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The Historical Development and Role of Turkology Centers in the Central Balkans and Their Impact on Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

Turkish has always been a matter of curiosity and need outside the borders of the Republic of Turkey. Turkology, which investigates Turkishness, the Turkish language and dialects, as well as Turkish culture, civilization, and history, started to develop as a discipline in 19th-century Europe before quickly gaining prevalence. The study of Turkish as a scientific language in the Balkan geography started after the Ottoman Empire had withdrawn from these lands. The first Turkology center in the Balkan geography was established at the University of Belgrade, and the primary purpose behind its establishment was the Serbs' need to know Turkish to be able to understand their own language and culture. After Belgrade, Turkology centers were opened in other Balkan cities such as Sarajevo and Skopje, and various studies were also being carried out. This study aims to reveal the establishment and historical development of Turkology as a branch of science in the central Balkan countries. Alongside the Turkology centers, the study also discusses the history of teaching Turkish as a foreign language (TTFL) in this region by using qualitative research methods. Based on the obtained data, two main reasons are seen to have emerged for Turkology studies to begin in central Balkan countries. The first has been concluded as the need for the Turkish language to carry out more detailed studies on their language and culture. The second is the presence of the indigenous Turkish people living in North Macedonia and Kosovo.

Keywords: Central Balkans, Turkology centers, teaching, Turkish.

Introduction

Due to the social interactions resulting from trade, education, culture, politics, and similar reasons, people have had to learn the languages and cultures of different societies in addition to their own languages and cultures. Therefore, the history of language teaching is as old as the history of contacts between societies. As cultures and civilizations developed, the need to learn a foreign language has also increased. Turkish, one of the oldest and richest languages in the world, has begun to learn and study the Turkish language and culture by various nations in line with different needs. In a narrow sense, Turkology refers to the branch of science that studies the Turkish language, dialects, and issues related to Turkishness. According to Buran Turkology, it is a science that studies the Turkish language, dialects, and issues related to Turkishness (Buran, 2015, p. 317). Soykut defines Turkology as the study of the Turkish civilization and its cultural works by isolating the culture belonging to the Turks in the modern sense and the research on it from that of other nations belonging to the Islamic civilization (Soykut, 2002, p. 42). The dominance established by the Turks in a wide geography throughout the historical process has created the need for other nations to research the Turks and the Turkish language. Although the archive of teaching Turkish in Europe dates back to the 13th century, Turkology as a systematic and independent branch of science was first established in France, Russia, Austria, and Hungary at the end of the 18th century. As a systematic and independent branch of science, Turkology was first established in 1870 at the University of Budapest in Hungary (Kurt, 2023, p. 46).

In the early 19th century, Turkology in Europe started to gain momentum. The withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from the Balkan countries due to the Balkan Wars led to administrative and demographic changes. The rich heritage of the civilization that had developed on these lands within the borders of the Ottoman Empire for centuries continued to exist both abstractly and concretely. It became essential for the nations living in the Balkan region to explore the elements of Turkish culture that permeated every aspect of life to understand their own identity and language following the Balkan Wars.

After the Ottoman Empire withdrew from the Balkan region due to the Balkan Wars, many aspects of Turkish culture and language continued to have a presence in these lands as a legacy. As a result, it became important for the nations that settled in these lands to study these elements, which impacted every aspect of life. Additionally, with the significant Turkish population in the region, the establishment

of Turkology Centers in the Balkans became inevitable. Consequently, Turkish language courses began to be offered in higher education institutions in the early 19th century, leading to the establishment and widespread presence of Turkology centers in the Balkan countries.

Although the fields of Turkology and teaching Turkish as a foreign language in the Balkan geography do not have a very long history, they have just started to gain importance in the literature. When it comes to Balkan Turkology and teaching Turkish in the Balkans, the focus is usually on teaching Turkish as a mother tongue. For this reason, the literature generally focuses on teaching Turkish as a mother tongue in the Balkans. Emin, in his study titled “Development of Turkish Language Education”, presents the development stages of Turkish as a mother tongue in North Macedonia (Emin, 2019). On the other hand, Yalap focuses on the situation of Turkology in the Serbian field in his study titled Turkology in Serbia (Yalap, 2020). In Emina Solak and Yasemin Uzun’s comprehensive study, the impact of Turkish on Bosnia and Herzegovina has been tried to be examined from both the perspective of today and the Yugoslav period (Solak & Uzun, 2021). However, it is seen that in the literature, Turkology departments are generally examined within the scope of Turkish Language and Culture studies rather than as institutions where Turkish is taught as a foreign language. Therefore, this study aims to address the contributions of Turkology departments to teaching Turkish as a foreign language. The study examines the historical development and current status of Turkish language teaching in Turkology Centers in the Balkan countries. The main focus is on understanding the evolution of Turkish language teaching in these centers.

Methodology

In this study, which reveals the development processes of Balkan Turkology Centers and the history of Turkish language teaching, the document analysis method of the qualitative research model is used. Document analysis covers the analysis of written materials containing information about the facts and phenomena targeted to be investigated (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, p. 189). In the document analysis process, existing documents are accessed for the purpose, their originality is checked, the documents are understood and analyzed, examined, the necessary information is noted, and evaluation processes are carried out (Kurt, 2023, p. 76).

Sample and Limitation

Historically, this study is limited to the post-Balkan Wars period and the Turkish Language and Literature Departments/Turkology Centers within universities in the Central Balkan countries of Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Kosovo.

Findings

The Balkan region, which is the precursor representation of Turkish culture and literature outside the borders of the Republic of Turkey today, held significant importance during the Ottoman Empire. In the past, other nations living in the Balkans didn't need to learn Turkish; rather, since it was the official language of the country, it was mostly spoken. However, with the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire, the position of Turkish also changed, and it became the language of a minority nation. Nations that lived under a common cultural roof for centuries had both cultural and linguistic contacts. After the Ottoman Empire, the study of the Turkish language and history became essential for conducting historical and philological research in the region. Understanding Turkish was crucial for gaining a complete understanding of the language and history of the region. As a result, Turkish courses started to be offered in some higher education institutions, and Turkology Centers/Departments began to be established. The findings obtained from the research and examinations are given in the continuation of the study in chronological order according to the countries.

Serbia

The Ottoman Empire left behind two important legacies despite withdrawing from the region. The first was Turkish historical archive sources written in Arabic letters, and the second was words that had passed from Turkish to Serbian. As a result, the Serbs needed to learn Turkish to research their history and language. To meet this need, the establishment of the Belgrade Turkology Center, which was the first Turkology Department in the Balkans, was initiated immediately after World War I. In 1925, Turkish courses were taught as an elective course by Fehim Bayraktarević at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Belgrade. On July 17, 1926, the Department of Turkology was established within the Faculty of Philosophy (Đukanović, 1968, p. 486). The establishment of the Turkology department at the University of Belgrade and the teaching of Turkish aimed to help Serbs understand their language and history by studying Turkish. The department was initially part

of the Faculty of Philosophy but became part of the Faculty of Philology in 1960 and is now known as the Department of Turkish Language and Literature (TLL). One of the early projects of the researchers at the Turkology department was the creation of a Turkish-Serbian Dictionary. This dictionary, led by Slavoljub Đinđić, aimed to uncover the connection between Turkish and Serbian, support the development of other Turkology departments in Yugoslavia, and provide study materials for those learning Turkish (Kurt, 2023).

Since there is no native Turkish population in Serbia, teaching Turkish in Serbia is considered teaching as a foreign language. Therefore, students at the Belgrade Turkology Department learn Turkish as a foreign language. To make this process more efficient, course materials for teaching Turkish have been prepared in addition to the dictionary. In the early stages, the lack of Turkish grammar teaching was addressed by the auxiliary course material prepared by the department's founder, Fehim Bayraktarević. This material was published in 1962, with Serbian explanations, under the title *Osnovi Turske Gramatike* (Fundamentals of Turkish Grammar). Slavoljub Đinđić published the Turkish textbook *Udžebnik Turskog Jezika* (Turkish Textbook) in 1979. The book, which was prepared for teaching Turkish at the elementary level, was used to teach Turkish to the 1st and 2nd-grade students studying at the Turkology Department and is still included in the curriculum today. In the field of TTFL, we also encounter the textbook *Turetski Jezik u Svakodnevnoj Komunikaciji* (Turkish in Daily Communication) by Teodosijević Marija and the supplementary course material *Vežbanje iz savremenog turskog jezika sa tekstovima* (Contemporary Turkish Exercises with Texts) prepared in collaboration with E. Ertun. Since 2012, Turkish courses have been offered at the Language Center of the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad as part of the Turkology Project, in addition to the University of Belgrade. Although there is currently no independent Turkology Department or TLL Department at the University of Novi Sad, the ongoing Turkish courses indicate a growing interest in the subject (Yalap, 2022, p. 491).

The Department of TLL was established by Nimetullah Hafız at Novi Pazar State University in 2001 and remained operational until 2010 (Yalap, 2022, p. 491). Following the closure of this department, the Department of English Language and Literature at the Faculty of Philology of Novi Pazar State University was introduced as an elective foreign language course in the first and second-year curriculum. Today, the only Turkology center in Serbia is located at the University of Belgrade. Turkish is actively taught as a foreign language in authorized institutions of the Republic of Turkey in Serbia and some educational institutions in Serbia. Under

these circumstances, it is likely that the majority of Oriental language specialists and Oriental researchers in the Balkans after the Ottoman period were Bosniaks. However, the fact that Bosnia-Herzegovina was a member of the Kingdom of Serbs-Croats-Slovenians and subsequently of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia after World War I and that its capital was Belgrade led to the fact that the first Turkology studies began at the University of Belgrade.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Due to their shared historical unity, culture, and religion, the Bosnians' interest in and relationship with the Turks has reached a higher level than other nations in the Balkan region. During the Ottoman period, a significant number of Turkish literary works were written in Bosnia, and Turkish was the most preferred language in literature. For many years, Turkish was not only the official language but also used for communication, education, and daily life. Therefore, the establishment of the first Turkology Center in Bosnia corresponds to later years. The Department of Oriental Languages was opened with the establishment of the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Sarajevo in 1950 (Gürgendereli, 2023, p. 35). Under the leadership of Nedim Filipović Turkology studies and Turkish language teaching began in the Department of Oriental Languages. In 1971, the name of the department was changed to Oriental Languages and Literatures, and TLL took its place as a separate department, which continues to exist today.

The Sarajevo Oriental Institute, established in 1950, is another institution where Turkology studies began around the same time as the University of Sarajevo. The institute's goals include conducting essential research on the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly during the Ottoman period, studying Eastern languages and literature, including Turkish, and assessing their influence on Bosnian language, literature, and culture. Additionally, the institute is responsible for publishing relevant works. In 2013, the institute became affiliated with the University of Sarajevo.

Other Turkology centers in Bosnia and Herzegovina include the Department of TLL at the Faculty of Philosophy of Zenica University, which was established in 2005; the Department of TLL at the Faculty of Philosophy of Tuzla University, which was established in 2002; and the Department of TLL at the Faculty of Philosophy of Mostar Cemel Beydici University, which was opened in 2012. Although there is no other Turkology center, it is possible to say that Turkish is also taught in the Turkish Language Teaching Department at the Faculty of Education of the International University of Sarajevo, which was opened in 2020.

North Macedonia

Except for minor disruptions following the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from the Balkan countries, Turkish language teaching has continued almost continuously in the region that encompasses present-day North Macedonia. The Balkan Wars and the political events in the immediate post-war period affected all aspects of life, including Turkish language teaching, causing disruptions. However, in general, it can be observed that the Turkish language never completely disappeared. Initially, through literacy courses and later through Teachers' Schools, a Turkish language teaching staff was established, ensuring the continuation of Turkish language education.

When we approach the subject in the context of Turkology, in addition to the fact that there are TLL Departments in three state universities in North Macedonia and a Turkish Language Teaching Department in one private university, the establishment and development process of Macedonia-Skopje Turkology corresponds to the recent period. The first study on Turkology in Skopje and the study that pioneered the establishment of the Turkology department was Olivera Yaşar Nasteva's doctoral thesis titled *Turkish Lexical Elements in Macedonian Language* in 1962. The Turkology Department of "St. Cyril and Methodius University" (Turkish Language and Literature Department) was established in the 1976-1977 academic year with the initiative of Olivera Yaşar Nasteva. The Department of TLL in Skopje has a different focus compared to the departments in Belgrade and Sarajevo. It primarily caters to the Turkish community living in the region, so the main language of instruction is Turkish. The department is designed to accommodate the multilingual and multicultural population of the region, and as a result, students are divided into two groups: native Turkish speakers and non-native Turkish speakers. Both groups take common courses, but non-native Turkish speakers learn Turkish as a foreign language from the first term under the title of Modern Turkish Language. Apart from Turkology in Skopje, the Department of Oriental Languages at Tetovo State University was accredited in 2008, and two main branches of science were opened in 2009: TLL and Arabic Language and Literature. In the first four semesters, students studying in both main branches have a common curriculum. Starting from the fifth semester, students are divided into two different groups: the Department of TLL and the Department of Arabic Language and Literature. At the same time, the Department of TLL was opened in the 2009-2010 academic year within the body of Goce Delchev University in Stip, and today, Turkology studies and Turkish language teaching studies are actively continuing in these departments.

Furthermore, the Turkish Language Teaching Department at the International Balkan University continues to be active at undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels. In addition to Turkology studies in higher education institutions, some Turkology studies were also conducted at the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts (MANU), the Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore, and the National History Institute.

Kosovo

The first traces of scientific and academic Turkology studies within the borders of today's Kosovo can be seen in the Oriental Studies Department established under the leadership of Hasan Kaleshi in 1973 within the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Pristina. In the Oriental Studies Department, courses such as Turkish, Ottoman Period Turkish, and Turkish Literature were taught, as well as Arabic and Arabic Literature (Sulçevsi & Sulçevsi, 2022, p. 324). There were attempts at Turkology here, but it is not possible to talk about Turkology or TLL as an independent department. In 1988, the Department of TLL was established at the Faculty of Philology at the University of Pristina. The founders of the department were Nimetullah Hafız and İrfan Morina. The main purpose of establishing the Department of TLL at the Faculty of Philology at the University of Pristina was to meet the needs of the minority Turks in different areas by training Turkish staff such as educators, teachers, translators, journalists, and researchers. However, with the acceleration of Turkish among the world languages, the department began to attract the attention of other ethnic groups besides Turks. Unlike other countries, Turkish is not taught only as a foreign language in the TLL Departments of Kosovo and North Macedonia. The language of instruction in the TLL Departments here is Turkish.

Conclusion

The study of Turks and topics related to Turks, known as Turkology, began to develop in the late 19th century, particularly in Europe. It gained popularity in the Balkan countries after the Ottoman Empire withdrew from the region. The nations living in the Balkans had shared their lives with the Turks under the same cultural roof for many years. As a result of this shared history, a significant historical archive written in Ottoman-era Turkish, as well as common language and cultural elements, were established. Consequently, the nations in the Balkan peninsula required knowledge of Turkish to research their own history and language. In re-

sponse to the need for Turkish language education, the first Turkology Department in the central Balkan countries was established in 1926 at the University of Belgrade. Turkish language courses were also introduced at the University of Sarajevo shortly thereafter. The Turkology Department and the Sarajevo Institute of Oriental Studies were established within the university, marking the beginning of Turkology studies in the region. Subsequently, Turkish Language and Literature Departments were established at the University of Skopje, Saint Cyril and Methodius in 1976, and at the University of Pristina in 1988. In 1926, Turkology began to develop in the Balkans and gained momentum, especially towards the end of the 20th century. Today, it continues to be a popular branch of science in the Balkan countries, often under the guise of Turkish Language and Literature or Turkish Language Teaching. There are currently Turkish Language and Literature Departments in a total of twelve universities in the Central Balkan countries, which is considered a geographical criterion.

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