the hegemony of the state and helping to frame/reframe the state's identity politics. The Turkish Republic since its foundation has Turkophonised and Turkified the public sphere. Not only the state apparatus and bureaucracy, but the entire fields of communication, education and economic activities have been Turkophonised. Only a few years before the Turkification campaign, the different languages were visual and public in Anatolia, in the field of communication, in trade companies, place names (especially villages), stores names and so on. All these were forbidden by a series of codes. Through the 'Speak Turkish Campaign', non-Turkish languages were excluded from the public sphere and those who spoke non-Turkish languages had to assimilate.²¹

At this point, the census helped the state to penetrate into domestic life and survey the reality between the four walls of the home. When, for instance, some Jews announced that they would declare their mother tongue to be Turkish in the 1927 census, as a sign of loyalty to Turkishness, the vice director of the Turkish Statistical Institute reacted strongly, replying that '[s]ome Jews suppose that they will be more subservient if they record their mother tongue as Turkish. Whereas our aim is only to collect statistical information. . . . All have to be sure that . . . not individuals but numbers will be taken into consideration by the government'. For the Turkish statisticians, to capture the domestic reality was much more important than domestic loyalty.²²

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the use of Kurdish in state institutions and public spaces. See Hasan Cemal, *Kürtler* (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2003), p. 374.

¹⁸ Ahmet Emin Yalman, 'Başyazı', *Tan*, 4 March 1937, p. 1.

¹⁹ Çağaptay argues that the 1920s were a secularisation period and the 1930s were a Turkification period. See Soner Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey Who Is a Turk?*, London and New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 11–64 (chapters 2 and 3).

²⁰ For a detailed evaluation and effect of the law, see İsmail Beşikçi, *Bilim Yöntemi, Türkiye'deki Uygulama 1 Kürtlerin Mecburi İskanı, 1977* and Ülker, 'Assimilation, Security and Geographical Nationalization'.

²¹ Turkification of names and surnames was carried out under the 1934 Surname Law (*Soyadı Kanunu*). Turkification of the Koran, the *ezan* (the Muslim call to prayer) and worship was enacted in 1932. Turkification of labour was effected by means of the prohibition of some occupational categories for non-Turks in 1933, and so on. For the Turkification of the economy, see Murat Koraltürk, *Erken Cumhuriyet Döneminde Ekonominin Türkleştirilmesi* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2011).

²² 'Kadin ve Erkek Memleketimizde Kaç Kişi Var', *Milliyet*, 22 October 1927, pp. 1 and 4. With the increasing nationalism, some Jewish intellectuals—especially Moiz Kohen—sincerely proposed the Turkification of Jews in Turkey. For example, in his work titled *Türkleştirme* (Turkification), originally published in 1928, Moiz Kohen

Apart from these language campaigns, the Turkish state created a theoretical and academic framework through the theory of ‘sun-language’. According to this theory, the origins of all languages (including Latin and the Slavic languages) were to be found in Turkish.²³ Thus, there were no other languages. Specifically, the languages of Muslim non-Turkish populations had lost their original Turkish character. For instance, the Kurdish language was said to be a mixed, disordered, hybrid language-like vernacular, which had ‘Turkish origins’.²⁴ Even, the official ideology claimed that the Muslim minorities who lived in Turkey were of Turkish origin, but because of ‘negligence and the politically incorrect’ policies of the empire, or because of the influence of other peoples, they lost their connection with their Turkish origin.²⁵

Similarly, in the reform project reports of 1928 concerning the Kurdish regions,²⁶ in state secret reports of the 1930s and 1940s²⁷ and in the meetings or reports of the Special Inspectorates (*Umumi Müfettişlikler*), the language and religion data of the censuses were used to frame and legitimise anti-minority policy. The Special Inspectorates paid special attention to the ethnic composition of their areas of responsibility. The ‘mother tongue’ data were used to determine the assimilationist policy. For instance, in a meeting on 7 December 1936, Şükrü Kaya explained that ‘[w]e did not expect such a number of Kurds. We had expected roughly 100,000. And the assimilation of this [number] was doubtful. Go to Diyarbakir, the educated, merchants and artisans speak in Kurdish in their homes and at work’.²⁸ The ‘Kurdish Report’ of 1935 by one of the General Inspectors, Abidin Özmen, shows that when he framed his propositions to solve the Kurdish problem, he used census data as ethnic data. He compared ‘language data’ with ‘ethnic data’ to assert that the Kurdish question is a demographic question. Özmen asserted that ‘the Kurds are producing [Kurds increasing more than Turks]’, and the only solution he proposed was the Turkification of Kurds. Prime Minister İsmet İnönü also used this argument in his report submitted to President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.²⁹

Particularly in the region of Dersim, state agents used ethnic and linguistic data to pacify and Turkophonise/Turkify the region in 1940, a process for which we have the state documents.³⁰

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Tekinalp summarised in ‘ten commandments’ what the Jews had to do to ensure that the Jews of Turkey be included in the ‘collective conscience’ that was the basis of Turkish national union: firstly ‘use Turkish names’ and secondly ‘speak Turkish’. See also another Jewish intellectual’s opinion: Avram Galanti, *Vatandaş Türkçe Konuş!* (Ankara: Kebikeç, 2000).

²³ For the sun-language theory, see Beşikçi, *Türk tarih tezi-Güneş*.

²⁴ See Kemal, ‘Anadolu’nun Doğusunda Dil Meselesi’.

²⁵ A more ironic argument was on the Turkishness of Kurds. According to official ideology, the term ‘Kurd’ was an evolution from an onomatopoeic description of the sound of walking on snow, ‘Kart-Kurt and Kurd’.

²⁶ For the 1928 report, see Hamit Pehlivanlı, ‘Cumhuriyetin İlk Yıllarından Günümüze Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu’nun Meseleleri Örnek Raporlar Işığında Karşılaştırmalı bir İnceleme’, in A. Şimşek and Y. Kalafat (eds), *Abdulhaluk M. Çay Armağanı V.II* (Ankara: Işık ofset, 1998), pp. 733–756, at pp. 737–738.

²⁷ In a secret Minority Report of the CHP (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi/Republican People Party; the founder party of Turkey, which was in power until 1947 during the single-party dictatorship) produced in 1940, the solutions that were proposed to solve the minority question were the dispersion of Muslim non-Turks and the concentration of all non-Muslims in Istanbul in the aim to facilitate their expulsion. To legitimise these arguments, the census data were presented as a scientific basis. For the report, see Faik Bulut, *Kürt Sorunu’na Çözüm Arayışları* (Istanbul: Ozan, 1998), pp. 166–191.

²⁸ M. Bülent Varlık, *Umumi Müfettişler Toplantı Tutanaqları 1936* (Ankara: Dipnot, 2010), p. 129.

²⁹ For ‘Birinci Umumi Müfettiş Abidin Özmen’in raporu’ of 1935, see Saygı Öztürk, *İsmet Paşa’nın Kürt Raporu* (Istanbul: Doğan, 2008), pp. 113–128.

³⁰ We can closely examine the utilisation of population data in the state Turkification policy in the Dersim region, since the archives of the inspector of Dersim were recently published under the title ‘Necmeddin Sahir Silan

When the Iraqi Kurdish question emerged following the 1958 Iraqi Revolution, one of the ex-inspectors of the Special Inspectorate, Avni Doğan, in his newspaper column, proposed that the government take a new assimilationist strategy to Turkophonise the Kurds. In his article, when he wanted to prove the urgency and magnitude of the Kurdish question he referred to the ‘mother tongue’ data.³¹

On 27 May 1960, when General Gürsel took power in a military coup, this linguistic campaign was revived in the Kurdophone regions.³² In 1963, the best-selling newspaper in Turkey, *Milliyet*, basing its approach on census data, declared that ‘in the Eastern part of Turkey, the proportion of Kurdish speakers is 67%, the Turkish is 27%’. To the newspaper, the reason for this high proportion of Kurdish speakers was because Kurds, who had not ‘revolted since 1937’, ‘refuse to speak Turkish’. In other words, for some intellectuals the high frequency of Kurdish as a ‘domestic language’ was a threat to state unity.³³

Under this ethnic and linguistic ideology and classificatory state, the language question in censuses can be better demonstrated. The article will now analyse all classificatory action that precedes and follows the census data.

The Linguistic Questions in the Turkish Censuses

In the four Ottoman censuses undertaken in the Ottoman Empire (1831 [accomplished partly], 1844 [unaccomplished], 1881–1893 and 1906–1907), the main classifications were ethno-religious. Muslims were simply listed as Muslims, without mention of sect or rite, but Christians were classified according to sect or ethnic identities.³⁴

The Ottoman census was part of a process during which the Ottoman Empire attempted to modernise and centralise the imperial structure to stop the loss of territories and stem the endless nationalist claims of its minorities. It was after this census and identity classification experience that the new Turkish Republic carried out its first census in 1927 in which citizens were classified according to mother tongue, religion³⁵ and nationality (*tabiiyet*). These questions were in accordance with the International Institute of Statistics’ proposition, and especially with the

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Arşivi’, by Tarih Vakfı. See especially Tuğba Yıldırım (ed.), *Necmeddin Sahir Silan Arşivi: Kürt Sorunu ve Devlet/Tedip ve Tenkil Politikaları 1925–1947* (Istanbul: Resimli Ay Matbaası, 2011), p. 141.

³¹ Avni Doğan, ‘Tehlike Çanı’, *Vatan*, 19–23 November 1958. The French military attaché in Ankara, in his report sent to Quai d’Orsay, argues that the ‘mother tongue’ data did not reflect the real number of Kurds in Turkey. To him, the number of Kurds in Turkey was approximately two times larger than what was reflected in the Kurdish-speaking population data. See Colonel Therenty’s report dated 26 November 1958, CADN [Centre des Archives diplomatiques], Ankara/Ambassadeur/1952–1963/52.

³² See ‘Kürt Varlığının İnkarıyla İlgili Devlet Kampanyası’, in Ertuğrul Kürkçü (ed.), *Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: İletişim, 1988), pp. 2113–2117.

³³ ‘Durum: Tehlikeli Ceryanlar’ [Editorial], *Milliyet*, 20 April 1963, p. 1. Even though this article does not cover the post-1985 period, when the ‘mother tongue’ question was excluded from the census questionnaire, I must add that the state policy against Kurdish language involved human rights violations in the 1990s. Aside from the Human Rights Watch’s annual reports, which regularly recorded these linguistic violations, for a musical aspect see <http://www.freemuse.org/sw6237.asp>. See also T. Skutnabb-Kangas, *Linguistic Genocide in Education—or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights?* (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000).

³⁴ For more details on the Ottoman censuses, see Kemal Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830–1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Stanford J. Shaw, ‘The Ottoman Census System and Population, 1831–1914’, *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 9(3) (1978), pp. 325–338, at p. 329; Cem Behar, *Osmanlı imparatorluğu’nun ve Türkiye’nin Nüfusu 1500–1927* (Ankara: Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü/State Statistical Institute (DiE), 1996).

³⁵ For the question of religion in Turkish censuses, see Fuat Dündar, ‘Compter, classer, contrôler: les minorités dans les recensements Turcs’, *Turcica*, 37 (2005), pp. 187–220.

1872 Petersburg Congress decision.³⁶ However, the ‘nationality’ question was formulated as ‘citizenship’, not as ‘ethnicity’, as had been done with the formulation of the ‘mother tongue’ question. In fact, under the ‘mother tongue’ question, the ‘domestic language’ was asked in all Turkish censuses. Turkish statisticians did not want to measure either ‘nationality’, in the sense of ‘ethnicity’, or ‘mother tongue’.

The choice of organiser for the first Turkish censuses, which had a major impact on the following censuses until the 1985 census, was a conscious one. Due to his membership of the International Statistical Institute and his expertise, Camille Jacquart, the director general of statistics at the Belgian Ministry of the Interior, organised the first Turkish census.³⁷ Beyond Jacquart’s expertise, the Belgian census was a reason to be invited to organise the first Turkish census. In the Belgian census, the linguistic question had been collected, since 1842, for administrative purposes, and had never been considered an indicator of ethnicity. It was not the mother tongue that was requested in the census, but the ‘language used’. In the 1920 census, the last census Jacquart organised in Belgium before his arrival in Turkey, a question about the second language spoken by the respondent was asked: ‘If he (the respondent) can speak two or three national languages, he is requested to state that which he uses most frequently’.³⁸

However, some Turkish demographers had differing opinions, arguing that the ‘mother tongue’ question was asked to capture the ‘ethnic reality’. For instance, according to Celal Aybar, the main Turkish organiser of the first censuses and future director of the TSIS, by the ‘mother tongue’ question, the TSIS intended to discover ‘the division [*inkisam*] of the population by mother tongue, by showing the areas where various national cultures [*milli kültürler*] were concentrated, and, to some degree, give valuable information regarding race and nationality’.³⁹ Another expert of the TSIS, Ratip Yüceulug, in his work for intern education declared that the geographic distribution of mother tongue data ‘showed, with a minor margin of error, the country’s ethnic mixture’ (*pek az hata ile memleketin etnik terekübünü gösteriyordu*).⁴⁰ Another expert argued that the mother tongue question was asked to uncover ethnic data, because if the nationality question was directly asked to people, ‘it would create suspicion and the true answer would not be obtained’ (*onlarda şüphe uyandır[ılacak] ve doğru cevap alın[mayacaktı]*).⁴¹

The ‘domestic language’ question as ‘mother tongue’ question

The ‘mother tongue question’ was never actually asked in any Turkish census. It was the ‘domestic language’ that was asked: ‘language spoken in family’ (*aile arasında konuşulan dil*) in the first two censuses (1927 and 1935); ‘language

³⁶ Zafer Toprak, ‘Cumhuriyet Ankara’sında İlk Nüfus Sayımı (Tecrübe Tahriri-1927)’, *Ankara Dergisi*, 1(2) (1991), pp. 57–66, at p. 61.

³⁷ *Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi* in Ankara (henceforth BCA), 14.40.16. See the opinion of Camille Jacquart on the discussions of ‘mother tongue’ and ‘nationality’ questions in the censuses in the Congress of International Statistics of 1924, in *Bulletin de l’Institut Internationale de Statistique* 1/AJ23 (1924), pp. 73 and 76.

³⁸ See [Belgian Census Data 1920], *Ministère de l’Interieur, Recensement général du 31 décembre 1920*, publié par le Ministère de l’Intérieur et de l’Hygiène (Brussels: M. Weissenbruch, Impr. du Roi, 1925), vols. I–III. After the unexpected death of Mr Jacquart, the general director of the Federal Institute of Switzerland, Dr C. Bruscheiller, was invited to coordinate the second census in 1935. As in Belgian censuses, the linguistic question in the Swiss censuses had not been asked to determine ethnicity.

³⁹ Celal Aybar and Sabit Aykut, *Nazari ve Tatbiki İstatistik Dersleri* (Istanbul: Devlet Basımevi, 1937), p. 89.

⁴⁰ Katip Yücenlug, *İstatistik Dersleri* (Ankara: Unpublished, only circulated for TSIS members, 1947–1948).

⁴¹ *Genel Nüfus Sayımları ve Genel Sayımların Uygulama Tarihleri*, 1. Yüksek İstatistik Şurası Tebliği No. 4, 30 January 1965 (Ankara: DiE Kütüphanesi Kayıt no. 1125).

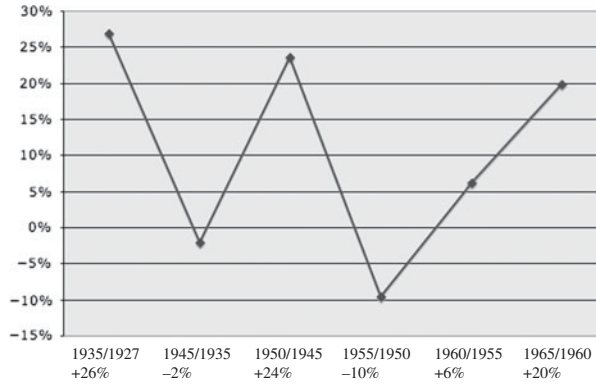


Figure 1. Change of Non-Turkish 'Mother Tongue' Data (Census/Preceding Census)

spoken at home' (*ev içinde konuşulan dil*) in 1945; 'language usually and easily spoken within the family' (*aile arasında kolaylıkla ve ekseriyetle konuşulan*) in 1950; 'language usually spoken at home, in family' (*ev içinde, aile arasında mutad olarak konuşulan dil*) in 1955; and 'language spoken in family and home' (*ev içinde, aile arasında mutad olarak konuşulan dil*) from 1960 to 1985.⁴² The formulation of the question could lead respondents to take the initiative to respond to the question themselves after observing the situation, in other words there was no self-declarative response. As seen in Figure 1, the proportions of the non-Turkish mother tongue data are highly instable; they change irregularly, neither decreasing nor increasing regularly. I believe the main reason for this instability is the changes in the formulation of questions in each census.

In the first census regulation (1927) distributed to enumerators, it was advised, concerning the mother tongue question: 'By the term mother tongue, it is meant the language that the person speaks with her/his children in his/her home'.⁴³ In the individual form under 'mother tongue', it was stated in small print: 'the purpose [meant by mother tongue] is the language spoken in the family and not the language of the mother'.

In the 1940 census regulation, it was stated that 'mother tongue is not the language spoken by the mother, but that spoken in the family. Children who have not yet reached the age of speech are not considered to be speaking the language of the family'.⁴⁴ But this description would change in the 1950 census:

The mother tongue of family members does not necessarily have to be the same. Sometimes the language of the elders and the grandchildren may be different. On this point, the language spoken by all family members is considered the mother tongue.⁴⁵

The second language question in the Turkish censuses

In some countries, outside of the mother tongue, a question concerning the second language has been asked to capture information on the 'official language'. This

⁴² For more details, see Fuat Dündar, *Türkiye Nüfus Sayımlarında Azınlıklar* (Istanbul: Doz, 2000), pp. 66–68.

⁴³ *Umumi Nüfus Tahriri-28 Teşrinievvel 1927, V.2* (Ankara: Başvekalet İstatistik Umum Müdürlüğü, 1929), p. 113.

⁴⁴ *1940 Genel Nüfus Sayımı: Kanunlar-Talimatnameler-Kararnameler-Tamimler-Örnekler*, Cilt I (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık İstatistik Genel Müdürlüğü Yayın No. 158, 1941).

⁴⁵ *1950 Genel Nüfus Sayımı* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık İstatistik Genel Müdürlüğü Yayın No. 410, 1961).

question is also formulated differently, according to the country's linguistic composition and historical or actual political and ethnic problems, even if the formulation can be differently interpreted. However, as Arel emphasises, the second language question is less 'politically charged' than that of the 'mother tongue', except in countries like Estonia. In Estonia, to present Russian as the second language is a highly political issue.⁴⁶ Despite the second language being less political, it has a higher margin of error than mother tongue data. This is because of the 'fluency' term, which is mostly used in the formulation of the second language question. How can fluency in a language be measured?

The second language question in Turkish censuses was also less politically charged. Its formulation changed significantly over various censuses. From the second census of 1935, the population was questioned on their 'second language', that is to say 'the language they could speak apart from their mother tongue'. From the 1950 census onwards, this formulation changed, adding the comparative adverb 'best': 'the language that is spoken the best other than his mother tongue'.⁴⁷ In the 1950 regulation, the 'second language' was explained as follows: 'those who speak not even a little Turkish are considered to be speakers of Turkish as a second language'. The fact that they can speak English, for example, is not considered as having a second language. This is important, because the authorities are attempting to highlight the degree of assimilation of minorities based on language. It is also advisable to enumerators to detail, as much as possible, the dialects used by people speaking languages other than Turkish as 'Azeri, Kirdashcha,⁴⁸ Zaza, Tatar, Kirmandja,⁴⁹ Bosnian, Pomak...'. In the following census, in 1955, 'best' was replaced by 'at least at a level sufficient to be understood'. It would be enough to speak a few words of Turkish for Turkish to be considered the second language of the counted.

Indeed, the 'second language' question was certainly not intended as a means of discovering the number of multilingual individuals. It was raised because the Turkish authorities considered the fact of speaking Turkish as the most characteristic sign of assimilation into the Turkish majority. As the director of the TSIS, Celal Aybar, stated, 'the purpose of the second language question is to know how much different cultures influence each other'.³⁹ So an increase in the number of 'bilinguals' from the previous census was considered an indicator of the success of Turkophonising, Turkification and assimilation.

The classification of linguistic data

Apart from the formulation of the question, the classification (and supra-classification) of linguistic data in the Turkish censuses was changeable, even arbitrary. As the census literature emphasises, a census classification is not a scientific abstraction independent of the social and institutional structures to which it applies. The classification of linguistic data reflects the state's minority policy. However, it is difficult to distinguish which corresponds to the more important

⁴⁶ Arel, 'Language Categories in Censuses', p. 97.

⁴⁷ Dündar, *Türkiye Nüfus*, pp. 66–69.

⁴⁸ Indeed, there is no 'Kirdashcha' language or dialect; however, the Zaza of Dersim call the Kurmanji speakers 'Kirdasi'. For Kurdish dialects, see Ziya Gökalp, *Kürt Aşiretleri Hakkında Sosyolojik İncelemeler* (Ankara: Komal, 1975), p. 51.

⁴⁹ *Kurmanji* (in Kurdish).

change in state policy, before the census, on the formulation of the question, or to the change in the classification of data. Changes in the formulation of the question or in the classification of data, no matter their hierarchy, both show the taxonomic arbitrariness of the state, especially when the state seeks to create a new language or new supra-classification. It is the state that decides in which group any given language has to be placed.

Although the language questions are formulated in different ways ('language spoken in the family', 'language at home'), the answers to these questions are printed in official publications as 'mother tongue data'. Just as the formulation of questions had changed, the categorisation and supra-categorisation of linguistic data had also changed in each census. In the seven Turkish censuses, 17 different 'minority' languages were classified, but their number changed in each census. There were nine minority languages in 1927, fifteen in 1935 and 1945, sixteen in 1950, thirteen in 1955 and 1960 and sixteen in 1965. On the one hand, some languages that existed in the early censuses disappeared in following censuses. On the other hand, languages that did not exist in the first censuses appeared irregularly in following censuses. No notes in the census documentation stated the reasons for the appearance, disappearance and reappearance of languages.⁵⁰

The supra-classification, and the order of classification of languages, was also changed. Obviously, Turkish was always presented at the first rank and separately. Other languages were then classified in various ways, according to the census. In the results of the first census, they were presented randomly, neither in alphabetical order nor in numerical importance. In the second and third censuses, languages were listed in alphabetical order, as stated by Anderson: 'alphabetical order as in a telephone directory'.⁵¹ In 1950, the languages were divided into three groups: 'Turkish', 'local languages' (the languages listed in Table 1) and 'foreign languages'. In the following census (1955), this classification system disappeared and returned to the alphabetical order system of 1945. In the last two censuses (1960 and 1965), languages were again divided into groups. This time there were seven: 'A-Turk', 'B-Muslim minority languages' (the languages listed in Table 1), 'C-Other minority languages', 'D-Anglo-Saxon languages', 'E-Latin languages', 'F-Slavic languages' and 'G-Other'. This categorisation was not purely linguistic, but rather politico-linguistic. Turkish was, as a language of 'real properties of Turkey', placed first, even though it was one of the 'Muslim languages'. On the other hand, the order of languages reminds us of the hierarchical society of the late Ottoman period: the Turks, Muslim minorities, non-Muslim minorities and so on.

More taxonomic operations were carried out on the Kurdish language, the second most spoken language in Turkey. For the first time in the 1950 census, Kurdish, considered one of the local languages, was itself divided into three: 'Kurdish-Kirmandja' (*Kürtçe-Kirmanca*), 'Kirdashcha' (*Kirdaşça*) and 'Zaza' (*Zazaca*). As mentioned above, before the census the enumerator was ordered 'to specify all local languages', but this was only for the Kurdish dialects, which were represented in the statistical tabulations. The invented division of Kurdish also

⁵⁰ Abkhazian (-1927), Albanian, Arabic, Armenian, Bosnian (-1927), Georgian (-1927), Greek, Hebrew, Kirdashcha (1950, 1965), Kurdish, Kirmandja (1950, 1965), Laz (-1927), Pomak (-1927), Tatar (1927, 1935, 1945), Circassian, Gypsy (1935, 1945) and Zaza (1950, 1965). The languages that are not followed by a date exist in seven censuses. For others, the minus sign means they are absent on this/these date(s). Conversely, the other date(s) means that it only exists on this/these date(s).

⁵¹ Benedict Anderson, 'Recensement et politique en Asie du Sud-Est', *Genèses*, 26 (1927), pp. 55–76.

Table 1. 'Mother Tongue' Data in Turkish Censuses (1927–1965)

Mother Tongue	1927	1935	1945	1950	1955	1960	1965
Abkhazian	-	10,099	8602	17,200	13,655	4689	4563
Arabic	134,273	153,687	247,294	269,038	300,583	347,690	365,340
Albanian	21,774	14,496	14,165	16,079	10,893	12,000	12,893
Bosniac	-	24,615	10,900	24,013	11,844	14,570	17,627
Circassian	95,901	91,972	66,691	75,837	77,611	63,137	58,339
Armenian	67,745	57,599	47,728	52,776	56,235	52,756	33,094
Georgian	-	57,325	40,076	72,604	51,983	32,944	34,330
Gypsy	-	7855	4463	-	-	-	-
Kurdish	1,184,446	1,480,246	1,476,562	1,854,569 ^a	1,679,265	1,847,674	2,370,233 ^b
Laz	-	63,253	39,323	70,423	30,566	21,703	26,007
Pomak	-	32,661	10,287	36,612	16,163	24,098	23,138
Greek	119,822	108,725	88,680	89,472	79,691	65,139	48,096
Tatar	11,465	15,615	10,047	-	-	-	-
Hebrew	68,900	42,607	51,019	35,786	33,010	19,399	9981
Population of Turkey	13,629,488	16,157,450	18,790,174	20,947,188	24,064,763	27,754,820	31,391,421

^a Including Kırdaşa and Zazaca.^b Including Kirmanja, Kırdaşa and Zazaca.*Source:* Tables 1 and 2 are compiled from the 1927–1965 data published by TSIS. See Dündar, Türkiye Nüfus, appendix.

includes a strange category of ‘Kirdashcha’. This is strange because there is no such language or dialect as ‘Kirdashcha’; it is a local term for Kirmandja used in the Dersim region. Indeed, there are only two Kurdish dialects in Turkey: Kurmanci and Zazakı. This classification was abandoned for the 1955 and 1960 censuses. However, in the last census (1965), there were four Kurdish and Kurdish-like languages. In other words, the Turkish statisticians created four languages from one language: Kurdish, Kirmandja, Kirdachtcha and Zaza under the supra-classification of ‘Muslim minority languages’. What was the reason for this taxonomic and ‘inventive’ operation on the Kurdish language? The answer is difficult to find. We know that the TSIS had identified the Zazas by the 1930s,⁵² but why were these data published in 1950? The question remains unanswered.

The Cessation of the Publication of Linguistic Data and Exclusion of the Linguistic Questions from the Census

The data from the linguistic questions (including second language) of the 1970, 1975, 1980 and 1985 censuses have never been published. This abandonment was not officially explained. Why did the state cease publication of these data? Can we explain this change of state policy through the development of ethnic politics in Turkey? Or did obtaining linguistic data fail to provide the necessary information for the state? Or was there an increase in nationalism among the minorities, as a result of increasing their sensitivity towards linguistic questions? What political changes occurred in society as well as in the state? To answer these questions we will re-emphasise this article’s argument. The Turkish state did not seek to count ‘ethnicity’ or ‘mother tongue’ but only the ‘domestic language’. I argue that there were two main reasons for this: the 1960 military coup⁵³ and the emergence of Kurdish nationalism in the late 1960s, which was mainly based on linguistic and cultural rights.⁵⁴ To my knowledge, until these years, no representative of minorities or minority-origin intellectuals had asked for linguistic rights or been involved in writing books or articles analysing mother tongue data. Thus, when one of the minorities became able or willing to do so, the state stopped publishing linguistic data.⁵⁵

⁵² In the ‘Kurdish Report [of 1943]’, Avni Doğan—one of the engaged nationalist theorists, author of the theory of ‘sun-language’ and young Turkish state ideologue—stated the number of Zaza-speaking people, basing this on the DiE data. See A. Doğan, ‘Kürt raporu (1943)’, in M. Bayrak (ed.), *Açık-Gizli/Resmi-Gayrresmi Kürdoloji Belgeleri* (Ankara: Özge, 1994), pp. 233–270.

⁵³ Actually, according to Cemil Ergene, a director of the TSIS, the 1965 ‘mother tongue’ data were accidentally published, despite the decision not to publish linguistic data. He did not know who made this decision, but I believe it was the officers who carried out the military coup in 1960. See S. Zeyneloğlu H. Y. Civelek and Y. Coskun, ‘Kürt sorununda antropolojik ve demografik boyut: Sayım ve araştırma verilerinden elde edilen bulgular’, *Uluslararası İnsan Bilimleri Dergisi*, 8(1) (2011), pp. 335–384, at p. 343.

⁵⁴ Thirty Kurdish magazines were published at the time, including *Dicle-Fırat* (1962), *Deng* (1963), *Riya Rast* (1963), *Neve Roja* (1963) and *Mezra Botan* (1969). The first pro-Kurdish association DDKO (*Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları*/Cultural Association of the Revolutionary East) had been founded in 1969. Two books were published in 1968 under the titles *The Kurdish Alphabet* (M. E. Bozarslan, Istanbul: Sim, 1968) and *Mem and Zin* (Ehmedê Xani, Istanbul: Koral, 1968). Forty-nine Kurdish nationalists were arrested and the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Turkey was created in secret in 1965. In addition, the ‘events of the East’ (*Doğu Mitingleri*), during which slogans and posters claimed the right to use the language of the Kurds, took place in 1967. For Kurdish nationalism in Turkey, see Hamit Bozarslan, *La Question Kurde* (Paris: Presses de Sciences-Po, 1993); Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structure of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books, 1992); Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism 1880–1925* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989).

⁵⁵ Beyond the emergence of Kurdish literature (political and non-political), two main organisations claimed Kurdish ‘minority’ and Kurdish linguistic rights based on the census data—DDKO (the first pro-Kurdish association) and TIP (Turkey’s Labour Party). See *Milliyet*, 21 May 1971, p. 7.

Following the 1985 census, the linguistic questions were removed. Why did the TSIS stop asking the linguistic questions? The Turkish authorities could have chosen to continue to collect information on languages, but keep the results secret, as had been done for the data from 1970 to 1985. According to the explanation of certain employees of the TSIS, the reason for removing the questions on language was ‘the high error rate on the answers to these questions’. Is this a valid reason for their disappearance? Could specialists of the TSIS, who had previously asked linguistic questions in 10 censuses, not realise earlier that the data were biased?⁵⁶ Or was the reason the re-emergence of Kurdish nationalism, specifically the PKK’s (Kurdistan Worker Party’s) armed activity? When language becomes a major factor in ethnic consciousness, the measurement of the ‘domestic language’ becomes a more problematic measurement. Some members of the minority could answer the ‘domestic language’ question as though it had been asked as ‘mother tongue’.

The other, and more concrete, reason for the cessation of the mother tongue question was political and legal. The Turkish constitution of 1982 forbade other languages.⁵⁷ Just before the 1985 census, some columnists and political party leaders criticised the appellation of Kurdish as an ‘international language’ in the census pamphlet. In the 1980 and 1985 censuses, the Kurdish language was one of the optional answers to the question of ‘Which foreign languages do you know?’.⁵⁸ Twelve members of the TSIS and the Census Committee of 1985 were sentenced for separatism by the Court of State Security (*Devlet Güvenlik Mahkemesi*). It is probably for this reason that the ‘mother tongue’ wording on the 1985 census form was delayed and replaced by ‘the language spoken at home and in the family’ (*Ev içinde ve aile arasında konuştuğunuz dil*).⁵⁹ Finally, following the 1985 census, the linguistic question has never again been asked.

Comparing ‘Mother Tongue’ Data with ‘Ethnic’ Data

As this article argues that the Turkish state did not ask the ‘mother tongue’ question because it did not want to measure ethnicity, and secondly the ‘mother tongue’ data do not present the ‘ethnic reality’ in Turkey, the article has three sets of ‘ethnic’ data to prove its argument. These three sets of ethnic data were collected, but never published officially, by the Turkish state. These data were the calculation of a register made by the local *Nüfus Daireleri* (Population Registration Institute). Before cross checking these register-based calculations with the mother tongue data, I would like to emphasise that the gravity of the issue lies in the fact that the Turkish state unilaterally determined (without asking citizens to declare their identity) and registered the ethnic origins of its citizens secretly and without

⁵⁶ As emphasised above, for the first censuses the Turkish statisticians, including the head of TSIS in the 1950s, Celal Aybar, had argued that the mother tongue questions could, despite some minor margin of error, reveal the reality, even the ethnic reality. See Aybar and Aykut, *Nazari ve Tatbiki İstatistik*, p. 99. See also Ratip Yücedag, *İstatistik Dersleri* (Ankara: Unpublished, only circulated for TSIS members, 1947).

⁵⁷ Constitution of 1982, 26th article: ‘Düşüncelerin açıklanması ve yayılmasında kanunla yasaklanmış herhangi bir dil kullanılmaz’, <http://www.basarmevzuat.com/dustur/kanun/5/2709/a/2709sk.htm>, accessed December 2011.

⁵⁸ ‘Dün Olup Bitti’, *Milliyet*, 8 October 1986, p. 9; A. Doğan, ‘21 Ekim’de Sayılıyoruz’, *Milliyet*, 8 July 1990, p. 8. In fact, according to other sources, Kurdish was one of the options besides English, French and German available to select in response to the ‘second language’ question. See *Milliyet*, 21 October 1990, p. 13.

⁵⁹ Faruk Bildirici, ‘Azınlıkların saymayan ülke’, *Gazete Pazar*, 30 November 1997, p. 5; and Zeyneloğlu et al., ‘Kürt sorununda antropolojik ve demografik boyut’.

informing them. As will be seen below, these data, based on state-sponsored secret ethnic registers, were greater than the mother tongue data, which I think demonstrates that ‘domestic language’ (not ‘mother tongue’) can only measure ‘language knowledge within four walls’, not ethnicity.

The first register-based enumeration was conducted by the *Ankara-Polatlı Nüfus memuru* only for the villages of Polatlı, on 23 March 1927. Comparing the mother tongue data from this census with register-based calculations, one can see that all ‘mother tongue’ data are less than the ‘ethnic data’. The most important difference was in ‘Tatars’ and ‘Tatar language’. While 2557 individuals were registered in the state registers as Tatar, there was no single Tatar-speaking individual in the official data for Polatlı. We cannot say that this is due to the state policy, since the ‘Tatar language’ was seen in other cities. The second difference can be seen in the ‘Bosnian’ and ‘Bosniac’ data. While 312 Bosnians lived in Polatlı in 1927, no single Bosniac appeared in the official census of the same year. The third difference can be seen in the ‘Kurds’ and ‘Kurdish’ data. While the state registers recorded 742 Kurds, the census counted 560 Kurdish speakers (see [Table 2](#)).

The second example is the data of Bala, a sub-prefecture of Ankara, from 22 May 1927, some months before the census. Like Polatlı, Bala’s data demonstrate that all ‘mother tongue’ data were less than ‘ethnic data’. According to the *Bala Nüfus Memuru*, 816 Tatars lived in Bala villages (excepting the city centre), yet only 254 Tatar-speaking people were registered by the census taken for the whole Bala sub-prefecture. Similarly, according to Bala registers, 5715 Kurds lived in 19 villages that were entirely Kurdish and only 132 Turks lived there. However, according to the 1927 census, which also covered the city centre, there were 4913 Kurdish speakers and 21,213 Turkish speakers (see [Table 3](#)).⁶⁰

The third and more significant data appear in an ethnic statistical table prepared, in 1935, by the registry offices (*Nüfus İdareleri*) of Kurdish-populated regions. These ‘ethnic data’ were prepared on the occasion of an official visit to the Kurdish regions (*Müfettişlik Bölgesi/provinces under Special Inspectorate*) by the Prime Minister of Turkey, İsmet İnönü. The registry offices of this region presented İnönü with the ethnic statistical data of the Kurdish-populated regions. As can be seen in [Table 4](#), the number of Kurdish speakers in the four vilayets determined by the ‘mother tongue’ question was 515,440, whereas the number of Kurds that the Turkish state determined was 617,170. In other words, 83 per cent of the Kurds registered by the Turkish registry office spoke Kurdish as their ‘mother tongue’ in their private home life.

Interpreting ‘Domestic Language’ Data as ‘Ethnic’ Data

The ‘domestic language’ data have been read and interpreted differently (often as a source of ethnic data) by different politicians, intellectuals and even demographers.⁶¹ As discussed above, it was sought to capture the domestic language, not as a ‘mother tongue’ or an origin or ethnicity. Yet most academic

⁶⁰ *Toprak İskân Genel Müdürlüğü Arşivi* (Archive of the General Directorate of Land and Settlement, henceforth TIGMA), 272/65/6/5/10, 22 May 1927.

⁶¹ For instance, see the interview with the director of the Hacettepe Demographic Studies Institute, Professor Aykut Toros. He emphasised that ‘those of Kurdish origin, according to their mother tongue, compose 13–14% of Turkey’s population’ (‘anadiline bağlı olarak Kürt kökenliler Türkiye nüfusunun %13–14ünü oluşturuyor’). See ‘2010’da İnşallah’, *Milliyet*, 21 October 2000, p. 24.

Table 2. Second Language Data in Turkish Censuses (1935–1965)

Second Language	1935	1945	1950	1955	1960	1965
Abkhazian	2108	1265	0	1489	8018	7836
Arabic	34,028	60,061	0	95,612	134,962	167,924
Albanian	26,161	17,701	0	25,898	37,144	40,627
Bosniac	13,526	9599	0	12,669	37,526	39,582
Circassian	14,703	9779	0	22,796	65,061	48,621
Armenian	9782	12,354	9322	6084	19,444	22,260
Georgian	16,255	9337	0	24,720	54,941	44,904
Gypsy	0	193	-	-	-	-
Kurdish	114,456	117,130	215,352	263,020	469,458	447,080
Laz	5061	4956	0	19,144	38,275	55,158
Pomak	8380	5594	0	22,816	28,602	34,234
Greek	67,547	64,736	55,280	58,990	82,830	78,941
Tatar	4106	2255	-	-	-	-
Hebrew	3578	2800	3770	4107	4375	3510
Population of Turkey	16,157,450	18,790,174	20,947,188	24,064,763	27,754,820	31,391,421

and non-academic studies do not distinguish between ‘domestic language’ and ‘mother tongue’. Some even read the ‘domestic language’ question as an ‘ethnic question’. No doubt, the first reason for this misreading/misinterpretation is the fluid boundaries between ‘domestic language’, ‘mother tongue’ and ‘ethnicity’. Alternatively, it may be due to the political anxiety/aim of commentators.

Some proceed from the statistical data, arguing, especially on the discussion of Kurdish demography, that the ‘mother tongue’ data underrepresent the ‘reality’, and the official census data have always been kept small in order to reinforce the idea that they are a politically small group.⁶² Others argue that the official language data give the real number of ethnic groups.⁶³ Interestingly, some census scholars also read the linguistic data as direct ethnic data.⁶⁴ Most interestingly, some General Inspectors until the end of the 1940s could not distinguish between ‘domestic language’, ‘mother tongue’ and ‘ethnicity’. In their reports on minority questions (predominantly the Kurdish question) and in their secret meetings, they evaluated the ‘domestic language’ data provided by the census as ‘ethnic data’.⁶⁵ None ask themselves why the Turkish Republic wanted to measure ethnicity.

⁶² Mahrud Izady, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook* (Washington: Taylor & Francis Publishers, 1992). See also M. V. Bruinessen, ‘Kurdish Society, Ethnicity, Nationalism and Refugee Problems’, in Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl (eds), *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 33–67; Michael Ignatieff, *Blood & Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism* (Toronto: Viking, 1993).

⁶³ Haluk Çay, *The Kurdish File* (Ankara: Tamga, 2001); and Justin McCarthy, *Muslim and Minorities: The Population of Ottoman Anatolia and the End of the Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 1983).

⁶⁴ For instance, some demographers examine ‘mother tongue’ data, without taking into consideration the formulation of the questions. I. Koç, A. Hancıoğlu and A. Cavlin, ‘Demographic Differentials and Demographic Integration of Turkish and Kurdish Populations in Turkey’, *Population Research and Policy Review*, 27 (2008), pp. 447–457; A. E. Özsoy, I. Koc and A. Toros, ‘Türkiye’nin Etnik Yapısının Anadil Soruların Göre Analizi’, *Nüfusbilim Dergisi/Turkish Journal of Population Studies*, 14 (1992), pp. 101–114; S. Mutlu, ‘Ethnic Kurds in Turkey: A Demographic Study’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 28(4) (1996), pp. 517–541; S. Mutlu, ‘The Population of Turkey by Ethnic Groups and Provinces’, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 12 (1995), pp. 33–60.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Avni Doğan’s ‘Kurdish Reports’ dated 1940, 1943 and 1947; Bayrak, *Açık-Gizli*, pp. 233–270; Suat Akgül, ‘Birinci Umum Müfettiş Avni Doğan’ın 1947 Tarihli İki önemli Raporu’, in A. Şimşek and Y. Kalafat (eds), *Prof. Dr. Abdulhaluk M. Çay Armağanı* (Ankara: [u.k.], 1998), pp. 39–46; and B. Akçura,

Table 3. Mother Tongue and Ethnicity Data for Polatlı in 1927

Polatlı	Turks	Kurds	Tatars	Albanians	Bulgarians	Bosnians	Alevis	Muslim Gypsies	Total
Ethnic data ^a	Turkish	742 Kurdish	2557 Tatar	Albanian	Bulgarian	Bosniac	62	12	14,523 Total
'Mother tongue' data ^b		560	-	3	9	-	-	-	16,557

^a By secret enumeration, excepting city centre.

^b 'Mother tongue' data of 1927 census.

Source: TIGMA, 272, 65, 6, 5, 4, 23 March 1927.

Table 4. Mother Tongue and Ethnicity Data for Bala in 1927

Bala	Turks	Kurds	Circassians	Tatars	Muslim 'Gypsies'	Bosnians	Total
Ethnic data ^a	132	5715	557	816	968	57	8245
'Mother tongue' data ^b	Turkish 21,213	Kurdish 4913	Circassian 238	Tatar 254	<i>Kiptice</i> (Gypsy language) —	Bosniac —	— 26,628
						[Others] 10	

^a By secret enumeration, excepting city centre.

^b *Umumi Nüfus tahriri-28 Teşrinievvel 1927 V. 2* (Ankara: Başvekalet İstatistik Umum Müdürlüğü Yayınları, 1929), p. 113.
Source: 'Mother tongue' data of 1927 census.

Table 5. Comparison of the Official Mother Tongue Data and Secret Ethnic Data of 1935

Provinces	Kurds in 1935 Registers ^a	Kurdish in 1935 Census ^b
Diyarbakir	185,135	155,846
Mardin	160,404	146,704
Siirt	115,266	101,311
Urfa	156,365	111,579
Toplam	617,170	515,440

^b 1935 Genel Nüfus Sayımı (Ankara: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başbakanlık İstatistik Genel Müdürlüğü Yayın No. 75, Cilt 60, 1937).

^a These data were compiled from several tables that were published by Saygı Öztürk, *İsmet Paşa'nın Kürt Raporu* (İstanbul: Doğan kitapçılık, 2008), pp. 66–68.

Despite giving responsibility to a Belgian expert, reformulate the ‘nationality’ question as a ‘citizenship’ question, and instead of ‘mother tongue’ asking for the ‘domestic language’, some intellectuals had identified linguistic questions with ethnic questions in first censuses. In fact, some intellectuals noticed that the census determined the ‘domestic language’ data.⁶⁶ As emphasised above, before the first censuses, to mobilise the masses to participate in the census, some intellectuals argued that the main reason for the census would be to find out the number of Turks. And some intellectuals following censuses argued that the most important data provided by censuses were ‘how many Turks and how many non-Turks’ lived in Turkey.⁶⁷ In particular by 1980, mother tongue data had become the centre of demographic discussion. This was mainly due to the PKK attacks in 1984 and the forced evacuation of thousands of Kurdish villages, creating massive immigration to Turkish cities in the western regions, and the ethnicisation of Kurdish votes in the 1990s through the foundation of the first pro-Kurdish party (HEP, Halkın Emek Partisi). These events created a demographic curiosity in the minority populations, especially the Kurdish one. In these discussions, some columnists and intellectuals interpreted ‘domestic language’ data as ethnic data.⁶⁸

Some Remarks

For the Turkish Republic, the Turkish language was not only a language of education and communication, but also a language of loyalty.⁶⁹ As the question of

Footnote 65 continued

Devletin Kürt Filmi: 1925–2007 Raporları (İstanbul: Ayraç, 2008), pp. 92–110. See also Bulut, *Kürt Sorunu'na Çözüm Arayışları*, pp. 166–191.

⁶⁶ In fact, some intellectuals noticed that the Turkish census determined the ‘domestic language’ data. In sum, the Turkish state did not want to determine the size of ethnic groups in Turkey, by reformulating the ‘nationality’ question as ‘citizenship’ question and by asking ‘domestic language’ instead of ‘mother tongue’. However, despite this census politics, most of the Turkish intellectuals had identified the linguistic data as ethnic data.

⁶⁷ *Milliyet*, 27 Ekim 1927, No. 613, s. 1. As emphasised above, a columnist evaluated the census results in such a way as to claim that ‘more than 12 million of the total [population] is pure Turkish’. Falih Rifkî, ‘Başyazı: 14 Milyon’, *Cumhuriyet*, 7 November 1927.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Uğur Mumcu, ‘Kürt Nüfusu’, *Milliyet*, 26 March 1992, p. 7; Mümtaz Soysal, ‘Açı: Duygularla Hesaplar’, *Milliyet*, 27 February 1991, p. 2; Taha Akyol, ‘Objectif: Nüfus Sorunu’, *Milliyet*, 26 September 1992, p. 13; H.C. Güzel, ‘Türkiye’de Kürt Sayısı ve Gerçekler’, *Radikal*, 6 September 2009, p. 7; Gündüz Aktan, ‘İyi İyidir, Ama!’, *Radikal*, 27 July 2006, p. 6; Rauf Denктаş, ‘Palavra ve Gerçek’, *Hürriyet*, 16 November 2011.

⁶⁹ Beyond the attempt at the Turkification of Islamic ritual (Koran and Ezan), the Turkish Republic declared the day of 26 September as a national festival alongside the other religious days. See ‘Bugün Ulusal dil bayramını Kutluyoruz’, *Cumhuriyet*, 26 September 1935, p. 1.

identity was a question of what the basis of loyalty to the state would be, the Turkish language was a *sine qua non* answer. If a minority was to prove its loyalty, it had to learn the Turkish language and speak it in its domestic, private life. This is why I believe that the ‘domestic language’ in Turkish censuses was asked not to measure ‘ethnicity’ or ‘mother tongue’ only, but also to survey the private life of citizens between their own four walls. As Michel Foucault’s studies teach us how the modern state is ‘modern’ insofar as it makes public every private sphere, we can also observe in this article how much the Turkish Republic has penetrated into the lives of its citizens even between the four walls of their own homes, and thus to what extent it is a ‘modern state’. The Turkish Republic, in contrast to its imperial antecedent that was not diffused through the household in its censuses, aimed to control all individuals. The state had already Turkified and Turkophonised the public sphere in the 1920s; the censuses helped to survey the ‘domestic language’ to measure the degree of assimilation.

At the beginning there was no consensus on the reason for asking the ‘mother tongue’ question in censuses, whether it was asking it in order to capture the ‘domestic language’ or ‘ethnicity’. While in the census questionnaire the mother tongue was written, in all verbal and printed regulations to the census taker the ‘domestic languages’ were emphasised. *The* wording of this question also often changed from one census to another. During categorisation and supra-categorisation of data, which ceaselessly changed, Turkish statisticians invented new languages. Because of ethno-political developments (mainly military coups and the politicisation of Kurdish identity), the linguistic data became a state secret (post-1965 censuses) and, finally, the question was definitively removed (post-1985 censuses). Still now, the ‘absolute number’ provided by the ‘mother tongue’ questions, and how to read and interpret them, are at the heart of political discussions.

Thus, social measurement, before data and especially after data (as an absolute truth), is an ongoing process, not only blurry but also endless. When political contexts change, the interpretations of data may also change. Social measurement, through clear-cut questions, to be flattened in absolute numbers, to be tabulated by clear-cut categories, is always an ambiguous and dynamic process and thus includes a margin of error. On the one hand, the type of question and its wording determines the data. On the other hand, the magnitude of data sometimes determines how to read, give the meaning and interpret it, thus the question. Obviously, this reversed reading is not correct, but it is certainly a part of ‘social fact’ and ‘social identity’. These fluid and changeable actors and interpretations, which encompass the fixed questions, categories and numbers, give the main character to the imperfection of ‘social measurement’. In other words, social measurement is a social process, and identity measurement is a step in the process of identity formation.

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