

The History of Teaching Turkish in Poland¹

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ABSTRACT: *Foreigners take interest in Turkish language due to its 1500-year comprehensive history and its prevalence. However, despite its history and common usage, Turkish is one of the less commonly taught languages in the world. The historical development of teaching the Turkish language in Poland will be discussed. The primary purpose of this study is to describe and analyze the teaching of the Turkish language at Polish universities; Jagiellonian University, Warsaw University and Adam Mickiewicz University.*

Keywords: *History, Poland, Turkish language.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The first most important era in the history of teaching Turkish was the 1700s. Teaching the Turkish language as a foreign language started with teaching Turkish to interpreters. Until the second half of the 18th century, the Ottoman Empire relations with the West employed an “ad hoc” diplomacy (Baker, 1998:571). Oriental studies in Poland have a rich tradition that stretches back for centuries. Throughout most of their history, Oriental studies focused on the cultures and languages of the Near and Middle East due to Poland’s close contacts with these regions. On the other hand, the geopolitical position of Poland in Europe on the crossroads from Central Asia to West Europe was one of the major factors, which facilitated close contacts with the Turkish speaking peoples. The earliest contacts between Poland and the Turkish tribes deal with the Kiptchak group of languages, notably the Tatars and the Karaims. Considerably great groups of Tatars and Karaims were settled down on the lands of Lithuania and Poland already in the 14th century (Majda, 2001:172).

Purpose of the study

The Turkish language has always been a significant language for historical reasons, and due to the political, geographical, and economic position it has in the world. As a result, many universities in the world have Turkish studies departments and more people encounter the language everyday and want to learn it. Unfortunately, the technical, methodological, and theoretical developments in the teaching of Turkish as a foreign language seem far from commensurate with the magnitude and significance of the demand for it. This fact motivates the author to evaluate Turkish language programs at three Polish universities.

The history of teaching Turkish in Poland

Turkish studies in Poland go back to the first half of the 15th century with the start of diplomatic relations between Poland and the Ottoman Empire (Toros, 1983:10). It is understandable that the relations between two countries were related to their mutual political, commercial, and cultural issues. Spoken and written Turkish was used in diplomatic relations between Poland and the Ottoman Empire so the Polish kingdom had to take interpreters into service. In order to educate these translators, King Sigismund August (1520-1572) decided to follow the example of West European countries and send young people to the Ottoman Empire. These young people were expected to learn the spoken language and how to translate the official documents sent to the Polish kingdom. The young people studied well and some of them become famous translators. One of these young people was Samuel Otwinowski who translated many works from Turkish to Polish. Franciszek Meninski (1623-1698) is another famous Turkologist who served as a dragoman and an envoy and produced the world-famous Turkish, Arabic, and Persian dictionary (Baranowski, 1950:112-115; Reychman, 1950:42; Zajączkowski & Reychman, 1955:6).

The last king of Poland, Stanislas August Poniatowski, founded a language school in Istanbul to educate interpreters for the Ottoman Empire. The idea to found a school came from the European “jeunes de langue” schools. The school opened in 1766 but, unfortunately, was closed in 1792 when Poland was occupied. The main aim to establish a school in Istanbul was the education of interpreters of Turkish for the royal chancellery, but a larger “Turcological” education was foreseen too. Teachers from Poland were employed together with those who were in the Polish diplomatic service in Istanbul. Again, lecturers of spoken Turkish

¹ This paper is based on a Phd study titled “Teaching Turkish at Polish Universities: Analysis of the Teaching Programs and the Effectiveness of the Instruction”

were the local hodjas. Several well-educated interpreters and Turcologists have finished the School (Abrahamowicz, 1984:124; Dubinski, 1990:100; Majda, 2001:173; Reychman, 1950:52).

After a few decades, the Oriental studies department was founded in Vilna (today Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania) in 1802. This department was the first Oriental studies department in Poland. However, Poland was not an independent country at that time.

Turkish Studies in Krakow

The history of Turkish studies in Krakow dates back to 1919 when Professor Tadeusz Kowalski opened the first Oriental studies department in independent Poland at Jagiellonian University (UJ) in Krakow. As far as the didactic program is concerned, the Turkish studies program has changed to a 3+2 model, a 3 years bachelor degree, and a 2 years master's degree at Polish universities. The Turkish studies program at UJ is a separate independent department at the Institute of Oriental Studies. The current program has a philological character by offering numerous Turkic languages such as Tuvan, Bashkir, Chuvash, Yakut, and Karachay-Balkar and other languages such as Latin, Turkish, Ottoman, Arabic, German, English, and Persian.

The curriculum of the UJ Turkish studies program focuses on language teaching, linguistics, history, and the literary knowledge of Oriental studies. The scope is not limited to the language since the program includes cultural anthropology, religion, philosophical studies, and history in its curriculum. There is a new trend in some universities to re-organize the curriculum of philology as a culture studies curriculum. The new curriculum is non-philological with numerous teaching subjects covering the areas of culture, aesthetics, art, modern literature, translation, and social thought. This non-philological framework reduces the earlier concentration on language teaching, linguistics, and the literature of traditional Oriental studies. However, the philological foundation of Turkish studies cannot be abandoned totally, since the program is philology. Compared to the past, the students now have different expectations from the programs. This should lead scholars and curriculum developers to analyze the current curriculum according to the expectations of the students.

Turkish Studies in Warsaw

The Institute of Oriental Studies at the Humanities Faculty of Warsaw University (UW) was established in 1932. In the following year, Dr. Ananiasz Zajęczkowski became an assistant professor due to the arrival of Professor T. Kowalski from Krakow. In 1935, Kowalski became the head of the Turkish Department and the founder of Warsaw Turkish studies department. In the 1934-1935 academic years, a Turkological seminar appeared on the unit list of the Oriental Institute. Unfortunately, World War II inflicted disastrous losses on Warsaw Turkish studies department. Thanks to Zajęczkowski's efforts, the Department of Turkish studies department opened in 1945 (Kaim, 2006:6-8; Majda, 2001; Tryjarski, 1983:29).

The program at UW is linked to the Section of Inner Asian Peoples at the Faculty of Oriental Studies. The current program has a philological character with various subjects including culture, philosophy, history, religion, Islamic art, logic, and semiotics. The curriculum of UW's Turkish studies program focuses on teaching the Turkish language and culture. This program is consistent with the above-mentioned new non-philological trend in some universities.

Students of UW attend summer courses of Turkish organized by TÖMER. There are also long-term scholarships and various exchange programs between Turkish and Polish universities which enable the students to study Turkish language, literature and history at the universities in Turkey. The program at UW is cooperating with a range of international educational institutions.

Turkish Studies in Poznan

The Department of Turkic, Mongolian, and Korean Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University (UAM) in Poznan was created from the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Studies in 2002. Initially, it was a part of the structure of the Chair of Oriental Studies. Next, from 2005-2008, it was a part of the Institute of Oriental Studies. Today, it is directly linked to the Faculty of Modern Languages and Literature (Majewicz, 2007:1).

Turkish studies department is a philological specialization offered to students by the Department of Turkic, Mongolian, and Korean Studies at the Faculty of Modern Languages and Literature, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan. It was initiated in 2002 as an M.A. program and, in 2007, was restructured into three programs: a B.A., a M.A., and a Ph.D. in Turkic Studies. However, the tradition of research and teaching Turkish at Adam Mickiewicz University is not new. A non-compulsory course of Turkish was conducted between 1982 and 2002 and research was done in the fields of languages like Crimean Tatar, Karaim, and Kazakh.

The Turkish department offers a range of optional courses at other departments such as Arabic, Hebrew, Kurdish, Chinese, and others. Turkic studies in Poznan are distinguished by the focus on a broader Turkic world, not only on Turkey. This includes the language and culture of the Karaims (Eastern Karaites), the

Polish Tatars, the Crimean Tatars, the Uzbeks, and the Kirghiz. Although the program concentrates on language and literature, the studies also include other areas of culture of the Turkic peoples.

The research areas in Turkish studies department are: Turkish, The Kazakh language and culture, Crimean Karaim and Crimean Tatar lexicography, Languages and cultures in contact in Central Asia, especially Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The Turkic languages of the Crimea: Crimean Tatar, Crimean Karaim and Western Karaim are studied in this department. Turkish dialects and Ottoman literature has been researched. The linguistic and cultural contact between Turks and Tatars on the Crimea, Korean and Mongolian linguistics are other are also an important research areas at UAM (Jankowski, 1998:377; Majewicz, 2007:1).

The program at UAM is linked to the Section of Turkic, Mongolian, and Korean Studies at the Department of Asian Studies at the Faculty of Modern Languages and Literature. The current program has a philological character. The curriculum of the UAM Turkish studies department focuses on the Turkish language and the Central Asian Turkic languages (Mongolian, Chinese, and Korean) and on the history, literature, and culture of Central Asian Turkic peoples.

II. CONCLUSION

Turkish, one of the less commonly taught languages, differs considerably from more commonly languages such as German, English, French, and Spanish. It is rare to encounter anyone who speaks Turkish in Poland and few Turkish language teaching or learning materials are available. However, although Turkish studies in Poland have a long tradition, no one has yet analyzed the Turkish language programs and Turkish instruction in Poland. Today, the Turkish language from the perspective of foreign language acquisition has been shortcoming since the Turkish studies departments of Polish universities have focused more on literature, history, Turkic languages, and culture rather than on modern linguistic studies. Turkish is a leading spoken and written language. Today, foreigners are taking increasingly more interest in Turkish owing to its 1500-year continuous and comprehensive history.

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