

NEW GENERATION OF DICTIONARIES OF THE KARAIM LANGUAGE BY KARAIM SPEAKERS

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Abstract. The paper aims at providing an assessment of the new generation of dictionaries of the Karaim language prepared and published by Karaim speakers over the last two decades. Apart from that, the paper aims at providing a brief analysis of the already existing documentation of the Karaim language. The article is divided into two parts: firstly, the evaluation of the previously published dictionaries of Karaim language is provided; secondly, the new generation of dictionaries published by Karaim speakers, is being analysed, focussing on four works, namely two Polish-Karaim, one Russian-Karaim and one Lithuanian-Karaim dictionary. The dictionaries are being analysed by raising the same question in each case: what information in these dictionaries is provided about the Karaim language?

Key words: Karaim, dictionary, Karaim language, Trakai, language.

Introduction

In the last 15 years, the Karaim language, which has been spoken in Lithuania since the end of the fourteenth century, has been documented in 4 dictionaries prepared by the Karaim speakers originating from Trakai. These works, including two dictionaries published as Polish-Karaim, one as Russian-Karaim and the other one as Lithuanian-Karaim, have not been a subject of a distinct study yet, although they mark great efforts of preservation of the Karaim language and its dialects by the Karaim community. The aim of this article is to assess these new generation Karaim language dictionaries published in the recent decades by raising the same question in each case: what information regarding the Karaim language is provided in the dictionary? In addition to it, I also aim at providing a historical evaluation of the Karaim language dictionaries published before the new generation dictionaries were prepared.

The article is divided into two parts: firstly, an assessment of the dictionaries of Karaim language published in the 20th as well as in the beginning of the 21st century is provided and, secondly, the 4 new generation dictionaries

of Karaim language prepared by the Karaim speakers are analysed. In the text, when referring to the titles of dictionaries, I provide their names in the original language, with the translation to English indicated in parentheses afterwards.

A historical overview of already existing documentation of the Karaim language

One of the earliest attempts to document the Karaim language in the form of a dictionary was made by Wilhelm Radloff (also known as Vasily Radlov), whose four-volume *Опыт словаря тюркских наречий* [Dictionary of Turkic dialects] provides a panoramic insight on the Turkic languages. Although the main focus in this work was not on the Karaim language itself, the data collected on the Karaim language, based on the author's expedition to Trakai and Luck in 1893-1911, provides much information about the Karaim lexicon.

In 1935, two volumes of Karaim-Polish-German language dictionary under the title *Ślownictwo karaimskie. Karaimsko-polsko-niemiecki słownik* [Karaim vocabulary. Karaim-Polish-German dictionary] comprising as many as 4417 words were prepared by Aleksander Mardkowicz. It is necessary to underline that namely Aleksander Mardkowicz, along with Tadeusz Kowalski and Ananiasz Zajączkowski, started to develop the written tradition of Karaim language in Latin script (Kobeckaitė 2016, 201).

In 1974, the three language Karaim-Russian-Polish academic dictionary (also known in the abbreviated form as KRPS) with 17 400 words written in Cyrillic script was published by Nikolaj Baskakov together with Prof. H. Seraja Shapshal, Prof. Ananiasz Zajączkowski and Aleksandr Dubinski (Kobeckaitė 2016, 202). Until recently, this work had been the most professional dictionary of the Karaim language with etymological explanations of the words and information about the dialects of the language provided.

Another important date for the preservation of the Karaim language was 1996, when the coursebook under the title *Mieñ karajče ūrianiam* [I study Karaim language] was published by Mykolas Firkovičius in Vilnius. Although this work was not actually a dictionary, the coursebook had a great influence for the development of written tradition of the Trakai dialect as the author developed the currently used writing system for the rakai dialect, based on the Latin script with additional letters introduced for representation of specific sounds found in the Karaim language (Kobeckaitė 2016, 203).

Additionally, in 2011, Halina Kobeckaitė prepared two conversation books, one being *Lietuviški-karaimiški-rusiški pasikalbėjimai* [Lithuanian-Karaim-Russian conversations] published in Vilnius, and the other being *Rozmówki polsko-karaimsko-litewskie* [Polish-Karaim-Lithuanian conversations], published in Wrocław (Kobeckaitė 2016, 205).

Apart from the works discussed above, there are several works to list, documenting the Crimean dialect. In 1970, Zacharij Osipovič Sinani prepared *Краткий словарь разговорного языка крымских караимов [рукопись]* [Short dictionary of spoken Crimean Karaim language [typewritten]], which was published in 2007 in Simferopol under the title *Караимско-русский и русско-караимский словарь разговорного языка* [Karaim-Russian and Russian-Karaim dictionary of spoken language] (Németh 2015, 8). In 1995 in Moscow *Русско-караимский словарь. Крымский диалект* [Russian-Karaim language dictionary of Crimean dialect] was published by Mark Chafuz. In 1997 in Odessa *Русско-караимский словарь. Крымский диалект* [Russian-Karaim dictionary of Crimean dialect] was published by Boris Levi (Kobeckaitė 2016, 205).

In addition to these works, two dictionaries were published in the Republic of Türkiye. Timur Kocaoğlu, in collaboration with Mykolas Firkovičius, prepared a Karaim, Turkish and English frazeologic dictionary under the title *Karay. The Trakai Dialect*, which was published in 2006 (Kobeckaitė 2016, 204). The same year in Istanbul, Tülay Çulha published Karaim-Turkish dictionary under the title *Karaycanın Kısa Sözcükleri. Karayca-Türkçe Kısa Sözlük* [Short Karaim vocabulary. Short dictionary of Karaim-Turkish].

Finally, the professional dictionary under the title *A Crimean Karaim-English dictionary*, prepared by Gulayhan Aqtay and Henryk Jankowski with 10 000 words documented in Latin script, was published in 2015 in Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. The work, being a new critical evaluation of the dictionary of 1974, currently is the most professional dictionary of the Karaim language with a comprehensive analysis of it being prepared by Michał Németh (Németh 2015).

The new generation of dictionaries of the Karaim language by Karaim speakers

When considering the new generation of dictionaries of the Karaim language by Karaim speakers, not professional linguists, we must go back to

the year of 2008. That year, in the printing house of Karaim union *Bitik* in Poland two Polish-Karaim dictionaries were published.

The first dictionary to assess is *Podręczny słownik polsko-karaimski* [The handy Polish-Karaim dictionary] prepared by Szymon Juchniewicz. The author in the foreword indicates that he decided to prepare the dictionary in 1998. The main reason for it was the lack of dictionaries of the Karaim language at the time, causing difficulties in translating texts from Polish to Karaim and vice versa. Besides, the author also emphasized his view that the most professional dictionary at the time, namely KRPS, is not convenient to use. Initially, the author prepared only one copy of the dictionary for his personal use without any ambition to provide a scholarly work, but with the growing number of requests for assistance from others working with Karaim language, eventually he took a decision to publish the dictionary aiming at making translations of the Karaim language more accessible to the Karaim community (Juchniewicz, 2008, 3).

The number of words provided in the dictionary is not indicated; the dictionary consists of 271 page. The Karaim words are supplemented with the capital letters *T, H, K*, providing the information about the origin of the word: it being used either in Trakai, Halich or Crimean dialect. In some cases, different types of pronunciation of a single word within the same dialect are provided, and the author also introduced several Polish letters. The dictionary provides no further information (Juchniewicz 2008).

The second dictionary to analyse is *Słownik polsko-karaimski w dialekcie trockim* [Polish-Karaim dictionary in Trakai dialect] prepared by Gabriel Józefowicz. It contains 654 pages while the number of words provided in the dictionary is not indicated either. In the foreword, the author claims to have had two main tasks by preparing this dictionary: firstly, he wanted to honor Professor Tadeusz Kowalski for his contribution to the documentation of the Trakai dialect, and, secondly, he aimed at publishing a dictionary for Karaims, willing to either improve or deepen their knowledge of the language (Józefowicz 2008, 7).

In the dictionary, a short introduction to the grammar of the Karaim language is provided. The author describes the Karaim language and its main features, also providing a brief information about the structure of the language, the basic information regarding the pronunciation of the words, although this information is not sufficient for a non-speaker of the Karaim language to understand the basics of the Karaim grammar (Józefowicz 2008, 11–14).

In the dictionary, the author provides information about the origin of the words, indicating whether a certain word was introduced into the Karaim language from Arabic, Turkish, Belarussian, Hebrew, Lithuanian, Mongolian, Persian, Polish, or Russian languages. Although the author does not provide any information regarding the dialect of the words, in many cases the references to the sources (there is a list of 36 abbreviations provided by the author, each representing a certain article or a book) used by the author when preparing the dictionary are provided, therefore, in case a researcher needs additional information about the words, it can be found there. On top of that, in the dictionary translations of several proverbs and translations of some sentences used in daily conversations are also provided with some examples serving as explanations revealing the meaning of certain words. Overall, the dictionary is very informative and, it can be concluded, is the most professional dictionary among those four that I analyse in this article (Jozefowicz 2008).

The third dictionary to assess is *Русско караимский словарь* [Russian-Karaim language dictionary] prepared by Markas Lavrinovičius and published in Vilnius in 2012 with as many as 36 597 Russian and 13 165 Karaim words. In the foreword, the author states that his main task was to provide the reverse dictionary to KRPS. The author also provides a short introduction to the system of Turkic languages and their relations to Karaim language. In addition, a short autobiography with the overview of the author's main publications is also provided. On top of that, the list of the literature the author used when preparing the dictionary, including 14 publications, is presented (Лавринович 2012, 5–13).

The author used the transcription of the Karaim language based on the Lithuanian alphabet with the additional letters introduced by Mykolas Firskovičius. In the dictionary, he does not only provide the information about the dialect of every word in the already above-mentioned *t, h, k* scheme, but also introduces additional explanatory letter *m*, which serves for indicating the words of the Trakai dialect in the Karaim language, that were not included into KRPS. The dictionary also includes information about the origin of the word, indicating whether the word was adopted to the Karaim language from Arabic, French, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Chinese, Persian, Polish, Russian, or Turkish (Лавринович 2012).

The last dictionary to assess is *Lietuvių-karaimų kalbų žodynas* [Lithuanian-Karaim dictionary] published in Vilnius in 2020 containing as many as 12484 words. The dictionary was prepared by the school teacher of Maths

Ana Špakovska (1936–2019), who in the foreword acknowledges that it took her ten years to complete the work. It is based on the Karaim-Russian-Polish dictionary of 1974, the Russian-Lithuanian dictionary of 1985 and the knowledge of the Karaim language by the author as well. The author of the dictionary explained that her intention by preparing the dictionary was based on the aspiration to assist those willing to learn the Karaim language, particularly the young generation of Karaim community. Ana Špakovska was not a linguist; the author claimed to have attempted to provide the translation of the words based on her personal knowledge of the language.

In the dictionary we can find the letters *T, H, K*, providing information about the dialect of the word. Also, on several occasions, we find translations of several phrases or proverbs used in the Karaim language. On top of that, some additional phrases are indicated aiming at providing a better explanation of the words and their meaning. The dictionary provides no further information (Špakovska 2020, 3-4). It should also be emphasized that we can find additional information about the dictionary on the Internet resources provided by the relatives of the author¹.

Conclusion

To sum up, the four new generation dictionaries, which were assessed in the first part of the article, are a great contribution to the already existing documentation of the Karaim language. The new generation of dictionaries, published in 2008 and afterwards, although prepared by the speakers of the Trakai dialect, who are not professional linguists, provide much information about the Karaim language, its dialects, and the origin of words. Therefore, we can conclude that these dictionaries serve to show great efforts put by their authors to the preservation of the Karaim language.

1 Two examples should be considered. Firstly, the interview with Severina Špakovska – the granddaughter of Ana Špakovska – was made in the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania in 2021 (Lietuvos nacionalinė Martyno Mažvydo biblioteka 2021); secondly, on the occasion of the presentation of the dictionary, there was a text published in the local press (Zakarevičiūtė, Jolanta 2021).

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