



The Historical Development of Foreign Language Teaching Methods in Turkey (1891-1928)

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Abstract

This study examines the foreign language teaching methods in Turkey, by focusing on the papers published in the periodicals from 1891 to 1928. The study investigates the foreign language teaching methods in Turkey and aims to contribute the history of the foreign language teaching in Turkey during the period under consideration. Prior to 19th century the persons having any foreign language in the Ottoman Empire were the non-Muslim subjects of the Ottomans. After *Tanzimat* the modern schools, whose curriculum had the French language, were created. The foreign language meant the French language during the period in question. Although many papers related to the teaching of foreign language took place in the Ottoman periodicals, these papers have not been examined yet.

Keywords

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Introduction

The problem of learning and teaching germane to foreign language in the Ottoman Empire increased importance in the early years of 19th century. Greek revolt in 1821 led to be established the *Tercüme Odası* (Translation Office) (Balci, 2006) and to be sent the students to Europe afterwards. After the *Tanzimat* the courses of foreign language, especially French language, were included curriculums. In addition to this, in 1864 *Lisan Mektebi* (Language School) was created (Balci, 2008) and *Mekteb-i Sultani* (Galatasaray High School) performing its educational activities in French was set up in 1868. From 1869 onwards *Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi* (Regulation of Public Education) came into effect and affected broadly the Ottoman Educational system. According to this regulation Arabic, Persian and French languages would teach at the Ottoman public schools, except public elementary schools. Secondary schools would teach Arabic and Persian languages, as foreign languages. Additionally some wise students of the secondary schools in the commercial regions could select French language. However, the only foreign language in the High schools was French Language. Literature Departments of *Sultanî* schools (a kind of high school) would have Arabic, Persian and French languages, but Science Departments of them would not have any foreign language. As to *Darülmualimîn* (School of Schoolmaster), it had three departments: Department of *Rüştiye* (Secondary School) Teaching, Department of *İdadî* (High School) Teaching and Department of *Sultanî* Teaching. "Arabic and Persian Languages", "Arabic, Persian and French Languages", and "Excellent Arabic and Persian Languages" and "Translation from Turkish into French and French into Turkish" courses would teach those departments, relatively. There was no any foreign language in the department of Primary School Teaching *Darülmualimât* (School of Schoolmistress), but Department of Secondary School Teaching

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had two foreign language courses: "Arabic and Persian languages." As for *Darülfünun* (University), Department of Literature and Philosophy of university would have foreign language courses called "excellent Arabic and Persian languages", and "French, Greek and Latin languages" (Takvim-i Vekayi, 6-8 Cemaziyelevvel 1286 (1869)). In conclusion, French language was the only European foreign language taught in the Ottoman public schools from 1869 to 1922. (Salman, 2005; Tenger, 2005). It, however, is known that German and Russian languages also began to be taught in the military schools in the last years of 19th and early years of 20th centuries (Demiryürek, 2013).

Shortly after the French language began to be taught in the Ottoman public schools, new discussions experienced, such as the reasons of failure of foreign language teaching, foreign language teaching methods, textbooks, dictionaries, and the aims of foreign language teaching. In these discussions, the foreign language meant the French language. If one examines *Türkiye Makaleler Bibliografyası* (Articles Bibliography of Turkey) and *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Makaleler Bibliografyası* (Articles Bibliography of Republic Period) in the website of the Turkish National Library and the thesis catalogue of YÖK (Turkish Higher Education Board), it can be seen that there has been made a lot of research concerning foreign language teaching in Turkey. Although Kayıran's (1987), Olut's (1993), Gökalp's (1988), Demirel's (1998), Hatipoğlu's (1999), Özseri's (2000), Çolak's (2002) and Ertural's (2008) master theses and research articles by Balcı (2008) and Özkan (2010) has been given comprehensive findings related to the foreign language teaching in Turkey, they have not included above mentioned discussions. In addition to this, the article entitled "Türkiye'de Yabancı dil Öğretimi Üzerine Bir Kaynakça Denemesi" (An Attempt of Bibliography on Foreign Language Teaching in Turkey) by Ömer Demircan also has not contained aforementioned discussions. To sum up, the developments relating to foreign language teaching in Turkey in the past has not been known. Recently a research made by M. Demiryürek (2013) contributed this subjects. It, however, has not been included the foreign language teaching method during the period under question. Therefore, the aims of this study are: to determine the methods used in the teaching of foreign language, to reveal the discussions concerning the foreign language teaching methods and to contribute the history of the foreign language teaching from 1891 to 1928 in Turkey.

Method

This research was designed as an evaluation of a period and situation. During the period under question is a process that the Ottoman Empire collapsed and a new Turkish state was found. However, during this period the only foreign language taught in the public schools was the French language. This study was based on the articles concerning foreign language teaching published between 1891 and 1928, and focused on the foreign language teaching methods. The dictionaries, textbooks and aims of the foreign language teaching will be studied another researches.

Results

The method of before words later rules of language

From 1869 onwards the French language was started to teach in the Ottoman public schools and in 1890s, about twenty years later, it was understood that there were many problems with regard to foreign language teaching. This situation triggered off some writers to write and publish articles in the Ottoman periodicals from 1891 onwards. Language teacher Mehmet Halid Bey was one of the authors producing papers. He was responsible for the department of French language teaching of *Mekteb* fortnightly published firstly in 1891. According to him, learning the French language was necessary and compulsory. It, however, had suggested that learning French language was difficult, in that its grammar and syntax specificities, especially writing and speaking, had some difficulties. He opposed this consideration. His opinion was that other languages also had these complications and imperfections and this was not an excuse to explain the reason of failure of foreign language teaching. The main problem was foreign language teaching method. Therefore every country created its foreign language teaching method, so that she was able to overcome above mentioned obstacles. Consequently, new methods were developed and learning the French language became easier (Mehmet Halid, 1891).

Later, Mehmet Halid Bey (1891) published an article with the aim of teaching French language in every issue of that periodical. In his papers, he focused on complex and incomplex words and gave translation examples. His serial publication went on about one year. He summarized his foreign language teaching method in his way: "Before grammar and syntax, it must be learned the correct and excellent pronunciation of a word". Up to now, it, nevertheless, has not been paid attention this topic. As a result, it has to be taught the words of a language and the correct and suitable pronunciation of the words, the subjects of grammar and syntax must be followed by "translation". He implemented this method in his articles printed in *Mekteb* journal.

This method was also defended by M. Fuad in 1893. According to him "the best way to be followed is to learn the words and complicated words, as a language teaching method. Later, it is followed by the rules of that language." This method was called by him as "practical teaching method".

Practical teaching method was also defended by *Malumat* daily in 1901. According to it, the reasons of the failure of the foreign language teaching in Turkey were that the aims of the foreign language teaching and methods of the foreign language teaching had not been determined clearly. In addition to this, it had been followed a theoretical methods and the practical teaching method had been ignored. It stressed that "the language is the first and rule is the second". In other words, "the language has to be taught firstly and this must be followed by the rules later." The duty of the foreign language teacher is to give practical lessons, such as speaking, writing and explaining. He also has to be an expert perfectly on language and follow the practical teaching method (Malumat, 1901).

The method of analysis of the words/phrase, sentence and passage

After Mehmet Halid's articles were competed, we witnesses that a new serial entitled "French Language: Teaching Method" began to be published in the same journal. These articles were written by H. Rüşdü. According to him, there are two methods for French language teaching: *Analyse Grammatical* and *Analyse Logique*. These methods were called "the method of analysis of the word/phrase, sentence and passage". H. Rüşdü claimed that this method was the main instrument for the person beginning to learn French language to reach satisfactory results. This serial lasted ten issues and he explained words, articles, adjectives, pronouns, adverbs, propositions and phrases of French language (H. Rüşdü, 1891).

The Method of Translation

As we see above, Mehmet Halid Bey mentioned "method of translation" but he did not elaborate it. He only accepted that method of translation was a part of his foreign language teaching method (Mehmet Halid, 1891). In 1892, a serial without signed was published as regards the French

language in *Mekteb* journal. In the first part of this serial entitled “French Language”, the author explained his conception: “My opinion is that translation is more required than grammar and syntax. Therefore I will begin with translation, i.e. I will try to teach method of translation to the children. I will also clarify the important of rules of grammar and syntax, special statements, homonyms, synonyms and so on. My objective is to serve our teeny weeny children” (Mekteb, 1892).

The method of translation was also supported and explained by *Marifet* weekly in 1898, like this: “One of the subjects needed by person wants to learn the method of translation is to compare the works translated by the expert with their original copies. It is known that this attitude will serve them to be good at learning French language. Since we especially take notice of this consideration, we will publish the translations examples with their French and Turkish versions in every issue of our journal.” Later, the weekly organized the open contest, by asking translation questions from Turkish into French or French into Turkish, and winners were awarded (Marifet, 1898).

Mecmua-i Lisan published in 1899 also contributed the Ottoman subjects to learn French language. It was published an article entitled “Book of method and writing of French Language” in its first issue and explained the reason of its publication germane the French language. According to the journal, the people asking for to improve their French language does not make do with the translation from French into Turkish, they have to also interpret from Turkish into French. In addition to this, they have to advance their foreign language, by writing short letters and statements. Furthermore, it explained that it would organize the translation competitions. *Mecmua-i Lisan* also published wisely sentences like proverb, translation examples, some French words whose pronunciations opposite their writing and reading with their French or Turkish on the base of method of translation in its later issues, and organized the translation contests and winners were awarded (Mecmua-i Lisan, 1899).

A Discussion on Method: Which method is the best method: Method of before words later rule of language or Method of Translation?

Mehmet Fuad was one of the writers studying on the methods of foreign language teaching method in Turkey in the early of the 20th century. His method was called “Practical Teaching Method”. According to him, the best method of foreign language teaching was to learn the words and idioms of the foreign language firstly and the rules related to these words and idioms later. For instance, the person speaking French language fluently can learn perfectly the grammar and syntax books in two months and twenty days respectively. Per contra, that is, if it is kept on to learn the grammar and syntax for years it cannot be reached the wished results. The main target is not to tell the rules of the language, but to speak and write it. Who use this method, they reach desired goal. Another benefit of this approach is to make happy to the students. Because the student taught new words in every day and feeling and witnessing the improvements of his speaking gradually, will enjoy it. “What is the usefulness of telling the rules of a language which the students don’t know and understand it? One can see the negative results of this method, especially on writing. The student learning the rules of grammar and syntax, but not the language of that rules, can write the words and idioms known by them. They, however, will write falsely the words and idioms are not known by them” (M. Fuad, 1903).

Aziz Hüdâî (1903) was another writer explaining his views in connection with foreign language teaching. He recommended that “read expressions and make translation” for whom asks “What can I do to learn the French language”. In his opinion, to memorize the words and idioms is the first step to be accustomed to speak a language. This was, however, is the task of the students, not the teacher. In other words, this method must be followed by the students. “The teacher will teach the verbs with simple rules that this method has already been implemented in our schools.” He also criticized Mehmet Fuad for his opinion “to speak foreign language, it has to be memorized the words firstly and his must be followed by the rules later.” Aziz Hüdâî underlined the importance of translation method and told a case experienced by historian and linguist Necib Asım: “I registered the school myself. The course, which I had studied mostly, was the French language. I, however, used to study other courses, like my friends. My method for learning the French language was translation.

Firstly, I began the simple books. I used to translate a page from French into Turkish today and tomorrow I used to translate it from Turkish into French again. Later, I used to compare my translation with its original copy and corrected my mistakes. Sometimes, I used to write a story with new and other words again and presented to my teacher to control and correct my mistakes. I learned the French language gradually in this way." According to Aziz Hüdâî, Mösyö Lopo, who is the French language teacher in the Ottoman Military School said that "It is compulsory the translation before speaking for you. The necessity of speaking French language for you is rarely obligatory, but you will need the translation every time."

M. Fuad (1903) opposed Aziz Hüdâî's critiques. He claimed that in effect Aziz Hüdâî accepted his views, by saying "firstly the students had been taught the words and idioms that secondly Aziz Hüdâî put forward the necessity of the method of translation and rules to bear them in mind." He also stressed that he agreed with Necib Asım's and Mösyö Lopo's considerations concerning translation. Later, he asked two questions: "Does learning foreign language by translating gradually mean to know the words and idioms? Does the considerations of these two expert show the benefits of practical teaching method?" He also said at the end of his article that "we firstly have to learn words and idioms before rules of language and secondly we must support them with the rules of language."

Nevertheless Aziz Hüdâî (1903) insisted his conceptions and published a new paper. In his article, he defended that it is impossible to implement "the idea of learning words and idioms firstly and secondly supporting them with the rules of language." He said "think that if you are a teacher, how can you teach the words and idioms in the class? Suppose that you are a student and if you don't use and repeat the words and idioms you learned today, how can you save them in your mind? In addition to this, how will a teacher decide that the time of words and idioms finish and the time of rules come?". According to him "the words and idioms have to be taught simultaneously with the rules." Practical is the shortest way to learn foreign language. "Since it is not possible every time, it must be applied the method of translation. Translation is the best instrument to teach words and idioms and to be accustomed to speak."

The considerations put forward by Aziz Hüdâî were rejected by M. Fuad (1903). He said that "to learn foreign language, one must learn the words and idioms of language before the rules, the nature of language occurred like this and it was learned in this way. It has to be made translation gradually that this practice is the other type of the practical language teaching. After the students are accustomed to speak fluently, they have to learn the rules of the language. This is the best way to be followed and it does not require any explanation of its benefits and advantages."

In the meantime, Mösyö Lopo (1903) also published an article and explained his views. In his opinion, it should be paid attention the results before saying that which method is the best method. If the people can state their ideas orally, if they can explain their considerations by writing and if they can read a text adequately and understand its meaning correctly, it means that they has learned the foreign language. These three developments are undoubted and if a foreign language teaching method does not produce these three conclusions simultaneously, it is not perfect and worth implementing."

A Critique on the Method of Translation

An unsigned dialogue was published in *Mekteb* journal in 1892. In fact, this conversation was a critique about the method of translation. This critique had two important points. One of them was that the method of translation was not relevant for the beginners, because firstly the words have to be learned and this process must be followed by translation later. Other point of that critique was that the translation from French into Turkish was useless. Unlike the translation from Turkish into French had advantageous. According to the dialogue, the two people were talking and one of them wanted to find a French language educator, in that he wished to learn the French language. The other had advised him to find a Frenchman or a teacher had two languages, that is Turkish and French adequately.

The man looking for a suitable teacher found two educators. The first one was not a Frenchman but he knew French. The other was a Turk and interpreter in one of the Turkish state departments. The adviser preferred the Turkish one but he was doubtful and the conversation went on as follows:

“-I don’t know him and his method. However, it is possible that his method will be the method of translation. As I said before you, this is an obstacle for foreign language teaching.

-I don’t understand. Could you explain it, please?

- Your question shows me you don’t understand me. I don’t say, don’t make translation. I say that you have to learn the foreign language properly before, not to attempt make translation. Because for the beginners the translation takes a lot of time and it is not suitable.”

However, later the adviser said that “the translation is useful for the person of advanced level. But our subject is for the beginners. Moreover, I have to explain that my opposition is the translation of French into Turkish. The translation from Turkish into French or other foreign languages are advantageous.”

Two Evaluations on the Foreign Language Teaching in Turkey

Mehmet Sadik Bey (1893) asserted that the reason of the failure of the foreign language teaching in Turkey was the inappropriate methods chosen to teach foreign language. He gave an example a new method implemented in England and introduced it, so that the people of interest are able to follow it. According to him, “children put together the verbs and things in connection with them and learn to speak in this way. Learning a foreign language briskly and effectively has to be acted like children learning their native language. Books, exercise books, must be put aside, at least for the beginners, the courses must be orally and the students have to explore the unknown things themselves. The students have to see something and learn the words in connection with it. In this way, the students are accustomed to the things with the foreign language that it is not possible to learn any foreign language seriously and completely without thinking in the foreign language. For example, Thinking in Turkish and later translating it into French in mind does not mean to learn French language. They can’t speak French. Using this new method an ordinary student can learn any foreign language in six months and use it in his/her relations with other people, like his mother tongue.” In his opinion, “the most naturel and reasonable method for learning foreign language is to train and educate the ears, and import the language from there to the mind.”

Hasan İhsan (1893) was another writer publishing his opinions. According to him, there are three methods concerning foreign language teaching. The first, teaching the foreign language by speaking with the people having that foreign language. It is easy, since it is just like to learn native language. This method has two ways. One of them is to be under the control of an educator from childhood. The second way, if the people wishing to learn the foreign languages are adult, they have to live among the people speaking that foreign language or to be close an expert permanently. The second method is to learn it by taking lesson from an expert comprehending two language adequately. The third method is to learn it by reading books written by experts, without any teacher. Although the first method is the best method, it is not suitable for everybody. Therefore we need the second and third methods.

To sum up, in effect these two writers challenged *Méthode Indirecte*, which has been implemented in the schools since 1850s and defended *Méthode Directe*, as a new method.

Méthode Indirecte, Méthode Directe and Méthode Mixte

An interesting article related to foreign language teaching was published in *Genç Anadolu* monthly in 1921. According to this publication, the methods concerning the foreign language teaching are two: *Méthode Indirecte*, *Méthode Directe*. Prior to 1908, *Méthode Indirecte* was used to teach Arabic and French language in Turkey. From 1908-1909 onwards *Méthode Directe* was came into effect in the schools. *Méthode Indirecte* was only based on “translation and rules, native language and thinking” and in five or ten years, the students could only put together some words without understanding.” They could only learn “some reading, a few words and some unnecessary rules” with this method. This article did not give any information regarding *Méthode Directe*, but it claimed that *Méthode Indirecte* was not a appropriate method for foreign language teaching (Genç Anadolu, 1921).

Another article published in 1925 also touched on foreign language teaching. According to this article written by İbrahim Memduh, there are three methods for foreign language teaching: *Méthode Directe*, *Méthode Indirecte* and *Méthode Mixte*.

Méthode Directe

According to İbrahim Memduh, (1925) the supporters of this method believe that their approach is “the naturel and vernacular” and defend their considerations as follows: “How does a child learn his language? In fact, mothers do not follow any rule of language. The children creeping before and walking later hear that it is given some names and features for the things in their surroundings and some verbs are used for some actions. Bit by bit they starts to use these words put their mind, by being repeated. Consequently *Personnalité de Language* (the linguistic personality of a child) emerges.” This method does not need any rule of grammar. It also asserts that the methods of “grammar” and “translation” are “useless”. This method only gives way to the grammar, providing that it is used for practical studies. *Méthode Directe* “prefers Socrates’ method, i.e. questions and answer. It accepts that the education without questions distresses the students and increases their attention. Since it believes the words cannot be saved in the mind of the students alone, it defends the words must be used according to their place in the sentence. It prohibits using the native language in the class while the foreign language is being taught and defends that it has to be used the foreign language for the communication between the students and the teacher. This method activates the students permanently and when it is used by a skilful teacher, even ordinary students are forced to study and make an effort to learn the foreign language. *Méthode Directe* challenged the classic *Méthode Indirecte*, which consisted of reading, translation, syntax and memorization of the rules of the foreign language. It emphasized that *Méthode Indirecte* is opposite psychological and pedagogical improvements of the modern age. According to İbrahim Memduh, *Méthode Directe* is based on exercise, seeing and hearing, and it has a lot of supporters in America and Europe. In his opinion, Mösyö Kare, who is one of the inspectors of Primary Schools in France, defends this method; Perlic Schools accept it; Klod Öjen’s grammar serials and Ernest Beryo’s book published in 1923 endorse *Méthode Directe*.

Méthode Indirecte

According to İbrahim Memduh, *Méthode Indirecte* was the method used in Turkey.² In this method, the teacher speaks his native language in the class. There is no exercise or a few. The students memorize the rules of the grammar and the teacher believes that the students had learned the foreign language. The teacher does not ask any question, but makes translation always and the students do not speak, but read. They translate the text like their teacher. The rules of the languages are very important. It is given more importance the translation and studying on the words than speaking. The students are not active. While a student is reading the text, other students pretend that they are listening, but they are not. The lesson is not fascinating and the students only listen to the teacher. The teacher talks his native language and gives information on rules. Most of time spends for syntax, grammar and native language. This method takes a lot of time in vain. It is not possible to learn foreign language. Knowing a foreign language means to speak that language, understand a book written that language and to explain an idea orally or by writing.

Méthode Mixte

İbrahim Memduh (1925) claimed that the aims of *Méthode Mixte* are to annihilate the imperfections above mentioned methods; to eliminate their extremities and change them. The method preferred by a lot of educator has vitality. Speaking and the rules of grammar and syntax are important. In other words, this method puts together the speaking and rule.

Another publication printed in 1925 said that there were five methods for the foreign language teaching. They were *Méthode Directe*, *Méthode Indirecte*, *Méthode Mixte*, *Méthode Grammaticle* and *Méthode Libre*. According to Zeki Mesud, *Méthode Grammaticle* is based on *Méthode Indirecte*. The followers of this method defends that grammar is totality of main rules of a language and it has to be formed the basement of language teaching. One of the features of intelligence of human is to look for and find the similarity and order for objects. The science mean to understand and comprehend this similarity and order. Grammar gives answer to this feature of intelligence of human. It is not possible to teach a language in the class, just like a mother, in that there is no more time. He underlined that *Méthode Grammaticle* was not implemented in Germany and France anymore. As to *Méthode Libre*, it defends that the foreign language teacher has to be free completely, in that the teacher is responsible for foreign language teaching. Freedom means responsibility. In conclusion, the teachers must have the right to select the foreign language teaching method, which is the most suitable method for the levels and capacities of the students. At the end of his articles, Zeki Mesud asserted that *Méthode Grammaticle* and *Méthode Libre* were not profitable methods and the most advantageous method was *Méthode Directe* (Zeki Mesud, 1925).

² Zeki Mesud asserted that although the developed countries gave up *Méthode Indirecte*, it is used still in Turkish schools in 1925. See, Zeki Mesud, "Müşahede ve Tetkikler: Almanya ve Fransa'da Lisan-ı Ecnébî Tedrisât", Maarif Vekâleti Mecmuası, cilt:1, sayı:2, 1 Mayıs 1341 (1925), s.69.

Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

In this study, it is found that in the last years of 19th and early years of 20th century in Turkey the most widespread foreign language teaching method was the *Méthode Indirecte*. However, it is revealed that this method disappeared gradually and a new method called the *Méthode Directe* was put into practice in Turkey, like in France, Germany and United States in the early years of 20th century. However, one can claim that the problem of the foreign language teaching methods in Turkey have not been solved even completely yet in nowadays, in that although there is a lot of well-educated persons/academician in Turkey, they cannot pass the exam related to any foreign language or if they pass the exam, they cannot write an abstract or article in foreign language and state their thoughts in any foreign language. Therefore, the history of the foreign language teaching methods used in Turkey have to be written and it has to benefit the experiences in the past, in that history puts some practices to the test.

When focusing on the foreign language teaching in Turkey in the last years of the 19th and early years of the 20th century, it is seen that one of the main problems of the foreign language teaching was the method used in the courses. At the same time, this was one of the reasons of failure on foreign language teaching and caused important discussions in Turkey. The need of the foreign language learning in Turkey in these days is not less than during the period in question, in that the Turks need to benefit from the productions of the European civilisation. Therefore, this field maintains its importance for the Turks.

It is evident that the methods used in foreign language teaching affect directly the achievement and failure of the foreign language teaching. The different methods that make up *Méthode Indirecte*, such as the method of before words later rules of the language, the method of analysis of the words/phrases, sentences, passages and the method of translation has been studied in this research historically during the period under question. It can be said it is not possible to eliminate completely its elements, like grammar, syntax and translation, in that it affects the accomplishment of foreign language teaching more or less. *Méthode Directe* is the best method for every country and everybody, but it is not possible to implement it every time. As a result, *Méthode Mixte* becomes important. It, however, is clear that the persistence on only one method or practise is not reasonable. In addition to this, it must be underlined that it has to be determined the aims of the foreign language teaching firstly and it must be produced the most advantageous way for these objectives secondly.

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