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CALICO Software Review

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Talk Now! Turkish

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Product at a glance

Product type	**Tutorial**
Language	**Turkish as a Foreign Language (TFL)**
- Level : Beginners (Level one)	
- Activity : Basic Vocabulary and Phrases	
- Age group : 12 - Adult	
Media Format:	**1 x CD-ROM**
Computer Platforms:	**Windows 3.1, 95, 98, NT; Macintosh OS7+**
Hardware Requirements	**PC: 468 processor or above**
8 Mb RAM	
Hard disk space: 30 Mb	
CD-ROM drive	
VGA with 256 colors	
MPC compatible Sound Card (e.g. SoundBlaster)	
Speakers or headphones	
Microphone (Optional)	
Mac: Any color Macintosh	
68030 processor or above	
8 Mb	
2x CD ROM Drive	
Microphone (Optional)	
Price:	**Individual copy : £29.99 (about $40 US)**
Site licence : Contact producer for details	

General Description

Talk Now! Learning Turkish is advertised as language software aiming to teach basic vocabulary and phrases to absolute beginner Turkish learners of 12 years of age and older. It offers basic Turkish vocabulary and phrases related to nine different topics such as First words (Ilk kelimeler), Food (Yiyecek), Colors (Renkler), Phrases (Deyimler), Body (V? Numbers (Sayilar), Countries (keler), Time (Zaman), and Shopping (Alis-veris).
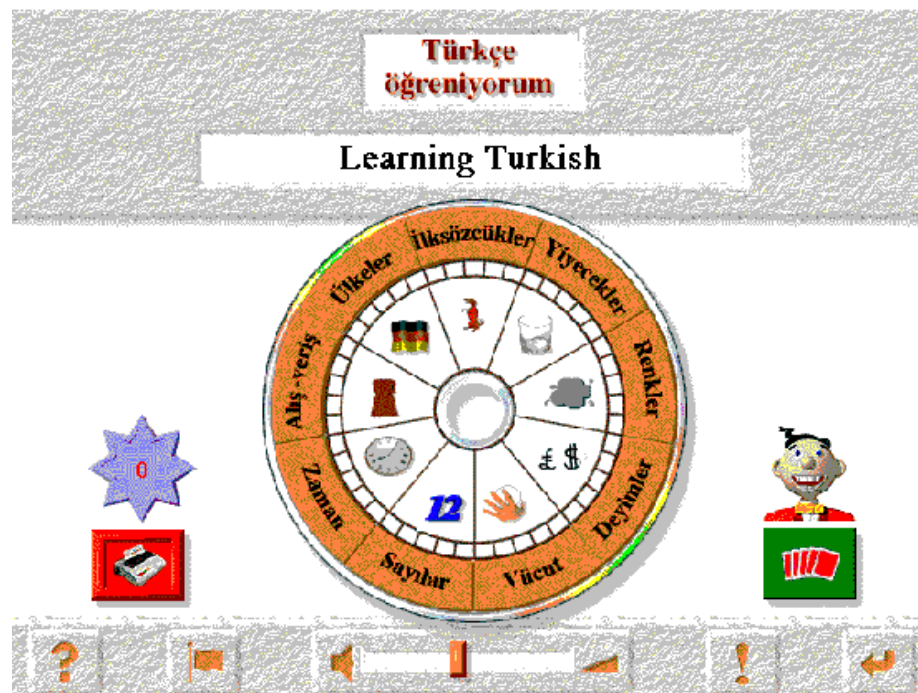
Figure 1 - Contents

Each Topic consists of five sections. These are: Word Practice (S?k alistirmasi yapmak), Speaking Practice (Konusma alistirmasi yapmak), Easy Game (Kolay Oyun), Hard Game (Zor oyun), Print Picture Dictionary (Resimli s?g?niz).
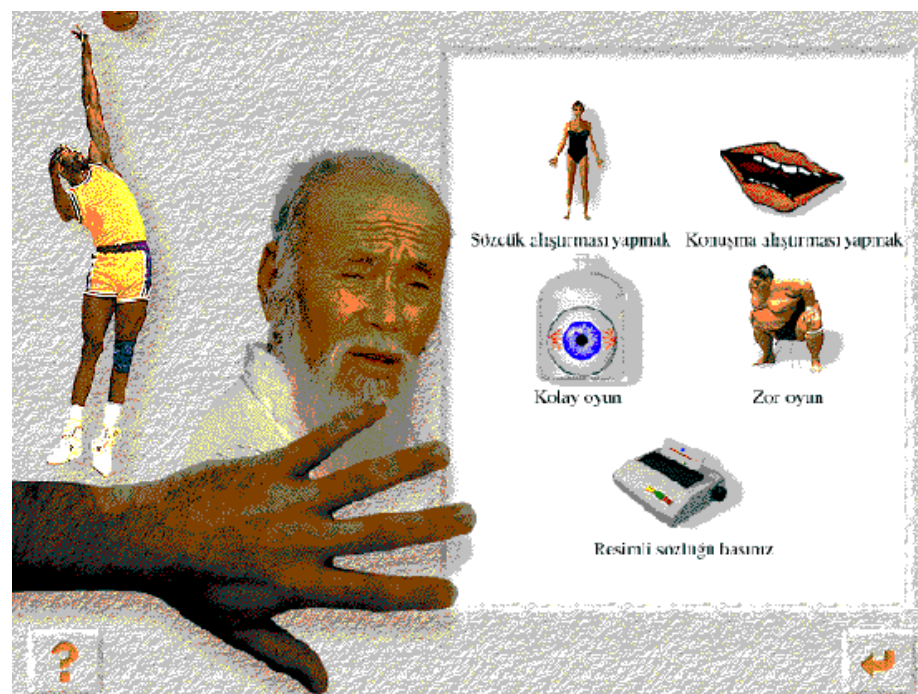

Figure 2 - Subsections of a topic (lesson)

In the *'Word Practice'* section, users are provided with either a list of words or pictures. They can click on the *'Brown button'* to see what they mean. Similarly words correspond to what pictures mean. While clicking they hear the pronunciation of the words from native Turkish speakers (a man and/or a woman). Alternatively, they can click a word or a picture from the list and listen to it. They can record their own voice and listen to both it and that of a native Turkish speaker. They repeat the process as many times as needed. The main function of this section is to introduce the written, visual and oral forms of new words and phrases to the learners of Turkish as a foreign language.

In the *'Speaking Practice'* section, the user is provided with three activities involving groups of words of increasing length (4, 8, and 10). These activities can be done at will in two ways: (1) by clicking on the *'Green button'* to hear words before recording their own voice or (2) by clicking on the *'Red button'* to record their own pronunciation without first hearing the model. After recording, users can compare their pronunciation to that of a Turkish native speaker (male or female, as desired). The main function of this section is to have users review what they have learned at the beginning section (*Word*

Practice section) of a lesson.

In the *'Easy Game'* section, a user is initially provided with four pictures and/or words or short phrases and their pronunciation. Then the pronunciation of one of the items is repeated and the user has to click the corresponding picture or word. The main function of this section is to give learners the chance to review what they have encountered in the beginning sections (i.e. *Word Practice*, *Speaking Practice* sections) of a topic. It also provides learners with the opportunity to test how well they have mastered the material. The *'Hard Game'* section is a more difficult version of the *'Easy Game'* section in which learners are exposed to more complex comprehension tasks, and given a chance to review what they have encountered before.

The last section of a topic is the *Print Picture Dictionary*. This section enables the user to print off all the words and phrases relating to each particular topic along with corresponding visual supports. Its main function is to allow users to study independently of the computer.

Additional features of the program are as follows:

- *Talk Now! (Learning Turkish)* provides users with on-line help in any one of 49 supported languages.
- When users access the software the target score they are expected to get is indicated.
- The program keeps scores for each user and has three types of attainment-based awards that can be printed out and kept by the user.
- The program also keeps summary records (i.e. when users last accessed the software, how many sessions they went through, what their score and awards were) that can be printed, deleted or kept.
- The program contains games to reinforce and motivate a user to review and learn better. This includes an incremental game which provides an over-all gradual review activity as well as a general test.

Evaluation
Technological features
The software is quite easy to load because of the 'Auto play' feature in MacOS and Windows 95. The program must be run manually in Windows 3.x, but is still quite easy to load.

In addition to easy loading, it also performs very well. In order to find out whether it had any problems in terms of performance, the reviewer ran it on four separate computers (PC) and did not encounter any difficulties.

The software is designed for both PCs and Macs. In the PC version, when the screen is smaller than the recommended size (i.e. 640 x 480 pixels) there is no mechanism to minimise the window. A user, however, can toggle between open programs by using Alt-Tab keys if need be.

Since the program features a volume control, sound level can be increased or decreased according to individual needs. The problem is, however, that this feature is only available on the main *menu page*. If users want to alter loudness elsewhere in the program, they need to return to the *menu page* to do so. With all but Windows 3.x this is, however, not a serious shortcoming inasmuch as other operating systems feature on screen volume controls.

The appearance of the screen is commendably simple, and uncluttered. This is a positive aspect of the software since it creates positive attitudes toward language-programs, particularly with software intended for autonomous learners (Hoffman 1995-6:26, Watts 1997:7). All navigational menus and icons are consistently placed and sized. The icons that represent functions such as 'Help', 'Exit', 'Instruction Language' are internationally standard. The function of other icons, however, is not always transparent and would be improved with the use of pointer captions to make them more meaningful and helpful (Clarke 1992:68 references to Guastello et al 1989).

With the exception of the arbitrary use of color to indicate mouse-over and mouse-off with icons, color is very well handled in the program. Restrained color usage avoids distracting the learner's attention (Clarke 1992:35 referencing to Christ 1975). In this software specific colors are consistently associated with different purposes. The program's use of a dark foreground on a light background is also to be recommended, since such a color scheme contributes to lower error rates and faster completion times Clarke (1992:45-6).

Activities (Procedure)
In terms of positive aspects, activities progress gradually from easy to more difficult. At the same time they allow users the freedom to move around as desired. Activities do not limit the time of exposure, so learners can complete them at their own pace and speed. One item is seen on screen at a time, which is helpful because it avoids confusion and can help learners to feel more confident and relaxed (see Brett 1997: 46, 48). Activities require that learners respond with answers, such interactivity is particularly important with materials intended for self-study (Little 1995:179, Mangiafico 1996:113). Moreover, expected answers are clear and short and within the capabilities of beginners. Ample opportunity is provided for review and self-testing. Activities provide learners with the opportunity of recording their own voice and comparing with native Turkish speakers.

On the other side of the coin, while consistency is a virtue, it can also lead to a certain monotony. In terms of type, all of the activities are essentially the same. '*Easy Game*' and '*Hard Game*', for instance, require learners to respond identically. Different learners might enjoy different types of activities. For example, some users might want to drag and drop, match or type answers, rather than clicking at every occasion. Greater variety of activities types would provide more motivation. Feedback is restricted to simple Yes/No responses (or Evet/Hayir depending on choice of on-line help language).

Teacher Fit (Design)
The underlying theoretical framework of this program is structuralist, with repetition of simple word associations and rote memorisation constituting the primary methodology. Very little attempt is made to contextualize vocabulary. Surprisingly, given this software's pedagogical approach, learners' attention is not drawn to cognates, which can play a vital role in learning new words in the target language (see Hammer & Monod 1978:32). A number of Turkish / English cognates are in fact present in this software as *basic words*, and users' attention could easily be drawn to them through feedback by saying, for instance, 'Is the word *televizyon (television)* similar or the same in your language?' (with 'Yes' and 'No' choices). (*Televizyon* kelimesi dilinizde ayni veya benzer mi?).

As indicated above, feedback is restricted to simple *Yes/No* responses. Inevitably, this is not always enough, and learners definitely need to be provided with more than this in many cases. In short, they should be told as much as possible not only why their answer is wrong, but also why it is correct. Another shortcoming of feedback is that learners are praised only when they answer all the questions correctly. Even if only one answer out of all questions is wrong, they receive no

praise. Moreover, learners always receive '*g�ext* which means '*well done*'. Instead a wide range of praising words or phrases such as '*good*', '*well done*', '*very good*', '*perfect*', '*good guessing*', '*that's right*', '*correct*', '*that's ok*', '*alright*', '*great*', '*that's correct*', '*you're right*', '*excellent*', '*yes*', etc. could be provided.

Although the socio-cultural aspects of the program are generally accurate, it does contain some mistakes stemming from cultural differences. One aspect of this is readily apparent in the feedback responses indicated in Figures 3 and 4. While in many European languages these pictures would be correctly interpreted as "Yes" and "No", in Turkish language and culture they correspond, respectively, more accurately to 'succeeded' and 'failed'.

Figure 3 - 'Yes'   Figure 4 - 'No'

Similarly, nearly all Turkish people, and the other minority groups who live in Turkey, drink tea from a specific small glass that is called '«ay bardagi', not from a cup. The cup which is shown in the software is mainly used for drinking *sahlep*, not tea; although a very low percentage of Turkish population might use it for tea as well. Such cultural differences really need to be emphasised in language teaching materials, otherwise they can mislead and prompt mislearning which might result in frustration at later stages.
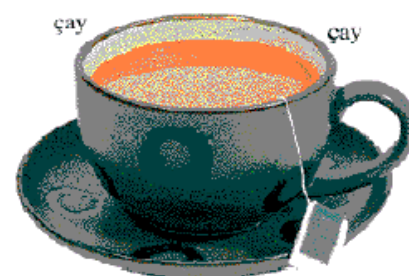

Figure 5 - A cup of tea in terms of Western culture

Learner Fit (Design)
Since this program is directed to self-learners, it is responsive to individual needs and adapts to different learning style preferences. Users are given full control of the program so that they can pause, repeat, record their voice and listen as many times as they want. Learners can be either visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, or tactile (Dunn & Dunn 1979, Dunn 1983). Some can be both auditory and visual (Reid 1987:96-7). In this software, pictures and written forms of words and phrases meet the needs of those who are visual, which is considered the most common learning style preference (Dunn & Dunn 1979). Pronunciations of the words and phrases meet the needs of auditory learners. Voice and clicking words/phrases correspond to the needs of those who are kinaesthetic and tactile. All these activities require users to review what they have already comprehended in different ways (although the types of activities are very limited), which is important because repetition can lead to acquisition as it is highly effective in learning.

Since this software is mainly for self-access, it might be difficult for language-teachers to incorporate into their curriculum. This, however, does not mean that it cannot be used in a classroom environment at all. In fact, some parts could be used in class as a supplementary aid or as tasks for group work. For example, a teacher working with a simple reading text relating to '*foods*' could use the corresponding section of the software program as a pre-reading activity, thereby providing visuals, written forms and especially pronunciations.

Summary
Although there is, as indicated above, room for improvement, *Talk Now! (Learning Turkish)* is beneficial and effective language software for a pleasure-giving and effective learning start. Since it is responsive to individual needs and adapts to different learning-style preferences, it can help users to learn *basic words* and *phrases* quickly, as advertised. This software would need, however, to be followed up with deep and more sophisticated Turkish language programs.

Scaled Rating (1 low - 5 high)
Implementation possibilities (for self-study) : 4.5
Pedagogical features : 4
Socio-linguistic accuracy : 4
Use of computer capabilities : 4
Ease of Use : 4
Over-all evaluation : 4
Value for money : 4

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