

**Miscellaneous****The Situation of French and German  
Teaching as a Foreign Language in Ottoman Empire****Fuat Boyacıoğlu<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** The Ottoman intellectuals and administrators underestimating Europe until Treaty of Karlowitz (1699), were considering the learning of a European language as an inferiority. Therefore, the international relations in the Ottoman State were carried out generally by non-Muslim dragomen. Sublime Porte (Bab-ı Ali) Foreign Language School and Ottoman Foreign Language School had been founded. In addition to Arabic and Persian languages, French language took place firstly as a European language in the Ottoman education system. French became the first European language to be taught. The Turkish and French relations beginning in the XVII<sup>th</sup> century and developing especially in the literature and cultural domain, continued well until XX<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the period of Sultan Abdulhamid II, Ottoman State made close relations with Germany rather than France and England. The visit of the German emperor Wilhelm II to Istanbul upon the invitation of Ottoman Sultan and Baghdad Railway Project fortified the German-Turkish relations. The Young Turks coming to power after the Dethronement of Sultan Abdulhamid II in 1908 had a great German admiration. During the First World War, the Ottoman and German relations in economic and political areas arrived to the culminating point.

**Keywords:** Ottoman Education System; Foreign Language; French Teaching; German Teaching

**1. Introduction**

The language being an instrument of communication, enables humans to make each other relations. Teaching and learning a foreign language are so important among people that they can make mutual relations. States like humans communicate mutually through language in order to execute their relations in peace or war time. The Ottoman international relations and affairs were carried out by

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Ottoman Greek and Armenian dragomen. The Ottoman statesmen could not rely on the fidelity of these dragomen after the Greek and Ottoman War. They decided that Turkish dragomen should perform this task. For this reason, they established some foreign language schools where the French language being diplomatic language took first place. In the period of Sultan Abdulhamid II, the Ottoman State made more relations with Germany rather than France and England which tried to make political pressures and interventions to the interior affairs of the Ottoman State. Thus, the German language teaching has been important. In addition to these foreign languages, Romanian, Greek, Bulgarian Armenian, Latin, Bulgarian, English, and Italian etc. were taught in these Ottoman foreign language schools.

## **2. The Ottoman State and Foreign Language Teaching**

The Ottoman State continued the political supremacy until 1606 and its absolute military superiority against Europe until 1699. Nevertheless, after the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699), it begun to lose gradually this supremacy against Europe getting more and more strong. In the presence of this supremacy of the Europe, the Ottoman State was obliged to send delegates to Europe in order to know it very well (Uzunçarşılı, 1998, p. 1; Sander, 1987, p. 82). The Ottoman State was considering as an inferiority its representation before another State up to this period. On the contrary, it regarded the delegates coming to the Ottoman State as a symbol of respect for it. For this reason, the Ottoman State didn't want to establish a regular foreign affairs system for the diplomacy. After the Treaty of Karlowitz, the Ottoman statesmen begun to give a great importance to the diplomacy in the international relations because of the prominence of the international diplomacy in Europe (Akyılmaz, 2000, p. 57).

The Ottoman State could not follow closely industrial developments in Europe and begun to decline because of losing its preponderance. For this reason, it had to realise new reorganisations and reforms almost in each field in order to obtain again its ancient power. After a series of defeats in the battles, it deemed necessary to make principally some reforms in the military area because the Ottoman statesmen considered the corrupted and degenerated military structure as a reason of these war defeats (Ürekli, 2002, p. 387).

At the Ottoman Tulip Age just after the Treaty of Karlowitz the Ottoman delegates went to Paris, Vienna, Warsaw and Moscow not only for making the diplomatic

relations but also for obtaining information about the European diplomacy, culture, art, industry and agriculture as well as the military and technological power of Europe. Some of them presented their observations and impressions as a report among which the most important is the Embassy Book/Sefaretname of Yirmisekiz Mehmet Çelebi. This work also established a ground for the Ottoman renaissance at the Tulip Age. In this period, the inauguration of the printing house and the publication of books had been realised even if their number was phenomenal and the first paper factory had been established in Yalova. These are very important steps and stages (Gerçek, 1939).

Teaching a foreign language became one of innovative transformations in this period. The Ottoman intellectuals and administrators underestimating Europe till then, considered the learning a European language as an inferiority (Özkan, 2010, p. 10). As a reason of the fact that the Ottomans could not learn a foreign language, we can enumerate these reasons: the Ottomans had the complex of superiority; they made a few trades with Europeans; they had self-enclosed, self-sufficient, religious and ideological feelings. The belief of the Ottoman statesmen that their administrative system was more superior than other systems in the world, conduced them to take the European States into inferior consideration (Karal, 1994, p. 73; Findley, 1996, p. 20; Lyber, 2000, p. 68).

The reason that the Ottomans could not learn any foreign language wasn't resulting from Islam Religion but the religious fanaticism. The studies affirm this fixation (Balçı, 2008, pp. 80-81). Another commentary on the foreign language question of the Ottomans is that the misinterpretation of this saying of the Prophet Muhammad "Somebody who tries to resemble to a nation becomes like it" conduced to the fact that the imitation of the European applications has been considered as the treason to the Islam (Göçek, 1996). However, the Prophet Muhammad requested from his secretary Zeyd b. Sabit to learn Hebrew and Syriac languages because the treaties concluded with Jews or the letters sent by them had been written in Hebrew and Syriac (Güner, 1984, p. 34; Atar, 1979, p. 146). In this case, the reason that the Ottomans could not learn any foreign language was totally resulted from the religious fanaticism not the Islam Religion. The Turkish historian İlber Ortaylı states that the reason that the Ottomans could not learn any foreign language was resulted not only from their superiority complex but also from the fact that the Ottoman merchants could not do commercial activities commonly in the international trade area (Ortaylı, p. 278).

In the Ottoman State “the international relations were carried out generally by non-Muslim dragomen. After the military expedition to Crete in 1669, a Greek from Ottoman nationality named Panayoti Nicoussios Mamanos was nominated as dragoman for the diplomacy. As from this date, the interpreting charge was generally monopolized by the Greeks from the Ottoman nationality” (Genç, 2003, p. 18). From the second half of XVII<sup>th</sup> century to XVIII<sup>th</sup> century, the dragoman charge of the Ottoman State was given generally to the Greek families from İstanbul among which the Mavrocordato family performed this charge during a century” (Ağıldere, 2010, p. 1). The Ottoman statesmen could not rely on the fidelity of these Greek dragomen. They were involuntarily in need of these Greek dragomen because the foreign language wasn't taught in the Ottoman education system (Balçı, 2008, pp. 83-84). The Ottoman international relations and affairs were carried out by these Greek dragomen. It was in doubt about these Greek and Armenian origin dragomen for fearing that they might reveal the State secrets and make deliberately wrong translation during the Greek Revolt in 1820's; it was understood that the Turks also would perform this task” (Genç, 2003, p. 19).

For this reason, the Sublime Porte (Bab-ı Ali) Foreign Language School had been founded in 1821. This institution can be qualified as an educational institution where the foreign language was systematically taught for the first time in the Ottoman State.

### **3. Sublime Porte (Bab-ı Ali) Foreign Language School (1821)**

It is deduced from the activities of Sublime Porte (Bab-ı Ali) Foreign Language School that one of European languages as foreign language was taught in addition to Arabic and Persian languages in the Ottoman schools opened in XVIII<sup>th</sup> and XIX<sup>th</sup> centuries. For example, French as well as Arabic started to be taught in the Ottoman military academy named Mühendishane-i Berr-i Hümayun opened in 1793. Especially we can say that the French teaching was seen in the modernization movements in the education starting in XIX<sup>th</sup> century. The tradition of a second foreign language and a third foreign language education had been sustained and continued always both in the classic period and the modernisation period of the Ottoman State.

During the revolt of Greeks against the Ottoman State, the Ottoman statesmen feel anxiety of the dragomen originated from Armenian and Greek for fear that they

would divulgate the secrets of the Ottoman State and mistranslate deliberately during the translation; it was understood that the Turks were obligated to learn any foreign language and to do the translation affairs” (Genç, 2003, p. 19). Founded in 1821, this translation school can be described as the first institution which teaches systematically the foreign language in the Ottoman State. Knowing a European language in the XIX<sup>th</sup> century would be an indispensable quality for the young Turks purposing to obtain a career in the Ottoman Government. For this reason, the Sublime Porte (Bab-ı Ali) Foreign Language School would take place beside the Palace and the Army in order to promote and come to power (Balcı, 2008, p. 77).

It will be useful to study briefly The School of Infants of Eastern Languages/ Ecole des Enfants de Langue d’Istanbul, founded by the French government in Istanbul in 1669 for the purpose of training interpreters of eastern languages, and the methods employed to teach Turkish as a foreign language. Doubtless, the school in question forms the most important cornerstone of the history of teaching Turkish as a foreign language. The most significant quality of this school of eastern languages is that it teaches the students being citizens of France, the Turkish culture and language in Istanbul from their early ages (Ağıldere, 2010, p. 1).

In the duration passing until the declaration of Tanzimat the classic education institutions of the Ottoman State were the infants' schools, madrasahs and Enderun schools. These schools maintaining their existence since the foundation of the Ottoman State had completed anymore their life in the beginning of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century. Apart from that, the schools such as Ottoman Imperial Maritime Engineering School /Mühendishane-i Bahr-i Hümayun (1776), Ottoman Imperial Land Engineering School/Mühendishane-i Berri Hümayun (1796), Ottoman Medical School/Mekteb-i Tıbbiye (1827) and Military School/ Mekteb-i Harbiye (1834) had rendered service as education schools opened in the European style. After the declaration of Tanzimat, the education reforms had been performed (Poyraz & Öztop, 2013, p. 309).

Due to some failures in the foreign language teaching, it was decided to open a new school in Istanbul to teach a foreign language in a good level and to satisfy the need of the civil staff of the State. This is why, a school named Galatasaray Sultani had been opened in 1868. The opening of this high school has been a turning point from viewpoint of learning a foreign language in the Ottoman State. In this school, the education was given in French. This school where the French teachers also were working was well known in a short time in Europe with its foreign language

education quality. Those who were graduated from this school knew perfectly French (Özkan, 2010, pp. 1789-1790).

Sultan Mahmut II underlined the importance of learning French in his speech addressing to students in the opening of Medical School: “Here you will study the medical science in French. My purpose isn't your study only in French, but you will learn the medical science and adapt gradually the terminology into the Turkish language. Try to learn the medical science from your teachers” (Lewis, 2002). Thus, the foreign language education took place in the school programmes by the occidentalisation movement in the military schools in the Ottoman State and the French became the first European language to be taught.

The Islahat and Tanzimat reform movements gave acceleration to the foreign language and this case was reflected on the education institutions. The fact that the education language was the French in these schools was resulting from the fact that the teachers giving courses were French teachers.

#### **4. Lisan Mektebi/The Ottoman Foreign Language School (1864)**

Due to the insufficiency of the foreign language education in the Sublime Porte (Bab-ı Ali) Foreign Language School and the necessity for the staff knowing the foreign language named Lisan Mektebi had been opened in 1864. Its study period was 4 years. It was the second school giving the foreign language education. The privileged foreign language in this school was French. Moreover the languages of the nations under the domination of the Ottoman State such as Romanian, Greek and Bulgarian etc. were taught in this school. In this school closed after a given period and opened again in 1892 by the order of Sultan II<sup>nd</sup> Abdulhamid. English, Russian and German languages in addition to French were taught in this school (Önen, 1971, p. 20).

The first attempt to open the Lisan Mektebi/Foreign Language School had been realised by the national education minister Kemal Efendi. In his official message dated 3 Mars 1866, he declared the necessity of opening the Lisan Mektebi by speaking of the fact that some students who want to learn French were going to Foreign Schools located in Galata and Pera. This school started to the education life with 20 students. Opened and closed several times Lisan Mektebi/Foreign Language School had been definitively closed in 1892 by the common official message of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Mehmet Sait Pasha and Grand Vizier

Cevat Pasha. The reason of closing this school was to not to obtain the required yield from this school. It was decided that another foreign language school will be opened in the name of Mekteb-i Ali-i Diplomasi. Thereafter, it was given up from this new school project.

### **5. The Ottoman-French Relations and the French Teaching in the Ottoman State**

The Turkish and French relations beginning in the XVII<sup>th</sup> century and developing especially in literature and cultural domain have continued well in XVIII<sup>th</sup> and XIX<sup>th</sup> centuries. The first ambassadors who were sent to France played the most important role to appear in newspapers, magazines and books which were being translated into Turkish through the first reports “Sefaret-Name”s of the first ambassadors who had been sent abroad. In the reports written by ambassadors during the Ottoman State, they described the social life events, diplomatic meetings, the places that they visited, the military, cultural, scientific discoveries that they observed. In addition to these, the intellectuals who were sent to France were under the influence of French literature, and they were impressed with the new kinds of theatre, novel and criticism. “With reforms of Tanzimat, it appeared to increase in schooling, legal regulations, development of the press, and equality of members of all religious in front of the law. In this manner, new schools were established in the Ottoman State as in Europe. Thanks to French language and western culture a new class of intellectuals manifested in this period. This class of intellectuals adopted Europe’s life style” (Aytekin, 2000, p. 407).

The effect of French Language on Turkish language increased more with the translation of works into Turkish. The density of translation beginning in Tanzimat literature continued until Servet-i Fünun literary movement. Most of the writers of this movement such as Ahmet Mithat Efendi and Rezaizade Mahmut Ekrem continued to write their works when they were under the influence of French. There were so many French words in the novel called *Araba Sevdası*/Love of car. The writer added a French-Turkish glossary at the end of this novel (Aksoy, 2000, p. 133).

It is possible to see the interaction between the domains of both literature and education. The dictionary studies from Turkish to French, from French to Turkish were done in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century. The education in both French and Turkish was

given in navigation schools, in medical schools and engineering schools opened during the time of Sultan III<sup>rd</sup> Ahmet; they were rearranged again and were supported by Sultan Mahmut II (Özön, 1962, p. 7).

During the Tanzimat Period of the Ottoman State, when “western literature” was mentioned, French literature was the most acknowledged among all. Almost all of Turkish writers were influenced by French writers when writing their first works. For this reason, most of Turkish writers knew French. For example, Şinasi learned French while working as a secretary at Reşat Bey’s office. When he went to France, he started to be well known in literature by translating Lamartine’s works. Another example is Ziya Paşa, who knew French and Arabic. He learned French while working at the Palace as a secretary; Ethem Pacha helped him to learn it. When he was in Switzerland, he translated J.J. Rousseau’s “Emile” and “Confessions”. Namık Kemal learned French with some encouragement from Şinasi, and worked in the “translation office” as a translator. “Later on, when he was abroad, he received his education on Law and Sociology” (Kurdakul 1991:49). Recai Zade Mahmut Ekrem knew Arabic, Persian and French; he became a teacher at the Galatasaray High School from 1880 to 1888. He was influenced by Hugo and Lamartine. According to Ahmet Mithat Efendi’s son Kamil, his father learned French in 17 months and soon after that he learned Arabic, Persian, English, Italian, Latin and Greek in succession (Yazgıç 1940, p. 56).

The writers of Servet-i Fünun also knew French like the writers of the Tanzimat Period. For example, the founder of modern poetry Tevfik Fikret was graduated from the Galatasaray High School (1867-1915). Cenap Şahabettin was sent to France to complete his education in medicine. Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil finished the French Catholic High School and later went to France. Mehmet Rauf, Hüseyin Cahid Yalçın, Süleyman Nazif, Ahmet Hikmet Müftüoğlu also knew French very well. After the Second World War, with the development of national literature, French began to leave its place to English. (Yağlı, 2012, pp. 234-249)

## **6. The Ottoman-German Relations and the German Teaching in the Ottoman State**

Since XVIII<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman State made an effort to temporize the developments in the European countries. For this reason, the European military specialists and advisors had been charged in order to reform its army and navy.



These military specialists had been demanded generally from England and France. In the period of Sultan II<sup>nd</sup> Abdulhamid, the Ottoman State made more relations with Germany rather than France and England. Sultan II<sup>nd</sup> Abdulhamid demanded the military advisors from Germany to reorganize the Ottoman army declined after the Ottoman-Russian War during 1877- 1878 (Beşirli, 2004, p. 121).

Especially the Ottoman relations with Germany and German language had been improved with the reorganisation activities of the Ottoman Army in XIX<sup>th</sup> century. Then, the cultural relations had been developed between Ottomans and Germans. In order to improve the German teaching, the German High School and Sank Georg Austrian high school had been opened. After 1908, teaching German as foreign language had been widespread in the Ottoman territories. Moreover the German Hospital, the German Archaeology Institute and Turkish-German Associations opened in Istanbul had improved Turkish-German relations. (Önen, 1974, p. 47)

The international relations in the Ottoman State had influence on the preference of foreign language to be taught in the schools. The Ottoman and French relations and the supports of French specialists in the different fields, played a great role on the preference of French language as foreign language in the Ottoman schools. The Ottoman and German relations developed in the different areas caused the preference of German language as foreign language in the Ottoman schools. Thus, German language became important as a foreign language. When the foreign language was said for long years the French was coming to mind firstly in the Ottoman State, but it lost partially its importance in front of German (Genç, 2003, pp. 22-23).

The admiration of Young Turks to German and Germany, as well as the balance policy of the Ottoman State caused the increasing of teaching German in the Ottoman territories. Furthermore, the fact that many Turkish people went to Germany for the education and training in 1883 and the cultural activities of Germans in the Ottoman State can be mentioned among the reasons of this German admiration. İlber Ortaylı says that Ottoman State became under the economic, political and military influence sphere of the Germans but the real German culture and propaganda could not penetrate in the Ottoman State (İlber Ortaylı, 1981, p. 62).

During a trip to Europe Sultan II<sup>nd</sup> Abdul Hamid, while he was a prince, had been fascinated by the power of Prussia. Germany having not the Muslim colonies as

well as the border with the Ottoman State there weren't any problem between two states and any difference between the German parliamentarism and the Ottoman absolutism (Ülman, 1973, p. 145).

The visit of the German Emperor Wilhelm II to Istanbul between 1889 and 1898 upon the invitation of Sultan II<sup>nd</sup> Abdul Hamid strengthened the German-Turkish relations in the political and economic field. The cultural activities of Germans in the Ottoman territories, led to a decrease of sympathies against Frenchs and an increase of interest and relevance against Germans. After the visit of the German emperor in Turkey, German Foreign Ministry begun to buy the lands in Jerusalem and Palestine for building churches, schools and orphanage. Its aim was to establish German-speaking Communities in these places.

Baghdad Railway project had an important place in the development of Ottoman-German relations. The admiration of some people for Germany by the Ottoman-German military and commercial relations decreased partially the French influence. This situation leads to German domination as foreign language. Firstly, German course was put and taught in the programme of the school named Mekteb-i Hayriye. The German teaching was made in particular in the section named Tophane of this school. By the influence of Goltz Pasha, the German began to be taught as a foreign language in Galatasaray High School giving education in French (Önen, 1974, p. 257).

The Young Turks came to power after the Dethronement of Sultan II<sup>nd</sup> Abdul Hamid in 1908 and the proclamation of the Constitution. Their German admiration and partisanship continued increasingly. The powerful States excluding Germany began to make agreements among them in order to divide the Ottoman State. German Empire took the part of the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. These factors caused that the Ottoman Government was sympathizing German Government. After the Second Constitution, the Ottoman relations developing with the Germans increased the German teaching as a foreign language in the Ottoman schools. A great importance was given to foreign language teaching in the High Schools named Sultani increasing after 1908. It was adopted to teach German and English as an elective foreign language as well as French as obligatory foreign language. The German teaching came up in some private, foreign and minority schools (Turan, 2000, p. 77; Önen 1974, p. 257).

During the First World War, the Ottoman and German relations in economic and political areas arrived to the culminating point. The fact that the Ottomans were

sided with Germans during this war increased the desire of learning German in the Ottoman public opinion. In those years, it was seen that the German language teaching was given in Darülfünun/Ottoman University, even in Madrasas. By an letter of instruction published in 1916 the decision was taken to teach German as well as other foreign languages in the Foreign Languages department /Elsine Şubesi of Darülfünun (Önen, 1974, p. 258).

In 1915 German Prof. Dr. Franz Schmidt became the consultant of the Ottoman National Education Minister Şükrü Bey. Besides this Turkish-German co-operation strengthening with the commercial, cultural and military agreements a Turkish-German Friendship Association had been founded by the support of Prof. Dr. Franz Schmidt. This association played a great role in the realization of cultural and social activities: the conference rooms, theatre halls, reading rooms, classrooms were opened to give German courses (Turan, 2000, pp. 111-112).

As for the higher education, "on the demand of the Ottoman Education Minister Ahmet Şükrü Bey and his German consultant Prof. Dr. Franz Schmidt, 20 German professors and 1 Hungarian professor came in Darülfünun/Ottoman University in 1915. (Tekel & İlkin, 1993, p. 96) These German professors began to work in Darülfünun and wanted to give the identity of German university to this Ottoman University. They had worked in these fields: pedagogy, psychology, history, economics, zoology, botany, physics, geology, chemistry, law and archaeology.

After the beginning of the First World War, the disruptions and the interruptions in the foreign language teaching as well as in many areas had been occurred. According to Serves Treaty after the Mondoros Armistice signed after the First World War and in particular by the desire of Britain as an occupying power, the Ottoman government was obligated to close the institutions giving German education and send back Germans and German teachers and professors to Germany. This situation has led to the disruption of teaching German in Turkey. Riza Tevfik Bey, the Ottoman Education Minister of on November 2, 1918, declared to Franz Schmidt that the contracts of all German university professors were cancelled. From the Turkish Independence War until the establishment of Turkish Republic in 1923 by Atatürk, a recession occurred in the teaching of German in the Ottoman schools (Widmann, 1970, p. 15). The Ottoman- German alliance during this war and their powerful cooperation in military, educational and cultural fields caused that the German language and culture were spreading in the level of formal and non-formal education in the Ottoman State.

## 7. Conclusions

In the Ottoman State, the foreign language teaching and education came to agenda in order to reorganise and reform the Ottoman education system. Firstly, the French had been taught as a European language in the Ottoman education institutions. It was aimed to teach German and English as well as French and to train the dragomen in these Ottoman Schools. Especially the Ottoman Sultans Mahmut II and Abdulhamid II gave a great importance to European language teaching as a foreign language in the Ottoman education system.

The Ottoman territories were occupied several times directly or indirectly by the Foreign Powers. Nevertheless they didn't become any colonized country. In Turkey, the foreign language takes never precedence over the mother language as well as in many African countries such as Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia etc. Some European countries had privileges of opening schools in order to do the missionary activities in the Ottoman territories. The French teaching had been used sometimes for this purpose. But the German teaching as a foreign language had been generally used for the political and economic interests of the Germans.

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