

## **My experience at the Turkish Language Center in Izmir, Turkey**

I retired several years ago and, as I seem to have a knack for languages (a German citizen with native English and conversational French and Russian), I decided to learn some Turkish. In Germany it's not at all as exotic as in the US or perhaps England.

I had had four and a half years of instruction in Turkish, but after that amount of time I was still mostly unable to form the simplest of statements or requests in comprehensible Turkish. The center point of my learning here in Frankfurt had been the written language (why is it called a "tongue" then?), and I asked several of my fellow students if they had had any experience with any language school in Turkey. One said she had been at the Turkish Language Center in İzmir and had learned quite a lot there. So on her recommendation I contacted Mr. Sentuerk and made the necessary arrangements. Everything ran quickly and easily; my requests were very specific and quite tailor-made for me. This was the first test for the school, which it passed very well.

I wanted one-on-one instruction, as I didn't want to be blown out of the water by more experienced (i.e. "better") students, and on the other hand, I didn't want to be dragged to a snail's pace by less experienced ones. I didn't plan on doing this more than one time, so I wanted it to be good.

There was no problem whatsoever with the school on my requests. I wanted two weeks, starting on a date not on their semester-calendar; I hadn't made up my mind until nearly the last minute whether I wanted to live with a family or in a hotel. With other students I didn't want; I would only learn their mistakes and weaknesses and they mine. In a family I would get "additional" practice/instruction in the late afternoons and evenings, but in a hotel I would have peace and quiet and my haven after a long day's instruction. What to do? Relatively shortly before my departure I decided for the hotel, and Semiha (the school's local director - one goes with first names in Turkey) got me one only 15 minutes from the school by foot. And in Karşıyaka (the portion of İzmir the school's in) there are NOT many hotels of any kind.

When you take one-on-one instruction, the two worst days are the first one and the last one. On the first day you don't know what's awaiting you. Gizem, my teacher, told me I should talk about myself - a subject I should know quite well. In Turkish of course. She had to judge my speaking abilities to make sure her class preparations were right for me. She was extremely understanding and helpful. She spoke no German (as I am, most of the students are Germans, too), but when things got rough in Turkish, she hauled out her English-Turkish dictionary and I my German-Turkish and we'd have a race. The instruction was cut precisely to me and my needs, and Gizem did a wonderful job of transmitting exactly what I wanted and needed: practice in oral and aural skills. Six hours a day, ten days in all, with time out for lunch with other students from the other classes (there were two other classes at the same time as mine; one with four students and one with six). At the end of each day I was issued several hours of homework (natch...), so my late afternoons were filled, but every evening I had free.

Unfortunately I had had a serious motorcycle accident a week before school began. Four broken ribs, smashed knees, you get the idea. I was seriously considering postponing the class at the last minute, but decided to go with it. After the first day my knee began to swell, and I did the entire course with my leg up on a chair. When the pain began to distract me from the course, I discussed the situation with Semiha and she did some behind-the-scenes stuff with Gizem - they offered to do a day's course for me on that Saturday so I could get my full time in, but leave to go home earlier than planned. I accepted.

But on that Thursday my knee began to get quite painful so that Friday afternoon Semiha and her husband took me to a Turkish doctor and a hospital where I was X-rayed. The doc gave me meds for the swelling and a brace for my knee and it worked wonders! By Sunday I was able to walk for several hours, painlessly, as I wandered through the Siks (marketplace) in the Old Town of İzmir. That next Thursday was my last day of the ten-day course.

Oh, yeah: The Last Day: I walked into the room and Gizem had written three statements on the board (in Turkish, of course): "Why did I move from the US to Germany?" "What was my greatest success in life?" (The third one I forget, but it was equally deep.) "Now," she said in Turkish, "you have a half an hour to talk about these topics." In Turkish, of course. That's why I was there, wasn't it? Hard as hell, but I was thankful, as that's the only way to learn quickly.

The next day I flew home to Germany. My experience with the Turkish Language Center and its personnel was nothing but positive. Without their consideration and extra effort it would have been a disaster for me (with the injury), but because of their efforts (in instruction) I made a quantum leap in my abilities in Turkish. When I got back home and started the next semester in Frankfurt, the other students in my class were blown away. They had been in the same class with me for the four and a half years and knew how poorly I had spoken. (They did, too.) I had seen my own progress day-by-day, but they saw only the beginning condition and the final result. The best one of the other students told me after class "hats off to you, Erich! Wonderful job!" But a big portion of the credit goes to my instructor Gizem, I must emphasize.

Will I ever go back for more? Very probably. Any doubt in the matter, however, will lie exclusively with me and my personal situation. But I would recommend the Turkish Language Center to any student who is willing to work (we all know if we don't work, the best teacher in the world isn't going to help). One-on-one instruction ain't cheap, but every cent of the expense was worth it to me.

--Erich Baumeister