



Beginning Turkish

Reviewed by

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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:

Two CD-ROMs

Computer Platform:

Windows 95/98/2000/ME+, Windows NT 3.51/4.0, Windows-XP

Hardware Requirements:

PC: 486+; 16 MB RAM (minimum); 9 MB of hard disk storage; 2X CD-ROM drive; SVGA or better monitor; sound card; microphone (recommended)

Price:

Individual copy, \$69.95 US; 30% discount for 10+ (\$48.97 US); for details, see clp.arizona.edu/cls/tur/order.htm

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

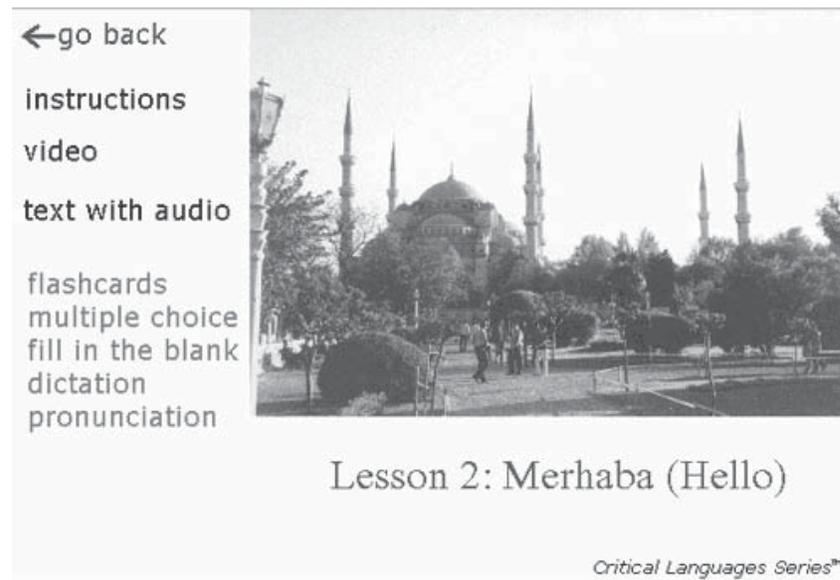
The *Beginning Turkish* program is interactive multimedia language software for beginning Turkish learners of 12 years of age and older who want to develop and practice their Turkish language skills by viewing video sequences, listening to audio sequences, and completing a variety of relevant tasks. The sequences are spoken mainly by two native speakers (a male and a female) 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 at the beginning are simple (e.g., greetings section), they gradually become more complex (e.g., Turkish culture and weather sections).

The software, developed as a part of the University of Arizona Critical Language Series for less commonly taught/learned 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 instructions, a video dialogue, a reading (a video monologue), transcript of the video dialogue with audio, and a supplemental dialogue (a reading text) with audio (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
First Page of Lesson 2: *Merhaba* 'Hello'



The video dialogues do not have subtitles, but 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 learners to listen and read at the same time.

Each lesson also contains a variety of tasks which are carried out by completing different activities such as (a) audio flashcards, (b) multiple choice, (c) fill-in-the-blanks (cloze), (d) dictation, and (e) 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 specific words or expressions 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 require learners to supply missing words. Pronunciation enables learners to practice modeled 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 their 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 current score. In Dictation activities, feedback is provided in the form of the provision of the correct word or sentence. When learners make spelling mistakes, the mistakes are highlighted in red, and a score is displayed (see 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 a score is also displayed in which the number of correct answers out of the answered ones can be seen.

Figure 2
Example of Feedback for Dictation Activities

Learners have full control over the video clips and the 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, listen word by word or sentence by sentence, and repeat a word or a sentence as many times as they want by simply clicking on it.



EVALUATION

Technological Features

The *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 users need to do is follow the instructions and click on 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 was excellent, and all clips played instantly. The video and the audio clips are of high quality although some of the talking heads (i.e., video clips) are rather monotonous because the same person is presented in two different roles within a video dialogue.

The use of color in *Beginning Turkish* is very well handled because (a) specific colors are consistently associated with different purposes, helping learners to know what-is-what and what-is-where at a glance; (b) the usage of color is restrained and thus avoids distraction, and (c) 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).

The screen design within lessons is consistent in terms of size, place, format, classification, layout, standard headings, color of the elements, and simplicity on the first page of each lesson. This is a strongpoint of the program since it fosters positive attitudes towards language-software (Watts, 1997). 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 1995-96, p. 26).

Another 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) 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 (a) enables learners to find out definitions of the underlined words and (b) provides notes on culture and grammar usage. These explanations are provided in the learners' mother tongue, rather than the target language, which enables beginning learners 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 or listened to in Text with Audio either as individual forms or in a sentence context. They can also see the words or expressions in the reading text where they are 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. Learners are supposed to click the right choice, which can be a synonym, antonym, suffix, expression definition, or cultural association.

Fill-in-the-blanks require 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 or expression.

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

Pronunciation enables learners to practice modeled 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 (see Figure 3), confusion is avoided and learners are helped to feel more confident and relaxed (Brett, 1997). Furthermore, since 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).

Figure 3
Sample of One Item Seen on Screen at a Time

Multiple Choices	
Select the opposite:	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> hastalık (sickness)	
<input type="checkbox"/> yorgunluk (tiredness)	
<input type="checkbox"/> durgunluk (stagnation)	
<input type="checkbox"/> kötülük (badness)	

Lesson Text	
Dialog:	Ne var ne yok?
Ali:	Merhaba Hilal!
Hilâl:	Merhaba Ali!
Ali:	Ne var ne yok?
Hilâl:	İyilik sağlık. Sende ne var ne yok?
Ali:	<input type="text" value="iyilik"/> Ne olsun?
Hilâl:	Hayırdır, Ali. Bir şey mi istiyorsun?

Teacher Fit (Approach)

The *Beginning Turkish* program 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 warm-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 programs on the market, the software can be used in the classroom if some prelistening tasks pertinent to each lesson are prepared in advance. Not only do such prelistening exercises prepare learners in class for what they are going to see and hear, but they can also compen-



sate 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 or second lessons as a prereading activity.

Surprisingly, the program does not draw learners’ attention to cognates, which are useful in learning a foreign language (Hammer & Mood, 1978). In fact, quite a number of Turkish-English cognates are present in the 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 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 subtitles, 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; Porter & Roberts, 1981; Deville, Kelly, Paulussen, Vandecasteele, & Zimmer, 1996).

Learner Fit (Design)

The objective of *Beginning Turkish* is advertised 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 kinesthetic 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 practicing and improving their pronunciation, which hopefully results 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, Chamot, & Kupper, 1989), a strategy which helps comprehension (Parkin, Wood, and Aldrich, 1988), and comprehension results in acquisition (Carroll, 1977; Krashen, 1982).

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

The *Beginning Turkish* program 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 because 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 in the multiple-choice activities. Students need clear explanations if feedback is to serve a remedial function from which learners can benefit (see Sheerin, 1987; Ruhlmann, 1995; Raphan, 1996).
- 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 prelistening tasks to prepare them for what they are going to see and hear (see Beile, 1978; Lund, 1991; Ur, 1992).
- Video dialogues and readings should be accompanied by specifically related tasks. In the absence of such exercises, learners (in particular nonvisual 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 is low; 5 is high)

Implementation Possibilities: 4
Pedagogical Features: 3.5
Sociolinguistic Accuracy: 4
Use of Computer Capabilities: 4
Ease of Use: 4
Overall Evaluation: 4
Value for Money: 4

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REVIEWER'S BIODATA

Vehbi Türel has a First Degree in Language Teaching from Marmara University and an M.Ed. in Educational Technology and TESOL from The University of Manchester. He is about to finish his Ph.D. on Design of Software: Creating Multimedia Listening Materials for Intermediate Autonomous Learners at The University of Manchester, England. He is mainly interested in teaching, research, and creating CALL materials in English, Kurdish, and Turkish. He has worked as a co-editor of two journals: *Graduate Educational Journal* and *The Researcher*.

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