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# BOLOGNA PROCESS IN TRANSLATION STUDIES BA PROGRAM: TURKISH EXPERIENCE

**Hülya Arslan and Nilüfer Denissova**

*Okan University, Turkey*

This paper focuses on two specific elements of the implementation of Bologna Process in Translation Studies (Russian) BA program: the principle of autonomous research and ECTS credits. After giving a brief summary of the history and importance of translation education in Turkey, with the help of a survey, we investigate the students' approach to the increase of independent research load and the consequent decrease of the in-class courses.We establish that in general students find this practice beneficial. However, (a) system of secondary education in Turkey does not develop the skills and techniques necessary for the autonomous study at the higher-education level. Besides this, (b) the lack of accessible, authentic learning materials in the field of Russian-Turkish translation poses another obstacle in this case. Same survey provides data for calculation of ECTS credits for a sample course with 4 weekly hours/8 ECTS credits.Calculation shows that the actual result does not correspond to the official version. Increasing the quality and hours of autonomous study can solve the problem, but this primarily requires the solution for both problems mentioned above.

**Keywords:** Bologna, Translation studies, Turkey, ECTS, Shortened BA degree.

## Introduction

The issue of implementing the Bologna Process decisions in "non-Western European" countries has been already thoroughly discussed from various points of view. The examples of such cases are the cases of Greece (Mattheou, 2011), Russia (Novakovskaya, 2013), Croatia (Kurelić, 2009), China (Zeng, Adams & Gibbs, 2013), Albany (Kume & Dhamo, 2013), Ukraine (Kovtun & Stick, 2009), Turkey (Elmas, 2012; Yağci, 2010; Aba, 2013) and many others. Some of them exhibit the negative attitude towards the idea of straightforward sowing the Bologna seeds into the specific national soil (Mattheou, Novakovskaya), while others underline certain positive aspects of Bologna Process type reform (Aba; Zeng, Adams & Gibbs). Kurelić describes the misrepresentation of the Process in his country, Kovtun & Stick investigate the reasons, decelerating the implementation, Yağci draws the structure of the actors involved.

In this paper, weshare the experience of implementing the Bologna Process decisions to the Translation Studies BA program, Russian Department, Okan University, Turkey. We specifically address two interconnected aspects: (1) the issue of credits (ECTS) calculation and (2) the practice of decreasing the number of in-class courses while increasing the load of autonomous study.Based on survey results, we aim toanswer the following questions:

1. Concerning individual study practice:

- Do students find it beneficial?
- How successfully do they apply it?

2. Concerning ECTS calculation:
3.
   - How realistic is it?
   - What is the actual situation?

Based on the data, we also aimto shed light on a possible source of these problems, touching upon theunified university exam issue and lack of learning material in this specific field.

## Bologna Process in Educational System of Turkey

Starting with the declaration of Turkish Republic in 1929, modernization, mostly understood as Westernization, became the main goal and the general ideological frame for cultural, pedagogic, social and other policies of the country. Its educational system was shaped by the strong influence of European models, first Humboldian, and later Anglo-Saxon. In general, education hasalways been seen as a tool of integration into the Western, Anglo-American world both by the ruling regimes and by the families, who still see the university degree as a guarantee of a better social and financial status for their off-springs.

Therefore, Bologna Process was welcomed as a natural continuation of the usual trend and did not provoke the same resistance as it did in other countries, e.g. Greece or Russia.Within approximately a decade after becoming a signatory country in 2001, Turkey developed a solid structure of key actors, responsible for putting into practice the main principles of the Process. The Council of Higher Education (CoHE/YÖK) is the top of the hierarchical pyramid. The National Team of Bologna Experts, appointed by CoHE, was established in 2004 andhas focused on specific elements of the implementation into regular two-year turns. The experts provide a range of theoretical and practical (presentations, workshops) support, aiming to enhance the speed and effectiveness of the reforms. Bologna Coordination Commissions (BEK) perform on the micro-level at the universities, customizing their services according to institutional needs (for more details on the subject see Yağcı, 2010, pp. 594-597).

## Translation and Translation Education in Turkey

It is a fact of common knowledge that owing to its geopolitical location, Turkey has a wide network of interstate communications in the most various areas: politics, economy, tourism, industry, culture. Therefore, the constant and quickly growing need for translators of different language profiles and specializations is only natural. There is a significant demand for technical and legal translators, consecutive and simultaneous interpreters.The higher-education institutions of Turkey strive to fill this niche: if the first departments of English translation were opened at Bosphorus University in Istanbul and Hacettepe University in Ankara in 1983-84 academic years, at present such departments with specialization in English, French, German, Russian, Arabic and Chinese are available at 57 universities of the country.

The literary translation of European literature, especially during the so-called one-party period (1923-1946) had a special status in cultural policy of Turkey. As we mentioned above,

Europeanization was a basic reference point of a state policy.So-called "Turkish Renaissance" was supposed to be achieved by transfer of European cultural fundamentals to the Turkish soil. And the translations of the prominent world literary works served as one of the main tools of its embodiment.State Translation Bureau was established in 1939, anduntil its closure in 1966 published 1 247 volumes of translated literature. The translation of 75 Russian Classics series takes the 5th place after the French, German, Antique (Greek) and English literatures[1].

In this example, we observe how the regime recognizes and uses the potential force of literary translation as a tool of a radical reorganization of the state system. It is sad to say that at present Turkey faces the problem of plagiarism in the field of translation. The literary market is overflowed with the cheap editions of classics, released by mushroomed publishing houses. Even a superficial reading shows that many of those editions werejustslightly changed copies of previously published translations[2].

In one century, the status of literary translation has quickly passed a long way from being a tool for transformation of cultural tradition to the method of making "easy money" for publishing houses with doubtful ethical standards.The readers, especially young ones, suffer from it most.Though the generation of the 40s was brought up with high-quality translations and appreciating the work of the translator as much as that of the author, the generation of 2000s often grows without appreciating the true aesthetic value of classical texts, and moreover, it is even ignorant about the existence of such a profession as a translator of literary text.For this very reason,a great amount of responsibility depends ontranslators nowadays. Under the current circumstances a translator, guided first of all by professional ethical standardshas to be an expert at each stage ofthe translation process.

As mentioned above, the first two departments of English translation were established in 1983 at two largest state universities of the country. In 1992, the department of French translation was established at another Istanbul university – Yildiz Teknik. A year after that, Istanbul State University followed it.The Private University of Bilkent, located in Ankara, founded two departments in 1993-94 academic year: four-year department with a specialization in two languages and two-year department, in one. The first translation department outside Istanbul or Ankara was established in 1996, and it wasthe German department at Mersin University in the south of the country[3].

According to CoHE statistics, today Turkey has 193 universities, both state and non-profit private ones. Research of their websites shows that 57 of them have departments of translation and interpreting or departments/faculties of translation studies (names vary). Departments, in turn, include 88 sub-departments/chairs: 45 of English, 13 of French, 12 of German, 9 of Russians, 6 of Arabic, 2 of Persian andper one chair of the Chinese, Kyrgyz and Bulgarian languages.

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[1] For more on the subject, see Tahir Gürçağlar (2008), Berk (2004), Arslan (2012)

[2] For more on the subject, see the research project supported by TUBITAK (The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey): http://dti.ieu.edu.tr/en/news/type/read/id/3187, Tahir Gürçağlar (2010), Parlak (2008), Denisova (2013)

[3] For more on the history of translation education in Turkey, see Eruz (2003), pp.96-133, Kurultay&Birkandan (1997), pp.135-158

## Department of Translation Studies at Okan University

Okan University is a young institution, founded in 2003. The following year, the Russian Chair of Department of Translation Studiesstarted to enroll the first students. According to the existing law, all entrants have to pass the unified state examination (USE). In order to enroll at the language departments, the entrants, apart from the USE, have to pass a foreign language test (English, German, French). Currently,the department has approximately100 students. Education lasts 5 years with the first year of preparatory school. At this stage, students take 24 hours of Russian per week and became the freshmen with a minimum language level of A2. Main objective of the BA program is constant development of various language and translation competences; along with it, students take courses on literature, linguistics, international trade, law and tourism. This practice aims to enhance their educational skills, giving theman opportunity to master not only their Russian, but also their native language – which is a crucial skill for a professional translator.Nevertheless, we can say that it was rather simpler to achieve these objectives in the previous years.

## Concept of Learner Independence in Turkish Context

As we all know, Bologna Process supports the principle of learner independence, and certainly, so do we. Nevertheless, the point we want to emphasize is that being a life-long independent learner requires acertain mindset, techniques and methods.This attitude should have a status of comprehensive and integrated state policy, supported and internalized by the whole society. Only then our students-to-be will come to the universities equipped with necessary skills for successful academic life.

The present state of student education does not meet with the aims mentioned in the previous paragraph. As we have already mentioned, entrants in Turkey pass the unified state exam, which consists of multiple-choice questionstest on all the disciplines taught at school.Turkish society considers this the turning point, the major threshold in a person's life. Families, often not satisfied with education provided by ordinary schools, send their children to special training courses or employ private tutors to ensure that their children are successful.
The exam is applied in two steps: the first step (YGS) is mandatory for everybody who is willing to get university education. YGS contains 160 questions and lasts for 160 minutes. Those who pass YGS, take the second step (LYS), one of the series of tests, oriented to the specific area of study (Language, Literature, Mathematics, Biology, etc.). For instance, LYS-6, a Foreign Language Test, contains 120 questions and lasts for 80 minutes. As we see, an entrant has in the average a 1.2 minute to answer each question. Therefore, potential students at this stage are required to learn by heart various formulas, patterns and rules, and master in techniques of a fast choice of the most suitable answer from four given options.

In other words, skills, in this system the necessary skills for autonomous studyare hardly developed if at all. As a result, young people who are used to a specific way of learning at school are unexpectedly imposed to an absolutely different teaching/learning method at university[4].

[4] For the general view of the situation, see, for example, the PISA 2012 report: http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-overview.pdf or relevant articles: http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2013/dec/03/pisa-results-country-best-reading-maths-science

**The Practice of Decreasing the Number of In-class Courses**

One ofthe fundamentals introduced in Sorbonne Declaration and later completed in Bologna Process, is the three-step educational period, with the 3-years bachelor degree, followed by master and doctorate. In Turkey, this period is applied with one difference: bachelor level lasts for four years, instead of three. In Europe, the practice of shorter bachelor stage was aimed 'to facilitate the speedy entrance of educated professionals into the job market through shortened degrees.'[5] We believe thatin Turkey, under the present conditions, the practice of shortening the first stage of the period will lead to far-reaching drawbacks. If the goal is to deliver the professional higher education, when a graduate enters the job market as a specialist, being able to perform at the expected level, then the sufficiency of 3-years study is highly questionable. In fact, even sufficiency of 4 years process may seem debatable in some cases. Nonetheless, in line with materializing the concept of learner independence and shortening the bachelor stage,the number of university courses has been gradually reduced. Back in 2008, BA program of Russian Translation at Okan University included 59 mandatory and elective courses for eight semesters. Now in 2014 it includes only 44. Below you can see the list of courses, removed from the program since 2008 to this day:

*First semester:*

- Comparative Language Analysis
- Elective Courses (2)

*Second semester:*

- Comparative Analysis of Literary Texts
- Elective Course

*Third semester:*

- Text Analysis for Translation
- Presentation and Discussion Techniques
- Academic Writing

*Forth semester:*

- Language Competence for Translation II
- Basic Skills of Translation
- Presentation and Discussion Techniques II

*Fifth semester:*

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http://www.aa.com.tr/en/education/258830--pisa-2012-results-turkey-is-ranked-42nd-for-maths-41st-for-reading-skills-and-45th-for-science-skills

[5] Robert Sedgwick, as sited in Kurelić, 2009, p.6

- Basic Skills of Translation
- Basic Skills of Interpretation ( these two courses were combined into one, Basic Skills of Translation and Interpretation)
- Specialization in Translation

*Sixth semester:*

- Information Technology in Translation
- Specialization in Translation
- Specialization in Interpretation (these two courses were combined into one, Specialization in Translation and Interpretation)

As it is seen from the above list, the department had to eliminate or compress some vital courses, and this was never an easy decision. Each time Academic Board had to seek for the balance among many factors and needs. Some courses now have to be either compensated with independent study orembedded in other courses.

Everyone working in the translation sphere knows that the ability to perceive the text from translational point of view is crucial. For this reason,the course "Text Analysis for Translation" was given at an early phase before Bologna Process. The course aimed to develop the ability to recognize the message of the source text and to recreate it in target language according to the norms of the cultural system. Now the course is being removed from the curriculum. Another example: the course "Comparative Language Analysis" with a focus on Russian syntax and ways of its transfer to Turkish previously was taught for two semesters. Now the material of this course is squeezed into the borders of one semester. The course of Russian literature, which we consider especially important for understanding of Russian culture, at present is planned as follows: one semester for each century. In practice, it means that in a 14-week period the students have to read minimum of eight works, do research for their cultural and historical contexts and analyze the texts.And last but not least: if we still didn't reduce the hours of translation and interpretation in seventh and eighth semesters, it is only by virtue of devoted teaching staff, working extra hours without additional payment.

The academic staff often criticizes this change emphasizing that this change will have negative effects on the professional life of the student. In order to monitor the situation, we conducted a questionnaire, where we asked our students about their opinion on the issue[6].

The questionnaire was sent to 35 students of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th year. 20 of them participated. Below you can see the first question and the answers[7]:

**Q1**: With the implementation of the Bologna Process the time, allocated to the in-class study, gradually reduced, while the time, allocated to autonomous study (research, project, etc.), increased. How do you estimate this situation in general?

A. I estimate it positively. The reason is…
B. I estimate it negatively. The reason is…

[6] Available at: https://tr.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-3FWYQ66/ (in Turkish)

[7] All questions of the survey required an answer.

The answers were divided into half. 10 students chose the answer (A) and the same number of students preferred answer (B). Here are some representative examples of the comments:

**Answer (A) – Positive estimation.**

**A1:** I find it more effective./It works.

**A2:** The number of unnecessary courses isreduced, and now we have the opportunity to focus on our specific field.

**A3:** By doing research, we learn more and have fun.

**A4:** Positively, because for working students like me, it is a big advantage.

**A5:** High number of courses destroys my motivation.

**Answer (B) – Negative estimation.**

**B1:** Our learning remains superficial; we do notget into the particulars. I think that the number of certain necessary courses should be increased.

**B2:** The number of courses is definitely insufficient. Most of the time the courses remain half finished.I am absolutely not pleased with this situation. It's probably classic, but lessons should be learned in class. The higher is the number of teaching hours, the better it is for us.

**B3:** I believe that researches, projects and presentations are very useful for us. But our language classes, already cut in half after prep-school, reduced even more and this causes our Russian level to decrease.

**B4:** Sometimes, doing the on-line search, I find myself just surfing on the Internet. Of course, this system has many positive aspects; it teaches us how to reach information. However, the attitude "I am not going to teach you this, find it and learn it yourselves" is open to misuse. "The candle doesn't lose its light by illuminating the darkness."

**B5:** Unfortunately, Turkish students are not given the skills of individual research; we don't know how to reach information, apart from the Internet. The sudden change of the previous system causes low-quality projects and presentations.

Answers testify that even those participants, who estimate the situation negatively, are aware of the beneficial sides of the process. However, they often underline the fact that Turkish students are not prepared for conducting the high-quality individual research. This supports our reasoning in Part 4 of this paper.

Besides this, there is another factor to point out. In addition to the underdeveloped skills, Turkish students often don't have sufficient opportunities to maintain a solid research.In the conditions of remoteness from the authentic language atmosphere, and extreme limitation of sources in the local libraries, we have to recognize that expecting from the students regular "independent study" is unrealistic.

Probably, for students, say, of English department similar barriers are much more surmountable. They can use rich collections of educational libraries and hear the language directly from native speakers, by means of movies and various programs of American and English TV channels, such as CNN or BBC, broadcasting on any cable or satellite television of the country. In our opinion, such an obvious difference in opportunities must bring the difference in course planning and assessment, too.

## ECTS and Credit Calculation

Another innovation, brought to the Turkish educational system by Bologna Process, is European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS or AKTS in Turkish). To put it very simple, this system is linked to student mobility, works in conjunction with outcome-based framework and helps to facilitatethe transparent and comparable learning process[8].

Educational institutions prepare and publish online the course descriptions, containing learning outcomes and workload. The term 'workload' includes not only the hours a student spends in class, but also the time s/he spends with research, readings, preparations, homework, i.e. all sorts of work, necessary to complete the course successfully. In Turkey, 1 credit corresponds to 25-30 hours of study, and one academic year corresponds to 60 credits, thus being equal to 1500–1800 hours of study.

Returning to the BA program in question, we put under the microscope the 4-hours courses with 8 ECTS credits[9]. Each semester lasts 14 weeks, plus 2 weeks for Midterm and Final examinations. Simple calculation (16*4) indicates that the in-class study gives us 64 hours, i.e. 2.6 credits (64/25). The remaining 5.4 credits, corresponding to 135 hours (5.4*25), are supposedly gained by autonomous study. It is important to keep in mind that passing grade is C, so the sample we examine here is an average C-student. The abovementioned questionnaire provides data for the calculation.

**Q2.** How much time do you allocate for your DAILY study for each course?

| **Answers** | **Results** |
|---|---|
| **A1:** 0-30 min. | 11 students, 55% of participants. |
| **A2:** 30 min. – 1 hour. | 5 sts, 25% of participants |
| **A3:** 1-2 hours. | 2 sts, 10% of participants |
| **A4:** 2-3 hours. | 2 sts, 10% of participants |

As we see, most of the students spend maximum 30 minutes a day for their regular studies for each course. Optimistically multiplied by 7, this gives us 3.5 hours of a weekly study.

**Q3.** How much time do you allocate for Midterm exam preparation for each course?

| **Answers** | **Results** |
|---|---|
| **A1:** 30 min.-1 hour | 1 student, 5% |
| **A2:** 1-2 hours | 2 sts, 10% |
| **A3:** 2-3 hours | 6 sts, 30% |
| **A4:** 3-4 hours | 6 sts. 30% |

[8] http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/ects_en.htm

[9] For example, Elective Language Courses, English-Turkish Translation course, Business English for Translators, and some other courses.

| | |
|---|---|
| **A5:** 4 hours and more | 5 sts. 25% |

Basing on the data we believe we can take four hours as an average indicator in this case.

**Q4.** How much time do you allocate for Final exam preparation for each course?

| **Answers** | **Results** |
|---|---|
| **A1:** 30 min.-1 hour | 1 student, 5% |
| **A2:** 1-2 hours | 1 sts, 5% |
| **A3:** 2-3 hours | 4 sts, 20% |
| **A4:** 3-4 hours | 6 sts. 30% |
| **A5:** 4 hours and more | 8 sts. 40% |

Here we take six hours as an average indicator for our final calculation.

**Q5.** How much time in total do you usually allocate for your individual study, for example, to complete a project, a translation, presentation, research, etc.?

| **Answers** | **Results** |
|---|---|
| **A1:** 0-30 min. | 2 sts, 10% |
| **A1:** 30 min.-1 hour | 1 st, %5 |
| **A2:** 1-2 hours | 5 sts, 25% |
| **A3:** 2-3 hours | 3 sts, 15% |
| **A4:** 2 or 3 days | 4 sts. 20% |
| **A5:** a few days | 5 sts. 25% |

Here we see the diverse answers, changing from 1-2 hours to a few days. We believe five hours will be a fair average in this case.

The received data can be generalized as follows:

| **Type of work** | **Hours per week** | **Weeks** | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Weekly study | 3,5 | 14 | 49 |
| Midterm exam preparation | 4 | 1 | 4 |
| Final exam preparation | 6 | 1 | 6 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| In total | | | **App. 60** |

Q5 indicates that students spend approximately five hours for each individual work. In usual practice, students have one or two big projects per semester, which gives us 10 hours to add to 60 hours above. 70 hours corresponds to 2.8 ECTS credits.

Doubtlessly, this is a simplistic calculation; assessment experts have special formulas for ESTC calculations, giving much more precise results. Nevertheless, we suppose the data of this survey can also be somewhat guiding in evaluation of the general state. Before the summative overview, we would like to present the answers for the question 6 of our survey:

**Q6.** How much time a week do you usually allocate for your personal or professional development, like reading books, watching documentaries, participating in non-obligatory educational events, i.e. extra-curricular activities?

| **Answers** | **Results** |
|---|---|
| **A1:** 0-30 min. | 4 sts, 20% |
| **A1:** 30 min.-1 hour | 4 st, %20 |
| **A2:** 1-2 hours | 3 sts, 15% |
| **A3:** 2-3 hours | 3 sts, 15% |
| **A4:** 3-4 hours | 2 sts. 10% |
| **A5:** 4 hours and more | 4 sts. 25% |

One student left the following comment: "I don't really have time for those, because I'm too busy with the classes."

With the broad spectrum of diversified answers coming to a general conclusion is challenging. However, 3 hours*10 weeks [10] seems to be the correct choice in this case. Consequently, if we add another 30 hours to the sum above, the process ends up with 100 hours or 4 credits. With 2.6 credits for in-class study, we have 6.6 ECTS credits for the course.

Acting quite generously, we managed to score six credits, and we still need another 1.4 to reach the standard. Even this flawed arithmetic shows that students cannot actually "take the credit" for the final ECTS they have in their transcriptions. One way to increase the workload is to intensify the individual study; thus, our argumentation makes a loop and takes us to the explanations in part 4 of this paper.

[10] We think that students highly unlikely find spare time for extracurricular activities every week of the semester, especially during midterm and final exam periods.

## Conclusion

Bologna Process, undoubtedly, has a set of the positive purposes: it develops responsibility and self-discipline, puts into practice the principle of life-long learning, facilitates students' mobility, makes the educational process transparent and customizable to various conditions and needs. Standardization though should not make the educational system mediocreand insufficient. Many researchers underlined the necessity of adopting Bologna model to national specifications (Huisman, 2009; Witte, 2006). Secondly, we would like to add that in Turkey Bologna Process should not only be national-bonded, but also widen its scope. Higher Education is a long process, starting with primary school, ending with university; in case of Turkey, we observe a deep gap between these steps in terms of learning method, teaching approach, methods, assessment, and expectations. This fact hinders the students' adaptation to the university life and influences the effectiveness of their studies, at least at the beginning phase.

All sorts of extensive reforms require time. Turkey in the last decade made a visible progress in applying the Bologna decisions, and it predicts a solid ground for future[11]. Nevertheless, there is still much to be done to achieve sustainable excellence in education quality. In this paper, we have looked at a specific area from a narrow angle, trying to highlight the most notable problems of one BA program. We assert that shortening the bachelor stage and/or decreasing the number of in-class courses in a situation when we have a) lack of authentic written and audiovisual learning material and b) lack of independent learner skills among studentsis a highly risky strategy with wrong timing. Both problems need time and well-organized policy to be solved. This possible policy should cover a wide scope of maneuvers, such as development of Russian-Turkish learning materials on translation and interpretation, further enhancing of exchange programs for students and teachers between the two countries, and including the courses on research techniques in the primary-secondary-high school curriculum.

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[11] '…the number of students from the US studying in Turkey should be noted because Turkey became a Bologna Process member country in 2001, and the number increased dramatically from 2002. Although there is no direct evidence to prove that the Bologna Process induced this increase, there is no doubt that the ECTS, improved quality assurance and transparent degree system has strengthened the attractiveness of Turkey, a non-traditional popular destination for the international student.' Zeng, Adams & Gibbs (2003), p.12

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