

Turkish As A Heritage Language In Skopje*

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Abstract. Today, one of the countries where Turkish language teaching is common is the Republic of North Macedonia, located in the Balkan peninsula. Many ethnic communities live in North Macedonia. Macedonians, Albanians, Turks, Bosnians, Serbs, Vlachs and Romani constitute the different ethnic national structure of North Macedonia. As in many countries of the Balkans, Turks living in North Macedonia have preserved their mother tongue, culture and traditions. In addition, ethnic groups in North Macedonia were given the right to education in their mother tongue, and thus education and training in Turkish continued. Since Turkish was the language of education, science, art and commerce in this region during the Ottoman period, it has been able to maintain its influence and existence until today. The speakers of Turkish as a heritage language in this region are not only Turks. Other ethnic groups (Romani, Bosnian, Serbian, Vlach, Torbesh, Bulgarian), especially Albanians, are both carriers and protectors of Turkish as a heritage language. In the Balkan geography, where linguistic and cultural heritage is a richness that creates mutual understanding, Skopje is one of the places where individuals from different cultures and ethnic origins come together. The aim of this study is to reveal the socio-cultural role of Turkish in intercultural interaction in Skopje. Today, the existence of Turkish as a heritage language in the Balkans, especially in Skopje, is influenced not only by the Turks in the region, but also by the existence of other ethnic groups. In the study, non-interactive qualitative research design was used. In this study, it is aimed to define the existence of Turkish in Skopje and to evaluate it within the scope of heritage language. In this context, it is thought that the study will contribute to the field by adding new and different dimensions to the concept of heritage language due to the presence of Turkish in the Balkans.

Keywords: Heritage language, multilingualism, multiculturalism, intercultural interaction, Turkish teaching

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1. INTRODUCTION

Balkan communities of different ethnic origins lived in a common cultural region under Ottoman rule. These communities, which have lived together for centuries, have adopted the Turkish culture and language while continuing to keep their own culture and language alive. People who freely conveyed their own beliefs, languages and cultural values from generation to generation without being subjected to pressure and coercion, on the other hand, helped shape a common Ottoman-Turkish culture in the Balkan geography and embraced this culture as an encompassing and cohesive bond. Turkish, which function as a tool of social life and social interaction, has never turned into an imperialist oppression tool and has been seen as essential for the continuity of intercultural interaction for the inhabitants of this geography. In the Balkans, the words Turk and Turkish were seen not as a means of ethnic affiliation, but as a means of belonging to a prestigious and integrative identity that would ensure cultural integration and being a subject of the state. Being Turkish and knowing Turkish mean gains about common culture. This perception still continues today.

It is important to observe that Turkish has an encompassing and integrating role not only for Turkish individuals who lives in Balkan countries but also for other individuals of different ethnic origins in the Balkan geography. In this context, in the study, the observations of researchers working as field researchers in Skopje as participant-observers were evaluated and the data were discussed within the framework of the heritage language concept by establishing a relationship with the literature. Within the framework of this purpose, the subject of what Turkish means as a heritage language in the Balkans, in particular in Skopje, has been explained and it has been emphasized that the concept of heritage language is a concept that needs redefinition for Turkish in the Balkans. The study was conducted with non-interactive qualitative research principles as it was based on observation notes. In the literature review, a master's thesis on Turkish as a heritage language in North Macedonia has been reached. In this study, Kara (2021) investigated the attitudes of Turkish-origin university students in North Macedonia towards Turkish and their perceptions of the Turkish presence in this region. In addition, with this study, the current situation of Turkish heritage in North Macedonia has been revealed and it has been determined that there is a positive image of Turkish heritage. The position of Turkish in North Macedonia within the scope of heritage language differs from other countries. For this reason, it has been observed that there is a need for studies that will define the existence of Turkish as a heritage language in the Balkans, in North Macedonia in particular, and reveal its sociolinguistic and sociocultural characteristics. In this respect, it is thought that the study will contribute to the studies on the existence of Turkish as a heritage language in North Macedonia in terms of providing a conceptual background. Concepts shape our world of thought and production. Especially in the field of language teaching, definitions contribute to the development of academic production and practices. According to Durmus, "the most basic function of terms is that they enable the speaker and the listener, and in writing, the writer and the reader to agree on the conceptual boundaries mentioned, and

mediate the transmission of the message in question" (Durmuş, 2018, p. 218). Although there are some standards in the literature on the concept of "Heritage Language", it has been observed that different definitions should be developed within the scope of Heritage Language due to the position of Turkish in different geographies. Considering this need, in this study, especially in Skopje, the qualities of Turkish as a "common heritage language" in the conceptual dimension were specified and suggestions were developed for its use in the literature. By defining the existence of Turkish in Skopje within the scope of "Common Heritage Language", it is aimed to reveal the new qualities that both the concept of Heritage Language and the existence of Turkish in the Balkans will gain. It is thought that these new qualities will contribute to the definition of the position of Turkish in the Balkans and to the language policies to be developed for Turkish in North Macedonia.

2. METHOD

In this study, the observations of researchers working as field researchers in Skopje as participant-observers were evaluated and the data were discussed within the framework of the heritage language concept by establishing a relationship with the literature. Within the framework of this purpose, the subject of what Turkish means as a heritage language in the Balkans, in particular in Skopje, has been explained and it has been emphasized that the concept of heritage language is a concept that needs redefinition for Turkish in the Balkans. The study was conducted with non-interactive qualitative research principles as it was based on observation notes.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Heritage Language

Today, human mobility or migrations for various reasons have increased the linguistic and cultural diversity in different countries or regions. The mobility that took place due to reasons such as wars, political and economic migrations, especially in the European continent, led to the formation of new communities with minority status. The habits of minorities living in different countries and regions and the language they use among themselves have brought many sociological differences and diversity. In this context, the concept of heritage language has been used to describe the language that minorities or immigrants usually speak with their family members at home.

Rothman (2009) stated that for a language to be defined as a heritage language, it must be spoken at home and those living in the same household must be exposed to that language in some way. According to Polinsky's (2008) definition, a heritage language is a language that is first [acquired] for the individual in order of acquisition, but not fully acquired due to the transition to another dominant language (p. 149). The common point of the definitions in the literature for heritage language is the language learned in

order to maintain strong cultural bonds through family interaction. (Fishman, 2001; Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003).

The language with a wide area of use and prevalence is defined as the dominant language. While the language used by more people or social groups in a country or region (Şen, 2022, p. 31) is described as the dominant language, the opposite concepts are preferred for the term heritage language. Based on the dominant language definition, the concept of heritage language can be described as a language used by fewer people or a small social group in a narrow environment with less function and limited prevalence in a country or region. In this context, the term heritage language is widely used to describe immigrant and minority languages. While the individual is exposed to heritage language in the family in early childhood, he speaks and uses it at a limited level outside his immediate environment in later periods. (Haznedar, 2021, p. 350).

In line with the definitions for the concept of heritage language, it can be stated that Turkish is a heritage language because it is spoken in Europe in a limited way in school, on the street and in business life. However, Turkish, which has an important regional and historical position throughout North Macedonia, has different contributions to the definition of heritage language.

3.2 Turks and Turkish in North Macedonia

Citizens of North Macedonia are exposed to more than one language since childhood due to the socio-cultural structure of the country. Considering this situation, family members, the environment they interact with, and the school play an important role in the formation of children's linguistic and cultural awareness. There are many reasons for the existence of Turkish in North Macedonia to reach the present day. The most important of these reasons is the existence of the Ottoman Empire and the fact that Turkish has been the language of education, science, art and trade in the region for many years.

Today, the existence of Turkish as a heritage language is influenced not only by the presence of Turks in the region, but also by the existence of other ethnic groups. The preferences, lifestyles, attitudes and behaviors of people in any region are formed as a result of the transfer of cultural accumulations they have acquired over many years from generation to generation. A Language is an important element in cultural transfer. The relationship between people's social status and their linguistic habits leads to the formation of both differences and partnerships, especially in societies where different ethnic groups live together. While variables such as geographical location, age, education, profession, and gender affect language use even among users of the same language, it is natural that there are common points as well as differences in the society where individuals with different languages and cultures live together. In this context, in order to define the current status of the contribution of the Turkish presence in North Macedonia to the existing cultural and linguistic partnership in the region, it is necessary to consider the historical processes of the Turkish presence in the region. From a

historical point of view, the Turkish presence in North Macedonia is explained in three periods:

1. Macedonian Turkishness before the Ottoman Empire (372-1370)
2. Macedonian Turkishness in the Ottoman Empire Period (1371-1912)
3. Macedonian Turkishness after the Ottoman Empire (1912-2021) (Hamzaoglu 2010: 36-37).

Considering the listed item above, although the presence of Turkish in Macedonia is thought to have settled with the Ottomans, the presence of Turkish is seen in the Balkan Peninsula in much earlier periods. The old Avar, Pechenek, Oghuz, Cuman and other Turkish tribes, who migrated to the Balkans before the Ottomans and carried their own culture, left thousands of Turkish origin words in the Balkans, especially in Slavic languages and place names, and they enriched these languages (Bakircilar, 2010, p. 74). This is one of the proofs that the Turks in the Balkans are as old as the Slavs (Tufan, 1995, p. 6).

The Ottoman Empire has turned its direction to the Balkans since its establishment and has continuously completed its development through the Balkans. For this reason, the Ottomans brought the Islamic civilization to the Balkan Peninsula and left artworks and positive impression in this geography even today. This is clearly seen in the multicultural mosaic of the Balkans.

During the Ottoman Empire period, all Balkan languages remained open to Turkish and Turkish culture. During this period, although the Balkan nations were of different ethnic origins, they agreed with each other by speaking Turkish. The most important reason for the influence of Turkish on the Balkan languages in the mentioned period should be sought in the fact that Turkish was a language of prestige, education, science, art and trade. During the Ottoman period, many new concepts and words belonging to the Turkish language and culture were transferred to these languages, and these words continue their existence today. In the Balkan languages, besides the administrative, legal and religious words, the names of food, vegetables, fruits, furniture, tools-equipment taken from Turkish are still alive today. (Pars, 2000, p. 12). In the study conducted by Barin and Temizyurek (2018, p. 3), some of the common Turkish words living in the Balkan geography were mentioned. These words are: (çay, çorba, işkembe, dolma, yaprak sarma, patlıcan, börek, şeker, tahan helva, baklava, kadayıf, kaymak, tulumba, yatak, yorgan, yastık, çarşaf, peşkir, çarşı, çeşme, cami, meydan, kale, taş, sanduk, tavan, pencere, tencere, kara, inat, pamuk vb.). Thus, the reflections of Turkish culture and lifestyle clearly show themselves in the languages of the individuals living in this region.

Various madrasahs opened in for teaching Turkish in the Ottoman period. Today, Turkish education in Skopje continues in primary, high school and higher education institutions.

Yıldız Yalçındağ in her study (2021) emphasized that Turkish education problems started in Skopje in 1912, with the end of the Ottoman Empire's dominance in the region. She stated that these problems continued until 1944, after which the right to Turkish education was withdrawn, albeit limited. Today, Turkish education is given in Petar Zdravkovski-Penko and Jashar Bej schools, especially in Tefeyyüz Primary School in Skopje. In the regions where the Turkish population is high in North Macedonia, there is a constitutional right to education in the mother tongue.

Today, Turks live in Skopje, Gostivar, Tetovo, Ohrid, Struga, Bitola, Kicevo, Debar cities in Western Macedonia and Veles, Valandovo, Strumica, Radovis, Stip cities in Eastern Macedonia. (Çayırılı, 2013, p. 315). Many ethnic communities live in North Macedonia. Albanians, Turks, Bosnians, Serbs, Vlachs and Romani constitute the different ethnic national structure of North Macedonia. (Baki, 2021, p. 2 According to the census results announced on March 30, 2022, the population of North Macedonia was determined as 1.836 million. When this result is compared with the census results in 2002, a 10% loss in the population of North Macedonia has been observed in the last two decades. According to the census results, 58.4 percent of the country is Macedonians, 24.3 percent is Albanians, 3.8 percent is Turks, 2.5 percent is Romani and 1.3 percent is Serbs. Other minorities, consisting of Bosnians, Vlachs, Torbesh (Macedonian Muslims) and Bulgarians, were included in the census results with small percentages.

North Macedonia is one of the important Balkan countries where the Turkish language and culture live in the historical process. Turkish culture has both created its own existence in this country and influenced them by interacting with the cultures in the regions where it exists. Within the scope of this historical background, Turkish has served as a cultural bond between people from different ethnic origins, especially in North Macedonia, and has been a tool for transferring the common life experiences accumulated from the past to new generations. As a heritage language that contributes to the formation of partnerships between peoples, it has survived among ethnic groups other than Turks until today.

3.3 Turkish as a Heritage Language in Skopje

The carriers of Turkish as a heritage language in the Balkan Peninsula are not only Turks. Other ethnic groups (Romani, Bosnian, Serbian, Vlach, Torbesh, Bulgarian), especially Albanians, are both carriers and protectors of Turkish as a heritage language. Skopje is at the forefront of the places where linguistic and cultural heritage creates richness and mutual understanding, and individuals with different cultures and ethnic origins coexist in the Balkan geography. The fact that mixed marriages between Albanians and Turks, not only in Skopje but also throughout the country, have a religiously common and social life, affect the existence of both Turkish and Albanian as heritage languages. Especially, Pomak Turkic students, called Torbesh, use Turkish only at school, as they speak Macedonian with their families at home. Therefore, despite exposure to the language spoken by the parents in early childhood, the language may differ with the influence of the environment and school as the age progresses. The

influence of the religion to which he belongs with the sense of cultural belonging also affects the individual's choice and learning of the heritage language in the following periods. According to this, heritage language users belonging to an ethnic or minority group can also be adults who develop emotional faithfulness to the family language and try to learn, revive and keep the heritage language alive even if they were not exposed to the language during childhood for various reasons. (Haznedar, 2021, p. 350). Even if Turkish is not spoken at home, Torbesh send their children to schools that provide education in Turkish or encourage them to learn Turkish because they feel culturally belonging to Turkish identity. For this reason, we can say that Turkish has a different and special situation as a heritage language in Skopje.

The existence of Turkish as a heritage language in North Macedonia is also effective in establishing relations between the countries of the region through economic, cultural and academic cooperation. In this way, the relations between associations, schools and state institutions in Turkey and North Macedonia continue to increase. Turkish as a heritage language in the Balkans differs from the heritage language of Turks living in countries such as Germany, France or the Netherlands due to its historical background and the economic and cultural relations that Turkey has developed. Individuals who speak Turkish as a heritage language abroad, especially in Europe, start to learn their mother tongue, Turkish, at home, but the use of Turkish is limited in school or business life. (Haznedar, 2021, p. 351).

Today, Turkish children in North Macedonia have the right to education in their mother tongue within the constitutional framework. Within the scope of the study, the primary schools providing multilingual and multicultural education in Skopje were determined. Two of the primary schools (1st to 9th grades) providing education in three languages were visited in Skopje, and observations were made in Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish classes (Petar Zdravkovski Penko, Jashar Bej Shkupi). During these visits, it was observed that the common linguistic and cultural heritage was perceived as a source of richness and interaction among students from different ethnic origins. In this context, it has been observed that Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish students discover and use commonalities in Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish languages in their communication with each other since they are in a multilingual and multicultural environment.

It was possible to converse in standard Turkish with almost all of the students in the classes studying in Albanian. The main reason for this situation was observed to be that Albanian students watch Turkish cartoons, TV series and movies from an early age. Another important factor in this regard can be explained as the fact that at least one of the family members (mother, father, grandmother or grandfather) is Turkish.

4. RESULTS, DISCUSSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Indigenous languages, immigrant languages, and colonial languages which had to live next to a dominant language, which were previously expressed with different concepts

are now widely expressed as heritage languages and are included under this concept in the literature. The increase in the number of studies conducted under this concept in recent years is explained by the increasing importance of bilingualism and multilingualism, the increase in respect for human and language rights and the rise of democratization efforts.

The momentum gained by the studies under the concept of Heritage Language is explained by the recent rise in the importance of bilingualism and multilingualism, the increasing respect for human and language rights, and the rise in democratization efforts. Studies in which Turkish is evaluated within the scope of Heritage Language have generally focused on Turkish-German. One of the main reasons for the intensification of studies on Turkish as a heritage language in Germany is the increasing Turkish population with the Turkish labor migration since the early 1950s (Daller, 2020; Schmid & Karayayla, 2019; Şaşmaz & Arslan, 2016). It has been observed that the number of studies on Turkish as a heritage language in the Balkans is quite low. In their study, Şaşmaz and Arslan (2016) collected data from teachers with semi-structured interview forms in order to determine the level of use of Turkish as a heritage language in the Balkans and made determinations about Turkish education in the Balkans. In his master's thesis titled "Turkish as a Heritage Language and Turkish Identity in North Macedonia", Kara (2021) determined how Turkish and Turkish perception is perceived by young people and made suggestions for the future of Turkish education in North Macedonia. As can be understood from the mentioned studies, it has been determined that there are almost no studies examining Turkish as a heritage language in the Balkans in general and North Macedonia in particular.

Taking this into consideration the term heritage language, which is widely used to describe immigrant and minority languages, falls short of reflecting the deep-rooted history of Turkish in North Macedonia, in particular in Skopje, and explaining why the reputation of Turkish is still preserved in this region and why people's perception of Turkish is positive. Therefore, in this study, it is underlined that a new meaning dimension should be given to the term heritage language, and it is emphasized that the term "Common Heritage Language" can be more understandable in the Balkans and that the sociolinguistic research of Turkish in this region should be encouraged.

In North Macedonia, different ethnic groups (Albanian, Romani, Bosnian, Serbian, Vlach, Torbesh, Bulgarian) have the right to receive education in their mother tongue within the constitutional framework. With the Albanian population exceeding 20% in North Macedonia, Albanian became the second official language. This also applies to schools affiliated to municipalities providing education in North Macedonia. Students of different ethnic origins, who have a majority in a class at school, have the right to receive instruction in their mother tongue. As a result of the interviews with the administrators and students of Petar Zdravkovski Penko, Jashar Bej, which provides education in three languages (Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish) and Tefeyyüz Primary School, which provides education in Turkish in Skopje, the presence of Turkish as a common heritage

language in daily life, at school and on the street has been observed. Turkish creates a common sense of belonging among peoples of different ethnic origins, especially in Skopje. This is due to the history of Turkish in the Balkan geography. However, today, the TV series, cinema and music industry also play a significant role in the intense interest in Turkish.

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