

Türkçe Sözlük [Turkish Dictionary], 12th Edition. Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, 2023, 2 vol., 3735 p., ISBN 9789751753977.

HALİL İSKENDER

Kırklareli University.
(hiiskender@gmail.com), ORCID: 0000-0001-6974-6538.

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The twelfth and most recent edition of *Türkçe Sözlük*, published by the Turkish Language Institute (Türk Dil Kurumu, TDK) in May 2023 represents a significant milestone in the ongoing evolution of the Turkish language, tracing its lexical development from its inaugural edition in 1945. TDK, serving as the authoritative body on Turkish, assumes a critical role in molding its path. This particular edition of *Türkçe Sözlük* emerges as a cornerstone in lexicography, offering comprehensive updates into the orthography, semantics, pronunciation, and practical applications of Turkish lexemes. Arriving a dozen years after its former edition in 2011, this volume encapsulates a wide array of linguistic shifts in Turkish, introducing new lexemes, enhancing definitions, and, notably, instigating discussion with its revised orthographic norms.

This edition of the dictionary represents a substantial augmentation, encompassing a significant expansion in entries, definitions, exemplifications of word usage, and other pertinent linguistic elements. The commendable efforts of the scholars (eleven professors of Turkology) and experts (ten TDK staff members) of the “Güncel Türkçe Sözlük Bilim ve Uygulama” [Contemporary Turkish Lexicography] Branch in the TDK, established in 2019, have been instrumental in this endeavor. Notably, the release of this edition coincides with the centennial celebration of Türkiye’s transition to a republic, adding historical relevance to its publication.

The twelfth edition of *Türkçe Sözlük*, comprising 25,000 printed copies, boasts an impressive array of 132,334 lexical entries. This total, excluding idioms and phrases, comprises 82,135 main entries and 18,133 internal entries, underlining the dictionary’s comprehensive scope.¹ Accompanied by 45,372 illustrative sentences, the aggregate word count, encompassing explanations and descriptions, reaches an astounding 1,756,396. The methods used in this edition

¹ In terms of its influence and orthographic authority, *Türkçe Sözlük* holds a similar status for the Turkish language as the *Oxford English Dictionary* does for English and the *German Duden* for German. When comparing the number of entries, *Türkçe Sözlük* contains about 100,000 entries, marking an increase from its 2011 edition’s 92,000 entries. In contrast, the *Oxford English Dictionary* features approximately 273,000 entries, and the *German Duden* has around 148,000 entries. Türk Dil Kurumu, “Türkçe Sözlük,” 11th ed. (Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, 2011); Oxford University, “Oxford English Dictionary,” <https://www.oed.com> (accessed November 13, 2023); Dudenredaktion, “Duden: Die deutsche Rechtschreibung,” <https://www.duden.de> (accessed November 13, 2023).

are well explained in a section called “Türkçe Sözlük’ün Kullanılmasıyla İlgili Açıklamalar” [Explanations for Using the Turkish Dictionary], which provides an insight into the lexicographic approaches used.

Amidst its various innovations, the twelfth edition of *Türkçe Sözlük* caused a real stir by first including and then quickly dropping the word *Türkiyeli*. The whole episode is a great illustration of the tug-of-war between the authority of dictionary editors and the huge impact of social media on how a lexicon evolves. The word *Türkiyeli*, defined in the dictionary as “Türkiye’de yaşayan halk veya bu halkın soyundan olan kimse”, translating to “people living in Türkiye or someone descended from those people”, became this big point of debate. It threw a curveball into the usual idea of Turkish national identity.² By recognizing non-Turkish citizens in Türkiye, it clashed with the constitutional idea that everyone in Türkiye is Turkish, regardless of their ethnic background.³ This dichotomy between the dictionary’s definition—based on actual language usage—and the constitutional stance was not just a contradiction, it seemed like a politically charged statement, sparking major discussions about lexicographic choices.

The online dictionary removed *Türkiyeli* on the day it was added, and the print version was immediately withdrawn from the shelves in July 2023. It is of interest to note that, despite these revisions, both the updated print and online editions continue to include words like *Almanyalı* (person from Germany), *Fransalı* (person from France), *İngiltereli* (person from England) and *Japonyalı* (person from Japan).⁴ This marks a deviation from the convention established in prior editions, wherein specific lexemes employing the ‘-li’ suffix, such as *Çinli* (*Chinese*) or *Koreli* (*Korean*), were utilized exclusively in instances where there were no distinct Turkish words for people of certain nationalities. However, for nationalities like *German* (*Alman*), *French* (*Fransız*), *English* (*İngiliz*), and *Japanese*

2 BBC Turkish, “TDK Sözlük: Satıştan Kaldırılan Yeni Baskı Neden Tartışılıyor?” <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/articles/c72079gr0lmo> (accessed November 25, 2023).

3 “In terms of citizenship, everyone in Türkiye is referred to as Turkish (*Türk*), irrespective of their religion and ethnicity.” *Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye*, art. 88 (1924); also reiterated in art. 54 (1961) and art. 66 (1982).

4 Türk Dil Kurumu, “Güncel Türkçe Sözlük,” <https://sozluk.gov.tr/> (accessed November 10, 2023).

(*Japon*), for which specific Turkish demonyms already exist, such words were traditionally not included. This raises the question of why these place-name-based words (*Almanyalı*, *Fransalı*, etc.) are included, especially since they did not exist in previous editions. The decision to omit *Türkiyeli* while including ‘-li’ suffixed words for people from over 190 countries needs a clear explanation from the TDK.⁵

The latest edition of *Türkçe Sözlük* not only found itself in the middle of this controversy, but also updated itself to reflect changing social and technological contexts. These updates include adding new words and an effort to remove language considered sexist or discriminatory. These progressive amendments are in line with global trends in lexicography, showing a move toward more inclusive and respectful language in dictionaries everywhere. While these advancements are indeed commendable and crucial, they do not constitute the primary focus of this particular review.

The most striking aspect of the 2023 edition of *Türkçe Sözlük* lies in the area of spelling reform. Of the sixteen orthographic changes introduced in the dictionary, a significant portion—nine changes—relate to the treatment of compound words. One notable shift is in the presentation of certain compound constructs: five compounds that were previously presented as separate entities are now separated into separate components, while four compounds that were previously written as separate elements have been merged into singular forms

5 Intriguingly, *Türkçe Sözlük* presents certain phonetically unusual instances, such as the term *Arnavutluklu* for a person from Albania, despite the existence of the specific and established term *Arnavut* for Albanians. Concurrently, the dictionary exhibits a notable omission of designations for people from tens of countries, including but not limited to *Gambiyalı* (*Gambian*), *İzlandalı* (*Icelander*), *Eritreli* (*Eritrean*), and *Haitili* (*Haitian*). It also lacks entries for all nationalities associated with the island nations in the Pacific. This absence and the inconsistency in the inclusion of certain national descriptors, while excluding others, raises questions about the criteria employed by the TDK in the compilation of the dictionary.

(1) a. Separation of formerly single orthographic words

<i>ak zambak</i> < * <i>akzambak</i>	“Madonna lily”
<i>hasır altı</i> (<i>et-</i>) < * <i>hasıraltı</i> (<i>et-</i>)	“to shelve”
<i>yeşil biber</i> < * <i>yeşilbiber</i>	“green pepper”
<i>yeşil soğan</i> < * <i>yeşilsoğan</i>	“spring onion”
<i>yeşil zeytin</i> < * <i>yeşilzeytin</i>	“green olive”

b. Combination of formerly separate orthographic words

<i>akçaarmut</i> < * <i>akça armudu</i> ⁶	“a type of pear”
<i>Marmaraereğlisi</i> < * <i>Marmara Ereğlisi</i>	“a town in Türkiye”
<i>sultanefendi</i> < * <i>sultan efendi</i>	“Ottoman princess”
<i>yakantop</i> < * <i>yakan top</i>	“dodgeball”

These recent orthographic revisions in *Türkçe Sözlük* represent a nuanced and somewhat arbitrary evolution in the treatment of compound words within the Turkish orthographic system, reflecting in part contemporary trends and usage patterns. The evolution of the spelling of compound words has been a consistent theme throughout the eleven previous editions of the dictionary, with significant controversies arising, especially in the 1980s. The orthography of compound words in Turkish continues to be a contentious issue, with no clear consensus within the linguistic community. This ongoing debate and the historical context of previous changes suggest that these latest changes are not entirely without precedent and can be rationalized within the broader context of the TDK’s spelling policies.

In addition, the dictionary has introduced changes to four lexemes, each involving a single letter change to accommodate the pronunciation preferences of specific groups who are the primary users of the words in question:

⁶ Differing from other examples, *akça armudu* also involves the omission of a suffix. This morphological alteration is noteworthy as it encompasses two distinct types of noun phrases: syntactically, *akça* functions as a noun in **akça armudu* and as an adjective in *akçaarmut*. This might also be a result of a pragmatic trend towards dropping the possessive suffix from the head noun in compound nouns, as seen in examples like *Sümbül Sokağı* “Sümbül Street” evolving into *Sümbül Sokak*. In either case, it seems prudent that **akça armudu* should be retained as an alternative listing in the dictionary.

- (2) *Doğubayazıt* < **Doğubeyazıt* "a town in Türkiye"
çi börek < *çiğ börek* "a type of pastry"
Yörük < *Yürük* "an Anatolian nomadic group"
boy pos < *boy bos* "stature"

These changes, unlike those concerning compounds, have not caused controversy because they primarily concern alternative lexical choices rather than issues of spelling. A notable example is the change of **Doğubeyazıt* to *Doğubayazıt*. This lexeme refers to a city in the eastern part of Türkiye. The shift in pronunciation preference among the town's residents, who prefer an 'a' sound to an 'e' in the latter part of the name, underscores the basis for this change. The city's name includes *Bayazıt*, a male proper name with various spellings, including *Beyazıt*, *Bayezid*, and *Beyazit*, among others. Given the prevalence of these different spellings, changing the name of the city is seen as a relatively simple decision that reflects evolving local preferences and pronunciation patterns rather than any significant lexicographical dispute. This exemplifies the dictionary's responsiveness to linguistic variation and community preference.

The discussion extends to the lexeme *çi börek*, a traditional Crimean Tatar pastry, particularly celebrated in Eskişehir. The prevailing pronunciation in this city features a short 'i' sound, in contrast to the longer 'i' typically used in the rest of the country. The inclusion of the letter 'ğ' in the original spelling suggests a prolonged 'i' sound. The revised spelling in the dictionary, aligning with the pronunciation prevalent among those who predominantly cook and consume this dish, thus opts for *çi börek*.⁷ However, this adjustment introduces a linguistic challenge: unlike *çiğ* (meaning "raw"), **çi* does not constitute a meaningful word in Turkish. Consequently, the rationale for writing *çi börek* as two separate words is questionable. In Turkish orthography, typically, only reduplicated forms are written as separate yet dependent words, despite being individually meaningless. Since **çi* is not a reduplicated form, its separation in *çi börek* could misleadingly imply that **çi* should exist as an independent entry in the dictionary. A more acceptable spelling, in line with the principles of Turkish

7 TRT News, "Eskişehir Halkı TDK'nın 'Çi Börek' Güncellemesini Olumlu Karşıladi," <https://www.trthaber.com/foto-galeri/eskisehir-halki-tdknin-ci-borek-guncellemesini-olumlu-karsiladi/58103/sayfa-1.html> (accessed October 8, 2023).

lexicography and orthography, might be **çibörek* unless TDK provides a specific definition or rationale for the standalone use of **çi*.

The third lexical modification in *Türkçe Sözlük*, concerning the lexeme *yörük*, similarly aligns with the pronunciation predominantly used by the Yörük people themselves. This change, where ‘ü’ is replaced with ‘ö’, mirrors the earlier discussed adjustments, the alteration from ‘e’ to ‘a’ and the omission of ‘ğ’. This specific transformation reflects the lexicon’s responsiveness to the linguistic preferences of the primary users of the lexeme. Notably, however, in compounds like *yürük semai* “a form in Turkish classical music”, which incorporate the same root word, the adapted form *yörük* is not yet recognized as acceptable. While this might initially appear contradictory, it is justifiable considering the distinct contexts and usages of these lexemes. *Yürük semai* is a specific term with established connotations and usage, differentiating it from the standalone word *yörük*. Nevertheless, it could be argued that TDK should consider extending the same level of optionality offered to *yörük* and *yürük* to the compound form *yürük semai* and a potential **yörük semai*.

The final lexeme under discussion, characterized as a reduplicated form where the second component lacks independent meaning, presents an intriguing case. In its older version *boy bos*, the use of ‘b’ seemed more congruent with the concept of reduplication, especially as it also encompassed ‘b’ in its structure *boy*. However, the preference for ‘p’ over ‘b’ in pronunciation among younger generations –who are presumably the primary users of that word or have particular interests in it– justifies the updated spelling. The incorporation of these new forms into everyday language use points to a broader orthographic trend, highlighting TDK’s sensitivity to and alignment with local and demographic linguistic patterns. Notably, with the exception of *Doğubayazıt*, where optional spellings might introduce bureaucratic complexities, the new edition of the dictionary offers flexibility. It allows for the use of either traditional or revised spellings for the other three words, thus accommodating diverse preferences and practices within the Turkish-speaking community.

Now let us turn our attention to the third type of spelling update:

(3) *kayyim* < *kayyum* “trustee, custodian”

This word, a loanword from Arabic, is conventionally not pronounced with an ‘u’ sound. Intriguingly, *Kayyum* exists independently in Turkish, albeit with a distinct meaning of “self-existing, a name of God”. The older spelling *kayyum* appears to be influenced by the unexpectedly prevalent pronunciation, which resonates with the similar-sounding *Kayyum*. TDK’s approach, in this instance, seems to be an effort to align the word’s spelling with Turkish phonotactic rules while maintaining fidelity to its original form as the choice of *kayyim* aligns with the principle of Turkish labial harmony and is closer to the word’s original pronunciation in its source language.

This change is reflective of a broader pattern observed in the evolution of Turkish spelling since the major orthographic reforms of 1945. Prior editions of the dictionary featured words like **hayın* and **aptés* instead of the current forms *hain* and *abdest*. Despite the older spellings being arguably more pronunciation-friendly and common, the current forms more accurately represent the preferred standard pronunciations and are increasingly prevalent. This trend indicates an attempt to align post-1928 alphabet reform spellings more closely with Turkish phonotactics, distinct from older orthographic conventions. However, the modification of previous forms in this manner has often lacked clear justification, presenting challenges in establishing a coherent and consistent orthography. The specific choice to favor *kayyim* over *kayyum* exemplifies this deliberate approach, underscoring an effort to establish a consistent spelling system. Nevertheless, this preference appears to be at odds with subsequent spelling updates:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------|
| (4) <i>pile</i> < <i>*pili</i> | “pleat” |
| <i>ünvan</i> < <i>*unvan</i> | “title” |

The former word *pile* in (4) is a loanword from French. It has been in use for more than a century, long before Türkiye switched to the Latin alphabet. It originally came from the French word *pli*, and immediately, it got a Turkish twist, becoming **pili* with an intervening ‘i’ sound. But the majority of Turkish speakers say *pile* instead of **pili*, even though **pili* is a possible in the Turkish phonotactics. Naturally, loanwords from Western languages into Turkish go through a process of adaptation. Often Turkish exhibits a variation of loanwords between more vs. less source-like pronunciations.

Take the word *makine* “machine” for instance. It used to be spelled **makina*, apparently inspired by the Italian pronunciation and spelling as the word was

borrowed from that language. However, it later shifted to *makine*, probably influenced by the French spelling. Both the Italian-inspired and French-inspired pronunciations are quite popular, but the previous **makina* spelling is no longer acceptable. Same with **pili*, it has been replaced by *pile*, but this change is based on the current pronunciation of the word, not on any influence from another language. What is really interesting and unjustifiable is that the current edition of the dictionary still lists the original French *pli* as an option, even though **pili* has been dropped.

The case of *pili* brings up the question of consistency in the standardization of loanwords of Western origin in Turkish. If the transformation of **pili* to *pile* was sanctioned on the basis of popular usage, why not extend this principle of orthographic modification to other recently borrowed Western words, especially when phonotactic considerations are evident? This question highlights a potential inconsistency in the orthographic policy of the TDK. For example, the word *egzoz*, adapted from the English word “exhaust”, does not correspond to its typical pronunciation in Turkish, with the majority articulating it with a ‘k’ or ‘s’ sound (**eksoz*). Similarly, *şoför*, adapted from French “chauffeur”, poses challenges due to its discordance with both palatal and labial vowel harmonies in Turkish, leading to alternative pronunciations such as **şöför* or **şofer*. The word *şarj*, adapted from French “charge”, also demonstrates this phonotactic tension, as the consonant cluster ‘rj’ is not customary in Turkish, resulting in the common pronunciation **şarz*. These examples illustrate widespread deviations from the phonotactic norms of Turkish. This raises the question of whether it would be more consistent and coherent for the TDK to revise the orthographic representations of such loanwords to more closely match their prevalent pronunciations, thereby reflecting the dynamic nature of the language and its adaptation to the phonetic and phonological constraints of Turkish.

In the context of linguistic evolution, the spelling update observed in the lexeme **unvan* mentioned in (4) deserves a special analysis. Far from being a neologism, this lexeme is a deeply rooted loanword from Arabic. The older form **unvan*, which reflects a pronunciation with an initial ‘u’, shows a closer alignment with the source language. Both **unvan* and *ünvan* are seamlessly integrated into Turkish; however, a comparative linguistic assessment suggests

that **unvan* is more congruent with Turkish, primarily because it adheres to the principle of palatal harmony, a feature that is disrupted in the *ünvan* variant.⁸

This change from **unvan* to *ünvan* stands in stark contrast to the change from *kayyum* to *kayım*, where the change was made to reflect the original form of the word despite common pronunciation trends. This inconsistency is a minor problem compared to the more significant challenges it poses. The change of **unvan* to *ünvan* in the latest dictionary edition represents a critical and potentially problematic shift in linguistic policy, opening the door to a myriad of complex issues in the realm of language standardization and etymological fidelity. This type of orthographic change is peculiar and unprecedented, as it has not, to the best of our knowledge, been documented in any of the previous eleven editions of the dictionary.

It is essential to recognize that the Turkish writing system, while not strictly deep, does not adhere to the criteria of a shallow orthography either.⁹ This characteristic is evident not only in the representation of individual words but also, and perhaps more significantly, in the orthographic treatment of various suffixes, which often diverge from their phonetic realizations. The decision to amend the spelling of **unvan* to better align it with its common pronunciation raises a pivotal question: why should this principle not be applied uniformly to other lexical items and morphemes within the language? Such an approach could potentially lead to orthographic disarray. However, it is incumbent upon the TDK to articulate the rationale behind its selective approach to orthographic reform. For instance, why are words like *meşhur* "famous", *bayağı* "quite", and *baskın* "dominant", commonly pronounced as **meşur*, **baya*, and **başgın*, respectively, not subject to similar spelling adjustments?

Furthermore, if we start changing spellings based on how the younger crowd pronounces words, the whole idea of 'correct' pronunciation and spelling gets fluid. I know that it is naturally always the younger generations that will bring

⁸ Interestingly, the prevalence of the *ünvan* pronunciation, especially among younger demographics, can be attributed to a phenomenon known as folk etymology. This process has seemingly forged a linguistic connection between *ün* (meaning "fame") and **unvan* (meaning "title"), influencing the phonetic shift towards *ünvan*.

⁹ Halil İskender, "Beyond Binary: Rethinking Orthographic Depth Through the Lens of Turkish Orthography," *Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları*, no. 28 (2023): 381.

change in a language and that is an inevitable fact. However, this idea really shakes up how we think about teaching standardized pronunciation in schools. If younger people are shortening vowels that used to be long, should we still be teaching the old-school way of saying them? It points to the need for a clear and open policy on language that keeps up with how people are actually using it and what that means for teaching it and writing it down.

Now, moving towards a phonetic way of writing things in Turkish, like we are seeing with the recent changes in *Türkçe Sözlük*, brings up some big questions about keeping the language stable and connected to its history. For someone who has been speaking, teaching, and marking papers in Turkish, switching from the spelling **unvan* to *ünvan* represents a significant paradigm shift.¹⁰ Pertinent questions arise regarding the genesis of this orthographic modification. For example, who wanted this change and why? Were there any individuals against this change, and what were their counterarguments? And why is **unvan* not still an option in the dictionary when other words have alternatives listed?¹¹ Do we have the records of these scholarly investigations? TDK needs to be more open about how they make these spelling decisions. If they had discussions where everyone could share their views and reasons, people might be more on board with these changes. The idea is to make the process more democratic and to facilitate a smoother transition for individuals as they adapt to revised spellings of words that have been a part of their vocabulary for their entire lives.

The latest edition of *Türkçe Sözlük*, along with its online version, signifies a substantial shift from the traditionally cautious approach of the TDK. Its impact

¹⁰ In regards to its pronunciation, a point of contention arises. Myself, alongside numerous other individuals, persist on pronouncing it with an ‘u’ sound. Interestingly, the printed version of the dictionary, possibly due to a typo, suggests pronouncing it with an ‘u’ as well (p. 3440). However, the online version of the dictionary asserts that using an ‘u’ sound in this case is incorrect, favoring the ‘ü’ sound instead. This discrepancy raises questions about the rationale for replacing an apparently correct pronunciation with one that is deemed incorrect.

¹¹ This question gains particular significance given that *Türkçe Sözlük* appears to lack a consistent policy regarding the provision of alternative spellings. As seen in the forms at issue, in some instances, the dictionary introduces new spellings while retaining older ones; in others, it does not. Providing alternative spellings alongside the preferred version is a common practice among major dictionaries, such as the *Oxford English Dictionary*. This approach allows for a comprehensive reflection of both contemporary and traditional language use.

extends beyond mere linguistic updates, intersecting with broader political discussions, as evidenced in the *Türkiyeli* debate. Lexicography typically aims to maintain consistency, thereby ensuring stability. The audacious decisions in this edition, such as the alteration from **unvan* to *ünvan*, on the other hand, are quite pioneering, albeit controversial. This could initiate a trend where commonly spoken expressions influence their written representations and diminish the language's historical continuity. Equally important is the methodology of these changes, including the stakeholders involved and the transparency of the process. It is imperative to ensure that any updates are meticulously considered in order to create a delicate balance between contemporary colloquialisms and the history of the language.