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**Some Remarks on Turkish Dictionaries Published in Constantinople/  
Istanbul Before and Soon After Language Reform in Turkey (1928)**

**Abstract**

The language reform which took place in Turkey in 1928 as part of the long-term fundamental changes affected the Turkish administrative, legal and educational systems, and introduced not only the change of writing system from Arabic characters to Latin ones, but brought also almost “revolutionary” changes in Ottoman-Turkish itself. In the second half of the nineteenth century, some dictionaries began to appear in Constantinople/Istanbul.<sup>1</sup> The first dictionaries included only Ottoman Turkish vocabulary, however, they already showed the first symptoms of language change (in terms of its purification, simplification). Apart from these lexicographic works, bilingual dictionaries, which comprised Ottoman Turkish vocabulary and translated into some European languages such as French, English or German, were also published. In the course of time, however, the contents of those dictionaries underwent some changes due to the reformatory rules introduced in 1928 and also after this date. The Turkish language was in the long-lasting process of change, which caused the appearance of new terminology and thus new kinds of dictionaries.

**Keywords:** Turkish language, Arabic script, Latin script, dictionaries

**Introduction**

Since the fifteenth century, due to the unflagging prestige of Arabic and Persian culture the Turkish language underwent a strong influence of Arabic and Persian languages. The dominance of Arabic and Persian elements noticeable in Ottoman Turkish

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<sup>1</sup> When analyzing some published sources one can notice that these two names were used parallel even until the twentieth century.

did not only confine to the loan words from these languages but comprised also the presence of grammatical elements such as Arabic plural forms (e.g. *memalik* instead of *memleketler* ‘dominions’) or gender-marked forms (e.g. *Memalik-i Osmaniye* ‘Ottoman Empire’, where the *-ye* ending in the word *Osmaniye* is the Arabic feminine ending). Even syntactic structures of the Turkish language were foreign and not concordant with its own spirit. Persian-type constructions such as relative clauses, temporal clauses, purpose clauses, Persian-type nominal phrases (*izafet*) or phraseological constructions with auxiliary verbs comprising combinations of Arabic participial forms with Turkish verb (e.g. *zayi olmak* ‘to be lost’) or involving Persian elements (e.g. *bir hoş olmak* ‘to feel embarrassed’) – all these are phenomena indicating enormous influence of Arabic and Persian languages on Turkish. Such a linguistic situation lasted in Turkey until the second half of the nineteenth century when the wave of deep and many-sided reforms spread throughout the country.

### The Tanzimat reforms

The Turkish reforms called *Tanzimat* which were initiated in 1839, affected not only the administrative, legal and educational systems but also, for the first time, the language itself. Therefore, the first attempts to emancipate Ottoman Turkish from the domination of Arabic and Persian can be dated back to that period. A famous writer of that time, Ziya Paşa in his article *Şiir ve İnşa* [‘Poetry and writing/composition’] (1886) claimed that legal and administrative language should be simplified; he also criticized the artificial and non-Turkish character of Ottoman literature. Another great writer of that period, Namik Kemal condemned the excessive use of foreign vocabulary by asking why it is regarded as an achievement to force everybody to repeatedly consult the Arabic and Persian dictionaries when reading a two-page article (Heyd 1954: 10–11).

The first changes of attitude towards the native language are reflected in the lexicographic works from that time. Since then, the first dictionaries including native, that is Turkish words have been published. On the other hand, Arabic and Persian words which were still present in the language were slowly modified in their spelling and limited in their meaning according to the requirements of Ottoman Turkish.

The growing appreciation of the native language was more and more apparent. Süleyman Paşa, the author of a grammar entitled *Sarf-i Türki* [‘Turkish grammar’] (1874) and some others, postulated the change of the name of the language from Ottoman Turkish to Turkish, raising it to the rank of so called “Kultursprache”, which would denote the language of Turkish generations before the time of the Ottoman Empire (Heyd 1954:13). Another linguist, Şemsettin Sami<sup>2</sup> who was also a writer, playwright, scholar (LT 2003: 236), noticed the similarity of Ottoman Turkish with other Turkic languages. He also suggested the replacement of Arabic and Persian elements with some genuine

<sup>2</sup> Şemsettin Sami is also known as Sami Bey Fraschery.

Turkish words borrowed from Eastern Turkish. His idea was seconded by another linguist, the radical purist Fuat Köse Raif who tried to replace Arabic and Persian borrowings with Turkish equivalents taken from Old Turkish, Turkish dialects or some other Turkic languages. However, this very puristic idea did not succeed (Heyd 1954: 13–14).

In 1897 a young poet Mehmet Emin, impressed by the Turco-Greek war, published his first patriotic poem using simple Turkish words and *hece vezni* – ‘the native metre’ (Płaskowicka-Rymkiewicz et al. 1971: 201). The publication of his poems which were addressed to all Turks opened the second phase of the language reform supported by the Young Turks Revolution of 1908/1909. The decaying Ottoman Empire and its almost continuous war pushed the Turkish nation towards a strong feeling of nationalism. Such an atmosphere created a fertile soil for deep and inevitable language reforms that were to come in the near future.

It should be stressed that in this national debate concerning the language reform an important role played also representatives of some minorities inhabiting Ottoman Turkey. Among the reformers who created the elites and organized intellectual life of the nineteenth century Turkey were present Armenians, Greeks, Jews and citizens of some European countries. Some publishing houses established by Armenians, Greeks and protestants acting in Istanbul at that time constituted the source of knowledge for Turkish future publishers, editors, journalists (Zajac 2013: 224–225). Among the authors of the nineteenth-century dictionaries which were published in Turkey there were also representatives of other nations living in Turkey (e.g. Sami Bey Fraschery, Albanian by birth, or Armenians: Diran Kelekian, Krikor Sinapian, and others).

### **The reforms in the Republic of Turkey**

The proclamation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 opened a new era for fulfilling the Kemalist idea, whose main aim was to form a nationalist, secular, populist country. The key to introducing these changes was the Turkish language or, to be more exact, its reforms. Atatürk’s idea concerning the creation of a new language was revolutionary, but far from novel. Kemal Paşa wanted to achieve a new form of a new Turkish within a short time. The slogan used by the Young Turks reformers concerning the simplification of the language returned.

The first aim was to create a pure Turkish – *öz Türkçe*. The second task was to bring the new literary language as close as possible to the spoken one in order to make it understandable to the broad masses. The year 1928 brought the first revolutionary change. In June 1928 a committee headed by Prof. Fuad Köprülü elaborated a program for the reform of the script being in use until then. A new script, composed of Latin characters, was to replace the Arabic script and was accepted by the Parliament in November 1928. The next step undertaken at that time was the foundation of the Turkish Linguistic Society, *Türk Dil Kurumu* in 1932; its first congress (*Türk Dil Kurultayı*) convened the same year in September. The main aim of the Society was to carry out the tasks already

formulated by the first reformers in the nineteenth century which concerned purification and simplification of the language. These were:

- the propagation of genuine Turkish words which might replace words of foreign origin frequently used in Turkish;
- establishing the principles of word formation and creation of words from Turkish roots;
- publication of Turkish lexical material which was used in old texts and popular language (Heyd 1954: 26).

The Society's work was supported by the government and administration. It is proper to add here that thanks to intensive work of the Turkish Linguistic Society on a first dictionary of modern Turkish, *Türkçe Sözlüğü Örnek Basımı* was published as early as in 1942, whereas the definite form of this dictionary entitled *Türkçe Sözlük* appeared in print in 1945 (TS 2009: VII–VIII). With a great enthusiasm the work of *Türk Dil Kurumu* was continued resulting in numerous publications and also monumental works. The process of purification was continued as well. The number of Turkish substitutes of foreign words found in Anatolian dialects, old Turkish and even in other Turkic languages grew considerably. The Turkish language reform lasted for many years with some ups and downs.

### Some Turkish dictionaries of the nineteenth century

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of the attempts at language reform, the first lexicographic works comprising also Turkish lexical material began to appear in Ottoman Turkey. These nineteenth-century dictionaries written by Turkish lexicographers concentrated mainly on the language itself, trying both to purify it from foreign (viz. Arabic and Persian) elements and to simplify it at the same time. The leading advocate of the idea of simplification (*sadeleşme*) was aforementioned Şemsettin Sami whose scientific dissertations focused on this very issue (Płaskowicka-Rymkiewicz et al. 1971: 192). Apart from these dissertations, Şemsettin Sami was also famous for his outstanding contribution to the lexicography; he compiled several dictionaries such as the *Kamus El A'lam* (1889–1898)<sup>3</sup> – six-volume encyclopedic dictionary comprising history and geography, *Kamus-i Türkî* (1899), *Dictionnaire turc-français* (1883),<sup>4</sup> *Dictionnaire français-turc* (1883).<sup>5</sup> Other lexicographic works which were published towards the end of the nineteenth century were Ahmet Vefik Paşa's *Lehçe-i Osmanî* (1889) and Mehmet Salâhî's *Kamus-i Osmanî* (1896).

<sup>3</sup> This dictionary, just as the other lexicographic works published at that time, had originally the year of publication written according to the Moslem calendar. However, for the purpose of this paper the date of editions of the discussed works is given according to the Gregorian calendar.

<sup>4</sup> Kelekian in the *Introduction* to his dictionary (1911: 10) wrote: "Il y a juste vingt-huit ans, que Ch. Samy bey Fraschery, (...), publiait son Dictionnaire Turc-Français." Judging by these words the date of the publication of Şemsettin Sami's work is 1883, whereas Heyd (1954: 11) gives a different date which is 1885.

<sup>5</sup> Both in the *Dictionnaire français-turc* and in the *Dictionnaire turc-français* the name of the author has the form Ş. Sami Bey Fraschery.

## Bilingual dictionaries

In parallel with the afore-named works some bilingual dictionaries began to be prepared both by Turkish lexicographers and by foreigners. There is no need to say that at the same time, in Europe, publications of bilingual dictionaries including Turkish vocabulary were very frequent and popular. On the other hand, it should be stressed that at that time in Ottoman Turkey European lexicographers also had their important contribution to the Turkish lexicography. European lexicographers used to prepare bilingual dictionaries which included Turkish vocabulary together with the vocabulary of one of the European languages. The European languages from which vocabulary was predominantly used in those works were French, English and German. The dictionaries prepared by Europeans and published in Turkey were edited mainly in Istanbul.<sup>6</sup> The role which those dictionaries played in the nineteenth century Turkish society was well characterized by the words of the outstanding publisher and the pioneer of a modern Turkish press of that period, Ahmet Ihsan Tokgöz (Zajac 2013: 224). In his autobiography<sup>7</sup> one can read his enthusiastic comment concerning the fact of publication of Şemsettin Sami's French-Turkish dictionary (Zajac 2013: 225). Among the bilingual dictionaries prepared by foreigners in Turkey at that time, one should mention at least the following:

James W. Redhouse's *Kitab-i Lehce ul-Maani li-James Redhouse el-Ingilizi. A Lexicon, English and Turkish*, Constantinople 1861;

James W. Redhouse's *Kitab-i Maani-i Lehce li-James Redhouse el-Ingilizi, A Turkish and English Lexicon, Shewing in English the Significations of the Turkish Terms*, Constantinople 1890;

Anton Tinghir, Krikor Sinapian, *Dictionnaire français-turc des termes techniques des sciences, des lettres et des arts*, Constantinople 1891;

Joannes Chloros, *Lexicon tourko-hellenikon*, Constantinople 1899;

Diran Kélékian, *Dictionnaire Turc-Français*, Constantinople 1911.

Apart from the above-mentioned dictionaries, one should also include, due to their bilingual character, already mentioned two dictionaries written by Şemsettin Sami: *Dictionnaire turc-français* and *Dictionnaire français-turc*.

As for the script used in these bilingual dictionaries one remark should be added. Generally, dictionaries comprising vocabulary both from Turkish and one of the European languages were written with the use of two scripts: Arabic in reference to Turkish vocabulary and Latin in reference to the European language. However, in some cases, like in Kélékian's dictionary, the Turkish vocabulary was written both in Arabic script and Latin transcription. Also, the date was presented both according to the Gregorian calendar and to the Moslem one.

<sup>6</sup> After the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey, when Ankara became a capital of the state various publications including dictionaries used to repeatedly come out there.

<sup>7</sup> A.I. Tokgöz, *Matbuat Hatıralarım*, İstanbul 1993.

## Spelling dictionaries and Ottoman-Turkish – modern Turkish dictionaries

The subsequent period of the Turkish language reform which occurred after 1928 brought new developments related to the script change. The introduction of a new script for the Turkish language, which was composed of Latin characters, created a new urgent need. This need was a dictionary of the new spelling. Thus, in 1928 *Imla Lûgati* ['Spelling dictionary'] (1<sup>st</sup> edition) was published. The second edition under the title *Imla Kılavuzu* was not published until 1942. The spelling dictionary was not only to give instructions on how to read and write the words written in the new characters but also how to correctly write the words which underwent a specific phonetic and spelling adaptation according to the rules of the Turkish language. The adaptation referred to numerous vocabulary items of Arabic and Persian origin which were not removed during the wave of purification. The users of the language luckily realized that it would not be possible to fill the gap in the language after removing some words reserved for such areas as daily life, religious life, lifestyle of Islamic civilization, science, medicine, law, theology and others. Thus, such words as *kahve* 'coffee', *lale* 'tulip', *hamam* 'bath', *cami* 'mosque', *namaz* 'prayer', etc. remained. Even in the name of the dictionary *Imla kılavuzu* the Arabic word *imla* 'spelling' exists until now in modern Turkish.

The subsequent years of the Turkish reforms brought further needs concerning dictionaries. In order to develop the modern language, the reformers used various methods, such as word formation, adaptation, borrowing from native dialects or other languages, including Turkic and foreign ones. Therefore, to make the Turkish society more familiar with a new Turkish language (*Türkiye türkçesi*) some new dictionaries were edited which translated Ottoman Turkish into modern Turkish and vice versa. As an example of such works one can mention *Türkçeden Osmanlıcaya Cep Kılavuzu* (Istanbul 1935) and *Osmanlıcadan Türkçeye Cep Kılavuzu* (Istanbul 1935). Here are some sample entries taken from one of these dictionaries:

instead of Ottoman (<Ar.) word *dikkat* 'attention' there is a neologism *abay* 'id.' (TOCK 1); the modern derivative *evcimen* 'home-lover' replaced the Ottoman *aileperver* (TOCK 121), which was a compound of two elements: *aile* 'family'(<Ar.) and *perver* 'caring for'(<Per.); Turkish word *zavallı* 'poor' replaced Ottoman (<Ar.) *fakir* 'id.' and Ottoman (<Per.) *biçare* 'id.' (TOCK 338).

Apart from an educational role, this kind of dictionaries played also another role – the role of propaganda. In the introductory part of the afore-named dictionaries the editors stressed the richness of the Turkish language and its deep and long lasting contacts with some other languages, even though they belonged to other linguistic groups.<sup>8</sup> Paradoxically, this kind of dictionaries did not always present a real, modern or, one could say, pure Turkish. Even taking into account the above-mentioned examples we can ascertain that two from the three quoted words, viz. *abay* and *evcimen*, are not recorded in contemporary dictionaries of modern Turkish. In some cases Arabic words (of course, in Turkish phonetic

<sup>8</sup> Such an opinion can be found in TOCK, 1935, p. VI.

adaptation) were confronted with some other, allegedly modern Turkish words which *de facto* were also Arabic. Here are given some examples taken from the same source, i.e. *Türkçeden Osmanlıcaya Cep Kılavuzu*.

Supposedly Turkish word *mehenk* ‘touchstone’ has the Ottoman (<Ar.) counterpart *mehakk* ‘id.’ (TOCK 210); allegedly Turkish word *meraba* ‘hello’ is confronted with Ottoman (<Ar.) *merhaba* ‘id.’ (TOCK 210); allegedly modern Turkish word *acele* ‘urgent’, which is in fact of Arabic origin, was confronted with its Ottoman counterpart *müstacel* ‘id.’ (TOCK, 1).

Another paradox, which can be noticed in the last presented example refers to a foreign word, that is the French word *urgent*, which was used in this dictionary to explain the meaning of the allegedly modern Turkish word *acele* and the Ottoman *müstacel*. One can find considerably more such paradoxes in this particular dictionary.

### The problem of technical and scientific terminology

A problem which also appeared in the course of time concerned the scientific and technical terminology brought by civilizing development.

To fulfil the expectations of the language reform, some Arabic and Persian words which could not be replaced by Turkish native equivalents because of the lack of the latter, were adopted with some phonetic modifications and simplifications, e. g. *ilmilârz* ‘geology’, cf. *arziyat* ‘id.’ (NRTED 1980: 77); *ilm-i cebir* ‘algebra’, cf. *cebir* ‘id.’ (NRTED 1980: 218); *ilm-i simya* ‘alchemy’, cf. *simya* ‘id.’ (NRTED 1019). However, some of those words were later replaced by European equivalents, borrowed mostly from French. Thus, the already mentioned word *arziyat* was replaced by *jeoloji*.

Besides, in some cases one could find in the Turkish language parallel words denoting the same meaning, whereas one was of Arabic origin and the other was a borrowing from one of the European languages, e.g. *hayatiyat* ‘biology’ (HTDW 1942: 162), *biyoloji* ‘id.’ (HTDW 1942: 49). Another method which was involved in the process of modernizing the Turkish language according to the needs of civilizing development was the incorporation of those European words which constituted not only technical and scientific terminology accompanying Westernization but also comprised some areas of the language referring to the daily life. Thus, such words as *elektrik* ‘electricity’, *kuliüp* ‘club’, *pasaport* ‘passport’, *telefon* ‘telephone’, *telgraf* ‘telegraph; telegram’, *arkeologi* ‘archaeology’, *biyoloji* ‘biology’, *fonetic* ‘1. phonetics. 2. phonetic’, etc., were incorporated into Turkish. The dictionaries reacted to these changes individually. New editions of bilingual dictionaries in some cases introduced these changes but with explanations concerning the older words. In other cases, only modern words, that is borrowings, were presented. A good example of dictionaries which preserved the older words and at the same time registered their modern equivalents were, among others, the subsequent editions of *New Redhouse Turkish-English Dictionary* which were based largely on the *Turkish-English Lexicon* prepared in 1890 by James Redhouse, and also the *Türkisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch* by Fritz Heuser, edited in Istanbul 1942 (1<sup>st</sup> edition, Istanbul 1931).

## Illustrated dictionaries and dictionaries of specialist terminology

Apart from bilingual dictionaries, some glossaries comprising specialist terminology from some scientific disciplines began to be published. The examples of such publications are: *Istanbul argosu ve halk tabirleri* (Istanbul 1934), *Türkçe Terimler Cep Kılavuzu* (*Astronomi, Biyoloji, Botanik, Coğrafya, Fizik, Jeoloji, Kimya, Matematik, Zooloji*) (Istanbul 1941), *Felsefe ve Gramer Terimleri* (Ankara 1942), *Türk hukuk lugati* (Ankara 1944). However, in course of time this kind of dictionaries was replaced by other works, more specialistic, which related only to one scientific area. Thus, several years after aforementioned *Felsefe ve Gramer Terimleri* a new *Dilbilim Terimleri Sözlüğü*<sup>9</sup> was published (Hatiboğlu 1982: 5). What is interesting, apart from the linguistic content this work includes a short dictionary translating linguistic terminology from Ottoman Turkish into the modern one, e.g. *elifba: alfabe* ‘alphabet’ (Hatiboğlu 1982: 145); *izafet terkibi: ad tamlaması* ‘the grammatical relationship between two nouns’ (Hatiboğlu 1982: 146); *kısa sait: kısa ünlü* ‘short vowel’ (Hatiboğlu 1982: 146); *mürekkep cümle: birleşik tümce* ‘compound sentence’ (Hatiboğlu 1982: 147); *zarf: belirteç* ‘adverb’ (Hatiboğlu 1982: 149).

It should also be added here that some dictionaries published in Turkey at that time contained illustrations which constituted a good method to assimilate a foreign word denoting something unknown and representing a different culture. Among others, the following already mentioned dictionaries were illustrated: Diran Kélékian, *Dictionnaire turc-français*, (Constantinople 1911), *Dictionnaire Français-Turc* by Ch. Samy-Bey Fraschery (Constantinople 1905).

## Conclusions

In order to summarize the problem of Turkish dictionaries published in Turkey before and some years after the language reform, one should first of all ascertain that those dictionaries reflected the language changes based on real needs and expectations of a developing society. Thus, those changes were strongly connected with social and cultural transformations which began in Turkey in the second part of the nineteenth century and lasted until the end of the Kemalist reforms. The methods which were used by the reformers such as, on the one hand, purism, simplification, word formation, emancipation from Arabic and Persian borrowings, and on the other hand, the introduction of European loan words, constitute another problem and need separate studies.

No matter what mistakes were committed during the language reform it should be emphasized that, in general, this process brought positive results which manifested themselves in a developing interest towards the Turkish language, in stimulating scholars to research and develop their own language in a controlled and conscious way in order to make it richer, close to the spoken language and modern. At each stage of the language

<sup>9</sup> The dictionary was published in 1949.



reform the published dictionaries documented the developments constituting on the one hand the evidence of changes, on the other hand presenting a new image of the language. The dictionaries, their variety and kinds, were not only a reflection of the changes – they became the result of the changes.

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