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FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION | REVIEW ARTICLE

Multilingualism in the Ottoman Colonial Empire in Relation to Dialect Formation, Pidgin, Creole, and Lingua Franca

Mehmet Demirezen*

Abstract: The Ottomans were, in fact, not an Atlantic/east Asian power even though they held lands in Middle East and Balkan Regions. The Ottoman navy conquered the countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea and Black Sea so as to secure Ottoman lands in that region. There is a misconception that the Ottoman rule influenced the languages of the Balkans via serious impositions. Ottoman Empire (1299-1922 A.D.), unlike western empires, was not a colonialist empire; therefore, it did not impose any damaging Ottoman language and cultural aspects on the people of the Balkans. The use of Ottoman language in the territories of Ottoman Empire was something like a lingua franca. In this study, the multilingual background of Ottoman Empire will be discussed in relation to the languages spoken in the land of the Ottoman Empire. It will be stressed that Ottomans were imperial, but not colonial.

Keywords: dialect, lingua franca, multilingualism, pidgin, creole, sprachbund.

The Ottoman Empire, which is also recognized as the Turkish Empire, was a massive and prominent empire. It existed from the late 13th century until the early 20th century, specifically from 1299 AD to 1923. While it is often not denoted as a “colonial” empire with the same meaning as European colonial powers, it did have a significantly colossal expansion and control over various regions of three continents. For example, 28 countries were under the rule of Ottoman Empire, some of which were Algeria, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, Georgia, Jordan, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Slovenia, Syria, Tunisia, Türkiye, and Ukraine. The capital Istanbul played an outstanding role as a multilingual, multicultural, and multi-ethnic urban center (Johanson, 2011, 741). The system of the Ottoman Dynasty was based on multiculturalism; they were the true and only example of this in modern history.

Ottoman Empire created a substantial impact on the languages of the countries that it conquered. It was a vast and diverse empire that encompassed many different regions and peoples with their own languages and dialects. As the empire expanded and came into contact with various linguistic communities, there was a natural exchange of linguistic and cultural influences. This situation led the Ottoman Empire to borrow lexical items from a variety of languages during its long history and expansive domination of territories. There were some of the key languages that influenced and were influenced by Ottoman Turkish.

Ottoman conquest of the Balkans paved the way for the adoption of many loanwords from Turkish in the languages of the region, such as Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Croatian, Romanian, and Serbian. In this regard, Ana Banana claimed that Ottoman Turkish words bloated the Serbian language: “We have about 8 000 Turkish words in the Serbian language. Some of them are used daily, and some are hardly ever used since the objects or verbs they used to signify are obsolete or nonexistent” (<https://www.quora.com/profile/Ana-Banana-59>). Similarly, as Lara Novakov S. stated that “in the case of Serbian, it’s enough to say that around 8,000 words entered Serbian through Ottoman Turkish (many being Persian and Arabic, as well as Turkish) that are used daily by those who speak the language” (<https://www.quora.com/Did-the-Ottoman-Empire-influence-the-languages-of-the-countries-that-it-conquered>). The use of the Ottoman Turkish script is said to have influenced the development of writing systems in some Balkan languages.

1. The Ottoman Turkish

Actually, the term “Ottoman Turkish” is used to describe a historical stage of the Turkish language from 1299 to 1928. The Ottoman Turkish was a fusion of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish vocabulary, acting in the structure of Turkish syntax. It had Arabic and Persian lexis in terms of word formation. One-third of the Ottoman Turkish was Anatolian Turkish. Ottoman Turkish was the writing tool of the Ottoman Empire on paper by means of Arabic characters. It contained more loanwords from Arabic and Persian than modern Turkish. The Ottoman Turkish, being the Court Turkish (Lisan-ı Osmanî, or Lisan-ı Divanî), was the elevated language that the Ottoman royalty and the courtiers used. It borrowed very heavily from Persian and Arabic through a backbone of Turkish. Ottoman Turkish was virtually a combination of Arabic and Farsi in the structure of Turkish grammar. Therefore, it was essentially a synthetic language that integrated many borrowed words, fundamentally from Persian and Arabic. It is impossible to understand without having specifically studied Divan Turkish, even for native Turkish speakers. The use of this language was limited to literature, poetry, and official correspondence between courtiers and nobles.

The mastery of Ottoman Turkish required a tri-lingual dictionary in many cases. It is for this reason that the Ottoman Turkish is said to have a multilingual basis. During the Ottoman Empire times, Ottoman Turkish was so influenced by Arabic, both in script and in the number of loaned words from Arabic and Persian. There were also lots of loan words from French, English, and German, making their way into the Ottoman vocabulary. It is said that many native Arabic speakers could understand Ottoman Turkish better than Modern Turkish in Ottoman times. Even today, Arabic and Persian words have the biggest share of loaned words in modern Turkish. Local dialects were not much influenced by the Ottoman language.

As opposed to the Ottoman Turkish, there was Common Turkish (Halk Türkçesi), which was the language that commoners, merchants, peasants, and everyone else not from the court spoke. This language borrowed very little from Persian and Arabic and thus remained as a pure form of Turkish until the Empire approached its final decades. This is the ancestor of modern Turkish and is almost completely intelligible to speakers of modern Turkish. The Ottoman elite regarded people who only spoke common Turkish with disdain, and the use of this language in the upper echelons of the Ottoman royalty, particularly in official settings, was considered rude and vulgar.

2. The Key Languages Influencing the Ottoman Turkish

The fact that the Quran was in Arabic has made a great impact on the Ottoman Turkish. Therefore, the most important and key language that influenced Ottoman Turkish was the **Arabic language**. As the language of Islam, Arabic had a significant impact on Ottoman Turkish. Many religious, cultural, and administrative terms were borrowed from Arabic into Ottoman Turkish. Due to the close ties of the Ottoman Empire with the Arab world, the integration of thousands of Arabic vocabulary easily took place.

Turks were living as nomadic clans; hence, they didn't develop their language very much. Mostly Persian scholars and Islamic missionaries came to Turkey to teach Islam to shamanistic Turkish tribes or other native Anatolian people. The poet Mevlana (1207-1273 A.D.) was one of them because all his poems have been written in Persian. Thus, it is a fact that Turks learned Islam from Persians first. Turks learned many of the religious terms from Persians with their Persianized forms. Also, the Ottoman Empire had close political and cultural relationships with Persia since the Great Seljukian Empire (spanning the time period 1037-1194 A.D.) and the Anatolian Seljukian Empire (1077-1308 A.D.). Great Seljukian Empire and the Anatolian Seljukian Empires were extensively influenced by Persian and Arabic languages, paving the way to the establishment of Ottoman Turkish. The Ottoman Empire ruled much of the Middle East from 1517 to 1917, including “South Syria”, later called the British Mandate of Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Gaza, and Judea and Samaria/West Bank. As a result, Ottoman Turkish incorporated a substantial number of Arabic loanwords within the impact of the Islamic religion, and especially Persian loanwords in the realms of poetry, literature, Court and Palace culture. Conversely, a number of Turkish words remain in Arabic, Persian, and Hebrew.

A secondarily important and key language that influenced Ottoman Turkish was the Greek language. After the takeover of Constantinople in 1453, the Ottoman Empire's control over the Byzantine (Greek) territories paved the way for the integration of Greek vocabulary into Ottoman Turkish. For example, the terms and words related to maritime, commerce, trade, and administration were often borrowed from Greek. Moreover, the Ottoman Empire's expansion into the Balkans brought it into contact with various Slavic languages, such as Bulgarian, Bosnian, Serbian, Croatian, and others. Hence, loanwords from these Slavic languages found their way into Ottoman Turkish, particularly in the areas of social life, military terminology, and everyday life.

Conversely, due to 400 years of cooperative living together, the Greek language absorbed a significant number of Turkish loanwords, especially in areas such as cuisine, clothing, and daily life. The Turkish language also influenced the development of certain Greek dialects, particularly in regions that were under prolonged Ottoman rule. One of these dialects was the Greek dialect spoken by Greeks in Cyprus.

A tertiary key language that influenced Ottoman Turkish was the Armenian language. In 1064, Armenia was conquered by Alp-Arslan, a Seljuk. During the 15th century, Armenia was annexed to the Ottoman Empire. The Armenian language spoken in the Ottoman lands and Anatolia had been recognized officially since Ottoman times. The largest Armenian community in the world lived in Istanbul and had civil-ecclesiastical authority. Armenians had the right to use their language in elementary schools, high schools, in the media, and in religious affairs, etc. The presence of a significant Armenian population within the Ottoman Empire quickened the incorporation of Armenian words into the Ottoman language, especially in the context of crafts, trades, food, and local customs.

3. The European Languages Influenced by Ottoman Turkish

Many of the Hungarian people consider themselves late descendants of Attila the Hun, of the Hun-Turkic origin. Therefore, the Hungarian language is generally considered as a kin of the Turkic languages. Since there was a substantial connection between the Ottoman and Hungarian languages, many Ottoman words entered the Hungarian language very easily after the subjugation of Hungary by Suleiman the Magnificent in 1521. In 1541, Romania was taken by the Ottomans. After Hungary and Romania came under Ottoman suzerainty, they remained fully autonomous until the 18th century, having some internal independence. Hungarian and Romanian languages incorporated numerous Turkish loanwords, particularly in areas related to administration, the military, and everyday life. The Ottoman presence also influenced the grammar and phonology of these languages to some extent.

As the Ottoman Turkish language itself was a Turkic language, it also borrowed from other Turkic languages, such as Chagatai, Azerbaijani, and various Central Asian Turkic dialects. Ottoman Turkish is the written language that originated and evolved in the Ottoman domains from the early 14th through the early 20th centuries. The Ottoman Turkish was composed of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, and thus became a unique blend of various linguistic influences. Ottoman Turkish was largely unintelligible both to the less-educated lower-class and rural Turks. The extensive linguistic borrowing and exchange within the multilingual Ottoman Empire lands contributed to the richness and diversity of the Ottoman Turkish language.



Figure 1. *The Ottoman Colonial Empire*

(Adapted from <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ottoman-Empire>)

Once again, Ottomans conquered and governed over large parts of Southeast Europe, as well as present-day Greece, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, as well as Hungary and Romania. The territories of these countries were not incorporated into the Ottoman Empire by means of invasion, but they were administered as Principalities in vassalage for almost 400 years. The deal of Vassalage was taken willingly by the local elites of those principalities. Constantinople, which is modern-day Istanbul today, served as the empire's capital and a key center of trade and culture. Additionally, it also stretched its control over much of the Middle East, including Syria, Palestine, Iraq, and parts of Arabia. In North Africa, Ottoman territories included Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya.

"Turkish is a recognized regional minority language in North Macedonia, Kosovo, Romania, and Iraq. It has been in use by millions of immigrants in Western Europe since the migration of workers from Turkey started in the 1960s. Though the spoken varieties vary, almost all migrants have retained Turkish as their first language" (Johanson, 2021, p. 98).

In 1595, during its highest success, the Ottoman Empire encompassed the areas of Türkiye, Egypt, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Macedonia, Hungary, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, some parts of the Arabian Peninsula, and North Africa. Ottoman Empire seized a maximum area of 19.9 million square kilometers in 1595 on three continents. Ottoman Empire was a superpower in the 16th century, and at that time, the Ottomans were still expanding their empire rapidly, especially towards Europe. Besides Turkish and Ottoman Turkish, the empire's important languages comprised Arabic, Persian, Greek, Bosnian, Armenian, Albanian, Kurdish, Bulgarian, Serbian, etc. As it is seen, the linguistic scene was very rich indeed (Fortna, 2023). The language of the court and government of the Ottoman Empire was Ottoman Turkish.

"The Ottomans had three influential languages, known as "Alsina-i Thalātha" (The Three Languages), that were common to Ottoman readers: Ottoman Turkish, Arabic and Persian. Persian was initially a literary and high-court language used by the educated in the Ottoman Empire before being displaced by Ottoman Turkish; and Arabic, which was the legal and religious language of the empire, was also spoken regionally, mainly in Arabia, North Africa, Mesopotamia and the Levant" (Strauss, 2003, p. 39; Saydam, 2009, p. 38-76).

Needless to say, the official language of the Ottomans was Ottoman Turkish. However, minorities were allowed to use their languages. In the 19th century, minorities were mainly Greek, Bulgarian, and Serbian in Europe. Some minority groups wrote Turkish using Greek, Armenian, or Hebrew alphabets. The non-Muslims, who represented 40% of the population of Istanbul, were principally Christian: Greek Orthodox citizens and Armenians, including a very small number of Catholics. The minorities of the Ottoman Empire were free to use their own languages and dialects amongst themselves.

However, *"if they needed to communicate with the government they had to use Ottoman Turkish. "Some ordinary people had to hire special "request-writers" (arzuhalcis) to be able to communicate with the government"* (Karpas, 2002, p. 266).

In villages where two or more populations lived together, the inhabitants would often speak each other's languages. In cosmopolitan cities, people often spoke their daily languages, and many non-ethnic Turks spoke Turkish as a second language. *"Educated Ottoman Turks spoke Arabic and Persian, as these were the main non-Turkish languages in the pre-Tanzimat era"* (Saydam, 2009, p. 39-76; Küçükoğlu, 2013).

"Turkish was spoken by the majority of the people in Anatolia and by the majority of Muslims of the Balkans except in Albania, Bosnia and various Aegean Sea islands; Persian was initially a literary and high-court language used by the educated in the Ottoman Empire before being displaced by Ottoman Turkish" (Saydam, 2009, p. 38).

The Ottoman Empire was getting to be weakened by and by in the 18th and 19th centuries, due to a combination of internal strife, external pressure from European powers, and socioeconomic challenges. The territories of the Ottoman Empire gradually fragmented through a series of wars, revolts, and nationalist movements. By the 19th century, many of its territories in North Africa, Europe, and West Asia were gone. Ottoman Empire was divided up after the end of World War

l by the occupying Allied powers. What was left of the empire became the Republic of Turkey in 1923. This was the time after which the Ottoman Empire no longer existed.

4. The Influence of Ottoman Language over the Conquered Countries and Their Languages

Ottoman Language had an extraordinary lexical impact on Western South Slavic languages such as Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, Serbian, and Torlakian. Furthermore, it had its lexical sway on eastern South Slavic languages such as Bulgarian, Gorani (spoken in the border region between Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia), Macedonian, Pomak (Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, living predominantly within the Balkans, specifically within the Rhodope Mountains), and so on. Also, the Ottoman language had a great impact on Greek, Armenian, and Albanian.

Ottoman Turkish had a moderate effect on a Romanian dialect called Vlachian, which is a term most commonly referring to Aromanian, but it can also denote Megleno-Romanian or archaic Romanian dialects spoken in Serbia, as well as such languages as Hungarian and Arabic. "At the linguistic level, even though the young generations of Romania do not fully notice, the number of words of Turkish origin in the basic vocabulary of the Romanian language, depending on the region, is between 2000 or more, especially in the lexicon used in gastronomy, clothing, agriculture, or trade" (<https://www.researchgate.net/publica>).

However, in all of the countries, it had a major impact, sometimes up to a third of the spoken lexicon; large-scale linguistic cleansing campaigns were established. They still continue to this day. As a result of century-long deturkification efforts, the languages have much fewer Ottoman words now, sometimes only a trace in the official written language. But as the replacements are often invented words or borrowings, this also has an impact.

One of the most notable impacts of the Ottoman Empire in terms of language use was that Ottoman Turkish was adopted as an administrative and literary language in many of the regions it controlled. Ottoman Turkish became the official language of the Ottoman administration and military, and it exerted a strong influence on the languages of the conquered territories. Many loanwords from Turkish entered the vocabularies of languages spoken in the domains of the Ottoman Empire.

5. Multilingual Character of the Ottoman Empire

Moreover, the Ottoman Empire's multilingual character also contributed to the expansion of linguistic influences in various regions. As different linguistic groups intermingled within the empire, there were exchanges of vocabulary, grammar, and linguistic structures. This led to a process of linguistic convergence and borrowing among the languages spoken in the Ottoman territories. Most Ottoman words were in areas of daily life and the house, business, and especially in moods and feelings, which used to be unrivalled in any language.

The Ottoman Empire had a massive territorial reach in three continents, encompassing regions across the Middle East, North Africa, the Balkans, and parts of Eastern Europe. As mentioned before, the Ottoman Empire was multi-ethnic, not a nation-state. While Ottomans impacted the linguistic landscape of these regions, they did not try to create entirely new languages in the same sense as constructed languages or creole languages. However, Ottoman Turkish itself played a domineering role as a language of administration, literature, and culture across the empire. Ottoman Turkish was a variety of Turkish that was heavily influenced by Arabic and Persian due to the cultural and political connections with the Arabic-speaking Islamic world and the Persian-speaking regions of Central Asia and Iran.

5.1. Ottoman Empire and its contribution to the emergence of regional dialects

Furthermore, it is a fact that the influence of the Ottoman Empire contributed to the development of regional dialects and linguistic features in areas under its control. Here are some examples:

1. **Bosnian, Turkish, and Albanian influences:** Ottoman Turkish influenced the development of vocabulary and grammar in languages spoken in regions under Ottoman rule, such as Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian. These languages absorbed loanwords and linguistic structures from Ottoman Turkish, which functioned as a superstrate over them, primarily through the introduction of a substantial layer of vocabulary known as Turkisms (Yücel, 2022). This linguistic exchange bridged the Ottoman rule over the Balkan languages. It also impacted the birth of combined grammatical structures in various Balkan languages, blending Ottoman Turkish elements into local phonetic and grammatical systems.

2. **Arabic and Persian influence:** Ottoman administration and cultural exchange also assisted the borrowing of vocabulary and linguistic features from Arabic and Persian into various languages spoken within the empire, including Arabic dialects and others. In poetry, the language was highly Persianized; meanwhile, the science, administrative, and legal language was more Arabized. This commingling process was triggered by Ottoman imperial bureaucracy and Islamic religion along with Islamic traditions, and thus created a cultured register that enriched vocabulary, grammar, and script across the empire for over six centuries, from 1299 to 1923.
3. **The Aleppo Arabic,** otherwise known as Aleppine Arabic or the “Halabi” dialect, was an urban Arabic variety spoken predominantly in the city of Aleppo. Aleppo Arabic belongs to the Levantine dialect group. Aleppo was a major administrative center of the Ottoman Empire (known as the Vilayet of Aleppo) that served as a significant spot where Arabic and Ottoman Turkish languages and cultures intersected for centuries. While the Syrian Arabic was the primary language of the local population, Ottoman Turkish, called superstrate, was the language of the ruling elite and official administration that engrained lasting imprints on the Syrian dialect.



Figure 2. *The Map of Aleppo Arabic*

(Adapted from <https://www.britannica.com/place/Aleppo>)

In those years, Turkish came in the third order of most widely used languages in Syria, a province of the Ottoman Empire, because various Turkish dialects were spoken by the Turkmen/Turkoman minority. Turks mostly lived in the eastern villages of the Euphrates and along the Syrian-Turkish border.

The Turkish dialect of the Turkmen/Turkoman minority is said to have influenced the Aleppine Arabic dialect, “which tends to have Turkish loanwords much more than most dialects in Syria and the region, and that can be explained by the geographical closeness to Turkey and the historical importance of the city being one of the largest cities inside the Ottoman empire as it was the center of Aleppo Vilayet in 1866, and the Sanjaq before the 19th century” (<https://www.quora.com/Did-the-Ottoman-Empire-influence-the-languages-of-the-countries-that-it-conquered>).

5.2. Cypriot Turkish dialect

Cypriot Turkish dialect spoken in Cyprus, “consisting of a blend of Ottoman Turkish and the Yörük dialect of the “Oğuz Branch” (Kabataş, 2007, p.19). It is spoken in the Taurus Mountains of southern Turkey. Started as a migratory dialect, it was brought to Cyprus around the 16th century, when the island was conquered by the Ottoman Empire. It “eventually became a part of it in 1571” (Saracoğlu, 1992, p. 20). So, the ancestors of Cypriot Turks were mainland Turks. “Cyprus is a convergence area, in which Cypriot Turkish, of Anatolian origin, has interacted with Greek since the sixteenth century” (Johanson, 2021, p. 182).

About 1.400 B.C., Greek settlers had colonized the island. Because of living under Greek and British rule, the Cyprus Turkish Dialect has been influenced by them. It has absorbed influences from Greek because it has been influenced by the Greek language due to the long history of Greek and Turkish communities coexisting in Cyprus. Today, Cypriot Turkish spoken in the northern half of Cyprus is mutually intelligible with Standard Turkish. “Cypriot Turkish is currently strongly influenced by standard Turkish through mass media, educational institutions, and new immigrants” (Johanson, 2021, p. 98).

5.3. Lingua Franca

In addition to specific linguistic influences, the diverse population of the Ottoman Empire, comprised of Albanian, Arabic, Armenian, Bosnian, Georgian, Greek, Jewish, Persian, etc.) and administrative structures necessitated the use of a lingua franca for communication. Ottoman Turkish served as this lingua franca across the empire, easing communication among speakers of different native languages.

In Albania, two main spoken dialects of Albanian existed, southern Tosk and northern Gheg, respectively. Actually, these two dialects were mutually intelligible. Ottoman Turkish triggered the birth of a dialect called Arbëresh (pronounced [arbə'ɾɛʃ]), which is a medieval variety of Tosk language spoken in southern Albania. Arbëresh is said to be a unique linguistic phenomenon because it is said to be basically a time capsule of 15th-century Albanian.

During the 1400s, the **Ottoman Empire** expanded into the Balkans and began conquering Albanian territories. After the Ottoman expansion, Albanians who stayed in the Balkans adopted many **Turkish**, Persian, and Arabic loanwords during Ottoman rule. The **Ottoman conquest** pushed Albanians to leave. Once the Ottomans consolidated control, many people feared due to created instability and warfare. Therefore, many Albanians fled the Balkans to Italy in the 1400s-1500s primarily because of Ottoman expansion, which caused social and political chaos. Secondly, Albanian fighters had previously helped Italian rulers in conflicts. The Kingdom of Naples needed soldiers and settlers after wars and population decline. Albanian fighters received an invitation from the Italian Rulers. If they settled there, they were granted land, tax privileges, and some autonomy. Additionally, many fighters were Christian (Catholic or Byzantine-rite) and wanted to maintain their traditions.

In Southern Italy, Albanian communities, particularly in Sicily and Calabria, have preserved their Albanian language and culture for centuries. *Arbëresh* keeps many features of medieval Albanian from the time before the Ottoman invasion of Albania in the 15th century. So, Ottoman expansion triggered the migration that preserved the dialect. Ottoman rule helped create the conditions for the Arbëresh dialect to exist, but it did not linguistically form the dialect. But it cannot be denied that "Adoption and assimilation of Turkish loanwords enlarged the Albanian lexicon" (Bilibashi & Bayraktar, 2022, p. 31).

Consequently, Arbëresh is often considered one of the Ottoman-influenced Albanian varieties because its speakers left the Balkans before Ottoman Turkish had its full linguistic impact on Albanian. In the Arbëresh dialect, "Turkish borrowings began in the 14th century and increased after Ottoman conquest" (Brame & Pajo, 2019, p. 103).



Figure 3. *The Territory of the Arbëresh Dialect in Italy*

(Adapted from <https://www.quora.com/What-are-some-interesting-facts-about-the-Arbereshe-language-compared-with-the-Albanian-language>)

5.4. Ottoman conquest on Albania: Revisited

The invasion of the Balkans by the Ottoman Turks in the 15th century became the cause of large waves of emigration from the Balkans to southern Italy. In 1448, the King of Naples in Italy asked the Albanian nobles to bring their Albanian mercenaries (Nasse, 1964) to Italy. There was a constant flow of ethnic Albanians to fight for Italy in the 16th century. These mercenaries became Albanians of Italy or Italo-Albanians. They established self-contained communities, which enabled their distinct language and culture to grow in Italy.

It must be noted that the creation of the Arbëresh dialect is not a direct result of Italian colonialism. In fact, Arbëresh dialect is a product of historical migration patterns and cultural interactions between Albania and Italy. Arbëresh is something like a window on what the Albanian language looked like 4-5 centuries ago. Naturally, Arbëresh has many loan

words from Italian, and a few from Ottoman Turkish and Greek. These loanwords are easy to identify, also revealing which words were made and changed within Albanian after the migration of Arbëresh in Italy

5.5. The creation of pidgins and creoles by the Ottoman Empire's language

The Ottoman Empire's multilingual and multi-ethnic environment did contribute to the creation of various pidgins, creoles, and dialects. Here are some notable examples:

1. **Ottoman Turkish pidgin in the Balkans:** In areas where Ottoman Turkish interacted with Balkan languages, simplified forms of Turkish emerged that were used for trade and administrative purposes. These pidgins often included elements of Balkan languages and Turkish, though they were not as fully developed or standardized as some other pidgins.
2. **Armenian Turkish creole:** In some regions with significant Armenian populations, a form of Turkish mixed with Armenian elements developed, particularly in informal settings and among communities.
3. **The Aleppine Arabic creole:** The Ottomans did influence Aleppine Arabic, as they did with many other Arabic dialects in regions under their control. Aleppo, a major city in northern Syria, was part of the Ottoman Empire from 1516 until the empire's dissolution after World War I. During this period, Turkish linguistic and cultural elements made their way into the local Arabic dialect. Ottoman Turkish, with its extensive vocabulary and administrative terminology, contributed certain words and expressions to Aleppine Arabic. These influences can be seen in various domains, such as food, administration, and daily life. For example, terms related to governance, the military, and certain cultural practices might show Ottoman Turkish roots. However, the impact on Aleppine Arabic is relatively modest compared to the influence seen in other aspects of Ottoman culture, such as architecture and culinary practices. The core structure and grammar of the Aleppine dialect remained primarily influenced by classical Arabic and local developments.
4. **Sabir creole:** Sabir, also called the Mediterranean Lingua Franca, was a pidgin language that developed around the Mediterranean Sea between roughly the 11th and 19th centuries. It evolved naturally from constant trade, travel, and contact between speakers of many languages. People who used it included crusades, merchants, sailors, diplomats, slaves and captives, and pirates/privateers. Because all these groups spoke different languages, they needed a simple shared way to communicate. Its vocabulary came mostly from Genoese and Venetian dialects, Spanish, Catalan, Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, and Greek. Sabir declined during the 19th century, mainly because European colonial powers imposed their own languages. Also, standard languages like the French language became dominant in North Africa. By the late 1800s, Sabir had mostly disappeared.

Several linguists and historians who work on Mediterranean contact languages clearly state that Sabir, the Mediterranean Lingua Franca, included lexical elements from Ottoman Turkish, although the language itself was primarily Romance-based. Cifoletti notes that Ottoman Turkish vocabulary entered Sabir, especially through Ottoman maritime presence in North Africa: "From a structural point of view, Turkish is of lesser importance for this Romance-based Mediterranean Lingua Franca, but it played a prominent role as a mediator ... for the distribution of vocabulary, especially in the nautical field, due to the presence of Turkish sailors in North Africa during the 16th century." (Cifoletti, 2011, p. 338). Another historical work describing everyday language in Ottoman North Africa also mentions Turkish among the languages that contributed to Sabir: "The street lingua franca called 'Franco' or 'Sabir' ... combined Arabic, Spanish, Turkish, Italian, and Provençal." (Spencer, 1976, p. 70). It must be noted that Ottoman Turkish influence was limited but real, particularly in nautical and maritime vocabulary, due to Ottoman sailors and corsairs in North Africa during the 16th century.

5.6. Creation of dialects by the impact of Ottoman Empire

The empire's complex linguistic environment led to significant interaction between languages, resulting in a rich tapestry of dialects and mixed languages reflecting the empire's diverse cultural and ethnic composition. Lewis (1999) explained that Ottoman Turkish contained extensive Arabic and Persian vocabulary and stylistic elements, but its grammar remained Turkic, so it was not a mixed or creole language. Similarly, Dankoff (2008) describes Ottoman Turkish as the Ottoman written standard of Turkish, shaped by Persian literary style and Arabic vocabulary, but structurally Turkic. Again, Johanson & Csátó (1998) classified Ottoman Turkish within the Oghuz branch of Turkic languages, emphasizing continuity with earlier Turkish rather than creolization. Conversely, Gökalp (1929), Karaosmanoğlu (1968), Emre (1931), Atay (1969), and Develi (2006) claimed that Ottoman Turkish was a creole composed of Arabic, Persian, and Anatolian Turkish. Buran (2006, p. 26) states that "classical Ottoman, the language of literature, is a real creole regarding its lexicon and grammatical structures."

1. **Istanbul Turkish (Istanbul Rumeli Turkish):** The dialect of Turkish spoken in Istanbul and surrounding areas evolved significantly over time. This dialect was influenced by contact with various languages spoken by the city's diverse population, including Greek, Armenian, and other Balkan languages. Istanbul Rumeli Turkish dialect was exposed in a TV series called "Elveda Rumeli". "Farewell Rumelia" (Elveda Rumeli) is a Turkish drama and historical television series that took place in Macedonia in the Balkans between 1896-1898 and 1907, and was broadcast on ATV on September 20, 2007.
2. **Ottoman Greek dialects:** In the Ottoman Empire, Greek-speaking communities in different regions developed their own local dialects influenced by Turkish, especially in terms of vocabulary and pronunciation.
3. **Judeo-Spanish (Ladino):** This language, spoken by Sephardic Jews, is a Spanish-based creole that absorbed many Turkish and Balkan elements due to the Jewish diaspora's interactions with local languages.
4. **Albanian dialects:** The Albanian language in the Ottoman Empire saw influences from Turkish, Greek, and other neighboring languages, leading to some regional variations. In Italy, particularly in the regions of Calabria and Puglia, the Albanian dialect spoken is known as Arbëreshë, which was created by the impacts of the Ottoman language. This dialect is part of the Albanian language, specifically belonging to the Tosk branch, which is one of the two main branches of the Albanian language (the other being Gheg).
5. **The Turkish Cypriot dialect:** The history of the Cypriot Turkish dialect exhibits its beginnings with the Ottoman conquest in 1571. After this date, Turks from Anatolia at various periods moved or were expelled to the island. This dialect represents a variety of Turkish spoken primarily by Turkish Cypriots in Northern Cyprus. It has some distinct features compared to Standard Turkish due to historical, geographical, and sociolinguistic influences. In addition, the dialect includes words and expressions borrowed from Greek, reflecting the historical and cultural interactions with Greek Cypriots. There are also some unique terms and slang that have evolved within the community. Furthermore, due to historical and social interactions, the dialect can be influenced by other languages, including English and Italian, particularly in vocabulary related to modern life and technology. Overall, while the Turkish Cypriot dialect is mutually intelligible with Standard Turkish, these differences give it a unique flavor and identity within the broader Turkish-speaking world.

6. Conclusion

Actually, the term "Ottoman Turkish" is used to describe a single historical stage of the Turkish language from 1299 to 1928, especially during the imperial period. In all stages of Ottoman Turkish, the fact that the Quran was in Arabic has made a great impact. The linguistic period from 1299 to 1453 could be regarded as "Middle Ottoman Turkish," while 1453-1826 is termed "Classical Ottoman Turkish in which some Arabic and Persian words with polysemic connotation, along with grammar rules and Persian grammatical particles, were extensively used in Ottoman Turkish to link words together.

From 1826, with the Tanzimat Dönemi (Reorganization Period) onwards, it could be considered as Modern Ottoman Turkish, regardless of the alphabet change in 1928. During these periods, Ottoman Turkish was profoundly influenced by Arabic and Persian, Greek, and Armenian, and it still functioned through agglutination, just like modern Turkish did. The classical Ottoman Turkish was also burdened by French, Italian, and English lexical items. So, Ottoman Turkish was, in any case, more of a literary and administrative language rather than the spoken language of the masses.

It is true to say that the Ottoman Empire had some significant lexical influences on the languages of the countries that it conquered. Ottoman rule in the Balkans was long, lasting from the 14th century up until the early 20th century in some of the Balkan territories. Yet the Ottoman rule did not impose destructive language-related and cultural issues on the Balkan nations, who were neither pidgin nor creole people, speaking their native languages plus Ottoman Turkish. In fact, the Ottoman Empire didn't create entirely new languages, yet its linguistic heritage is evident in the vocabulary, grammar, and cultural influences found in the languages spoken within its formerly occupied countries.

"Apart from loanwords that do have equivalents in their respective Balkan languages, the Ottoman rule did not affect the local languages at all. All of the languages remained unchanged and followed their normal pattern of development" (<https://www.quora.com/Did-the-Ottoman-Empire-influence-the-languages-of-the-countries-that-it-conquered>)

Overall, contrary to popular belief, the Ottoman Empire did not even wholeheartedly try to convert the population of Balkan people to Islam. No Balkan native was forced to change their identity. No one was forced to change their religion or their language. Therefore, all Balkan nations under the flag of the Ottoman Empire were intact and autochthonous even after 500 years. Unfortunately, this intactness facilitated the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. In brief, the Ottoman Empire had an intense lexical impact on the languages of the countries it conquered, leading to linguistic borrowings, exchanges, and influences that are still visible in the languages spoken in these regions today.

Basic Ottoman Turkish vocabulary still lives in Serbian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Romanian, and Hungarian languages. Especially Bosnian Muslims, due to the common religion, felt very close to Turkish loans and accepted them as an identity marker of being Bošnjak/Bosnian Muslim. It cannot be denied that all Balkan languages have borrowed substantial Ottoman Turkish vocabulary because Ottoman Turkish was a coherent linguistic entity alongside the Balkan languages. All in all, the Ottoman language happened to be the sprachbound in the Balkan area till the first decade of the 20th century. But many Balkan countries have attempted to purify the Turkish loans in their languages, yet against all odds, those Balkan languages still have pretty much Turkish loans, particularly in their colloquial speech.

All in all, the Ottoman Empire was highly multilingual; however, it was imperial, but not colonial. Had the Ottoman Empire been colonial, it would not have lost the two Balkan Wars. In fact, the Balkan Wars came in a series of two conflicts that took place in the Balkan states in 1912 and 1913. In the first Balkan War, the four unfaithful Balkan states, namely Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bulgaria, declared war upon the Ottoman Empire and defeated it because the peoples of these unfaithful countries did not support the Ottoman rule, even though they received almost no impositions from the Ottomans, including the fact that the Balkan Christian population was not even forced to change their religion to the Islamic religion.

It must be noted that the Ottomans did not force the Balkan people to change their mother tongues and use the Ottoman language. This Ottoman defeat triggered the process of stripping the Ottomans of their European provinces, and approximately 4 to 5 million Ottoman Turks were massacred. Only Eastern Thrace was left under Ottoman control. In addition, in the Second World War in 1913, the Ottomans fought against the former four original fighters of the first war, and a new fighter called Bulgaria. Ottomans also faced an attack from Romania from the north. Thus, the Ottoman Empire lost the bulk of its earlier territories along with its millions of massacred Ottoman Turkish Population in the Balkan region.

Up until 1900, the vast territories of the Ottoman Empire spanned Europe, Asia, and Africa across three continents, incorporating a wide array of ethnic and linguistic groups. To effectively govern such a diverse population, the Ottoman administration had to be multilingual. Different regions used their own languages for local administration, legal documents, and education. Estimating the exact number of languages spoken in the Ottoman Empire is challenging due to the empire's vast and diverse nature. However, it is generally acknowledged that hundreds of languages and dialects were used across its extensive territories.

The Ottoman Empire accommodated a multitude of religious and ethnic communities, each with its own language. The "millet" (nation) system allowed religious communities (millets) to govern themselves in matters like education, family law, and religious practice in their own languages. This system facilitated the preservation and use of languages like Arabic, Macedonian, Armenian, Hebrew, and so on among their respective communities. Furthermore, the empire was a crossroads of various cultures and languages due to trade, diplomacy, and migration. This exchange encouraged multilingualism among the educated and elite classes who often needed to communicate across different linguistic groups. Consequently, the multilingual nature of the Ottoman Empire, being mainly imperial but not colonial, was a reflection of its complex, multi-ethnic makeup and the practical needs of governing a diverse and widespread territory.

All in all, Ottoman Turkish, as the administrative and lingua franca of the empire for centuries, contributed thousands of Turkish-origin words called Turkisms (Yücel, 2022) into Balkan languages such as Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian, and South Slavic varieties. These loanwords occurred in domains like administration, military, law, trade, urban life, food, nursery terms, and everyday vocabulary because Ottoman social, political, and economic life introduced many new concepts for which local languages borrowed terms, as Ottoman Turkish occupied a superstrate position in these Balkan countries. Additionally, Ottoman Turkish did influence existing dialects, for example, Turkish-influenced Turkish dialects called Rumelian Turkish dialect in the Balkans, and these are considered dialectal variations within Ottoman Turkish.

Disclosure of Conflict

The author(s) declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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