ABSTRACT

It is commonly believed that the great reforms in the Tanzimat era (1839-76) played a significant role in the development of translation activities in Ottoman Empire, which showed an increase through the establishment of Terövne Odalet (Translation Chambers). However, it is very possible to come across the Turkish translations of Aesop’s Fables written before this period on the dusty shelf. Based on the relevant sources collected from the extensive archives of various libraries, the purpose of this project was to ascertain the significance of these old translations in the Ottoman Empire by analyzing their place in the life of the orientalists and dragomans, who had an important role in the international relations of the Empire. Accordingly, the collected data on the intellectual and educational backgrounds of these people show that these translations were among the primary sources used to improve their language skills in Ottoman Turkish, which could be found in the shelves of École des Enfants de langue (Hüzlü, 1995, p. 95).

Based on this information, the project aimed to evaluate and examine these literary works within the framework of current language learning theories and methods. The use of the bilingual (parallel) texts to introduce these fables in Ottoman Turkish is reminiscent of the “Grammar-Translation Method”, which was used to learn the classical languages in the same period. Furthermore, it seems that these works consist of bilingual word-to-word dictionaries and grammatical explanations of the sentence structures in the translation of Aesop’s fables, which makes the argument of the project stronger and plausible. Thus, the project gives us a valuable clue about how to use the pedagogical method of translation more effectively and Aesop’s fables in today’s language classrooms.

Finally, we looked into the sources of these fables by reading and matching them to those found in English sources, and from there matching them with the Perry and Chambry indexes most importantly, along with all the other sources of the fables which are currently known. This will help us, and researchers to come, designate these fables, perhaps looking into the ways in which they came to be found in the Ottoman Empire, and perhaps look into the translation methods and the discourse.

OBJECTIVES

- To find out the purpose and establish the significance of Turkish translations of Aesop’s fables, especially in the context of the life of the orientalists and dragomans.
- To figure out the sources of the newly discovered translations, where they come from and whether they were fabricated by the translators, and also analyze the ways in which they did their translations.
- To draw a link between modern learning theories and the use of these translations as a language learning method.
- Ultimately, to make these materials accessible to the general public and academicians, contributing to the pool of knowledge and stimulating further research.

AESOP’S FABLES IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Grammar-Translation Method, also known as the Prussian Method, is one of the traditional approaches to foreign language teaching, which was originally used to teach classical languages in the belief that they would increase intellectual and mental capacity (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 2). In the later years, as the curriculum of bilingual and multilingual schools in Europe began to include modern languages, they were also taught by using the principles of the same method such as bilingual dictionaries and deductive grammar teaching. However, the collected data on the early manuscripts of Turkish translations of Aesop’s fables in Ottoman Empire show that orientalists and dragomans benefited from the major characteristics of the Grammar-Translation Method in order to learn and read Ottoman Turkish. Since this method primarily puts emphasis on the written expression rather than oral communication, it seems appropriate to their needs and purposes, which were to help to maintain the international relations between Ottoman Empire and other countries through translations.

INDEXES FOR DIFFERENT SOURCES

As per one of our project objectives, we also read the various fables found in the newly discovered manuscripts, dating back to the very beginning of the 17th century, then traced them back to the major indexes and sources we could find. Some of the most important ones are the Perry and Chambry indexes, along with Gibbs’ modern translations into English. Briefly, Perry was a 20th-century professor who published an edition of all Aesop fables known to him at the time, with the fables in the order of their language (Greek then Latin), date, source, and the alphabet (Gibbs, 2008, p. xxi) Chambry likewise was a 20th-century scholar who made a compilation of Aesop’s fables for the Bell’s Letters series (Gibbs, 2008, p. xxx), whose order of the fables is followed in many modern Turkish translations, and Gibbs is the most important Aesop scholar alive today. The other sources are Greek, Latin, and English, most of which date back to the antiquity, while some to the Medieval Ages and 17th to 18th century.

CONCLUSIONS

- Evaluating these tables within the framework of the current language learning theories has given us a clue about the purpose and significance of them in the school curriculum of the Ottoman Empire.
- Analyzing these translations has provided a set of guidelines about how to build an effective language learning classroom by using effectively the pedagogical method of translation.
- Indexing the newly discovered fables has helped us, and will help future researchers to come, fit them into the greater body of literature on Aesop’s tales.
- Publishing these tales and our findings would also be of interest to the general reading audience, as well as scholars.

REFERENCES


It is generally accepted that vocabulary items are taught in the form of isolated word lists by means of bilingual dictionaries. In the example above, we see an anonymous dictionary-type manuscript of Aesop’s fables in Ottoman Turkish, which has been found in the historical archives of Leiden University and written in 1703. At the beginning of the 18th century, a passionate orientalist, Johannes Heyman, used this work to develop his vocabulary skills in Ottoman Turkish through transcriptions and translations in Latin and Italian on the left or right pages by creating a bilingual glossary (Van den Bossert, 2017, p. 298).