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BARRIERS TO PROFESSIONALIZATION: POVERTY CULT TRAITS AMONG TRANSLATORS IN TÜRKİYE	MESLEKLEŞMENİN ÖNÜNDEKİ ENGELLER: TÜRKİYE'DEKİ ÇEVİRMENLERDE YOKSULLUK KÜLTÜ İZLERİ
<p><b>ABSTRACT</b></p> <p>This study investigates how internalized traits associated with the concept of poverty cult influence the professionalization of translators in Türkiye. Drawing on Neil Inglis's poverty cult, an adaptation of Oscar Lewis's culture of poverty theory, and Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus, the research examines the impact of structural challenges on the attitudes and behaviours of translators. Data were collected through open-ended survey responses from 237 translators based in Türkiye between January 2022 and January 2023, and the analysis was conducted using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA). The findings reveal several prevalent characteristics linked to the poverty cult, including resentment of colleagues' success, isolationism, cynicism toward institutions, and resistance to professional unity. Although many participants advocate for enhanced regulation, unionization, and greater public recognition, these comments were often articulated in passive language, reflecting a reluctance to take proactive measures. The results suggest that internalized economic marginalization obstructs engagement with professional networks and collective advocacy. To effectively promote professionalization, strategies must directly confront these ingrained dispositions by fostering solidarity, trust, and a shared professional identity. Achieving this requires targeted initiatives from translator associations, educational institutions, and supportive policy frameworks.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Language services sector, Poverty cult, Professionalization, Qualitative Content Analysis, Translator habitus</p>	<p><b>ÖZET</b></p> <p>Bu çalışma, içselleştirilmiş <i>yoksulluk kültürü</i> eğilimlerinin Türkiye'deki çevirmenlerin meslekleşme sürecini nasıl etkilediğini incelemektedir. Çalışmada Oscar Lewis'in <i>yoksulluk kültürü</i> kuramından Neil Inglis tarafından uyarlanan <i>yoksulluk kültürü</i> ile Pierre Bourdieu'nün <i>alan</i> ve <i>habitus</i> kavramları temel alınmıştır. Türkiye'deki 237 çevirmenden 2022-2023 yılları arasında toplanan açık uçlu anket verileri Nitel İçerik Analizi (QCA) yöntemiyle analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, katılımcılar arasında meslektaşların başarılarına karşı hoşnutsuzluk, mesleki yalnızlaşma, kurumlara yönelik alaycı tutum ve mesleki birlikteliğe karşı direnç gibi yoksulluk kültürü eğilimlerinin yaygın olduğunu göstermektedir. Birçok katılımcı yasal düzenleme, sendikalaşma ve toplumsal tanınma vurgusu yapsa da bu taleplerin genellikle edilgen bir dille ifade edildiği, kişisel sorumluluk üstlenmekten kaçınıldığı gözlemlenmiştir. Sonuçlar, içselleştirilmiş ekonomik marjinalleşmenin profesyonel ağlarla etkileşimi azalttığını ve ortak mücadeleyi engellediğini ortaya koymaktadır. Meslekleşmenin etkili biçimde desteklenebilmesi için, dayanışma, güven ve ortak mesleki kimlik duygusunu geliştiren stratejiler aracılığıyla bu yerleşik tutumlarla doğrudan mücadele edilmelidir. Bunun için çeviri dernekleri, eğitim kurumları ve ilgili politika çerçevelerinin hedefe yönelik girişimlerde bulunması gereklidir.</p> <p><b>Anahtar kelimeler:</b> Çevirmen habitusu, Dil hizmetleri sektörü, Nitel içerik analizi, Meslekleşme, Yoksulluk kültürü</p>

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## Introduction

The current economic landscape, shaped by neoliberal principles emphasizing deregulation, privatization, and free markets, has led to notable transformations in employment patterns, such as outsourcing and remote work. These changes have been particularly evident in the translation industry, with freelance and remote work arrangements becoming increasingly widespread (Jan Chan & Ming Liu, 2013; Moorkens, 2017; Kuznik & Verd, 2017). The post-pandemic era has further accelerated this trend, as the surge in digitalization has heightened the outsourcing of translation services to freelance practitioners, causing precarious working conditions (Mahadin & Olimat, 2022; Lambert & Walker, 2022; Fırat et al., 2024; Liu, 2024).

In this transaction, Türkiye comes to the fore as a country where rigorous neoliberal economic policies have been in effect since the 1980s, and a low level of professionalization has been observed in the language sector. Additionally, the country has recently experienced rising inflation and an increased cost of living, leading to deteriorating working conditions and work-life balance, affecting all sectors in general (Şahin & Kansu Yetkiner, 2020; Fırat, 2021; Fırat et al., 2024; Karadoğan, 2025). Therefore, evaluating the working conditions of translators based in Türkiye, especially considering the challenging circumstances they face, has become an essential area of study.

With the sociological turn in Translation Studies (TS), various new theories and concepts have been introduced to shed light on these new phenomena. Among these, the theory of habitus and field proposed by Pierre Bourdieu (1998) has gained significant attention from translation scholars (Simeoni, 1998; Inghilleri, 2003; Gouanvic, 2005; Sela-Sheffy, 2005; Wolf, 2011). *Habitus*, in the translation field, refers to the internalized dispositions and practices translators develop through their education, work experiences, and interactions within the profession, shaping how they perceive their value, negotiate their labour, and respond to market pressures (Simeoni, 1998). The *field* is understood as a structured social space where various actors, such as translators, agencies, clients, academic institutions, and professional organizations, compete for resources, recognition, and influence. Within the field, actors leverage their economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital to secure a favourable position. Incorporating these ideas has enhanced interdisciplinarity within the TS and led to a deeper understanding of the sociological factors influencing translation.

One such early attempt was made by Neil Inglis, who addressed the American translation market in his 1996 speech at the American Translators Association (ATA) Conference. He introduced the term “poverty cult” (Clay, 1998, p. 1) to describe translators’ internalized traits such as resentment for others’ success, aversion to monetary gain, and preference for modest living. Inglis’s concept builds on the anthropologist Oscar Lewis’s (1966) “culture of poverty” theory, and it suggests that certain behaviours among translators resemble those of disadvantaged communities. These traits can impede professionalization, discouraging engagement in professional networks and information sharing, which undermines the status of the profession. However, translation scholarship has yet to connect these traits to the ongoing struggles of professionalization.

In this context, this study aims to investigate the presence and variation of poverty cult traits among translators based in Türkiye, drawing on Inglis’s adaptation of Lewis’s culture of poverty theory. It examines how these dispositions manifest across different employment categories and

how they shape translators' attitudes toward professionalization. To deepen the analysis, the study also employs Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital, highlighting how economic precarity, undervalued cultural capital, weak professional networks, and limited symbolic recognition reinforce individualism and hinder solidarity. In doing so, the study addresses a gap in the sociology of translation literature by showing how such internalised traits structure translators' habitus and contribute to behaviours that obstruct the professional development of the translation field in Türkiye.

For this purpose, the research questions are as follows:

- RQ1: What themes related to the culture of poverty emerge in narratives of translators based in Türkiye?
- RQ2: How do these dispositions shape translators' attitudes toward professionalization?

To answer these questions, an online questionnaire was distributed featuring demographics, work-related questions, and open-ended inquiries into participants' perceptions of the translation profession and their suggestions for enhancing it, in order to identify recurring themes and discern any traces of poverty cult traits within the dataset. The data was collected from a sample of translators based in Türkiye with variations in employment status (full-time vs. part-time) and work type (freelancer, in-house, institutional) and analyzed in accordance with Qualitative Content Analysis using MAXQDA Analytic Pro (2024). To gain a deeper understanding of the field, the next section provides insights into the context of professionalization in translation.

### **Professionalization of Translators in Türkiye**

In the context of TS, a profession is understood as an organized occupation characterized by formal training systems, standardized certification procedures, ethical codes, and efforts to regulate and protect expertise domains (Pym et al., 2012). Professionalization, in this context, refers to the systematic and deliberate efforts of an occupation to establish itself as a respected and recognized profession. The goal of professionalization is to enhance the credibility and reputation of the occupation as well as to ensure the quality and consistency of services provided to clients or the public (Pym et al., 2012, p. 80). Beyond structural characteristics, professionalization also involves the establishment of collective identity, prestige, and mechanisms of boundary maintenance that distinguish members of the profession from non-professionals (Sela-Sheffy, 2015). Thus, understanding translation as a profession requires attention to institutional frameworks and the social and symbolic dynamics that shape translators' status and solidarity (Tyulenev, 2015).

In the late 20th century, neoliberal economic policies emphasizing deregulation, privatization, and labour market flexibilization fundamentally reshaped work conditions worldwide (Harvey, 2005; Block et al., 2012). The creative and service industries, including the language services sector, have increasingly shifted toward freelance, project-based, and precarious employment models (Menger, 2017; Figart, 2021). In Türkiye, these global trends intersected with national economic reforms initiated in the 1980s, resulting in a highly fragmented language services market characterized by widespread informal labour, unstable incomes, and limited professional protections for translators (Fırat, 2021; Fırat et al., 2024). As digitalization and global outsourcing accelerated, translators faced heightened competition, downward pricing pressures,

and blurred boundaries between professional and non-professional translation (Grbić & Kujamäki, 2018; Jiménez-Crespo, 2024). These market conditions necessitate an urgent focus on the professionalization of translators, not merely to uphold quality standards but to safeguard translators' economic survival and collective standing (Sela-Sheffy, 2015; Koskinen & Dam, 2016; Pym et al., 2016; Al-Tarawneh & Al-Badawi, 2024).

To achieve this, the role of professional organizations in the professionalization process is well-established in the literature (Yılmaz-Gümüş, 2018; Seymen & Selcen Aslan, 2019; Uysal, 2021; Obdržálková, 2024). According to Tseng's (1992) model of the professionalization of conference interpreters in Taiwan, a profession is characterized by the amount of power it holds, and professionalization is a combined effort rather than an individual one. He stated that "powerful professions are characterized by power associations" (1992, p. 20). Therefore, a relationship exists between the position of translation associations and the professionalization of translation in a country. However, the association membership among translators in Türkiye appears to be low, although precise figures remain unclear. For instance, in the study by Fırat et al. (2024), none of the participants, most of whom were freelancers translating for digital platforms, were members of any association.

Alongside the establishment of numerous professional associations and academic programs in translation and interpreting across various languages, there have been specific efforts to professionalize translators in Türkiye. In 2012, the Vocational Qualifications Authority of Türkiye (MYK), in collaboration with academics and sectoral stakeholders, published the occupational standards for translators and interpreters. Another step toward professionalization was taken when the Turkish Standards Institute (TSE) adopted the translation services standards TS EN 15038:2006, TS EN 15038:2009, and, most recently, TS EN ISO 17100:2015. Although these tangible efforts are noteworthy, providing the abovementioned standards and qualifications is optional in the Turkish market. Moreover, holding a relevant diploma or certificate to practice translation or interpreting is not mandatory, nor is it necessary to start a translation business. Therefore, the hard work of these prominent actors is in danger of being wasted as market conditions and technological frameworks evolve.

### **Translators' Poverty Cult and Habitus**

One notable impediment to collective action towards the professionalization of translators is the phenomenon termed the "poverty cult," as articulated by Neil Inglis during his address at the American Translators Association (ATA) Conference in 1996, later reported in NOTIS News (Clay, 1998, p. 1). While access to the original recordings of the speech has not been possible, several pieces, blog posts, and interviews addressing and underlining this concept have been in circulation for some time. Accordingly, Inglis identified seven distinctive traits of the poverty cult, which include feeling resentment for other people's accomplishments and taking pleasure in their misfortunes, believing that it is preferable for everyone to be unsuccessful rather than just a few to thrive, having reservations about money, idealizing a modest way of life, preferring to possess less rather than taking chances, and experiencing *Schadenfreude* (Clay, 1998, p. 1). These claims still appear valid, as translators continue to discuss them in blog posts and interviews (Leridi, 2014; Hendzel, 2018). Moreover, Inglis (2016) revisited his speech 20 years later and underlined the legitimacy of his claims despite the advances in technology and changing market conditions.

Inglis's concept of "poverty cult" comes from the term "culture of poverty," which should be separate from the concept of poverty, and was first put forth by Oscar Lewis in his study of Mexican families living in the US (1974, p. 16). Lewis (1966; 1974) argued that individuals in economically disadvantaged communities often develop a shared worldview shaped by long-term structural deprivation, leading them to internalize attitudes of fatalism, mistrust of institutions, and short-term decision-making over long-term investments. These traits bring about "feelings of hopelessness and despair which develop from realizing the improbability of achieving success in terms of the values and goals of the larger society" (Lewis, 1974, p. 18).

Similarly, Inglis's poverty cult traits suggest that many translators have internalized a mindset discouraging professional ambition and economic advancement. For instance, resentment of others' success and Schadenfreude can be understood as manifestations of an ingrained sense of competition rather than cooperation, which aligns with Lewis's observation that marginalized groups often struggle with collective organization due to internal divisions. Likewise, the preference for universal mediocrity over selective success reflects a form of resistance to hierarchical differentiation, a key aspect of Lewis's framework.

If individuals believe that it is preferable for no one to thrive rather than for a few to succeed, professional advancement efforts, such as specialization, certification, or rate standardization, may be viewed with suspicion by some translators. The scepticism toward money and idealizing a modest lifestyle mirrors Lewis's (1966) findings that those in persistent economic hardship often develop ambivalent attitudes toward wealth and economic mobility. Moreover, the aversion to risk-taking and preference for having less align with Lewis's argument that impoverished individuals often prioritize immediate security over long-term investment. All these impediments can leave traces in the translator's habitus, which, in turn, further impact translators' decision-making process in the professional field. These dispositions are formed through socialization and experience (Bourdieu, 1998) and guide translators in their approach to their work and professional choices (Simeoni, 2005).

Here, the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *field* refers to the social world in which agents are situated. It is a kind of microcosm or an environment that actors help shape while also being shaped by it in return. Within every field, there is an ongoing power struggle. Those who already hold power try to maintain their position, while others attempt to gain access to it. Crucial to this dynamic are the different forms of capital that actors possess and mobilize. Bourdieu (1998) distinguishes between *economic capital* (material and financial resources), *cultural capital* (knowledge, skills, education, professional qualifications), *social capital* (networks, associations, and connections), and *symbolic capital* (prestige, status, and recognition). These capitals are unequally distributed, and their relative weight varies depending on the logic of the field.

Moreover, an individual's actions and decisions within a field are not independent of their past experiences, education, cultural background, or values. All of these factors come together to form what Bourdieu calls *habitus*. In short, *habitus* refers to such embodied systems as perception, taste, and action, etc., that develop over time through actors' social environment. It is the way the social becomes part of the individual, built into the body as a lasting set of dispositions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2003). Within this framework, the intense competitiveness and precarity of the Turkish language services sector, along with the acceleration of the platform and gig-based

economy (Firat et al., 2024), all affect translators' habitus in a way that they can exhibit traits which can be termed as the culture of poverty.

Consequently, this study employs a qualitative approach to gain a clearer understanding of how sector pressures and precarious working conditions influence translators' habitus in the field, in that they may exhibit poverty cult traits and the overall impact on the professionalization process. The following section provides details on the methodology of this study.

## Methodology

This study examines a sample of translators in Türkiye, including freelance, in-house, and public institution translators and interpreters, with variations in employment status and income dependency on translation work. After obtaining ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Scientific Research and Publication of Kırklareli University (Decision No: E-88720503-299-40870, dated 16.02.2022), a Google form with seven demographic, ten work-related, and three open-ended questions about perceptions of translation work was released online in January 2022. The answers from 237 participants were collected within one year, until January 2023.

Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) was chosen for the analysis as it is suitable for identifying latent patterns and themes within textual data, particularly in contexts where participants' underlying attitudes and dispositions are analyzed inductively and deductively (Schreier, 2012). Accordingly, QCA is a method used to make sense of extensive data, including interview transcriptions and answers to open-ended questions (Schreier, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Lune & Berg, 2017). Since the number of participants is relatively high, MAXQDA Analytics Pro (2024), a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software, was utilized as it is considered one of the most innovative tools for social science methodologies (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023). Consequently, the results from the demographic and work data are listed below:

**Table 1:** Demographic and work characteristics of participants

Variable	Category	n	%
Country	Based in Türkiye	237	100%
Gender	Female	150	63.3%
	Male	84	35.4%
	Other	3	1.3%
Marital Status	Single	158	66.7%
	Married/Equivalent Partnership	79	33.3%
Education	Bachelor's Degree	177	74.7%
	Postgraduate Degree	50	21.1%
	Associate Degree	7	3%
	High School Diploma	3	1.3%
Employment Type	Freelancer	160	67.5%
	Private Institution	60	25.3%
	Public Institution	17	7.2%
Employment Category	Part-time/Project-based	146	61.6%
	Full-time	91	38.4%
Work Type	Translating	176	74.3%
	Translating and interpreting	54	22.8%
	Interpreting	7	2.9%
Primary Income	Translation as the main income	150	63.3%
	Other sources of income	87	36.7%

This study surveyed 237 translators to examine demographic characteristics, working conditions, and income levels. Of the participants, 63.3% identified as female (n=150), 35.4% as male (n=84), and 1.3% as other (n=3). Regarding marital status, 66.7% were single (n=158) and 33.3% were married or in equivalent partnerships (n=79). In terms of education, 74.7% held a bachelor's degree (n=177), 21.1% a postgraduate degree (n=50), 3% an associate degree (n=7), and 1.3% a high school diploma (n=3). In terms of employment, 67.5% worked as freelancers (n=160), 25.3% in private institutions (n=60), and 7.2% in public institutions (n=17). 61.6% worked part-time or on a project basis (n=146) and 38.4% were employed full-time (n=91). All participants were over 18, with an average age of 31.6 years and work experience ranging from several months to a maximum of 40 years. Furthermore, the open-ended questions included in the questionnaire were as follows:

- In your opinion, what are the positive aspects of the translation work?
- In your opinion, what are the negative aspects of the translation work?
- In your opinion, what steps should be taken for improvement?

The survey questions and responses were collected in Turkish, the native language of the participants. After data collection, the open-ended responses (approximately 11,650 words) were processed and analyzed. A hybrid inductive-deductive coding strategy was employed: initial categories emerged from participant responses and were later refined to align with theoretical constructs such as habitus, culture of poverty, and professionalization. Major code families included "Professional Isolation," "Distrust Toward Peers," "Hostility Toward Clients and Institutions," "Financial Aversion," and "Skepticism Toward Collective Action," with sub-categories capturing nuances such as resentment toward peer success and cynicism toward translator associations. Code relations were organized using MAXQDA's Creative Coding tool, facilitating decisions about merging, separating, or deleting codes. Two field specialists reviewed the resulting code structure, and revisions were made based on their feedback. The next section highlights the findings of the study.

### **Findings: Tracing the Poverty Cult Traits**

Inglis's poverty cult, drawing from Lewis's culture of poverty concept, emphasizes common traits among translators' habitus, such as resentment of others' success, scepticism of wealth, risk aversion, and a preference for mediocrity. These reflect Lewis's theory that economically struggling groups adopt attitudes that hinder their advancement. To assess whether these traits are present in participants' habitus, the study examines their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of their work, highlighting key themes.

### **Deflecting Responsibility for the Sake of Collective Action**

According to 62 participants (44 freelancers and 18 in-house translators), the most favourable feature of the translation profession is that it can be done remotely. Therefore, it is "flexible," and the translator is "not tied to anyone or anywhere." They underlined that being able to practice this profession "independently," "alone," and "by yourself," as well as not being obligated to "deal with any co-workers or boss" or "communicate with others," is the main attraction for them. These participants value their freedom and independence.

They are also somewhat reluctant to establish face-to-face, in-person relationships with their clients or other translators. This is rather contradictory to the fact that 37 participants who answered similarly also indicated that the most viable way to solve the problems in the translation sector is to gather under one umbrella organization that will fight for translators' rights and recognition. As stated in the previous sections, the establishment of a professional association is one of the main steps of the professionalization process. However, despite these calls for collective action, participants overwhelmingly used passive voice ("should be done," "must be set") instead of asserting personal agency ("we should do it"). This linguistic choice reflects a key characteristic of the culture of poverty: the expectation that external forces, not the translators themselves, will drive professional change. These responses indicate that many translators prioritize their independence over collective efforts, despite some expressing a desire for collective action.

In this regard, some participants stated that they prefer to work alone with minimal social contact. Nevertheless, they still seek solutions to their problems through social recognition of the translation profession. For instance, four institutional translators stated that society does not "realize the value" and "respect for the difficulty of our profession." They seem uncomfortable as the profession is "open to the criticism of anyone." They assert that raising public awareness about the vital role of translation and translators in day-to-day business operations, technological advancements, and international relations will eventually lead to a more sympathetic and respectful clientele and higher wages. As people distinguish between high and low-quality translation work, they will "give translators their due."

However, these participants seem to overlook the connection between their own visibility and public awareness, as they prefer to stay in their preferred corners and avoid going out in public, expecting social recognition for the translation profession to rise by itself. The language they used in this sense was, again, non-personal. Some of them stated with similar words that "the awareness of the society should be raised." Who is going to do it? The participants did not demonstrate a willingness to invest any concrete effort in raising the visibility and symbolic capital of language professionals. This is parallel with the culture of poverty, as marginalized groups resist collective action due to perceived ineffectiveness, perpetuating their economic vulnerability. Also, translators' habitus is oriented toward individual autonomy due to precarious work conditions. Still, to secure recognition within the field, where symbolic capital is crucial, actors need to collect social capital.

### **Gatekeeping and Pricing Issues: "Interpres Interpretis Lupus"**

As one of the main problems in the language services sector, eighty-five participants (58 freelancers, 22 in-house, 5 institutional translators) pointed to the translators who "knock down" prices. They claim that these translators work "off the books" without paying taxes, and they cause "unfair competition." This is because "everybody and their uncle can practice translation" and "there is no certification system" to control entrance into the profession. Participants agree that establishing a translators' union and offering training and certification can limit undeclared work and price-cutting. This frustration with "price-cutters" aligns with Inglis's observation, in that translators may respond with mistrust or resentment towards peers engaging in aggressive pricing strategies, thus highlighting internal divisions and competitive tensions that hinder collective professional advancement.



Instead of forming strong advocacy groups or pushing for standardized rates, many participants framed the issue as a problem of unqualified individuals devaluing the profession, reinforcing divisions rather than fostering unity. This echoes Lewis's notion that marginalized groups may struggle with internal competition, prioritizing individual survival over collective action. Also, in Bourdieu's terms, these tensions illustrate the dynamics of a dominated field, where translators compete for scarce resources and recognition, often against one another, rather than consolidating their position collectively within the field.

Interestingly, while most participants mentioned similar problems in the sector, there is no way to pinpoint these "price-cutters" or "undeclared workers." Some participants who give similar answers may have been price-cutters at some point in their professional lives. As can be deduced, there is no simple way to "separate the wheat from the chaff," as one participant offered as a solution. Some comments were outright hostile, such as "those low-quality people who pass as translators should be weeded out of the profession." This hostility reflects Inglis's *Schadenfreude*, where some translators may find satisfaction in others' struggles instead of seeking systemic improvements. While their frustrations are understandable, this antagonism discourages collaboration and reinforces the industry's fragmentation. Rather than raising professional standards, some participants promote exclusivity that does not improve working conditions.

Another factor that comes to the fore is that 16 participants (12 freelancers, four in-house translators) support the idea of indiscriminately excluding translators who do not have university degrees in translation and interpreting. One participant suggested "letting only translation graduates to practice" as "it affects the employment of those who have translation degrees." This assumption can be correct to some degree; however, the quality of education in these departments, unfortunately, is not uniform, varying in geography and university. Also, some other language programs, such as Language and Literature, offer translation courses to train literary translators; thus, it would be a somewhat dismissive attitude to ignore these facts completely. Instead, five participants (4 freelancers, one in-house translator) offered a "professional competency certification system on a national level" or "accreditation" to regulate and authorize professional practice "under the supervision of a translator association or union."

This can be a solution to the problem of professional entrance control. Still, this dismissive approach may stem from unwanted competition and rivalry, as some translators are specialists who graduated from domain-specific departments, such as those in civil aviation or engineering. They cannot simply be asked to completely disappear from the language services sector and find work in their fields. Such calls for exclusion reflect boundary struggles within the field, where holders of formal education (cultural capital) seek to protect their position by devaluing alternative pathways into the profession. Moreover, this preference for universal mediocrity over selective success, one of Inglis's key traits, suggests a reluctance to acknowledge alternative pathways to excellence in the profession. Instead of encouraging merit-based professionalization, a higher number of participants seek to gatekeep the industry by prioritizing formal credentials over demonstrated competence. This aligns with Lewis's argument that marginalized communities may resist differentiation, favouring uniformity at the cost of quality distinctions.

Another interesting finding is that 27 participants (17 freelancers, nine in-house, one institutional translator) expressed strong opinions about client-translator or employee/LSP-translator relations, indicating the widespread "system of exploitation." In Türkiye, apart from

medium or large-scale LSPs with experienced administrative staff and translators, there are many small-scale enterprises named “translation bureaus,” which have drawn some participants’ fire. “The commercial bureaus are our cancer,” stated one participant, as they claim that these businesses “act as brokers,” “leech off of translators,” and “lack professionalism.” Another actor on the front lines of the harsh criticisms of these participants is the client. According to them, the main problems in the sector stem from the “uneducated,” “disrespectful,” and “inconsiderate” clients who “assume translators are in their pockets,” indicating that clients always seek lower prices because they lack awareness about the translation process. Clients have “unrealistic expectations about deadlines and prices” and “they are insistent about bargaining.” It can be deduced from these comments that the undervaluation of translators’ cultural capital produces a habitus marked by frustration and low professional self-esteem, which reproduces the cycle of marginalization in the field. In this sense, this adversarial stance toward clients, rather than efforts to educate or negotiate with them, further reflects the poverty cult mindset. Instead of pushing for industry-wide education and awareness-raising on the value of translation, some participants chose to frame clients as an unavoidable problem rather than a group that could be influenced through outreach and negotiation.

### **Resorting to Cynicism, Distrust, and Resignation**

It was not easy to persuade and encourage the translators to participate in this study. While some participants sounded excited to be part of the study, others, as reflected in their answers, approached the research with distrust, even hostility, mocking the study and the researcher. Some responses displayed notable cynicism toward the research process itself. While discouraging, such attitudes illustrate the broader scepticism toward collective initiatives noted in the study’s findings. Moreover, these reactions underscore the barriers to fostering effective sector-academy cooperation within the translation community. Still, it is interesting to note that instead of choosing not to answer the survey, one participant went to some lengths to insult the researcher, which also points to the poverty cult traits. This cynicism toward research, professional organizations, and external intervention reflects the belief that structural improvements are futile. The culture of poverty fosters disillusionment, leading individuals to reject systemic improvements in favour of maintaining the status quo, assuming that any attempt at reform will ultimately fail.

In line with this distrust toward academia, 25 participants (14 freelancers, 10 in-house, one institutional translator) highlighted the shortcomings of undergraduate-level translator education and training, mentioning the need for “improvement to encompass modern sectoral problems.” According to one participant, “the skills needed to make money as a freelance translator, such as finding clients, advertising, entering and keeping a foothold in the market, are not taught in school.” Another participant highlighted the need for “training translators in specialized translation, along with machine translation, taking into account market conditions. Graduates do not know specialized fields.” Despite these recommendations, the overarching attitude remains one of resignation rather than proactive engagement, as if the “low quality education at the undergraduate level” is a constant. Although respondents widely recognize systemic issues in education and professionalization, several responses indicated that they do not always perceive themselves as active agents in resolving these problems. Additionally, this parallels the generational transmission of these traits, as translators are caught in a self-reproducing cycle of precarity, primarily because new entrants to the profession are funnelled into the same unstable systems.

It was not particularly encouraging to read the responses “yok” (none) or just “-” to the question about the positive aspects of translation work. Thirteen participants (11 freelancers, two institutional translators) declared that they did not find any positive aspects apart from the “inner pleasure” translation brings. One participant stated that “it is hard to find a positive aspect lately”, using a “:)” icon, possibly trying to diminish the depressing effect it might have on the researcher. The participants who gave similar answers sometimes added that they were “translating almost for free,” which might be why they feel there is nothing to gain from this profession. According to one participant, “there is nothing apart from blood, sweat, and tears,” perceiving translation as a thankless job requiring too much effort and yielding too little gain. This acceptance reflects a professional habitus shaped by repeated exposure to unstable working conditions. Over time, translators internalize precarity as a natural part of their work, making it less likely that they will challenge or resist it. Moreover, the persistence of precarious working conditions reflects translators’ limited economic capital, which both shapes their professional habitus and normalizes it as an almost natural condition of the field. This perspective also encapsulates the culture of poverty, where economic hardship is normalized and professional dissatisfaction is framed as an inherent part of the job rather than a structural issue that can be addressed.

Despite all the discussion about low income, translators tend to be quite tight-lipped regarding pricing and salaries, as twelve respondents chose not to answer the question about their income. Additionally, the analysis of the income question yielded no coherent results, as the dismissive answers included criticism instead of actual numbers. Moreover, one participant later left a comment under my post stating that asking people to disclose their income was not nice. It may be understandable in a particular setting; however, this data is not readily available to researchers or translators. Short of directly asking other practitioners, a translator has no way of knowing what standard pricing they need to give their clients in Türkiye. As there is no legal framework or agreement among translation associations, the price grid is not fixed. This reluctance to disclose prices and wages also points to the poverty cult traits in a dominated field with limited economic capital.

## Discussion

This study explored how poverty cult traits, as put forth by Inglis and rooted in Lewis’s concept of the culture of poverty, manifest among translators based in Türkiye and how these traits affect professionalization efforts. The findings provide evidence that translators demonstrate several key poverty cult traits, such as distrust toward peers, scepticism of collective action, and reluctance to engage with professional organisations. These dispositions, embedded within translators’ habitus (Bourdieu, 1998), are the result of long-term positioning in a professional field characterized by weak institutionalization. Within this field, translators’ limited economic capital, under-recognized cultural capital, reluctant social capital, and scarce symbolic capital shape and reinforce their inclination toward individualism and competition rather than solidarity.

Addressing RQ1, the data revealed recurring patterns of distrust, cynicism, and disengagement from professional organizations. Many participants expressed doubts about the effectiveness of translator associations due to fragmentation, hesitance to share rate information, and a preference for working independently. This internalized isolation reflects Lewis’s observations (1966, 1974) on marginalized communities, where distrust of collective structures perpetuates marginality. Furthermore, translators often perceived their peers as competitors,

undermining the market through underpricing, reinforcing fragmentation, and discouraging collaborative initiatives. Such dynamics align with Inglis's poverty cult traits (1998), including distrust, resentment, and risk aversion, which limit professional ambition and cooperation. In Bourdieu's terms, reluctance to share rate information, for example, can be read as a strategy to protect scarce economic capital. At the same time, distrust toward associations reflects the weakness of translators' social capital. The lack of symbolic capital attached to the professional habitus further undermines efforts at recognition, leaving translators trapped in a cycle where mistrust arises from and reproduces structural marginalization.

In response to RQ2, these traits present significant obstacles to professionalization. To explain, professionalization relies on collective actions, such as participation in associations, rate standardization, and advocacy for legal recognition, but these are undermined by the same dispositions of distrust and disengagement identified in this study. As Tseng (1992) noted, strong professions require strong associations, yet the fragmentation within the Turkish translation sector weakens its collective power. Consequently, while existing literature has documented the external challenges translators face under neoliberal pressures (Sela-Sheffy, 2015; Pym et al., 2016; Moorkens, 2017), this study contributes to the insight that these pressures become internalized, reproducing the very conditions that obstruct collective advancement. To explain, translators occupy a dominated position within the broader field of cultural production, where their cultural capital is insufficiently converted into symbolic capital. This marginal positioning exhibits both their professional frustrations and their hesitation to invest in collective strategies, which are also indicative of poverty cult traits. Efforts to foster professionalization in Türkiye must therefore address not only structural barriers but also the internalized mindsets that hinder engagement. Translator associations, in particular, have a critical role in rebuilding trust, promoting collaboration, and fostering solidarity through transparent practices, mentorship programs, and shared advocacy efforts.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize the well-documented criticisms of Lewis's culture of poverty framework. Scholars have argued that such cultural explanations risk overshadowing the structural causes of inequality. They may unintentionally shift attention away from systemic economic and political factors sustaining precarity, reducing them to victim blaming (Valentine, 1968; O'Connor, 2001; Small et al., 2010). It may also oversimplify or stigmatize the behaviours of translators, which is certainly not the intention of this study. Moreover, while this study included freelance, part-time, and in-house translators and interpreters, it does not claim that poverty cult traits are uniformly distributed across these groups. Still, participants from diverse employment types strongly emphasized the undervaluing of translators and criticized employers and clients, unstable work hours, and economic precarity, reflecting poverty cult traits. This study acknowledges these critiques and interprets poverty cult traits not as inherent flaws of translators but as dispositions of habitus shaped by precarious structures. In other words, cultural explanations become meaningful only when situated within the material and institutional context of the field.

Finally, while similar dynamics have been observed in other translation markets (Moorkens, 2020; Lambert & Walker, 2022), the persistence and intensity of poverty cult traits among Turkish translators reflect the compounded effects of economic instability and a lack of cohesive professional organization (Firat, 2021; Firat et al., 2024). Future comparative studies could explore whether these traits are similarly entrenched elsewhere and how successful professionalization movements have overcome internal fragmentation. Although comprehensive meetings were held

on several occasions where shareholders gathered to discuss the translation sector in Türkiye (Eruz, 2012), few tangible outcomes have been achieved. While many participants, as well as academics, believe that sector-academy cooperation is the best way to improve translator training programs and equip novice translators with the necessary tools for the sector (Parlak, 2012), the poverty cult traits may hinder translators from taking these events seriously.

In sum, poverty cult traits among translators in Türkiye reflect internalized cultural patterns and the structural dynamics of the field in which they are embedded. Formed under chronic precarity, translators' habitus exhibits individualistic dispositions, while their lack of economic, social, and symbolic capital limits collective advancement. Strengthening professional associations, enhancing networks, and valorizing translators' cultural capital are thus essential steps if the field is to move toward professionalization.

## Conclusion

This study investigated how poverty cult traits influence the professionalization of translators based in Türkiye, focusing on a sample of 237 participants with varying employment statuses and relationships to translation work. Using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) supported by MAXQDA, the research revealed that key poverty cult dispositions, including distrust, resentment, aversion to financial success, scepticism of collective efforts, and preference for modesty, persist among translators and act as significant barriers to professionalization.

As embedded components of translators' habitus, these traits reflect the broader influence of neoliberal economic conditions, which have cultivated an environment of precarity, individualism, and distrust. These internalized behaviors are not just personal attitudes but rather socialized dispositions that sustain stagnation and fragmentation within the translation field. This limitation affects the power and influence of professional associations, reducing opportunities for collective action. The findings also indicate that while translators recognize the need for stronger collective representation and greater public acknowledgment, these objectives are obstructed by deep-rooted attitudes that discourage active participation in professional networks and organized advocacy.

This study has certain limitations. While poverty cult traits were identified among freelance, part-time, and in-house translators, this study does not provide conclusive evidence regarding how these characteristics vary across different employment categories. Since it relies on self-reported data and perceptions, it may not entirely capture the complexities of translators' professional behaviours. Although the sample includes diverse employment statuses, the analysis did not systematically or statistically explore subgroup variations. Future studies could examine how employment type, specialization, and demographics influence translators' habitus and access to capital. Moreover, comparative research across countries could test whether the poverty cult traits found here are specific to Türkiye or part of a broader global trend driven by economic pressures and weak institutionalization.

In conclusion, the ongoing challenge of the professionalization of translators in Türkiye requires structural reforms, institutional support, and a critical awareness of the internalized dispositions that shape translators' collective practices. This study shows that poverty cult traits, embedded in translators' habitus, are reinforced by limited economic security, under-recognized cultural capital, weak social networks, and scarce symbolic prestige within the field. Recognizing the structural and cultural barriers reveals how translators' marginal position is sustained. This

understanding can explain why professionalization remains elusive and suggest pathways to strengthen solidarity, valorize cultural capital, and build frameworks for change.

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