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A typographic analysis of newspapers and magazines in the Turkish alphabet reform (1928-1929)

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Abstract

Turkish was written in Arabic alphabet for over a thousand years until the Latin alphabet reform, which was imposed in 1928 as a result of the modernization reforms. Despite this profound change, its effects on the design and typographic choices of period's publications and the role of these publications in the reform are not known. This research investigates how the reform was treated typographically and was promoted in newspapers and magazines, which were also helping the reformers in the transition and post-reform periods from 10 August 1928 to 1 May 1929. This study is based on archival research in the libraries of Turkey.

The thesis consists of four main parts. The first part introduces the methods used to define the scope of newspaper and magazine analysis and to develop the criteria to select these publications, and describes the framework used to analyse the selected publications. The second part provides the linguistic and print-related context to the alphabet reform by tracing back the early alphabet discussions and the observations regarding the multicultural scene, starting from the 19th century in the Ottoman period. The aim of this part is to gain an insight into how the Turks ended up with the idea of this change. The third part presents the historical account of the reform and the phases of the implementation from political, social and educational perspectives. The final chapters, as the fourth part, contextualise and explore the transition through the design of five broadsheets (*İkdam, Cumhuriyet, Milliyet, Hakimiyet-i Milliye, Akşam*), two tabloid newspapers (*Karagöz, Yeni Köroğlu*) and two magazines (*Servet-Fünun, Resimli Ay*) published in this period. This part documents the general features of these publications, including production, layout and the use of type and how these were influenced by the transition from Arabic to Latin scripts.

The analysis of publications showed that broadsheets played a key role by integrating Latin content during the transition period and publishing encouraging articles and alphabet lessons daily. Tabloids did the same, but with less participation, as they were the prominent ones in promoting the reform via cartoons. Besides publishing similar supportive content, magazines focused more on visual and content quality. Before the reform, newspapers and magazines in general had a more homogeneous look due to the few Arabic type style and size variations. After the implementation, because of new type purchases and rich variations of Latin metal types, page designs looked more refined, as the hierarchy between the sections became more visible despite some peculiar executions. Typesetters came up with creative solutions to substitute alternative letterforms for the new missing Turkish characters, due to the short period of transition (four months) and the lack of type and print resources. In this way, they showed a unique resilience to adopt this new convention owing to the multi-cultural printing scene inherited from the Ottoman Empire.

This study aims to be a starting point for further studies, by revealing the first encounter of Turkish printed media with the Latin printing convention and the initial responses, which have long-term effects on the design, typographic and printing journey of Turkey.