

## Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language to Polish Speakers

Fatih Yılmaz\*

MA Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland.

**Abstract:** As the importance of Turkish language grows, teaching Turkish language as a foreign language is growing as a profession and as a field of education. New methods and techniques should be developed to meet the demands of the changing world and teach Turkish more effectively. Many linguists have studied on the difficulties and problems of learning and teaching Turkish as a foreign language as they face failure during teaching or learning process. In this article Turkish language teaching as a foreign language is evaluated by a native speaker at Oriental Philology of Jagiellonian University in Krakow. The researcher is a Turkish lecturer at the department. He has been teaching Turkish at Oriental Philology for two years. He has practical Turkish courses for the Polish students. He would like to share the knowledge he gained from reflecting on his teaching process. The aim of the present paper is to discuss the most common mistakes Polish university students make in the process of learning Turkish.

**Key words:** Turkish language, Nominal case, Goals and objectives, Foreign language

### Polonyahlara Türkçenin Yabancı Dil Olarak Öğretimi

**Özet:** Türk dilinin önemi arttıkça Türkçe'nin yabancı dil olarak öğretimi eğitimin bir alanı ve iş olarak giderek artmaktadır. Türkçe'yi daha etkin olarak öğretmek ve değişen dünyanın ihtiyaçlarını karşılamak için yeni metotlar ve teknikler geliştirilmelidir. Birçok dilbilimci öğretim ve öğrenim sürecinde zorluklarla karşılaştıkları için Türkçe'nin yabancı dil olarak öğretiminin zorlukları ve sorunları üzerine çalışmalar yapmışlardır. Bu makalede Polonya, Krakow Jagiellonian Üniversitesi Doğu dilleri bölümünde çalışan anadili Türkçe olan kişi tarafından Türkçe'nin yabancı dil olarak öğretimi değerlendirilmiştir. Araştırmacı bölümde iki yıldır Polonyalı öğrencilere Pratik Türkçe dersleri vermektedir. Öğretim süreci içerisinde edindiği izlenimleri paylaşmak istemektedir. Bu makalenin amacı Polonyalı öğrencilerin Türkçe öğrenirken yaptığı belirgin hataları anlatmaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türk dili, İsim hal eki, Amaç ve hedefler, Yabancı dil.

### INTRODUCTION

Many linguists have studied the difficulties and problems of learning and teaching Turkish as a foreign language as they face failure during teaching or learning process. Considering the failure of teaching Turkish as a foreign language, there are different reasons: insufficient number of instructional units offered in Turkish courses per week, linguistic difficulties of both languages, lack of appropriate teaching materials, lack of skilled native speakers, and lack of linguistic theoretical basis (Eryılmaz, 1996). Cotukesen (1983) also states that learners of Turkish as a foreign language have difficulty with suffocation, nominalizations, subject-verb agreement, adjective phrases, complex sentences, relative clauses, nominal cases, and derivational

suffixes. He concludes the difficulties by stating that the students also face difficulty with orthography, punctuation, intonation, pronunciation, pitch and juncture. Aydın (1993) mentions about the effect of positive and negative transfer, giving examples for overuse of personal pronoun, lack of object-verb agreement. He also studied and analyzed the errors made by learners of Turkish coming from Turkic states, in terms of both vocabulary and word order. Demir (1993) studied the difficulties encountered in Turkish language teaching in two main parts:

A) Difficulties confronted by teaching organizations; there is lack of coordination between the Turkish language teaching institutions; and there are not research or publication centers for teaching Turkish as a foreign language.

B) Difficulties encountered in terms of the learners. According to Ercil (2003), a Turkish language instructor categorizes the problems in four groups:

1. shortage of the instructional materials, such as course textbooks and digital instructional materials,
2. individual differences among students,
3. students learning activities outside the classroom, and
4. Organization of the Turkish classes.

### THE NATURE OF TEACHING TURKISH

Students learn best when the language is presented in a communicative approach, for instance, the more closely the classroom context related to a real communicative context, the more easily they recall the language. The key idea of the communicative approach is the view of language use in the context of communication. The primary objective is to provide the learner with the experience and the opportunity to practice the target language and culture.

The aim of the present paper is to discuss the most common mistakes Polish university students make in the process of learning Turkish as a foreign language at Turkology department, Jagiellonian University, Poland. The author collected data to discuss this problem while teaching Turkish to the students at various levels. These students at Turkology department study and have practical courses with the author. Since the researcher teaches practical Turkish, the goal of his instruction is to make students speak Turkish fluently, so he suggests that the language introduced in a meaningful context where it can be used communicatively is easily learned. For example, the language can be presented in a situation that the students would find themselves in outside of class, such as at shopping in markets, at asking directions in streets, or eating at restaurants, etc. The communicative language learning method is applied in his classes and all the students are involved in all the activities. The language is introduced in a dialogue format so that students not only learn the language, but also learn how to use it for real usage of communicative purposes. This is certainly not a new method of teaching but it takes on new meaning when the teacher uses to teach communication rather than language (Dakowska, 2005).

**Grammar:** Being little exceptions in Turkish grammar makes it easily learned. The researcher suggests that grammar should be taught with speaking and listening purposes. Grammar needs to be taught, but students should not be expected to speak grammatical accuracy when they are trying to communicate. Grammar is best taught before or after the dialogue as part of a meaningful context, when the grammar is taught in dialogues, the students can learn naturally the grammar as a main part of communication.

\* Okutman, Jagiellonian Üniversitesi. Filoloji Fakültesi, Krakow

The structure of Turkish word order is quite different than Polish, so beginner level students try to make similar sentences as in their native language, which cause mistakes in the target language. Story past tense is difficult issue to be understood by Polish students, since there is not heard and seen past tense in Polish language. Gerunds and infinitives are other difficult issues for students, instead of using gerund and infinite they prefer to use the verb, for example; students say "I like read" instead of "I like reading" because it is difficult to change the verbs with suffixes to gerund and infinitive. In grammar lessons students are forced to make full and grammatically correct sentences, but in real life speech is usually made up of short utterances rather than complex sentences. Case endings and other suffixes are also problem because they are confused with their native language, not because of word order or first language interference. For example some suffixes are mostly used in communication such as, -ler, -ye, -de, -li, -den, -siz but some are rarely used in communication such as -sı (Walter, 1993).

**Speaking:** Although speaking is the most emphasized skill in the field of foreign language teaching and various teaching methods have focused on its development, it is nevertheless recognized as the most difficult one to develop in the classroom conditions. Speaking has been treated as the goal of foreign language learning for most of the students (Dakowska, 2005). The researcher develops speaking courses in forms of different activities, such as, dialogues, role-plays, solving puzzle, developing a story, simulations, interviews, discussions and debates.

Speaking is the most difficult ability for the Turkish language learners, but the students at Turkology are able to speak fluently at the initial stages of their learning in the first classes. Although it is not possible to teach students to communicate in the classroom in the way that they will need to communicate outside the classroom, it is possible to develop their fluency. Students are encouraged to speak and to be active in class with communicative language teaching method. Students experience to make incomplete and short sentences to make communication easier to avoid word order problems. Normal conversational speeches are actually made up of short utterances rather than complex sentence structures. Some of the students are brave to communicate without speaking with grammatical accuracy. Having chance to study in Turkey with grants and as an Erasmus students in Turkey helps to develop students' fluency and also they live the target language culture. Focusing on grammar causes communication break down because students effort a long time to think how to say something.

Students learn new sounds of language easily but they have problems with the stress or rhythm. They confuse some sounds, saying "canta" instead of "çanta", "geçe" instead of "gece". The researcher notices that students stress the words differently which makes them misunderstood such as; ağaç, aç etc.. When the students do not pronounce or stress the word correctly, it is not understood, but when they speak grammatically incorrectly and pronounce correctly, it is understood. Pronunciation and stress are very important in communication. The problem with pronunciation is caused by students' first language. At first vowel harmony is confusing for beginner classes but later it becomes naturally as they practice more and more, students do not need to think about vowel harmony and they make a success of speaking correctly.

**Pronunciation:** Turkish alphabet is easy as it is read as it is written. Students are successful on phonetics and most voices are similar both in Turkish and Polish. On the other hand it is difficult to pronounce some letters such as "ç,ö,ü,g", students

pronounce "ulke" instead of "ülke", "üniversite" instead of "üniversite". Polish students have difficulty on pronouncing the letter "ğ" in such words like "ağaç", "kağıt", "değil". Among Turkish consonants, the so-called soft "ğ" and "r" cause the greatest difficulty in utterance. The soft "ğ" has been the centre of debates among linguists as to whether it can be counted as a separate letter. For example, Hildreht (1972) comments on the Turkish orthography stating that "ğ" has no sound at all between certain vowels or may have the sound of "y" between certain vowels, and after some vowels before a following consonant. However, it would be wrong to say that "ğ" has no sound at all between certain vowels, as this letter has a specific function each time it is used. Lewis (1991:5) states that "ğ" is a concession to the traditional spelling of Turkish in the Arabo-Persian alphabet, "g" and "gh". Students have problems on stress in Turkish.

Pronunciation is not only to pronounce the word but also involves the rhythm of the language. Students have problems on pronunciation because of first language interference. Many foreign language speakers never acquire a native pronunciation, but speak with an accent. Repetition is necessary for overcoming to correct the mistakes, when students mispronounce a word, we usually repeat it correctly in a sentence, we do not correct the students after each mistakes, in order not to demotivate them. Correcting all the mistakes might be resulted in tension and students worry about making mistakes.

**Listening:** It is often stated in textbooks on methods and techniques of teaching foreign language that listening is a prevailing form of communication. If learners of Turkish as a foreign language have regularly and consistently exposed to the recordings or native speakers, their understanding level will be high. When the students talk about their listening problems, Polish students complain about the listening activities of textbook, which are too long and fast, and which make them stressful and tired. Hence, we try to adjust the level and help them by stopping the listening materials. Learning to listen is a slow process and not as easy as learning to speak. Teaching listening methods in the beginner classes are different than in later classes. At first students should listen to what they have taught, later, they can listen to familiar language spoken with new items. At first, students need to hear language spoken slowly. We maintain a consistent listening practice. At Turkology department listening is limited to the practical language for a limited hour; the researcher is the only native speaker at the department. Generally the speech in and out of class is quite different. Too often the words sounded alike such as "yarın, yarım" "takviye, tavsıye". This characteristic of Turkish make it difficult to recall the correct words, in addition, when suffixes are added to a word, students do not recognize the word and they say they do not know the word. When the researcher speaks Turkish at beginner classes, students find it difficult to understand, but when he makes dialogue and rate of speaking is slow they are able to response. In order to develop listening students are advised to listen and watch audio-visual materials in Turkish.

**Vocabulary:** Students use lots of words borrowed from Arabic and Persian while speaking, and some students confuse some of the similarly written Arabic words such as "tahammül, tahayyül", "temsıl, teslim", "tahlıl, tahsıl", "takviye, tavsıye", "iftihar, iftira", which have totally different meanings. The euphony in Turkish makes its word to be learned easily, when a word or root word is learned, the more words are learned easily.

Students can easily remember the words from the context in which they are taught. The absolute beginner students have difficulty with understanding the figurative and idiomatic meanings of the words. All the words should be taught in a meaningful and communicative context. Since vocabulary can not be learned at once it will take time to learn, the context should be repeated with new vocabulary each time. Of course using the vocabulary is best way to learn it, and repetition in any way helps. The more the vocabulary is spoken, heard, read, and written the more it will be remembered. Students should create their own style to learn vocabulary, such as, grouping the words by concept, related words, making word association and so on. Vocabulary from the context is easy to learn but it is easily forgotten if not used, some words are easily confused because of the similarities in pronunciation such as; tahayyül, tahammül, temsil, teslim, tahlil, tahsil. The more meaningful and communicative from real life the context is the more easily students remember the words. Students have different strategies to learn words, some write the words on a piece of paper with the meaning in first language, whereas some students organize the words according to conceptual categories, such as food, clothes etc.

Mistakes are natural, and they are part of learning process. Mistakes are an integral part of language learning and language use. They are inevitable, teachers can eliminate to a certain extent. Correction should not be used to cause for embarrassment, some correction is useful. Teachers have to let students become aware that mistakes are sometimes necessary, acceptable and will be dealt with a non-judgmental, supportive and effective way. Bad mistake management is worse than none at all (Bartham M, Walton R, 1991).

Upon considering the errors, students' nominal case ending mistakes are more striking, as a native speaker the researcher noticed the students make mistakes more on case endings. Ozkan (1994) classifies the errors made in the usage of nominal cases into five types; lack of nominal case, overuse of these cases, the wrong usage of nominal cases, failure in the usage of the vowel harmony, and putting the nominal case in the wrong place.

As a native speaker case ending mistakes are more striking than any other grammatical mistakes. So, the researcher collected the notes of mistakes student make on nominal case endings. Here are some examples of nominal case ending mistakes Polish students make while learning Turkish as a foreign language:

#### ***The Mistakes on Accusative Case.***

1. I would like learn (öğrenmek) a foreign language. (Nominal case ending -i should be added to the verb in Turkish version) *False* to learn-i (öğrenmeyi) *Correct*
2. I remember the various Turkish rules but I forget use (kullanmak) it. to use (kullanmayı)
3. All the countries should legislate in order to save the environment. (çevre). Çevreyi
4. Krakow is one of the most beautiful cities (şehir). (“i” should be fallen) Şehri
5. They enjoyed the meal (yemek) I cooked. (“k” should be softened to “ğ”) Yemeği

#### ***The Mistakes on Dative Case.***

1. I am going to karolina party (Karolina partisi). Karolinanın partisine
2. If I have money I will go to all abroad (bütün ülkeler). bütün ülkelere
3. We learn how not to join the fight (kavgaya). kavgaya
4. I started write (yazmak) when I was four years old. yazmaya
5. My father told me (beni) much about Turkey. Bana

#### ***The Mistakes on Ablative Case.***

1. After primary school (ilkokulda) I started to secondary school. ilkokuldan
2. After that (o zaman) time it is written in secret..... o zamandan
3. The words borrowed from the west europe...(batı avrupanın) batı avrupadan
4. After I graduated the school (okul) in 1983..... okuldan
5. I am sure that Turkish is the most difficult (zor olduğunu) in the world langugaes. Zoru olduğundan

#### ***The Mistakes on Locative Case.***

1. Recently (son zamanlar) people become bad. Son zamanlarda
2. I have been to Turkey as a beneficiary student 2007 (2007). 2007’de
3. Eack book (her kitap) has someting beneficial. her kitapta
4. My family (ailemin)consists of four members. ailemde
5. I learned Turkish to TOMER(Tomereye). Tomerde

#### ***The Mistakes on Genitive Case.***

1. The wounded (yaralı durum) is not well. Yaralının durumu
2. My mother (benim annem) name is Anna. benim annemin
3. Founded by Al-kindi’s.....(Al-kindinin tarafından) Al-kindi tarafından
4. My mother (annem) good voice. Annemin var
5. Since everybody’s (herkesin) lives under stres..... herkes

#### ***The Mistakes on Possessive Case.***

1. Family (benim aile)consists of total five people (beş kişi). Benim ailem beş kişiden
2. Birthday (doğum tarihi) is 24 may 1980. Doğum tarihim
3. According to my (benim göre)the most difficult school is lycee. Bana göre
4. I study a university of Krakow. (Krakowun Üniversitesinde). Krakow’da Üniversitede
5. Even first class (sınıfta da)I had problems (problemi)on easy sentences . sınıfta problemim

#### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the analysis of researcher’s language teaching experience, some suggestions can be made with regard to his

experience. Since the program he teaches at is philology, students not only focus on learning Turkish to communicate, but also read and understand the literature and history of Turkic languages. In this article, the researcher makes general evaluation of Turkish language. The evaluation of teaching Turkish should be according to the goals and objectives of the programs. Of course, in foreign language courses students have more classes and they focus on all the language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Philology faculties aim to prepare students as a philologist both with the ability to speak fluently and the knowledge of literature and history of the target language.

Two of the most important problems are the insufficient materials on teaching Turkish as a foreign language, and lack of Audio-visual materials at classes while teaching Turkish. When considered the course books available, it is seen that the most common course book is the Hitit series published by Tömer Ankara University, Turkey, and the other newly published one is "Yabancılar için Türkçe 1-2" published by Gazi University, Turkey. Since there is lack of materials, this problem could be solving by providing Materials Development Offices and Testing Offices at the departments in order to prepare appropriate materials for the levels of students. There are not enough Turkish instructors teaching Turkish as a native speaker at Turkology departments, English, German or French instructors teach Turkish as a temporary job. Permanent professionals as a native speaker should be employed at Turkish language departments.

It is important for all language teachers to understand their students' learning strategies that help them to learn and do not help them to learn. Teachers should learn a variety of methods and techniques and vary them according to the needs of their students. Teachers need to be aware of the needs of all their students. In order to address the students' Turkish language needs, clear cut objectives should be set for the students and the courses should be planned and organized based on the goals and objectives set for each course. In needs analysis Brown (1995) "refers to the activities involved in gathering information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the learning needs of a particular group of students" (p.35). The aim of the curriculum is to provide a clear definition of the purposes of a program, to provide guidelines for teachers, for learners and material writers. The aim and objective should be consistent with the aim of the curriculum, and should be feasible (Richards, 2001). Students should be informed about their Turkish language needs according to the objectives and goals of the program. Before students enroll in the preparatory programs they should know what the goals and objectives of the program so they make informed decisions about their participation in the program. If speaking should be an important goal of the program, teachers should consider making significant changes in their teaching methodology.

## REFERENCES

- Aydın, O. (1993). *Türkçenin Sözdizimine ilişkin Olumsuz Aktarım Yanlıları*. Dil Dergisi, TOMER, Sayı:9.
- Bartram, M. & Walton, R (1991). *Correction: A positive Approach to Language Mistakes*. Language Teaching Publication, England.
- Brown, J. D. (1995). *The elements of language curriculum*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Cotukesen, Y. (1983). *Yabancı Dil Olarak Türkçe Öğretimi/ Yabancıların Türkçe Öğrenirken Karşılaştıkları Güçlükler ve Yaptıkları Yanlılar*. Turk Dili Sayı: 379-380.

Dakowska, M (2005). *Teaching English as a Foreign Language: A Guide for Professionals*. Wydawnictwo PWN SA, Warszawa.

Demir A. (1993). *Türkçenin Yabancı Dil Olarak Öğretiminde Fransız Öğrencilerin Karşılaştıkları Güçlükler*. 7. Bilim Kurultayı Bildirileri. A.U. DTCF Yayını, Ankara.

Ercil, N (2003). *An Electronic Performance Support System for Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language: A Case Study*. Unpublished Phd Thesis. METU, Ankara

Eryılmaz, E. (1996). *Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language: A Systems Approach Through Linguistic Perspective*. Unpublished Phd Thesis. Hacettepe University, Ankara.

Hildreth, G (1972) *'The Story of Spelling Reform in Turkey' in Spelling Progress Bulletin Spring 1972, republished in ed. Newell Tune Spelling Reform: A Comprehensive Survey of the Advantages, Educational Benefits, and Obstacles to Adoption, North Hollywood, CA.: Spelling Progress Bulletin, 2nd edition, 1982.*

Lewis, G L (1991) *Turkish Grammar*, Oxford and New York: OUP.

Ozkan, A (1994). *Yabancı Dil Öğretiminde Ad Durum Eklerinin Öğretimiyle İlgili Kimi Sorunlar*. Dil Dergisi TOMER Sayı 29.

Richards, J. C. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Walter, E (1993). *Learning Turkish as a Foreign Language: A personal Account*. Dil Dergisi TOMER Sayı 14.