

## turkish alphabet

<i>Aa</i> a	<i>Bb</i> be	<i>Cc</i> je	<i>Çç</i> che	<i>Dd</i> de
<i>Ee</i> e	<i>Ff</i> fe	<i>Gg</i> ge	<i>Ğğ</i> yu-moo-shak ge	<i>Hh</i> he
<i>Iı</i> uh	<i>İi</i> ee	<i>Jj</i> zhe	<i>Kk</i> ke	<i>Ll</i> le
<i>Mm</i> me	<i>Nn</i> ne	<i>Oo</i> o	<i>Öö</i> er	<i>Pp</i> pe
<i>Rr</i> re	<i>Ss</i> se	<i>Şş</i> she	<i>Tt</i> te	<i>Uu</i> oo
<i>Üü</i> ew	<i>Vv</i> ve	<i>Yy</i> ye	<i>Zz</i> ze	

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## introduction

Turkish (*Türkçe tewrk-che*) – the language which traces its roots as far back as 3500 BC, has travelled through Central Asia, Persia, North Africa and Europe and been written in both Arabic and Latin script – has left us words like *yogurt*, *horde*, *sequin* and *bridge* (the game) along the way. But how did it transform itself from a nomad's tongue spoken in Mongolia into the language of modern Turkey, with a prestigious interlude as the diplomatic language of the Ottoman Empire?

The first evidence of the Turkish language, which is a member of the Ural-Altaic language family, was found on stone monuments from the 8th century BC, in what's now Outer Mongolia. In the 11th century, the Seljuq clan invaded Asia Minor (Anatolia) and imposed their language on the peoples they ruled. Over time, Arabic and Persian vocabulary was adopted to express artistic and philosophical concepts and Arabic script began to be used. By the 14th century, another clan – the Ottomans – was busy establishing the empire that was to control Eurasia for centuries. In their wake, they left the Turkish language. There were then two levels of Turkish – ornate Ottoman Turkish, with flowery Persian phrases and Arabic honorifics (words showing respect), used for diplomacy, business and art, and the language of the common Turks, which still used 'native' Turkish vocabulary and structures.

When the Ottoman Empire fell in 1922, the military hero, amateur linguist and historian Kemal Atatürk came to power and led the new Republic of Turkey. With the backing of a strong language reform movement, he devised a phonetic Latin script that reflected Turkish sounds more accurately than Arabic script. On 1 November 1928, the new writing system was unveiled: within two months, it was illegal to write Turkish in the old script. In 1932 Atatürk created the *Türk Dil Kurumu* (Turkish Language Society) and gave it the brief of simplifying the Turkish language to its 'pure' form of centuries before. The vocabulary and structure was completely overhauled. As a consequence, Turkish has changed so drastically that even Atatürk's own speeches are barely comprehensible to today's speakers of *öztürkçe* ('pure Turkish').

With 70 million speakers worldwide, Turkish is the official language of Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (recognised as a nation only by the Turkish government). Elsewhere, the language is also called *Osmanlı os-man-luh*, and is spoken by large populations in Germany, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Greece and the '-stans' of Central Asia. So start practising and you might soon be complimented with *Ağzına sağlık! a-zuh-na sa-luhk* (lit: health to your mouth) – 'Well said!'