

Osmanlı Devleti'nin Son Döneminden Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemine kadar Türkiye'de Çeviri Etkinliklerinin Gelişimi ve İlerlemesi *

Barış Can AYDIN¹

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lotusjournal@selcuk.edu.tr

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Öz

Bu çalışmada Türkiye'de çeviri etkinliklerinin Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun son dönemlerinden erken Cumhuriyet dönemine kadar olan gelişiminin ve ilerlemesinin yanı sıra Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun zengin kültürel ve dilsel çeşitliliğinin, Türk edebiyatını ve entelektüel düşünceyi şekillendiren önemli çeviri uygulamalarına nasıl zemin hazırladığı ve bu cumhuriyet döneminde hız kazanan çeviri etkinliklerinin Genç Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin yeni kimliğine nasıl etki ettiği incelenmektedir. Çalışmada, Tercüme Bürosu'nun yürüttüğü çeviri etkinlikleri Türkiye'nin kültürel modernleşme ve kimlik inşa sürecine nasıl bir katkı sağladığı, Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e uzanan süreçte çeviri etkinliklerinin amaçları ve uygulama biçimleri nasıl dönüştürdüğü ve Çeviri Bürosu'nun etkinliklerinin Türk edebiyat sistemi içinde nasıl bir işlev üstlendiği konuları ele alınmıştır. Araştırma, tarihsel-betimleyici bir yöntemle gerçekleştirilmiş; arşiv belgeleri, döneme ait çeviri metinleri, çevirmen yazıları ve ikincil kaynaklar temel alınmıştır. Kuramsal arka planda Even-Zohar'ın Çoğuldizge Kuramı ile Toury'nin Betimleyici Çeviri Kuramı yer almakta olup, analiz sürecinde çevirilerin edebî sistem içerisindeki konumları ve hedef odaklı normlara göre nasıl şekillendiği incelenmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular, Tercüme Bürosu'nun yalnızca Batı klasiklerini Türkçeye kazandıran bir kurum değil, aynı zamanda ulusal kimliğin yeniden inşasında ideolojik işlev gören bir aktör olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Büro'nun çeviri etkinlikleri, hem edebiyat kanonunun oluşumuna katkı sağlamış, hem de Cumhuriyet ideallerinin kültürel düzlemde yerleşmesine aracılık etmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çeviri Etkinlikleri, Tanzimat Dönemi'nde Çeviri, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, Kültürel Değişim, Tercüme Bürosu

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¹ Arş. Gör., Çağ Üniversitesi, Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngilizce Mütercim ve Tercümanlık Anabilim Dalı, Mersin, Türkiye, bariscanaydin@cag.edu.tr, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8268-6020>

Development and Progress of Translation Activities in Türkiye from Late Ottoman to Early Republican Era *

Bariş Can AYDIN ²

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Abstract

This study examines the development and progression of translation activities in Türkiye from the late Ottoman Empire to the early Republican era. It also explores how the Empire's rich cultural and linguistic diversity laid the groundwork for significant translation practices that shaped Turkish literature and intellectual thought. Furthermore, it analyses how the translation efforts that accelerated during the Republican period contributed to the construction of a new national identity in the nascent Turkish Republic. The study addresses how the translation activities carried out by the Translation Bureau contributed to Türkiye's cultural modernization and nation-building processes; how the objectives and modalities of translation evolved from the Tanzimat (Reformation) period to the Republican era; and how the Bureau functioned within the Turkish literary system. The research employs a historical-descriptive method and is based on archival documents, translated texts from the period, writings of translators, and secondary literature. The theoretical framework is informed by Even-Zohar's Polysystem Theory and Toury's Descriptive Translation Studies. Within this framework, the analysis investigates how translated texts were positioned within the literary system and shaped according to target-oriented translation norms. The findings reveal that the Translation Bureau was not merely an institution dedicated to introducing Western classics into Turkish, but also served as an ideological agent in the reconstruction of national identity. Its translation activities not only contributed to the formation of the literary canon but also facilitated the cultural consolidation of Republican ideals.

Keywords: Translation Activities, Translation in Tanzimat Era, Turkish Republic, Cultural Exchange, Translation Office

* Ethical Statement: It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited.

² Research Assistant, Çağ University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of English Translation and Interpretation
bariscanaydin@cag.edu.tr, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8268-6020>

Introduction

Translation has played a pivotal role in shaping the cultural, intellectual, and literary landscape of Türkiye. The intricate tapestry of translation activities in the region can be traced back to the multifaceted society of the Ottoman Empire, a civilization characterized by its rich diversity and cosmopolitan nature. The vast expanse of the Ottoman Empire, spanning three continents and encompassing numerous ethnicities and languages, provided a fertile ground for a variety of translation practices. These activities not only facilitated communication across different cultures but also significantly influenced the development of Turkish literature and intellectual thought (Findley, 1980).

The Ottoman Empire, with its deeply rooted history and extensive cultural heritage, serves as a treasure trove for translation historians. The empire's interaction with different nations and civilizations, especially following the conquest of Istanbul in 1453, marked the beginning of formal translation activities (Kafadar, 1995). Initially focused on interpretation for diplomatic and military purposes, these activities gradually evolved, reflecting the empire's changing intellectual and cultural dynamics.

During the 15th century, under the reign of Mehmet II, translation efforts were primarily interpretative, managed predominantly by Greek translators within the palace and conquered provinces. This period saw limited written translations, mainly due to the introverted nature of Ottoman intellectuals, who did not engage extensively with the classical works of Greek and Roman civilizations (Lewis, 2002). Instead, translations were largely confined to Islamic texts and Sufi literature, a trend that continued until the 16th century.

The era of enlightenment in the West, marked by the Renaissance and Reformation, highlighted the relative stagnation of Ottoman intellectual pursuits (Zürcher, 2004). While Western societies experienced rapid advancements in science, philosophy, and the arts, Ottoman translation activities remained largely focused on religious and moral texts. This intellectual gap began to narrow in the late 17th and 18th centuries, as the empire initiated various educational reforms aimed at bridging the divide (Findley, 1980). The establishment of Western-style educational institutions spurred a new wave of translation activities, particularly in the fields of science, politics, and military affairs (Göçek, 1987).

The 'Tanzimat' (Reorganization) period (1839-1876) was a crucial phase in the evolution of translation activities within the Ottoman Empire. This era of reorganization and reform introduced new literary genres, such as the novel, to Ottoman society. Translations from French

and other European languages brought works of prominent authors like Guy de Maupassant, Emile Zola, and the Goncourt Brothers into Turkish literature (Mardin, 2000). These translations not only enriched the literary landscape but also facilitated a cultural exchange that laid the groundwork for modern Turkish literature.

The role of translators in the Ottoman Empire was significant, often involving members of privileged and elite classes. By the 18th century, translators were frequently individuals who had studied abroad and served as diplomats or politicians (Findley, 1980). This period of active translation laid the foundation for the scientific, literary, and cultural advancements that would later flourish in the early Turkish Republic.

The establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 marked a new chapter in the history of translation activities in Türkiye. Under the visionary leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the young republic embarked on an ambitious project of modernization and westernization (Lewis, 2002). Reforms in education, law, and culture were accompanied by a vigorous translation movement aimed at integrating Türkiye into the global intellectual and cultural milieu.

One of the most notable figures in this movement was Hasan Ali Yücel, the Minister of National Education from 1935 to 1950. Yücel's establishment of the 'Translation Office' (Tercüme Bürosu) in 1940 played a crucial role in the development of contemporary Turkish literature and education. The office's extensive translation projects included works from French, German, British, Russian, and Scandinavian literature, significantly contributing to the intellectual enrichment of Turkish society (Zürcher, 2004).

Tahir-Gürçağlar (2018) narrates the foundation of the Translation Office as:

The initial structure and activities of the Translation Bureau were largely influenced by the work of the 'Translation Committee' (Tercüme Encümeni), which was established at the Publications Congress on May 2, 1939. Twenty-seven of these council members met at the Mainland Community Center on the day the congress opened. The work of the committee lasted two and a half days and the prepared report was presented on the fourth of the congress, on May 5, 1939. The Translation Committee, whose members were organized according to their 'fields of expertise', included writers, editors, instructors, academics and members of parliament (Tahir-Gürçağlar, 2018, p. 73).

Yücel's translation initiative was driven by two primary objectives: engaging with universal culture through the translation of classical works and fostering a literate and intellectual society.

The translations carried out during his tenure laid the foundation for a vibrant literary culture in modern Türkiye transitioning the society from an oral to a written tradition (Seyhan, 2008).

This study accentuates that the history of translation activities in Türkiye, from the late Ottoman to the early Republican era, underscores the critical role of translation in cultural and intellectual development. These activities not only bridged the gap between Eastern and Western civilizations but also played a fundamental role in shaping the modern Turkish Republic's legal, educational, and literary frameworks. The legacy of these translation efforts continues to influence contemporary Turkish culture and literature, highlighting the enduring importance of translation in the nation's historical and cultural evolution. What is intended to investigate in this study is that the development and progress of translation activities in Türkiye from the late Ottoman Empire to the early Republican era. The central research question revolves around how translation activities influenced Turkish intellectual, literary, and cultural development. It aims to explore the role of translation in shaping modernization efforts, cultural exchange, and the transition from an empire to a nation-state. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how translation practices evolved from being predominantly religious and diplomatic in the Ottoman period to becoming a central tool for modernization and nation-building in the early Turkish Republic.

In this context, the study aims to examine the transformation of translation activities in Türkiye from the late Ottoman Empire to the early Republican era through both historical and theoretical lenses. It approaches translation not merely as a linguistic operation but as a tool of cultural construction and ideological orientation. Accordingly, the following research questions guide the inquiry:

1. How did the translation activities carried out by the Translation Bureau contribute to Türkiye's cultural modernization and the construction of a national identity?
2. In what ways did the objectives and modalities of translation evolve from the Tanzimat period to the Republican era?
3. What role did the Translation Bureau play within the Turkish literary system, and how were these processes shaped by translation norms?

The aforementioned questions are explored within a historical-descriptive methodological framework, supported by Polysystem Theory and Descriptive Translation Studies.

Methodology

This study adopts a historical-descriptive qualitative approach to examine the development of translation activities within their socio-cultural and political context. It focuses specifically on the institutionalization and ideological functions of translation practices from the late Ottoman Empire to the early Republican era in Türkiye.

Primary data sources include official documents, writings by prominent figures involved in translation initiatives, published translated works, government archives, and relevant secondary literature on the history of translation. These materials are comparatively analyzed in light of the historical context and prevailing translation policies of the period.

The theoretical framework of the study is grounded in Even-Zohar's Polysystem Theory and Gideon Toury's Descriptive Translation Studies. Accordingly, the analysis considers translated texts in terms of both their position within the literary system and the norms that shaped their production. Particular attention is given to initial, preliminary, and operational norms, and how these norms influenced the selection, adaptation, and presentation of translated works.

Polysystem Theory, as formulated by Itamar Even-Zohar, emphasized that translated literature does not occupy a marginal position in the target literary system; on the contrary, translated texts can potentially be placed at the center of a target literary system at times of sociocultural upheaval (Munday, 2016). In this context, translations are considered as vectors of innovation and culture renewal. Toury's Descriptive Translation Studies takes a step further by introducing the idea of translation norms—regularities that control translators' choices in specific sociocultural circumstances (Venuti, 2012). This is why these theories combined offer a dynamical perspective for thinking translated texts as reflections for the cultures and ideologies that produced them, not just as literal linguistic reproductions.

This methodological design enables an understanding of translation not merely as a linguistic act, but as a cultural, ideological, and socially embedded process that contributed to broader transformations in national identity and intellectual life.

Limitations

While this study offers a detailed historical and descriptive account of translation activities from the late Ottoman period to the early years of the Turkish Republic, certain limitations should be acknowledged.

Firstly, the research relies predominantly on secondary literature and published archival sources, as access to unpublished primary materials—such as government correspondence, internal records of the Translation Bureau, and personal notes of key translators—was limited. This may have restricted the depth of institutional insight, particularly regarding the internal decision-making processes and ideological negotiations that shaped translation policies. Moreover, the scope of the analysis was necessarily selective. Given the vast number of translated works produced during the period—especially by the Translation Bureau—only a representative sample could be examined in detail. This selective approach, while methodologically necessary, may have resulted in the omission of significant but less prominent texts that could have offered alternative perspectives. Furthermore, the study's reliance on a qualitative framework grounded in Polysystem Theory and Descriptive Translation Studies provides interpretative depth but does not include quantitative data such as publication frequency, readership metrics, or reception studies. The exclusion of such empirical elements limits the ability to measure the broader public impact of translation activities.

Last but not least, the temporal and cultural distance between the present and the historical period under study inevitably shapes the interpretation of events and actors. Although efforts were made to contextualize the findings within their proper socio-political framework, there remains an inherent risk of anachronism or imposing contemporary analytical categories onto historical phenomena.

1. Translation Activities in the Late Ottoman Era

Ottoman Empire, which possesses a cosmopolitan society that consists of several different nationalities including Turks, Greeks, Armenians, and several other ethnic groups, can be considered as a country, where several different types of translation were carried out and shaped its culture and literature. The demographic and cultural diversity that the Ottoman Empire possesses caused a great deal of interaction between different nations and civilizations as well as different languages and cultures. Since Ottoman Empire possesses a rooted history that lasts for about seven hundred years and three continents, its cultural heritage can be evaluated as a treasure for translation historians.

As Aksoy (2005) accentuates, translation activities in the Ottoman Empire date back to the Mehmet II Era in the 15th Century, when it transformed into an Empire through the conquest of Istanbul in 1453. Translation activities of the Era were mainly based on interpretation rather than translation, which was carried out mostly by Greeks for general diplomatic contacts in the palace and the conquered provinces, as well as for military purposes (Aksoy, 2005, p. 950).

However, the improvement in interpretation activities was not in the same situation when it comes to the written translation, since Ottoman society and intellectuals in that era were rather introverted and did not develop any relations with older civilizations like Greeks and Romans like once Umayyads and Abbasids did. Thus, the only translated works in the era were those related to Islamic civilization and Islamic Sufism (Ülken, 2011, p. 231). Ülken (2011) asserts that 'While the works of Latins and Greeks were not translated into Ottoman Turkish in that era, the intellections were also indifferent to their Arabic translations which had been already translated by the Umayyads.' (p. 231).

Eruz (2010) explains the features of translators in the Ottoman Empire as following:

Translators were generally of Greek, Armenian or Jewish origin and knew four or five languages. Until the 17th century, translators were often from what is today considered a minority group living in Istanbul, as well as from christians conscripted with the purpose of joining the janissaries and other ottoman corps or freed slaves (p. 66).

As Ertürkoğlu (2023) asserts:

Since the Ottoman Civilization was a part of the Islamic Civilization, the translators of the Ottoman Period were largely attached to the Arabic-Islamic translation tradition in terms of their understanding of translation. In terms of translation theory, some of these translators expressed their views on translation - largely inspired by Arabic-Islamic translation theorists - in the prefaces of their translations (p. 135).

In the 16th Century, when the era of enlightenment had begun in the West, intellectuals of the Ottoman society were rather unsuccessful in following the development and progress happening in the West through the Renaissance and Reform movements, and it caused the Ottoman culture to get slow down and remain primitive comparing with that of the West (Yazıcı, 2010, p. 45). Yazıcı (2010) emphasizes that the production of the translation activities in that era were rather religious and mystical works, as well as daily information and advice related to morality and politics, rather than works on positive and natural sciences like logic, mathematics, physics, or medicine (p. 45).

During the Ottoman Empire, especially from the 16th century onwards, European states felt the need to train their own translators in order to strengthen their diplomatic and commercial relations with the Ottoman Empire. In this context, schools called "Language Boys" ("Dil Oğlanları") were established. The main purpose of these schools was to teach Turkish and other

Eastern languages to young European students and to train them as competent translators and diplomats (Eruz, 2010, pp. 71-73).

The first "Language Boys" school was established in 1551 by the Republic of Venice in the Pera region of Istanbul. This school became an important center for training the translators that Venice needed in its relations with the Ottoman Empire. Similarly, the French government opened the Oriental Language Boys School in Istanbul in 1669 (Timur-Ağıldere, 2010, p. 695). Moreover, in 1669, France decided that ten French students, around eight years old, who were either born in France or the Near East and personally selected by the king, would receive a royal scholarship to study at the prestigious Louis-le-Grand College in Paris. In addition to their Latin education, they were also expected to learn Turkish and Arabic. These students took on important roles as diplomats and translators in international relations in the following years and formed a bridge between Ottoman and European culture (Timur-Ağıldere, 2010 p. 696).

The educational programs implemented in Language Boys schools included Ottoman culture and literature in addition to language teaching. In this way, students gained in-depth knowledge not only of the language but also of the social and cultural dynamics of Ottoman society. The curricula of the schools were updated over time and, in addition to the mission of training translators, courses aimed at developing students' diplomatic skills were also included in the program (Eruz, 2010, p. 74).

Individuals who graduated from these schools played crucial roles in Ottoman-European relations. Graduates who worked as diplomats and translators in particular made significant contributions to the promotion of Ottoman culture and literature in Europe. In addition, interest in teaching Turkish and Eastern languages increased in Europe through these individuals, which strengthened cultural interaction (Eruz, 2010, pp. 74-75).

The Language Boys schools established during the Ottoman period are of great importance not only in terms of language teaching but also in terms of cultural diplomacy and the development of international relations. These schools made significant contributions to the strengthening of cultural and diplomatic ties between the Ottoman Empire and Europe.

However, the actual era, where written translation gained importance in the Ottoman Empire was the late 17th and 18th Centuries (Eruz, 2003, p. 31). Since the vast educational and cultural gaps between rapidly developing Western societies and the introverted Ottoman society led the Ottoman Empire to weaken, sultans enacted several reforms particularly in the field of education to catch up on the innovations, especially in the field of science, politics, and military

(Eruz, 2003, p. 31). The most essential one of those reforms was establishing new educational institutions where western-style education had been carried out and this led to the initiation of the new translation activities, which includes the translation of scientific books into Ottoman Turkish (Eruz, 2003, p. 31).

Translation activities carried out after the 18th Century also shaped the Ottoman Literary tradition of the era, as well as introduced several new genres from the West to Turkish literature, which had been shaped by the Eastern tradition throughout centuries, for instance, theater, which was supported and followed generally by the Christian minority in its early years in the Ottoman Empire, also drew the attention of Muslim originated members of the Ottoman society (Yazıcı, 2010, p. 46). Furthermore, other literary genres like novel are also introduced to the Ottoman Society through translation, particularly carried out between French and Turkish (Yazıcı, 2010, p. 46). Due to the fact that the earliest examples of the novel occurred during the reformation period between 1839 and 1876, also known as the "Tanzimat" (Reorganization) Era, it may be argued that the novel is a completely alien genre for Turkish literature (Karadağ, 2015, p. 114). Numerous changes were implemented in the Ottoman Empire's social and administrative structures during this time, which had an impact on the literature that was already impacted by European literary movements and genres. The first novels in Turkish literature were translations of published novels that were well-liked in Europe, especially France. These novels included works by Guy de Maupassant, Emile Zola, and the Goncourt Brothers (Kandemir, 2018, p. 101). François Fénelon's didactic novel *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, which was translated from French into Turkish by Yusuf Kâmil Paşa in 1862 is considered the first translated novel ever in Turkish literature (Kandemir, 2018, p. 102).

When the translation activities carried out in the Ottoman Empire are examined, the social and occupational status of translators cannot be underestimated. As Yazıcı (2010) accentuates, translators, most of whom are majorly non-Muslim and minority-originated, have been considered members of a privileged class in Ottoman society since the 17th Century. In the 18th Century, translators were members of elite families who studied abroad and worked as diplomats or politicians (Eruz, 2003, p. 33).

Aksoy (2005) summarizes the translation activities in the Ottoman Era, as:

Consequently, although translation activities in the Ottoman Empire could not compete with similar activities in the West or elsewhere which resulted in the formation of the European Enlightenment, these activities laid down the foundation for the creation of

sciences, literature, and the arts as well as many cultural advancements to happen in the Modern Turkish Republic (Aksoy, 2005, p. 995).

Aksoy's assessment goes beyond reductionist approaches to Ottoman translation history. Here, it is emphasized that Ottoman translation activities, although they could not compete with the West, had their own intrinsic value and contributed to the intellectual foundations of Modern Türkiye. This approach reveals the importance of considering translation history not only in terms of "success" or "failure" but also in the context of processual transformation. In this respect, translation is the carrier of historical continuity and accumulation.

To sum up, it can be easily said that the role of translation cannot be denied during the development and progress of Ottoman culture and Turkish Literature since it builds bridges between East and west not only in terms of literature but also in politics and science. Furthermore, the history of not only the development of translation in Turkish society but also in the whole of Eastern society cannot be thought separable from the history of translation in the Ottoman Era.

2. Translation Activities in the Early Republican Era

Foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, has a special importance not only in Turkish political history but also in the history and development processes of the translation activities in Turkish literature. The early years of the republic, where numerous revolutions, which were realized under the guidance and leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, like changing the alphabet from Arabic to Latin, and the law on unification of education gave birth to a new 'enlightenment era' in Turkish society and Turkish culture (Tahir-Gürçağlar, 2008, p. 51). Turkish revolution aims to adopt the social, juridical, and educational structure of several Western countries including Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and France into Türkiye, therefore it is undeniable that translation plays a crucial role in the progress and development of the young Turkish Republic.

As Eruz (2003) accentuates, translation activities in the early Republican Era generally comprised of literary and legal translation, particularly translation of several world classics from Western works of literature into Turkish when Hasan Ali Yücel was the minister of national education, as well as translation of the legal texts from French into Turkish, which is done by the academics of the Faculty of Law (p. 58). However, as Eruz (2003) emphasizes, legal translations carried out in that era, which were mainly done by foreign academics like German-originated Ernst Eduard Hirsch (1902-1985), caused several mistakes in the target

texts which are caused by either misperception of the source texts, or mistakes in the source text. Nevertheless, the role that translation plays in the development of the Turkish legal and educational system is crucial and constructed contemporary law of the Turkish Republic, which is more integrated into the Western world.

Hasan Ali Yücel (1897-1961), who served as the Minister of Nation Education of the Turkish Republic between 1935 and 1950, can be considered among the most prominent figures of the translation activities in the early republican era for his contributions to the literary translation by founding the 'Translation Office' (Çeviri Bürosu). Founded within the body of the Turkish Ministry of National Education on May 19, 1940, the 'Translation Office' ('Tercüme Bürosu' in Turkish), has immensely contributed to the development of contemporary Turkish literature as well as Turkish enlightenment thanks to translation and publishing of several books, majority of which were the novels, from European literature (Kara, 2010, p. 98). The founders of the Translation Office include some preeminent men of letters in Turkish Literature such as Nurullah Ataç, Saffet Pala, Sabahattin Eyüboğlu, Bedrettin Tuncel, Enver Ziya Karal and Nusret Hızır (Başaran, 2018, p. 70).

The works translated in Yücel's era are still being published either in their original forms or as revised editions under the brand of 'The Serie of Hasan Ali Yücel Classics' (Hasan Ali Yücel Klasikleri Dizisi) by the publishing house 'Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları.'

The importance of the cultural development of the republican period, which Hasan Ali Yücel considers as 'Turkish Humanism', and the undeniable role of translation in these developments are brought to light with the following words of Yücel, which are included in the preface of the books in the 'Hasan Ali Yücel Classics Series' published today by Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları:

Humanism begins with the adoption of works of art, which are the first stage of understanding and sensing of the soul, the most eloquent expression of human existence. Among the branches of art, literature is the richest in the mental elements of this expression. For this reason, when a nation repeats the literature of other nations in its own language, in its own more ordinary understanding; it increases, revives and recreates its intelligence and power of understanding at that rate. Here, translation education, we say that this technology is important and effective in terms of our cause of civilization (Yücel, 1941 as cited in Austen, 2006, p. i).

In this regard, What Yücel (1941) wants to state is that translation is seen not only as a means of transferring knowledge but also as a means of “awakening” in terms of the spiritual and intellectual development of the individual and society. This understanding transforms the function of translation from a technical act to a cultural and moral duty. According to Yücel, translation is the reconstruction of human reason and sensitivity. This perspective provides a strong ideological basis that explains the placement of translation at the center of national cultural policies.

Yücel (1941) also emphasizes the importance of translation, particularly the literary translation in the same preface as follows:

Whichever nation’s library is rich in this respect, that nation is at a higher level of perception in the world of civilization. In this respect, managing the translation movement systematically and carefully is to strengthen one of the most important aspects of Turkish wisdom and to serve its expansion and progress (Yücel, 1941 as cited in Austen, 2006, p. i).

The total number of books translated by the ‘Translation Office’ is 604 and only 34 of them were from Eastern Literature, while 210 of them are from French literature, 90 of them from German, 65 from British, 78 from Russian, and 6 of them from Scandinavian Literature (Aytaç, 1997, p. 38). The Ministry of National Education in Türkiye also published a journal named ‘Translation Journal’ (‘Tercüme Dergisi’), which has 42 editions, and 7 volumes published between May 19, 1940, and March 19, 1947 (Yazıcı, 2010, p. 60). As Tahir-Gürçağlar (2005) asserts, translation activities carried out in Yücel’s era were so comprehensive that their impacts remained still profound and permanent until today (p. 39).

The establishment of the Translation Office is often viewed as a visionary move that signified the Republic's commitment to education and cultural development. This initiative is recognized as a testament to the belief that knowledge should be made accessible to all, laying the groundwork for a literate society. The foundational translations produced during this period have had a lasting impact on the cultural landscape of Türkiye.

Yücel further advanced translation and literary efforts through encyclopaedia and journal projects, following the resolutions of the First Publishing Congress. He aimed to enhance understanding of Turkish culture and Islam by establishing an Encyclopaedia Office, launching the first volumes of the Turkish [İnönü] and Islam Encyclopaedias, and beginning the translation of the Grand Memento Larousse in 1942, paving the way for greater intellectual

enlightenment (Kılıçoğlu et al., 2015, p. 36). During his tenure, he also undertook initiatives to standardize and purify the Turkish language, aiming to make education more straightforward and accessible (Kılıçoğlu et al., 2015, p. 23).

An example of the literature gained or enriched through translation can also be seen in the improvement of modern Turkish literature in the late 19th century and the Republican Era. According to Göktürk (1994), “It is interesting that early Turkish literary translators such as Ahmet Mithat Efendi (1844-1912) and Şemsettin Sami (1850-1904) also wrote and published their own novels.” (p. 54). Additionally, after the foundation of the Republic of Türkiye, the series of translated literature published by the Ministry of National Education of Türkiye in the 1940s, has given birth to a renaissance in Modern Turkish Literature as well as Modern Türkiye's world of thought (İçöz, 2013, p. 137).

Yazıcı (2010) emphasizes that there mainly are two reasons behind the translation movement initiated by Hasan Ali Yücel: The first one is getting engaged with the universal culture through the translation of Ancient Greek and Roman works, and the second one is creating a permanent society, which is literate and intellectual especially in modern Turkish Language through considering literary translation, which is an important step for transiting from oral culture to written culture (p. 59). At this point, translation assumes a twofold function: both an outward-looking intellectual opening tool and an inward-looking nation-building mechanism. In other words, while Türkiye integrates with universal knowledge through translation, it also creates its own type of modern citizen and enters a social “rewriting” process. This can be interpreted that the role of translation can be considered as a kind of “social engineering” practice in Turkish society.

Hilmi Ziya Ülken (1901-1974) gave a detailed list of the authors, whose works were translated by the ‘Translation Office’ in the Yücel's Era, in his book entitled ‘The Role of Translation in Awakening Eras’ (Uyanış Devirlerinde Tercümenin Rolü) published in 1935 and republished in 2011 (Ülken, p. 264). Ülken also comments on translation activities positively: “If translation activities continue in the same pace and seriousness, we will obtain all the literary and philosophic classics that our country needs within ten or fifteen years (Ülken, 2011, p. 264.).”

This foresight indicates that translation is not only a tool but also a cultural strategy. Ülken (2011) claims here that the translation movement can enrich national knowledge in a short time. This vision is an expression of translation being seen as an element that shapes the future and being made an “engine of modernization.”

3. Historical and Theoretical Perspectives on Translation in Türkiye

Translation has been a central force in shaping the cultural and intellectual history of Türkiye, serving as a bridge between civilizations from the Ottoman Empire to the modern Republic. The role of translation, however, has evolved across different periods, influenced by political priorities, modernization efforts, and ideological shifts. Scholars have explored these developments through comparative analyses, examining how translation policies and practices in Türkiye aligned with or diverged from other national movements.

Bayraktar-Özer (2022) highlights the similarities between the translation movements in Türkiye and China, both of which used translation as a means of modernization in the 19th and 20th centuries. While China's translation efforts were largely decentralized, Türkiye adopted a centralized approach, especially with the establishment of institutions such as the Translation Bureau. "While China and Türkiye both underwent radical transformations, translation was crucial in introducing Western knowledge into both societies. However, Türkiye's efforts were more centralized through institutions such as the Translation Bureau" (Bayraktar-Özer, 2022, p. 137). This statement of Bayraktar-Özer (2022) demonstrates that translation movements in Türkiye progress in a state-guided and planned structure, while revealing that translation is positioned as an ideological tool. Therefore, one can understand from this statement is that translation in Türkiye is not only a cultural transmission, but also an instrumentalized practice in the construction of national ideology. Institutions such as the Translation Office have operated as implementers of national strategies rather than individual creativity. According to this statement, it can be easily understood that translation can be considered as a cultural engineering tool intertwined with the "state mind" in Türkiye. This institutionalized approach played a crucial role in shaping the nation's intellectual landscape.

The role of translators within these institutions was often constrained by political and bureaucratic structures, limiting their agency. Sarıgül (2020) argues that Ottoman translators were often seen as mere conduits of knowledge rather than independent intellectuals, stating: "Translation history tends to focus on the text and text production process more than the individuals who took part in those processes. Institutional translators need more research from both a contemporary and historical perspective" (p. 178). This statement draws attention to an important gap in translation historiography: the invisibility of translators as agents. Based on Sarıgül's criticism, it can be easily understood that historical documents and policies reflect translation as an institutional activity but overshadow the individual contributions behind these activities. This situation has caused translators to become ideological tools, especially in

bureaucratic structures such as the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, within the framework of this interpretation, it can be argued that translators should be considered not only as instrumental but also as subjective and political figures in the process from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic. This bureaucratic control over translators meant that their work often had to align with state ideologies rather than reflecting an organic intellectual exchange.

As a result, the reception and impact of translated works were deeply intertwined with political and social transformations. Şimşek & Tosun (2017) discuss how translations of European literature played a significant role in the Ottoman Empire's transition toward modern literary forms. "The introduction of European literature through translation created a cultural shift in the late Ottoman period, enabling local authors to adopt new narrative techniques and genres, which in turn laid the foundation for the modern Turkish novel" (p. 402). This influence is evident in the emergence of Turkish literary modernism, which borrowed structural and thematic elements from French and Russian literature.

Governmental policies regarding translation were not only limited to literature but also extended to legal and administrative texts. Strauss (2016) highlights how the Ottoman government translated key legislative documents, such as the 'Kanun-i Esasi' (Ottoman Constitution), into multiple languages to accommodate its multilingual empire. "The translation of the Kanun-ı Esasi into minority languages such as Armenian and Greek was not merely an act of linguistic accommodation, but a strategic decision aimed at reinforcing state authority and ensuring legal uniformity" (p. 45). This observation by Strauss (2016) points out that translation is not only a cultural tool but also an administrative tool. Within the multilingual structure of the Ottoman Empire, the translation of legal texts into different languages was not only for "access" but also for "control". Here, translation functions as a kind of hegemonic legitimacy tool. This clearly reveals that translation is not only a knowledge-transferring practice but also a power-building practice. This suggests that translation was also a political tool, ensuring that state policies reached diverse ethnic and linguistic groups within the empire.

Beyond legal translation, scientific and religious texts were also areas of contention. Wilson (2014) discusses how translation was central to the ideological battles between Islamic traditionalists and modern reformers in the late Ottoman period. The translation of the Qur'an into Turkish, for example, was controversial, as it challenged the authority of classical Arabic interpretations. "The Ottoman attempts at Qur'an translation reflected broader ideological struggles between Islamic tradition and modernist reformers, leading to debates about the

appropriateness of rendering sacred texts into the vernacular” (p. 89). This reflects how translation was not merely a linguistic process but a deeply political and religious one.

During the early Republican period, translation was instrumental in language reform and nation-building. The Turkish Language Reform of 1928, which aimed to replace Arabic and Persian loanwords with Turkish equivalents, was heavily supported by large-scale translation efforts. Lewis (1999) describes this process as a double-edged sword, stating: “The aggressive language purification movement of the 1930s and 1940s was paralleled by a surge in translation activities aimed at replacing Arabic and Persian-derived terms with Turkish equivalents, often resulting in linguistic discontinuity” (p. 112). While these efforts aimed to modernize the Turkish language, they also disconnected younger generations from older texts and cultural references. This statement explains the synchronization between the language revolution and the translation movement. Lewis’s observation shows that translation is not only a tool for modernization but also a carrier of the linguistic rebirth process. The translation activities that ran parallel to the purification of the Turkish Language served to reconstruct both the intellectual and linguistic memory of the nation. In this context, translation is a kind of “new language architecture” construction.

One of the most structured efforts in translation policy came with the establishment of the Translation Bureau in 1940, spearheaded by Hasan Ali Yücel. Tahir-Gürçağlar (2018) describes the Bureau as a key institution that sought to create a national literary canon through translation. According to ‘Tarih-Gürçağlar (2018): “The establishment of the Translation Bureau in 1940 represented an institutionalized effort to create a national literary canon, ensuring that translations aligned with the ideological vision of the Republic” (p. 73). Foundation of Translation Office reveals that translation activities in Türkiye are not only intellectual but also political and bureaucratic. When we look at the structure of the Translation Committee, we understand that the state aims for both an ideological and cultural reconstruction through translation. This structure demonstrates how translation has become a “cadre movement” in the process of building a collective consciousness. This initiative not only introduced Turkish readers to world classics but also played a role in shaping Türkiye’s intellectual identity.

Translation did not only function as a means of modernization but also facilitated intellectual exchange between Turkish and Western scholars. Berk (2004) argues that translation acted as a cultural bridge, bringing Western philosophical and literary ideas into Turkish intellectual circles. As Berk (2004) asserts: “Translation functioned as a cultural bridge, introducing Turkish audiences to Western philosophical and literary traditions, which were subsequently

assimilated and adapted within the framework of local discourse” (p. 54). Berk’s metaphorical expression emphasizes that translation is a “field of encounter” rather than “transfer.” In this sense, translation is not static but a dynamic field of intercultural interaction. The “bridge” image here implies not only a transition but also a two-way reproduction: while translation localizes the foreign, it also transforms the local. This highlights how translation was both a tool of cultural transformation and a means of resistance, as Turkish intellectuals selectively adapted foreign ideas to local contexts.

Despite the progress in translation policies, challenges remained. Paker (2002) critiques the Eurocentric models of translation theory, arguing that they fail to capture the unique characteristics of Ottoman and Turkish translation traditions. “Ottoman translation practices cannot be fully understood through Western paradigms alone; rather, they should be examined through indigenous translation concepts such as *terceme* and *nazire*” (p. 12) What Paker (2002) wants to state is that translation theory should be sensitive to locality. In this context, it is stated that the Ottoman understanding of translation cannot be grasped with Western terms. Traditional concepts such as translation and ‘*nazire*’ constitute the conceptual vocabulary of local translation history and offer an alternative theoretical ground. This paves the way for the rewriting of translation history with a postcolonial sensitivity. Consequently, this suggests the need for alternative translation theories that account for non-Western historical contexts.

The contemporary field of translation studies has expanded beyond linguistic concerns, incorporating sociopolitical and ideological dimensions. Baker & Saldanha (2009) emphasize that modern translation studies must acknowledge these broader influences. "Translation studies as a field has evolved to encompass not only linguistic concerns but also sociopolitical, ideological, and historical dimensions, particularly in contexts such as Ottoman and Republican Türkiye” (p. 34). This reinforces the idea that translation is not just a technical process but a deeply embedded cultural practice that reflects power dynamics, intellectual shifts, and historical contingencies.

Consequently, translation in Türkiye has undergone significant transformations, from its role in the Ottoman Empire as a means of legal and religious transmission to its function in the early Republic as a nation-building tool. While translation helped introduce new ideas and literary forms, it was also shaped by political ideologies, institutional constraints, and modernization efforts. The scholarly discussions surrounding translation in Türkiye reveal that it has always been more than just a linguistic activity; rather, it is a key force in shaping cultural identity, intellectual development, and national policy.

4. Limitations and Challenges in Translation Activities in the Ottoman and Early Republican Era

Translation activities in the Ottoman Empire and early Republican Türkiye faced several challenges, including disorganization, political constraints, and a Westernization bias. These issues shaped the trajectory of translation history in Türkiye, limiting its scope and impact on intellectual and cultural development.

One of the primary issues was the lack of systematic and organized translation efforts in the Ottoman period. According to Aksoy (2005), translation activities before the 19th century were highly fragmented and inconsistent, primarily serving religious or administrative functions rather than fostering broader intellectual development. She notes, "Although these activities were disorganized and inconsistent, they still helped the development of similar sciences and Modern Turkish Literature which was to reach its peak in the Modern Turkish Republic established in the 20th century" (p. 951). This inconsistency meant that while translation had a role in shaping the Ottoman intellectual landscape, it was not a structured movement that could systematically contribute to scientific and literary progress.

Another significant limitation was the role of institutional translators, whose agency was often constrained by political agendas rather than intellectual independence. Sarıgül (2020) argues that translation history has traditionally overlooked the role of translators as individuals, focusing instead on the texts themselves. Sarıgül (2020) emphasizes the need for further research into institutional translators, stating, "Translation history tends to focus on the text and text production process more rather than the individuals who took part in those processes and produced those texts. [...] Institutional translators need more research from both a contemporary and historical perspective" (p. 178). This highlights how translators, particularly those working in the Ottoman government's Translation Chamber, were often restricted in their work, serving primarily as diplomatic tools rather than independent intellectual contributors.

Moreover, the translation policies of both the Ottoman and early Republican periods exhibited a strong Westernization bias, often neglecting non-Western sources of knowledge. Bayraktar-Özer (2022) critiques this Eurocentric focus, noting that modernization efforts in Türkiye were largely shaped by defensive attempts to integrate Western legal, scientific, and literary traditions rather than fostering a more balanced exchange with other cultural spheres. As Özer (2022) explains, "Although Türkiye's modernization is frequently compared to Russia's and Japan's, one difference between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, for instance, is the 'offensive modernization' of the former, which aims to be acknowledged and included in Europe, and the

'defensive modernization' of the latter, which aims to hold on to its belongings” (p. 134). This suggests that while translation played a crucial role in the modernization of Türkiye, it often did so at the expense of indigenous intellectual traditions, reinforcing a one-sided cultural exchange.

In conclusion, the history of translation in the Ottoman Empire and early Republican Türkiye was marked by significant limitations. The lack of systematic organization, the constraints placed on translators, and the strong Westernization bias all contributed to shaping a translation movement that was reactive rather than proactive. While translation undeniably facilitated cultural and intellectual exchanges, these limitations highlight the need for a more nuanced and balanced approach to translation history that considers both Eastern and Western influences.

Discussion

The Ottoman Empire's cosmopolitan nature, encompassing a diverse array of ethnicities, languages, and cultures, provided a unique context for the flourishing of translation activities. The initial phase of translation during the 15th century was marked by interpretative efforts aimed at facilitating diplomatic and military communication. The conquest of Istanbul in 1453 under Mehmet II catalyzed these activities, with Greek translators playing a crucial role within the palace and newly conquered territories. However, the intellectual climate of the Ottoman Empire during this period was largely introspective, with limited engagement with the classical works of Greek and Roman civilizations. Instead, translations focused predominantly on Islamic texts and Sufi literature. This trend persisted until the 16th century when the empire's intellectual isolation became more pronounced, especially in comparison to the burgeoning intellectual and scientific advancements in the West.

The late 17th and 18th centuries marked a turning point in the Ottoman Empire's translation activities. Recognizing the growing intellectual and scientific gap between the Ottoman society and the rapidly advancing Western world, the empire initiated several educational reforms. These reforms led to the establishment of new educational institutions that adopted Western models of education, thereby fostering a new wave of translation activities.

Translations during this period were no longer confined to religious and moral texts but began to include scientific, political, and military works. This shift not only enriched the intellectual landscape of the Ottoman Empire but also laid the groundwork for the cultural and scientific advancements that would later define the early Turkish Republic.

The Tanzimat period (1839-1876) was a critical phase in the evolution of translation activities within the Ottoman Empire. This era of reorganization and reform introduced new literary genres to Ottoman society, most notably the novel. Translations from French and other European languages brought the works of prominent authors such as Guy de Maupassant, Emile Zola, and the Goncourt Brothers into Turkish literature. Reflecting on this transformative period, it becomes apparent that the Tanzimat era served as a crucial turning point in Turkish literature. The introduction of new genres sparked a creative renaissance, and the translators who championed these works can be seen as cultural ambassadors who brought forth ideas that would challenge and inspire future generations.

These translations played a pivotal role in modernizing Turkish literature and fostering a cultural exchange between the East and the West. They also facilitated the introduction of new literary forms and ideas, which enriched the Turkish literary tradition and contributed to the intellectual awakening of Ottoman society and gave pace to the westernization efforts of the Ottoman intellectuals.

The establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk marked the beginning of a new era in the history of translation activities in Türkiye. The young republic embarked on a comprehensive project of modernization and Westernization, which included significant reforms in education, law, and culture. Translation was seen as a crucial tool in this process, enabling the republic to integrate into the global intellectual and cultural milieu by not compromising the national identity and values for Turkish society.

One of the most influential figures in this translation movement was Hasan Ali Yücel, the Minister of National Education from 1935 to 1950. Yücel's establishment of the 'Translation Office' (Çeviri Bürosu) in 1940 was a landmark initiative that significantly contributed to the development of contemporary Turkish literature and education. The office's extensive translation projects included works from French, German, British, Russian, and Scandinavian literature, which played a vital role in the intellectual enrichment of Turkish society.

Yücel's translation initiative was driven by two primary objectives: engaging with universal culture through the translation of classical works and fostering a literate and intellectual society. The translations carried out during his tenure laid the foundation for a vibrant literary culture in modern Türkiye, transitioning the society from an oral to a written tradition.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to explore the effect of translation activities to Türkiye's modernization and cultural transformation between the late Ottoman and the early Republican era, focusing especially on the institutional effectiveness of the Translation Bureau. Several key research questions directed the inquiry, and the findings provide nuanced answers to each.

Firstly, with respect to the place of the Translation Bureau within early Republican cultural modernization and identity construction, the study indicates that translation was utilized strategically, not only to enrich the national literature but also to provide a different set of societal values more in concordance with Western, humanist standards. The Bureau's activities were deeply intertwined with the educational and ideological reforms of the time, operating as a project of cultural engineering led by the state. The Bureau was actively involved in its own process of construction of both a shared cultural memory and an institutional intellectual identity through the systematic editing and appropriation of canonical texts.

Yet another result that one can conclude from the research is that the functional character of translation activities underwent a significant change from the Tanzimat period to the Republican era. Translation during the Ottoman Empire, particularly early on, remained mainly focused on diplomatic and religious 'needs' rather than the Tanzimat period which saw more literary or ideological pursuits—save for the translation of Western scientific texts which were preferred for pedagogical purposes, such as understanding innovation. This trajectory continued and became institutionalized with the establishment of the Translation Bureau, signifying a shift from responsive borrowing to proactive cultural planning.

Furthermore, in response to the Bureau's role in the Turkish literary polysystem, the study applies Polysystem Theory and declares translated literature as the centre of the 1940s and dominating the literary system. These translations did not just supplement an existing canon; they displaced originals, cementing dominance and shaping genre formation and literary taste. There are already translated novels, plays, and philosophical texts available in institutions and public discussion, which represent this paradigm shift.

Finally, the exploration of norms and strategies according to Toury's Descriptive Translation Studies indicate that the Bureau adhered to predominantly target-oriented norms. Translations were conditioned by the doctrines and expectations of the age in new ways, with interventions that sought to domesticate foreign texts. It is through these operational and preliminary norms that

one observes a deliberate manipulation of source texts to serve national ideals rather than a fidelity or equivalence in any conventional sense.

The historical trajectory of translation activities in Türkiye, spanning from the late Ottoman Empire to the early Republican era, reveals a complex and dynamic interplay of cultural, intellectual, and political forces. This study has explored the significant role that translation has played in bridging cultural divides, fostering intellectual growth, and shaping the literary landscape of the region. The impact of translation activities is seen as transformative, with the shift from an oral to a written culture recognized as a profound change. This transition not only democratized knowledge but also empowered individuals to engage critically with diverse ideas. It is posited that this evolution was pivotal in shaping a more informed and culturally aware citizenry in Türkiye. By examining the evolution of translation practices and their impact on Turkish society, this study provides a deeper understanding of how these activities contributed to the development of modern Türkiye.

In conclusion, the history of translation activities in Türkiye is a testament to the transformative power of translation in shaping cultural and intellectual landscapes. From the late Ottoman Empire to the early Turkish Republic, translation has served as a bridge between different cultures, fostering intellectual growth and enriching the literary tradition of the region. The legacy of these translation activities continues to influence contemporary Turkish culture and literature, highlighting the enduring importance of translation in the nation's historical and cultural evolution.

As Türkiye continues to navigate the complexities of the modern world, the lessons learned from its rich history of translation activities remain ever-relevant. The ability to engage with diverse cultures and intellectual traditions through translation will undoubtedly continue to play a vital role in the country's ongoing development and progress.

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