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## CALICO Software Review

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### *Beginning Turkish* (Yeni Başlayanlar İçin Türkçe)

Vehbi Türel - The University of Manchester

#### Product at a glance

Product type:	Multimedia Language learning software
Language:	Turkish
	Level: Beginning (Age: 12-Adult)
	Activity: Multiple choice, vocabulary completion, audio flashcards, pronunciation, listening comprehension and dictation
Media format:	2 CD-ROMs
Computer platform:	Windows 95/98/2000/ME+ or Windows NT 3.51/4.0, Windows-XP
Hardware requirements	PC: 486 +
	RAM: 16MB (minimum)
	Hard disk space: 9MB
	CD-ROM (2x speed)
	SVGA or better; sound card; speaker; microphone (recommended)
Price	Individual copy: \$69.95 US Site license: 30% discount for 10+ (\$48.97 US) Information on how to order: <a href="http://clp.arizona.edu/clc/tur/order.htm">http://clp.arizona.edu/clc/tur/order.htm</a>

#### General Description

*Beginning Turkish* is interactive multimedia language software for beginner Turkish learners of 12 years of age and older who want to develop and practice their Turkish language skills by viewing video / listening to audio sequences and completing a variety of relevant tasks. The sequences are spoken mainly by two natives (i.e. a male and a female speaker) at the 'speed and intonation of normal conversational speech', as advertised. The software is principally for self-study. It consists of a wide variety of basic situational topics such as *Okul (School)*, *Merhaba (Hello-Simple greetings)*, *Alis-veris (Shopping)*, *Karakolda (At the police station)* and so on that are necessary and vital for beginning learners of Turkish. While the topics, such as *greetings*, at the beginning are simple, gradually they become more complex as in the *Turkish culture* and *weather* sections.

The software, developed as a part of the University of Arizona Critical Language Series for less-commonly taught / learnt languages, contains 29 video dialogues and readings and over 9,400 audio recordings on a two CD-ROM package, each of which features 10 different lessons. In general, each lesson contains an *instruction*, a *video dialogue*, a *reading* (a video monologue), *transcript* of the video dialogue with audio, and a *supplemental dialogue* (a reading text) with audio (Figure 1). The *video dialogues* do not have sub-titles, but potential users can listen and read the same texts simultaneously in the *Text with audio* section since transcriptions with audio clips are provided there. All *supplemental dialogues* have voice-over clips that enable a learner to listen and read at the same time.

←go back

instructions

video

text with audio

flashcards

multiple choice

fill in the blank

dictation

pronunciation

Lesson 2: Merhaba (Hello)

Critical Languages Series™

Figure 1 - The first page of lesson 2: 'Hello' (Merhaba)

Each lesson also contains a variety of tasks which are carried out by completing different activities such as (1) *audio flashcards*, (2) *multiple choice*, (3) *fill-in-the-blanks* (cloze), (4) *dictation*, and (5) *pronunciation*. These tasks are extensive and provide practice in different areas such as listening, reading, writing, and grammar. In *Audio flash cards*, learners can hear individual words or expressions. They can also see the word or expression in the reading text, hear in a sentence, and can even access their translations in a word form or in a sentence context. *Multiple choice* reinforces the use of Turkish vocabulary, while *Fill-in-the-blanks* requires learners to supply missing words. *Pronunciation* enables learners to practice modelled words and sentences and compare their own pronunciation with that of native speakers. *Dictation* requires learners to type in the written form of an audio version of a word or a sentence. All of these activities can ultimately reinforce what has been covered in the *video dialogues*, *readings*, *transcripts*, and *supplemental dialogues* such as pronunciation, vocabulary, expressions, structures, culture, and grammar.

Feedback is provided in various ways for different activities. In *multiple choice* activities, when the answer is correct, learners receive an 'ok dialogue' accompanied by a reinforcing sound. When the answer is wrong, the correct answer is displayed at the top of the screen. Both kinds of answers are accompanied by the display of the learner's current score. In *Dictation* activities, feedback is provided in the form of the provision of the correct word or sentence. When there are spelling mistakes in the learner's output, they are highlighted in red and also a score is displayed (Figure 2). In *Fill-in-the-blanks* activities, when the answer is correct, the response is highlighted in blue. When the answer is wrong, it is displayed in red, and also a score is displayed in which the number of correct answers out of the answered ones can be seen.

Compare Your Answer to the Correct Answer

Ne var ne yak?

Ne var ne yok?

Points Off

for mistakes in answer: 1

for relistening: 0

Sentence Score: 9 / 10

Listening and Scoring

Play Sentence WordByWord

SlowlyWordByWord Stop

Total Lesson Score 99

Sentence 1 of 10

Figure 2 - An example of feedback for *Dictation* activities

Learners have full control over video clips and audio sequences. They can play and stop them whenever they want. They can rewind and forward video clips by moving the slide bar. Similarly, they have full control of audio clips:

- They can listen as many times as they need.
- They can listen word by word or sentence by sentence.
- They can repeat a word or a sentence as many times as they want by simply clicking on it.

### Evaluation

#### Technological features

*Beginning Turkish software* is a Windows-based application and is rather easy to install. Since the software incorporates an 'Auto run-feature', the installation commences automatically when the CD-ROM is inserted into the required drive. Following this, the InstallShield wizard takes over and all the user needs to do is follow the instructions and click proper

choices. When the installation process is complete, users are instructed to reboot their computer. While not difficult to do, the necessary installation steps are also printed on the CD-ROMs themselves, which is more reassuring for novice users.

In addition to easy installation, the software performs very well. It was run on two different computers with no difficulties. The speed of delivery is excellent, and all clips play instantly. The video and the audio clips are of high quality although some of the talking heads (i.e., video clips) are rather monotonous as the same person is presented in two different roles within a *video dialogue*.

The use of colour in *Beginning Turkish* is very well handled because (1) specific colours are consistently associated with different purposes and this helps learners to know what-is-what and what-is-where at a glance. (2) The usage of colour is restrained and thus avoids distraction. (3) The use of a dark foreground on a light background is also a perfect combination as it contributes to lower error rates and faster completion times (Clarke 1992:45-6).

The software is consistent in terms of screen design within lessons, in terms of size, place, format, classification, layout, standard headings and colour of the elements, and also maintains simplicity on the *first page* of each lesson. This is a strongpoint of the program as it fosters positive attitudes towards language-software (Watts 1997:7). Navigation between lesson elements, on the other hand, leaves something to be desired. For example, to return from *Text with audio* to the *first page* of each lesson, users simply need to click on the <go back> button. However, when they return from any of the five types of activities, they are required to click on the 'exit' submenu of the 'file' menu. It is possible to click on the <close button> at the left top of the screen of the five activity types to return to the *first page*, though one would expect this to close down the whole application as does the right-top <close button> of *Text with audio*. This kind of inconsistency needs to be avoided when the material is particularly intended for autonomous learners because 'no matter how sound the instruction is pedagogically, it is worthless if students... become frustrated' (Hoffman 1995-6:26).

A further feature in need of improvement is the way the reading texts are presented. They require vertical scrolling, which unnecessarily complicates the task of simultaneously listening and reading and can easily lead to distraction and de-motivation. Static page-length texts are preferable because not only do they avoid distracting learners' attention, they also help to keep the amount of text on a page to the acceptable amount. As Peter (1994:201) points out, this is an important software design consideration because poorly motivated learners do not read long passages of text on-screen.

A strength of *Beginning Turkish* is the use of hypertext in the reading texts, which (1) enables learners to find out definitions of the underlined words and (2) provides notes on culture and grammar usage. These explanations are provided in the learners' mother tongue, rather than the target language, which enables a beginning learner to understand them. However, grammatical explanations are sometimes more detailed than they should be at this particular stage.

### **Activities (Procedures)**

As previously mentioned, five types of activities (*audio flashcards*, *multiple choice*, *fill-in-the-blank*, *dictation* and *pronunciation*) are available in *Beginning Turkish*. These are intended to be undertaken after watching *Video dialogues*, and / or listening to *Text with Audio* and *Supplemental dialogues*.

In *Flash cards*, learners hear the words or expressions they encountered in the *Video dialogues* and /or listened to in *Text with Audio* either as individual forms or in a sentence context. They can also see the word or expression in the reading text where it is highlighted, thus enabling them to see at a glance and remember the context. This type of activity meets the needs of both auditory and visual learners because users can both hear a word or expression and see its written form. Furthermore, learners can access the translation of the words they hear in this activity.

*Multiple choice* reinforces the use of Turkish vocabulary. A learner is supposed to click the right choice, which can be a synonym, antonym, suffix, expression definition or cultural association.

*Fill-in-the-blanks* requires learners to fill in the missing words in a passage. This provides learners with the opportunity of typing what they hear and see, which can promote acquisition of the written form of a word / expression.

*Dictation* requires learners to type in the written form of an audio version of a word or a sentence. Apart from focussing learners' attention on pronunciation and providing writing practice, this activity type also meets the needs of auditory, visual, and kinaesthetic learners because they can see, hear and type.

*Pronunciation* enables learners to practice modelled words and sentences and compare their own pronunciation with that of native speakers. This can help learners to tease out what kind of difficulties they have, what kind of mistakes they make, and how they can overcome such problems.

Another positive aspect of the activities is that they progress gradually from easy to more difficult. Additionally, they allow learners the freedom to move around as needed and desired. Activities do not limit the time of exposure; therefore, learners can carry out the tasks at their own pace and time. Since one item is seen on screen at a time (Figure 3), confusion is avoided and learners are helped to feel more confident and relaxed (Brett 1997:46, 48). Furthermore, as users are expected to give clear and short answers either by *clicking* or *typing*, it requires learner participation, which is important with materials intended for self-study (Mangiafico 1996: 107).

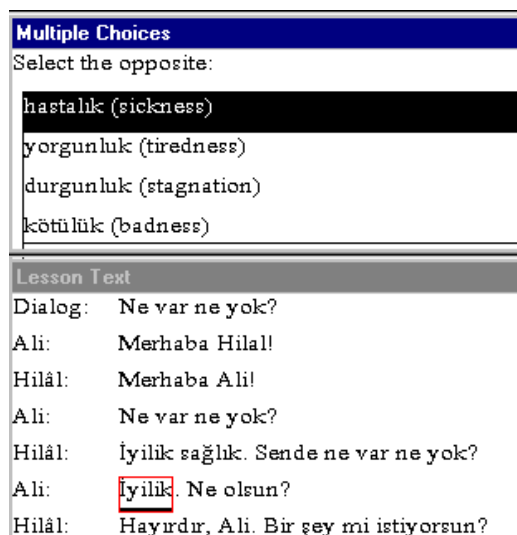


Figure 3- A sample of one item seen on screen at a time

#### Teacher Fit (Approach)

*Beginning Turkish* is based on the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) model. In other words, learners are initially exposed to listening segments (i.e. *video dialogues*, *readings* and *text with audio*) without any preparation or warming-up exercises. Later they are requested to practice what they have covered through *audio flashcard* and *multiple choice* activities. Finally, they are instructed to produce by completing *fill-in-the-blanks*, *dictation* and *pronunciation* activities (although they are free to do activities in any order they want). The material also contains instructions about how they can make effective use of the software. Additionally, all activities require only a single user to complete. All of these features of the software make the material more intrinsically suitable for self-study rather than for classroom use.

However, like many other self-study programmes on the market, the software can be used in the classroom if some pre-listening tasks pertinent to each lesson are prepared in advance. Not only do such pre-listening exercises prepare learners in class for what they are going to see and hear, but they can also compensate for a weakness of the software which itself lacks such tasks. This might further encourage and motivate learners to use the software to their advantage during self-study. In addition, some parts of the software, such as *video dialogues*, *audio text* or *reading texts* can be used in class as a supplementary aid or as tasks for group work. For example, a teacher working with basic and simple reading text pertinent to '*greetings*' could use the *video dialogues* of the first and / or second lessons as a pre-reading activity.

Surprisingly, the program does not draw learners' attention to cognates, which are useful in learning a foreign language (Hammer & Mood 1978:32). In fact, quite a number of *Turkish / English cognates* are present in this software, and it would be a simple enough matter to bring this out through *footnotes* or *feedback*. It could be argued, however, that doing so might not be relevant to the situation at hand and could side-track the learning of the conversational lexicon as a systemic entity.

The socio-cultural aspects of *Beginning Turkish* are well presented and learners' attention is well drawn to relevant expressions and topics such as *inşallah*, *maşaallah*, *şahlep*, *anıkabir* and so forth.

The lack of subtitles for video clips at the beginning stage of each lesson, as well as the availability of the transcripts of the same clips with audio, which are also highlighted, is a perfect design and combination for language learning. The assumption underlying this is that the former encourages learners to try to understand the sequences without the help of sub-titles, which might motivate and result in viewing the same clip a few more times (Türel, 2002). The latter enables learners to understand what they hear, pick up a great deal of language, and help them feel relaxed and attentive (Vanderplank 1988:271-81, Porter and Roberts 1981:47, Deville et al. 1996:82).

#### Learner Fit (Design)

The objective of *Beginning Turkish* is advertised as being to '...actively encourage your listening, speaking and reading skills by combining interactive audio, video and text in a variety of exercises....' The *video dialogues*, *readings*, and *text with audio* provide learners with the opportunity of listening. They also meet the needs of visual learners. Since *text with audio* contains audio clips, such clips likewise meet the needs of auditory learners.

The availability of reading texts and transcripts can also improve learners' reading skills, while *dictation* activity, which corresponds to the needs of kinaesthetic and tactile orientated learners, is very likely to help learners to acquire the written forms of words and expressions. In the same way, *pronunciation* activity gives learners the opportunity of practising and improving their pronunciation, which hopefully result in speaking development.

In sum, not only do all five activity types accommodate a range of learning style preferences, but they also reinforce what users cover in the *video dialogues*, *readings*, and *supplemental dialogues*: pronunciation, vocabulary, expressions, structures, culture, and grammar. While accommodating a range of learning style preferences encourages and motivates learners, reinforcement activities can result in language learning and acquisition, because repetition (practice) is one of the cognitive strategies most frequently used by learners (O'Malley et al. (1989:431-2), a strategy which helps comprehension (Parkin et al 1988:77-86) and comprehension results in acquisition (Carroll 1977:500, Krashen 1982:21).

Apart from meeting the needs of learners with different learning style preferences and having the potential of improving different skills, another strength of the software is that all *video dialogues*, *readings* and *text with audio* are read by native speakers. This can help to prepare learners for the target world. Although different ethnic groups in Turkey speak the language with regional accents, this can be drawn to learners' attention at later stages.

With regard to linguistic level, the grammatical explanations in the *Footnote* and *Grammar note* are very challenging, and would be better dealt with at the intermediate level or above.

### Summary

*Beginning Turkish* is a very welcome addition to the teaching / learning of Turkish. It does, however, suffer from a number of shortcomings that would profit from attention.

- The same person should not be presented in two different roles within a *video dialogue* and a *text with audio* as this can lead to monotony, boredom and confusion.
- Feedback should not consist of only 'the correct answer is:..' for wrong answers or 'Correct' for right answers as it is with the multiple choice activities. Students need clear explanations if feedback is to serve a remedial function from which learners can benefit. (cf. Sheerin 1987:29, Ruhlmann 1995:55, Raphan 1996:28)
- The sounds which accompany feedback need to be improved or eliminated. In the case of correct answers, the sound is particularly noisy and can quickly become a source of irritation.
- Learners need to be provided with pre-listening tasks to prepare them for what they are going to see and hear (see, for instance, Beile, 1978:148, Lund 1991:202, Ur 1992:4).
- *Video dialogues* and *readings* should be accompanied by specifically related tasks. In the absence of such exercises, learners (in particular non-visual learners) are likely to ignore these parts of the program, and focus only on *Text with audio*. In which case they will not benefit from video segments at all, which are essential for drawing their focus to the native speakers' facial expressions and gestures and in preparing them for the target culture.

### Scaled rating (1 low-5 high)

Implementation possibilities: 4

Pedagogical features: 3.5

Socio-linguistic accuracy: 4

Use of computer capabilities: 4

Ease of use: 4

Over-all evaluations: 4

Value for money: 4

### Producer Details

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