

The Social Status of Turkish in Austria

A quantitative study on how ideological dividing lines are manifested in language attitudes

After the guest-worker treaties of the 1960s, many Turkish migrants have permanently settled across Western Europe, for instance in Austria. Originally, the guest-worker treaties stipulated that blue-collar workers from across Europe should be allowed to stay in some Western European countries as long as their workforce was needed, and then return home. In practice, however, this guideline has never been implemented in many countries. Many Turkish minorities have suffered from a bad social reputation ever since, which is reflected in limited career possibilities and the public view that they are unwilling to integrate (Pásztor, 2008; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2010; Wets, 2006). In this paper, I will present quantitative data of a Matched Guise Test (n=155) to outline how the so-called ‘myth of return’ (Savaş, 2010, p. 331) is reflected in the public conception of the Turkish minority in Austria.

In my study, I recorded short bits of Cinderella in Turkish and German read by one male and one female bilingual guise. Participants who have lived at least 3 years in Austria then attributed 14 different personality traits to the different guises in an online questionnaire, ranging from aggressiveness, religiousness or economic wealth to enjoyment of life. Dimension reduction with the help of factor analysis and structural equation modelling shows that the German and Turkish guises were evaluated fundamentally differently. Either the guise was depicted as a Modern European or as an Archaic Migrant. The Turkish guises were overwhelmingly depicted as the latter, which includes the belief that they are aggressive, uneducated and badly integrated. There is, however, an age-effect. For participants born after the 1990s, this overall stereotype starts to cease. Also, there appears to be a gender difference: the female Turkish guise is considered to be significantly more modern than the male guise, which is more prone to less integrated depictions.

I shall argue that participants’ depictions of the guises follow an ideological dividing line, which is itself linked to their ideological self-conception of Austria as a relatively young republic: Austria’s active nation-building since the end of WWII has actively excluded unwanted non-elite migration from poorer countries. The particular disfavour of Turkish migrants extends well beyond the 20th century and is rooted in the complex relationship between the Ottoman Empire and the rest of Europe.

References

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