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# REACTIONS TO TURKISH IN A MULTILINGUAL DUTCH CLASSROOM

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## Introduction

One of the main points on the agenda of the international conference (Türkiye'de Anadili Öğretimi Semineri) and correspondents' meeting of the International Mother Tongue Education Network (IMEN), hosted by TÖMER and Ankara University, 15-18 April 1994, was the preparation of the 1995 IMEN conference on standard language teaching and multilingualism. The starting point for this conference will be country reports, written by IMEN correspondents, that contain historical overviews of reactions of standard language teaching on multilingualism and case study accounts dealing with the same issue on the level of everyday classroom practice.

During the Ankara meeting the provisional Guidelines for writing these country reports were thoroughly discussed, giving particular emphasis to the historical part. In order to give an example of what can be understood by a case study account of reactions of standard language teaching on multilingualism, I gave short impression of some aspects of the analysis of an incident that took place in a multilingual primary school classroom in the Netherlands. In this paper I will present this analysis.

## Context

The following contains a very brief account of the analysis of an edited fragment of the classroom tapes of the Dutch part of the international comparative German-Dutch case study 'Language Teaching in Multilingual Schools.' The full analysis is to be found in the Materials for the Hamburg IMEN/FABER Workshop (30.10.-1.11.1992)<sup>1</sup>. The fragment is from audiotape 12A counter 543-579, taped on Friday 22.5.1992. The total duration of the fragment is two minutes. It deals with reactions of standard language teaching on multilingualism in a multiethnic and multilingual fifth grade primary school classroom (age 8/9). In the class under study (as in the whole school) there is a rule that Turkish pupils are not allowed to speak Turkish amongst each other. The reasons for this rule are of a pedagogical-didactic nature (every Turkish word is one less Dutch and therefore potentially harmful for the children's second language development) and of a social-communicative nature (if

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1. See Sjaak Kroon, Davut: An Analysis of Reactions to Turkish in a Multilingual Classroom, in *Internationaler FABER-IMEN-Workshop, 30.10.-1.11.1992 in Hamburg, Material*, Hamburg, FABER/IMEN, 1992, 49-64; see also Sjaak Kroon, Yaş günün kutlu olsun: reageren op meertaligheid, in P. van den Hoven et al. (red.), *Taal in onderwijs en organisatie. Een vlootshouw van onderzoek*, Utrecht, Centre for Language and Communication, 1993, 87-94.

Turkish pupils speak Turkish, Dutch teachers and pupils cannot understand them). The classroom observations and the interviews with the teacher make it very clear that the rule is applied in a very conscious and strict way, but that, at the same time, expectations to the rule are possible. I wanted to analyse such an expectation, that is a fragment in which the teacher reacts in a positive way to Turkish in the classroom, and I found it in a lesson in which the birthday of the Dutch pupil Kees is celebrated.

The context in which the fragment takes place is as follows. It is a Friday morning. The children start coming into the classroom at about 8.26 a.m. All kinds of stories are being told, with nothing out of the ordinary taking place. Then, suddenly, a quarrel starts in which apparently Roberto plays a central role. The teacher gets angry and Roberto is sent away. He has to stay in the corridor for a while. At 8.32 a.m. the teacher asks the children to clear up their things and to sit in a circle. Before the teaching routines begin, Kees' birthday is celebrated. It is his ninth birthday and he is allowed to sit in the special chair. Nine little candles are lit by Selda. There is a banner attached to the blackboard saying 'Happy Birthday' and 'It's Kees' birthday' is written on the blackboard. Kees wears a party hat; he is really beaming. In the circle, next to Kees are Johan and Wim. The class is singing birthday songs, a total of nine, selected by the pupils. After the singing Petra, the teacher, congratulates Kees. After her, the pupils do the same. Some make a wish, for example Ertügrül, who hopes Kees will become 1.80 meters tall. Many pupils have made drawings as a birthday present for Kees and one after the other they give their presents to Kees. One of Kees' classmates, the Turkish pupil Davut, has made a drawing for the occasion, on which he has written 'congratulations' in Turkish. Pupils sitting close to Kees and Davut see this and want the text to be read aloud. The teacher enthusiastically joins in and first gives the reading assignment to Kees<sup>2</sup>.

- Teacher : Ah, read it aloud, Kees. (Ah, lees eens voor, Kees).  
 Davut : Almost at the bottom, below nine. (Bijna onderaan, onder negen.)  
 Wim : Must I read? (Moet ik lezen?)  
 Kees : Go ahead. (Lees maar hoor.)  
 Wim : Yes, me, eh, GARS GÜNI [.....]. (Ja, ikke, eh GARS GÜNI [.....].) {Wim tries to read a Turkish sentence aloud}  
 Canan : YAŞ GÜNÜN KUTLU OLSUN.  
 Davut : YAŞ GÜNÜN KUTLU OLSUN.  
 Kees : Aha. (Aha.)  
 Teacher : But do you know what that means? (Maar weet je wat dat betekent?)  
 Pupils : Yes, yes, hearty congratulations, congratulations. (ja, ja, hartelijk gefeliciteerd, gefeliciteerd).  
 Kees : Congratulations on your birthday. (Gefeliciteerd met we verjaardag.)  
 Teacher : Hello! Well, that's clever! (Goedeorgen. Zo, da's knap!)

2. The transcript contains a more or less literal translation into English of the Dutch text in brackets. Text that is read aloud is put in capitals; [text] refers to badly or not understandable utterances; [text] contains comments.

- Pupils : Hahaha, haha. {laugh loudly}
- Dara : He just guessed it. (Hij gokte d'r op.)
- Hacer : She does know, eh, a little bit of Turkish. (Ze ken wel, eh, een klein beetje Turks.)
- Teacher : Indeed, clever isn't it! (Nou, knap hè!)
- Hacer : Hhh. {laughs softly}
- Dara : [In fact he does not know it] but he can still understand it. ([Eigenlijk kan ie het] niet maar hij kan het wel begrijpen.)
- Teacher : Yes, jee! (Ja, poeh!)
- Ünal : Miss, a boy, a boy, he is called Erol, he knows Turkish and he is half Turkish and half Dutch. [He knows Dutch and Turkish.] (Juf, een jongen, een jongen, die heet Erol, hij kan Turks en hij is half Turks en half Nederlands... [Hij kan Nederlands en Turks.]

Meanwhile the conversation on what the text and the drawing look like continues and then the teacher finishes:

- Teacher : Yes, nice isn't it! So you can read it again anytime, Kees. (Ja, leuk hè! Kan je 'm nog 'ns nalezen, Kees.)
- Kees : Yes, [Turkish], nice. (Ja, [Turks], mooi.)

After this fragment, the offering, unwrapping and discussing of presents continues. Ünal offers a drawing with a typewritten Dutch text, saying 'From Ünal. Kees is a nice boy. He is very nice. Earlier on Kees was not that nice'. Ali has made a rebus: a drawing of a cheese (in Dutch 'kaas') with the formula 'a=e' (leading to 'kees'). Some children say that they have not yet finished their drawings. Kees blows out the candles. Then the children have to close their eyes as Kees brings out his treat: a little bag of potato chips for everybody. After the treat the children have a sandwich and brush their teeth. The teacher says, that after brushing their teeth everybody is expected to start working on orthography in their language book 'Taalkabaal' and their spelling notebooks<sup>3</sup>. The children start working. Meanwhile the teacher talks to Roberto whom she had sent to the corridor earlier because of misbehaviour and who now returns. There is a telephone call. Hatice walks over to Selda, Ünal talks to Dennis, Kemal asks Dara for an eraser, and Roberto, very irritated, says to someone: 'Why are you speaking Turkish man!?' It's 9.25 a.m., normal classroom routines again.

### Analysis

In this fragment all kinds of things happen. At first sight the teacher, in violation of the school rule, reacts positively to Turkish in the classroom. After a closer look, however, it is remarkable, that in doing so, she addresses herself almost exclusively to Dutch pupils. The reading assignment first goes to Kees but it is the Dutch boy Wim who, by being very assertive, manages to take the floor: he tries to read the Turkish text - as if were Dutch. The

3. See Project Onderwijs en Sociaal Milieu Rotterdam, *Taalkabaal*, Tilburg, Zwijsen, 1981 etc.

Turkish pupils Canan and Davut interrupt and read the text aloud in perfect Turkish. The teacher is still enthusiastic and asks Kees -not one of the Turkish pupils- if he knows what the sentence means. The teacher, however, does not react to the many-voiced and, I think, mainly Turkish-voiced answer 'Congratulations'. But she does react very enthusiastically the moment Kees says 'Congratulations on your birthday', saying 'Hello! Well, that's clever!'. The class, however, and especially the Turkish pupils, sense that something's up. Such enthusiasm only because Kees, who doesn't even know any Turkish, guesses the obviously right answer? That's too much of a good thing. There is some laughter, and the Iraqi / Kurd Dara says what they all think: it was just a guess, and not even a difficult one. Also the Turkish girl Hacer has certain doubts as to Kees' proficiency in Turkish. But why then would the teacher be that enthusiastic? Does Kees perhaps know some Turkish after all? She voices her doubts in covered terms by suggesting in an inquiring tone that Kees does know a little bit of Turkish. In doing that she gives the teacher the opportunity to go either way: she can indicate that she knows that Kees does not know any Turkish- and then Hacer is okay - and she can also insist that she thinks it is very clever of Kees that he knows Turkish, even if it is only a very little bit - and then Hacer is okay as well. The teacher chooses for the second option and insists: 'Indeed, clever isn't it!' For Dara, however, this is too much. He does not want to let the teacher down on the one hand but on the other hand he also does not want to accept that Kees is thought to know Turkish. He formulates an utterance that includes a potential reconciliation of the two conflicting points of view: 'In fact he does not know it, but he can understand it'. Again the teacher is offered the opportunity to straighten things out. But again she does not do it: "Yes, jee!".

What exactly is at stake here? Why does the teacher react the way she does? What do the pupils think of her reaction? Kees guesses the right answer and is praised for this time and again in an exuberant way. Dara and Hacer react to this praise because they do not understand what is so praiseworthy of Kees' achievement: he does not know any Turkish and he did not read it; he just answered a very obvious question with a very obvious guessed answer. Twice they try to get the teacher on their side, but she does not take any notice. In their attempts, I kind of hear the Turkish speaking pupils ask for justice: we are the ones who know Turkish; we know how to write it (see Davut's writing); we can read it (see Canan's and Davut's reading); we know what it means (see our answers to your question). Why then is it, that you do not give us the opportunity to show our knowledge by giving us a turn; why don't you praise us for our achievement instead of Kees who does not know any Turkish at all. This is our 'territory', so do grant us our success here. This is the world turned upside down: Kees is praised for his alleged knowledge of Turkish (of which everybody knows (that everybody knows) that it does not really exist) and the Turkish speaking pupils hardly get the opportunity to show and use their existing knowledge of Turkish in an open and accepted way.

This more or less implicitly articulated message of the Turkish pupils, that it is not Kees, but they themselves who are praiseworthy, since they possess a certain amount bilingualism, is explicitly expressed by Ünal in his story about Erol, who 'knows Turkish and he is half Turkish and half Dutch'. But this story also does not succeed. The teacher does not react to its content. Ünal's final remark ('He knows Dutch and Turkish') contains the explicit message that is at stake here: the fact that there are Turkish pupils who do not know

any Turkish - in a very meaningful context are able to guess the meaning of a Turkish sentence that is in that context very easy to understand. But the teacher does not falter: in a concluding statement she says to Kees that, given the fact that the Turkish text is written down on his drawing, he will be able to read it again anytime he wants. 'Yes [Turkish], nice' says Kees who does not know any Turkish...

### **Conclusion**

My preliminary and tentative conclusion is that the Davut incident, contrary to my expectations when I selected it for analysis, although it is about using Turkish in the classroom, does not necessarily reflect a positive attitude to the use of the Turkish language in the classroom.

The way in which the Turkish text is dealt with, however, and especially the role that is played by the teacher in this respect, show that 'accepting' or even 'stimulating Turkish' is not the whole story here. A closer look at what 'really' goes on in the interaction, in my opinion, shows, that the way in which the Turkish language is dealt with in the Davut incident, is a very limited and at the same time very limiting one. On the one hand the teacher sticks to a 'discussion' of the way in which just this one sentence has to be read and what it possibly means, and does not feel like going into a more extensive discussion about aspects of bilingualism, which is proposed several times by some of the Turkish pupils. On the other hand she almost exclusively involves Dutch pupils in the interaction on the Turkish text and hardly ever uses the actual proficiency in Turkish on the side of the Turkish pupils in the classroom. It seems as if it is, in her view, not the fact that the Turkish pupils know and use Turkish, which makes the language an interesting classroom topic and legitimizes the attention paid to it at that very moment. It is rather that she wants (some) Dutch pupils to be interested in Turkish and therefore talks them into a position of seeming to be proficient in this language that they do not know. In doing so, Turkish becomes more or less a curiosity, an interesting object of reflection for non-Turkish pupils. In this reflection then, the knowledge of the Turkish pupils with respect to Turkish is, almost by definition, not used, if not to say totally neglected. Neither the fact that there are Turkish pupils who know Turkish, nor the fact that Turkish apparently plays a role in intra-ethnic communication, and could probably also play a role as a language of instruction or as an ethnic core value, seem to be important. What does seem to be important, however, is the fact that there are Dutch pupils, whom the teacher makes 'pretend' that they (would like to) know some Turkish. In this interpretation of the attention given to Turkish in the classroom as being of a very limited and limiting nature, there does not seem to be such a big difference between the tenor of the Davut incident on the one hand and other incidents in the data, in which Turkish is treated in a negative way, on the other hand.

Finally I want to go briefly into the question why the pupils and the teacher willingly 'violate' the 'no Turkish in the classroom rule'.

In her research with Hamburg teachers, Ingrid Gogolin found justifications for not using languages other than German. Apart from the ethical considerations (we should all be able to always understand each other and therefore no Turkish should be spoken), these mainly concerned the functions of what happens in schools: 'Wenn richtig gearbeitet wird, wird

drdeutsch gesprochen'.<sup>4</sup> A logical consequence of this legitimation is that there are also times in education in which languages other than the dominant language can play a role, for example where the social-attitudinal function of school is concerned. The use of other languages can, at certain times in the educational context, contribute to a feeling of well-being for all, to a nice climate, to a feeling of being accepted on the part of ethnic minority children. At other times, however, when real work is going on, other languages seem to only be acceptable when their use contributes to a better understanding of what happens in the dominant language. The difference between these two types of educational situations is termed by Gogolin using the dichotomy 'Leben/Lernen' (living/learning) % 'learning', in education, by definition goes on in the dominant language; in living, in education, minority languages may also be used.

As was shown above, the Davut incident takes place at the very beginning of a school day. This is not to say that it happens outside classroom routines (the teacher has asked the children to clear up their things, class has started and the children are sitting in a circle and are engaged in a birthday party routine, singing songs and offering presents) but certainly that it happens outside learning routines: the birthday party routine is closed by eating sandwiches and brushing teeth, and after that spelling starts-back to business i.e. learning. Another indication for this changeover from 'living' to 'learning' might be fact that the teacher says to Robert, who at the end of the birthday part returns to the classroom after having been sent away because of misbehavior, that, through his own fault, he missed something very nice. My conclusion regarding the first question is, that the Davut incident is indeed one of those times in education in which 'living' is on the agenda, and at that moment, there is apparently room for using a language (i.e. Turkish) other than the main language of education (i.e. standard Dutch), and that there seems to be a shared understanding of this type of moments with the teacher and the pupils. In the brief description that I gave of what immediately follows after the birthday party routine, I cited an angry utterance of Roberto, blaming a Turkish pupil for speaking Turkish ('Why are you speaking Turkish man!?!'). The shared understanding of the arrangement not to use Turkish in the classroom apparently includes an agreement as to when exactly it applies: in celebrating a birthday party it is okay to use Turkish (living) but as soon as learning (spelling in this case) starts again, Dutch should be used.

There should be no doubt that the teacher is, in a very conscious and well-informed way, paying attention to the fact that she conducts a multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual class. She, in doing so, uses explicitly formulated starting points and aims and specific teaching methodologies and materials, which she can account for on a rethorical level without many problems. And still she does not succeed in overcoming in her teaching a Dutch tradition in which the Dutch language is the implicit point of reference for all educational efforts. In this sense the Davut incident reflects what Ingrid Gogolin, following Pierre Bourdieu, has termed as a 'monolingual habitus'.

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4. See Ingrid Gogolin, *Der monolinguale Habitus der multilingualen Schule*. Münster/ New York, Waxmann, 1994.

## ÖZET

15-18 Nisan 1994'de ev sahipliğini TÖMER ve Ankara Üniversitesi'nin yaptığı, Türkiye'de Ana dil Öğretimi Semineri'nin asıl amaçlarından biri, standart dil öğretimi ve çokdillilik hakkında verilecek olan 1995 IMEN konferansına bir hazırlıktır. Bu çalışma çokdilli ve farklı etnik gruplardan oluşan, ilkokul 5. sınıfta standart dil öğretimini inceliyor. Bu okulda Türk öğrencilerinin birbiri ile Türkçe konuşması yastaktır. Bunun nedeni ise her Türkçe sözcüğe karşılık bir Almanca sözcüğün az olması ve dolayısıyla ikinci dil gelişmesi açısından zararlı olması; sosyal iletişim açısından, öğrencilerin Türkçe konuşurlarsa diğer öğrenciler ve öğretmenin onları anlayamaması. Öğretmenlerden alınan bilgilere ve gözlemlere göre bu kural çok bilinçli ve sıkı bir şekilde uygulanmaktadır.

Cuma sabahı saat 8.26 civarında öğrencilerin okula gelmesiyle gözlem başlar. Sıradan olaylar devam eder. Bu sırada aniden bir kavga başlar. Roberto bu kavgayı başlatmıştır. Öğretmen gelir ve Roberto'nun koridorda bir süre beklemesini söyleyerek cezalandırır. 8.32'de öğretmen öğrencilerden eşyalarını düzeltmelerini (toplamalarını), o gün Kees'in doğum günü olduğunu ve kutlanacağını söyler. Bu Kees'in dokuzuncu doğum günüdür ve özel bir sandalyede oturmasına izin vardır. Kees doğumgünü pastasının mumlarını üfler, herkes iyi dileklerini sunar. Hediyeler verilir. Öğrencilerden biri Türk olan Davut üzerinde Türkçe kutlama yazısı bulunan bir resim verir. Kees bunun ne olduğunu Türkçe bilmediği halde tahmin eder. Davut ve Canan "yaş günün kutlu olsun" cümlesini okurlar. Öğretmen birşey söylemez ama Kees'e tahmini için aferin anlamında bir şeyler söyler. Bazı Türk öğrenciler de Türkçe bildiklerini göstermek isterler. Ünal ise üzerine Almanca "Ünal'dan. Kees iyi bir çocuk" yazısı bulunan resmini verir. En sonda ise kızarmış patates ve sandviçler yenir. Dişler fırçalanır, Roberto sınıfa döner.

Sıradan olaylar sürerken öğretmen Türkçe kutlamasına olumsuz bir tepkide bulunmuyor ama Kees'in bunu çevirmeye çalışmasını destekliyor. Böylece sınıfta Almanca konuşmak destekleniyor. Bunun yanında Türkçe bilen Canan ve Davut kendilerine bu cümlenin Türkçe bildiklerini gösterme şansı verilmiyor. Öğrencilerin Türkçe hakkında söyledikleri şeylere öğretmen olumlu ya da olumsuz hiçbir tepki vermiyor.

Şunu belirtmek gerekir ki, bu durumda öğretmen farklı etnik, kültürel ve çokdilli grupların oluşturduğu bir sınıfta olduğunun bilincindedir.