





Agnes Grond and Salih Akin  
Editors

# Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Central Anatolia

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## **Editors' Introduction**

For centuries, the area of Anatolia<sup>1</sup> was politically, culturally and socially shaped by the Ottoman Empire and its predecessors. This influence and the accompanying socio-cultural integration manifested itself on many different levels, such as the social organization and the management of linguistic and religious diversity. With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the successor states developed different ways of dealing with the cultural heritage and its high diversity. In many successor states, including Turkey, nation-building processes took place that were shaped by the ideology of a homogeneous state inhabited by a culturally and linguistically homogeneous population. Unsurprisingly, at the beginning of the 21st century, a high number of the languages and cultures of Anatolia have disappeared or are in danger of disappearance. Despite this loss of cultural diversity, today's Turkey alone is home to different Turkic, Indo-European, Caucasian, and Semitic languages, varieties and dialects.

This diversity was not treated for a long time due to prevailing language and cultural policies. Moreover, it was not always possible to conduct field research in the Anatolian regions. Nevertheless, there is research that addresses different aspects of minority languages of the Ottoman Empire and its successor states. Several volumes or studies refer to the Anatolian area (e.g.

<sup>1</sup> The toponym Anatolia comes from the ancient Greek ἀνατολή, *anatolé* ("levant") means "East, Levant" in relation to the geographical position of ancient Greece. It began to refer to the territory in the contemporary sense during the Ottoman Empire.

Bulut 2018, Haig & Khan 2018) or to modern Turkey (e.g. Andrews & Benninghaus 1989). With this volume we are addressing a region in Anatolia that has only recently come into the focus of research, the region of Central Anatolia. Central Anatolia (İç Anadolu Bölgesi) is one of Turkey's seven geographic regions stretching from Sivas in the east to Eskişehir in the west and from Çankırı in the north to Karaman in the south. These regions were determined in Turkey's inaugural geographic Congress held in 1941, based on geographical and economic characteristics. Rather than being distinguished by administrative structures, the regions vary according to topography, climate, settlement patterns and economic activities. This focus on geography and economics rather than the inhabitants and their languages and cultures served the political project of ethnolinguistic minorities of Turkey.

Amongst the seven geographical regions Central Anatolia is the least renowned. The Marmara and Aegean regions in western Turkey are renowned for their large urban conglomerates, including Istanbul and Izmir, as well as for their thriving industry, tourism, and immigration. Since ancient times, these areas have served as cultural and administrative hubs, playing significant roles throughout history as part of the Byzantine and Ottoman empires, and continuing to do so in modern-day Turkey. For centuries, the east of Turkey, comprising eastern and southeastern Anatolia, has been located at the crossroads of large empires like Sassanid and Byzantine Empires, as well as their successors, the Persian and Ottoman Empires. The regions to the north and south of Turkey, specifically the Black Sea and Mediterranean areas, have felt a significant impact due to their proximity to the seas, which has resulted in distinctive economic and cultural growth forms and expressions. Despite the significant Neolithic and Bronze Age sites in Central Anatolia, such as Çatalhöyük and Hacılar, the region's history has been marked by fragmentation and a transit status since the post-ancient period. Despite its location at the heart of Turkey, Central Anatolia has exhibited peripheral characteristics in recent



history, as evidenced by the population growth of its major cities. At the time of the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, Istanbul - the former capital - had approximately 300,000 residents. In the southeastern periphery, Diyarbakir was inhabited by 30,000 people, while Ankara - the central Anatolian city that was designated as the new capital - also had only 30,000 inhabitants. The peripheral nature of a region that is centrally located has been a major influence on settlement patterns, policies, and migration movements since the Middle Ages. This influence is still evident today in the diverse population of the region.

However, the linguistic and cultural diversity of Central Anatolia has come into the focus of research only in recent years, mainly based on the growing visibility of their inhabitants in the European diaspora. As part of this awakening interest, focused primarily on the Kurdish population of Central Anatolia, there are studies on the historical development, the impact of political events, and the migration flows to the Central Anatolia region. Mehmet Fiğan (2021) traces the immigration of Kurdish tribes to Haymana County. In particular, he analyses sources that document the migration route of the Şexbizinî tribes. Suat Dede (2011) describes the migration history of the Rışvan tribe, whose members are nomads originally living in the area between Maraş, Malatya, Adana and Northern Syria. From the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, they became one of the targets of Ottoman resettlement policy from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. While some members of the Rışvan tribe remained in their original settlements in eastern Anatolia, others were resettled by the state to the Haymana region of Central Anatolia. While Dede describes the impact of the new residents on the local population, Barbara Henning (2018) explores the effects of the resettlement of the Rışvan tribe on intra-Kurdish networks and information exchange in the late Ottoman Empire. Hacı Çevik (2022) investigated political organization and participation of the Kurds of Konya based on fieldwork in Kulu and Cihanbeyli as well as in the European diaspora.

The history of the immigration of Kurds to Central Anatolia and their coexistence with the local population and among themselves has thus already been described and analyzed in several works. However, there is little work on other ethnic groups in Central Anatolia<sup>2</sup>, and there is also little work dealing with the linguistic or sociolinguistic aspects of Central Anatolian communities, or the close connection between language, culture, and identity in this region. The aim of this volume is to fill this research gap through a compilation of case studies on a selection of ethnolinguistic groups settling in Central Anatolia. Three areas were conceptually instrumental: First, a focus on the complex repertoires through societal diversity that encompass a broad range of communicative strategies. Second, our goal was to offer linguistic descriptions of several individual groups. And third, we aimed to present selected studies that exemplify the complex interrelationships of language, identity, and culture. The volume is organized along these three topics with the sections *Linguistic Repertoires in Turkey and in the Diaspora*, *Linguistic Descriptions of Selected Groups* and *Languages and Cultures in Central Anatolia*.

The first section starts with the contribution *Young Adults' Attitudes towards Languages Spoken in Turkey* by Gülşah Türk. Türk explores the beliefs and attitudes towards multilingualism in Turkey and the use of languages other than Turkish in the education system. Her work shows that young people are positive about the autochthonous Turkish multilingualism, but that teaching and studying in languages other than Turkish is not supported in the same way. Participant feedback suggests that negative attitudes towards multilingualism and multilingual education are often due to misunderstandings and lack of awareness, rather than the often cited reasons of national integration and ethnic polarization.

Agnes Grond's paper *Komplexe zentralanatolische Repertoires in der Migration* (Complex Central Anatolian Repertoires in Migration) deals with immigration from Turkey to

<sup>2</sup> An exception is the study of Richard Foltz (2022) on the Ossetian villages of Central Anatolia.

the southern Austrian region of Styria and its capital, Graz, is predominantly from Central Anatolia. As a result, the communities residing in Graz reflect the linguistic, cultural and social diversity of Central Anatolia. This paper documents the linguistic ecology in which Central Anatolian immigrants live in a Central European city. In terms of methodology, the study uses narrative interviews and participant observation, complemented by a case study of binaural recordings of everyday communication. It reveals the speakers' pragmatic approach to language transmission and tasks, which is oriented towards the communicative range of the languages involved. For the speakers, the everyday language ecology is in strong contrast to the demands of institutionalized language acquisition.

The second section provides descriptions of selected Central Anatolian linguistic groups. The first paper in this section, *An Overview on Kurdish Varieties in Central Anatolia* by Salih Akin analyses the outcomes from a survey conducted among Kurdish speakers in four Central Anatolian locations: Boyabat, Cihanbeyli, Haymana and Imranlı. The focus is on dialectal variation, specifically phonological and lexical differences in the expression of select concepts. Similarly, the selection of pronouns, numerals, locatives, and interrogatives, along with the differentiation of grammatical gender, is examined. Specific consideration is given to the expression of definiteness and indefiniteness and the use of ergative constructions.

Yaşar Aratemür also deals with a north-western Iranian language in his article *Zur Wortgeographie der Zaza-Sprache* (On the Word Geography of the Zaza Language). Most speakers of Zazaki live in eastern Turkey, although some language islands exist in Central Anatolia. The largest of these language islands is in the province of Aksaray in Central Anatolia. It comprises a total of 13 villages and represents a cohesive area. Outside this area, there are three other villages in the immediate vicinity where Zazaki is spoken. Another language island with three villages (Çağşak, Küçük Söbeçimen and Küçük Örtülü) can be found in the Sarız district in the province of Kayseri. In terms of methodology, Aratemür follows the tradition of German and

Romance dialectology, which, with its language atlases (cf. Bayerischer Sprachatlas), developed methods for studying the linguistic variation of larger regions. This approach has been modified and developed according to the current conditions and the specific situation of the Zaza regions. The linguistic material was collected through field recordings, using a standardised questionnaire that takes into account linguistically relevant aspects in factual questions. The questions have an ethno-linguistic, but also a socio-economic and a socio-cultural focus, and are directed toward the environment in which the interviewees live.

*A Linguistic Analysis of the Poshá Language* is offered in the article of Melike Üzüm and Nurettin Demir. The Poshá community resides in Çankırı, a small city situated in Central Anatolia. Its populace comprises around 2000 individuals who are proficient in both Poshá and Turkish languages. The community primarily employs Poshá when communicating within their group or when they need to communicate secretly with others. The Poshá language is understudied in the literature, even when it is spoken in other regions. Few studies have examined the languages of Boshá and Lomavren, which are variations of Poshá. Üzüm and Demir introduce the socio-cultural composition of the Çankırı Poshá community and present findings related to their language's characteristics, drawing from fieldwork data. They offer fundamental observations on the characteristics of the Poshá language and the impact of language contact with Turkish. Moreover, they discuss the speakers' language orientation and sociolinguistic positionings, drawing insights from the literature on endangered languages.

The third section of this volume presents three studies dealing with the deep interconnection of language with culture, religion, identity.

Christoph Giesel's contribution *Muslim Georgians between Assimilation and 'Ethnic Revival'. Two Case Studies in the Central Anatolian Villages of Tatlıpınar und Akyazı* describes the immigration, Self-attributions and group-internal differentiations

among the muslim Georgians, Identity attitudes, embedding in the Turkish environment, assimilation processes and, on the other hand, efforts and achievements in the preservation of the ethnocultural characteristics.

The contribution of Thede Kahl and Andreea Pascaru *History through Oral Narratives: Analyzing Folk Songs of the Greek-speaking Muslim Community of the 'Vallahades' in Yeşilburç (Niğde, Central Anatolia)* explores the songs of the Vallahades, a Greek-speaking Muslim ethnic group, living in the upper Haliacmon Valley until their forced relocation to Turkey between 1922 and 1924. The study investigates their overlooked history and culture through fieldwork in Yeşilburç, documenting traditional songs and narratives. It provides insights into their pre-1922 Greek dialect and Muslim customs intertwined with Greek Orthodox traditions.

The musical repertoire of the Vallahades includes love, historical and ritual songs, mainly typically Greek songs from south-west Macedonia with Christian perspectives, such as the fall of Constantinople. The absence of bilingual songs or Turkish heroes indicates a long period of monolingual Greek life in Yeşilburç. Techniques such as melodic variation helped to preserve the songs despite forgotten lyrics. The study highlights the endangered status of the Vallahades' musical heritage, with only a few individuals preserving extensive repertoires. It fills a gap by highlighting the rich folklore and cultural heritage of the Vallahades, beyond the focus on their expulsion and ethnic origins.

Christoph Giesel's second contribution to this volume *Characteristics, situation and attitudes of the Armenians in Turkey in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (with selective references to Central Anatolia)* analyses the complex situation of the Armenian community in Turkey. It examines the historical, social, political, and psychological factors shaping Armenian life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These include the tensions between collective historical trauma and psychological repression, as well as between citizenship loyalty and minority status. It further explores the topics of social integration, discrimination, assimilation, and

self-assertion within the Armenian community, highlighting internal differences and ambivalences. Government policies towards Armenians and other minorities demonstrate ambivalence, oscillating between restrictive measures and occasional grants of freedoms. This has a strong impact on the debate within the Armenian community about adaptive behaviours, which are viewed either as necessary survival strategies or compromises with identity. Despite challenges, Armenians in Turkey have managed to adapt through strategic ethnic mimicry and adaptation. Istanbul serves as a community center for Armenians from Western and Central Anatolia, reflecting the diverse community dynamics across the country. Giesel concludes with an outlook on the future of Armenians in Turkey, which remains uncertain amidst assimilation and migration trends.

This collection of research articles provides an initial and still incomplete insight into the linguistic and cultural heritage of Central Anatolia. As demonstrated by Christoph Giesel using the case studies of Tatlıpınar and Akyazı, emigration plays a significant role in shaping the population structure of Central Anatolia. As smaller ethnic and linguistic communities are even more vulnerable in large urban conglomerates than in their traditional regions, further documentation as well as description is urgently needed. This anthology serves as an initial step towards this goal.

Graz and Rouen  
Agnes Grond  
Salih Akin

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