

POMAK

21 February International Mother Language Day

I learned, bread, water, flowers, birds, wind, rain and everything else in Pomak...

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I learned Pomak language from my family. My grandfather and grandmother were speaking in Pomak. I've been speaking Pomak with my siblings. In the village that I was born, everybody was speaking Pomak. All through my childhood, I was playing games in Pomak. I'd listened to tales and songs from the elderly in Pomak. There were some Gacals inside the community, whose mother tongue was Turkish but they were only a minority in my village. I learned the bread, water, flowers, birds, wind, rain and everything else in Pomak... Until the day I began going to the elementary school. I did not know any Turkish till the first year.

That very first year at school, I was playing with my friends in the schoolyard one day. All of a sudden, without my attention, the principal appeared before us and hung me by my ear in the air saying "This is Turkey. I never want to hear you speak in Pomak again. Everybody speaks Turkish here."

After that day I learned Turkish well but I forgot about my mothertongue. I've written in Turkish, I've read in Turkish but I forgot Pomak. Now, I cannot speak Pomak the way I did when I was a child.

Pomak is still being used in a lot of villages in Turkey, including mine... but almost half of them switched to Turkish. I would like to write and read in my own language but there is less and less people everyday that I can speak in Pomak with. Our elderly that could be teaching us of our language are leaving this world one by one as well. We've forgotten our songs or tales. We're at the verge of losing our language.

For me, mother tongue is life itself. Just like in my childhood, I want to be able to yell, laugh or swear in Pomak.

I want my mother tongue to have equal opportunity with other languages, I want it to be developed. I want Pomak to be taught and spoken as well. I want the teachers who are assigned to Pomak villages to learn Pomak. I want Pomak to be taught at school. I want no one to hang us by the ear when we speak Pomak.

Because, my language is my identity. I want Pomak to live forever