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SLAVIC LANGUAGES IN CONTACT, 2: ARE THERE OTTOMAN TURKISH LOANWORDS IN THE BALKAN SLAVIC LANGUAGES?

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Abstract

It would not be an easy task to find a Slavic linguist who had never heard about the Ottoman Turkish influence upon Balkan Slavic. Nevertheless, this author argues that caution should be exercised with the term which is inconsistent with the Turkological understanding of “Ottoman”. In the final part of the paper some terminological suggestions are made.

1. Preliminary remarks

Turkological matters are very often mentioned, sometimes even discussed, in studies on Slavic, especially Balkan Slavic linguistics. Unfortunately, the situation bears strong resemblance to a case described in another context a few years ago:

[...] dieselben Etymologen, die mit peinlicher Genauigkeit zwischen Dialekten, ja sogar Mundarten der Einzelsprachen Europas unterscheiden und jeden orientalischen Autor auslachen würden, der sich mit einer Etymologie wie «aus einem Dialekt Osteuropas» bzw. «aus dem Albanischen (Europa) oder dem Obugrischen» begnügen wollte, betrachten das weit differenziertere Sibirien als einen Kessel mit kochender Suppe, von der man zwar manchmal kostet, da sie ja schön exotisch schmeckt, ohne jedoch bereit zu sein, die Zutaten zu lernen und nach dem Rezept zu fragen. (Stachowski M. 2000: 304sq.)

It is no use enumerating, explaining and correcting all mistakes concerning the Turkic world that one can encounter in non-Turkological publications. Rather,

a typological classification of such mistakes would be of some benefit to all of us. One cannot easily say why, for instance, the notion “Altaic” seems to be especially attractive to some researchers. However, the interchangeable use of the terms, say, “Turkish”, “Altaic” and “Oghuz”, is certainly inadvisable. But, on the other hand, such a mistake will on the whole cause no serious consequences. After all, there are no direct Mongolic or Tunguzic loanwords and calques in Balkan Slavic so that Altaic can actually only be reduced to Turkic, and Turkish is the main representative of the Turkic linguistic family in the Balkans (apart from Gagauz which, however, does not seem to have ever influenced Slavic), as well as the main direct source of Turkic elements borrowed into South Slavic. The same is, *mutatis mutandis*, valid for Oghuz because Turkish is, at the same time, the only Oghuz language that could possibly have influenced Balkan Slavic. Be that as it may, the terms “Turkish”, “Altaic” and “Oghuz” are certainly not synonyms.¹

Some other mistakes, however, are of greater concern. I am going to present only one such problematic term in this note, but an especially salient one.

2. Problems with the term “Ottoman”

It is but natural that the Turkish language of the Ottoman Empire has been called “Ottoman Turkish” in Europe, which is perfectly parallel to the pair “British Empire – British English”. But the resemblance and plainness deceive. Even though they seem to match the term “Turko-Tatar languages” (obsolete and erroneous as it is still used by some non-Turkologists) which suggests that the family is composed of a Turkish and a Tatar group, the Turkish one being mostly identified with Ottoman Turkish and Tatar being usually understood as a *pars pro toto* of Kipchak. All this is more or less erroneous or at least oversimplified.

The problem is that the term “Ottoman Turkish” has been used by Slavists in its ethnical and historical meaning – a composition that is only half correct.

The population of the Ottoman Empire was divided into two unequally large parts: the Ottomans (= Turkish *Osmanlı*) and the Turks (= Turkish *Türk*). An Ottoman was an educated, generally rich and elegant member of the higher class in Istanbul. A Turk was his opposite – he lived in the provinces (which linguistically means Anatolia because Turkish speakers in Rumelia were as a matter of fact persons resettled from Anatolia), never enjoyed the privilege of a real education (although some of them could to a degree read the Quran) and was, thus, rather a poor simpleton.² It would not have been wise to call an Ottoman a Turk at that time.

¹ The problem of a thinkable Kipchak impact can be readily omitted in our context because it is not involved in the question of the senses of the term “Ottoman”. However, the situation is somewhat different in Romania (along with Moldova and Dobruja) where one has to reckon with a possibility of stronger Kipchak influence (for a general picture see Stachowski K. 2014: 207–211, 225–227; for Kipchak and Turkish in Polish see Jankowski 2015; for the problem of Kipchak elements in Gagauz see Aydemir 2005; *passim*).

² Cf. the meanings of the word *Türk*, attested in 1680: “Türck, Tartar, ein schöner, schwarz-äugichter Bub, Buhler; Grober Vogel, Landläuffer, oder Stürtzer, Dieb // Turczyn, Tâtärzyn,

Also the languages the two social groups spoke were fairly different, to such an extent that Atatürk would have felt it necessary to initiate a language reform (*nota bene*, one of the results of the reform is that also his own speeches are scarcely comprehensible to today's youth in Turkey). It is, thus, absolutely correct to speak of the Ottoman period ~ administration ~ conquerors and so on, but the term "Ottoman" is better avoided when speaking of the Turkish language in the Balkans.

The crux of the problem is, therefore, that the term "Ottoman Turkish" is perceived as an ethnohistorical one in Slavic linguistics whereas it is a sociohistorical term for Turkologists. In other words, when a Turkologist sees a phrase like "an Ottoman Turkish word ~ collocation ~ proverb" or the term "Ottomanism" or "Osmanism" he thinks of a word ~ collocation ~ proverb typical of the idiom of higher classes in the Ottoman period, quite possibly unknown to (or, at best, only occasionally repeated after their Ottoman master by) uneducated servants, craftsmen, vegetables suppliers from the provinces and so on.

Čaušević (2014: 9) is rather liberal when he says: "The term *Ottoman language* refers to the highly stylised variety (*fasih Türkçe*), as well as to its spoken or middle variety (*orta Türkçe*)", but he also rightly adds, still on the same page, that "Bosnian Turkish was a popular variety, whereas Ottoman had the status of an official language, the most significant domains of which were administration, the military, law, education, and high culture. The two were differentiated from one another due to their separate sociolinguistic roles".³ Indeed, the middle variety, that is the colloquial Ottoman language was certainly used and heard in the Balkans. But it was fairly different from the literary Ottoman language⁴ and, nowadays, it can only be reconstructed on the basis of so-called "Turkish transcription texts". Unfortunately, we still do not know the spoken Ottoman Turkish language sufficiently well, even though we have some essays at our disposal, cf. recently Kartallıoğlu (2017a).

Another source of Turkic words in the Balkan languages was the language of Gypsies. The problem of their lexicological mediation has actually never been studied and discussed in the investigation of the Turkish or Kipchak influence on the Balkan languages. Going into this in detail would take us too far afield. Suffice it to mention two facts. First, some Gypsy groups came from the Ottoman Empire to the Balkans⁵

Piękny chłopiec, miłośnik, kochanek, y Gruby, okrutny, błakájący się złodziej, albo rozbojnik' (Meninski 1680: Spalte 1158); and still in 1866: "Türke aus Asien, Bewohner von Turkestan und Hinterasien, Turkmane, Nomade [...], Landstreicher, Soldat von der Leibwache, Trabant; ungebildeter Mensch, Töpel; poet. ein schöner Knabe, der Geliebte" (Zenker 1866: 279c).

³ In sociolinguistic terms, *fasih Türkçe*, lit. 'correct Turkish', was a "formal language", and *orta Türkçe*, lit. 'middle/average Turkish', a "public language" (Głuszkowski 2013: 125).

⁴ An appropriate formulation comes from a Turkish researcher: "Osmanlı Türkçesi bir yazı dilidir, yazıldığı gibi hiçbir dönemde konuşulmamıştır" (Kartallıoğlu 2017b: 44a), i.e. 'Ottoman Turkish is a written language, it was never spoken in a way it was written'. *Nota bene*, also the sense of the title of Kartallıoğlu's study (2017b) is suggestive: "Osmanlı nece konuştu?" i.e. 'What language did the Ottomans speak?'

⁵ Cf. "A large number of Gypsies arrived in the Balkans at the time of the Ottoman invasions, either by directly taking part in these invasions (mainly as auxiliary soldiers or as craftsmen serving the army), or by being among the population which accompanied the invasions. [...] The first mention of Gypsies in the tax documentation of the Ottoman Empire dates from

and, thus, it can be taken for granted that they spoke some sort of a Turkish dialect (otherwise they could scarcely have served in the army), which became another source of Turkish loanwords in the Balkans. Secondly, some historians believe that the earliest groups of Gypsies in Romania were brought in the 13th century as the slaves of invading Tatars (Kocój, Lechowski 2008: 375).⁶ Their descendants, having officially been granted freedom in the second half of the 19th century, “started to move from Romania to the Balkan Peninsula and settle in Serbia [...], as well as in Bosnia and northern Bulgaria” (Kocój 2016: 272). It thus stands to reason that also some Tatar, that is Kipchak words might have been spread by the Gypsies on their migratory routes. Be it as it may, speaking of Ottoman Turkish simply as an older form of modern Turkish is really risky.

In this context, the question arises if the discrepancy of the Slavistic and the Turkological understanding of the term “Ottoman Turkish” makes much difference. I think it does. The use of the term “Ottoman Turkish” with a generalized sense of ‘(any sort of) historical Turkish’ makes the whole picture inaccurate, causes misunderstandings between Slavic and Turkish or Turkic linguists and, above all, its practical consequence is that a Slavist uses popular modern Turkish dictionaries to find a source for a word that was borrowed in past centuries from an Anatolian dialect, which means that he is doomed to make mistakes, and a Turkologist gets irritated if he sees, say, a 19th-century French borrowing in Turkish that was re-borrowed into a Balkan language and is called “Altaic” in a scholarly study.

3. A terminological suggestion

One cannot of course expect that *all* students of Slavic philologies should also receive some regular training in Turkish (or Turkic) linguistics. But mistakes can be at least reduced by using correct terms. It is actually impossible to believe that the Balkan Slavic population borrowed Turkish words by reading Ottoman *ghazal*’s, *kaside*’s or historical chronicles. Their sources were rather conversations with their Turkish neighbours (*nota bene*, brought by force from Anatolia), pedlars, tax collectors or simple soldiers in a nearby casern. One can readily presuppose that a village imam was more often than not the best educated Turk ever seen by the Slavic village population.⁷ Tadeusz Kowalski posited the primacy of Anatolian dialects in research on the Balkans as early as 1929 when he participated in a First Slavistic Conference in

1430 and is found in the Register of [...] the Nikopol sanjak [in northern Bulgaria – M.S.] [...]” (Marushiakova, Popova 2001: 26sq).

⁶ Even though this idea is not widely accepted it corresponds quite well to a Turkic etymology of the ethnonym *Cygan* ‘Gypsy’ (Stachowski M. 2002).

⁷ It is therefore also the case that the borrowing process in the opposite direction gave similar results. The number of Slavic words is much greater in Turkish dialects than it has ever been in the literary – both Ottoman and modern – Turkish language. This is also valid for other non-standard languages of the Ottoman Empire, like Armenian for that matter (see the clear presentation in Rocchi 2017: 11, 26).

Prague (October 6–13, 1929). His contribution was published in a conference volume three years later (Kowalski 1932) and was recalled by Turkologists several times in the past, but it does not seem to have profoundly influenced the *entire* Slavistic world.

However, positive examples can also be found, as is, for instance, the case with an explanation of a Serbian word, attested in 1647, *dešerme* ‘blood tax, devshirme’ as a reflex of an archaic [possibly also dialectal] Turkish form *değşürme*, read [-eʔšü-] ~ [-ēšü-],⁸ rather, than of the standard literary form *devşirme* [Petrović 2013: 396]. Fortunately, Petrović speaks of a Turkish etymon and avoids the term “Ottoman”. Also Radovan Samardžić writes, in his monograph *Mehmed Sokolović*, about the education of *devşirme* boys in the Ottoman Empire: the less gifted ones were sent to a Turkish village in order to learn colloquial Turkish, and only the most talented boys were sent – after what could today be called preparatory courses in reading, writing and religion – to a special class where they learned the Turkish literary language, that is Ottoman Turkish, along with Arabic and Persian (Samardžić 2010: 24–25). In other words: Ottoman Turkish was taught as if it were a foreign language.

In point of fact, it is much better to call Turkish loanwords in the Balkan languages just “Turkish”, which is sufficiently clear in English, or “Anatolian (or Rume-
lian) Turkish” rather than “Ottoman Turkish”.

Russian *тюркский* and Polish *turkijski* ‘Turkic’ as well as Russian *турський* and Polish *turecki* ‘Turkish’ (although *turecki* was still used in both meanings about twenty years ago in Polish as was also the case with Russian in the 1920’s) are adequate equivalents of the English terms “Turkic” and “Turkish”, respectively. The situation is less convenient in most other languages. The French practice specifies *turque* for ‘Turkic’ and *turc* for ‘Turkish’, but the difference is only observed in writing; happily enough, we also have another (albeit not very popular) modern French proposal, namely *turcique* for ‘Turkic’. German makes a difference between *türkische Sprache* ‘the Turkish language’ and *Türksprache* ‘a Turkic language’, but one cannot say **Türkwort*, **Türkgeschichte*, **Türkmorphologie*, **Türkeinfluss*, and so on. The problem is partially solved by the adjective *türkeitürkisch* for ‘Turkish’, but even then it is not entirely clear that *türkisch*, if used alone, stands for ‘Turkic’, so *gemeintürkisch* (= ‘all Turkic languages except for the Bulgaric group’) or *gesamt-türkisch* (= ‘all Turkic languages along with Bulgaric’) should be preferred instead in the latter case. Nevertheless, a Slavic linguist can always find an appropriate word to express ‘Turkish’ (as opposed to ‘Turkic’) or ‘Anatolian/Rumelian Turkish’ without suggesting an allegedly high social status of a Turkish etymon.⁹

⁸ The notation [-^h-] signals a reduced pronunciation of *ü* which is typical of middle syllables in three-syllable words in Turkish.

⁹ Yet another term is *Turanian* ‘Turkic’. It was fairly popular in the 19th century but is viewed as obsolete and compromised nowadays because of its having been loaded with nationalistic ideas and expansionist political undertones. Therefore it is better to eschew it in scholarly publications apart from historical studies on such movements.

The answer to the question expressed in the title of the article is as follows:

We do not know for certain if there are Ottoman Turkish loanwords in Balkan Slavic. But there are a great many Anatolian Turkish ones. Some of them may have been identical with their Ottoman Turkish counterparts in both phonetic and semantic respect (e.g. words like *baba* ‘father’, *su* ‘water’, or *taş* ‘stone’) but the social contact situation usually speaks against the possibility of borrowing words on a massive scale directly from high-class Ottomans. On the other hand, some Slavs adopted Islam, learned the Arabic script, read Ottoman Turkish books and even studied in Istanbul. Obviously, they spoke the literary Ottoman Turkish language. But their number was not very high and one cannot claim that the whole Slavic-speaking population in the Balkans learned elegant words from them. If there is no clear-cut evidence pointing to the literary Ottoman Turkish origin of a specific loanword – and mostly there is none – it is better to call it just “Turkish”.¹⁰

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¹⁰ A sociopolitical definition is introduced by K. Stachowski (2014: 2012): “«Ottoman» will be used to refer to ‘any Turkic language from which word(s) have penetrated into the Balkans as a result of the presence of the Ottoman Empire in the region’, i.e. not so much to the nation and the high language of its elites as to the political entity it ran.” Note that the author uses the term “Ottoman” rather than “Ottoman Turkish” and offers a clear definition, so that there should be no misunderstanding. If one is not quite sure if the words one is adducing in a study belong to the Turkish (~ Oghuz) or Tatar (~ Kipchak) layer but knows for sure that they were introduced from the Ottoman Empire (not from, for instance, Ukraine or the Russian steppes) one can readily use the sociopolitical term “Ottoman” (but not “Ottoman Turkish”), provided that one also offers an explanation and/or alludes to that definition. Also Čaušević (2014) uses the term “the Turkish language” rather than “Ottoman Turkish” in the title of his monograph.

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