

**Miha Pintarič**

UDK 811.163.6'373.45:811.512.161

Filozofska fakulteta Univerze v Ljubljani

miha.pintaric@ff.uni-lj.si

## ON TURCISMS IN SLOVENIAN

While the shared Turkish-Slovenian history has been a frequent object of scientific research, Turkish language and literature have never been seriously investigated at all in Slovenia (the honorable exceptions are recent studies by B. Jezernik, author and editor). The present article is therefore an unpretentious contribution to the linguistic awareness of Slovenian speakers and first-hand information providing topical case-to-case basics for non-Slovenians interested. A well-informed Slovenian reader, however, will be familiar with most of the bellow content and very likely capable of adding to it. This content namely brings up the Turkish words which Slovenian speakers adopted at different moments in history. It draws on two other languages for the sake of a clearer comparison, Serbian or Croatian on the one hand, English on the other. The former provided Slovenian with its micro-linguistic (and general) context in 20<sup>th</sup> century, the latter performs, with some difference, much the same or equivalent function today.

Turcisms in Slovenian can be divided, quite arbitrarily so, as follows: first, words denoting specifically Turkish phenomena and objects (these are perhaps the least interesting from a purely linguistic point of view); second, those that Slovenian has accepted although they have preserved a foreign and often »exotic« connotation; third, expressions that have entered the everyday speech and are widely used without even calling to mind anything that does not belong to the speaker's primary mental world.

In each of these word groups semantic distinctions can be made as appropriate since the meaning of turcisms in Slovenian regularly falls into the categories of either food or religion while the rest are rather individual cases than constitutive of semantic groups, the number of which surely is much larger in other South Slavic languages than in Slovenian (e. g. arms and other objects used for soldiering in Serbian; social functions, architectural elements in Bosnian).

It is clear that Slovenian, like most other languages, uses Turkish words for expressing Turkish reality, past or present. A »handjar« is not any »zakrivljeni meč« (*bent sword*), a »dervish« not a »duhovnik« (*priest*) and a »minaret« not at all a »zvonik« (*bell tower*). A »divan« is neither a »kavč« (*couch*) nor a reception room or the State Council (cf. Fr. »bureau« for »office«, by metonymy), nor a collection of poetry. (I remember indeed, though, that my relatives did call their couch »divan«; the word seems to have been preserved only in non-urban milieu, how and why, I do not know). Similarly »musliman«, »harem«, »beg«, »aga«, »kan«, »bajram«, »čibuk«, »horda«, »janičar«, »paša«, »mufti«, »otomana«, or even words

which one would sooner associate with Greek (like »buzuki« or »tzatziki«) or Bulgarian (»bulgur«) than with Turkish.

The expressions typical of the second group, mostly related to food, entered Slovenian in its Yugoslavian period (1918-41 or 1945-91). Surely the notorious »čevapčiči« (*pl.* in Slovenian, *sg.* in English) first come to mind, the word for which is derived from »kebab« although this dish looks nothing like the slices cut from a big chunk of meat rotating around a pole. »Baklava« has preserved its denomination, shape and, in the best of cases, its taste (only walnuts though, no pistaccio). The famous »burek«, probably the most popular »fast food« in Slovenia and in many other countries, is larger than the original and is oven-baked instead of deep-fried. »Ajvar«, also used in this context, is a well-known word which people, when asked, would classify as Serbian, but pushed a little bit more, they would say it is »probably Turkish«, while »kaviar«, derived from the same word form as »ajvar«, which is indeed of Persian origin, would never make anyone think of Turkish fish.

Who would, then, even remotely associate »joghurt« with a Turkish source? But even something as intrinsically Slovenian as »klobasa« (*sausage*) may have a Turkish etymology, quite inadmissibly for those guardians of the national linguistic heritage who intuitively associate »sausage« with »kranjska« (*Carniolan sausage*). This etymology has not been proved but is possible. Serbian and Croatian use words of Turkish origin for even more elementary alimentary items, like »pilić« (*chicken*) or »šećer« (*sugar*).

Many of the above words are present also in English, which does not apply to those that denote objects for everyday use. Thus Serbian and Croatian have »jastuk« (*pillow*), »sat« (*clock, hour*), »kat« (only Serbian), »kutija« (*box*), »kaciga« (*helmet*), »pamuk« (*cotton*). On the Balkans, the demarcation line separating the regions which have undergone an important Turkish linguistic influence from those that have not is believed to be indicated by the use of the Turkish word »jorgovan« (*lilac*), which, in Slovenian, is called »španski bezeg« (literally: *Spanish elder*). (source: prof. dr. Bojan Bujić, Magdalen College, Oxford).

The history of another word pointing to the same conclusion, namely that Slovenian was not exposed to direct Turkish linguistic influence, may be illuminating since it denotes one of the most widely consumed liquids apart from water, i. e. coffee. The Slovenian »kava« for coffee only goes back as far as the Yugoslavian period and is derived from »kafa«, the Serbian version (or its Croatian equivalent, »kava«) of the Turkish »kahve«. Before 1920's, as well as later, of course, but with progressively lesser frequency, another word was used, »kofè«, which comes from German, as indeed many other Turkish borrowings in Slovenian.

Most Turkish words used in Slovenian are international and have no semantic or any other unifying feature. Nevertheless, one will hardly realise that expressions like »angora«, »macramé«, »šakal«, »kozak«, »lakaj« or even a word as modern as »kiosk« come from Turkish, let alone the Slovenian name for China (»Kitajska«, from Turkish »Cathay«). To most native Slovenian speakers this may come as a surprise similar to that of an English speaker who learns that »gypsy« is in fact a Turkish word. The latter's surprise will nevertheless be of a different nature, for, indeed, English as an imperial language has swallowed words from

the four corners of the world, just as Turkish had done in its days, which did it no harm, on the contrary, it made the language richer and more appropriate for everyday use if not more resistant to the loss of its »Shakespearian« core. However, in the case of Turkey, the Republic very soon instituted a process of purification for the »protection« of the Turkish language.

The pocketfull of Turkish words in Slovenian confirms a historical, cultural, geographical and political position on the margins between the two worlds which have shaped the complex Slovenian identity. (Incidentally, the Slovenian word for pocket, »žep«, is of Turkish origin like in Serbian or in Croatian, i. e. the two languages that yielded it to Slovenian, while some northern Slovenian dialects have words of their own for it – the Carinthian »devžej«, for instance). With hardly any direct influence, Slovenian has got its share of turcisms from the two sources, European vz. international (mostly German or English) and Serbian vz. South Slavic.

Slovenia has never been an empire and Slovenians have never had an imperial mind. An imperial mind does not question its own identity, the consequences of which are surely complex and far from reducible to either positive or negative impacts no less for the »subject« than for the »object« (the »other«). Perhaps this is why there is in Slovenian a special word for »words of foreign origin« (»tujke«), which is not the case in English nor, probably, in Turkish. Any word can be and is in fact English, so are those of Turkish origin. Not so in Slovenian. When people were interviewed in the street if they knew of any Turkish word in Slovenian, a man answered: »Yok.« Unfortunately he was not being ironic.

## POVZETEK

### Turcizmi v slovenščini

Članek povzema najosnovnejše turcizme v slovenščini in ugotavlja razlike v jezikovni politiki in praksi med slovenščino in turščino.

**Ključne besede:** slovenščina, turcizmi, tujke

## ABSTRACT

### On Turcisms in Slovenian

This brief article takes the elementary stock of turcisms in Slovenian while stating one or two differences between Slovenian and in Turkish attitudes towards their respective languages.

**Key words:** Slovenian language, turcisms