

# A Secret Queer Language: Politics, History, and Ethics of Lubunca

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Lubunca is a secret contact language spoken primarily within the queer community in Turkey, especially among trans sex worker women. Its etymology traces back to the Romani word *lubni* ('female prostitute'), combined with the Turkish suffix *-ca*, typically used for language names (Kontovas 2012). This study employs a descriptive-analytical approach, drawing on historical accounts, sociolinguistic research, and critical discourse analysis within the framework of queer linguistics.

The evolution of Lubunca is examined in relation to shifting socio-political dynamics and increasing LGBTQ+ visibility and activism in Turkey. The analysis is divided into three historical phases: (1) from the 15th to the 19th century, exploring how Istanbul's linguistically diverse population contributed to Lubunca's early development; (2) from the early 19th to the late 20th century, focusing on the effects of Ottoman decline and Westernization on the perception of non-Turkish and queer populations; and (3) from the late 20th century to the present, highlighting growing awareness of Lubunca and the emergence of three distinct speaker circles: the inner circle (trans+ sex worker women), the middle circle (activists), and the outer circle (non-activist, non-sex worker individuals). The study identifies three primary functions that Lubunca serves across these circles: (a) as a means of secrecy, (b) as an identity marker, and (c) as a vehicle for solidarity (Çakar 2023). While these functions overlap, their prominence varies; for example, secrecy tends to be more emphasized within the inner circle (*ibid.*).

As Lubunca gains broader visibility, processes of partial relexification have emerged, especially among inner-circle speakers who alter the lexicon to preserve its role as a confidential code (Magid 2017). This raises important ethical concerns about the documentation and analysis of secret languages within marginalized communities. The study concludes by initiating a critical discussion on the linguistic study of such codes, weighing the arguments for and against the analysis of their lexicon and grammar.

## References

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