

Reviews

Gerjan van Schaaik: Review of Esin İleri, *Lehrbuch der türkischen Sprache*. Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag, 2007. XIV + 289 pages, ISBN 978-3-87548-344-4, Euro 29.80

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Gerjan van Schaaik, Leiden University

Aim

Lehrbuch der türkischen Sprache is a book intended for students who have a full command of the German language. This is an important condition because it is the language used for grammatical explanations and instructions to the exercises, as well as for the preface and introduction. According to the preface, the book aims to lead to “communicative competence for daily life, travel and professionals (teachers)” at A2-B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Furthermore, it is claimed that this course will require a beginning student with no prior knowledge of Turkish to invest some 220 hours of instruction (“Unterrichtsstunden”). In terms of the European Credit Transfer System this part of the work load (for classroom instruction alone) would be equivalent to $220/28 = 7.85$ credits. It is to be expected that some additional time should be allotted for homework and preparation for tests, et cetera. The (standard) ratio between instructional time and time to be spent on homework is however an unknown factor, which makes it difficult to calculate or even estimate the overall course load in terms of the ECTS.

Taking a quite different perspective, we could reason as follows: assuming four hours per week of classroom instruction plus six to seven hours per week for homework over a period of thirteen weeks (one term), the total workload of a complete course adds up to approximately 140 hours, which equals 5 ECTS. Given the size of the book, the complexity of the subject matter, the intended final level of competence, the number of exercises and the size of the vocabulary, I believe that the total workload of this course cannot exceed 10 ECTS (and comes actually closer to 5 ECTS).

Structure

The book is published in a nice, practical format and comprises twenty lessons, each of which is based on dialogues, grammatical explanation, exercises and a vocabulary section, all presented in this order. It contains a table of contents covering four pages, showing among other things which *conversational*

topics (such as greetings, shopping, asking the way, visiting a restaurant) together with their corresponding *grammatical issues* are treated in each chapter. Unfortunately, a register / subject index is lacking, to the effect that in order to look up a certain topic one must rely entirely on the table of contents. At times, certainly as long as one has not yet become very familiar with the contents, this might be a rather laborious enterprise. On the other hand, a very practical list of abbreviations is included at the beginning of the book. And at the end of the book there are two special sections. A “module” in which some vocabulary is presented in a diversified way: articles of clothing, vegetables, fruit and sun-dried fruits, and body parts. The second special section is the key to the exercises.

The book is enlivened by a multitude of illustrations, all well-chosen and well finished. They come in two sorts: drawings and photographs, and they are applied in the text body as well as in a number of exercises – their function, however, is not purely ornamental but intended as a graphic representation of things and situations to be expressed by Turkish words and phrases.

A special word of praise is in place for the vocabulary lists at the end of each chapter. They are well thought-out: some adjectives are presented together with their antonyms (and translations), e.g. *başarılı* ⇔ *başarısız*, and, where possible and useful, grammatical, derivational or phraseological information is given in red print, (e.g. to *otobüs durağı* ‘bus stop’ the item *durak*, -*ğı* ‘stop’ is included; *Anadolu* ‘Anatolia’ is followed by *Anadolulu* ‘Anatolian person’; to *eldiven* ‘glove’ the phrase *bir çift eldiven* ‘a pair of gloves’ is added).

Method

The teaching method underlying the way the book is organised is referred to as post-communicative: “das aktive und bewusste Lernen”, that is, active learning with a strong appeal to the awareness of what is being learned. This approach is materialized in the following sequence of activities: reading & comprehension, followed by listening & speaking. Apparently, these skills are to be developed under the guidance of a teacher, in any case where listening & speaking are concerned, for the simple reason that a CD with recorded dialogues is not included. Since the book is designed for instruction in a classroom (I think preferably by a native speaker of Turkish), it is not a priori suitable for self-study.

Evaluation

The main question for a reviewer of course books is always to what extent the ultimate aim as formulated in the preface is actually accomplished. No doubt that working one’s way through this book will lead to a thorough knowledge

of the most frequent structures of Turkish, albeit on an elementary / basic level. The final level is definitely basic, though not superficial. In my opinion, the student who finishes this course will very well be able to entertain a conversation on a variety of topics.

Moreover, the vocabulary contains some 2000 words, a number which is more than sufficient for most daily situations. And of course, a good proficiency in the skills of listening and understanding (passive knowledge) is always a precondition to the more productive skills such as speaking and writing (active knowledge). On top of it, the level attained at the end of the course is an excellent basis for further development. As indicated above, the final level is elementary / basic, since participles, converbs and other means of building complex structures are excluded. This circumstance precludes all attempts to read even the simplest novels, let alone newspaper articles.

Some criticisms

My overall impression is that we have a solid book in hand, rich in dialogues, well-chosen illustrations, good exercises, and a balanced and well-structured vocabulary. In short, it is a book which is most welcome to anyone who wants to make quick progress on a basic and not too complicated level. A few minor points already mentioned are the lack of an index and a CD which would facilitate self-study. But there is more.

On the level of grammatical explanations I certainly have a few complaints. Partly because a number of factors leave me with the impression that the author is not very well-versed in these matters, and partly because the great number of people who deserve big thank you's (page XII) obviously had no influence on the numerous inconsistencies and downright old-fashioned ideas about how to explain certain grammatical phenomena. Here we go...

Taking a contrastive perspective, the alphabet and sound system of Turkish is compared with those of German. On page 1 we read that "...most sounds of Turkish are familiar to the German-speaking learner due to his mother tongue; only few sounds of Turkish must be learned anew [...die meisten Laute des Türkischen sind dem deutschsprachigen Lerner von seiner Muttersprache her bekannt; nur wenige Laute des Türkischen müssen neu gelernt werden"]. Roughly speaking this is true, but significant and audible differences are to be found in the tasty details, which are unfortunately not always presented or carefully explained.

Take the *ö*, which sounds 'longer' in *schön* 'beautiful' than in *Dörfer* 'villages'. For a similar difference, compare the *a* in *Jahr* 'year' with the one in *Mann* 'man'. And what about the *e*, to which the sound value "open e" [offenes e (ä)] is assigned, as exemplified by *Ente* 'duck' and *Kätzchen* 'kitten', thereby ignoring the fact that the letter *e* in Turkish may stand for differ-

ent sounds, as in: *gel* [gel] ‘come!’, *şey* [šej] ‘thing’ and *eğmek* [e:–mek] ‘to bend’. Without any indication of which one to choose, the reader is at this stage totally left in the dark, despite the fact that on page 3 a single statement can be found on the quality of vowels: "All Turkish vowels are open and not long" [Alle türkischen Vokale sind offen und nicht lang], immediately followed by a series of remarks dealing with spelling.

On the phonological level there are some omissions as well. We mention only: aspiration of the /r/ in word final position (as in: *dur* ‘stop!’ and *var* ‘there is/are’) and aspiration of /p/, /t/, /ç/ in syllable initial position (as in: *kapı* [k^ha + p^hɪ] ‘door’, *tütün* [t^hü + t^hün] ‘tobacco’ and *çiçek* [tsj^hi + tsj^hek] ‘flower’). Nor is there any systematic treatment of vowel reduction phenomena in relation to accentuation, as occurring in for instance: *anlayamaz* [an + lɪ + ya + maz] ‘(s)he cannot understand’ and *söyleyebilir* [söy + li + ye + bi + lir] ‘(s)he may say’, et cetera.

Pages 3 and 5 depict cross sections of the human mouth, showing the tongue position relative to the palate and other points of articulation. In the light of the contrastive approach to the sound systems of Turkish and German, it remains to be seen to what extent these illustrations contribute to a better understanding of the mutual differences (not the similarities – these are irrelevant) between the vowels of Turkish and those of German. For example, a difference between the sounds *e* and *ö* on the one hand and *i* and *ü* on the other can hardly be distinguished on page 3. And contrary to what is stated on page 2, that the *ğ* is a "lengthening consonant" [Dehnungs-konsonant] (*sic*), it is represented on page 5 as a guttural obstruent.

The caret (^), merely an orthographical symbol which is not always consistently applied in Turkish texts, is said to function as indicating palatalisation (of a preceding consonant, that is), which is exemplified in İleri’s book by *gâvur* [gja: + vur] ‘heathen, infidel’, *kâğıt* [kja: + ht] ‘paper’, *ilâç* [i + laç] ‘medicine’ and *lâstik* [las + tik] ‘tyre’. This is in fact correct, but why it is not explained what palatalisation actually is, and next, why the effect of palatalisation is indicated (by the symbol "j") only for /g/ and /k/ and not for /l/ remains unclear to me. Also, there are some other (minor) problems with representations. The symbol "+" is used in the first chapter as a marker of syllable boundaries, but in the remainder of the book it indicates morpheme boundaries, although the symbol "-" is used in verb forms (e.g. pp. 30-31). So why is there one symbol for different types of boundary, and why are inflectional boundaries indicated by two different symbols?

Furthermore, in a very limited number of cases the *ğ* is used as a phonetic symbol and accentuation marks are used in lieu of a more straightforward representation of lengthening and accent position. For *ağa* ‘large landowner’, *değer* ‘worth’ and *yiğit* ‘hero’ we get on page 6 the awkward [á+ğà], [

dé+ğër], [yí+ğît] rather than for instance the much simpler and accurate [a:+a], [de:+er], [yi:+it].

As for other issues concerning grammar, I think that most things will work out well: Turkish is Turkish and there are many ways that lead to Rome. After all, grammar in a book of this kind is not an exercise in its own right, but should be seen as a supportive device in elucidating the structure of the language in a maximally possible efficient way, as well as a means to prevent overzealous students from writing up their own logical (and sometimes – in most cases due to a lack of sufficient data and analytical skills – illogical) systems.

Yet, there are a few other suggestions as well for the next edition of this book. For instance, the way the possessive suffixes are represented (p. 17) in the form of an abstraction, could be pursued one step further: *-(I)m*, *-(I)n*, *-(s)I(n)*, *-(I)mIz*, *-(I)nIz*, and *-lArI* (rather than the *ad hoc* and confusing *-lArI*). Why not following the same course as for instance with the imperative second person plural (p. 32, *-(y)In*), the genitive (p. 120, *-(n)In*), and the suffix for the future tense (p. 216, *-(y)AcAk*)? A similar level of abstraction could of course be applied for the paradigms represented on p. 67. Moreover, this would be in line with the common practice in this field.

As a second suggestion I would like to mention a small adaptation to the treatment of the dative (p. 44). Although it is correctly stated that the dative indicates direction, I fail to discern this semantic trait in verbs such as German *aufpassen* ‘to pay attention’, *fragen* ‘to ask’ or *schreiben* ‘to write’ and the like, nor in their respective Turkish equivalents *dikkat etmek*, *sormak*, and *yazmak*. Looking at the German examples, wouldn’t *Fragen Sie den Lehrer!* and *Schreiben Sie an die Tafel!* rather suggest that we are dealing with a direct object in the first sentence and with some location in the latter? Admittedly, this might be confusing, but there is a way out. Better examples are based on *schauen* ‘to look’ and *lachen* ‘to laugh’, and correspondingly, *bakmak* and *gülmek*. Why not include a simple thing like *Okul-a gidin!* ‘Go to school!’ at the very outset to exemplify direction and leave other usages of the dative, e.g. as depending on verb semantics or as used in combination with certain postpositions, for what they are – the intricacies of language?

Third, for a grammar the final level of which is elementary / basic, it can be expected that the bulk of grammatical explanations are related to inflection and that derivational processes are necessarily treated as a poor relation. Fortunately, in a limited number of cases the author has chosen to deviate from this practice. This has been a wise decision. Especially the suffixes *-II* and *-sIz* deserve particular attention on p. 69f. However, the treatment of the “privative suffix” (a rather unusual term at this level of instruction) is not entirely transparent. Surprisingly, the common German prepositions *mit* ‘with’ and

ohne ‘without’ are scarcely applied to render the meaning of *-II* and *-sIz*, and rather complicated solutions are offered instead. For instance, *başarılı* is said to be an adjective (*erfolgreich* ‘successful’), but no word about its application as an adverbial (*mit Erfolg* ‘with success, successfully’). Analogously, *dikkat* ‘Aufmerksamkeit, Sorgfalt / attention, caution’ leads to the derivation *dikkatli*, which could be translated adjectively as ‘aufmerksam, sorgfältig’, but which could also be rendered adverbially as ‘mit Aufmerksamkeit’ as in: "mit Aufmerksamkeit etwas beobachten" or ‘mit Sorgfalt’ as in "Allgäuer Käse, mit Sorgfalt produziert!". The same holds for the suffix *-sIz*: the form *başarısız* could simply be translated as ‘ohne Erfolg / without success’ and *gözlüksüz* as ‘ohne Brille / without spectacles’, rather than the long-winded and hard-to-see-through "nicht *bebrillt* bzw. nicht mit Brille, d.h. ohne Brille" or "not spectacled, respectively not with spectacles, that is, without spectacles". All in all, on the basis of such fragments it occurs to me that the subject matter might have been inspired by another book. In itself this is a good and common practice, which is however only allowed on the proviso that matters should first be entirely digested and reflected upon before being put in some other publication. Certain grammatical matters should, as it were, be reanalysed or adapted and given a "personal touch" in order to fit into the rest of the book.

As a final point in case, there is this everlasting problem of the negated form of the present tense (p. 105). Let me come straight to the point and offer a straightforward solution at a beginners’ level. Assuming the suffix *-(I)yor* for the present tense, verb forms can be built up in a predictable way: *yürüyor* ‘(s)he walks’ and *kalkıyor* ‘(s)he rises’. Now, ignoring any phonological processes accounting for vowel reduction in relation to the position of stress, we can postulate the fourfold negational suffix *-mI*, which is to exclusively precede *-(I)yor* – to be realised as *-yor* since *-mI* ends in a vowel, instead of the "regular" twofold set *-ma / -me*. Everything becomes now bafflingly simple (cf. the data on p. 105) without the need to point out that "a wide vowel is transformed into a narrow one, according to the laws of the Greater Vowel Harmony" [... das Zeitsuffix **-yor-** macht aber aus einem unmittelbar vorangehenden breitenVokal einen engen Vokal nach den Gesetzen der großen Vokalharmonie]. Expectedly we get: *başla-mı-yor* ‘(s)he doesn’t begin’, *bekle-mi-yor* ‘(s)he doesn’t wait’, *yürü-mü-yor* ‘(s)he doesn’t walk’, *oku-mu-yor* ‘(s)he doesn’t read’, *al-mı-yor* ‘(s)he doesn’t take / buy’, *ver-mi-yor* ‘(s)he doesn’t give’, *gül-mü-yor* ‘(s)he doesn’t laugh’, *öl-mü-yor* ‘(s)he doesn’t die’, *sor-mu-yor* ‘(s)he doesn’t ask’, et cetera.

To wrap up this section, the remarks made here are not intended to spoil the positive remarks I made in the foregoing sections: they are merely suggestions to help make a good book to an even better book in its next edition.