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An Overview of Arabic Translation and Interpreting Programs in Turkish Higher Education

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Abstract

Although the history of translation is almost as old as the history of humankind, it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that translation studies were recognized as an independent discipline. Perhaps due to this fact, translation and interpreting programs at the higher education level started to be introduced in Turkey in the 1980s. These programs were English translation and interpreting programs. The first program to train Arabic translators and interpreters was opened at Kırıkkale University in 2011 and remained the only program in its field until 2017. Between 2017 and 2023, nine more Arabic translation and interpreting programs, six at public universities and three at private universities, started actively admitting students. In this study, Arabic translation and interpreting programs in Turkey are examined from various angles. At the end of the study, it was concluded that the demand for the departments at state universities was higher, the students with the highest scores preferred Istanbul University. Interpreter and translator students scored an average of forty-two points in the eighty-question foreign language exam and there were an average of 3.8 faculty members in these programs. Eight faculty members work in these programs and the students who are admitted to them are mostly placed in universities in their home cities. The total capacity of the programs is sufficient and, although there is no unity in the curriculum of the programs, similar courses are offered in different classes. The programs focus on language skills for the first two years and, subsequently, focus on translation-oriented courses. At the end of the study, we make some suggestions for translation and interpreting programs by making associations with the findings of the related literature.

Keywords: Arabic, Translation and Interpreting, Higher Education

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce to the Problem

Although the history of translation is quite old, the recognition of translation studies as an independent discipline is quite new. The phenomenon of translation, which had been studied under disciplines such as linguistics, literature, and textual linguistics for a long time in line with their own perspectives, began to operate as an autonomous discipline in the West in the 1970s, as it could not be analyzed solely with the approaches of those

disciplines (Şan & Fidan, 2021:128).

In Turkey, after the 1980s, awareness of translation studies increased and independent programs began to be offered in higher education institutions. As Akbulut (2016:10) points out, it is possible to mention the existence of a department offering translation education in Turkey with the beginning of preparatory education at Hacettepe University in 1982-1983. Later, academic translation education programs started to operate at Boğaziçi University in 1983-1984 and then at Yıldız Technical University in 1993. However, all three of these programs were established to train English translators.

As Kara (2010:94) emphasizes, when translation, as a tool of intercultural communication, is evaluated from a historical perspective, it is seen that it has made a significant contribution to the development of societies. The Arabs have a centuries-old history of translation, so much so that, they carried out one of the largest translation movements in the world during the Abbasid period, which led to a great transfer of knowledge and culture from East to West (Dağbaşı, 2013:186). Although not as intense as the Arabs, translation activities have also been carried out by Turks throughout history. However, despite this rich history, the first program to train Arabic translators and interpreters was opened at Kırıkkale University in 2011-2012. This date is quite long overdue. This program continued to exist as the only one in its field until 2017-2018. Later, Arabic translation and interpreting programs at Istanbul Aydın, Istanbul 29 Mayıs, Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt, Selçuk, Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey, KTO Karatay, Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli, Samsun 19 Mayıs and Istanbul universities started to actively admit students.

When the general objectives of these programs are examined, it is found that they aim to train students who have adopted translation as an intercultural communication expertise that can produce solutions to real needs. Additionally, these programs aim at training Arabic translators who are equipped with terminology and knowledge in various areas such as medicine, law, social sciences, technology and literature. These students can translate at national and international level in these areas, have the ethics of translation and can successfully carry out translation and interpreting in all public and private institutions and organizations in Turkey and abroad (Ballı, 2018:1465).

1.2 Purpose of the Research

The aim of this study is to discuss the data on Arabic translation and interpreting programs in ten universities in Turkey, 7 public and 3 private, and to prepare the ground for further research on the subject.

The questions of the study are as follows:

- 1- What has been the course of the establishment of Arabic translation and interpreting programs and what is their current status?
- 2- Is the number of faculty members in Arabic translation and interpreting programs sufficient?
- 3- Which of the Arabic translation and interpreting programs are most preferred by students?
- 4- What is the general ranking of students placed in Arabic translation and interpreting programs?
- 5- What is the average foreign language test score of the students placed in Arabic translation and interpreting programs?
- 6- What are the similarities or differences between the four-year curricula of Arabic translation and interpreting programs?

2. Method

Qualitative research method was used in this study. Within the scope of the research, information about the ten Arabic translation and interpreting programs actively admitting students was obtained by scanning the Higher Education Program Atlas page of the Council of Higher Education. In addition, the web pages of universities were also utilized.

2.1. Data Analysis

The data obtained on the profiles of Arabic pre-service teachers were categorized with the help of a statistical expert and interpretations were made based on these statistical data.

3. Findings and Interpretations

Table 1: Some information about Arabic translation and interpreting programs

University	Annual quota	Order of student with highest score (2022)	Order of student with lowest score (2022)	Foreign language test average in 80 questions	Number of choices in the last year	Current number of students	Opening year	Number of department members
Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University	60	19487	54852	53.2	779	120	2021	5
Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University	60	15172	52874	55.4	687	195	2018	4
İstanbul University	30	4814	27422	70.3	823	27	2202	3
İstanbul Aydın University	17	32476	110779	36.1	54	13	2017	3
İstanbul 29 Mayıs University	21	13159	58759	53.5	102	-	2018	3
Karamanoğlu Mehmet Bey University	60	59335	92163	20.7	428	151	2020	7
Kırıkkale University	50	48939	80873	30	541	146	2011	3
KTO Karatay University	15	58871	108526	22.8	30	21	2020	4
19 Mayıs University	40	27579	69670	38.7	571	98	2022	3
Selçuk University	60	8671	68524	43.2	662	199	2018	3

Each year, 413 student quotas are allocated for Arabic translation and interpreting programs in Turkey. The vast majority of these places are at public universities. The quota at private or foundation universities constitutes only 13.3% of the overall quota. It is possible to say that the number of quotas is sufficient considering Turkey's commercial, economic and social relations with the Arab geography.

In terms of faculty members, Karamanoğlu Mehmet Bey and Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Universities are in a satisfying position. In most of the other six university programs, the number of faculty members is three, which is the minimum number required by the Council of Higher Education. This number is too low to provide high-quality education in any program. Such programs need to meet their faculty member needs swiftly.

Istanbul University is preferred by the most successful students among all universities. This university is followed by Selçuk and Istanbul 29 Mayıs Universities. The programs with the lowest success rankings are Istanbul Aydın and KTO Karatay Universities. However, one should note that there is a big gap between the base and maximum rankings among the students who are placed in all programs. For example, while the success ranking of the student who ranked in the first place in Selçuk University Arabic Translation and Interpreting program is 8671, the success ranking of the student who placed in the last place is 68524. In other words, there is a difference of almost 60.000. In this case, students studying in the program will be at varying levels and perhaps in-class education and training activities will be affected.

In order to be placed in Arabic Translation and Interpreting programs, students are required to solve a foreign language test consisting of eighty questions. The students who are most successful in this test prefer Istanbul, Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt, Istanbul 29 Mayıs and Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Universities respectively. When averaged across all universities, the average score of prospective Arabic translator and interpreter students is 42.39 in 80 questions. This shows that students were able to solve about half of the foreign language test.

According to the number of preferred Arabic Translation and Interpreting programs, the most popular universities are Istanbul, Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli and Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt Universities, respectively. Private universities are the least preferred universities. The fact that Istanbul and Ankara are the two largest cities in Turkey may play a role in these preferences. In addition, a little more than half of the 150 applicants (78 candidates) to these three universities were preferred by people residing in the cities where these universities are located. Although the rate is not as high in other universities, the situation is similar.

The Arabic translation and interpreting programs are four-year programs. Most universities also have a one-year preparatory education. Below, the mandatory courses of universities offering translation and interpreting programs in Turkey are analyzed on one academic-year basis and some conclusions are drawn. Since the course content of Istanbul University Arabic Translation and Interpreting Program could not be accessed, it could not be examined in this section.

In the 1st grade, university-based mandatory courses in Arabic are as follows:

Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University:	Arabic Speaking I-II, Arabic Writing I-II, Applied Grammar I-II, Reading I-II, Introduction to Translation I, Arab Countries and Cultures.
Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University:	Grammar I-II, Legal Translation I-II, Reading I-II, Writing I-II, Speaking II, pre-Islamic Arab Culture, Media Translation, Media Translation, Audio Analysis, Post-Islamic Arabic Culture I.
Istanbul Aydın University:	Speaking I-II, Writing I-II, Reading Skills I-II, Arabic Grammar I-II, Introduction to Translation I-II.
Istanbul 29 Mayıs University:	Intercultural Communication, Readings in Modern Arabic Texts, Introduction to Translation, Readings in Classical Arabic Texts, Comparative Civilization Studies, Applied Interpretation.
Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University:	Arabic Grammar I-II, Lexicology I-II, Speaking I-II, Introduction to Translation I-II, Writing I-II.

Kırıkkale University:	Arabic Grammar I-II, >Lexicology I-II, Speaking I-II, Reading and Translation I-II, Writing I, Dictation.
KTO Karatay University:	Grammar I-II, Reading I-II, Writing I, Speaking I-II, Introduction to Translation, Textual Analysis, Translation Theories.
19 Mayıs University:	Contextual Grammar I-II, Speaking I-II, Vocabulary, Introduction to Translation, Writing I-II, Linguistics I, Culture and Translation.
Selçuk University:	Speaking I-II, Writing I-II, Reading I-II, Grammar I, Introduction to Translation I-II, Linguistics I.

Based on these data, all universities, except Istanbul 29 Mayıs University, include the four basic language skills in their first-year programs. Therefore, it is possible to say that the first year of translation and interpreting programs focus on basic language skills rather than the students' translation competence. Kırıkkale, Yıldırım Beyazıt and Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey Universities have lexicology courses. The inclusion of courses on culture and civilization in their curriculum at Istanbul 29 Mayıs University is noteworthy. In addition, this program provides the fewest number of mandatory courses. Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, on the other hand, is distinctly different from universities in the way they offer more variety of courses. In this program, there are courses on special fields such as media translation and translation of the news in the first year. KTO Karatay University, on the other hand, offers the Translation Theories course to students in their freshman year, which is usually offered in the sophomore or junior year in other universities.

Second Grade Courses:

Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University:	Arabic-Turkish Translation, Textual Analysis for Translators, Dialects of Arabic I-II, International Institutions and Translation, Translation and Translation in History, Turkish-Arabic Translation, Translation of Proverbs and Idioms, Research Methods in Translation.
Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University:	Post-Islamic Arabic Culture II-III, News Translation II-III, Modern Arabic Texts, Translation Theories, Speaking III-IV, Literary Translation I-II, Legal Translation III-IV, Complex Language Structures I-II, Consecutive Translation I, Classics, Note-taking Techniques.
Istanbul Aydın University:	Arabic Grammar III-IV, Writing III-IV, Introduction to Translation III-IV, Arabic Literature I-II, Speaking I-II, Advanced Reading I-II, Basic Skills in Interpreting.
Istanbul 29 Mayıs University:	Textual Analysis for Translators, Introduction to Community Interpreting, Technical Writing.
Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University:	Applied Grammar I-II, Textual Analysis for Translators I-II, Speaking III-IV, Turkish-Arabic translation I-II, Writing III-IV, Translation Theory and Methods I-II.
Kırıkkale University:	Arabic Grammar III-IV, Arabic Textual Analysis I-II, Speaking I-II, Turkish-Arabic translation I-II, Writing I-II.
KTO Karatay University:	Turkish-Arabic Translation I-II, Speaking III-IV, Technical Translation I-II.
19 Mayıs University:	Contextual Grammar III-IV, Speaking I-II, Writing I-II Linguistics II, Arabic-Turkish translation I, Note-taking Techniques, Translation Theories.
Selçuk University:	Translation Theories, Comprehension and Speaking I, Consecutive Translation I, Literary Translation I, Note-taking Techniques I-II, Translation-oriented Textual Analysis I-II, Translation of Social Texts.

Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt, Hacı Bayram Veli and Selçuk universities have intensive curricula and many types of courses. KTO Karatay and Istanbul 29 Mayıs Universities have very few mandatory courses. It can be said that this is advantageous for students because they will be able to choose the elective courses in the field they are interested in or want to specialize in. Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University continues to offer courses on Arabic culture, while Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University offers a course on translation and interpreting in history, which is not available in other programs. Courses on the four skills (writing, reading, listening, speaking) gradually decrease in almost all programs, while Istanbul Aydın University continues to offer them.

Third Grade Courses:

Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University:	Specialized Knowledge I-II, Consecutive Interpretation I-II, Translation Practices I-II, Media Translation I-II, Dialects of Arabic III-IV.
Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University:	Consecutive Interpreting II-III, Simultaneous Interpreting I-II, Effective Communication Skills I-II, Tourism Translation I-II, Literary Translation III, Technical Translation I-II, Diplomacy Translation, Terminology and Translation of Divine Texts I, Medical Translation I, Legal Translation V, Arabic Idioms and Proverbs, Literary Criticism.
Istanbul Aydın University:	Modern Arabic Texts I-II, Arabic Composition I-II, Interpreting Techniques I-II, Simultaneous Translation I-II, Dialects of Arabic I-II, Subtitle and Dubbing Translation I-II.
Istanbul 29 Mayıs University:	Consecutive Interpreting, Translation Theory and Criticism, Sight Translation, Quality Standards in Translation.
Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University:	History of Translation I-II, Translation Techniques I-II, Advanced Arabic I-II, Consecutive Translation I-II, Translation of Press Texts, Translation of Commerce and Economy Texts, Dialects of Arabic I-II, History of Arab Culture I-II.
Kırıkkale University:	Grammatical Analysis I-II, Written Translation Techniques I-II, Oral Translation Techniques I-II, Simultaneous Translation I-II, Specialized Texts I-II, Dialects of Arabic I-II
KTO Karatay University:	Arabic to Turkish Translation I-II, Translation of Press Texts I-II, Literary Translation I-II, Consecutive Translation, Document Translation.
19 Mayıs University:	Translation from Arabic to Turkish I, Consecutive Translation I-II, Simultaneous Translation I-II, Dialects of Arabic I-II, Translation from Turkish to Arabic I-II, Translation of Text Types I.
Selçuk University:	Translation of Economy, Legal Translation, Consecutive Translation, Advanced Consecutive Translation, Medical Translation I-II, Subtitle and Dubbing Translation, Interpreting Theories, Written Translation Theories, Audiovisual Translation, Arabic Dialects I-II.

In the 3rd year translation and interpreting programs, Istanbul 29 Mayıs University continues to offer minimum number of courses to its students. The program at Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, on the other hand, is intensive and offers mandatory courses in many different sub-fields such as medicine, law, religion, diplomacy and tourism. Similarly, Selçuk and Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey universities also have intensive programs. Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University, on the other hand, continues to emphasize dialect teaching in the third year.

Fourth Grade Courses:

Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University:	There are no compulsory courses. There are elective courses such as cultural studies, literary translation, religious text translation, community interpreting, conference interpreting.
Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University:	Terminology and Translation of Religious Texts II, Medical Translation II, Essential Arabic Sources, Dialects of Arabic I-II, Digital Media Translation, Translation Practices, Contemporary Arab World, Arabic Manuscript Analysis.
Istanbul Aydın University:	Consecutive Translation I-II, Translation of Integrated Texts I-II, Proverb and Idiom analysis I-II, Arabic Textual Analysis I-II, Modern Short Story and Novel, Contemporary Arabic World.
Istanbul 29 Mayıs University:	Arabic Research Techniques, Conference Interpreting.
Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University:	Linguistics I-II, Simultaneous Translation I-II, Translation of Academic Texts, Document Translation, Discourse Translation I-II.
Kırıkkale University:	Special Topics Translation I-II, Arabic Print and Visual Media I-II, Media Translation I-II, Simultaneous Translation III-IV, Dialects of Arabic III-IV.
KTO Karatay University:	Translation of Integrated Texts I-II, Simultaneous Translation I-II, Dialects of Arabic I-II.
19 Mayıs University:	Translation of Written and Oral Media I-II, Simultaneous Translation III-IV, Translation of Text Types II, Translation Practice I-II.
Selçuk University:	Simultaneous Translation I-II, Conference Interpreting I, Translation Criticism, Arabic Dialects III, Translation of Legal Texts.

Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli and Istanbul 29 Mayıs universities allow their students to take a large number of elective courses in the fourth year. While Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University continues its intensive course program, Istanbul Aydın University offers courses on Arabic literature and culture during this year.

When the four-year curricula of these institutions are compared, some university-specific conclusions are drawn: Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University stands out as a program that attaches importance to the teaching of the dialect. In its program, which begins with the teaching of basic language skills, the curriculum does not give much room for thematic field courses. The program of Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, on the other hand, is intensive, with the highest number of courses compared to other universities. There are theme specific courses such as tourism, medicine, law and religion. The fact that the legal translation course is included in the program for five semesters shows the importance given to this field. Istanbul Aydın University seems to be a program that emphasizes reading, writing and speaking skills. Istanbul 29 Mayıs University, on the other hand, stands out with its low number of mandatory courses and relatively high number of elective courses. This can be both positive and negative for students. It can be positive because students can choose the course they want to specialize in. It can be negative because it may not be possible to offer ample amount of elective courses with only three faculty members in the program. Thus, students may be forced to choose mandatory elective courses. The programs of Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey and Kırıkkale Universities are similar, as both programs focus on language skills and then move on to translation courses. However, the number of compulsory courses at Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University is higher. KTO Karatay University is also a language skills-oriented program. 19 Mayıs University's program is largely similar to the other programs but differs from the other programs in that it includes an important course such as linguistics as a mandatory course for two semesters. Selçuk University's program is similarly intensive compared to that of Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University. It also differs as the only program that offers courses in conference interpreting and interpreting theories.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Although English translation and interpreting programs were opened in Turkish higher education immediately after translation and interpreting was accepted as a discipline in the world, the first Arabic translation and interpreting program was opened almost thirty years after the English one. In other words, the oldest Arabic translation and interpreting program has a history of ten years, while the remaining nine programs have a history of six years. This is not enough time for these programs to complete their development.

The number of faculty members in Arabic translation and interpreting programs is insufficient. Six of the ten programs have the minimum number of three faculty members. It may not be very efficient to manage a program with approximately 180-200 students with three or four faculty members. This may cause a decrease in the motivation of the faculty members due to the excessive course load and may be tedious for the students. This situation should be urgently addressed and the number of faculty members in these programs should be increased. Turkey's position and its increasing multidimensional relations with Arab countries create a need for translators and interpreters who are fluent in Arabic. It can be said that the 413 quotas allocated to universities to train Arabic translators in Turkish higher education are sufficient to meet this need.

The universities most preferred by prospective translators are located in Istanbul and Ankara. This is not surprising because these two cities are the largest and most developed ones in Turkey.

It was observed that there was a big difference between the score rankings of the students who were placed in the translation and interpreting program. While the ranking of the student with the highest score in Turkey is 4814, the ranking of the student with the lowest score is 110779. In other words, there is a difference of 105,965 students.

According to the average of all programs, the average score of prospective Arabic translators in the eighty-question foreign language test is 42.39. Based on this, it can be inferred that successful students in the language test do not prefer the Arabic translation and interpreting program. In order to change this situation, perhaps scholarships or support can be offered to students for a certain number of quotas.

When the compulsory courses directly related to Arabic in these programs for four years are examined, it is found that almost all programs are similar to each other in terms of courses: the programs concentrate on reading, writing and speaking courses, especially in the first and second years, but do not offer listening courses. The third and fourth grades, on the other hand, are heavily devoted to translation studies. It was also found that a very important course such as "Note-taking Techniques" was not included in many programs, which can be said to be a shortcoming for the programs. Similarly, in some programs, "Translation Theories" and "Translation Criticism" courses are offered as electives rather than mandatory courses. It is thought that these courses should be in the category of mandatory courses in order to increase the philosophical and intellectual knowledge of prospective translators and interpreters.

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