Firat Ciftci

LING 23920

Jason Riggle

22 March 2019

Utilization of Language Through Deception and Humor for the Promotion of Sociopolitical Agendas in the History of Anatolia and Turkey

Introduction

Since humans have been utilizing language to communicate, deception and humor have played an important role in the content and context in which humans interact. Consequently, through the utilization of language by an increasing population of peoples, the way humans speak have been diverging from each other, practically causing other dialects and totally separate languages to be created. In today's world, there are countless different languages, each one having an immeasurable amount of dialects, with all of them clashing and contacting one another. Language contact, change, and diversification and change is not a new phenomenon; written records of languages being influenced by each other can be traced back even to the Sumerians and the Egyptians, yet this exchange of linguistic information is happening at a much larger, faster, and on a global scale since the beginning of the modern era. As someone who speaks Turkish as their first language, I am accustomed to language contact, change, and diversification giving rise to certain sociopolitical problems

and occurrences in history, which have mainly been transmitted through traditional folk tales and other types of written stories. Through these linguistic exchanges, I have noticed certain trends in deception and humor revolving around languages being utilized to promote and propagate certain ideologies. This paper will examine certain examples highlighting these occurrences and thus examine the reasons and effects behind language contact, change, and diversification, and how this shapes the overall sociopolitical environment of a nation throughout history.

Analysis: "Karagöz and Hacivat" in the Ottoman Empire

One of the first examples of humor being seen in Turkish culture and literature is a form of shadow play titled "Karagöz and Hacivat." The plays revolve around the communication of the two main characters, Karagöz (literally Black-eyed, IPA: /kaɾaˈɟœz/) and Hacivat (literally Ivaz the Pilgrim, IPA: /hadʒiːvat/). In the play, the two characters are complete opposites of each other; while Karagöz symbolizes the illiterate and rural population of the Ottoman Empire, Hacivat resembles the urban elite who is educated and is cultured in terms of Ottoman literature and poetry. Consequently, Karagöz commonly uses words that are more "pure" and Turkic, while Hacivat prefers loanwords from Persian and Arabic, as Persian had been the language of poetry, literature, and culture, while Arabic had been the language of religion and state affairs during the Ottoman era. This dialectic mirrors the Ottoman aristocracy's view of linguistics at the time. The sultans and his court looked down on vulgar Turkish (and other languages used by the commoners) as low-prestige, even

though they were mostly Turkish themselves. Instead, they opted to use a modified version of the Turkish language in which suffixes and common verbs were held intact, while the large majority of the language was replaced with Arabic and Persian nouns, adjectives, and adverbs, followed by a total replica of Persian morphology and syntax. The play "Karagöz and Hacivat" utilized this dichotomy for the purposes of humor, as it highlighted the use of language and how it affected everyone in their daily lives. In it, while Karagöz was painted as the more popular and likeable character, always having something ready to say and always willing to dispute anything thrown at him, Hacivat was always the eventual winner at the end. All arguments Karagöz put forward were tied to him being illiterate and uneducated, which was also associated with his use of the Anatolian Turkish language, while Hacivat, with his use of the Ottoman Turkish language, was always the educator, the civilizer, the smarter. Ultimately, the play was a way of directing public opinion of the elite class to be more positive and thus making the rural populous see and internalize the aristocracy as more prestigious than them, not just because of their monetary and militaristic power, but with their seemingly more refined civilization and culture as well. Through such, the Ottoman Empire was able to sustain the split between vulgar Anatolian Turkish and elite Ottoman Turkish as a way of maintaining class structure.

Analysis: "Karagöz and Hacivat" in the Republic of Turkey

With the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of the Turkish Republic after WWI, "Karagöz and Hacivat" had to change and adapt. As nearly all loanwords in the Turkish

language was trying to be “purified” with Ataturk’s language reforms, heavily Arabicized and Persianized Ottoman Turkish was no longer seen as more prestigious; rather, the historically looked-down-upon Anatolian Turkish was being accepted as the standard for all future Turkish communication. The new Republican Turkish government couldn’t accept the traditional “Karagöz and Hacivat” to continue unaffected by the reforms. Thus, the play was also modernized. This time, Karagöz was shown as the rural and illiterate Turkish populous who couldn’t understand the newly introduced Latin alphabet and who hadn’t replaced common Arabic and Persian loanwords with their “purified” Turkic counterparts. (Not poetic or governmental words in this case, but rather more daily words, e.g. “şimal” /ʃimal/ to “kuzey” /kuzej/ for “north”) Here, Karagöz’s perception and character got shifted from being illiterate yet Turkic to still illiterate, but this time reactionary, conservative, and against the Republican revolution. In contract, Hacivat became the beacon of progress and revolutionary sentiment, utilizing all linguistics reforms to its fullest extent. As being the ultimate winner at the end of all of the plays, through the combination of clever and humorous elements throughout each show, the Hacivat character managed to undermine and insult all arguments and ideas brought by Karagöz, thus making the Turkish population understand that the future of the language was one of Hacivat’s, not Karagöz’s. Common humorous elements included Hacivat acting as if he couldn’t understand Arabic and Persian loanwords that Karagöz would use, forcing him to repeat himself with the new Turkic counterparts, which is exactly what the Republican Turkish government aimed to inspire for

its people. Through cloaking the elements social engineering with humor and art, the Republican Turkish government managed to make the populous change and adapt its language and use of words to those the government deemed more appropriate. Overall, it is clear that throughout the history, "Karagöz and Hacivat" has been a prime tool for both the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey regarding the utilization of humor as a way of promoting a certain kind of sociopolitical understanding of language, ultimately aiming to alter the linguistics tendencies of the Turkish population. It can be confidently stated that both entities managed to achieve their purposes pretty well, as can be seen from the state of the Turkish language during both the Ottoman and Republican eras.

Analysis: "Nasreddin Hodja" in the Ottoman Empire

Another example of the utilization of linguistics coupled with certain elements of humor is the tales of "Nasreddin Hodja (Hoca)." (literally Nasreddin the Teacher, IPA: /nasɾeddin hodʒa/) Historically, Nasreddin Hodja was an Islamic cleric who was sent to the Anatolian Sultanate of Rûm by the Persian Shah in order to sow dissent against the oppression of the Sultan through enlightening the populous regarding justice and social order. Throughout his stay in Anatolia, he was seen as one of the most influential and also most liked figures, quickly becoming a legend in history with numerous tales being associated to him. Hodja is usually known for bringing the linguistic culture of puns, irony, and satire to Turkish folk literature, usually utilizing such elements of humor in order to make a political or social statement. An example of his tale is as follows:

Innocent Thief

Hodja's donkey was stolen. Instead of consoling, his neighbors were blaming him, saying,

"You should have locked the shed!"

"Didn't you hear any noises?"

"You should have tied the donkey securely."

Hodja listened patiently for a while, and finally said,

"Well, you are putting all the blame on me. Do you think the thief was innocent?"

Here, the ironic statement being tied to a certain social problem can be seen very explicitly. Even though the translation does not reflect the actual language being used, the way Hodja utilized humor to teach the people of Anatolia a certain social lesson can be understood. In Turkish, these tales are usually being delivered in a very plain language, which was also the case in the written forms of Hodja's tales found in travelogue's dating back to the 12th century. This signifies a very important concept: The tales of Nasreddin Hodja was not fabricated or distributed by the Sultan and his elite's Arabicized and Persianized language; instead, it was of the rural commoners, spreading in Anatolia from mouth-to-mouth in a plain and mostly Turkic language. Here, similar to the previous analyses given, language plays a crucial role in understanding the development of humor in early Turkish history. The manner in which language is being filtered down in humorous stories and tales act extremely importantly as to how effective they are in terms of making sure the humor is

being understood and thus appreciated by its target audience. As the rural Anatolian population internalizes the tales of Hodja, they also understand how irony and satire play into the construction of humor and entertainment through language, which ultimately enables them to understand a much larger sociopolitical message being transmitted in the bigger picture.

Analysis: "Primo, the Turkish Child" Short Story

Similar to the tales of Nasreddin Hodja during the 12th and 13th centuries, the Republican Turkish era during the early 20th century is known for its tales and stories that connect to a certain sociopolitical ideology. Once again, these stories utilize humor to live and spread safely under the radar of state oppression and silencing, which further proves that elements of humor play a long way in delivering certain messages to a large populous, even managing to last for centuries. However, some stories also utilize deceptive techniques through the usage of language in order to achieve a certain sociopolitical agenda. The short story "Primo, the Turkish Child" was written by Turkish author Ömer Seyfettin in 1920. It depicts a boy named Primo, who is born to an Italian mother and a Turkish father and showcases the boy's increasing affinity to Turkishness after the Italian invasion of Ottoman Libya. Having French and Italian as his mother tongues, Primo wishes to learn Turkish and read about all the Turkish khanates and sultans in history. When the Greeks capture Thessaloniki, Primo's hometown, Primo refuses to escape to Italy with his mother; instead, he sides with his father and thus sees him as a proper Turk. Ultimately, he finds an abandoned

pistol in a street in Thessaloniki and starts to guard himself with it every day, wishing that he would be martyred with his gun. He gets hostile toward other Greek and Jewish kids in his neighborhood, shouting slurs at them in broken Turkish. He stops speaking in French or Italian altogether, thus adopting Turkish as his new mother tongue and changing his Italian name to a Turkish one, Oghuz.

"Primo, the Turkish Child" paints a clear picture of early 20th century Turkish nationalism and consequently how the perception of language played a very important role in establishing the rise of nationalist and racist sentiment against other peoples of the Ottoman Empire at that time. Primo and his willingness to give up his mother tongues and instead start speaking a language he has zero knowledge in promotes the sentiment that the Ottoman Empire is Turkish, and all other languages are that of invaders and traitors. Thus, it doesn't matter what your ethnicity, religion, or background is; anyone and everyone can be a Turk through practicing the adoption of Turkish as their main language. Such ideology is highly deceptive regarding the actual realities of the world. Primo symbolizes how a discriminatory, racist, and ultra-nationalist sentiment can blur the lines between the science of language and pseudo-science, thus promoting a deception in every meaning of the word. In reality, it is not what language we speak that shapes our understanding of the world; rather, it should be who we are as a human being, independent of our ethnicity and linguistics state of affairs, that should shape our perception and world view in general. Primo acts as the clear and stark antithesis against humanism and equality without any and all types of borders

between human beings. Ultimately, the only synthesis that can be hoped for is a more universal and objective understanding of language, one that is not blurred through the use of deception in order to promote a certain, and usually harmful, ideology toward any and all groups of peoples.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper explored how language has been utilized through deception and humor in order push certain sociopolitical agendas in Turkish history. While some seem less problematic than others, all have the underlining idea of seeing language as a tool to be utilized, instead of viewing it as a simple human skill for communication purposes. It must be stated that these techniques range from 12th century folk tales to 20th century short stories, so such methodology can be regarded as timeless. A possible question that could be asked is about the nature of language choice: Is it only Turkish that is plagued by such phenomenon, or can all world languages have such issue occur to them? A more in-depth analysis of other major world languages is needed in order to tackle such concept; however, it is reasonable to assume that Turkish is not unique in this matter and that human nature tends to capitalize on anything it deems suitable in order to push a certain agenda to other human beings.

References

Smith, James. "Karagoz and Hacivat: Projections of Subversion and Conformance." *Asian Theatre Journal* 21.2 (2004): 187-193.

Öztürk, Serdar. "Karagöz Co-Opted: Turkish Shadow Theatre of the Early Republic (1923-1945)." *Asian Theatre Journal* (2006): 292-313.

Kilic, Sibel. "CONTRIBUTION OF KARAGOZ HUMOUR MAGAZINE (1908-1955) TO SOCIO-CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE TURKISH SOCIETY WHICH DERIVES ITS SOURCES FROM THE KARAGOZ HUMOUR PRACTICES AND ITS IMPORTANCE THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE TURKISH CULTURAL HISTORY." *Journal of International Social Research* 4.16 (2011).

Asilioglu, Bayram. "The educational value of Nasreddin Hodja's anecdotes." *Children's Literature in Education* 39.1 (2008): 1-8.

Sullivan, Patricia N. "Nasreddin Hodja and the Importance of Context." *Forum.* Vol. 40. No. 3. http://exchanges. state. gov/forum/, 2002.

Gawrych, George W. "The culture and politics of violence in Turkish society, 1903–14." *Middle Eastern Studies* 22.3 (1986): 307-330.

Turan, Lokman. "Violence and Death in Stories of War Period Writer Omer Seyfettin." *Online Submission* (2006).

Ersoy, Ahmet, et al.. *Modernism: Representations of National Culture: Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe 1770–1945: Texts and Commentaries, volume*

III/2. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010. Web.

<http://books.openedition.org/ceup/985>.