Communities of practice and lexical variation in the Montréal Turkish community

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This study examines the social organization of the Turkish community in Montréal and its influence on language use. The Montréal Turkish community has been growing since the 1960s as a result of various waves of migration. Bilge (2004) explained the fragmented structure of the community through ethnicity (Turks, Kurds and Armenians). However, conservative movements have grown stronger in the last two decades in Turkey and recent socio-politic changes are mostly based on religion rather than ethnicity. I anticipate that these sociological changes in Turkey have an impact on the organization of the Turkish community in Montréal and that I can observe the social identity of the members of the Turkish community in Montréal through lexical variation. To verify this prediction, I used a dual methodology: participant observation and analysis of the words used by participants to describe the structure of the Montréal Turkish community, the group to which they feel they belong, and other groups. The ethnographic study confirms that conflicts triggered by the socio-political structure and national ideology in the country of origin are determining factors in the organization of the Montréal Turkish community. Montréal Turks form an immigrant community divided into at least two communities of practice, traditionalist and progressive, each with its own socialization sites and its own discourse/style.

Keywords: ethnography, community of practice, Turkish immigration, Canada

1. Introduction

For the most part, previous works on immigrant communities in Montréal focused on long-established communities such as Italians and Greeks (Labrie 1991, Maniakas 1983, Preiml 2012, Reinke 2011). In contrast, the Turkish community is relatively young, allowing researchers to document its emergence. Moreover, the community members retain strong ties with their country of origin, making it possible to observe how social changes happening in Turkey affect the Montréal Turkish community.

Studies on Turkish migration movements have generally been conducted in European countries (Backus 2013, Çağlar 1995, Doğruöz & Backus 2010, Manço 1999, 2006; Manço & Franchi 2002). There is an extremely limited number of studies specifically focusing on Canada, and particularly the Turkish community in Montréal. Exceptions to this are Bilge's study in 2004 and Boyacıoğlu's smaller scale study in 2016. Unlike Boyacıoğlu's work, which was limited in scope, Bilge (2004) is a comprehensive sociological study of the Turkish community in

Montréal. It discusses the formation and development of this community and its social strata, as well as the effects of intra-community relations, interminority relations, and post-migration majority/minority relations on communalization. Bilge's (2004) study reveals the structure of the Turkish community in Montréal and highlights the role played by ethnicity within this structure. More specifically, this study shows that the conflicts, based on ethnic differences and ideological approaches, happening during this period (the 2000s) affected the community deeply. Ten years later, one can ask whether the transformations in the sociopolitical context of Turkey and in the profile of immigrants in Montréal have modified the social structure described by Bilge.

In this perspective, the fundamental questions this study seek to answer are:
- How is the Turkish community in Montréal currently structured?
- How do social changes happening in Turkey affect the community in Montréal?
- Which lexical choices should be made to accurately describe the social structure of the Montréal Turkish community?

I first argue that the socio-political climate in Turkey continues to play a decisive role in the construction of the Montréal Turkish community. I further argue that the heterogeneous structure of the community manifests itself in a linguistic perspective. Speech communities are often studied as monolithic and homogeneous structures. This study reveals the heterogeneity of the Montréal Turkish community. Two communities of practice within this emerging speech community were identified and shown to differ in terms of the linguistic behavior of their respective members.

2. Theoretical framework

In this section, I present the notions of community of practice and social identity. In addition, I introduce a model representing the reciprocal link between community, social identity, and language.

The community of practice (CofP) is a set of individuals who come together for a specific purpose. According to this concept, first proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and further developed by Wenger (1998a), a community of practice is a group of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn to do it better by interacting regularly. Taken in this respect, CofP allows for the modeling of subsets defined by common linguistic and social practices. Instead of seeing the community as a static unit or socially recognized category, it is a matter of seeing it as a social entity created through daily practices and gathering "around something" (Eckert 2000, Wenger 1998a, 1998b).

Another key concept in this study is social identity, because group behaviors are the outcomes of broader social processes in a particular context. In defining the concept of social identity, Tajfel (1974) noted that social identity it is a self-concept, derived from the individual's membership in a group, the knowledge they have from

being a member of a group, and their emotional connection to that group. As Blommaert (2005) states, in everyday life, the individual is continuously involved in identity rituals and "Who and what we are" depends on the context, the occasion and the purpose of different social situations. Language is not exempt from this contextual dependence; it appears in these social situations and changes in relation to social identity. Thus, social identity and language have a mutual relationship: social identity has linguistic content and this linguistic content is a sign of social identity. Eckert (2008: 456) summarizes this fact as follows: "different ways of saying things are intended to signal different ways of being." Thus, speakers do not express themselves in the same way in all social contexts, but rather adopt different styles suited for different contexts.

Based on these observations, I propose a model that shows the three main concepts – community, language and social identity – in a reciprocal relationship. In Figure 1, in the space between community and identity, all kinds of symbols, clothing styles, stereotypes, perceptions and representations form the ideological interface. Between language and community, language-centered organization and linguistic variations within the community form the social interface. Between language and social identity, there are the linguistic variations.
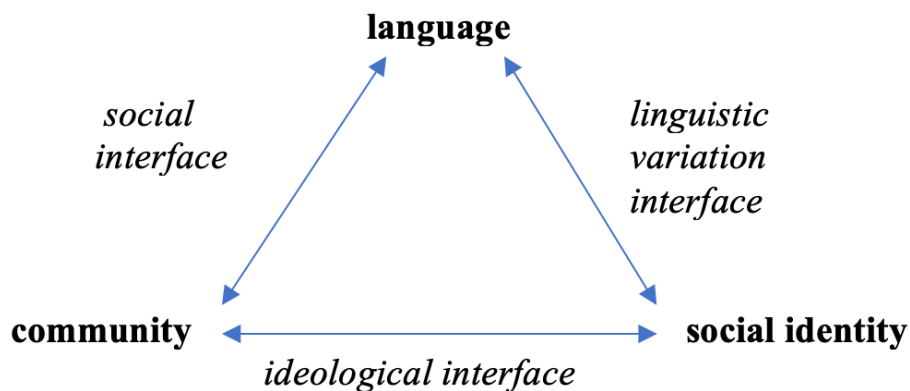

Figure 1: Model showing the interrelation between community, social identity and language

The main purpose of this study is to focus on linguistic differences, especially at the lexical level. There are linguistic differences between language and social identity that emerge through lexical variations. To put it more clearly, I predicted that differences in the daily practices and socialization styles of the Montreal Turks would affect their choice of words and that they would use different words and categories when describing the structure of the Montreal Turkish society and the subgroups of Montreal Turkish society.

In the next section, I present the methodology of this study, which is based on two complementary approaches: ethnographic description based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

3. Method

This study employed a double methodology. First, the characteristics and social dynamics of the immigrant community were noted and described using the participant observation method. Then, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 40 Turkish immigrants.

For ethnographic research, the method used in this study is participant observation, which is based on the direct or active participation of the ethnographer in local activities (Riemer 2012) and a process in which the presence of the observer is maintained for the purpose of scientific investigation (Schwartz & Schwartz 1955). This method was used to analyze the structure of the Turkish community in Montréal and to validate the model of the relationship between community of practice, social identity and language.

The first step was to participate in the activities of the Turkish migrant community. Subsequently, the author integrated the social environment by joining networks developed with the "friend of a friend" method. In order to conduct the ethnographic research, equal time was spent on the activities of each different group, and the dress codes and behaviors required by these events were followed. In order to meet the community members, the author used Turkish language instruction and organized classes for the children of Turkish immigrants from six to sixteen years old. Classes were weekly and lasted for two years. Native language instruction provided both an atmosphere of trust and mutual benefit.

The second part of this analysis is based on semi-directed interviews. To confirm the findings of the of the ethnographical observations, 40 face-to-face interviews were conducted. The interviews were conducted in Turkish, the mother tongue of the participants. The duration of the interviews varied from 20 minutes to 90 minutes. The participants were asked to choose the place and time for their interviews so that they could feel comfortable. I tried to include as many subgroups of the Turkish community as possible for the interviews, including members of different associations, conservatives, seculars, business owners, workers, and formally educated as well as less educated people. I interviewed the participants one at a time.

The participants of this study consist of 14 people from the progressive community, 14 people from a traditionalistic community and 12 people who are peripheral members. In this recruitment process, the following parameters are considered decisive in identifying CofP membership: self-identification; membership in Facebook groups; participation in cultural, religious, and political events; Turkish newspapers, magazines, and TV channels followed or considered reliable. According to the inclusion criteria, participants had to be over the age of 18, to have lived in Montréal for more than five years, and to not be an international student. Table 1 shows the social profiles of the study participants.

Table 1: Distribution of participants by age, gender and length of residence in Montréal

	Resident + 5 years		Resident +10 years		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Under 40 years old	5	4	4	5	18
Over 40 years old	3	4	5	10	22
Total	8	8	9	15	40

Building a gender balanced speaker sample was somewhat hampered by the difficulty in recruiting women. For this reason, as shown in Table 1, the speaker sample suffered from a shortage of female speakers (17/40), especially in the older group (8/22).

The interviews were structured in three thematic modules: the first module dealt with personal history; the second with language; and the third with the Turkish community organization and current events. In this article, I focused on the words used by the participants to describe the structure of the Montreal Turkish community and its subgroups. I categorized these words according to their themes and analyzed their frequency of use by social groups.

4. Results

In this section, I first describe the ethnographic findings and then move on to the linguistic analysis of the interviews. While the ethnographic findings consist of participant observation, the linguistic analysis covers the lexical variables identified within the framework of this ethnography.

4.1 Participant observation

In Montréal there are currently four active associations founded by Turks. Turquebec, which has been operating since 1964, consists of people who adopt western values and prefer a secular lifestyle. The Islamic Center of the Turkish Community, founded in 1991, is an association that adopts religious values favored by conservative Turks. The other two associations are thematic organizations. Instead of positioning themselves in relation to the secular/religious or progressive/traditionalist divide, they focus on certain groups such as women and entrepreneurs/business owners. These organizations attract attention from the members of the other two associations as well.

Based on field observations, the progressive and traditionalist groups represent the overwhelming majority of the Turkish community in Montréal, and they differ significantly in their activities. This presented the opportunity to access the two different CofPs through various activities. Table 2 presents the activities attended by the author. The table is organized based on the dominant group of each activity, not in terms of the number of members who participated in the activities.

Further, the activities attended by the author are separated into five themes: cultural activities, commemoration, national holidays, religious practices, and miscellaneous.

Table 2: Turkish community activities attended by the researcher

	Progressive	Traditionalist	Neutral
Cultural Activities	Golden Horn Turkey Film Festival Turkish Classical Music Choir		Montréal Turkish Film Festival
Commemoration	November 10th Commemoration of Atatürk	Celebration of the fall of Constantinople	
National Holidays	Youth, Sports and Atatürk Memorial Day Republic Day Victory Day		April 23, National Sovereignty and Children's Day
Religious practices		Friday Prayer Feast of Ramadan Feast of Sacrifice İftar	
Miscellaneous	Turkish language courses Cooking of Turkish meals Breakfasts	Production and cooking of Turkish meals Breakfasts Visits of Turkish government officials	The Turkish Peace Garden of Montréal, at the Botanical Garden

One observation highlights the binary structure of the community: Montréal Turks annually organize two film festivals in Montréal, the Montréal Turkish Film Festival (established in 2009), and the Golden Horn Turkey Film Festival (established 2014). The existence of these two festivals in the community reflects a socio-political partition rather than distinct approaches to film. The difference between *Türk Filmleri* 'Turkish films' and *Türkiye Filmleri* 'Films from Turkey' are seen as deliberate lexical choices. 'Turkish films' reflects a reference to a national identity implying a more nationalist approach and reference to a regional identity, while 'Films from Turkey' contains several ethnic identities (Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian, etc.) existing within Turkish territory and indicates a more neutral approach.

There is no television or radio station dedicated to the Turkish community in Montréal. However, the community has access to two printed monthly magazines which reflect the progressive/conservative split of the community. The first, *Our Anatolia*, emphasizes secular values, is published in three languages (French, Turkish, and English) and has been published in Montréal for 22 years. The second, *CanadaTürk*, is more conservative, has been published in Toronto for 13 years in English and in Turkish, and is distributed by mail across Canada. The main tool of

communication between Turkish migrants appears to be social media. There are three major active groups on Facebook: Montréal'deki Türkler, MontréalTurk and Kanada-Montréal Türkleri. The dual structure of the community is also reflected in these social networks. The group Montreal'deki Türkler stands out from the other two as being more focused on religion. Analysis of the content shared on activities and politics revealed a division in the community regarding religion. In the Montreal'deki Türkler Facebook group, invitations to religious performances and Islamist political discourse were more often found than in other Facebook groups.

In summary, it is possible to see a binary community structure driven by socio-political trends. This is reflected in community associations, cultural activities and media. The traditionalist group favors conservative values and a social life within the framework of these values. The progressive group places more importance on the adoption of the secular way of life and the secularity of the Turkish state.

4.2 Lexical choice

In the interviews, the participants defined the structure of the Montréal Turkish community. I present the data with a thematic classification and frequency analysis. Table 3 presents a list of the designations made by the participants, along with their frequency values.

Table 3: Most frequent words used to describe the Turkish community of Montréal

N=6	fragmented
N=5	decomposed, divided
N=3	not together, dispersed, broken
N=2	disorganized
N=1	small groups hating each other, individual, various, grouped, withdrawn, closed, not attached, detached, polarized, politicized, who only works, without structure

Table 3 shows that, overall, the most frequent words used to describe the Turkish community in Montréal circle around a general theme of separation and fragmentation. The three words most frequently used words across all social groups are "fragmented," "decomposed," and "divided" (translations by the author). Nearly every word, even those that occurred as single tokens, centers around the same theme, with the exception of "withdrawn," "closed" and "who only works."

The study also concerns the way that the participants define CofPs within the Turkish community in Montréal. Thus, I tried to see if there is a correlation between participants' social identity and their definition of CofP. Based on the idea that social identity has a function of attribution by self and others (Barth, 1998), one way to obtain information about an individual's group membership is to ask about their classification of Turkish CofPs in Montréal.

Table 4 presents the characterizations of progressives given by progressives compared to traditionalists. Table 5 presents the characterizations of traditionalists supplied by traditionalists compared to progressives.

Table 4: Terms used for progressives in the context of endogroup and exogroup characterization

By progressives	By traditionalists
kemalist laicist nationalist-secular oppositional	
pro Atatürk progressive modern educated	left-wing man westernist white Turk marauder elitist pro-Gezi

Table 4 lists the words used to refer to progressive people. Some are politically correct words used by both groups, such as 'oppositionals' and 'Kemalists.' Progressives generally identified themselves as 'progressive,' 'modern' and 'educated.' The words used by traditionalists when describing the progressives tend to be more negative, such as 'Westernist,' and in the case of 'marauder', even insulting. The terms used by of members of the traditionalist CofP use to describe the progressive group include 'Westernist,' 'white Turk' and 'elitist.' These terams are used to criticize members of the progressive CofP and to imply that they have turned their backs on national values by adopting Western values. The terms 'marauder' and 'pro-Gezi' refer to the 2013 Gezi protests[1], and suggest a negative assessment of the progressive CofP's support for these events.

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[1] The 2013 protest movement began on May 28 in Istanbul with a sit-in by about 50 residents of Taksim Gezi Park, which was quickly joined by hundreds of thousands of demonstrators in 78 of Turkey's 81 provinces. Due to its scale, the nature of the demands made by the protesters, and the police violence that was used against them, these demonstrations have been compared to the Arab Spring (which began in 18 December 2010 in Sidi Bouzid,Tunisia), the Occupy movement (which began on 17 September 2011 in New York City, USA), or even May 1968 (which began on 2 May 1968 in Paris, France).

Table 5: Terms used for traditionalists in the context of characterizing the endogroup and exogroup

By traditionalists	By progressives
religious conservative	
traditionalist believer Muslim	religionist Islamist right-wing man bigot

Table 5 lists the words used to refer to traditionalists by both groups. As seen, there are shared words, such as 'conservative' and 'religious.' Traditionalists identified themselves as 'believers' or 'Muslim.' Progressives refer to traditionalists negatively with terms such as 'religionists'; or even with insults such as 'bigot.' Overall, the participants mostly referred to political and religious distinctions when classifying the structure of the Turkish community in Montréal. In addition, the use of 'Islamist' and 'right-wing' in this category is a reference to the politicized attitudes of traditionalists in the context of religious conservatism.

Finally, the different responses of the participants were grouped under main themes. Following this grouping, I collected the excerpts and expressions interview participants used to describe the groups within the Turkish community in Montréal, according to eight thematic categories, which can be seen in Table 6.

Some of the words present in the data were used only by one participant, and thus are not listed in Table 6. When these single tokens are considered, as well, it becomes clear that a majority of the references are based on political characterizations (total N=14):

Table 6: Distinctive terms to characterize the Turkish sub-communities in Montréal by theme

Types of characterizations	Pole	Turkish terms	N	Equivalents in English
Political (N=35)	progressive	*Atatürkçü - Kemalist* *laikler* *solcular* *cumhuriyetçi*	5 4 2 2	pro-Atatürk - kemalist laicists leftists republican
	conservative	*AKP-AK partili-AKP'ye oy verenler* *muhafazakarlar* *fetöcü - fethullahçı*	3 3 2	pro-AKP/AKP voters conservatists pro-F.Gülen
Religious (N=34)		*dindarlar, dini kökenli, din kökenli, din ağırlıklı, dini duyguları yüksek* *kapalı - başörtülü* *camii cemaatleri* *dini gruplar* *aleviler* *dinciler*	8 4 5 5 2 2	religious people, people who have religious tendencies, people who have religious feelings wearing religious coverings / kerchiefied congregations of mosques religious congregations alevis bigots
Geographic origin (N=21)		*köylüler-köyden gelenler* *denizlililer* *konyalılar* *maraşlılar*	3 6 3 3	villagers/peasants from Denizli (a city) from Konya (a city) from Maraş (a city)
Socio-professional life (N=19)		*Öğrenciler* *üst tabaka / zengin / sosyete*	5 3	Students elites / rich people / socialites
Personality (N=12)		*snob* *eleştirel bakanlar* *modern* *toleranslı* *valizindekilerle duran* *akıllılar* *buralı olmaya çalışan* *hayata tutunmuş*	5 1 1 1 1 1 1 1	snobbish critics modern tolerant living out of their suitcases intelligent trying to integrate managed to survive
Ethnicity (N=7)		*Kürtler* *ermeniler* *rumlar*	5 1 1	Kurds Armenians Greeks
Education (N=5)		*eğitimli/iyi eğitimli* *üniversiteli/yüksekokullu*	3 2	educated / well educated academic/has higher education
Date of arrival to Montréal (N =4)		*1986'dan önce ve sonra gelenler*	4	Those who came before or after 1986

- **progressive:** *CHP* 'pro CHP,' *kendini kemalist zanneden* 'so-called Kemalist,' *elitler* 'elites,' *ileri görüşlüler* 'progressivists,' *hayırcı* 'naysayers'[2]
- **conservative:** *anti laik* 'anti secular,' *milli görüşçü* 'pro nationalist views,' *milliyetçi* 'nationalist,' *aşırı muhafazakarlar* 'extreme conservatists,' *islamcı* 'islamists,' *sağcı* 'right-wing,' *evetçi* 'yeasayers'

Another major theme is religious distinctions (N=8):
- **secular:** *dindar olmayanlar* 'non-religious'
- **religious:** *dindar görünenler* 'so-called religious,' *hacı-hoca* 'so-called clergymen,' *sünni* 'Sunni,' *süleymancılar* 'solimanists, name of a congregation,' *kırklar* 'kirklar, name of a congregation,' *tarikat bağlantılı* 'member of congregation,' *mezhep farkı* 'different congregations'

In addition to these, geographic distinctions (N=6):
- **urban:** *şehir kökenli* 'people with urban background'
- **rural:** *doğulu* 'eastern,' *tarladan gelenler* 'farmland people,' *hemşehri* 'compatriots,' *taşralı* 'provincial,' *kırsal kesim* 'rural'

and socio-professional characterizations (N=11):
- **wealthier class:** *iyi işleri olanlar* 'those who have good jobs,' *profesyoneller* 'professionals,' *akademisyen* 'academics,' *doktor* 'doctor,' *mühendis* 'engineer'
- **less wealthy class:** *kamyon şoförü* 'truck driver,' *fabrika işçisi* 'factory worker,' *serbest göçmen* 'free immigrant,' *işçi sınıfı* 'working class,' *çalışmaya gelenler* 'come to work,' *çalışanlar* 'workers'

When classifying the structure of the Turkish community in Montréal, participants mostly referred to political (N=35; N=13 progressists, N=14 traditionalists and N=8 peripheral members) and religious (tN=34; N=10 progressists, N=21 traditionalists and N=3 peripheral members) distinctions. The high frequency of political and religious themes is consistent with previously identified CofPs.

The results underline the importance of politics in defining the two groups. With regard to religion, the situation is quite different. Many references are made to the strength and practice of religious beliefs, and the traditionalist group is chiefly defined through these attributions. The fact that 'non-religious' is only used to describe the progressive group, and that it is used only once, indicates that the religious distinction is more related to the influence of belief in daily life practices and general worldview, rather than the level of belief or non-belief. Similarly, with regard to geographical origin, the names of cities in Turkey such as Denizli, Konya, Maraş are frequently mentioned, as compatriotism is more important in the traditionalist group. Members of the progressive group, on the other hand, are mentioned only once, as coming from an 'urban city.'

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[2] In reference to the 2017 Turkish constitutional referendum.

In contrast, evaluations based on personality and education were more frequently used when referring to progressives. For example, various personality attributions for members of the progressive group included *snobbish*, *critical*, *modern*, and *tolerant*; the traditionalist group is characterized only as *living out of their luggage*. Similarly, educational levels are mentioned only in reference to the progressive group (*educated/well-educated* and *academic/has higher education*).

In summary, politics was the category with the highest percentage for each of the groups in terms of distinguishing between the two main CoPs. This leads to conclusion that politics is the determining criterion that participants use to define different groups within the wider community. At the same time, political themes were mentioned less by the peripheral members of the communities. My interpretation is that this comes from a desire to stay away from this issue, and thus avoid contributing to further polarization.

5. Conclusion

During participant observation, I found there to be two main communities of practice among the Turkish migrant community of Montréal. The first part of the analysis of data gathered from the interviews confirmed this finding. The responses to the interview questions showed that religious, political and cultural divisions are at the forefront of discourse about the community. According to the terms used when referring to sub-communities, the results showed that different communities of practice use different forms of categorization; political distinctions were the most frequent and powerful, followed by religious distinctions. Other distinctions referred to home region in Turkey, assumed social characteristics, and ethnicity.

The research questions for the ethnographical portion of this study were "How is the Turkish community in Montréal currently structured?" "How does the social changes happening in Turkey affect the community in Montréal?" and "How do speakers manifest their social belonging and identity?" At the organizational level, the structure of the community reflects the social polarization of the country of origin. That is, as in the model presented earlier (Figure 1), the ideological interface between social identity and community can be grounded in social change and polarization. According to a previous study (Bilge, 2004), the division used to be ethnically based. However, in the current era political and religious divisions are at the center of the community, and this manifests through different associations, different media and different communal activities.

The data, gained through interviews with 40 members of the Turkish community in Montréal, support the findings of the ethnographic observations. Almost all the participants described the Montréal Turkish Community as divided and polarized. The ethnolinguistic research question was: "Which lexical choices could show the social structure of the Montréal Turkish community?" The findings show that the different CofPs have different ways of indexing subgroup membership, such as their ways of describing sub-communities. This result can also be seen in the linguistic variation interface between language and social identity, as

shown in Figure 1. In other words, social identity influences the choice of words describing one's own group and other groups. When describing the components of this divided structure, participants mostly referred to political and religious content. Considering that these CofPs meet the two important conditions of continuity and commitment, the fact that politics and religion are at the forefront of the Turkish community is an expected outcome. In this context, social identity and group membership can be expected to have an impact on how one classifies the community. In light of all these data, it can be said that the interrelationship model between community, language and identity is an effective ethnolinguistic perspective to understand the internal structure of a community.

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