

Bulgarian Turkish Language Choice: A Facebook-based Case Study.

The ethnic identity of members of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria is enacted partially through language repertoire and code-switching choices. Language is, however, a less defining characteristic than in the past, and many Turks choose to use Bulgarian (and other languages) in ways that have changed rapidly in recent decades. In this talk we briefly survey the history of the language situation in Turkish communities in Bulgaria, before concentrating on a case study: the current social media usage of Bulgarian, Turkish, and other languages by several Bulgarian Turks.

The relative isolation of Turkish villages in Bulgaria, both socially and geographically, from Ottoman times through much of the 20th century, resulted in most Turkish women being effectively monolingual in Turkish, albeit Turkish with many Bulgarian loanwords. Men tended to know some Bulgarian, but generally with far-from-native proficiency. Even after Bulgarian language education became compulsory the language of intimate family interactions was Turkish, and through the ups and downs of nationality policy the public and private use of Turkish took on political significance. Eminov and Rudin described this situation in detail in several publications in the 1990s; see references.

Things have changed. The increased mobility and other social changes of the post-communist period, along with near-universal internet access, have led to younger generations of Turks who are fluent in Bulgarian as well as Turkish (sometimes more comfortable in Bulgarian; Yusufoff 2013) and who in many cases also know some German, English, or other languages. Enrollment in Turkish language classes has dropped precipitously in the last 2 decades (Željazovka et al 2012). Young Turks' facebook posts and comments are often partially or wholly in Bulgarian, both cyrillic and roman alphabets are used for writing both Turkish and Bulgarian, foreign words and phrases are used consciously for a variety of effects -- in short, language choice has become fluid and creative for this bilingual generation, and the ability to code-switch freely has become emblematic of Bulgarian Turkish identity.

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