



# When Particular Contexts Create Their Concepts: The Evolution of *Meal* as a Canonical Translational Term for Qur'an Translations in Türkiye\*

## Kendi Kavramlarını Yaratan Bağlamlar: “Meal” Kelimesinin Bir Kur’an Tercümesi Terimine Evrilme Serencamı

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### ABSTRACT

The plethora of Qur'an translations in Türkiye, with hundreds of different and/or edited translations, attracts attention as a productive and fruitful but, at the same time, tense and resistant translational site. This study aims at uncovering the motives behind the evolution of the translational term "*meal*" [meaning] in the field of Qur'an translations to contribute to the history of translation tradition in Türkiye with a particular concentration on religious text production. This study illustrates the prevailing harsh discourse concerning the output of Qur'an translations, which necessitates new designations (i.e., titles), and portrays one of its results: *meal*. In this respect, the translational endeavor to survive and act under the guise of an alternative title (i.e., *meal*) is portrayed with references to conceptual history. To this end, firstly, the premises of conceptual history are visited. Secondly, approaches toward Qur'an translations are introduced with an emphasis on the notion of translation to better explain the background that led to the formation of this particular term. Thirdly, the evolution of *meal* from a common word into a widely recognized translational term of daily circulation is tracked in different long- and short-term sources to comment on the poetics and politics of Qur'an translations in Türkiye.

**Keywords:** Qur'an translations, conceptual history, translation history, *meal*

### ÖZ

Bu çalışma, “meal” [anlam] çeviri teriminin Kur’an tercümeleri alanındaki evriminin ardındaki perdeyi aralayarak, dini metin üretimi özelinde Türkiye’deki çeviri geleneği tarihine katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Yüzlerce farklı ve/veya gözden geçirilmiş/düzenlenmiş Kur’an tercümesinden oluşan bu çeviri bütüncesi verimli ama aynı zamanda gerilimli bir tercüme çalışma alanı olarak dikkat çekmektedir. Bu araştırma, Kur’an tercümelerinin üretimine ilişkin yeni adlandırılmalar gerektiren baskın ve yönlendirici bir çeviri söylemi üzerinde çalışarak, bu durumun sonucu olduğu iddiasıyla “meal” kavramı üzerinde yoğunlaşmaktadır. Bu bağlamda bir alternatif çeviri başlığı arama güdüsü, Kur’an tercümeleri ve çevirmenleri için bir hayatta kalma çabası olarak tasvir edilmektedir. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, kavram tarihi araştırma öncülleri ele alınmakta, ardından Kur’an tercümelerine yönelik yaklaşımlar, bu özel terimin oluşumuna yol açan arka planı daha iyi



açıklamak için incelenmektedir. Çalışma kapsamında, zengin bir metin örgüsü içerisinde bir kelimenin (yani *meal*'in) bir çeviri kavramına dönüşüm yolculuğu örneklenmekte, Türkiye'deki Kur'an tercümeleeri özelindeki çeviri söylemine farklı kaynaklardan yararlanılarak ışık tutulmaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Kuran tercümesi, meal, kavram çalışmaları, terminoloji

## 1. Introduction

Tracking the historical account of a term or a concept falls into the same field of conceptual history. Any particular designation of a specific phenomenon emerges due to a social, political, and/or cultural change. In other words, the decision to name a particularity in a particular way is governed by varying conditions, and their analysis can provide resourceful insights. This is the primary motivation behind this study on a translational term peculiar to Qur'an translations in Turkish: “*meal*” (meaning). Today when a Turkish-speaking person says, “*Meal okuyorum* [I am reading *meal*],” the addressee immediately understands that s/he is reading the translation of the Qur'an but nothing else, which was not the case before the 1930s. Regarding concepts as political and historical structures, this study portrays an interdisciplinary approach and merges the premises of translation studies with conceptual history.

*Meal* stands out as a remarkable translational instance representing the evolution of a specific word defined as “meaning” into an established translational term defined as “the book including the meanings of the Qur'an, and the translation of the Qur'an, etc.” (Öztürk, 2019). *Meal* as a common word found its way into vernacular-terminological language as a term through translation. Before delving into the grand narrative of Qur'an translations, one should note that the Turkish language is vibrant concerning translational practices (Paker, 2011). Various forms of text production are (in)directly related to translation in the general sense. The words such as *tercüme* [translation], *çeviri* [translation], *derleme* [compilation], *adaptasyon* [an adaptation], *hülasa* [summary], *nakl* [conveying], *sadeleştirme* [simplification], *iktibas* [borrowing], etc. all refer to a translation-oriented practice. Then one considers, in this abundance, what led relevant agents to look for a new term to define their Qur'an translations. This is where the politics of translation comes to the stage and governs the process and the discourse on the translation of the Holy untranslatable (i.e., the Qur'an). A brief look through the available data reveals that “*meal*” began to be used in the title of a Qur'an translation in Turkey in 1935 with the first state-sponsored translation of the newly established Republic of Turkey. This is where the story begins, which will be explained in detail below.

This study aims to uncover the motives behind the evolution of the translational term “*meal*” [meaning] in the Qur'an translations in Turkey to contribute to the history of translation studies in Turkey with a particular concentration on religious text production. The analysis illustrates the prevailing tense and resistant discourse concerning the output of Qur'an translations, which necessitates new designations (i.e., titles) and portrays one of its results: *meal*. In this respect, the translational endeavor to survive and act under the guise of an alternative title (i.e., *meal*) will be portrayed with references to conceptual history.

In this research, the premises of conceptual history are used to explore the account of an existing common noun that transforms into a term with alleged translational attributions. To this end, the premises of conceptual history will be visited with particular references to its relation to translation. Secondly, the approaches toward Qur'an translations in Turkey will be

introduced with an emphasis on the notion of translation to better understand the background that led to the formation of this particular translational term (i.e., *meal*). Thirdly, the evolution of *meal* from a common word into a canonized translational term will be tracked in different long- and short-term sources. In the final part, the poetics and politics of translation are discussed under peculiar findings and statistical data concerning Qur'an translations in Turkey with minute comparative examples from the Qur'anic renderings worldwide. By elaborating on the issue from different perspectives, I am motivated to provide exemplary research for further studies on Qur'an translations in Turkish, which – to my mind- have not yet received adequate attention in the field of Qur'anic translation studies in Turkey until now.

## 2. Merging Conceptual History with Translation History in a Micro Study

Conceptual history is a field that studies concepts to analyze different forms of cultural, political, and social changes. With its simplest definition, it requires tracking a particular word in a spatial and temporal framework. This is also the theoretical insight that governs the practice's quest to explain a conceptual change and its relation to social changes. Conceptual history is an interdisciplinary field of study, and its practical use in translation studies will be exemplified in this study. To this end, a translational term's discursive and definitional baggage will be analyzed to offer stimulating perspectives in a corpus of study.

The hybrid nature of the field welcomes various researchers from different disciplines. Reinhart Koselleck is one of the prominent scholars of the area and, in a way, determines the general premises of a study concerning conceptual history as follows: (1) to identify concepts that had a prominent role in the characterization of history; (2) to contextualize concepts within the relevant social and political discourses; (3) to provide critical analysis of the concepts concerning historical data (Koselleck, 2002). Christophe Bouton (2016) evaluates Koselleck's approach as an "inquiry into the historical categories that are used in or presupposed by the experience of history at its different levels, as events, traces, and narratives" (164). The framing insight in this approach is that any historical representation uses a vocabulary that distinguishes the issues under discussion. It is where historical concepts- a translational term in this study- come to the stage and allow specific identifications. It is a dual process: both questions in a conceptual history study consider how the relevant word is understood and how it has changed over time.

On this point, one might rightfully ask how this perception relates to Translation Studies. Translation and translation history, in particular, deals with concepts and, more often, with terms concerning translational practices. That is, the terms used to define various text production practices constitute subject matters of the field. Any attempt to excavate these terms might benefit from the practical premises provided within conceptual history. In this regard, the in-depth analysis of a translation historian resembles the work of a conceptual historian in the sense that both endeavors to reveal particular uses in vocabulary to illustrate specific breaking points

and transformation processes. However, they might differ concerning the comprehensiveness of the words they deal with. A conceptual historian might study grandiose concepts such as modernism, equality, freedom, etc., that provide grand narratives. In contrast, it is more probable for the translation scholar to work on micro cases like translational terms rather than concepts that indicate turning points in translation history in synchronic and diachronic contexts.

The analysis of the emergence and instrumentalization of a key translational term uncovers the particularities of performativity (Austin, 1962) and “refractions, frictions and the breaking up of certain enduring elements that affect the chain of events, or we may refer to the retrospective of events upon their enduring presuppositions” (Koselleck, 2002, 7). The evolution of a term under the guise of canonical religious text production (i.e., the Qur’an) portrays the circulation of the relevant word while constructing and maintaining a reality in life. In this regard, Hans-Jürgen Losebrink (1998) identifies an interplay of “lexicological, semantic, intermedial, socio-cultural and intercultural” dimensions (115) as critical categories of research on conceptual history.

Another critical point in the analysis of a concept is the selection of data because the history of concepts is to be accompanied by the history of the objects to which the terms of the repertoire refer (Koselleck, 2002). To this end, the elaboration on “*meal*” cannot be fully understood without exploring established texts in the field of Qur’an translations. In this regard, canonical texts which refer to the works produced by scholars/ prominent figures of the field, receive wide acceptance, and have a broad scope of circulation can be viewed as primary areas of the meaning-making process (Koselleck, 2002). Within the scope of this study, canonical texts will be limited to well-known Qur’an translations with prefaces, forewords, and conclusions, which refer to the peritexts and epitexts (Genette, 1997; Tahir Gürçağlar (2002) to have a viable and trackable source of data in chronological order. Besides, examining the term will accompany other short-term and long-term sources (Palonen, 1997). Texts of daily circulation, like letters, newspapers, and magazines, constitute the first group of sources. The latter group comprises dictionaries, encyclopedias, and classical texts of established scholars (Palonen, 1997, 48). With the available data, the non-homogeneous terminological inventory of the term *meal* will vividly be shown from different perspectives in the long-time scheme of the new Republic of Turkey with inevitable reference to the Ottoman intellectual heritage of Turkish culture.

### 3. An Overview of the Discourse on the Translation of the Qur’an (in Türkiye)

The statistical data on the number of Qur’an translations in Turkey reveals that more than five hundred are available today (Üstün, 2013). In this plethora of translations, as expected, there are various voices concerning the production of these translations of the Qur’an.

The discourse on the translation of the Qur’an is primarily governed by the view that at the outset, all Muslims, Arabs, and non-Arabs, learn and read the Qur’an in Arabic because it

is the Arabic version that Muslims consider to be the true Qur'an, the direct word of Allah. It should be noted that no translation is regarded as the Qur'an or the Word of Allah as such, and no translation has the same status as the original Qur'an in Arabic. For Muslims, in general, translations are renderings of the Qur'an's meanings and are not representative or by no means capable of replacing the original Arabic version.

These are the prevailing concerns that direct the presentation of the Qur'an in renderings in Turkey. The emphasis on originality (Mustapha, 2009), untranslatability of the holy text (Hussein, 2001; Al-Amri, 2010), and the asymmetrical and hierarchical power relation between the creator (i.e., God creating the source text) and the developed (translator producing the target text) all govern and determine the flow of the energy in this translational particularity (Akpınar, 2011; Baltacıoğlu, 1952; Boynukara, 2002; Cündioğlu, 2011; İnan, 2007). This context loads the term "translation" with insecurity, insufficiency, and to some extent, impossibility and puts the agents of this translational act into a defensive position. That is why you will read in the prefaces of many Qur'an translations the translators' statements concentrating on the validity and justification of their translations rather than their methods, particular features, etc.

The Turkish case is complex concerning the designation of the translation of this great untranslatable (i.e., the Qur'an), and the intriguing narrative of this study, which is the evolution of "meal" (b. 1935) as a translational term, becomes evident in the subsequent sections. What is more, I think this is the leading insight that guides translators of the Qur'an around the world to refrain from using the term "translation" but something else in the title of their translations. The examples are numerous, and here are some of the well-known ones: Marmaduke W. Pickthall (1875-1936) - *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*; Muhammad Asad (1900-1992) - *The Message of the Qur'an*; Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdûdi (1903-1979) - *Towards Understanding Qur'an*; Muhammad Muhsin Khan (1927- 2021) - *Interpretation of the Meanings of Qur'an in the English Language*, etc. These decisions belie the respective translators' underlying ideologies, views, and discourses.

#### **4. The History of a Term Reflecting Upon the History of Translation Tradition in Türkiye: The Evolution of "Meal."**

The fluid nature of language well plays its role in *meal*. The word is of Arabic origin and is defined as meaning or a synopsis of meaning. It has long been used in Turkish interchangeably with other Turkish words such as "*mana, anlamlı*, etc." [meaning, content]. Because the Turkish language (actually Ottoman Turkish) borrowed and internalized numerous words from Arabic and Persian throughout history, it is impossible to determine the first use of the word in Turkish as a common word.

The initial use of the word as a term in the context of Turkish Qur'an translations dates back to 1935, corresponding to the publication of *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili Yeni Meallî Türkçe Tefsir* [True Religion and True Word – New Exegesis of the Qur'an with the Synopsis of

Meaning] by Elmalılı Muhammad Hamdi Yazır. This was the first state-sponsored translation of the Qur'an of the new Republic of Turkey, established in 1923. Its official presentation, wide distribution, and circulation, along with the prominence of the translator as a well-known Islamic scholar of the time, supported this translation. It turned it into an established reference work in the world of Qur'an translations in Turkey. The active engagement of a prominent translator figure governed the discourse over this translation. Hamdi Yazır provided a long preface in this translation where he defined the term and explained the motives behind his preference to title his translation as a “*meal*” rather than “*tercüme/çeviri*.” The term was defined as follows: “The act of rendering a statement verbatim by including one of its possible interpretations rather than its all meanings which result in some deficiency has been called a *meal*. Our preference for *meal* stems from this deficiency” (Yazır, 1935, 31). The definition draws attention with its initial acknowledgment of the insufficiency/deficiency of the translation before the source text and secondly with its concentration on the endeavor of the translator to faithfully render the original with no authorial intention. The *differentia specifica* of “*meal*” stems from this translational pragmatism leading to its establishment as a term. I deliberately chose the word pragmatism because the terminological use of the word “*meal*” served as a means of justification for the production of Qur'an translations in the Turkish context under the shadow of discussions on its untranslatability. With this lexical choice, the translator- Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi Yazır (1935) - manifested from the very beginning that his translation was a product of a humble human being, and it could by no means be equal to the holy original (i.e., word of God), and that he accepted the supremacy of the original vis-à-vis his translation.

The translator (i.e., Hamdi Yazır (1935)) produced a masterly clever discourse in the reformative years of the early Republican era in Turkey. The new nation-state witnessed the first Qur'an translations in Turkish and controversial attempts to change the language of worship and *ezan* [call to prayer] from Arabic to Turkish, which were conducted with dreams of a pure Turkish Islam disseminated by a state institution Directorate of Religious Affairs<sup>1</sup>. Yazır broke the regime of the Great Untranslatable<sup>2</sup> [i.e., the Qur'an] with his translation. Simultaneously, he eliminated any criticism against his attempt to translate the Qur'an for the state by stating that “I do not claim to translate but to produce a *meal*” -even though the end product was a translation *par excellence*- and his translation would trigger the boom of Qur'an translations in Turkey in the following years. In other words, his preference for “*meal*” rather than “*tercüme*” did not stem from the intention to propose a new translation strategy or a new text production practice because when you compare two different translations of the Qur'an, “*meal*” and “*tercüme*,” you might not be able to find distinctive differences with respect to methodology. Instead, he was motivated to create a discursive narrative over Qur'an translations to covertly spread the idea that the Qur'an could not be translated precisely to

1 For a detailed depiction and discussions of the attempts to Turkify the language of religion in Turkey, see Tuğlacı, 1987; Parla & Davidson, 2004; and Armağan, 2010.

2 This is a deliberate choice to define the Qur'an to emphasize the dominant discourse over its untranslatability.

the source text; thus, no rendering of the Qur'an could be used to replace the Arabic original (which was claimed to be the hidden motivation of the new ruling elites of the era). According to Yazır (1935), only a “*meal*” could be produced to help people understand the message of this holy book, and it could not bear any claim for representation or authorial power. In this context, the term ‘*meal*’ can be evaluated as an outcome of the socio-political circumstances guided by an agent of change (Touy, 2002) of the domestic Qur’anic repertoire in Turkey. The following data collected from short-term and long-term sources (i.e., letters, newspapers, dictionaries and encyclopedias, classical texts of established scholars, etc.) (Palonen, 1997) illustrates the account of this evolution and sufficiently explains the heavy baggage of this translational phenomenon.

#### 4.1. Tracing “*meal*” in Established Translations of the Qur’an

The history of concepts is to be accompanied by the history of the objects to which the terms of the repertoire refer (Koselleck, 2002). Thus, the elaboration on “*meal*” cannot be understood without exploring established texts in the field of Qur’an translations. For this study, the canonical texts are limited to well-known Qur’an translations with prefaces, forewords, and conclusions (i.e., peritexts) to have a viable and trackable data source in chronological order.

The term “*meal*” first appears in the mid-1930s with the state-sponsored official translation by Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır. As a prominent Islamic figure of the period, Yazır seems well aware of the newness he brought to the existing repertoire (Even-Zohar, 2002). He drew strict lines between different rendering practices relevant to Qur’an translations in Turkey as follows:

[Translation is to express the meaning of a word in another language with a corresponding expression. “It must be equivalent to the original expression in clarity and signification, in summary, and in detail, in general, and in particular, in liberating and in restricting, in strength and accuracy, in the beauty of style, in the manner of elucidation, in the production of knowledge and in craft” (quoted in Wilson 2009, 430). Otherwise, it would not be a complete translation (translation proper) but a deficient version.] (1935, 9)

With his translation-oriented definitions, the translator constructs a bi-faceted discourse concerning the text and agency. Yazır (1935) asserts that “*meal*” could not represent the holy original as it would be inherently deficient. The translator will be in a secondary position before the sacred author. This translation produced by Yazır has been one of the most frequently published Qur’an translations since then. It has been reproduced in different forms with additional notes, abbreviations, summaries, etc. In the 1960 edition of this translation, edited by Osman Nebioğlu (1960), the term is re-formulated with a concentration on the acknowledged eloquence of the original. In this regard, Nebioğlu (1960) draws attention to the stylistic preservation of “*meal*” and claims that it is what differentiates it from “*tercüme*” [translation]. With this and the following instances, it will be better seen that the initial mapping of “*meal*” with “*verbatim*



translation” changed in time, and varying text production practices began to be called “*meal*” as well. The explicit statements of the translators also illustrate the broad recognition that the term has gained and how it has continued to add to its translational baggage.

As a matter of interesting fact, long prefaces in the 1973, 1981, and 1985 editions of the exact translation also include additional chapters on the untranslatability of the Qur’an. However, neither of them further problematizes and/or further conceptualizes using the term “*meal*” apart from the short statements written by Hasan Hüsnü Erdem in the 1961 edition. This illustrates the ongoing dominance of “untranslatability” governing the definition of “*meal*” in the relevant period.

This only covers part of the story, though. New translations were produced with nuances to “*meal*” as a translational practice. In the preface of his Qur’an translation, Süleyman Ateş (1977) - a well-known Turkish Islamic scholar - intriguingly defined the attempt to produce a verbatim translation of the Qur’an as a sinful and infeasible act. In this way, he broke the bond between word-for-word translation and *meal* that was constructed by the initial translation by Hamdi Yazır (1935). Ateş (1977) approaches translation from quite a narrow perspective and limits it to verbatim rendering, and this view shapes his discourse on *meal*.

The translational baggage of the term continued to be loaded in time, and the definition of the translatorial agent producing meal also thickened. *Meals* are prevailingly recognized by their producers/translators, which can be a person or a committee affiliated with an official institution (i.e., the Directorate of Religious Affairs]. In this regard, the translator of the *meal* matters significantly in the acceptance and circulation of a Qur’an translation in Turkey. Namely, their symbolic capital is briefly defined as “the capital—in whatever form—insofar as it is represented, i.e., apprehended symbolically, in a relationship of knowledge or, more precisely, of misrecognition and recognition” (Bourdieu, 1986, 257). That is why translators of the Qur’an act as meaning-makers who govern the reception of the relevant translation and accordingly determine the designation of their translations (i.e., *meal*). With this particularity, most *meal* producers are widely recognized Islamic scholars enjoying great visibility that has not been granted to translators in many non/literary circles.

#### 4.2. Tracing “*meal*” in dictionaries and periodicals in Turkish

A better grasp of the evolution of the term “*meal*” requires new variants of the textual corpus. To explore the shifts in direction and momentum of the term, this section is spared for analyzing “*meal*” in different lexicons and periodicals to keep track in a durational and regular period.

Strolling through the lexicons published in the early Republican period with the Latin script, *Türkçe Sözlük* [Turkish dictionary] (1945) defines the word as “*diyem, meşhum*” [purport, notion]. The *Yeni Resimli Lügat ve Ansiklopedi* [New Pictured Dictionary and Encyclopedia] (1947) echoes the former definition with a few additions such as “*anlam, diyem, mana, meşhum*”

[meaning, purport, meaning, notion].

In the 1950s, the same definition is repeated in several other dictionaries such as *Türkçe Sözlük* [Turkish Dictionary] (1955, 1959, and 1966 editions), *Ansiklopedik Büyük Sözlük* [Grand Encyclopedic Dictionary] (1966), and *Büyük Lügat ve Ansiklopedisi* [Grand Dictionary and Encyclopedia] (1969) with a concentration on “meaning, concept and purport” as frequent correspondences.

In the 1970s, not much was added to the definitive features of the word, and “*meal*” is still defined just as “*anlam, kavram, mefhum*” [meaning, concept, notion]; “*bir söz veya yazının anlatmak istediği fikir (eş. Mantuk, mazmun, diyem, mana, mefhum*” [the idea of a statement or a writing- syn. The reason, theme, purport, meaning, sense] in the *20. Yüzyıl Ansiklopedik Sözlük* [Encyclopedic Lexicon of the 20<sup>th</sup> century] (1971) and *Resimli Büyük Türk Dili Sözlüğü* [Grand - Pictured Turkish Lexicon] (1971) respectively. Along the same lines, a bilingual dictionary designated as *Turkish English Lexicon* (1978) explains “*meal*” as “a place or thing to which one returns as a home refuge. The meaning to which words point, substance, the purport of a sentence”, which reverberates to the original use of the word in Arabic.

In the decades-long quest for the term within dictionaries, the 1980s marked the debut of particular Qur’anic and translational attribution to the word “*meal*.” In the *Büyük Türkçe Sözlük* [Grand Turkish Dictionary] (1982), the definition is given as “*Mana, mefhum, kavram. Öz, özet. Kur’an-ı Kerim’in anlamını ihtiva eden kitap*” [meaning, notion, concept. Essence, summary. The book that consists of the meaning of the Qur’an]. This is a remarkable and precise instance of a terminological establishment in a certain language. The word acquires a self-expressive definition with respect to the Qur’an translations in Turkish. On this point, it should also be noted that the translational attribution to the word is included in the lexicons five decades after its first usage in the title of a Qur’an translation. This demonstrates the importance of analyzing different sources of information so as not to miss temporal gaps between lexicons and other textual productions.

In the same lexicon, the definition is further detailed with the word’s derivative forms. As an example, the word “*mealci*” [*meal +ci*] is defined as “*Kur’an-ı Kerim meali hazırlayan kimse, Kur’an-ı Kerim meali okuyan kimse* [The person who prepares the *meal* of the Qur’an, the person who reads the *meal* of the Qur’an],” where dual agency is attributed. The use of the same designation both for the producer and the addressee of the translational act can seem confusing at first sight. It is a consequence of a particular discussion, “*mealcilik*,” concerning Qur’an translations since the 1980s concerning the over-dependence on *meal*.

Furthermore, the publisher of this dictionary deserves attention to its symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). It was published by *Yeni Şafak* Publications, recognized for its Islamic inclination. This might have impacted the inclusion of such a detailed definition of a Qur’anic term different from most of the lexicons of the same period. That is why I insist that the term’s evolution in dictionaries has also blossomed under ideological motivations surpassing

etymological and semantic concerns.

Coming to the new millennium, “*meal*” seems to have acquired a foundational translational characteristic. The *Axis Ansiklopedik Sözlük* [Axis Encyclopedic Dictionary] (2000) defines the word briefly as “*anlam, kavram*” [meaning, concept] without including any expression on the practices of Qur’anic renderings. However, the sample sentence accompanying the word in this dictionary vividly illustrates the embedded translational reference into the terminological inventory of the term: “Kur’an’ın *Türkçe meal*” [Turkish rendering/synopsis of meaning of the Qur’an].

Along with monolingual and bilingual Turkish dictionaries, a terminology lexicon titled *Tefsir Terimleri Sözlüğü* [The Dictionary of Exegesis Terms] (2009) introduces “*meal*” by focusing on its particular utilization for Qur’an translations by revisiting the abovementioned concerns:

[Qur’an translations are called *meal* (synopsis of the meaning) rather than *tercüme* (translation), as the former is more appropriate for the content of the act. “*Meal*” means ‘deficient translation, with a different approach to translation.]

However, the terminological account of “*meal*” in periodicals follows a different and subtle path. The term does not appear in newspapers or journals with a specific Qur’anic attribution until the 1950s. This period is a breaking point in Turkish history, hosting many socio-political changes with the transition to the multi-party period and the rise of Islamic publications in Turkey. Developing the terminological use of *meal* in newspapers’ promotion pages is possible. Interestingly, in several promotions (published in *Milliyet* 21 August 1957; *Milliyet* 10 June 1963) of Remzi Publishing House, the term *meal* is used interchangeably with *tercüme* (translation).

Only after the 1970s does, the term seem to have established its translational baggage and begin to be used as a term on its right in the periodicals. The following excerpt from a periodical exemplifies this usage in a precise way: “*Kur’an meali ve açıklamaları Diyanet tarafından hazırlanmalıdır.* [The Directorate of Religious Affairs shall prepare the meal and the explanations of the Qur’an] (*Milliyet*, 8 September 1976). Thus, the terms seem to have entered into daily circulation in periodicals quite late, considering its first usage in the title of a Qur’an translation in 1935. In this respect, this is a vivid example of establishing a translational term under the auspices of a religious text production, which bears repercussions of the relevant periods’ social, political, and cultural conditions.

## 5. What Meal Tells Us about the Politics and Poetics of Qur’an Translations in Türkiye

The analyses of the canonical texts (i.e., paratextual elements of well-known Qur’an translations) have revealed that the evolution of the term “*meal*” dwells upon three premises: untranslatability, subjectivity, and representativeness. According to this view, any textual

reproduction of the Qur'an in any language is doomed to be impotent to preserve all of its semantic, linguistic, and aesthetic properties, and here *meal* functions as the declaration of this deficiency: “[It is a new concept that began to be used peculiarly for the Qur'an. It resulted from the view that the eloquence of the Qur'an cannot be translated by preserving all its aspects. *Meal* means translating the meaning in a form between translation and exegesis]” (Atalay, 2007, 29). This idea frames the main arguments on untranslatability. Secondly, agency constitutes another concern for Qur'anic renderings. The endeavor of the translator to transfer the words of the Holy Creator is discussed with references to subjectivity. In this regard, “*meal*” is presented as a humble attempt at a subjective interpretation of the Qur'an: [As the Qur'an cannot be translated into any language completely, its translations are called a *meal*. That is, the *meal* is not the complete transfer of the meanings of the Qur'an but the transfer of what the translator understands from the Qur'an] (Altuntaş & Şahin, 2009, 8). As the final remark of this triad, the idea of the (un)representativeness of a Qur'an translation develops based on its acknowledged untranslatability and subjective nature; accordingly, the words of the omnipotent creator cannot be represented as a whole by a potent creator (i.e., the translator); and thus, it can by no means be replaced by its any kind of renderings.

In the plethora of Qur'an translations available today, it is seen that social, political, and ideological premises are embedded into the terminological baggage of “*meal*.” The 1980s witnessed the debut of *meal*-oriented arguments in Turkey. However, it bore a slightly pejorative connotation. In these years, an increasing amount of Qur'an translations published in several forms as “*meal*” gained wide-spread circulation (Üstün, 2013) and began to receive considerable criticism with the claim that they violated framing features of “*meal*” with radical shifts in forms, rank-bounds, and interpretations of certain ayahs. Some of these translations were even accused of manipulating the essence of the Holy Book. This criticized dependence on the “*meal*” (i.e., Turkish rendering of the Qur'an) rather than the original Qur'an in Arabic also gave birth to an ideological orientation on its right. It was called “*mealcilik*.” The word is defined as “*Kur'an-ı Kerim meali okumayı ön plana alma görüşü*” [The view, prioritizing reading the *meal* of the Qur'an]. This view over-prioritized the meaning of the Qur'an, which put Qur'an translations to the core of the world of belief and put Sunnah and hadith (i.e., practices and expressions of the Prophet Mohammad) into a relatively secondary and/or insignificant status. These arguments have placed “*meal*” at the center of discussions on Qur'an translations with unanswered questions on the potentials of the translation vis-à-vis the original since then. In this context, renderings produced peculiarly for certain sects and religious groups began to constitute the site of polarization in these translation-oriented discussions in 1980s Turkey. I believe this crystallization in the deliberate preference for specific translations over others has mainly derived from the manipulative power struggle among different Islamic groups in Turkey. In this case, translation emerged as an instrument of ideological combat with repercussions on market dynamics. Besides, these discussions draw attention with their emphasis on the collective agency. The criticisms directed towards these

Qur'an translations never address the relevant translators but the sects. The spiritual leaders of the related denominations should be held responsible for any alleged misinterpretation in the translation under discussion. The foregrounding of leading figures in these translational instances can also be interpreted as a repercussion of market dynamics (governed by the demands of the readers), which are counted among the factors that affect the quantitative superiority of *meal* among Turkish Qur'anic renderings with other titles as well (Demirel, 2009).

## 6. Conclusion

This study has portrayed the evolution of a typical word into an established translational term in Qur'an translations in Turkey. Since 1935, the terminological inventory of the term has been embedded with varying translational attributions such as “word-for-word translation of the Qur'an, rendering the Qur'an into Turkish, transferring the original into another language with some deficiency, the book including the translation of the Qur'an, etc.” The conceptual history of the term can be summed up under three facets: concerning translational function, performance, and product. The first refers to the primary motivation that led to its formulation as a term. *Meal* has served as a means of justification for Qur'an translations under harsh discussions on the untranslatability of the Qur'an. To this end, the translator avoided any criticism and/or accusation against his translation by preliminarily accepting that his translation is deficient before the holy original and that s/he has no authorial will for representation. Besides and more importantly, this term served as a discursive tool for a covert resistance against the period's politics (i.e., official attempts to replace the Arabic Qur'an with its Turkish translation) by producing a non-fluent verbatim translation insistently articulating its deficiency.

Second, the term is attributed to varying methodological definitions concerning translational performance. Initially, it is designed to refer to verbatim, word-for-word translations of the Qur'an. In time, different translators began to produce new sense-for-sense translations and called their works “*meal*” as well. The complex texture of the term with respect to translation strategy is further embedded with creative transpositions of the Qur'an in Turkish in the form of verse rather than prose.

The changes observed in the definition of the term inevitably have had repercussions on the depiction of the translatorial agent. They have moved from the position of inactive conveyers who slavishly adheres to the source text to the position of creative transposers with authorial copyrights. Nevertheless, regardless of where one stands between these two edges, the visibility Qur'an translators (*meal* producers in particular) have enjoyed in Turkey has not changed. Most of the *meals* are received in society under the impact of their producers, where the symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) of the relevant translator makes a difference. Namely, who renders the *meal* matters significantly in the Turkish context of Qur'an translations. In this regard, I can safely assert that most *meal* producers have enjoyed the visibility and recognition many translators in non/literary circles have never experienced.

Third, the term now functions as a self-expressive term for Qur'an translations in Turkey. As a demonstration of its broad spectrum of usage and acceptance in daily language, an addresser saying "I am reading a *meal*" can easily convey to the addressee that "s/he is reading the Qur'an translation" without further explanation. In this vein, numerous renderings of the Qur'an in Turkish called "meal" are available in the market today, bolstering the definition "the book including the Turkish translation of the Qur'an."

Having a conceptual history of more than eighty years as a particular term of Qur'an translations in Turkish, *meal* proves to be an insightful subject of research in translation. It portrays the impact of socio-political and ideological trajectories on translation. The tracking of the term in different sources has revealed that it appeared in the 1930s within canonical texts (referring to well-known Turkish Qur'an translations in this case), in the early 1950s within the periodical pages, and in the 1980s as a dictionary entry. The lack of temporal linearity concerning the term's evolution in different sources also reverberates on its complex and blurry definition. The study's findings also illustrate how ideological and discursive motivations might surpass etymological and semantic concerns in a translational case with religious sensitivities; thus, they require a particular perspective. The rich texture of the term can be viewed as a preliminary study reflecting the politics of Turkish Qur'an translations in different periods and under specific contexts of production. Accordingly, this evolutionary journey can also serve as an eye-opening quest to form a meta-narrative on the translational norms of Qur'an translations in Turkey.

As a final remark, comparative macro and micro studies on the designation of Qur'an translations in different languages around the world can significantly contribute to the field of Qur'anic studies by opening the path to contextualize and discuss traditions and norms that govern the translation of this canonical book which is translated numerous times into several languages across the globe.

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