

# What about Mr *Türkyılmaz*?

## *The Short History of Turkish Surnames*

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### Abstract

With the title of her book *Herr "Demirci" heißt einfach "Schmidt"* (Mr "Demirci" just means/is just called "Smith"), Annemarie Schimmel (1992) suggests that the system of Turkish surnames is not that different from the German one; and on first sight, names like *Terzi* 'tailor', *Ankaralı* 'person from Ankara' or *Uzuner* 'long man' seem to confirm this. A deeper look, however, shows that the majority of Turkish surnames – e.g. *Türkyılmaz* 'Turk does not shy away', *Demirbaş* 'iron head', *Şenol* 'be happy' – cannot be integrated into the classification used for German (and other European) surnames.

Rather, the unique situation in which surnames were introduced in Turkey, by law as part of a series of reforms shortly after the Republic was declared by a nationalist government following the defeat in WWI, brought about very different kinds of surnames. While German surnames reflect some characteristic of their original bearer, most Turkish surnames were chosen for their positive, yet arbitrary, semantics.

Supposedly, all Turkish surnames also have transparent meanings because of their short history. Surprisingly many of them though are rather opaque since they were introduced during the peak of the language reform and hence do not coincide with words in the present-day Turkish vocabulary.

## 1. Background

- DFD (Digitales Familiennamenwörterbuch Deutschlands 'Digital Surname Dictionary of Germany')
  - Cooperative 24-year project of Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur Mainz (<http://www.adwmainz.de/>) and Technische Universität Darmstadt (<http://www.tu-darmstadt.de/>)
  - Goal: mapping and etymologising (not only German) surnames in Germany, to be published incrementally in an online dictionary
  - Data: phonebook 2005, all names with at least 10 entries
  - Target audience: Interested public as well as academics
  - Systematisation by linguistic origin, grammatical features, thematic groups (motivations)

## 2. Definition

- German *Familiennamen* 'family name' inaccurate
  - Family members can have different surnames
  - People can stop being a family and still bear the same surname
- Best defined by contrasting it with its predecessor, the byname which
  - is given in the course of one's life
  - is not hereditary

- refers to an individual
- is motivated (i.e. describes some feature of its bearer)
- is changeable in different life stages
- is often used with a connector (e.g. *John **the** Miller*)

### 3. German Surnames

#### 3.1 History

- 13<sup>th</sup> century: increased reference with bynames in south and east Germany
- 15<sup>th</sup> century: mass phenomenon also in north and east Germany; increased evidence of surnames (siblings with same name, hereditary names etc.)
- 17<sup>th</sup> century: magisterial regulations
  - prohibiting surname changes
  - prescribing the use of surnames
- 01.01.1900: establishment of registry offices fixes spelling of surnames

#### 3.2 Factors

- Population growth and concentration lead to more people bearing the same given name in a place
- Increased written administration makes unambiguous identification necessary
- Surnames make the assertion of hereditary entitlement easier
- Influence from neighbouring countries, especially France and Italy

#### 3.3 Classification

- Patronymics
  - Father's or other person's name
  - E.g. *Petersohn* 'Peter's son'
- Locational names
  - Newcomers' place of origin
  - E.g. *Bayer* for someone from Bavaria
- Habitational names
  - Description of the place where someone lives
  - E.g. *Holzer* 'wood +er' for someone living in/near the woods
- Occupational names
  - Profession or something to do with it (product, tools etc.)
  - E.g. *Metzger* 'butcher'
- Nicknames
  - Mental, physical or biographical characteristics
  - E.g. *Krause* 'curly'

### 4. Turkish Surnames

#### 4.1 The Naïve View

- Turkish Surnames were introduced in the 1920s-30s
- Due to their young age their etymology must be transparent
- So the names just have to be translated and put into the German categories

## 4.2 Top 10 Turkish Surnames

1. *Yılmaz* ‘won’t shy away’ → Nickname?
2. *Kaya* ‘rock’ → Habitational name?
3. *Demir* ‘iron’ → Occupational name?
4. *Şahin* ‘falcon’ → ???
5. *Çelik* ‘steel’ → Occupational name?
6. *Yıldız* ‘star’ → ???
7. *Yıldırım* ‘lightning’ → ???
8. *Öztürk* ‘pure Turk’ → Locational name?
9. *Aydın* ‘enlightened’ → Nickname?
10. *Özdemir* ‘pure iron’ → Occupational name?

## 4.3 Current State of Research

- Name dictionaries
  - Mainly deal with given names
  - List all literal meanings, even if they are probably irrelevant for names
  - Don’t say how names might be motivated
  - Often not very well researched
- Spencer 1961
  - Classification:
    - Names relating to occupations
    - Surnames derived from place names
    - Heroic and tribal eponyms
    - Object Names
    - Lâkap Names
    - Euphonic Names
  - Mixes motivations with semantic classes
  - „Euphonic names“ dumping ground for everything that doesn’t fit into the other categories
- Jastrow 1985
  - Classification:
    - Primary nouns and nouns derived from verbs
    - Nouns that describe professions and occupations
    - Primary adjectives
    - Derived adjectives
    - Adjective + noun
    - Noun + noun
    - Participles
    - Noun + participle
    - Imperative constructions
    - Older names
  - Primarily morphological classification
  - Not very in-depth
  - Mixes grammatical and semantic features (“professions and occupations”)
- Sakaoğlu 1979, Zengin 2007, Mehrebani-Yasyba 2010
  - Classification:
    - Names relating to occupations
    - Names derived from place names
    - Names denoting persons

- Nicknames
- Euphonic words
- Words from the flora and fauna
- Minerals and metals
- Times of the day
- Cardinal directions
- Natural forces and words describing nature
- Colours
- General human ideals
- Martial world ideals
- Mental, physical and moral qualities
- Kinship terms
- Law and order
- Titles
- Numerals
- With the word that means ‚name‘ itself
- Sentential names
- Categories not clearly defined (“Nicknames” vs. “Mental, physical and moral qualities”)
- No hierarchies (“words describing nature” > “flora and fauna”)
- Unnecessarily small classes (“times of day”, “cardinal directions”)
- Zengin and Mehrebani-Yasyba just added onto Spencer’s categories; somewhat unreflected, it seems

## 4.4 Considerations

### 4.4.1 Turkish Given Names

- Pre-Islamic
  - Religion: mainly Shamanism
  - “Magical” names whose meaning was believed to determine one’s life
  - In another tradition names were given only after a heroic deed
  - Ancestor cult
  - Motives:
    - Battle/war
    - Strength/power/bravery
    - Reputation
    - Wisdom
    - Animals
    - Stone and Metals
    - Forces of Nature
    - Kinship Terms
- Islamic (from 10<sup>th</sup> century)
  - Arabic and Persian names
  - Mainly religious motives
- Modern (from 20<sup>th</sup> century)
  - Return to Turkish roots
  - Names from history and legends
  - New names modelled after old Turkish names (similar motives)

#### 4.4.2 Historical Political Background

- 1920: Treaty of Sèvres
  - Peace treaty after defeat in WWI
  - Partitioning of the Ottoman Empire, leaving only a very small territory
  - Rejected by Young Turks (nationalist movement)
- 1922: Abolishment of the Sultanate
- 1923: Treaty of Lausanne
  - Political and economic sovereignty
  - Loss of non-Turkish territories
  - Kurds not recognised as nationaliy (hence no own territory)
  - Exchange of Greek and Turkish populations (based upon religious identity)
- Also 1923: Proclamation of the *Republic of Turkey* governed by the Young Turks

#### 4.4.3 The Language Reform

- Ottoman Turkish: *Mischsprache* (Turkish, Arabic, Persian)
- 1928: adoption of Latin script
- 1932: establishment of *Türk Dili Tekiki Cemiyeti* ‘Turkish Society for the Study of Language’, later *Türk Dil Kurumu* ‘Turkish Language Association’
  - Papers and talks like “Turkish Is an Indo-European Language”, “How Turkish Roots Gave Birth to Arabic”
  - Word-collection mobilisation: army officers, teachers and other officials were called upon to collect dialect words which were compiled into a dictionary
  - coinage of new compounds and various affixes
  - *Tarama Dergisi* (1934): scholars combed dictionaries of Turkic languages and old texts for words that had fallen out of use or never been used in Turkey

Heyd 1954 (quoted from Lewis 1999): “Now any Turkish word found in the vernacular of a remote Anatolian village, in the speech of an even more remote Turkish tribe in Siberia or in a manuscript of an eleventh century Turkish-Arabic dictionary was regarded as a possible addition to the modern Turkish vocabulary. On the other hand, practically every word of Arabic or Persian origin was considered outlawed and condemned to suppression as soon as a Turkish equivalent was found.”

Atay 1951 (quoted from Lewis 1999): “ ‘Listen to me, my boy,’ he said. ‘We have put to the test the claim of those who say that Turkish has no need of any foreign word. We really have got into a dead end. [...]’ But on one point he was insistent: it had to be explained that the words which were to remain in Turkish were Turkish in origin.”

Lewis 1999: “The key to understanding the course taken by the reform in its early years is that language was his [i.e. Atatürk’s] hobby. [...] in indulging his passion for etymology Atatürk was more enthusiastic than scientific.”

#### 4.4.4 The Surname Law 1934

See Appendix for the Surname Regulation (more detailed than the Law text)

#### 4.4.5 Naming Practice

- Application at the registry office where the name may be rejected
- Name books
  - Lists of old Turkish Names from history and legends
  - Description of old Turkish name motives
  - Lists of affixes to distinguish names from one another

- *Öz Türkçe* ‚pure Turkish‘ (i.e. reformed Turkish) dictionaries as sources for names
- Also more creative names, e.g.
  - *Kavakaltındayatarıuyuroğlu*  
‘son of him who lies and sleeps under the poplar
  - *Uçarturnagurbetgezerdiyardiyarellerde*  
‘the flying crane goes far from its homeland from strange country to country’

## 4.5 Classification

### Same categories as German names:

- Patronymics  
(NB: modern Turkish names cannot be models for patronymics since they are as young)  
e.g. *Ahmed, Nevzat, Cengiz*
- Locational names  
(NB: many Turkish placenames are much younger (1960s/70s) and cannot be models for surnames)  
e.g. *Uludağ, Van*
- Habitational names  
e.g. *Kaya* ‘rock’, *Çağlayan* ‘waterfall’
- Occupational names  
e.g. *Terzi* ‘tailor’, *Balıkçı* ‘fisher’, *Örs* ‘anvil’, *Tabak* ‘plate’
- Nicknames  
e.g. *Topal* ‘lame’, *Kıllı* ‘hairy’

### Specifically Turkish categories:

- Names modeled after old Turkish given names
  - Ancestry  
e.g. *Aksoy* ‘white kin/clan’, *Torun* ‘grandchild/descendant’
  - Nature  
e.g. *Polat* ‘steel’, *Aktan* ‘white dawn’, *Kaya* ‘rock’
  - War/Heroism  
e.g. *Kılıç* ‘sword’, *Kahraman* ‘hero’
  - “Magical” names  
e.g. *Yorulmaz* ‘doesn’t tire’, *Şanlı* ‘famed’, *Bilgin* ‘wise’
- Religious names  
e.g. *Ramazan, İslam*
- Nationalist Names
  - Patriotism  
e.g. *Yurdakul* ‘slave to the homecountry’
  - National symbols  
e.g. *Albayrak* ‘red flag’, *Ayyıldız* ‘moon and star’
  - Tribes and Peoples  
e.g. *Öztürk* ‘pure Turk’, *Tatar* ‘Tatar’, *Sümer* ‘Sumerian’
  - Freedom/Independence  
e.g. *Özgür* ‘free’, *Halas* ‘salvation/liberation’
- Meta names  
e.g. *Adıgüzel* ‘whose name is pretty’, *Adsız* ‘nameless’

## 5. Outlook

- Not all names fit neatly into these categories
- Geographic distribution
  - Regional distribution: region-specific names, especially in Kurdish and former Greek regions?
  - Urban vs. rural names: urban names more creative?
- Quantitative analysis
  - More singular names than in Germany?
  - Most names taken from lists?
- Impact of name changes after 1936 (relatively easy in Turkey)?
- Comparison with other countries, especially those with similar legislations/histories

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## Appendix

### Surname Regulation

(quoted from Türköz 2004, with minor modifications and emphases)

#### Section I

##### Special judgments

**Article 1:** Every Turk must carry a surname separate from his proper name (*öz ad*). Those without surnames must choose a surname and register these in population registers and birth certificates by 2/7/1936.

**Article 2:** In speaking, writing and signature, the proper name comes first, and the surname comes last. This can be done with all the letters [of the names] spoken or written but also only the use in writing and speaking only the use of the surname without the proper name, and in signing.

**Article 3:** According to Article 30, governors or district governors will choose the surnames of those who fail to choose and register a surname in the population records by 2/7/1936. From this day on if surnames are not written in the population registry they may not be used. Changes made in surnames will not be counted until they are written in the population register.

**Article 4:** According to the stipulations of the *Kanuni Medeni* (Civil Code), surnames can be changed with a court decision. Those who have registered or unregistered surnames from before the publication of the law, can change and take a new surname by 2/7/1936; however those who have changed their old surname or those who took new surnames may not change these without a court decision.

#### Section II

##### The Surname

**Article 5:** The new surnames must be taken from the Turkish language.

**Article 6:** The surname can be used either alone or with the *-oğlu* (son of) ending. It is mandatory to use the *-oğlu* ending in names referring to historically prominent people and legally given titles.

**Article 7:** It is forbidden to add endings or words such as *yan, of, ef, viç, iç, is, dis, pulos, aki, zade, mahdumu, veled* and *bin* referring to other ethnicities, or taken from another language. Those endings which have been added may not be used and must be replaced with *-oğlu*.

**Article 8:** [Names such as] *Arnavutoğlu, Kürtoğlu*, which in a general manner refer to another ethnic group/nation or like *Çerkes Hasan oğlu* and *Boşnak Ibrahim oğlu* those that indicate other nationalities or those, like *Zoti* and *Grandi*, are taken from another language may not be used or re-used.

**Article 9:** Names referring to tribes or clans may not be used or re-used.

**Article 10:** Names indicating rank and civil officialdom in the old or new state cadres may not be used or re-used.

**Article 11:** Names which are not suited to public morals, those which are ridiculous or insulting may not be used or re-used.

**Article 12:** Surnames referring to elders who have attained recognition/fame in history may not be taken unless they are supported by official regulations and documents. These [names] may not be used or re-used.

**Article 13:** Surnames which go against articles 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 shall not be registered in registries or birth certificates. Those which are entered will be scratched out and replaced with [another name] and an explanation attached.

**Article 14:** Families who come from the same lineage may, if they don't have a surname or if they want to change, choose a common surname and register it in the population registers and birth certificates.

**Article 15:** If people who are not of the same lineage in a village, town or city choose the same surname, the [surname of the family] who applies first will be accepted and the other one is changed. If [the second family] insist on not changing, [their name] can be distinguished by the addition of an adjective or addition such as (*büyük* (big), *küçük* (small)) and be transcribed in population registries and birth certificates.

In the application of this law, each population office in the cities will be considered a town.

Exceptions to this article may occur in cases where family members in one location take the same surname as their relations in another location.

### **Section III**

#### **The right and duty to choose the surname**

**Article 16:** Children whose ancestry is known will carry the name of their father. Children whose ancestry is not known take the surname of their mother. Only if the father recognizes them, or if there is a decision by a judge can these children take their father's name.

**Article 17:** The adopted child shall take the surname of the one who adopted [him/her]. If the adoption agreement is spoiled [?] the adopted child shall take his own father's surname.

**Article 18:** When women marry, they leave their father's surname and take their husband's.

**Article 19:** The woman who remarries shall take her new husband's surname from the day she marries him, and cannot ever return to her old husband's surname again.

**Article 20:** The woman whose marriage is spoiled, or who is divorced cannot use her husband's name after the [bozulma] or the divorce.

**Article 21:** The father who has children who are minors, whether they reside with him or not, must chooses surnames and register them in population registers and birth certificates.

These children are obligated to use this name. The child who has come of age is free to choose his own surname. Married women's husbands shall choose their surnames and transcribe them into the population registers.

**Article 22:** In the case of the annulment of marriage or of divorce, even if the child stays with the mother, the right and duty of selecting a surname for the children belongs to the father .

**Article 23:** If the father has died and his wife has not remarried, or if the father is under supervision because of mental illness or weakness and the marriage is still continuing, the right and duty to give

surnames to the children and have these transcribed into the population register shall belong to the mother. However if the father has a name that is already registered, the mother cannot change it.

**Article 24:** If the mother has remarried on the death of the father or if the father has been taken under custody because of mental illness or weakness and the marriage has declined, the duty and right to choose a surname and transcribe it into the population registry shall go to the nearest male relative of the father and of these, the oldest, and if there is no adult male blood-relations, then [this right belongs to] the guardian.

**Article 25:** If an adult child is under custody because of mental illness or weakness, his father shall choose his surname and have it transcribed in the population registry; if he has no father, his mother, and if no mother, then his guardian shall do this.

**Article 26:** The family chief is responsible for transcribing into the population registry the surname chosen by those blood, step or in-law relations (mother, father, grandfather, and siblings) and other blood or proximate relations living in a house.

Of these relatives, those not of the same lineage may not be given the same surname. If there is nobody else carrying the responsibility of assigning a surname to those relatives who are not of legal age, or who are mentally ill or weak, the family chief shall have the population officials on duty select a name and have inscribed in the population register. However, those who are not of legal age and who are ill, may change their surnames when they become of legal age, or when they regain their health with a court decision.

**Article 27:** Children who have no mother, father, or other male blood relations, or those whose blood relations exist but are under custody because of mental illness or weakness, shall be assigned a surname by their guardian, who will transcribe this into the population register.

The surnames of adults who are under custody because of mental illness or weakness shall also be chosen by their guardians and transcribed into the population register.

**Article 28:** Surnames for those children who have neither male blood relations from their father's or mother's side or a guardian, or those children whose mother and father are not known shall be selected by aldermen and elder delegation members in villages, municipal representatives shall assign surnames with the approval of the district governor in neighborhoods, and with the approval of the governors in provincial centers and transcribe these into the population registers.

**Article 29:** The children in Articles 27 and 28 may change the names that have been given to them when they come of legal age by applying to the court.

**Article 30:** Governors, district governors or those who these officials delegate to shall choose the surnames of those who have not selected a surname by 2/7/1936 and transcribe these into the registers. These people are obligated to carry the surnames that have thus been selected.

**Article 31:** Conflicts that may arise between those who would see themselves as the rightful person to select surnames for others, according to the Surname Law and this regulation, will be categorically resolved by district governors in provincial subdivisions and by governors or those who they would delegate in provincial centers and in the villages attached to these centers.