



LEXICAL-SEMANTIC FEATURES OF TURKISH BORROWINGS IN ENGLISH

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Abstract: *This thesis examines the lexical and semantic features of Turkish borrowings (Turkisms) in English, focusing on their assimilation and meaning changes. Turkish words mainly entered English indirectly through trade, the Crusades, and colonial contacts, adapting via phonetic shifts, semantic widening, narrowing, and metaphorical extensions. The study shows English's high openness to these borrowings, especially in cultural and household areas, while highlighting the risk of gradually losing their original cultural meaning.*

Keywords: *Turkish borrowings, Turkisms, English language, lexical borrowing, semantic shift, semantic widening, semantic narrowing, metaphorical extension, language contact.*

INTRODUCTION

English has borrowed words from many languages throughout history, and Turkish borrowings (Turkisms) represent an interesting but less-studied group. In today's globalized world, analyzing how foreign words change their meaning helps us understand language development, cultural exchange, and the influence of historical events on vocabulary. This topic is especially relevant because Turkisms show how English adapted words from the Ottoman Empire through trade, literature, and colonial contacts, a process that still continues with modern globalization. The main aim of this thesis is to analyze the lexical and semantic features of Turkish borrowings in English, with special focus on their assimilation processes and semantic changes.

The integration of Turkish words into English traces back to socio-political and economic interactions, particularly during the Crusades (1096–1270), when Europeans encountered Turks in Palestine and Syria. Terms like "Saracen" entered English, initially referring to Turks but semantically widening to encompass all Muslims, including Arabs a common error in etymological attributions that overlooks Turkic influences on Arabic and Persian (Nasrullaev & Rakhimova, et al). By the 10th century, Turkic tribes like the Oghuz and Kipchak had influenced regions such as Egypt and Syria, where Kipchak became a state language under Mamluk rule, facilitating the transmission of Turkisms via these intermediaries (Sobolev, et al).

Trade and colonial ties further amplified borrowings. In the 16th–19th centuries, English merchants visited Central Asian hubs like Bukhara, Samarkand, and Baku, introducing words via Russian (over 60 Turkisms) or Indian languages (about 40, e.g., during British-India relations). Examples include "coach" (from Turkish "koch" meaning a covered cart, via Hungarian and French, evolving to denote carriages or tutors) and "caviar" (via French). French, as a key intermediary post-1536 Franco-



Ottoman treaty, channeled terms like "caique" (boat) and "turquoise" (gemstone), amid European Turkophilism that produced over 900 works on Turkey in the early 16th century (Nasrullaev & Rakhimova, n.d.). In the 19th century, Istanbul-based English newspapers like The Levant Herald disseminated more Turkisms.

Literary and diplomatic influences also played a role, with words entering via descriptions of Ottoman luxury. Notably, many Turkisms are not purely Turkish but include Arabic or Persian elements transmitted through Turkish, similar to Balkan patterns where Turkish mediated diverse origins (Sobolev, n.d.). From our point of view, the Crusades seem to have had a stronger impact in adding that first layer of exotic meaning to English Turkisms, rather than compared to the gradual and more natural cultural exchanges in the Balkan area Classification of Turkish Borrowings.

Turkish borrowings in English can be semantically classified into groups such as military, commercial/economic, cultural/household, administrative/social, and natural realities, echoing Balkan categorizations (Sobolev, n.d.; Usmonova et al., 2021).

Military Terms reflect Ottoman warfare, e.g., "yataghan" (sword) and "Saracen" (warrior, widened semantically). These often retain specificity but form phrases like "under the kourbash" (compulsion, from "kırbaç" whip).

Commercial and economic terms include "bazaar" (market, from "pazar") and "kiosk" (small shop, from "köşk" pavilion). Currency or trade items like "para" show adaptation.

Cultural and Household Terms: Encompass food/drinks like "sherbet" (şerbet), "coffee" (kahve), and lifestyle items like "hammam" (bath) or "pilau" (rice dish). Clothing: "turban" (tülbent).

Administrative and Social Terms: Titles like "bey" (lord), "pasha" (official), "shah", "rajah", or "sheik". Irregular terms: "bashi-bazouk" (soldier).

Natural Realities: ethnographic items like "pillow" (via Persian but Turkic-mediated) or vehicles like "caique".

Many are hybrids, e.g., "Turkey red" (dye). Borrowings may remain unassimilated semantically if denoting foreign concepts (Usmonova et al., 2021). According to estimates, English has around 400 Turkisms, with 55% ethnographic, 26% socio-political, and 19% natural (Nasrullaev & Rakhimova, et al). We believe English borrowed more cultural and household Turkisms (such as coffee, yogurt, sherbet) than military or pastoral terms, mainly because British-Ottoman relations focused on commerce, literature, and colonial rule, unlike the shared rural or nomadic life in the Balkan region.

The essence of this thesis focuses on the lexical-semantic traits of Turkish borrowings, including assimilation, phonetic/graphic adaptation, and semantic evolution (Sobolev, Usmonova et al). Phonetic and Graphic Assimilation: Words adapt to English phonology, e.g., "kahve" to "coffee", "yogurt" to "yogurt". Variations like "chibouk" (pipe, spelled "chibouque") reflect incomplete mastery. Diacritics may persist in partial assimilations.



Semantic Assimilation and Evolution: Borrowings broaden (e.g., “kiosk” from pavilion to any small structure), narrow (e.g., “horde” from tribe to chaotic crowd), or shift (e.g., “divan” from council to sofa, a metaphorical extension from Ottoman benches). Neutralizations occur when one word spans fields, e.g., Balkan “bayır” (height/mountain/forest) parallels English “turkey” (geographic to bird via confusion with imported fowl).

Degree of assimilation: Fully assimilated like “coffee” (indistinguishable); partially like “imam” (cultural specificity); unassimilated like “yataghan” (terminological). New meanings develop 50–100 years post-borrowing (Usmonova et al., 2021). Strong influence indicators include borrowed verbs or elementary words, with thematic analysis showing Turkish in food/lifestyle spheres.

In our opinion, this kind of meaning expansion and metaphorical use shows that Turkish words in English were shaped more by imagination, trade, and a sense of 'exotic' appeal than by deep everyday use unlike the area-based meaning overlaps often seen in Balkan dialects.

“Kiosk” is borrowed from “köşk” (palace pavilion), entered via French, narrowing from garden structure to newsstand, showing cultural adaptation (Sobolev, n.d.). From what I see, the way “kiosk” narrowed its meaning feels connected to how cities grew in English-speaking places during the 19th and 20th centuries unlike the more village- and countryside-focused Balkan situations in Sobolev’s work. “Yogurt” is taken from “yogurt” (fermented milk), broadened to flavored varieties, illustrating widening. “Divan” shifted from council to sofa, metaphorical from Ottoman courts.

Conclusions.

Turkish borrowings exemplify lexical-semantic interplay in language contact, assimilating phonetically, semantically, and morphologically to enrich English. Through historical ties, these words have evolved via shifts, widening, and neutralization, integrating dynamically (Sobolev, n.d.; Nasrullaev & Rakhimova, n.d.; Usmonova et al., 2021). This underscores English’s openness, vital for cross-linguistic studies. To me, the way Turkish borrowings have evolved in English tells us there’s been steady contact between the languages and also a long history of English speakers being really interested in the “Orient”. It is quite interesting for future studies to see if social media and the digital age are now making these word meanings change much faster and sometimes disappear quicker than before.

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