

# The Role of Maps in Teaching Foreign Languages

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**Abstract**—What kind of relationship can political and geographical maps have in the teaching of a foreign language? How is it possible to teach languages to young people who normally have little contact with maps or awareness of the location of states on a world map?

What new methods can philology professors adopt when teaching a highly challenging language with striking differences to their mother tongue?

This study is focused on the new methods that can be applied by philology professors in order to teach languages in a much more interesting and interactive way, with a high level of student participation even when they have a very basic knowledge of the new language that they are seeking to learn.

**Index Terms**—Language, maps, new methods, students learn quickly.

## I. INTRODUCTION

During the classes of foreign languages such as English, Italian, Spanish or Turkish that I have taught in a range of different countries I have had the privilege of being able to observe students from a variety of origins and mother tongues, some of whom were bilingual or even trilingual. I have had access to a wide range of materials, text books and exercise books for the teaching of foreign languages, CDs for listening exercises, foreign films, etc. I have nevertheless seen the need for philology professors to offer something more original to the next generation of students instead of continuing to resort to these now highly familiar methods.

In this paper I will illustrate the new methods that I have been using in my Turkish classes at the Philology Faculty of Madrid's Complutense University. My research is based on the observations I have made during my classes, together with the imagination and the questions of my students. A student of philology needs to learn not only the language but also the literature, the culture and the history of the country of study. As a professor I need to assist my students in attaining sufficient working knowledge of Turkish in the space of just two years since at the academic institution where I work, the subject is taught only as a second language within a 4 year degree of Arabic and Islamic Studies.

In Spain the Turkish language is not studied widely and is a relatively new incorporation to academic syllabuses, partly due to the geographical distance that separates the two countries and likewise due to the scarce interest among students. Nevertheless, in recent years I have observed a growing interest in Turkish culture and in Turkey as a

country.

As a result of this curiosity for Turkish geography and culture, in many of my classes my students ask me the names of key cities in Turkey and some of them even have trouble identifying Turkey itself on a map. Consequently, a couple of years ago I started to think more deeply about how geographical maps could be included in language classes.

## II. THE ROLE OF MAPS IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Geography and Philology at first glance do not appear to bear a strong relationship with each other for university students. Consequently, how can a philology professor combine the teaching of geography and a foreign language in the same class?

In this paper I will seek to explain the use of political and geographical maps in language teaching. Thanks to this method, I have managed to speed up the process of learning a foreign language at the same time as making it more interesting for the students.

In the first classes of level A1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Language Teaching (CEFR), a European standard used also in other countries to measure the level of oral and written comprehension of a specific language, it is possible to use a political map of the country where the language is spoken.

There follow a few examples with regards to my Turkish classes at the Philology Faculty of Madrid's Complutense University.

### A. *The Use of a Political Map of Turkey Indicating the Borders with Other Countries, the Key Cities, the Neighboring Countries and the Surrounding Seas*

- Relevant vocabulary: city, capital, region, sea, country, neighboring country.

The students stand up from their desks and come close to a big map which is fixed to the whiteboard. [1]

Objective: During the class the students learn the relevant vocabulary, the names of Turkey's neighbors and the surrounding seas.

With the help of the map, the students are taught compound names: Marmara Denizi (Sea of Marmara), İstanbul Bogazı (The Bosphorus of Istanbul) and the accusative suffix. [2]

The students can then start to ask each other questions using the question word, "Nerede?" ("Where?"). In this way, a level A1 language class can include a range of oral exercises that would otherwise be difficult to achieve when teaching a language that is completely different to the students' mother tongue. In the case of Turkish, which originates in Asia and is an agglutinative language with a very different word order to Spanish, it is even more

difficult to begin to create a favorable environment for oral interaction among students who are in the initial phase of learning a foreign language. For example, in Turkish grammar the verb goes at the end of the sentence in a similar way to the Basque language. This change in the position of the verb presents a challenge to the students at the start of the learning process and can lead to it taking up to three months to understand the logic of the syntax of the phrase. This is because in order to understand a sentence in Turkish, the student needs to advance until the end of the phrase to find the verb and then go back to the start in search of the subject and the other complements.

Next, the professor places a map of Turkey on the whiteboard with the names of the neighboring countries, the seas and key cities removed. [3] He or she can then observe if the students are able to recall the newly acquired vocabulary. In this part of the class, those students with a faster visual memory obtain very good results.

As a result, after just one hour of class in level A1 the students can get their head around the first suffix, the most common one in the Turkish language.

At this point it is interesting to look at the example of "Atatürk Caddesi" (Atatürk Avenue) and how this is often mispronounced by Spaniards visiting Istanbul. Unlike in Turkish, The letter "C" in Spanish is pronounced the same way as the "K". Consequently, when Spaniards travel to Istanbul, they often incorrectly pronounce the word for avenue, "Caddesi", in which the letter 'c' should be pronounced as a 'j' (as in the English 'jet' rather than as the 'c' in 'cat), thus leading to misunderstandings and, more often than not, being sent off in the wrong direction. By way of this anecdote, the professor can explain to the students the correct pronunciation of the word for avenue in an entertaining and memorable way.

Another exercise that can be performed with the political map of Turkey is to teach the students the Turkish suffix for 'from', "-li, -lı, - lu,- lü" which varies according to vowel harmony in Turkish.[4] A key advantage of this activity is that it can be performed standing since this raises the pupil's attention levels and encourages interaction and participation.

First of all, the teacher places a map of Turkey on the blackboard, on which the pupils can consult the names of the country's key cities. Then the students form two lines, with each pair of students facing one another. Next, while consulting the names of the cities on the blackboard, they perform a role play, asking each other which Turkish city they are from. The student standing opposite then answers by using the correct suffix for 'from' "-li, -lı, - lu,- lü". [5]. For example, Nerelisin? (Where do you come from?) I am from Istanbul. (Istanbulluyum). In the case of Turkish, as it is an agglutinate language the student would also need to add the suffix of the verb "to be" which also changes depending on the person concerned.

Later the professor can use a world map for another exercise. [6]

#### *B. The Use of Istanbul City Map with Only Historical Center*

- Relevant vocabulary: street, avenue, shop names.

Objective: During the class the students learn the relevant vocabulary, professions and the use of compound nouns in

Turkish.

The professor gives the students an Istanbul city map with the names of the main avenues, streets and also the name of the typical shops of a district in Istanbul. [7] After the professor explains the new associated vocabulary, the students, aided by the map, try to use question words like where (nerede?). This exercise can be carried out in pairs and can serve as very good oral exercise for a basic level of any language.

During the second half of the class the professor gives a different Istanbul city map to the students, this time with the place names removed. The students use question words like where (nerede?) or which (hangi?). The main aim of this exercise is to encourage the students to speak using the new language that they are learning.

Just before beginning this exercise the professor can change the pairs of students around. By changing partners, the students get to know each other better and can start to ask basic questions using the new language that they are learning. In a final stage of the exercise, the pairs can compare the results of their respective activities with the class as a whole, and even fill in some of the gaps in each other's acquired knowledge of the places and the vocabulary. At the end of the lesson the professor explains and clarifies any doubts that may have arisen.

Using the same map another exercise can be performed by selecting names of shops, for example: Bakkal (grocery). The professor can explain to the students the importance of this shop in daily life in different districts of Istanbul. For example, he can point out that the owner of the grocer is not only a seller but also can provide assistance for anything that you need as a recently arrived foreigner in the city. He can find you someone to fix the pipes, for example, or he can simply talk about you to the neighbors'. Gossiping is a big part of his job. Gossiping is also a great way to teach students more about the foreign language that they are learning.

First the professor writes the name of the main products that are on sale in a typical bakkal (grocery), for example, sigara (tabaco), yoğurt (yogurt), ekmek (bread), yumurta (egg), gazete (newspaper), çikolata (chocolate), etc. As the professor writes more and more product names on the whiteboard, the students can be surprised on seeing that many of these products in EU countries are sold in specific stores whereas in Turkey your bakkal (grocery) is a multi-purpose shop where you can find nearly anything.

The professor can also create a role play using the word, bakkal (grocery). [8] The students can perform dialogues asking the typical questions used in this type of store. This kind of exercise is more effective when performed in pairs. During this exercise the professor can also teach the students about Turkish lira so that they can calculate the amounts and discuss the price of different products in local currency.

During another class on a similar subject the professor can teach the names of professions. In Turkish we have a special suffix which is only used for professions: "-cı, -ci, -cu, -cü". [9] As Turkey is one of the biggest producers of carpets, I will use this as an example:

The word for 'carpet' is Halı whereas the person who sells carpets or the shop where carpets are sold are called:

halıcı. You just need to add the suffix of the profession by applying the rules of vowel harmony [10].

*C. The Use of a Political Map of Turkey Where You Can See the Borders, the Name of the Neighbor Countries, the Seven Regions of Turkey and the Main Cities of Each Region*

- Relevant vocabulary: sea, region, city, product.

Objective: The aim of this lesson is to teach the students the 7 geographical regions of Turkey and the main cities of each region.

The Professor can start the lesson by reminding the students about the accusative suffix and the use of compound nouns that the students have learnt during the previous class.

The professor offers the students the example of: İstanbul Boğazı (The Bosphorus of Istanbul) together with further examples with compound nouns such as historical place names in Istanbul: Topkapı Sarayı (Topkapı Palace), Galata Kulesi (Galata Tower).

Following this short introduction to the lesson the professor gives the students a map of the first region that they will study : Marmara Bölgesi (Marmara Region) [11].

The students can see on this regional map the main cities names and the region's main exports. All of these details will help the student learn new vocabulary.

In this exercise the students can start to familiarise themselves with another suffix known as the locative suffix. [12]. This suffix helps to identify an object's location. The students can therefore use this suffix to ask about the place where different regional products are produced.

Depending of the students' prior knowledge, if they are at level A2 or B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Language Teaching (CEFR), the professor can add other types of activity: for example, reading a short text about the traditions of the region or the typical dishes of the region. As homework the professor can ask the students to draw a map of their city or region of origin. This homework will be correct during the next lesson.

This kind of homework has a strong functional importance in our lessons due to the fact that most of my students come from different origins. As I have mentioned previously, Turkish is taught at the Complutense University's Philology Faculty as a second language in Arabic and Islamic Studies Department where students from Bosnia, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Italy, Morocco, Spain, Syria and the USA all study together, providing a diversity and richness to language teaching, together with the opportunity to discuss different experiences.

*D. The Use of a Geographical Map of Turkey Indicating the Rivers, Lakes, Mountains*

- Relevant vocabulary: river, lake, main adjectives.

Objective: During the class the students learn the relevant vocabulary and about the use of the adjectives in Turkish grammar.

During this class the professor will indicate the names and locations of the principal rivers, lakes and mountains of Turkey by way of a geographical map[13]. He or she will write on the white board the main adjectives and their opposites, for example, küçük (small) x büyük (big), uzun (long) x kısa (short), yüksek (high) x alçak (low). If the

professor is teaching students whose mother tongue is a Latin language, such as Spanish, Italian, French, Romanian or Portuguese, he or she should explain to the students that in Turkish the adjective is placed before the noun [14].

In the second part of the class, the professor gives the students a geographical map of Turkey, this time with the names of the main lakes, rivers or mountain ranges left blank. By way of this exercise, the students practice forming compound nouns in Turkish.

For the students who are at level A2 or B1 of the CEFR, the geographical map can also be used for teaching comparatives and superlatives. With the help of the geographical map, the students can compare the length of the rivers, the size of the lakes or seas or the height of the mountains. This can be a very good exercise to be performed in pairs, with each student formulating questions and answers requiring the use of this grammar form [15].

### III. CONCLUSION

By using different types of maps in my teaching work, I could observe that my students managed to speed up the acquisition of a new language, as well as the knowledge of the culture and the history of a country which is quite far from their current place of residence.

It can be a considerable challenge for a professor to try to create new exercises for oral interaction especially for students with a very basic level knowledge of the foreign language. This difficulty is accentuated when the new language that they are learning is totally different to their own mother tongue as in the case of Turkish. Likewise, it is very important not to tire out the students since they tend to learn faster when they are motivated and excited about the new subject. The professor needs to encourage this motivation without wearing them out with complicated grammar rules. Younger students have a special need for professors to maintain their interest in new methodologies and attractive exercises. As I have shown with the help of geographical maps, learning a new language can be much more interesting for new learners. At present as an Associate Professor of Turkish at Madrid's Complutense University, I have offered many examples from my Turkish teaching classes since the maps are currently not used in any books for teaching Turkish. I have nevertheless also had the opportunity to use these methods for teaching English, Italian and Spanish.

In the case of English you have the possibility of using the maps of the different countries where they speak English and depending on the level of the knowledge of the students you can add a range of activities discussing the traditions of each country. Although in most of the English teaching books you can find a map of Great Britain, it would be more attractive to teach students the maps of the other more distant countries where English is spoken as a mother tongue. Teaching Spanish using the maps could be even more interesting due to the differences in regional vocabulary in the different countries of Southern and Central America. Most of the books published in Spain for learning Spanish come with Iberian Peninsula maps [16] meanwhile in Mexico students can find maps of the different states of Mexico [17].

With this paper I have tried to explain the different uses

of geographical maps for teaching languages. A country map should not be limited to one page in a text book but rather be used more widely in oral exercises in order to make language teaching classes more social and interactive.

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Recently, she translated one of the chapters of Spain's greatest work of literature, Don Quixote, for a special edition edited in 150 languages including Turkish under the title: "El Quijote Universal Siglo XXI", (Don Quixote Universal, XXI Century).

Ms. Boray Elliot is currently an Associate Professor of Turkish Language and Literature at the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies of the Complutense University of Madrid where she also participates in two research groups on Cultural Manifestations in Arabic and other Islamic Languages and Onomastics (the study of proper names). She is also completing a PhD as part of the Applied Linguistics Program of the Complutense University of Madrid.