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Report

Two conferences in Northern Cyprus

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The Turkish and Foreign Languages Research and Application Centre, TÖMER, at Ankara University has organized a number of conferences with the aim to discuss issues of teaching Turkish as a foreign language. This important initiative has been followed up in Northern Cyprus, where two conferences have recently been held on issues concerning teaching Turkish.

The *I. Uluslararası Türkçe Eğitimi ve Öğretimi Sempozyumu* (1st International Symposium on Turkish Language Teaching and Instruction) was organized by the Eastern Mediterranean University, Gazimağusa, March 27-28, 2008. The proceedings of this meeting have recently been published by the organizers Adnan İnce and Vügar Sultanzade under the title *I. Uluslararası Türkçe Eğitimi ve Öğretimi Sempozyumu Bildirileri / International Symposium on Turkish Language Teaching and Instruction*. The follow-up to this conference, the *II. Uluslararası Türkçenin Eğitimi-Öğretimi Kurultayı*, was organized this year (2009) by the Linguistics Department of Ankara University; for more information see: www.turkishlanguage-symposium.org

The first conference, called *Dünya Dili Türkçe* (Turkish as a World Language) was held at Başkent University, Ankara, in 2008. Two universities in Northern Cyprus show a special interest in this subject. Thus, the *II. Uluslararası Dünya Dili Türkçe Sempozyumu* (2nd International Symposium on Turkish as a World Language) was held by Cyprus International University, December 9-11, 2009. The convener of this meeting was Ahmet Pehlivan, professor at the Department of Turkish. More than eighty participants gathered, mostly from Turkish universities, at the venue in Girne. Several European countries, Albania, Germany, Hungary, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, Macedonia, and even the USA were represented.

The invited topics at both of these conferences in Northern Cyprus included the following issues: teaching Turkish as a mother tongue and as a foreign language, teaching Turkish in the Turkic world, development of teaching methods and mate-

rial, Turkish literature and arts in teaching Turkish, Turkish lexicography and linguistics, language policy, Turkish dialectology and sociolinguistics.

Several papers in Girne discussed the level of teaching Turkish outside Turkey. The situation of teaching Turkish as a foreign language in European countries was reviewed by Kutlay Yağmur, who gave a pessimistic review of present developments. Although present research has again confirmed the advantages of bilingualism, mother tongue education of Turkish children in European countries is not satisfactory; see Yağmur's co-authored article in this issue of *Turkic Languages*. According to Jaklin Kornfilt, Turkish is poorly represented at American universities. About 20 American universities offer courses in Turkish, but only a few of them have bachelor or master programs in Turkish or Turkic studies. This might be due to the fact that the number of Turkish speakers in America is relatively low. Güler Gülsevin spoke about the great interest in learning Turkish in the Turkic world outside Turkey and outlined a more positive picture. In Kirghizstan, for instance, a large number of students learn Turkish. One interesting example of this growing interest is the case of Albania, where an academic Turkish program was started in 1996 at the University of Tirana. The number of students studying Turkish today is about one hundred. Two young researchers from Tirana presented papers at the conference in Girne. Xhemile Abdiu spoke about difficulties Albanian students encounter in learning Turkish complex sentences. Fatos Dibra analyzed the 17th-century transcription text *Dictionarium Latino-Epiroticum* as a source for studying Turkish language history.

Issues of teaching Turkish as a native language in Turkish schools are manifold. Seçkin Aydın, in his study on the comprehension of ironic texts by teacher candidates, explained that most of the candidates fail in the use of background knowledge. The need for teaching Turkish as a foreign language is growing in Turkey as well. Universities are opening classes for foreign students. Nazife Aydınoglu and Mehmet Ali Yavuz described new methods of teaching Turkish as a foreign language through the use of lexical chunks.

The second main topic of the conference was linguistic variation in the Turkic world and the study of present and past varieties. Lars Johanson and Éva Á. Csató presented the languages of the Turkic-speaking world and called attention to the urgent task for linguists to document the still existent myriad spoken varieties. Nurettin Demir studied differences between spoken Cypriot Turkish and standard Turkish. In the discussion, Igor Kormushin commented on the usages of the terms *Türkçe* and *Türk dili*. Nadejda Chirli, a native speaker of Gagauz, examined the influence of Russian on Gagauz word order. Her data gives evidence that the word order properties are the same in the language spoken by different generations of speakers. Ali Kafkasyalı talked about the present situation of Irano-Turkic languages and varieties. According to his investigations, the speakers of Turkic in Iran are very keen to maintain their Turkic varieties. Osman Uyanık presented the Urum minority in the Ukraine. Éva Kincses-Nagy talked about Mongolic and Turkic language contacts and mutual copying processes. Mehmet Dursun Erdem presented new data on

the central Sinop dialect. Mária Ivanics dealt with a story of a donkey that became a girl. She concluded that the original of this story is most probably in Rabgūzī, though it is also included in other texts, e.g. in *Dede Korkut*.

Bernt Brendemoen addressed the question of what might be the reasons for similarities between North-West Bulgarian Turkish dialects and Eastern Black Sea dialects. Jaklin Kornfilt presented empirical results contradicting Slobin's claim that left-branching non-finite Turkish relative clauses are acquired later than corresponding right-branching structures in English. Ömer Demircan presented his recent findings concerning the Turkish *devrik cümle* 'inverted clause'. His new book on the subject, *Devrik cümle ve odaklama* ('Inverted clauses and topicalisation'), was published in 2009. Mustafa Volkan Coşkun reported on an interesting investigation concerning the relation between the phonetic and the semantic features of words in Turkish. According to his findings, words denoting positive meanings in Turkish poems tend to contain more sonorants than words with negative meanings. Sema Aslan Demir studied the viewpoint values of Turkish periphrastic verb forms in the framework of Lars Johanson's aspect theory. Issues of definiteness in Turkish were presented by Engin Yılmaz.

There were many other interesting papers presented at the conference. The contributions will be published in different journals, such as *Bilig*, *Turkish Studies*, *Folklor/Edebiyat* (published by the Cyprus International University), and in *Turkic Languages*. The next conference on *Dünya Dili Türkçe* will be held at Dokuz Eylül University, Izmir.

Reference

- İnce, Adnan & Sultanzade, Vügar (eds.) 2009. *I. Uluslararası Türkçe Eğitimi ve Öğretimi Sempozyumu bildirileri / Proceedings of the I. International Symposium on Turkish Language Teaching and Instruction*. Gazimağusa: Doğu Akdeniz Üniversitesi Yayınları. ISBN 978-975-8401-69-7. The publication includes a DVD.