The historical development of the foreign language education in Ottoman Empire

Fuat Boyaciğlu*

*Faculty of Letters, Department of French Language and Literature, Selcuk University, Konya, Turkey

Abstract

The education in the Ottoman Empire as a public work had been realized since the Ottoman Tanzimat Reformation. The foreign language education after the Tanzimat has been carried out by the European methods while the education before the Tanzimat was based on the religious basics. In the rising periods of the Ottoman Empire, Arabic and Persian were taught whereas European languages especially French were taught in its period of stagnation and decline with the adoption of the European supremacy. The westernisation and modernisation movements such as Tanzimat and Islahat were launched firstly in the Ottoman military schools then, in the public schools. After the First Constitution in 1908 French teaching became obligatory and German and English teaching became elective in all Ottoman schools.

Keywords: History of education; Ottoman Empire; Foreign Language Teaching History; Ottoman Schools.

1. Introduction

Throughout the history Turks have established generally multi-national empires. When they didn't make any discrimination of race, religion, language they became successful in the administration. The Turks didn't impose their language to the non Turkish communities and gave the freedom to them. Thus, they had a multinational structure. The Balkan and Muslim Arab communities are a good example in the Ottoman Empire. On the contrary, the Ottomans tried to teach and learn the languages of the communities under their domination, especially Arabic and Persian in their peak periods and the French, German and English in their periods of stagnation and decline.

Arabic being the language of Quran, became more important that Turkish language by the adoption of Islam by the Turks (932-1212). Although Arabic is the language of Islamic civilization, Persian became the cultural language
because the bureaucrat class in the government had been Persian origin since the Abbasid period (750-1258). In the Great Seljuk Empire period the Persian language was the court language. The literature courteous was written in Persian. However, the public language was Turkish. The difference and the alienation between the court literature and the public literature, between the court language and the public language have being continuing for centuries. Omar Seyfettin, Turkish writer said in this matter: there are two important stages and influences in the history of Turkish Literature 1-Persian influence 2-French influence. He emphasizes the dimension of the superficial and blind imitation in Turkish literature (Ali Canip, 1935).

The Ottoman State continued the political supremacy until 1606 and its absolute military superiority against Europe until the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699) after which it begun to lose more and more its political and military supremacy. The Ottoman administors approving the superiority of the Europe had to send delegates to Europe in order to know it very well (Uzunçarşıli, 1998; Sander, 1987). The Ottoman rulers were considering as inferiority its representation before another State until 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). 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 (Karal, 1994; Findley, 1996; Lyber, 2000).

The Ottoman Empire was constantly and militarily face to face with European countries during the wars. In XVIIIth century, Ottoman armies were defeated not only by Europeans armies but also by Russian and Egyptian forces benefiting from European military techniques. This case necessitated that Ottoman military schools had been established accordingly with European techniques. In the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries the experts coming from various European countries, recommended the military education in the European manner (Mustafa Ergün, 2013).

The loss of importance of the Mediterranean Basin because of geographical discoveries and the economical dissolution of Ottoman Empire and the capitulations enabled many foreign merchants to come to Anatolia and make commercial activities. The commercial relations had been executed relatively and equally until 1838’s. But the Ottomans territories had been completely a European market after the 1838 Treaty of Commerce (Cengiz Poyraz, 2013).

We are going to study the foreign language education in two periods: The period between 1299 and 1773 before the foundations of the schools in the European manner and the schools period between 1773 and 1923.

2. The foreign language education before the moderns schools in Ottoman Empire (1299-1773)

The education had been realised as a public service accordingly with the European methods in the schools period between 1773 and 1923 whereas it was carried out by the establishments affiliated to the religious foundations in the period between 1299 and 1773. The Ottoman Empire improved the education heritage and tradition that it took from Seljuk’s and other Islamic states. In this respect, some basic exact sciences such as mathematics and astronomy besides theological sciences had been given in the education institutions of Ottomans adhering to the Seljuk traditions in its formation (Selim Hilmi Özkan, 1999). In this period, the Arabic education was given in madrasahs since the textbooks were written in Arabic. But the Turkish lectures were preferred. It can be said that the majority of students graduated from madrasas in the classical Ottoman period knew Arabic and Persian as well as mother tongue (Ramazan Şeşen, 2002). During this period, the Infant's Schools, Madrassas and Enderun Schools were giving the education service.

Infants/Sibyan Schools: They were elementary training schools. In these schools called also as the local school, the prayers on the Islamic religion were memorized in Arabic, practising the prayer, psalmodying the sacred texts and writing in Arabic were taught to children (Oya Soner, 2007).

Madrassas: In the Ottoman Empire, the first madrasas had been established by the Ottoman sultan Orhan Gazi in 1331 in Iznik. The most well-known madrasas were Fatih (1451-1481), Sulaymaniyah (1520-1566), the Hagia Sophia and Beyazıt Madrasas. All Ottoman Madrasas were educational institutions affiliated to the religious foundations. Mother language Turkish was not taught in these educational institutions. Arabic was holding the most important place in the education. The purpose of teaching Arabic was to understand Arabic textbooks and other resources. Therefore, Arabic grammar was taught firstly. These books had been written to teach the Arabic morphology and the syntax (Özcan Demirel, 2004). As an expression of respect to Muslim Religion, the Ottoman
Empire took an extreme interest in Arabic. As a requirement of respect and interest in Arabic, it became the most important language in madrasas. Even it was said that Ottoman Sultan Yavuz Sultan Selim was intending to make Arabic as the official language of the state.

_Enderun a special school in the Ottoman Palace:_ Enderun School was established to train cultivated and experienced men for the services of the palace. In this school, Arabic and Persian other than Turkish were taught as a foreign language. One of features of these schools was to teach Turkish as a second language to devşirme/Christian children conscripted to brought up for the janissaries in terms of language teaching (Özcan Demirel, 2004).

The Persian teaching begins to be taught in the Ottoman madrasas by means of Grand Vizier Nevşehirli İbrahim Pasha. There was not much more attempt for the Persian teaching until this period was not well considered. However, the works “Masnavi”, "Gulistan" and "Bostan" written in Persian were taught in the Ottoman madrasas. Especially the darülmesnevis had been opened to read only masnavi (Osman Nuri Ergin, 1977). Although The Ottoman rulers had a great interest in Arabic and Persian they were aware that Turkish should be the state's official language. For this reason, the Ottoman administrators wanted that Arabic had been taught in the madrasas as a means of the love and respect of religion and learning religious values instead of making Arabic the official language of the state (Selim Hilmi Özkan).

As the Ottoman classic period since XVIIth Century couldn’t produce information and follow developments in the world, they became inefficient. Ottoman Empire wasn't occupied in rehabilitating a lot the madrasas being the oldest educational institutions and begun to establish modern schools along with them. The dichotomy between Madrasa and school in Turkish history has emerged in this way. This duality had been terminated in 1924 by the law on Unity of Education (Giyasettin Aytaş, 1999).

3. Modern schools period in the Ottoman Empire (1773-1923)

We can enumerate several factors concerning the establishment of these modern schools: the dissolution of Ottoman Janissary military system, the defeats of the Ottoman army by European armies against which they triumphed until the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699), the influence of European military experts suggesting the military reformation on Ottoman Army.

The first serious attempt of the Ottoman modernisation was Nizam-ı cedid/New Order of the Sultan Selim III. Trained in the reformist tradition of the XVIIIth, Sultan Selim III, while he was crown prince, corresponded with XVIth Louis, the last king of France before the French Revolution and received some advices from him. New Order Reform (Nizam-ı cedid) of the Sultan Selim III had been applied firstly in the military field. The European teachers and the specialists had been brought from Europe especially from France in order to give course (Karal, 1994; Lewis, 2000).

In addition to Arabic and Persian languages, the French language, took place in the Ottoman education system in the schools opened XVIIIth and XIXth centuries after the activities of the Bab-ı Ali Translation Chamber. In fact, in the Ottoman Empire, the first French-language education begins in Istanbul in 1669 in the School of Language for Boys (Dil Öğlan Okulu) built by Capuchin priests. It gets official status with its new name: College of Capuchin Fathers of St. Louis. Turkish and French were taught for three years in this school (Gündüz 1977; Frederic Hitzel).

3.1 The military educational schools

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 XIXth century. Apart from that, the schools such as Ottoman Imperial Maritime Engineering School /Mühendishane-i Bahri-i Hümayun (1776), Ottoman Imperial Land Engineering School/Mühendishane-i Berri Hümayun (1796), Ottoman Medical School/Mekteb-i Tibbiye (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 and Öztop, 2013).

_The Imperial Maritime Engineering Schools/ Mühendishane-i Bahri-i Hümayün (1776):_ A serie of defeats of the Ottoman navy in XVIIIth century and especially the incineration of the Ottoman Navy by the Russian Navy caused
the opening of a military school upon the recommendation of the Algerian Hassan Pasha in the Imperial Shipyard. Baron de Tott in the school's opening has been a significant share of the recommendations. This school continued the choppy and mixed development in the periods of Sultans Selim I and Mahmut II. Since 1838, the compulsory foreign language in the school became English instead of French. In the school the British teachers begun to give courses. In 1910 this Maritime Engineering School was introduced into a new arrangement according to British Naval School system (Mustafa Ergün, 2013).

*The Imperial Land Engineering School/Mühendishane-i Berri-i Hümayûn(1796):* The Engineering School/"Mühendishane-i Sultanî" in 1791's and the Imperial Land Engineering School/Mühendishane-i Berri-i Hümayûn in 1796's were established in order to educate literate mathematician artillery officers. French military schools program had been applied in this school. The land and marine geometry and accounts and the war information and education about the geography fields were given to all military students. The artillery officers were usually trained in the Imperial Land Engineering School. Then the staffs of the Land Army were usually trained in this school. After the War College was opened in 1834, this school became the Engineer Corps School.

*Medical School/Mekteb-i Tibbiye(1827):* The XIXth century was a century when the important changes were occurred in the medical field as in all scientific areas. The European medicine from the Renaissance already making a very significant development has left back the Eastern medicine. In Ottoman Turkey, an attempt to establish the modern medical school began in 1826 by the initiative of a medical chief physician Mustafa Behçet Efendi. This school was founded in order to cure the sick and wounded soldiers of the newly established. 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 your learning the medical science and adapting gradually it into the Turkish language. Try to learn the medical science from your teachers"(Lewis, 1998). Thus, the foreign language education took place in the school programmes by the westernisation movement in the military schools in the Ottoman State and the French became the first foreign language to be taught.

The Islahat and Tanzimat reform movements gave acceleration to the foreign language education 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. In the university successively named Darülfünun (1846), Darülfünun-i Osmani (1870), Darülfünun-i Sultanî (1874) and Darülfünun-i Şahane (1900) the courses were taught both in French and in Turkish. In the school named Tibb-i Şahane, opened in 1839 the education language had been French since 1871. On the other hand, the education language was English in the school Mühendishane-i Bahr-i Hümayûn because the teachers were English (Ergün, 2013).

### 3.2 The civil educational institutions and schools

The international relations in the Ottoman State were carried out generally by non-Muslim dragomen. Ottoman Muslims did not learn all the European languages, languages of the infidels according to them, especially during their heyday and their period of stagnation. In their relations with Europe, they used translators and interpreters belonging to non-Muslim communities, especially Greeks Phanariots until 1820-1830 years and then Armenians dragomen (Ekrem Aksoy, 2007). However, the fidelities of these Greek and Armenians dragomen could not be trusted sometimes. For this reason, the Bab-ı Ali Translation Chamber had been founded in 1821. The Ottoman Foreign Language School named "Lisan Mektebi" had been opened because the Bab-ı Ali Translation Chamber had lost in time the mission of teaching the foreign language in the administrative organisation of the Ottoman State.

*Bab-ı Ali Translation Chamber (1821):* It is deduced from the activities of the Bab-ı Ali Translation Chamber that one of European languages as foreign language was taught in addition to Arabic and Persian languages in the Ottoman schools opened in XVIIIth and XIXth centuries. We can say that the French teaching was seen in the modernisation movements in the education starting in XIXth century. The morphology and the syntax of the Arabic, Persian and French languages were taught in the programmes of the schools named “Rüşîye” opened in 1838 and the schools named Mekteb-i Maarif-i Adliye opened in 1839. 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.

The Ottoman Greeks were performing the translation and interpretation until the opening of the Bab-ı Ali Translation Chamber. The family Mavrocordato from Istanbul Phanar Quarter executed the translation affairs in the Ottoman State during one century (Ağıldere, 2010). 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 (Genç, 2003; Ekrem Aksoy, 2007). This situation continued until the opening of the Bab-ı Ali Translation Chamber in 1821. This obligatorily founded translation chamber can be considered as the first institution teaching systematically the foreign language in the Ottoman State. Knowing a European language in the XIXth century would be an indispensable quality for the young Turks purposing to obtain a career in the Ottoman Government. For this reason, the Bab-ı Ali Translation Chamber would take place beside the Palace and the Army in order to promote and come to power (Balei, 2008).

**Lisan mektebi/The Ottoman Foreign Language School (1864):** Due to the insufficiency of the foreign language education in the Bab-ı Ali Translation Chamber and the necessity for the staff knowing the foreign language a language school named Lisan Mektebi had been opened in 1864. Its study period was 4 years. It was the first 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. Abdulhamit. English, Russian and German languages in addition to French were taught in this school (Önen, 1971).

This Foreign Language School opened and closed several times 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-ı Ali-i Diplomasi. Thereafter, it was given up from this new school project.

**Galatasaray Sultanı High School (1868):** 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 Sultanı had been opened in 1868. The opening of Galatasaray Sultanı High School has been the first in this direction"(Genç, 2003). 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. In the following years Arabic, Persian, Armenian, Latin, Greek, Bulgarian, English, German and Italian had been given as elective course in the school programme. Galatasaray High School became a turning point in the foreign language education in Turkey. It was the first State school where the education was given in foreign language. In this school, the Muslim and no-Muslim students were receiving together education (Özkan, 2010).

In 1874, three schools were founded by the initiative of Sultan Abdulaziz: Galatasaray Darülfünun-u Sultanı Hukuk Mektebi (Law School), Galatasaray Mühendis Mektebi (School of Engineering) and Galatasaray Edebiyat Mektebi (School of letters). These three schools were united under the name of Mekteb-ı Aliye-i Sultanıye (Great Imperial School). These schools were largely based on the model faculties of the Sorbonne programs, both in their administration and in their teaching. The education quality of Galatasaray Law School being comparable to that of Western universities was a major step in the development of Faculties of law in Turkey. Galatasaray Sultanı High School has been a turning point from viewpoint of learning a foreign language in the Ottoman State. The foundation of Galatasaray High School in 1868 marked the peak of the Francophony in Turkey (Ekrem Aksoy, 2007).

**III-The German teaching as a foreign language in Ottoman Empire**

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. In XIXth century, the Ottomans maintained balanced economical relations with Germans. These relations caused that the Ottomans came under the political and military influence of the Germans. The military officers and specialists tried to widespread the German language teaching as well as their permanent duty.

In the period of Sultan Abdulhamit 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 Ottomans developed the political, commercial and economical relations with Germans. Sultan Abdulhamit
II demanded the military advisors from Germany to reorganize the Ottoman army declined after the Ottoman-Russian War between 1877 and 1878 (Beşirli, 2004).

Especially the Ottoman relations with Germany and German language had been improved with the reorganisation activities of the Ottoman Army in XIXth 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). German Teaching started to be given regularly in the Ottoman military schools after 1882. The German education in the Ottoman State had been realised mainly by the military officers and specialists such as Goltz Pasha charged by German Emperor Wilhelm I to reorganise the Turkish Army ( Genç, 2003).

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. 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). The Young Turks came to power after the Deprisonment of Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid II in 1908 and the proclamation of the Constitution. Their German admiration and partisanship continued increasingly. The powerful States excluding Germany begun 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. German supporters of the government have led to this situation.

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.

During the First World War, the Ottoman and German relations in economical 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 Darülfunun/Ottoman University, even in Madrasas. By the 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 Şubesı of Darülfunun (Önen, 1974). In 1915 German Prof. Dr. Franz Schmidt became the consultant of the Ottoman National Education Minister Şikrüss 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 (Turant, 2000).

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 (Widmann, 1970).

Conclusion

The Ottomans gave a great importance to the education language as well as the form and quality of the education. In the peak periods of the Ottoman Empire Arabic and Persian were taught in the classic schools such as infant's schools, Madarsas and Enderun schools. In its periods of recession and decline, they decided to reform and reorganise their education system after the Treaty of Karlowich. The European languages especially French as well as Arabic and Persian begun to be taught in the modern schools in order to make the international relations. The Islahat and Tanzimat reform movements gave acceleration to the foreign language education and this case was reflected on the education institutions.

French was taught as a foreign language in the military 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 Tibbiye (1827) and Military School/ Mekteb-i Harbiye (1834) in order to accelerate the military reforms. In order to train the statement, official staff, dragomen knowing a foreign language the civil institutions and schools such as Bab-i Ali Translation Chamber, Lisan mektebi/The Ottoman Foreign Language School and Galatasaray Sultani High School continuing yet its existence today were
opened. 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 Abdulhamit II gave a great importance to European language teaching as a foreign language in the Ottoman education system.

German teaching as a foreign language under the period of Sultan Abdulhamit II was given firstly in the Ottoman military schools, then in the other civil schools. It was understood that there were economical and political plans and interests behind the efforts of putting forward the German teaching against French and English teaching. The Ottoman and German relations in economical and political areas arrived to the compelling point with the First World War. The alliance of the Ottomans with Germans 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.

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