

LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TRANSIT REFUGEES IN TURKEY:
A CASE STUDY OF AFGHANS IN SIVAS

A Master's Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

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M.A. The Program of Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Philip Durrant

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This work characterizes the sociological and sociolinguistic situation faced by refugees and asylum seekers living temporarily in Turkey. Despite the fact that such information could be of direct use to refugee aid organizations and refugee-receiving countries, there has been no serious attempt to research the ways in which these particular transit refugees obtain education. This study is an initial attempt to address this research gap, in particular with regard to language learning.

The study has three main components: First, it characterizes the linguistic challenges faced by refugees both while living in Turkey and after they have resettled to a third country. Second, it gives an overview of the opportunities currently available to refugees and asylum seekers to learn Turkish and English, either privately or through formal instruction, while living in Turkey. The final component gives informed speculation on what sorts of systematic changes, either to the Turkish legal

system or to the aid programs offered by non-governmental organizations, might ameliorate some of the problems present in the current system. The study is based on a series of interviews with refugees and representatives of various aid organizations.

The results of the study indicate that there are a variety of traditional and non-traditional forms of refugee language learning going on in Turkey, but that these are viewed as grossly insufficient both by aid organizations and refugees themselves. Afghan refugees interviewed in Sivas, for instance, consistently spoke of language acquisition as one of the biggest challenges they face, and a crucial aspect of how they spend their time in Turkey. Interviewees were acutely aware of the fact that they would need English in order to lead successful lives after resettlement, while aid organizations generally saw the need for new educational structures, but had not been able to offer broad support outside of Istanbul and Ankara.

In the analysis portion of this study, some of the main difficulties faced by aid organizations interested in providing language support are addressed, and suggestions are made concerning how future aid projects might sensibly be implemented.

Keywords: refugees, asylum, EFL, Sivas, NGO (non-governmental organization)

ÖZET

TÜRKİYE'DEKİ TRANSİT MÜLTECİLER VE DİL EDİNİMLERİ: SİVAS'TAKİ AFGANLAR HAKKINDA BİR ÖRNEK-OLAY İNCELEMESİ

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Bu çalışma Türkiye'de geçici olarak yaşayan mültecilerin ve sığınma arayanların sosyolojik ve sosyolinguistik durumunu tanımlıyor. Bu konudaki bilgiler mülteci yardım örgütleri ve mültecilere sığınma imkanı veren ülkeler için çok önemli olmasına rağmen, bu mülteciler ve onların eğitimleri hakkında ciddi bir araştırma yapılmamış. Dil edinimi üzerine olan bu çalışma literatürdeki bu boşluğu doldurmaya yöneliktir.

Bu çalışma üç aşamalıdır: 1. Mültecilerin Türkiye'deki ve Türkiye'den ayrılıktan sonraki dil sorunları, 2. Mültecilerin halihazırdaki resmi ve resmi olmayan dil (İngilizce ve Türkçe) öğrenme fırsatları, ve 3. Dil ve eğitim hakkındaki güncel sorunlara yönelik çözüm önerileri. Bu çalışmanın verileri genel olarak mültecilerle ve bazı yardım örgütü temsilcileriyle yapılan görüşmelerden oluşmaktadır.

Çalışmanın sonuçları Türkiye’de bir çok doğrudan ve dolaylı eğitim çeşitleri olduğunu gösteriyor. Ancak bunlar hem mülteciler hem de örgütler bu eğitim olanaklarının yeterli olmadığını belirtiyor. Örneğin, Sivas’taki Afganlar ilerki hayatları için çok önemli olduğunu bildikleri dil edinimi konusunda çok fazla problem yaşadıklarını söylüyorlar. Yardım örgütleri de her zaman daha kapsamlı bir eğitim desteği vermeye çalışıyorlar fakat şu anda İstanbul ve Ankara dışında yeterli değiller. .

Çalışmanın analiz bölümünde, dil eğitimi ile ilgilenen yardım örgütlerinin karşılaştığı ana zorluklar ve gelecekteki olası yardım projelerinin gerçekleştirilmesine yönelik tavsiyeler verilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: mülteci, sığınma, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğretimi, Sivas, sivil toplum örgütü

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

While Turkey's role as a migrant- and refugee-sending country during the past several decades has been well documented in sociological literature, considerably less attention has been paid to its role as a receiving and a transit country. Far from being a purely academic issue, this oversight has practical consequences for thousands of people each year.

Research on migrants, and especially forced migrants, is not simply an intellectual exercise or a dispassionate collection of knowledge. Accurate, up-to-date information on various aspects of the migration process is the basis for large-scale policy decisions and aid planning, and can thus have a direct influence on the well-being of large numbers of people. In the case of Turkey, several current issues regarding migrants make the need for well-informed shifts both in policy and in support infrastructure clear, including:

- human trafficking, dangerous border crossings and forced prostitution (IOM, 2008)
- inconsistent legal treatment, danger of refoulement¹ (Levitan, Kaytaz, & Durukan, 2009)
- inconsistent access to basic resources and services (Frantz, 2003)

This thesis primarily addresses refugee² and asylum seekers' access to language education in Turkey. The following sections first give evidence that foreign language

¹i.e. the forced return of an asylum-seeker or refugee to his/her country of origin

²The terms "refugee", "asylum seeker" and "migrant" have precise meanings in certain academic and legal contexts, but those meanings are not always consistent with each other. A "refugee" according to the UNHCR is not necessarily recognized as a refugee by the Turkish government, for instance. For the

skills are vital to the current and future quality of life of refugees in transit through Turkey and then address the question of whether additional refugee education structures in Turkey are in demand, feasible and potentially beneficial. The basis for these conclusions was a series of in-depth, exploratory interviews undertaken by the author from Fall 2010 through Spring 2011. The interviewees include refugees and asylum seekers, and NGO and IGO³ representatives.

Background to the Study

More than 16,000 documented refugees and asylum seekers were living in Turkey as of January 2010, according to the Turkish branch of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The UNHCR projects that this number will rise to over 20,000 in 2011.

The majority of these forced migrants come from Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq or Somalia. Asylum seekers from these countries have no legal prospect of being allowed to stay in Turkey permanently. Because Turkey maintains a geographical restriction to the 1951 “Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees”, migrants of non-European, non-Turkic origin are not eligible to receive permanent asylum in Turkey. Instead, they may be granted temporary asylum, and allowed to live in Turkey while organizations like the UNHCR search for a receiving country to which they can be resettled. The primary countries of resettlement for Turkey’s non-European refugee population are the US, Canada and Australia. The length of residence for transit refugees living in

sake of clarity, and to avoid awkward phrasing, I use the term “refugee” in the remainder of this thesis to refer to anyone seeking, or having been granted, political asylum in a country other than his/her country of origin. Where more precision is required, the relevant terms are clarified accordingly.

³International Governmental Organizations, like the UNHCR.

Turkey varies widely, with some migrants being accepted for resettlement within a few months of their arrival, while others wait years for their application to be processed and, if the application is accepted, for a resettlement country to be found (Buz, 2008).

The academic literature on transit refugee populations in Turkey does not provide a complete picture of the current situation. This is partially due to the fact that a great deal of research on this subject is intended to produce data meant to inform policy decisions, either in Turkey or at the EU level. These works tend to focus exclusively on information directly relevant to policy decisions, which is then used to criticize or praise particular aspects of the current Turkish legal framework (Commissioner For Human Rights Of The Council Of Europe, 2009; Kaya, 2008). By focusing on legal frameworks and policy implications, studies such as these tend to describe the situation based on official opinions and statistics, reflecting the *de jure* situation, rather than *de facto* conditions.

Another factor that has prevented academic research from thoroughly exploring concrete aspects of transit refugee life in Turkey has been an occasional lack of government cooperation in research efforts (Levitan et al., 2009).

A handful of studies have been carried out that explore Turkey's transit refugees' backgrounds, living conditions and social interactions (Kolukirik & Hüseyin Aygül, 2009; Akcapar, 2006, 2009; Buz, 2008) from a sociological viewpoint. This research has tended to be of a very specific nature, focusing either on one small group of refugees or one narrow sociological research question. One exception to this trend is Elizabeth Frantz's 2003 exploratory study, which characterizes a wide range of aspects of the lives of transit refugees in Turkey, drawing on data gathered from interviews with

NGO, IGO, and governmental representatives as well as several groups of refugees and asylum seekers living in Istanbul, Ankara, Van and Eskişehir. Frantz (2003) provides a starting point for further research by giving a general, apolitical overview of the concrete issues relevant to transit refugees and how those issues are viewed by the various people and organizations involved.

Frantz (2003) briefly addresses the issue of transit refugees' access to education while living in Turkey. She characterizes the relevant legal framework: a constitutional guarantee of education access, and describes practical restrictions to this legal guarantee, for instance the (inconsistently applied) requirement that only children with valid residence permits can attend Turkish primary schools. She cites an interview with a high-ranking UNHCR official, who says that some refugees see no reason to send their children to Turkish schools, since their stay in Turkey is temporary. Frantz also briefly describes some small-scale educational programs offered by the UNHCR and three different NGOs.

Aside from this brief section in Frantz (2003), the literature mentioned above does not address educational issues associated with transit migration through Turkey. There has been no research directly focused on literacy rates, levels of education or ways in which Turkey's transit refugees attempt to educate themselves while waiting for resettlement, though several studies have attempted to address these questions for refugees living temporarily in other countries (Preston, 1991; Hanbury, 1990; Sinclair, 2001). These studies are presented in more detail in Chapter II.

While literature on educational opportunities for Turkey's transit migrants is lacking, there is substantial literature on language education provided to refugees after they

have received asylum and are resettled in a destination country. These works, which for instance examine data from the US, Canada and England, point to a common situation among resettled refugees in which they are unable to find work appropriate to their vocational skills because of insufficient language ability (Bloch, 2002; Wooden, 1991). Research indicates that pre-resettlement language knowledge significantly increases the odds of successful economic and social integration for refugees (Godin, J., & Renaud, 2002; Watson, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

While sociological and governmental/intergovernmental literature has examined certain aspects of the lives of transit refugees in Turkey ((Kolukirik & Hüseyin Aygül, 2009; Akcapar, 2006, 2009; Buz, 2008), other aspects have been largely neglected. As described in the previous section, this neglect can be at least partially attributed to the relatively narrow range of motivations that have fueled research in this field. While the legal struggles and financial issues faced by refugees have been the focus of various research agendas, topics like in-transit education have thus far remained outside of the scope of both sociological and policy-oriented research. No academic works have examined the opportunities for and role of language education in Turkey's transit migrant populations.

Literature on post-resettlement educational structures in the US and England indicates that one of the most problematic aspects of refugee integration in host countries is language acquisition, and that existing pre- and post-resettlement language instruction suffers from a variety of shortcomings (Phillimore, Ergün, Goodson, & Hen-

nessy, 2007; Columbia University School Of International And Public Affairs, 2010). Two reports produced by a New York-based advocacy and research group (Women's Refugee Commission, 2007, 2009), make a specific plea for additional educational structures for refugees in transit, rather than waiting for those refugees to resettle to the US. The 2009 report states "There was resounding consensus in all interviews with refugees, teachers, resettlement agency staff and employers that English-language training would have been the most helpful element in preparing refugees for resettlement and life in the U.S." (Women's Refugee Commission, 2009, p. 3). The report also stresses the need for other forms of in-transit education, including "basic education" as well as "transferable vocational skills, such as farming, healthcare, information and communication technology and financial literacy." (Women's Refugee Commission, 2009, p.2).

Significance of the Study

The current study examines the issues mentioned above that have been neglected in academic literature. Through a series of exploratory interviews with transit refugees, asylum seekers and NGO/IGO representatives, I attempt to give a broad summary of the general educational opportunities available to transit refugees in Turkey. Particular attention is given to destination-language learning opportunities available to refugees, as well as the attitudes of all involved parties toward the concept of refugees learning languages as preparation for future resettlement. Opportunities to learn Turkish are also explored, since the long stays of many refugees in Turkey make it possible for them to benefit from a knowledge of the country's language. The results should be of

interest to sociologists who work with theoretical models of the journeys undertaken by transit migrants, and should add significantly to the the small body of literature on the specific conditions faced by transit refugees in Turkey.

The primary goal of this study is, however, practical in nature. As mentioned above, there is evidence that improvements in the transit country educational structures available to refugees would lead to substantial post-resettlement advantages for refugees, the countries that accept them and the various organizations that support them. By further clarifying the current educational opportunities available to refugees in Turkey, I hope to provide the initial framework for a possible expansion of those services. This thesis includes sections examining questions of funding and feasibility that are specifically directed at organizations interested in educating refugees in Turkey.

Research Questions

This thesis attempts to provide provisional answers to the following questions:

1. What sorts of formal and informal language education opportunities are available to Turkey's transit refugees?
2. What experiences have long-term refugees living in Turkey had with language learning and language barriers, and what are their opinions concerning language aid?
3. What are the future prospects for refugee language instruction in Turkey?

Methodology

The data-gathering portion of this qualitative study consisted of a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews. Each interview covered certain predetermined topics relevant to the research questions listed in the previous section, the nature of many other questions asked and issues considered depended to a large extent on the results of interviews conducted up to that point.

This flexible approach to the interview process, in which each interview has the potential to steer the researcher in new directions, was largely motivated by the lack of literature on the topic of refugee language education in Turkey. The study could not be planned in detail at the outset because such planning would have involved making definite decisions about the topic before collecting reliable evidence on which to base those decisions.

One area of data collection consisted of personal interviews and group sessions with Afghan refugees waiting for status determination, appeal processes or resettlement. These interviews were conducted in informal settings, usually in the interviewee's homes. Since the UNHCR, like most groups working with refugees in Turkey, is hesitant to provide researchers with access to refugees, the selection of interviewees was non-random, and dependent on the author's success in establishing contact via word of mouth. The geographical distribution of interviewed refugees and asylum seekers was also based on the practical issue of access, and was restricted entirely to the city of Sivas.

The second area of data collection consisted of formal and informal interviews with UNHCR representatives as well as various representatives of other groups that deal

with refugee issues in Turkey. Attempts were made to contact and gather information from a wide variety of organizations, though some groups were hesitant to provide details, a fact which is discussed further in Chapter IV.

A few of the initial interviews were recorded with an audio recording device, and later transcribed. However, after these interviews I had the impression that interviewees were somewhat intimidated by the device, and decided to use traditional note-taking for the remainder of the interview process. Email interviews were simply cataloged.

The evaluation and selection of interview materials for inclusion in this work was largely subjective. An attempt was made to recognize themes and majority views in each set of interview data. No statistical procedures were used to analyze interview results, since the sample is likely skewed by non-random factors and also since the interviews conducted did not follow a standardized format conducive to statistical analysis. Where relevant, details of the specific conditions of individual interviews are given.

The data collection portion of this study consisted of three phases:

1. A handful of initial interviews were carried out in order to establish contacts and solidify the research questions that guide the remainder of the study.
2. A series of email interviews were conducted in order to find out about refugee language courses currently being offered in various Turkish cities.
3. The bulk of this study's data collection took place during this phase, which consisted of interviews with 10 refugee families in in Sivas. This phase helped test the validity of initial impressions and provided additional nuances and a few unexpected ideas.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter presents research grouped into three main subject areas:

1. Language needs of refugees in destination countries
2. General aspects of in-transit refugee education
3. The current state of refugee education in Turkey

The conclusion drawn from this overview is that there is a clear need for additional research regarding the language education available to refugees in Turkey, and that the present study has been specifically designed to address that need.

Refugee Language Skills

As mentioned in Chapter I, there is a large body of academic literature on refugee integration in host countries. There are several reasons for academic focus on this phase of refugee life, the most obvious of which is access. Research institutes in refugee-hosting countries can much more easily study aspects of post-resettlement refugee life than pre-resettlement aspects. Post-resettlement refugees are well-documented legally and in close physical proximity to host-country researchers. Another reason that post-resettlement research is more common than in-transit research is that host countries are most interested in learning about those refugees who will integrate into their own society. After resettlement, that group is clearly defined. In contrast, a refugee who is in transit is often unsure of his/her final destination, i.e. whether he/she will be resettled and if so, to which country. Thus, research that is funded by national organizations

interested in that particular nation's refugee population is more likely to emphasize post-resettlement research, which is guaranteed to focus on the specific refugees of greatest interest to that nation.

The question typically asked in such post-resettlement research is the following: "What factors determine the success of refugees' economic and social integration into Country X's society?". The factors that are of greatest interest to this thesis are those that can be influenced by in-transit access to education, like literacy and language competence.

McBrien (2005), in his review of literature on post-resettlement educational issues for US refugees, sees a natural division (based on Sinclair (2001)) of research on the needs of post-resettlement refugees in the US into two main topics: psychosocial well-being and language acquisition. Concerning the second issue, McBrien (2005)'s survey describes the results of several studies on refugee language acquisition, noting (unsurprisingly) that "all of the studies indicated that immigrant students with good English language skills were better adjusted to their U.S. school environments." (McBrien, 2005, p. 341-342), and further, that "children's language retention and acquisition related not only to academic achievement but also to their success with acculturation and a sense of continuity with their parents and others from their native country. Bilingual children had the highest test scores, lowest levels of depression, highest self-esteem, and highest education and career goals." (McBrien, 2005, p. 343). He also describes problems with language-based discrimination and mistreatment, which are cited in a variety of sources as major obstacles to refugee integration.

A 2010 study carried out by a group of researchers at Columbia University exam-

ined the strengths and weaknesses of the refugee resettlement structures in place in the US. One of the aspects of the US system that is praised is the provision of post-resettlement language assistance, which aids in integration because, “prior to resettling, many refugees have little experience with written or spoken English.” (Columbia University School Of International And Public Affairs, 2010, p. 5). One of the “challenges” discussed is that current pre-departure orientation programs are insufficient and inconsistent, and that what is needed is a more “long-term and comprehensive orientation program run by OPEs [Overseas Processing Entities] that takes place while refugees accepted for resettlement to the U.S. await departure”. This overhauled program should include “thorough cultural, linguistic, and vocational orientation” (Columbia University School Of International And Public Affairs, 2010, p. 16).

Two studies carried out by the US-based Women’s Refugee Commission (2007, 2009) provide additional evidence of a need for pre-resettlement, post-displacement language training. The 2007 and 2009 reports are based on interviews with refugees and resettlement staff at facilities in San Diego, California and Tucson, Arizona respectively. Both reports make strong recommendations for the provision of pre-settlement services based on information gathered from those interviews. The 2007 report notes that:

IRC program staff and employers working with resettled refugees had many suggestions for services they would like to see implemented overseas, specifically, more vocational training programs, more language instruction, especially English as a Second Language, and more realistic cultural-orientation programs as preparation for resettlement. Resettlement program staff were, in general, surprised at the limited services available in refugee camps and often unaware of the harsh realities of life for refugees living in camps or in urban areas overseas. (Women’s Refugee Commission, 2007, p. 3)

The 2009 report notes that:

There was resounding consensus in all interviews with refugees, teachers, resettlement agency staff and employers that English-language training would have been the most helpful element in preparing refugees for resettlement and life in the U.S. With refugees 18 and older expected to find employment within weeks of their arrival, they have little or no time to become even remotely functional in English.” (Women’s Refugee Commission, 2009, p. 3)

Both reports stress that refugees in transit will be able to use any education they are given, including language education, to improve their future lives, regardless of whether they return to their country of origin, settle in their current country or resettle to a third country. They also both specifically call for the expansion of existing pre-departure language programs offered to refugees who have already been selected for resettlement to the US.

A study conducted in Canada, Watson (2006), involved a statistical analysis of data on 3,608 refugees resettled to British Columbia from 1998-2004, looking for predictors of which refugees would eventually receive welfare support. The dependent variable was binary (received or did not receive any welfare), and the independent variables analyzed were education, language, gender, marital status, source area, age, destination, family status and “special programs” (post resettlement employment and trade certificate programs). Watson (2006) draws upon the results of this analysis to make recommendations for potential changes in policy for the governmental department Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

One initial finding of the study (based on respondents’ answers, not formal testing) was that over 80% of the refugees in question had no knowledge of either of the country’s two main languages, French and English, at the time of their arrival in Canada.

The results of the main portion of the study indicate a significant correlation between lack of language skills on arrival and receipt of welfare: “Refugees that know English are 29.4 percent less likely to receive income assistance.” (Watson, 2006, p. 60). Of the nine independent variables examined, language knowledge was the only one found to have a strong correlation with welfare receipt for both of the timeframes examined in the study¹. Based on these results, Watson (2006) discusses a variety of future policy options, including maintenance of the status quo, and concludes that the best option in terms of effectiveness, political feasibility, equity and cost would be to expand English language education services offered to recognized refugees overseas, who are waiting to be resettled to Canada.

The range of studies considered in this review of the literature is somewhat limited, but the message is clear. Effective pre-departure language education can have a major positive effect on the ability of refugees to integrate into their target country’s society, and from the perspective of those target countries, offering this sort of education might well be the most cost-effective way to solve integration difficulties.

In-Transit Refugee Education

This section gives a survey of the literature on the education of refugees in transit situations. This literature, none of which covers the specific case of Turkey, can be a source of ideas about how refugee language education in Turkey might be approached, both academically and practically. By briefly exploring how refugees have been provided with educational opportunities in other countries, I hope to enable a bet-

¹The time period of the study was split into two periods, 1998-2001 and 2001-2004, since a significant shift in British Columbia’s welfare policy in 2001 led to a sharp decline in the number of refugees receiving income assistance.

ter understanding of the situation in Turkey, which is the focus of the section “Refugee Education in Turkey” below.

The following two quotes give a broad indication of the state of refugee education in the world.

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

Article 26, UN, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Although education is an internationally accepted right, over 120 million primary school-aged children are not in school; more than 52 million of those children are in situations of conflict or post-conflict recovery

Women’s Commission For Refugee Women And Children (2006, p. ii)

The section “Refugee Language Skills” above provided evidence that additional language education prior to resettlement would help refugees successfully integrate into their target country’s society and economy. While this sort of evidence might very well convince refugees and target-country policy makers of the utility of in-transit instruction, it does not provide the governments of transit countries with a compelling reason to support such endeavors.

Literature on in-transit refugee education (not limited to language instruction) draws on a different motivation for providing education to refugees in all phases of their flight—the idea that access to quality education is a basic human right, rather than an optional service. This approach implies that refugees spending several years in transition countries have as much of a right to be educated as any other human being,

and that the widespread lack of provision of education in such circumstances should be treated as an urgent human rights issue.

This is the approach taken by literature on transit refugee education like Preston (1991, 1990) and Inquai (1990), as well as more recent literature on “Education in Emergencies” (EIE)² like Courtney (2007), Sinclair (2001) and Andina (2005).

Preston (1991) provides an overview of the issues related to transit refugee education. Although she mainly reports on the situations in closed refugee camps, many of the trends that emerge might, pending further study, hold true for other types of protracted refugee situations. Preston (1991) reviews broad legal issues and gives a general description of the state of refugee education in various countries of temporary asylum around the world. She notes that signatories to the 1951 Geneva Convention are required to “accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education” (Article 22, Geneva Convention) and that “secondary schooling should be made available to the extent that it is for other non-citizen groups” (Preston, 1991, p. 4). Whether these provisions are the responsibility of the Turkish government is an open issue, since Turkey does not officially recognize “convention refugees” who are of non-European origin.

Preston (1991) also examines issues of funding and possible sources of educational resources for refugees, an issue which is explored in more detail in Chapter V. Of particular interest to this thesis are Preston (1991)’s attempts to identify patterns and trends in the provision of in-transit refugee education, since these patterns might provide a sensible starting point for research into refugee education in Turkey, which has

²a general term that includes as a subcategory pre-resettlement refugee education in situations of sustained displacement

yet to be properly studied. She cites studies that essentially see the following stages in the provision of refugee education (modified to incorporate information from other sections of Preston (1991)):

1. Refugee-initiated, informal instruction, including some language instruction
2. Formal government-assisted instruction for refugees expected to settle in that country
3. Education organized by refugee organizations (or camp officials)
4. Language and cultural instruction organized by foreign countries for incoming refugees

To what extent each of these possible forms of refugee education is present in, or could be implemented in Turkey is examined closely in the remainder of this thesis, especially in Chapter V.

One of the more interesting trends that Preston (1991) describes is that of refugee-initiated educational projects and the related practice of providing teacher-training to refugees so that they can teach one another in formal and informal instruction. In widely varying refugee contexts, the first forms of education to emerge has been initiated and carried out by refugees, most often in the form of primary education for children (Preston, 1991, p. 66). In many refugee camps and other protracted refugee situations, refugees have also been specifically trained to teach one another by camp administrators or other organizations. In Thailand and Hong Kong, for example, “refugees are being trained to teach English as a foreign language to refugees anticipating resettlement in English-speaking countries” (Preston, 1991, p. 73). The concept of refugees

as teachers and organizers of refugee education in transit situations is discussed thoroughly in the following chapters.

Preston (1991) briefly mentions distance education utilized in a transit refugee context, a topic that is covered in more depth in Inquai (1990). Citing problems of poorly-trained teachers and inadequate funding for facilities and materials, Inquai (1990) suggests that distance education can be a practical solution to such problems.

Inquai gives information on specific instances in which refugee distance education has been implemented, for instance the provision of in-service teacher training to around 5,000 Palestinian refugees in the Near East, starting in 1964. The program, organized by the United National Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and UNESCO, resulted in a rise in the percentage of qualified teachers in the participating schools from 10% to 94% in its first 15 years. Inquai describes a similar program initiated in Somalia in 1981, in which Ethiopian refugees living in camps separate from the Somali population were provided with distance-based in-service teacher training, organized by a Somali governmental institute in cooperation with the UNHCR. This course included English language instruction in an advanced phase of training. Other projects described include a distance-based secondary education program in Sudan for refugees from Eritrea and Ethiopia and parallel programs set up in Tanzania and Zambia for refugees from South Africa and Namibia respectively. The trend that emerges from each of the studies described in Inquai (1990) is that distance-based refugee education has the potential to be effective, popular and comparatively inexpensive.

A more recent study, Courtney (2007), draws on qualitative interviews with resettled Sudanese refugees to assess in-transit education. While the concrete recommenda-

tions Courtney (2007)'s interviewees make are mostly not transferable to the Turkish context, one important finding is worth mentioning. The refugees interviewed strongly felt that their opinions about what sort of education they needed while in transit should have been taken into account by the organizations attempting to provide that education. A substantial portion of this thesis is devoted to attempting to gather refugee opinions about their own educational (and specifically language) needs, rather than basing recommendations solely on official statistics and NGO assessments.

Refugee Education in Turkey

Frantz (2003) provides the most comprehensive overview of the *de facto* refugee situation in Turkey, despite having been conducted eight years ago. More recent overviews have been published by organizations like the United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (United States Committee For Refugees And Immigrants (USCRI), 2009), the UNHCR (UNHCR, 2009) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2008). Each of these three reports devotes a handful of words to refugee education. The USCRI report mentions that refugee children are guaranteed primary education in the Turkish constitution, but that in practice they must have a valid residence permit to enroll in public schools. The UNHCR report notes that the organization has contributed to "education assistance" (UNHCR, 2009, p. 3), and that school attendance rose between 2008 and 2009. The IOM report simply notes that "lack of access to education" is a problem faced by refugees in Turkey (IOM, 2008, p. 48).

In contrast to the works mentioned above, Frantz (2003) gives fairly substantial

coverage of refugee education in Turkey. As described in Chapter I, she draws on interviews with refugees, information provided by the UNHCR, and Turkish legal documents to paint a succinct portrait of a general lack of educational provision. She does note, however, that while refugee children are generally not allowed to enter primary school without a valid residence permit, they are at times allowed to do so by local authorities. The main goal of this thesis is to greatly expand on this brief coverage provided in Frantz (2003), both by bringing it up to date and by increasing the amount of qualitative information collected on the specific issue of language education.

Though I have implied that no research has looked directly at refugee education in Turkey, it should be mentioned that a 2005 study, Busch (2005), did cover that topic, but produced results that for the most part do not significantly add to the literature cited above. Busch (2005) does mention small educational programs run by the UNHCR, the ICMC and the Turkish Educational Volunteers Foundation (TEGV), calling such efforts promising but inadequate. In the following chapters, I give a more comprehensive account of this sort of small, NGO-sponsored educational programs offered to refugees.

The basic situation can thus be described in the following manner: For a variety of reasons, and despite clear guarantees in the Turkish constitution and a 1994 Turkish law, Turkey's government does not provide consistent access to primary education to refugees and asylum seekers, unless they pay for a residence permit. By not allowing refugees to work in Turkey without a work permit, which is very difficult to obtain, refugees are also effectively prevented from paying for private education at any level. A handful of NGOs in Turkey offer (or coordinate) courses for refugees, but these

programs are limited in scope and largely undocumented in academic literature. There are no reliable estimates, or even guesses, as to how many refugees in Turkey receive some sort of education, what sort of education they need/prefer, or how those needs and preferences might best be met.

As will be explained further in Chapter V, the Turkish government does not allow refugees living in Turkey to stay in the country's biggest cities (Istanbul, Ankara). Instead, they are sent to 30 so-called "satellite cities" around the country. These cities do not contain refugee camps. Instead, refugees sent there find their own housing, and are reliant on whatever aid provision is available in that particular city. Sivas is one satellite city of around 30 in Turkey. Others include Kırşehir, Tokat, Burdur and Eskişehir.

This is the starting point for the data collection involved in this thesis. The first phase of data collection involved initial interviews with UNHCR workers in Istanbul and Ankara, as well as with an Afghan refugee family living in Sivas. These interviews pointed to a major demand for formal or informal English language instruction among transit refugees living in Turkey. The remainder of this thesis attempts to characterize the nature of that demand, and further investigate the poorly understood NGO-led educational structures currently in place.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodological details of three phases of data collection and analysis:

- Initial interviews with: a UNHCR worker and one Sivas-based refugee family.
- Email-based interviews with a variety of refugee support organizations.
- A series of interviews with 10 Sivas-based refugee families.

The following sections describe each of these phases in detail.

First Interviews

In the first phase of this thesis, while I was still learning basic details about the sociological and legal situation in which transit refugees live in Turkey, I also conducted three interviews. The interviewees were chosen via convenience sampling: I quite simply asked all of my friends and colleagues in Turkey whether they knew any refugees or people who were working for refugee support organizations. I received quite a few leads, which led to informal interviews with two UNHCR workers and one refugee family.

One of the UNHCR workers was based in Istanbul, and I spoke with her via Skype. I essentially asked for details of any refugee language programs she was aware of, and for her general impression of whether there was a need for additional language support. She mentioned a variety of refugees with whom she had worked who had expressed a

strong desire to learn English, because they had very little else to do while waiting in Turkey.

The second UNHCR worker was based in Ankara, and I spoke with her in person. She told me that Afghan refugees generally wait much longer for resettlement than those from Iraq and Iran. She also gave me some tips for how to interact with refugee communities.

The final interview of the first phase of my data collection was conducted in Sivas, with an Afghan refugee who speaks fluent English, with whom I coincidentally share a mutual friend. I traveled to Sivas and met with this refugee, and later with his wife and young daughter. I asked a wide variety of questions, in an attempt to understand the family's background and current situation. Results of this interview are included partly in Chapter IV.

These three interviews gave me a great deal of direction in the early phases of designing my study. Most importantly, they gave me information that allowed me to ask the right sorts of questions in the remainder of my interviews.

Email Interviews with Aid Organizations

For this phase of data collection I simply emailed dozens of refugee aid organizations, and asked them the following basic questions:

- Does your organization offer any sort of language assistance to refugees?
- Do you know of other organizations that offer language assistance?
- If you do offer this sort of aid, can you give me some details on the participants and on the dynamics of the program itself?

I began sending out such emails in the Fall of 2010, and continued to send out more, and correspond with organizations that sent responses, through Spring 2011. I gathered contact information from academic literature, web searches and through tips provided by other organizations. The results of this phase of data collection are given in detail in Chapter IV.

Sivas Refugee Interviews

This phase of data collection was conducted over the course of three days in April 2011. It consisted of a series of interviews of varying levels of formality, varying lengths, and varying scopes of topics covered. The reason for this variation was that I had the impression that formal, structured interviews would not provoke the sort of personal, unscripted responses I wished to receive. This is also the reason I chose to conduct these interviews without a recording device, using traditional note-taking to record the data given. All of these interviews were conducted with the help of an interpreter, who is also the same refugee whom I interviewed in the first phase, described in Chapter III. I refer to this refugee as **A.** in Chapter IV, as well as in the present section.

Selection of Participants

The decision to include only Afghan refugees in this portion of the study was a practical one. It proved quite difficult to gain access to refugee communities, especially since I do not speak Arabic or Farsi, and my level of Turkish proficiency is not high enough to properly conduct interviews (though I did conduct a portion of one of the

Sivas interviews in Turkish, while my interpreter was not available). If I had had access to an Iranian or Iraqi refugee community, I would have included them in the study, which would have made the study more effective. Likewise, if I had gained access to an Afghan community in another city, I could have increased the generalizability of my results.

I consider the present study acceptable, however, for two reasons. First, including only Afghans in the study does make some sense. According to my UNHCR sources, the length of Afghan refugees' stays in Turkey is on average considerably longer than that of refugees from Iran or Iraq. For reasons which were never adequately explained to me, but which seem to be political in nature, receiving countries have a strong preference for Iranian and Iraqi-origin refugees, compared with Afghans. This means that while it is not unusual for an Iranian refugee to spend six months in Turkey, and then be resettled, Afghans can expect to spend several years waiting, even after being granted full refugee status.

In terms of language learning, this means that the Afghan refugee community in Turkey has the most to gain from spending their time learning languages—both Turkish and English. They will have more time to use any Turkish they learn, and they will have more time in general to work on preparing for their post-resettlement future. In this sense, my interviewees have the most to gain from learning languages while in Turkey.

Interviewees for this phase were chosen among the Afghan refugee community in Sivas via convenience sampling, since I simply interviewed as many different families as I had access to. This sample might also be biased, since the interviewees were all

people with whom **A.** was on good terms. One example of this potential sample bias is that **A.** told me that one or two of the Afghan refugee families in Sivas were very conservative, and refused to send their children to Turkish schools. I got the impression that **A.** was not particularly close to these families for ideological reasons. This means that the families that I had access to might have had a tendency to be less conservative than the families that I did not get the chance to speak with.

Another non-ideal aspect of the interviews conducted in this phase is that I very seldom had direct access to the women of the community. I was only able to directly ask questions to two different women, **A.**'s wife and a widowed woman who had not remarried. The patriarchal nature of the community's family structures were such that when I visited the houses of families, it was simply assumed that I wanted to speak with the men of the house. While I asked many questions *about* their women and children, it was made clear to me that it would be inappropriate to direct my questions to anyone but the men. This difficulty was exacerbated by the fact that my interpreter was an Afghan male, so I could not play the "foreigner's card", so to speak, by breaking the community's conventions and hoping that any irregularities in my behavior would be attributed to my being unfamiliar with their customs.

Setting and Procedure

Most of the interviews were conducted in the homes of the refugee families being interviewed. Some of the meetings were unplanned, including one chance meeting on the street and one instance where a visit to one refugee's home turned into a group interview with three refugees who were all there by chance. In some cases, family members of those being interviewed were present, and in other cases they were else-

where.

The procedure of the interviews also varied considerably. I asked each interviewee questions about his/her family's experiences with Turkish, and attempts they had made to learn both Turkish and English. In most cases I asked for information on their previous professions and attempts to find work in Turkey. I also made sure to give each interviewee the chance to express any concerns or suggestions they could think of that I had failed to mention. Chapter IV gives a more detailed picture of which specific questions I asked in each interview.

I recorded the data given by hand. Because the translation process took time, and because I used a variety of time-saving shorthand techniques, I generally had enough time to write down exact quotes when they seemed relevant. It should be noted that the quotes are all reliant on **A.**'s interpreting skills, and where there were small language errors in what **A.** conveyed to me, I corrected them automatically, making every attempt to preserve the original message.

CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS

This section gives the main results of the two primary components of my data collection phase. The section “current language support” describes the information I was able to obtain about language aid currently offered to refugees in Turkey. The following section, “Refugee Interviews”, describes the themes that emerged from the interviews I carried out in Sivas.

Current Language Support

This section summarizes the results of my attempts to gather information on current language-learning aid offered to refugees and asylum seekers in Turkey. It proved unexpectedly difficult to gain access to consistent, reliable and comprehensive information on this subject, for the following reasons:

1. There is no comprehensive list of refugee aid organizations, including detailed descriptions of what services they provide, and where they operate in Turkey. This made a systematic approach very difficult, as I was forced to work with incomplete or local lists.
2. Many organizations that I contacted were reluctant to share detailed information about their educational offerings. Several also asked to be kept anonymous, which undermines the main point of presenting this information in the first place—providing an informative resource for people and organizations interested in refugee language education.
3. A few organizations did not respond to my queries, for unknown reasons.

One of the organizations that wished to remain anonymous explained that they were uncertain about the legal ramifications of the courses they offer, considering that they do not ask refugees for a valid residence permit before offering them language assistance. It is unclear whether the Turkish government would attempt to shut down an organization supporting unregistered asylum seekers—I am not aware of a case in which this has occurred, but concerns about this sort of legal issue evidently shape the policy of some refugee aid organizations in Turkey.

Another organization explained its concerns in the following way:

We work voluntarily and informally. Our organization does not have legal status. We are not licensed by the Turkish Ministry of Education to provide education. Also we do not want our clients to be harassed in any way. It is very important to us to protect their privacy and safety. The places where we provide the classes are sometimes very sensitive.

It is good of you to want to get this information about language learning opportunities out to people passing through Istanbul; however, we always have more applicants than we have money to help. Even though we keep a low profile, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers find us and make good use of our services.

Anonymous Aid Organization Representative

ICMC Pre-Departure Orientation

Since the US is the most common receiving country for refugees who flee through Turkey, this section briefly describes the orientation program in place for refugees who have been accepted for resettlement to the US. This is the only official program aimed at easing refugees' transition to life in their receiving country.

As noted in Women's Refugee Commission (2009), the US does not typically offer English learning assistance prior to refugees' arrival in the US. The ICMC (the US's official Resettlement Support Center in Turkey) confirmed that the orientation program

in Turkey does not include a language component. The orientation consists of a single 3-day program carried out in Istanbul. Costs are covered by the ICMC, and the aim of the program is to “help refugees develop realistic expectations about life in the United States and to facilitate their successful resettlement.” The sessions are conducted in English, with the aid of interpreters. Since this is the extent of the resettlement support provided by receiving countries, refugees wishing to prepare for their eventual integration into an English-speaking society have to find other sources of English materials, instruction and practice.

Turkish

Asylum seekers typically arrive in Turkey with no knowledge of the Turkish language. The section “Refugee Interviews” below describes some of the consequences of this fact on an individual level.

Once in Turkey, of course, asylum seekers are surrounded by native speakers of Turkish, and hear and see the language on a regular basis. However, full immersion, with no guidance or previous experience with the target language, is not an ideal method for language learning, at least for adults. As is argued in greater detail below, this language barrier contributes to the isolation of refugee communities, based on country of origin, from Turkish society.

The formal opportunities for learning Turkish listed in the following section provide a possible means for refugees to improve their ability to successfully deal with social difficulties and find employment while living in Turkey.

List of Language Aid Programs

When I contacted the institutions mentioned in the list that follows, I asked for details about any language courses or assistance they provide to refugees, as well as any assistance they could provide in finding additional organizations offering such services in Turkey.

The following list includes all of the organized language assistance projects I was able to find.

Assistance in Istanbul

- Anonymous Group 1: sends volunteer English teachers to a center for Iraqi refugees located in Istanbul, to assist the Iraqi teachers working there in providing classes in basic English. Classes are taught “several hours a week” and serve an unknown number of refugees.
- Anonymous Group 2: offers its own English and Turkish tutoring programs and send students to Turkish language schools for Turkish/English courses. They also send migrants to an English teacher training school, where they are taught by aspiring English teachers. Additionally, AG2 uses grant money to award educational scholarships to refugees and asylum seekers living in Istanbul.
- Helsinki Citizen’s Assembly: offered one-time refugee community interpreter training programs in 2010, in both Istanbul and Ankara.

Assistance in Ankara

- Anonymous Group 3: has provided English conversation practice to refugees and asylum seekers living in Ankara twice a week for the past two years and have sent many more to Turkish courses at Halk Eğitim (“People’s Education”, see below). They also offer informal assistance in writing resumes and job applications, and preparation for exams like the GED.
- Anonymous Group 4: offers language courses to refugees and asylum seekers in Ankara, but wishes to maintain a low profile regarding such activities.
- People’s Education (Halk Eğitim): offers free Turkish (and vocational) courses to asylum seekers who have received permission from the governor’s office.

Aid in Satellite Cities

- AG3 (Ankara-based, see above): offered regular conversation practice (10 students) in Nevşehir, but these ended in 2010.
- Refugee Association (Mülteci Derneği): offered a small language course in Izmir for 20 refugees, but the course was canceled due to a high turnover rate. Students were either sent to satellite cities or left without giving a reason. The association plans to offer new educational programs in the near future.
- National Education and Health Ministries (Milli Eğitim ve Sağlık Bakanları): offers free Turkish and vocational courses in Sivas and other cities. New courses can be arranged if 10 students apply.

- Education Volunteer Foundation of Turkey (Türkiye Eğitim Gönülleri Vakfı): offers free, regular Turkish and English courses to “refugee children and a limited number of women” living in Van, according to an ICMC representative.

This list, while certainly incomplete, gives a general impression of what kinds of organized linguistic support are available to refugees and asylum seekers living in Turkey. While several large organizations offer formal or informal language aid in Istanbul and Ankara, refugees who have been sent to the satellite cities have far fewer options. The most significant language aid program in the satellite cities comes from the National Education and Health Ministries. I give more details about their programs, and how they are utilized by the refugees in Sivas, in the following section.

Refugee Interviews

I have four goals in this section. First, I would like to give some anecdotal data on actual situations faced by actual refugees and asylum seekers living in Turkey, to provide a more complete picture of the sorts of situations they face. This data is of course not generalizable, in a strict sense. It should, however, provide the reader with a better understanding of the possible linguistic dynamics found in refugee communities in Turkish satellite cities.

My second goal is to present my findings about informal language-learning opportunities that were not covered in section “List of Language Aid Programs”. This includes self-learning, online courses and materials and community-internal instruction. This is covered in the following sections.

My third goal is to look for suggestions, made by the refugees and asylum seekers

themselves, for how their troubles and difficulties might best be addressed. This is a component that was largely absent in the literature I reviewed in Chapter II, but I think it is a crucial element in making informed decisions about how to give aid to refugee communities. A purely academic or statistics-based approach can overlook crucial, unexpected factors that refugees themselves are able to perceive.

The following sections are organized according to a few basic themes that arose during the interview process. Finally, in the section “Community Dynamics”, I present a few of my observations about the Sivas refugee community as a whole, and speculate about the relevance of those factors for appropriate and effective aid provision.

Afghan Refugee Community in Sivas

The community of refugees and asylum seekers that is described in these sections consists of approximately 20 families, and approximately 70-80 individuals. I was able to arrange interviews with at least one member of around half of those families. During those interviews I also asked the interviewees for information about the rest of the Afghan refugee community in Sivas.

A large portion of the Afghan refugees living in Sivas were forced to move there from Van approximately a year ago, as part of the efforts by the Turkish government to redistribute the refugee population to the provincial satellite cities. They had originally arrived in Van around 2008, after fleeing Afghanistan and spending various amounts of time in Iran. The interviewees universally indicated that the move to Sivas had brought with it a variety of new difficulties. The job market in Sivas, they explained, is considerably worse than in Van. It is also more difficult to contact NGOs and other aid organizations from Sivas, since none of them have offices in the city. The small

size of the Afghan community in Sivas compared with that of Van also created difficulties in terms of organization and community support with things like translation and interpretation—i.e. in Van it was comparatively easy to find an Afghan who spoke English or Turkish, whereas only a handful of the Afghans in the Sivas community are available to support the community with language issues.

One interviewee estimated that of the 20 families, seven have internet access. Only two individuals, he said, speak fluent English. Four or five individuals speak Turkish well enough to take part in vocational training taught by Turkish instructors—though this number does not include the children who are learning Turkish in public schools.

To simplify the presentation of interview data in the following sections, I have assigned each individual interviewee a boldfaced letter. The following list should serve as a reference, while also providing a few more details about the composition of the community.

- **A., M. and daughter:** As mentioned previously, **A.** was my main contact in the Sivas Afghan community. He speaks very functional English and Turkish, though he still has difficulties with both languages. He fled Afghanistan as a child, and lived in Iran for eight years before coming to Turkey around three years ago, as conditions for refugees in Iran worsened. He married an Afghan woman while living in Iran, and now lives with his wife and young daughter in Sivas. **A.** has worked in a variety of jobs, including English teaching and nursing. His wife, **M.**, speaks a small amount of Turkish, and no English. Both are literate in Dari/Farsi. Both are UNHCR-recognized refugees awaiting resettlement.
- **B., wife and four children:** **B.**'s family came to Sivas 6 months prior to our

interview. Their application for refugee status was rejected initially, and they are currently filing an appeal. **B.** worked as a tailor in Afghanistan, but has not been able to keep a job in Sivas due to language difficulties. Their oldest child is 10, and all four are in Turkish schools.

- *C., wife and three children:* **C.**'s children are 13, 17 and 18 years old. His youngest child is attending Turkish school. **C.** worked as a commander in the Afghan army, and also worked in agriculture and knows "how to work with horses". He has not found the chance to work in these areas in Sivas. The two oldest children support the family by working in restaurants.
- *D. male, no children:* The wife of **D.** lives somewhere besides Sivas (the details were unclear). **D.** worked as a mechanic and a carpenter in Afghanistan, and has done both types of work in Sivas. **D.** is waiting on the appeal process after not being granted refugee status initially.
- *E., wife and family:* I only spoke briefly with **E.** so some details are missing. He worked as a plumber in Afghanistan, but has not been able to do plumbing work in Sivas because of the language barrier.
- *F. and family:* **F.** worked at a confectionery in Afghanistan, but cannot do that work here because the things he made there are not produced in Turkey.
- *G., wife and two children:* **G.** worked as a stone-cutter and as a soldier in Afghanistan, but works various short-term jobs in Sivas. His children (five and nine years old) are both attending Turkish school.
- *H., wife and three children:* **H.**'s three children are all attending Turkish schools.

- *I., wife and two children:* **I.**'s children are 10 and 15 years old. The older child is not allowed to attend Turkish school because she is “already too old”, but the younger child attends school. **I.** worked in agriculture in Afghanistan, as a tractor driver and doing landscaping work. He has not found that sort of work in Sivas, but has done wood-chopping work and worked in restaurants.
- *J. widow, two children:* **J.** is the only woman I was able to interview directly, aside from **M.** She has a 17-year-old son and a 20-year-old daughter. Her son works in a restaurant and supports her.

Learning Turkish

All of the families I spoke with that had school-age children said that their children were attending schools, in accordance with Turkish law. There was a general consensus that these children were learning Turkish very quickly and very well, quickly overtaking their parents in proficiency— **B.** for instance often asks his children to read and translate things for him and his wife. Even the children who were too old to be admitted to Turkish schools seem to be learning Turkish with considerably less trouble than their parents, which is most likely related to the fact that the older children in the community seem to be more successful in finding and keeping jobs than their parents.

When asked about their initial encounters with the language after arriving in Turkey, interviewees described a stressful period, exacerbated by the severity of the various other challenges they faced at that time (navigating the legal process of applying for asylum, dealing with financial issues, etc). **J.**, who speaks “no Turkish at all” despite living in the country for three years, recalls breaking down in tears after returning from

an encounter in a market, where she was unable to communicate with the cashier to pay for her groceries. Even **D.**, who had been more successful acquiring Turkish, notes that “we faced a language problem here in Turkey. We don’t want to face that problem in another country.” **B.** notes that there was little need to learn Turkish in Van, where the Afghan community was large enough to provide language support and help finding employment, but that the situation was different in Sivas, where it is very difficult to survive without speaking Turkish. **G.**, who speaks functional Turkish, spoke of his difficulties in negotiating compensation for his work: “You go to work, and because you can’t speak, you don’t even know how much you’re earning [...] sometimes it feels like being a slave.”

None of the interviewees could recall any sort of formal Turkish-learning support being offered to them in the past. None of them had ever had any form of formal Turkish instruction, for any length of time. **F.** notes that while he did try to learn Turkish, it was quite hard, because he is illiterate in his native language, which means that he cannot take advantage of written introductions to Turkish. The handful of adults in the community who can communicate in Turkish have learned by interacting directly with Turks. The most successful self-learner in the community is surely **A.**, who has made Turkish friends in Sivas, and is currently attending training as a healthcare provider, which is carried out entirely in Turkish. **A.** has the advantage that he spoke English at a high level when he arrived, and has had constant access to the internet, where he has been able to look up words and phrases, check spellings, and learn about grammar. Several of the interviewees mentioned that one of the major obstacles to their learning Turkish is the lack of availability of Turkish-Farsi dictionaries. My impression is

that even a simple list of 2-300 common Turkish words and phrases, and their Farsi translations would be immensely helpful to those who can read Farsi.

As mentioned in the section “List of Language Aid Programs” above, refugees and asylum seekers living in Sivas have the opportunity to take part in free Turkish courses offered by the National Education and Health Ministries. Participants need to have a valid residence permit, and for a course to be established, at least 10 students must be found. It is important to note that the Afghan refugee community in Sivas, which has been in the city for over a year, was completely unaware of the possibility of taking these National Education and Health Ministries courses until a few weeks prior to my interviews. **A.** found out about the courses by chance, while talking to a Turkish friend, and went in and inquired further to learn how he could join. If **A.** had not happened to discover the MESB, the entire community would still be unaware of its existence.

But as I observed **A.** telling the other interviewees about the MESB course offerings, some additional obstacles to participation became apparent. First, the MESB courses would be taught entirely in Turkish, since the instructors would be Turks who do not speak Dari/Farsi. While this would be unproblematic for the Afghans who already spoke some Turkish, the complete beginners were worried about the idea of an immersion course. Another problem for the course dynamics would clearly be the large variety of different levels and skills present in the Afghan community. **A.**, who was most pro-active in trying to gather 10 people and start a course, is also the most proficient Turkish speaker in the community. It is not clear how helpful a course would be in which **A.** was grouped together with complete beginners, many of whom are illiterate in their native language. The course would necessarily either be too advanced

for the beginners, or too simple for **A.**. More practically, many of the interviewees said that while they want to improve their Turkish, they don't have time during the day, because they have to be either working or searching for work. When I asked **H.** whether he would join **A.** for a Turkish course, he hesitated, and then said that he has to work, and his children are already learning Turkish at school, so he probably wouldn't participate. **G.** had a similar reaction. **D.**, in contrast, immediately said that he would take part, and **I.** said that his entire family would definitely attend courses with **A.**.

Another, less tangible obstacle to learning Turkish is motivation. As mentioned above, without exception, all of the interviewees said that they would like to know Turkish better, and that they had had major problems with the language since arriving in Turkey. But at the same time, the interviewees are acutely aware of the fact that current laws make it impossible for them to fully integrate into Turkish society. They will never be granted Turkish citizenship, nor will they ever have full citizen's rights. The recognized refugees among them expect to be resettled to English-speaking countries at any time, and are already living their lives in anticipation of that resettlement. This viewpoint is hardly surprising. Language learning is about investing in the future, and the interviewees unanimously indicated that they do not see a future for themselves in Turkey. Since they do not know when they will be resettled, but hope that it will be in the very near future, they are concerned about investing a lot of time and effort into learning a language that could suddenly become useless to them. When asked whether they would prefer a Turkish course or an English course, the interviewees unanimously, and without hesitation, chose English.

Learning English

While Turkish is clearly more immediately useful to the Sivas refugee community, as mentioned above, there seems to be a very strong tendency, at least among the Afghan refugee community, to prefer to learn English. Most reported that they had specifically attempted to learn English by themselves, but didn't know where to start.

I asked each interviewee whether he/she had books or CDs or other materials that they had used to teach themselves English, and several of them brought out learner's books. **G.** and **D.** had both borrowed CDs from **A.** with Persian-English dictionary software on them. **D.** showed me a book he had from the "New Headway" series, but said "I have a lot of problems (with the book) because I have no teacher. I must solve all of these problems by myself."

Some other English learning strategies emerged from the interviews as well. **A.** asked me whether I thought it would be helpful to listen to word lists while sleeping. **G.** had plans to have **A.** teach him two new English words every day, so that he could gradually expand his vocabulary. **C.** showed me a notebook in which he had copied the phrase "whatisyername" dozens of times in an attempt to commit the construction to memory. Several of the interviewees also asked me how they could effectively use their books and materials, and specific questions like whether to watch English films with or without subtitles, showing that they were actively trying to choose effective strategies. In what was surely the most ambitious attempt to learn English made by the community, the refugees asked **A.** to organize and teach an English course for them.

A. had already taught a similar sort of community-internal English class while living in Van. In Sivas, he decided to offer a class that met 3 times a week for 2 hours,

for which he charged 15 lira per month per person. Some of the students were unable to pay this fee, but were allowed to participate anyway. I sat in on a session of this class, which mainly focused on teaching the Latin alphabet and some very basic words and phrases. The methodology was very traditional, with each student being asked to approach a small whiteboard and copy down the alphabet, and then read what they had written. There were 7 students present, and each recitation took some time, so the 2-hour session was finished by the time everyone had been to the board. The participants were all women, including **C.**'s wife and **J.**'s daughter.

For reasons that are not entirely clear to me (though not for lack of inquiry), the class was canceled after just a few weeks. **A.** says that there were disagreements about the schedule and the amount of instruction. This occurred a couple of months before I conducted my main interviews. The question of what difficulties might lead to the failure of a community-internal language course is of course highly relevant to my research aims. After speaking with both **A.** and several of the former participants, I think the ultimate problem was money. The refugee families in Sivas have more immediate financial issues to deal with than learning English, and while they realize that doing so is a sensible investment in one sense, it is difficult to spend money on the future when it can be of such direct use in the present. Despite this, a majority of the interviewees said that they (and in many cases, their entire families) were strongly interested in joining a similar course in the future, if **A.** were to offer it again. The major benefit of learning English from **A.** is of course that he can use Dari-language instruction at the beginning, which is perceived as considerably less intimidating than instruction that uses nothing but English from the start. This community-internal instruction should

remind the reader of Preston (1991)'s first phase of refugee education, from Chapter II.

Suggested Solutions

Every single refugee and asylum seeker, as well as all aid organization representatives I spoke with in relation to this thesis, agree that language is a major problem for transit refugees in Turkey, and that a solution should be actively sought. This section presents the suggestions made by the Afghans I interviewed in Sivas. Chapter V presents my own suggestions, based on my interpretation of the data that emerged from this study.

D., **F.** and **G.** all view the problem with learning English as primarily financial. **F.** says "We're barely surviving here, just breathing. If the UN could help us [financially], we would continue to learn new things, like English". **G.** expresses a similar sentiment, "If the UNHCR were to pay us some sort of salary, I would not go to work, and I would be able to work on the English language. We have to learn English, today or tomorrow".

Others simply wanted a proper English course to be offered to them. **H.** specifically implored that I "please set up an English course for my children". Several other interviewees echoed this sentiment that their primary concern in terms of English was that their children learn the language. **F.** suggested that UNHCR or ASAM money could be given to **A.**, so that he could teach an official course for Afghan refugees, that would be free for participants.

C., after initially saying that an English class would be much more effective than simply providing learning materials, subsequently corrected himself, saying "on the

other hand, a book is much better! Our children return from work at 12 am, so if we had some resources [to learn at home], it would be much more useful.”

In terms of a solution for their problems with Turkish, the interviewees had less to say. I had the sense that they thought that in the case of Turkish, the damage had already been done, and that there was not much sense in looking for a solution now that they had already been in Turkey for around three years, and were focused more on resettlement than on integration and adaptation to Turkish society. **G.** did make a suggestion for how aid organizations might help newly-arrived refugees. He felt that the main problem with Turkish was the absence of a basis on which to build, saying “The UNHCR should offer a Turkish course for refugees, at least for the first six months, so that they can then go find work. At the very least, they could do this”. This sentiment is echoed by **D.**, who says that one motivation for learning English before resettlement is that he does not want to face the same sort of initial problems that he faced in Turkey, having arrived with no knowledge of the language.

Community Dynamics

In the course of the interview process, I learned quite a lot about the dynamics of the Afghan refugee community in Sivas that should be taken into consideration in designing aid programs. At first glance, the Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in Sivas form a close-knit community. They conduct weekly meetings, which can be attended by any community members. These meetings are ostensibly religious gatherings, but often include discussions of community issues as well. While I was conducting my main set of interviews, I observed community members exchanging ideas and gathering information from one another on a regular basis. While walking from one house to

another with **A.**, for instance, we coincidentally met **H.** and **E.** on the street, the former with his children, and **A.** immediately struck up a conversation with them about various community issues. When **A.** and I went to see whether **D.** was home, we discovered **E.** and **F.** were already at his house, drinking tea, discussing various issues. I was invited to dinner by **I.**, and when I arrived **J.** and **E.** were already there, as well as several other community members, and we all ate together. Thus, in the course of just three days, I observed a wide variety of intra-community socializing and information sharing.

But I also got the chance to see a concrete example of this system of word-of-mouth communication. As mentioned in Chapter IV, **A.** discovered by chance that there were Turkish courses available to refugees and asylum seekers living in Sivas. Considering the difficulties community members described to me about communicating in Turkish, and not having the necessary “6-month basis” to successfully learn the language, it seems logical that out of the 20 Afghan families living in Sivas, **A.** should have absolutely no trouble finding 10 individuals willing to participate in a free Turkish course. But as **A.** explained, and as I was able to observe during our interactions with various community members, organizing projects like this is not a trivial task.

The homes of the Afghan refugees in Sivas are scattered over a sizable portion of the city. Most are within walking distance of one another, but visiting a specific community member can often mean a 20 or 30-minute walk both ways. As mentioned above, most of the families do not have internet access at their homes, so email communication is of limited use when it comes to community-wide organizational issues. What this means is that when a community member like **A.** has new information of interest to the community, that information spreads relatively slowly. More importantly,

when a community member wants to organize something involving other community members (which requires more interaction and discussion than simply passing on information), he or she must speak directly, in person, with a large number of people who live relatively far apart from one another.

Because of these factors, **A.** found the task of gathering 10 participants for a Turkish course quite daunting. It required him to take responsibility for organizing the course, go to a dozen different houses and convince the others that they should come to the course, make sure that they were serious, coordinate with the MESB throughout the process, find a time appropriate for all of the participants (i.e. meet with them again), gather signatures and copies of residence permits, etc, etc, etc. At the same time, **A.** stands to gain the least from such a course, out of all of the potential participants. He is already taking part in vocational courses conducted in Turkish, and he regularly interacts with Turkish friends and colleagues, so he is already getting a great deal of Turkish practice. Many of the students who might join **A.** for the course would be starting from essentially zero knowledge of Turkish. It is hard to imagine a course being of benefit both to the complete beginners and to the advanced learners. It is thus paradoxically the case that the refugees most able and willing to take on organizational responsibilities for setting up a Turkish course are also the refugees who tend to have already put in the time and effort to become proficient themselves, and who would benefit the least from a mixed-level course.

There is more to say about this issue, but this should suffice to show that one of the main obstacles to the success of certain types of initiatives and aid programs is poor community organization. This conclusion is examined in more detail in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This thesis set out to provide a more detailed picture of the sociolinguistic challenges faced by transit refugees in Turkey than has been given so far in academic or other literature. The two biggest gaps in knowledge seem to be:

- In what ways do transit refugees in Turkey currently receive language support?
- How do these refugees view their sociolinguistic situation? What do they think they need in terms of language support?

These questions, which correspond to the first and second research question listed in earlier in this chapter, are addressed in turn by the two main phases of data collection of the present study. The third research question is the following:

- What are the future prospects for refugee language instruction in Turkey?

The following sections review and interpret the results of the two data collection phases. The third research question is then addressed in the section “Future Prospects and Questions for Further Research”, which attempts to synthesize the results given so far and speculate on a few possible future developments.

What is Available

The most striking pattern revealed in Chapter IV is that the focus of current aid programs is clearly Istanbul and Ankara, despite the fact that long-term transit refugees in these cities are eventually forced to move to satellite cities. Of course, the present

study was limited in the sense that I mostly contacted large, well-known aid organizations, and that the only satellite city that I learned about in detail was Sivas. It is conceivable that smaller groups offer English courses in other satellite cities, and that the NGO representatives I corresponded with are unaware of those offerings.

It is not clear, however, whether simply shifting the aid programs of the organizations mentioned in Chapter IV would have the effect of providing more refugees with language education. Only one organization that I corresponded with indicated that they had had trouble finding enough students to participate in their language tutoring program—that of Mülteci Derneği in Izmir. The other organizations all seem to have little trouble finding as many refugee students as they can manage to accommodate. If the capacity of these aid programs is already being reached, moving the programs to a different location would not allow more refugees to benefit from them.

What this means is that it is unsurprising that aid organizations with limited resources offer language support only in Turkey's major cities. It is considerably more practical to offer such programs near each organization's base of operations, almost all of which are located in Istanbul and Ankara. The only NGO I could find that has a continuous presence in multiple satellite cities (Eskişehir, Kutahya, Bilecik, Van and Ağrı) was the Human Resources Development Foundation, which does not run any educational programs.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this discussion is that while it is certainly not ideal that most of the language aid available to refugees in Istanbul and Ankara, where refugees are not allowed to stay long-term, that is also no simple solution. Aid provision in the satellite cities would be less economical for aid organizations, and the

aid they are already providing is not going to waste. To illustrate my point with a semi-specific example, if Organization X, currently operating in Ankara were to decide that it would like to offer English courses to the refugees living in Sivas, they would be forced to help fewer refugees per dollar invested than if they simply offered additional courses in Ankara. It's expensive to set up an office in a new city, or to pay for teachers to commute six hours each way from Ankara to Sivas.

Directly offering language courses in satellite cities is thus, under the present circumstances, probably not a practical solution. A better approach might be to find inexpensive ways of helping refugees in satellite cities educate themselves. The following two sections provide a variety of suggestions for how this might be accomplished.

Analysis of Refugee Interviews

Several of the details that emerged from the refugee interview phase of this study's data collection provide some insight into how language aid could be expanded without forcing NGOs to open expensive new field offices.

Information

One major finding was that while there are government-run vocational and Turkish courses that refugees can join for free, there seem to be no organized attempts to inform refugees of these possibilities, at least in the case of the Sivas refugee community. If these courses are indeed suitable for refugees with no knowledge of Turkish, they could potentially serve as "crash courses", as envisioned by G. in Chapter IV. When Afghan refugees arrive in Van (the initial residence of the entire Afghan refugee community

in Sivas), they could be given information on how to attend government-run Turkish courses. In that case, the role of an NGO might be to simply distribute information, or it might take a more active role in coordinating the courses, and helping the National Education and Health Ministries design courses appropriate for Dari speakers. This sort of coordination work would be considerably less expensive than arranging courses entirely from scratch.

This solution of course puts pressure on the programs of the National Education and Health Ministries, and could lead to a flood of new applicants for their courses. Any such action would need to be coordinated closely with that institution.

Formal English Instruction

As noted in Chapter IV, the refugees I interviewed in Sivas all indicated that they would prefer to learn English, rather than Turkish. The situation might of course be different for refugees who have recently arrived in Turkey (all of my interviewees had been in Turkey for over a year). A few of the interviewees even indicated that they did not intend to take part in the free MEB courses, because there was no sense in learning Turkish when they would not have any use for it after resettlement.

The Ministry of Education does not seem to offer English courses in Sivas, so NGOs interested in helping refugees learn English cannot simply improve advertising for already-existing courses. As mentioned above, directly setting up and providing formal language courses is also an impractical strategy for an NGO, when they could serve as many people for less money in Istanbul or Ankara.

Materials Distribution

But there are several ways that educational support could be provided, aside from offering full-fledged courses. One simple option would be to distribute free learning materials to refugees in satellite cities. The books being used by my interviewees were outdated, English-only and often at an inappropriate level. As mentioned in Chapter IV, C. specifically indicates that it might be easier for refugees to learn from good materials than from a course, since those refugees who have steady work would have difficulty attending a course during the day, but they could study materials whenever they have time. What sorts of materials would be most appropriate for this situation, how they might be effectively distributed and what sort of explanations or training refugees would need to get the most benefit from them are questions that would need to be explored in detail before implementing such a program. At the very least, I would suggest, it would be necessary to include instructions for effective use of the materials in the refugees' native language.

Community Instructors

Another way to help refugees in satellite cities learn English would be to provide encouragement and support for intra-community language instruction, like A.'s informal course. There are several advantages to this solution, compared with more formal approaches. Community-internal instructors will be fluent in the language of the local community, and also be aware of that particular community's dynamics and issues. If an organization like the UNHCR were to pay a member of a refugee community to teach English to his or her community, the money spent would also achieve two

purposes—helping stabilize the financial situation of the instructor, while simultaneously helping provide language education to the community. There are some difficulties with this approach as well, however. A refugee must be found in the community whose English proficiency level is high enough for him/her to sensibly teach such a course. Also, a refugee-taught course would be difficult to monitor and evaluate, in the absence of a nearby field office. Another difficulty would be giving qualified refugees enough tips and guidelines for effective language teaching to make their courses effective. It is unlikely that a suitable candidate will be able to be found in most refugee communities in the satellite cities, who is both highly proficient in English and trained as a teacher. Another difficulty with this strategy is that a refugee instructor would be faced with the same problems of mixed levels and L1 illiteracy that were discussed in previous chapters, and less equipped to deal with such issues than a properly trained teacher. One more difficulty with community-internal instruction is that conflicts among community members might prevent some refugees from gaining access to instruction. If community member X is given money to teach his/her community English, but does not get along with Family Y, a fair distribution of aid might not be maintained. Such problems would also be very difficult for aid organizations to find out about and address.

Organizational Support

I looked at issues of community organization in Chapter IV. This is the area where it seems to me that the most cost-effective support could be provided to Turkey's refugees, regarding language education as well as other issues.

The situation in Sivas is quite telling: 20 Afghan families are staying there, and are

fully aware that they will likely have to stay there for several more years. They have major difficulties with the Turkish language on a regular basis, and are in complete agreement, in principle, that it would be a good idea to learn Turkish. One member of the community, **A.**, discovered that there are free Turkish courses available for groups of at least 10 students. This discovery came more than a year after most of the 20 families came to Sivas. Even after the news spread to the community, the task of gathering information from potential participants and coordinating course times has proven quite complex. Those most capable of taking on these organizational tasks are also unfortunately those who have the least need for Turkish instruction.

Organizational problems also prevented **A.**'s offering of informal English instruction in his home from being successful in the long run. Issues arose regarding communication between **A.**, his students, and other potential students—regarding for instance the frequency of their meetings and the location. Some students stopped coming because they were not offered chairs, which **A.** did not have enough of, and they were not informed beforehand that they should bring their own.

During my interview sessions, it was also clear that many of the interviewees had not spoken to **A.** about language-learning materials before. When the subject came up, several of them asked **A.** to bring them dictionary software (Persian-English) that he had at home. Many interviewees had their own materials, both book-based and electronic, which they were quite willing to share with the community when asked, but which had beforehand been unknown to the other community members.

Each of these issues could be addressed, and possibly even completely resolved, by an easily accessible system of community-internal communication. Community

members interested in taking part in a Turkish course could quickly contact the entire community and search for additional participants. When new support structures or new legal information emerges, NGOs serving the community could quickly and effortlessly distribute such information to all community members. A community member interested in offering a service to the community, like language instruction, could quickly inform all potential participants of the details, and could easily coordinate with potential students regarding time, location and other details. Community members searching for useful learning materials, whether for learning languages or for other purposes, could quickly ask the community whether someone can give them access to what they need.

There are a few possible forms that such organizational structures might take. All of the families I spoke with have cell phones, but calling 19 other families to ask about small issues like English materials is both expensive and time-intensive. It also seemed to be the case that a given community member would have the phone numbers of only those families with which he or she was directly associated. A central telephone list would mitigate this problem to a certain extent, though it is not clear whether this would improve communication among community members who would not otherwise have communicated with each other.

Regular community meetings could also potentially solve the problems listed above, but in the case of the Sivas refugee community they do not seem to be particularly effective. One issue is that the meetings are not simply intended to serve the goals of community organization, but also to be religious gatherings. At least one of the community members I spoke with avoids coming to the regular meetings because he does

not feel that he fits in in such a religious setting. The issue of participation in Turkish courses was apparently also brought up at such a meeting prior to my interview sessions, but many of the interviewees were still unaware that **A.** was actively searching for new participants. Another possible solution would be to set up an internet-based, Dari (or Farsi)-language community portal, possibly in the form of a forum, where community members could post questions, suggestions and other information that might be of use to the community as a whole. This solution avoids many of the complications of phone communication or in-person meetings, but brings with it the additional difficulty that not all community members have internet access in their homes. However, if such a website were to be set up and used regularly, it seems likely that those without direct at-home internet access would be able to participate by going online at public libraries, internet cafes or the homes of other community members. Another potential problem for this strategy is that families without literate members would not be able to benefit directly from the website.

Several weeks after my interview sessions, **A.** informed me that he intended to set up a website for Afghan refugees living in Turkey, with goals quite similar to the ones mentioned above, but on a larger scale. The initial reactions to the site that he subsequently created have been quite positive, according to him.

It would be considerably easier for an organization like the UNHCR or ASAM to create a website for specific refugee communities in Turkey. **A.**'s site is hosted as a free blog website, and news of the site is spread to other Afghan communities in Turkey by word-of-mouth or through Facebook. A large NGO would be able to purchase web space, and inform refugees of the existence of a website for community organization

much more effectively than an individual refugee.

The benefits of such a web portal are clear, and go far beyond what has been listed so far. Setting up and maintaining this sort of website would also be quite inexpensive compared with other, more direct ways of addressing issues like refugee education.

Future Prospects and Questions for Further Research

There is some speculation in the literature that Turkey might eventually change its asylum laws, and become a country of first asylum for Asian-origin refugees. Such a development would completely change the sociolinguistic dynamics discussed in this thesis, as the role of Turkish language instruction would become considerably more important both to refugees and to Turkey. Assuming that such a major change will not occur in the next few years, I would like to give some speculation as to how the situation in refugee communities like the Afghan community in Sivas might develop in the near future.

The Afghan refugee community in Sivas is growing, and overcoming some of the initial difficulties that arose during the formation of the community. I suspect that whether or not an NGO takes an active role in facilitating communication, the community will become increasingly well connected. Especially as more and more families gain internet access—a process which I observed in the course of my interviews—various online forums and websites with user-generated content will become more widespread in, and useful for, the community.

In terms of direct language learning, it is not clear whether the situation in Sivas will change without significant outside influence. Increased communication will pre-

sumably help the community coordinate linguistic issues, and could conceivably help community members organize participation in free government-run Turkish courses. English learning showed no signs of development, aside from vague plans for **A.** to make a second attempt at offering in-home English instruction—which several interviewees said that they would definitely take part in.

Several questions about the current state of language aid provision to Turkey's refugee communities have remained unanswered here, and would require further research to answer properly. The question of whether funding is available for additional education provision to Turkish refugee communities has not been addressed here. It is not clear whether US-based donors and aid organizations would be willing to provide educational support to refugees who have not yet been selected to be resettled to the US. It is also unclear whether diverting funding to language education from other forms of aid would be a sensible step for NGOs operating in Turkey. It has also not been established to what extent the refugees from the Sivas refugee community would follow up on their indicated interest and actually participate in regular language courses—i.e. it is quite easy to recognize that you “need” to learn English, but requires a considerable amount of effort and dedication to regularly take part in courses. It needs to be established to what extent those refugees who indicate that they would like to be offered free English courses would have the time and energy to actually attend.

Another open question is whether free courses like those offered by the National Education and Health Ministries in Sivas can handle a large influx of refugee students, or whether they are already operating near their full capacity, and would have to turn away potential students if demand were to rise significantly. These questions should be

addressed in further research, and should certainly be addressed by any organization considering offering the sorts of language learning aid described in this thesis.

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