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Teaching Turkish as a foreign language to native speakers of Greek: the case of the Department of Turkish and Modern Asian Studies, University of Athens

On the occasion of the graduation, within a few months, of the first students of the Department of Turkish and Modern Asian Studies of the University of Athens, we aim to assess our work related to the teaching of Turkish within the Department, given the fact that the end of the first four year period since the Department was launched marks also the completion of a full period of teaching Turkish to native speakers of Greek. We shall present the teaching methodology, the skepticism developed, as well as the aims and the perspectives of the teaching of Turkish at the University of Athens, in relation to the general structure of the Department's Programme of Studies.

Our paper is therefore structured as follows:

- (A) Teaching Turkish;
- (B) The experience and the theoretical problem: teaching methodology and research;
- (C) Aims and Prospects.

(A) Teaching Turkish at the Department of Turkish and Modern Asian Studies of the University of Athens

As pertains to the weekly programme: the teaching of Turkish to our students is ensured without interruption, for eight terms (four academic years), nine hours per week.

Numerically-wise, the above courses sum up to 828 hours of teaching Turkish and cover 23 courses of the Department's Programme of Studies (9 hours per week, for an average of 12 weeks per term, and for a total of eight (8) terms [NB: during the 8th semester, 6 hours are offered per week instead of 9]). Students are distributed to three classes of 20 persons each. The teaching staff are either bilinguals (of Turkish and Greek) or native Greek speakers, graduates of faculties specialising in the Teaching of Turkish as a FL, or native Greek speakers with a perfect knowledge of Turkish, all with many years of experience in teaching Turkish as a FL.

Also, our students have the opportunity to attend around twenty courses (out of a total of twenty-two theoretical courses), which are directly or indirectly related to the Turkish language, culture, politics and history, summing up to a total of 720 hours of teaching (20 three-hour courses taught for 12 weeks per term, during a total of 8 academic terms).

Prerequisite courses have been implemented at our Department, from the Fifth Academic Term onwards. In other words, a student may not attend the courses offered during the Fifth Semester, unless he/she has been successful in the examinations for courses offered during previous semesters. This ensures the consolidation of the content of language courses, and, thus, the students' optimum performance. Also, in order to optimise the result with regard to the students' level of their FL knowledge and teaching capability, there is provision for a special examination, during the Eighth Semester, aimed to certify their level of linguistic performance, as well as for their (they have the) obligation to provide a specified number of public, model teaching courses (at the Department of Languages of the University of Athens), so as to be able to teach Turkish, both linguistically and pedagogically.

In our Department, the only one in Greece cultivating Turkish language and culture to such an extent so as to be reasonably named *Department of Turkish Studies*, the teaching of Turkish is one of the two pillars on which the whole structure of "Turkish Studies" is based, taking up half of the courses taught, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

In other universities where Turkish is taught (as well as courses related to the Turkish literature and culture) - i.e. the University of the Aegean, the Ionian University, the Universities of Macedonia, Crete, Thrace and Western Macedonia, the relevant studies (both at the undergraduate and the postgraduate levels) are oriented towards matters of History, Political and International Sciences, Balkan and Black Sea Studies, as well as Mediterranean and Translation Studies. Turkish is taught within these thematic frameworks¹.

At the University of Athens, Turkish is taught for a series of six academic terms, while the seventh and the eighth terms (semesters) are devoted mainly to translation, i.e. the teaching of the Use of Turkish through the translation process.

Linguistic teaching takes place based on the post-communicative method, by seeking to

¹ The Department's degree is equivalent with only the degree of the Department of Turkish Studies and Middle Eastern Studies of the University of Cyprus, even though the number of teaching hours is significantly smaller than in our Department.

Language, literature and Turkish culture are taught (both at an undergraduate and postgraduate level) at the Universities of the Aegean, Western Macedonia and Crete – Turkish and Ottoman Studies, or in the context of Balkan Studies (University of Macedonia), of Mediterranean Studies (University of the Aegean), of Eastern and Black Sea Studies (University of Thrace) or of Translation Studies (Ionian University).

combine the traditional with the communicative method, by organising the teaching corpus using linguistic material, of both the analytical and the synthetic types. Thematically-wise, translation courses from Turkish into Greek are organised based on their content, i.e. starting from the translation of general texts and the translation of texts with a social, economic and political content, to the translation of literary and/or specialised texts, during the eighth semester.

The combination of the above methods and of content organisation is reflected on the categorisation of language courses into courses of Phonetics, Morphosyntactic analysis and Vocabulary, Writing Skill Acquisition Courses (Perception/Comprehension and Production) and Oral Skill Acquisition Courses (Perception/Comprehension and Production).

This combination of modern and traditional teaching methods is imposed by reasons of didactics/pedagogy and sociolinguistic nature.

(a) For our students, Turkish is a foreign and not a second language, given the fact that it is not taught in the country where it is spoken and, therefore, is not supported substantially by its environment. This has as a result the incapability to adopt a purely communicative approach.

(b) One of the aims for the students' professional prospects (as described in the relevant statutory text establishing the Department) is their employment as teachers of Turkish. However, in order for a person to be able to teach Turkish (to Greek-speaking natives in Greece), he/she must have adequate skills for the structural analysis of Turkish. This is particularly true in the case of Greek speaking natives, given the typological differences between Greek and Turkish. Therefore, and in order to systematise the material to be taught to future teachers of Turkish, it is necessary to adopt a structural, synthetic type of teaching approach, providing the future teacher and researcher of Turkish with adequate skills of structural analysis (at both the morphosyntactic and lexical levels), so as to be able to study contrastively the languages involved and to apply his/her findings in the teaching of Turkish (see below). This method is primarily followed in the context of Morphology and Syntax courses.

(c) On the other hand, exactly because Turkish is not taught in a Turkish-speaking environment, the linguistic material to be taught must be, concurrently, approached also notionally- and functionally-wise, so that our students are given various Turkish-speaking inputs, of oral and written discourse alike, corresponding to various types of communicative needs. In this case, we follow an analytical-type programme, so that our students can have an holistic view of the target language and be in a position to analyse larger units of discourse (written or oral) into its constituent parts in order to combine structure and message. This method is followed primarily in the context of the courses entitled "Written Discourse Perception and Production Skills" and "Oral Discourse Perception and Production Skills".

(d) As pertains to Translation courses, we also deal with a combination of two approaches, i.e. of the Pedagogical and Professional translation. Utilising the communicative aspect of translation, i.e. the translation as a communicative act in matters of language didactics, we adopt the aims, the principles and the methodology, rather of the professional and, to a lesser extent, the pedagogical translation (Sella, 1997; 141, 148). Our aim is [a] the comprehension, by means of the translation process, of the structural differences among the two languages by contrasting, both morphosyntactically and stylistically, the texts of the Source Language (SL, Turkish) and the target language (TL, Greek); [b] the thorough understanding of the way the Turkish language functions, by utilising the interpretative translational approach reflected in the so-called "de-lexicalization", i.e. the detachment from the lexical and morphosyntactic structures of the ST; and [c] using authentic texts, the "in vivo" discernment of the particularities of the use of Turkish in various communicative

conditions, on the one hand, and the identification, on the other, of not only the points where linguistic interference during the transfer from the one language to the other is observed, but also of the fields where the pragmatic dimension of texts marks cultural and, at the same time, structural and stylistic differences.

The progress of the teaching material levels and structuring is based on the adoption of the guidelines and the scale of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, with the aim being the certification of the knowledge of Turkish at the third level of language skills, i.e. the "absolutely satisfactory usage of the language". Also, the teaching material used includes all the written means (in hardcopy or in softcopy) or the audiovisual media that are commonly used with the aim to enhance the linguistic knowledge of students, together with their linguistic experience.

The objective of the teaching approach of Turkish that is adopted in our Department and is described above, is triple:

(a) providing the Department graduates with an absolutely satisfactory knowledge of the language, so that they are fully capable of perceiving (and producing) neutral, formal and scientific registers of discourse, both written and oral;

(b) forming graduates who are capable of translating from Turkish into Greek, both pragmatic and literary texts;

(c) forming graduates who are capable of teaching Turkish as a foreign language, both at the beginner's, intermediate and at the advanced levels.

(B) Experience and Theoretical Problems: teaching methodology and research

This triple aim may appear to be an ambitious one, owing to the limited time available (four academic years). However, it is not an unattainable aim, on the condition that certain needs are satisfied with regard to the teaching of Turkish, as identified during the first four years of operation of the Department's current programme of studies.

Our experience and the results achieved so far illustrate both the positive and the problematic points that are directly or indirectly related to the teaching of Turkish within the our Department .

The positive results are reflected on the fully satisfactory level of linguistic knowledge achieved by the majority of the first graduates of our Department, as well as on the results achieved by our students participating in the Erasmus/Socrates programme, where they are given the chance, for the first time, to follow a so-called "immersion programme" and thus to immerse into Turkish-speaking environments and not only to complete this test harmless, but also to enhance their cognitive level and to live the experience of the language by closely contacting the civilisation, the society and the institutions of the country in which the language being taught is spoken, by acceding, even temporarily, the Turkish-speaking society.

However, in order to achieve the optimum results, if possible for the totality of our students, we should aim at covering the gaps and needs identified. These are multi-faceted and cannot be clearly distinguished into primary or secondary, since they interweave with one another, while a deficit in meeting one need directly impacts on the meeting of the other. Such needs are classified into: [a] didactic; [b] pedagogical/linguistic; [c] cognitive/encyclopaedic; [d] practical/didactic; and [e] research needs.

[a] As pertains to the didactic needs, the teaching staff, of not only our Department, but also of

faculties and departments of other universities in which Turkish is taught, identify the problem of a basic teaching manual, with a common aim and methodology for all levels of Turkish language teaching. Currently, the general context of the material to be taught is indeed specified and organised in advance, so that all teachers perform in parallel, based on each teaching level (as mentioned above, according to the requirements of the European portfolio). However, it is in the discretion of the teachers to adopt, as a basic teaching manual, either one of the Turkish Teaching Methods published by the University of Ankara (Tömer Institute), or the Boğaziçi University, the Dilmer editions, the Dilset editions, etc, or his/her own unpublished teaching material (notes), resulting from their many years of experience in teaching Turkish, or, finally, a combination of the two approaches.

This lack of uniformity derives, on the one hand, from the fact that the Turkish teaching methods available are oriented towards the learning of Turkish "within communicative contexts", i.e. in a Turkish-speaking environment and are therefore difficult to apply in our context of language teaching and, on the other, by the fact that even though many of the Department's teachers do have their own teaching material available (collection of authentic texts, material for the teaching of morphosyntactic and lexical structures, of specialised and general vocabularies, of exercises and audiovisual media related to the material, etc.), its unification and coordination lacks behind, as well as to produce, beforehand, a unified method for the teaching of Turkish, including basic teaching manuals organised as per the language teaching levels, grammar books, practice books, audiovisual material and collections of authentic texts from various sources, both in hardcopy and in softcopy (CD-ROM).

In this way, it will be possible to fully coordinate the individual classes by the semester of studies, and no differences will be observed in relation to the teaching material (or even problems during the exams period). Also, the needs of the particular students will be met, together with the aims of the Department. Assigning the task to build such a programme corpus, with the approval of the University of Athens, to a group of the Department's scientists, perhaps also in cooperation with some of the other departments of Greek Universities in which Turkish is taught, would provide a solution for this deficit.

[b] As pertains to the needs of a pedagogical/linguistic nature: these relate to the perception and production skills of mainly Turkish oral discourse. Currently, the first graduates of our Department, in their vast majority, have reached level C in terms of their written discourse perception and production skills, but are still lacking behind as pertains to their oral discourse perception and production skills. This is caused by the lack of a contextual Turkish-speaking support for the material taught within the statutory framework of the University class, and by the lack of interaction possibilities, outside the school class. The latter deficit impacts even on the students who, by inference, perform well, making them incapable of uttering discourse in Turkish, due to low self-esteem and self-confidence. It should be added here that our experience from the students' short stay abroad in the context of the Erasmus programme has illustrated both the causes and the solutions to the problem.

The only solution to this problem is to expose students to (Turkish-speaking) authentic linguistic inputs, a task that can be achieved only by means of the compulsory and sponsored stay of the students in Turkey and the attendance, on their part, of classes in Turkish universities. There are two ways to achieve this aim, and both require the aid from the Greek state and, more in particular, the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.

(i) Legislative enactment (and student grants) for a semester abroad, to be considered as a

normal time of study for all students (during the seventh or the eighth semester: study in Turkey). It is necessary, in accordance with the policy of European universities' foreign language departments (London University SOAS), in order for students to be knead together with both the language and the linguistic community during their final semesters of study at the Department (see the precedent of the Ionian University Department of Foreign Languages, Translation and Interpreting, GG 16/B/27.01.1988, number B1/61).

(ii) Alternatively, even though on a different course of thought, we could also propose the organisation of the (also compulsory for all the students and sponsored by the state) attendance of *Summer Courses of Turkish in Turkey*, for a minimum of two periods during the first semesters of their study. In this manner, the dire need to familiarise students with the language and the Turkish-speaking linguistic community will be satisfied during the first semesters of study (e.g. in Tömer). Analogously to the first proposal, we might agree with Tömer, so that the marks achieved by the students in the context of these summer courses be taken into consideration and correspond to credit units necessary for graduating from our Department.

It is noted that many of our students have already attended, at their own expense, summer courses of Turkish in Turkey, by utilising collaborations in the context of the Erasmus programme and, generally, those that can, participate in all kinds of cooperation agreements reached on a personal level, by the teaching staff of the Department (e.g. last year's agreements of Mr. Millas with the Edirne University, and of Mr. Dafnopatides with the Yıldız University). However, it is difficult to pursue such collaboration agreements, unless they are formalised and consolidated, as collaboration schemes between the Universities involved. It is also impossible to pursue such efforts on the part of students and teachers, because they distinguish students into categories based on their economic profiles and, on the other hand, it is necessary to institutionalise them if our aim is to optimise the results for our students, in terms of their linguistic competence in Turkish.

Let us not forget that our students must not be compared to students of foreign language departments (English, French, etc.) who enroll in the University after six, seven, or even ten, years of studying their respective languages. Our students are acquainted, for the first time in their lives, with Turkish upon enrolling in the University and, unless there is additional support from the State, in the form proposed above, we may never perform what is required, at a University level, in order to achieve the maximum level of linguistic performance (C) of the Common European Framework of Reference, in terms of skills in both the written and oral discourse, during the four years of undergraduate study, with the objective being the capability to teach Turkish.

[c] In relation to the needs of a cognitive/encyclopaedic nature that must be covered, our reference is to the deficit observed during the teaching of texts in Turkish, that is due to the encyclopaedic knowledge of Turkey's geography, of the Turkish societal structure, of the country's customs and habits, of the influence of Kemalism and of the Islamic religion on the country, of Turkish institutions, of the organisation of the Turkish state, of Turkey's economy and geopolitics; in other words of the cultural, extralinguistic, realities of the country that are reflected on (and transferred by means of) the language proper.

The Department's programme of studies is, of course, enriched with relevant courses providing basic knowledge of the subject-matters. Also, specifically selected texts, within the context of linguistic courses, become the basis for acquiring such knowledge. However, these occasions do not seem to suffice. There are two supplementary possibilities to overcome this obstacle: [a] to introduce seminars in related subjects, throughout the course of studies, in the form of elective courses and [b]

the students' stay in Turkey (as proposed above), so that they are in a position to live within the cultural principles and systems of values of the modern Turkish society.

[d] The needs of a practical/administrative nature that have an impact on Turkish language learning relate to the identity of the Department and its non-inclusion in the list of foreign language departments and faculties by the Ministry of Education, which is a source of problems, both at a scientific level (given the difficulties arising in ordering and distributing books written in Turkish or in any other foreign language to cover the teaching needs of either the Department's language courses or of other relevant courses, see e.g. the problems arising with the bibliography of the History of the Turkish language), and at a practical level, such as the incapability of the University to subsidise educational excursions to Turkey.

[e] The needs that must be covered in terms of research relate to the research work in matters of language, that is expected to be produced by the teaching staff or the students. However, in order to meet this specific need, two conditions must be satisfied beforehand:

- (i) a common "language" for describing (and teaching) the structure of the Turkish language, among the teachers, on the one hand, and among teachers and students, on the other – in other words, the homogenisation of the relevant terminology used; and
- (ii) the operation of the Department's Postgraduate Studies Programme directed, *inter alia*, to the Didactics of Turkish.

However, in order to satisfy the first condition, it is indispensable to inform the teaching staff on matters of modern Linguistics, both theoretical and applied. This could be achieved by means of the research programme which we plan to undertake, with the aim being the authoring of a Turkish didactic method (see above, [a]). For example, when teaching our students -according to the international tradition- that Turkish has cases such as nominative, genitive, accusative, etc., there is the risk that they can confuse the use and function of the nominative case of the Greek structural system with the suffix in Turkish which, in the "traditional" description is termed as "genitive" and is only in part reflected in the function of the "genitive" case in Greek. It is our belief, however, that many of these malformed matches could have been prevented if we had used the linguistic terminology of the structural-functional analysis to present the structures of Turkish. A similar problem, in relation to the terminology related to the structure of Turkish, is addressed also when it comes to the authoring of MA/BA dissertations (some of which are notably interesting) or individual course dissertations by our students. Given the need for our students to teach Turkish in the future, it is our belief that they must know not only the functions of the language, but also the way it is structured in order to be able to teach it as a FL.

However, in order for our students to be able to use such notions and terms, we would propose extending the course on "Linguistics" to a minimum of two academic semesters, so as to cover the need to initiate the students in linguistic analysis and, by extension, in matters of (Turkish) didactics as a FL. Also, given the fact that in this case we have to do with a language genetically and typologically different from the students' native language, it would be useful to offer courses of Applied Linguistics relating to the contrastive study of languages, either in a general context or with a more specific perspective ("principles of contrastive linguistics", "grammatical analysis and bilingualism"/"Contrastive Grammar of Greek and Turkish").

It is also our belief that this Department, given its interlingual and intercultural nature, could

indeed focus on issues of interculturalism in general and intercultural education in particular, both at an undergraduate and a postgraduate level. More specifically, as pertains to the Turkish Studies, and due to the “invaluable specific weight” they *de facto* enjoy within Greek society –both historically/politically as well as linguistically/culturally speaking- we do believe that its graduates/alumni, in order to be able to meet the demands of intercultural education, should be supplied with all that is necessary to do so. In this context, we would therefore propose the introduction of a series of applied and interdisciplinary linguistics, as well as of interculturalism (compulsory and/or electives), structured so as to serve more general issues of society and language interfacing, as well as more specific ones, related to intercultural education.

As pertains to the students' intercultural education, which is based on the principles of interculturalism that nowadays govern the modern (globalised) societies, either politically or educationally, it is our belief that the Department's graduates should be informed both on the general principles per se, and on their application (interculturalism and ideology/racism and interculturalism, intercultural education and training, intercultural curricula, collaborative educational processes / factors of school success).

When it comes to the second requirement, i.e. the institutionalisation of a Postgraduate programme of studies, a *conditio sine qua non* for promoting research in the fields of Turkish language didactics with the objective being to utilise the findings of this research in the teaching process, it must be admitted that this problematic is overtly based on the questions posed and the interest expressed by the students themselves, during the four years of their study of Turkish, as well as their dissertations and the fertile discussions we have held with them.

Two are the main axes of the students' interests in pursuing issues related to the Turkish language:

(i) synthesis work efforts, aimed to elaborate further into (and enrich our knowledge of) issues relating to the structure of Turkish, the relations between Greek and Turkish both at a diachronic and a synchronic level, the contrastive study of Greek and Turkish, the History of the Turkish language, etc. What must be noted in this respect, is the serious, particularly interesting and original translation work performed from Turkish into Greek, either in the context of individual translation courses, or when authoring MA dissertations in translation subjects; and

(ii) research issues, aimed to investigate the processes of learning and acquisition of the Turkish language by Greek natives, in order to utilise the pertinent findings for the most efficient teaching of the Turkish grammar to Greek natives. Small-scale research efforts are already underway in the framework of MA dissertations with impressive results so far and, more in particular, with excellent prospects when it comes to the study of our students' interlanguage (in other words, the particular, transitional linguistic system that leads the speaker to mastering the foreign/second language [Sella, 2001; 55; Sella, 2006; 49 ff). Our students show a genuine interest in the mechanisms that govern the acquisition of the foreign language and that become obvious in the Error Analysis process. However, if our aim is to pursue long-term research and obtain sound research findings, it is necessary to institutionalise a postgraduate level of studies leading to a Master's Degree, on the one hand, and to a Doctor's Degree, on the other. In this context, the students will be initiated in the subject-matters that are deemed necessary for conducting research at a postgraduate level, in order to achieve the optimum and most efficient teaching of Turkish a FL to Greek natives.

C. Aims and Prospects

Following the presentation of the methodology for the teaching of Turkish at the Department of Turkish Studies of the University of Athens, and the development of the reasoning derived from our experience during the first four years of its operation, there are clear-cut objectives and interesting prospects.

In summary, the objectives relating to the teaching of Turkish as a FL are the following:

- combining the traditional method with the notional/functional method in the teaching of Turkish, in order to combine, in turn, the students' interests and aims with the interests and aims of the FL teaching methodology;
- the supplementary and equal development of oral and written discourse perception and production, based on the guidelines and the scale of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages;
- completing the knowledge on the structure of Turkish, with the knowledge of the structure of its texts, by analyzing the various types of styles and discourse, by means of the translation act; in other words by translating from Turkish into Greek, pragmatic and literary texts;
- addressing the deficit identified in encyclopaedic matters of knowledge of the Turkish language and civilisation, by adding compulsory and elective courses that cover knowledge areas which, currently, are not taught independently – this will facilitate the teaching of Turkish, not in terms of structure analysis, but in terms of content analysis of messages composed in Turkish;
- emphasising on the living use of Turkish within communicative contexts, i.e. where the language is used on a daily basis, by introducing, on a statutory basis, a “semester in Turkey”, i.e. allowing the attendance of courses at a University in Turkey, for an academic semester (term);
- the resultant of the above-mentioned aims is to achieve a level of proficiency for the teaching of Turkish, to be certified automatically by the Ministry of Education upon a student's graduation from the Department (i.e. the acknowledgement of the teaching ability for all the graduates of the Department of Turkish and Modern Asian Studies of the University of Athens).

Also, in terms of theoretical reasoning and research, our aims are summarised as follows:

- unifying the teaching material that is currently used by the teachers of Turkish, by authoring a common basic manual for teaching Turkish, developed on common guidelines and methodology, for all the Department's teaching levels;
- homogenising and modernising the terminology used in relation to the description of the structural schemas of Turkish and their teaching, using the principles of modern descriptive linguistics and of applied linguistics, when it comes to matters of contrastive linguistic analysis;
- enriching the Department's programme of studies with courses related to more general aspects of interfacing between society and language, as well as to more specific matters of intercultural education - this being indispensable, in our opinion, in order for the students to realise what teaching Turkish in a Greek-speaking setting really means.
- Finally, the particularly favourable prospects that are opened in an ground that is generally considered to be open to research, such as the study of Turkish, must be supported institutionally by both the University and the Greek state.

Institutionalising a postgraduate studies degree in Turkish, the Didactics of Turkish and the

Translation from Turkish into Greek, leading to a Master's or a Doctor's degree is, now, a dire necessity. It is not only our students, but also graduates from other university departments, who have expressed their lively interest in this respect. On the other hand, the varying subject areas that are open for research will address significant gaps in the scientific reality, both Greek and international.