

WORK OF AN INTERPRETER IN TURKEY: A COMPARATIVE AND STATISTICAL SELF-ANALYSIS

El trabajo de un intérprete en Turquía: un autoanálisis comparativo y estadístico

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ABSTRACT: As a translator and conference interpreter who has been working for 15 years in Turkey, I have been keeping a precise record of all jobs I have undertaken on a spreadsheet from the very beginning of my professional life. As of the end of 2017, I had 1425 days of interpretation in my portfolio (and today, it is more than 1500 days). My contribution aims to share the results of the statistical analysis I conducted over this raw data: The geographical distribution, workload over days of the week and months of the year, as well as the themes of the conferences in the context of an interpreter working in Turkey since the early 2000s. In order to contextualize my work within my colleagues' works, I conducted an anonymous survey on Google Forms and asked a series of questions to conference interpreters. I collected 94 replies and I present these replies and my self-analysis side by side in this contribution.

Keywords: conference interpreters, self-analysis, working conditions.

1. INTRODUCTION

I have been working as a translator and interpreter since 2003, mostly between English and Turkish, recently between Turkish and Spanish, and occasionally between Kurdish and English. I have contributed to some 25 books, translated around 10.000 pages for commercial projects and interpreted for some 800 different meetings.

I am keeping a precise record of all the jobs I have been contracted on a spreadsheet with various fields. At the end of the 15th year of my professional life, I decided to conduct a series of statistical analyses based on this database which included 1425 days of work as of that date. The graphics I obtained really supplied an insight into the job which I am doing on a day-to-day basis. However, this insight still lacked a context – a general landscape of the interpretation job in Turkey. In order to contextualize my personal work, I conducted a survey using Google Forms¹ and circulated the survey through e-mail and IM groups of interpreters. I collected 94 replies until the end of October, which, presumably, is one-third of all interpreters in Turkey.

In the following pages, I will use the architecture of this survey and compare its results with my self-analysis to outline the professional landscape in Turkey.

1 Survey (in Turkish) is accessible at <https://goo.gl/forms/xP5t5gNjrZ7i2rBs2>.

2. METHOD

The comparative and statistical analysis in this contribution draws upon two sources: the spreadsheet I used for keeping the record of the jobs I have undertaken, and the Google Forms survey replied by 94 interpreters including me.

The spreadsheet includes the following fields: *Date*, number of *workdays*, *organization* (for whom I interpreted), *location*, *subject topic* or title of the meeting, *type* of the interpretation (consecutive or simultaneous), the *translation office* that engaged me for the work and *field* of the work (technical, medical, international relations etc.) I use Microsoft Excel for this purpose and submit a copy of this file as an attachment to my CV.

TOTAL DAYS OF INTERPRETATION		1525					
Date of Beginning	Workdays	Organization	Location	Subject Topic	Type	Translation Office	Field
May 11, 2011	3	Chamber of Mining Engineers	Chamber of Mining Engineers	22nd International Mining Congress of Turkey	Simul.	Lingöürk	Geology & Mining
May 26, 2011	3	Ministry of Environment and Forestry	Ministry of Environment and Forestry	National Watershed Management Strategy Planning	Simul.	Bağmsız	Environment
June 4, 2011	2	Turkish Air Force	Turkish Air Force	100th year Turkey Air Show	Simul.	Microtech	Security, Defense, Military
June 7, 2011	3	OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe)	OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe)	Securi Election Monitoring	Simul.	Institution itself	Politics
June 15, 2011	1	TEPAV (Economy Policy Research Foundation of Turkey)	TEPAV (Economy Policy Research Foundation of Turkey)	Rese SME Banking	Simul.	Bağaran Tercüme	Finance
June 17, 2011	1	EBRD (European Bank of Reconstruction and Development)	EBRD (European Bank of Reconstruction and Development)	Reco Geothermal Market in Turkey	Simul.	Semicon	Energy & Water
June 22, 2011	1	TOBB (Union of Chambers and Stock Exchanges)	TOBB (Union of Chambers and Stock Exchanges)	anTIR System Training Seminar	Simul.	Bağaran Tercüme	Transport
June 24, 2011	1	TOBB (Union of Chambers and Stock Exchanges)	TOBB (Union of Chambers and Stock Exchanges)	anc Business Meeting	Consec.	Bağaran Tercüme	Business & Economics
June 28, 2011	1	TCCD (Turkish State Railways Administration)	TCCD (Turkish State Railways Administration)	Noise and Vibration Management	Simul.	Net Tercüme	Transport
June 29, 2011	1	EMN (IT Company)	EMN (IT Company)		Consec.	Institution itself	Business & Economics
June 30, 2011	2	TOKI (Mass Housing Administration)	TOKI (Mass Housing Administration)	Meeting with Tanzanian delegation	Consec.	İnisas Tercüme	Architecture & Planning
July 6, 2011	1	DG of EU Affairs	DG of EU Affairs	Fifth Meeting of IPARD Monitoring Committee	Simul.	Semicon	EU & IR
September 4, 2011	1	BDP (Peace and Democracy Party)	BDP (Peace and Democracy Party)	2nd Ordinary Congress and Evening Reception	Simul.	Institution itself	Politics
September 5, 2011	4	ITC (International Training Center) and Ministry of Health	ITC (International Training Center) and Ministry of Health	Health Projects and Programmes Monitoring and Control	Simul.	Bağmsız	Health & Medical
September 13, 2011	2	BESD-BİR (White Meat Producers Association)	BESD-BİR (White Meat Producers Association)	Animal Welfare Inspection	Simul.	Institution itself	Veterinary Health
September 15, 2011	1	BTG	BTG	Embarcadero Software Launching	Simul.	Net Tercüme	IT & Technology
September 18, 2011	1	TOKI (Mass Housing Administration)	TOKI (Mass Housing Administration)	Meeting with foreign delegation	Simul.	İnisas Tercüme	Architecture & Planning
September 17, 2011	1	Ankara Initiative for Freedom of Thought	Ankara Initiative for Freedom of Thought	İsmail Bağlık Symposium	Simul.	Institution itself	Social Sciences
September 21, 2011	4	Golden Boll Festival	Golden Boll Festival	International Cinema Congress and Golden Boll Meeting	Simul.	Institution itself	Culture & Arts
September 28, 2011	2	TAIEX and Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry & Food	TAIEX and Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry & Food	Workshop on the implementation of the hygiene pack	Simul.	Net Tercüme	Health & Medical
October 3, 2011	4	RSPCA (Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty Against Animals)	RSPCA (Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty Against Animals)	Pre Seminar on Dog Shelters	Simul.	Institution itself	Veterinary Health
October 14, 2011	1	TOBB (Union of Chambers and Stock Exchanges)	TOBB (Union of Chambers and Stock Exchanges)	TIR Legislation	Simul.	Bağaran Tercüme	Transport
October 17, 2011	5	Ministry of Health	Ministry of Health	Certificate Training on Public Participation	Simul.	Bağaran Tercüme	Health & Medical
October 25, 2011	1	SETA (Foundation for Political Economic and Social Research)	SETA (Foundation for Political Economic and Social Research)	Arab Spring and Human Rights	Simul.	Institution itself	International Politics
November 1, 2011	1	Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs	Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs	Training Course on Seed and Seedling Growing Techniques	Simul.	Uşem Tercüme	Agriculture, Forestry & Food
November 3, 2011	1	BP	BP	Mobile App Usability Survey	Simul.	Bağmsız	IT & Technology
November 15, 2011	1	FAO, MARA (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry & Food) and Ministry of Environment and Urban Affairs	FAO, MARA (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry & Food) and Ministry of Environment and Urban Affairs	Turkey Partnership Programme (FTTP)	Simul.	Uşem Tercüme	Agriculture, Forestry & Food
November 16, 2011	1	Ministry of Environment and Urban Affairs	Ministry of Environment and Urban Affairs	Financial Center Evaluation Meeting	Simul.	İnisas Tercüme	Finance
November 19, 2011	3	Chamber of Electricity Engineers	Chamber of Electricity Engineers	8th Energy Symposium	Simul.	Lingöürk	Energy & Water
November 21, 2011	1	Pink Life Association	Pink Life Association	Meeting following the Queer Festival	Simul.	Net Tercüme	Civil Society
November 23, 2011	1	Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs	Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs	9th SMC Meeting for Environment Operational Programmes	Simul.	Asal Tercüme	Environment
November 24, 2011	1	Veterinary Orthopedy and Traumatology Association	Veterinary Orthopedy and Traumatology Association	1st Veterinary Orthopedy and Traumatology Congress	Simul.	Bağmsız	Veterinary Health
November 28, 2011	5	ITC (International Training Center) and Ministry of Health	ITC (International Training Center) and Ministry of Health	Health Projects and Programmes Evaluation	Simul.	Bağmsız	Health & Medical
December 6, 2011	4	CESS (Centre for European Security Studies)	CESS (Centre for European Security Studies)	Democratic Oversight of the Security Sector in Turkey	Simul.	Bağmsız	Security, Defense, Military
December 9, 2011	1	Chamber of Electricity Engineers	Chamber of Electricity Engineers	Workshop: Publicity Again	Simul.	Lingöürk	Politics
January 7, 2012	1	Energy Company	Energy Company	New Year Invitation	Consec.	Sabina Organizasyon	Energy & Water
January 27, 2012	1	EIE (DG of Electrical Power Resources Survey and Development)	EIE (DG of Electrical Power Resources Survey and Development)	Project meeting	Consec.	Institution itself	Energy & Water
February 9, 2012	1	TOKI (Mass Housing Administration)	TOKI (Mass Housing Administration)	Meeting with Bhutanese delegation	Consec.	İnisas Tercüme	Architecture & Planning

Figure 1: A recent screenshot from the spreadsheet I used for keeping the record of my jobs.

The survey includes 34 questions under the following categories: General information, interpretation and translation experiences, locations and fields of interpretation, income and living conditions, professional life and personal life. The survey made it clear that the results were planned to be shared in 1st International Conference Translation and Cultural Sustainability in Salamanca and it asked no personal details such as name and surname². Response rates were 95% and higher for most questions, only the question about the university from which the responder was graduated from was lower than this (78%).

74.2% of interpreters are female and 25.8% male³. We observe and talk about the fact that there are more women than men in our professional community, but this imbalance is even higher than our

2 I must add, however, considering the wideness of the sample compared to the interpreters' population in Turkey, an enthusiastic data miner can still track some responses to some names by cross-examining the individual replies with the gender, school and language combinations of the responders. I just can assure that this has not been done and never intended to.

3 The survey mostly was interested in sex rather than gender, but the responders were given an "Other" option with a free text field allowing the LGBTi community members to enter. This option was not used by any of the responders but of course, we have LGBTi individuals among interpreters in Turkey. One interpreter chose not to answer this question.

expectations. 69.6% of the responders, including me, are married or in a long-term relationship which might be indicating that distance is not a great concern in relationships.

Before going into details of each category and comparing them with my own experience it might make sense to look at the answers of one question: *What is your estimate for the number of interpreters working in Turkish labor market?* Since we interpreters do not have a professional organization in Turkey⁴, most of the interpreters are freelancers and a registry of our colleagues is nowhere to be found. So, this estimate is important. As it is seen in Figure 2, most of the interpreters (36.6%) estimated the number of their colleagues to be between 200 and 300. To put in another way, around 60% of interpreters think that there are 300 or fewer interpreters actively working in Turkey. So, this survey might be fairly estimated to sample one-third of all interpreters in our country.

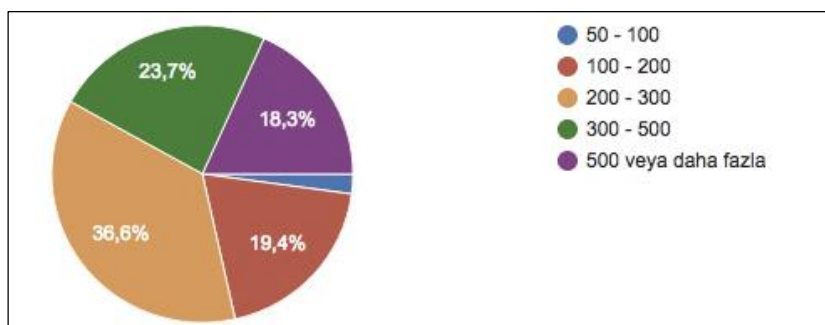


Figure 3: Estimates for the total number of interpreters in Turkey (last line: 500 or more).

3. SELF- AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

This section will compare the questions in the survey with my own experience, therefore it will be both a self-analysis and a comparative analysis.

3.1 General information about the Responders

Interpreters in Turkey mostly undertake jobs involving simultaneous interpreting, consecutive and whisper interpreting, and escort/travel interpreting. I work in all these modes. The first question in the survey asked the types of interpreting the responder was doing with the possibility of putting a check mark on more than one answer. Responses⁵ show that 92.4% of the responders make simultaneous interpreting, 93.5% consecutive and whisper interpreting and 82.6% escort (and other) interpreting. This is not surprising because the interpreters in Turkey are paid per day rather than hours and an interpreter with principles charges more or less the same price for all types of interpreting. Still, however, the survey shows that 7-8% of the responders are not doing either simultaneous or consecutive interpreting – two major types of all interpretation jobs. Also, we see that 17.4% of the responders are not preferring to take an escort/traveling job, which might be attributed to either personal/family conditions of the interpreter or to the higher stress involved in these sorts of jobs.

4 Although some NGOs, especially The Conference Interpreters Association of Turkey (<http://www.tktd.org/english/>) are doing their best to protect interpreters' professional rights, it is not a trade union or chamber.

5 2 responders decided not to answer this question, so the results are provided compared to 92 responders as in some other questions.

The second question –again allowing the responder to select more than one item– asked the language combinations of the interpreters. Interpreters in Turkey, almost always, use their B language all the time also as the target language, so in a typical conference we will have only one booth with two interpreters interpreting both from Turkish to English and from English to Turkish. I work mostly between English and Turkish and occasionally between Spanish and one of the former languages. According to survey responses, 85.1% of the interpreters are working between Turkish and English. Second most common language is French with 11.7%, followed by Spanish 9.6%, Russian 8.5%, Arabic 6.4%, and German 5.3%. Furthermore, we have 3 interpreters in each of Italian, Bulgarian or Kurdish, 2 in Flemish, and 1 in each of Japanese, Azerbaijani or Ukrainian.

The following question in this category deals with the working status of the interpreters: freelancers, for a translation company or for a governmental agency or private company. I am a freelancer and so are 75.5% of all responders. 13.8% works on a full-time or half-time basis in a translation company. Remaining 10.6% are interpreters working in either a public body or a private organization. We can conclude that the vast majority of interpreters in Turkey are preferring to work freelance, which is a quite flexible position with a satisfactory pay but lacking many benefits such as health coverage and pension. Like many of my freelancer colleagues, I am not covered by any insurance and I try to compensate this with private or voluntary insurance.

Another question deals with the education of interpreters. I was graduated from Ankara University, Faculty of Humanities, Department of Theatre. I had my Master's in philosophy and doing my Ph.D. in two different fields: theatre and political science. I began to work as a translator and interpreter even before graduating from the university. I had dropped out of civil engineering department and was preparing for another school when I began to work fulltime in a translation office thanks to a test job I was asked for and delivered successfully. After a while, I was invited to see an interpretation session, which I found very attractive, and then self-educated myself as an interpreter. Most of the interpreters I was working together with in those days were also graduates of university departments other than interpretation schools whereas many of the translation/interpretation graduates were not preferring simultaneous jobs. Apparently, according to the survey, this balance has changed in favor of interpretation school graduates in recent years. 53.2% of the responders have been graduated from the Department of Translation and Interpreting of universities. Another 23.4% have been graduated from a language and literature or linguistic department. 22.3%, like me, have been graduated from any other department (the sample includes one non-graduate interpreter, too). The schooling and self-education ratio is still not very imbalanced since only around half of the interpreters are coming from a translation/interpretation school while others are individuals who have a different background, but my impression is that the interpretation schools have done a good job in recent years.

When the interpreters are asked to give points from 1 to 5 over a scale related to the contribution of practice *vis-à-vis* education (practice and apprenticeship model contributes most: 1 pts; translation schools and formal education contributes most: 5 pts), 39.8% puts the emphasis on practice and apprenticeship while only 4.3% deem the schools as the most important contributor. 25.8% see both factors equally important.

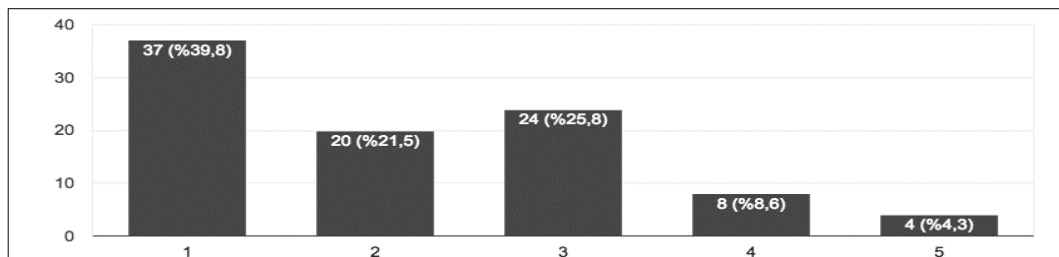


Figure 3: Impact of practice and apprenticeship versus schools in interpreting profession.

Considering the uneven distribution seen in Figure 3, we can say that the vast majority considers practice more important than schools, which is not a surprise when the practical and performative aspect of this profession is taken into account.

3.2 Interpretation and Translation Experiences⁶

As I was writing this text, I completed my 15th year in this job. Two-thirds of the responders also have 10 or more years of professional experience. To give a breakdown: 34% have more than 15 years, 33% 10-15 years, 20.2% 5-10 years, 9.6% 1-3 years, and 3.2% 3-5 years of translation and/or interpretation experience. When we look at the answers given to the question “For how many workdays have you interpreted since the beginning of your professional life?”, we see a similar breakdown: 33%: 1500 days and more, 25.5%: 1000-1500 days, 19.1%: 500-1000 days, 13%: 100-500 days, and 8.5%: 1-100 days. (This gives us a rough estimate of 100 days per year of professional life; naturally, the actual number of workdays increases year by year in a real-life situation.)

A question in this category asks: “What percent of your annual income comes from (oral or written) translation?”. I generate around 90% of my income from this profession whereas the other 10% comes from copywriting, scriptwriting and music. Most of the responders (63.8%) stated that their only source of income is oral or written translation. 21.3% obtains 50-90% of their income through translation, 7.4% obtains 20-50% and another 7.4% obtains 5-20%. Most of the interpreters are earning their living on this job, while around one-third have another major source of income.

Responses to another question related to the perceived distance between the responder’s and their profession shed light on this situation: 57.6% of the interpreters said that they have at least one other field of interest that is as important as translation. 37% said that they have another field of interest albeit not as significant as translation. Only 5.4% defined translating as their “way of life” and said that they devote almost no time and effort to any other field.

When we look at the fields of interest other than interpretation we meet a quite cultural, artistic and sportive population. Around 75% of the responders are interested in arts and/or literature, 39% in sports and/or other physical activities, 26.7% in politics and other activism, 24.4% in handicraft and other hobbies. 3% are interested in traveling (still). Law, chess, design, philosophy, diving, research, cooking, astronomy are some other fields of interest of individual interpreters whereas one interpreter defines her/himself as a polymath (a person having interest in many different subjects).

⁶ For the purpose of this study, the word “translation” will denote both written and oral translation hereinafter except when it is obvious from the text that it only refers to written translation.

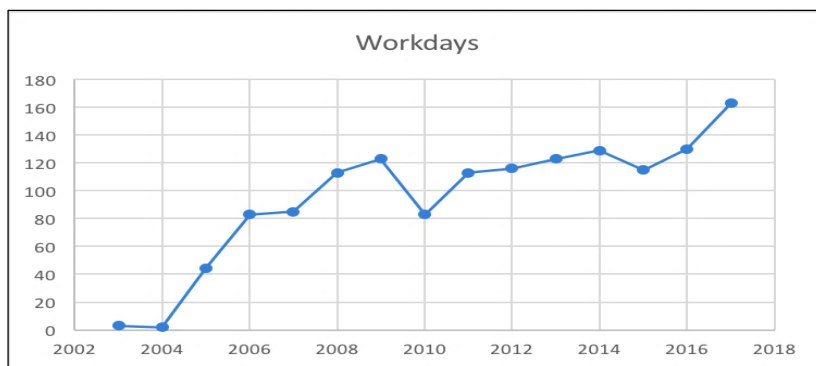


Figure 4: The workdays I worked by years.

I maybe am not a polymath, but I have more than one major field of interest besides translation. I have been interpreting since 2003. In the first years, interpreting was just an occasional work I did in addition to translations for translation offices and publishing houses. As it is seen in Figure 4, it gradually became more and more important beginning from 2005. Considering the last 10 years during which I worked as a professional interpreter on a consistent basis, my average workday per year is c. 120 days which gives me around two-thirds of the year as free time to devote to my other fields of interest such as composing music, writing scripts for theatre and screen and, last but not least (really?), writing two Ph.D. theses. 2017 was a peak for me with more than 160 workdays and seemingly, it will be more or less the same for 2018. This decreases the amount of free time I allocate for other things, however not significantly.

When we look at the answers given to the question about estimated workdays per year for interpreters, we see a wide distribution. 28% works 50-100 days a year, another 28% 100-150 days, 22.6% more than 150 days, 14% 20-50 days and 7.5% 1-20 days. I fall into the 40% slide who works 100 to 150 and more days a year. So, we can say that most of the interpreters in Turkey enjoy plenty of free time as I also do, which explains the other major fields of interest attracting most of the interpreters.

Answers given the question about the ratio of simultaneous interpreting in overall oral translation works show that nearly half of the interpreters (47.9%) have 60-90% simultaneous jobs. 20.2% work mainly simultaneous with a 90-100% ratio. 18.1% work 30-60% simultaneous. For 13.8%, other types of interpretation are more important and only 0-30% of their work is simultaneous. This corresponds to the AIIC statement that “Today, interpreters spend most of their time performing simultaneous interpretation,”⁷ and to my experience, too: 75% of the jobs I take are simultaneous, 22% are consecutive, the remaining being either both simultaneous and consecutive or any other mixed jobs which shows that I follow the general rule in this regard.

The answers to the question on the written translation made by interpreters indicate that only a small percentage of interpreters undertake written jobs. 20.2% say they do not make written translation at all. 31.9% say that written translations represent only 1-10% of the time dedicated to and income obtained from translation in general. Another 31.9% says this ratio is 10-40% for them. For 12.8%, translations represent 40-80% of their day-to-day work, and only for 3.2% percent of the responders, translations are the main source of income.

When we asked the interpreters whether or not they have ever translated a book, 44.1% answered negatively. However, 37.7% translated 2 or more books while 18.3% translated only one book. I have

⁷ <https://aiic.net/page/1403/how-we-work/lang/1>

translated, either alone or with other interpreters, more than 25 books. So, I fall into the rare category of those who have translated 5 or more books, which is only 5.4% of the sample.

3.3 *Locations and Fields of Interpreting*

I am based primarily in Ankara and secondarily in Izmir. 35.4% of my works are in Ankara (central Turkey) and 23.8% in Izmir (western Turkey) where my wife lives, followed by various places (22.8%), Antalya (7.8%), other countries (5.4%) and Istanbul (4.8%) as is seen in Figure 5.

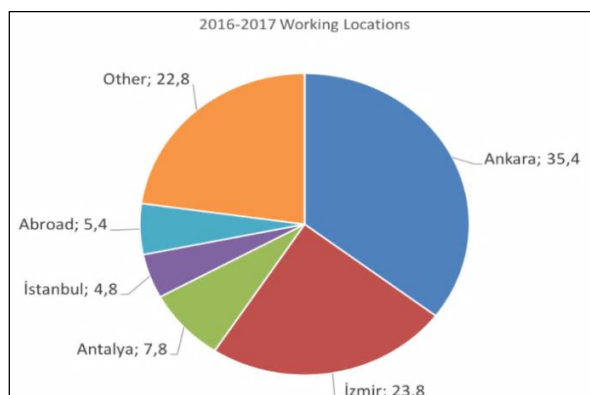


Figure 5: Locations where I work most frequently.

The answers given to the survey (Figure 6) display a similar tendency with regards to Ankara: 56.4% of the interpreters live in the Capital. However, this might be attributed to sampling; my colleagues living in Ankara, with whom I have more personal relations, might have been more eager to join the survey. The correspondence between two datasets changes in other cities. Istanbul is second in the survey while it is last in my records because interpreters in Istanbul, mostly work in Istanbul. Same goes for those in Ankara and Izmir (respectively the three biggest metropolises in Turkey). One might point out, however, that Izmir is not an important venue of interpretation, nor does it contain so many interpreters; it is an artifact that it covers an important place in my experience, as I have a second home there. We can conclude that Ankara and Istanbul contain the highest number of interpreters whereas it is impossible to state which of the two is more important based on the comparison between my data and survey data. They are followed by Antalya and Izmir.

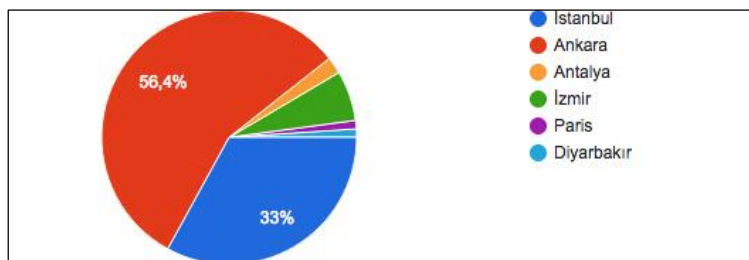


Figure 6: Main work locations of interpreters (Survey).

Another question in the survey might also have a bearing on a comparison in this regard. When the interpreters were asked to put a mark on cities where they have worked 10 days of more, the reply “Ankara and nearby cities” came first with 71.3%. It is followed by Istanbul and nearby cities with 69.1%, and Antalya and its vicinity with 55.3%. Antalya is a very important touristic center packed with hotels, and many international events, especially the medical conferences, are hosted by this Mediterranean city.

The fourth most checked option is “other countries” (37.2%). Izmir (the third biggest city in Turkey) comes only after other countries with 26.6%, which again shows that my personal data is not representative when it comes to Izmir. Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia comes fifth in the row before more industrialized southern cities of Adana and Mersin. This “surprise” shows that the intensity of interpretation jobs is not to be understood solely in relation to business but social issues like migration, human rights and development might sometimes be even more important. Black Sea region, which also contains many underdeveloped cities but does not have an ethnicity-based conflict opposed to the mostly-Kurdish region of Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, comes even after Northern Cyprus (which is 7.4%) with 4.3%.

The answers given to the question about fields of interpretation can be compared with this one. Based on the multiple selections of the responders, we see that most of the interpreters have interpreted events on politics and international relations (77.7%). It is followed by law, society, gender and human rights (58.5%), business, economics and finance (52.1%), environment, forests, agriculture and food (50%), health and medical (47.9%) and culture, arts, sports and education (31.9%).

In responding to a complementary question, more than 90% of interpreters hold that making translations in a vast range of fields contributes highly or very highly to their intellectual formation. 7.5% thinks this impact to be moderate whereas only 3 persons think it to be low or none.

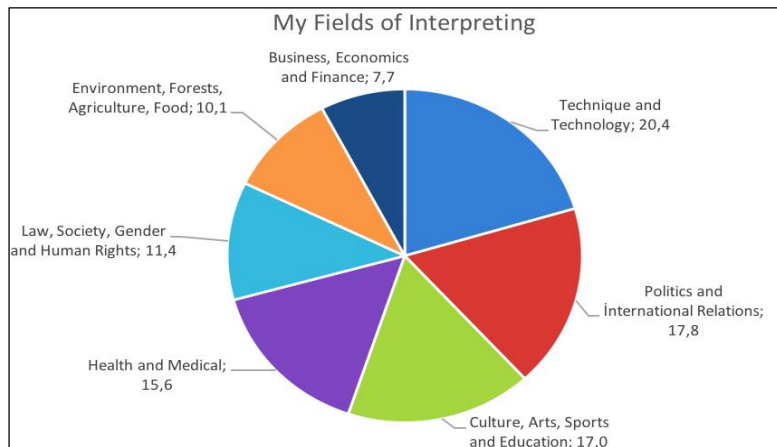


Figure 7: The fields and disciplines for which I work as an interpreter.

As the Figure 7 shows, I mostly translated events on technical field and technology followed by politics and international relations and other. However, a more detailed breakdown (Figure 8) shows that I mostly interpret on health and medical sciences (15.6%) followed by agriculture, forestry, food and environment (10.1%), and culture, arts and social sciences (11.2%). Business, economics and finance, which is the most marked option by other interpreters, comes in the fourth place in my work with 7.7%, which I hope to be a clear indication of my anti-capitalist political stance!

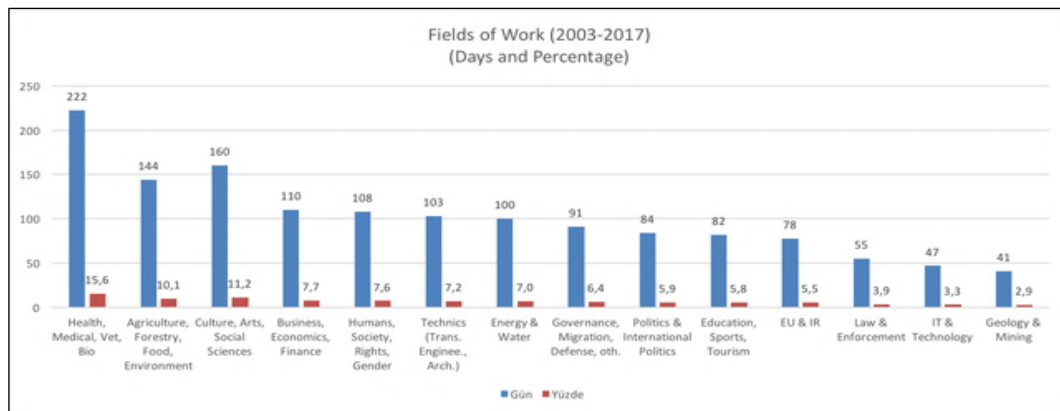


Figure 8: Detailed breakdown of my fields of interpretation (blue: workdays, red: percentage).

3.4 Income and Living Conditions

The fourth category of the survey had questions related to payments, income, working and living conditions and similar issues. 60.6% of the responders think that they are paid the market average while around one-third of interpreters (28.7%) think that they are paid more, and 10.6% think that they are paid less.

I am also paid in compliance with the market average which makes around 8.000 Turkish Lira in a month (1250 Euro as of late October's exchange rate). We have high seasons and almost-off-seasons (mid-summer) so the monthly payment is calculated on average.

46.2% percent of responders say that they earn 4-8 thousand liras a month. 26.9% between 8 and 12 thousand Turkish Liras, 17.2% 2-4.000 liras, and 2.2% (probably less frequent workers) 1-2.000 liras. 7.5% says that they earn more than 12.000 TL. When the amounts are converted to Euro they seem quite low, but the net average monthly salary is 400-500 Euro⁸ in Turkey (which became even less after the value loss in Turkish Lira), so the interpreters are generally satisfied with their payments. 45.2% of the interpreters, in answering another question about their satisfaction with payments, marked 4, and 18.3% marked 5 (fully satisfied) out of a scale of 5. 29% have given 3 points whereas the remaining 7.6% are not satisfied at all or poorly satisfied with the wages.

The first question about working and living conditions is related to –not surprisingly– the fact of working away from home. When the responders were asked to give a point to the frequency they lodged in hotels or away from home on a scale from 1 (very seldom) to 5 (very often), 30.9% gave 3. Around 36% stay away from home quite seldom while 33% stay quite often. I would give 4 or 5 points to this question. If I consider both Ankara and Izmir my home cities (which was the situation in recent three years), two-thirds of my workdays are at home and one-third away from home. When I take out Izmir, then it makes Ankara 54% and other places 46%, which makes me a very frequent traveler. I might be slightly exceptional because in practice I live in four different homes (2 in Ankara, 1 in Izmir and 1 in an Aegean seaside town) even when I am not away from home for conferences.

I also asked two different questions about the perceived impact of lodging in hotels respectively on family and social life and on the general health status of the interpreters. Since the responses are more or less the same, we can consider them together. Around 30% of interpreters think that being a frequent

⁸ See the graphic on <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/DP5I8XKW4AEkf2d.jpg> and the Wikipedia article “List of European countries by average wage”.

traveler has a very negative impact on their family and social life as well as on their health. Another 30 percent think this impact to be medium whereas the remaining each 20 percent think it to be less or more than medium. I would say it has a medium to high negative impact on my life together with the 75% of the interpreters. This brings the question of payments for the jobs away from home to the fore. In Turkey we are not generally paid more for events outside our home cities, and only accommodation and travel fees are covered. However, considering that the majority of interpreters perceive this as having negative effects, this scheme should be reconsidered.

I hold that the voluntary jobs are important in both ethics and training of an interpreter. I do my best to undertake at least a few days of interpretation for the less-than-average price (semi-voluntary) or free of charge (voluntary) for financially weak NGOs with the causes of which I empathize at least to a certain extent. I also take the opportunity of this less-strict works for training my students and apprentices. 44.7% of the responders said that they never do this whereas 43.6% work 1-10 days on a voluntary or semi-voluntary basis. 11.7% said that they work even longer in semi/voluntary jobs.

3.5 Professional Life and its Impact on Personal Life

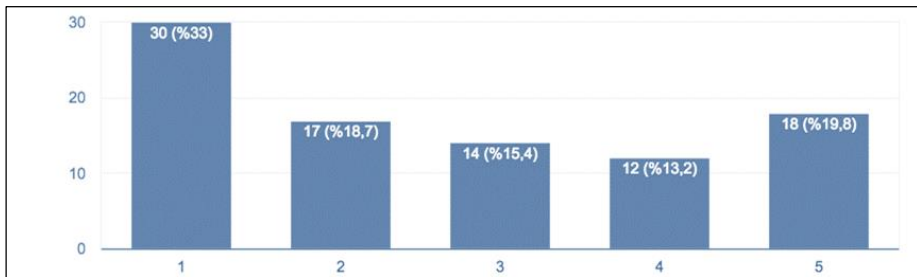


Figure 9: Contribution of professional organizations, associations and networks.

This chapter in the survey deals with various aspects of the professional life of an interpreter. The first question in this section is related to the contribution of national or international professional organizations, associations or networks to our professional life, rights and experience. As Figure 9 shows, 33% considers this contribution very low and 19.8% very high. The other 18.7%, 15.4%, and 13.2% marked respectively 2, 3 and 4 over 5 points.

The following question is interesting and allows a comparison between my personal work data and survey results. The interpreters were asked about their estimates of the busiest days of the work and the busiest months of the year in terms of interpretation programs.

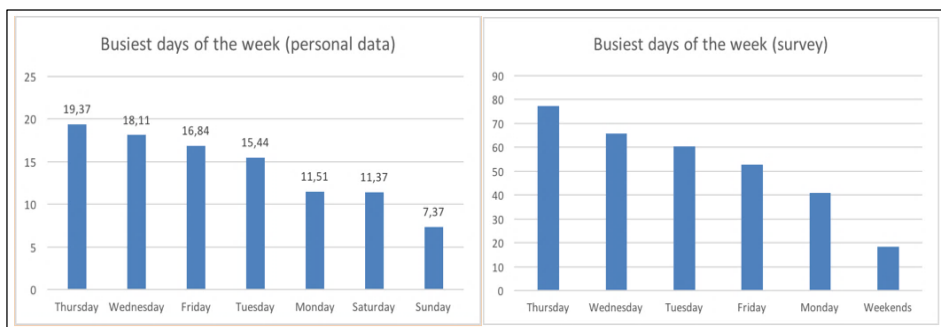


Figure 10: Busiest days in a week.

As might be seen in Figure 10, the comparison of my data and survey data shows a strong correspondence. Thursdays are the busiest and weekends are the least busy times in a week. Monday, counter-intuitively, is not a very busy day. There is a disagreement on Friday; it is the third busiest day in my experience, but the other interpreters think it to be a quite weak day⁹.

In Turkey, a typical interpretation season begins in September and ends in June. The longer summer and shorter winter vacations (corresponding to Christmas and New Year's Eve) are very scarce in terms of workdays. My personal data (Figure 11) illustrates this tendency. May and November are the busiest months followed by October, September, April, March and June. December, January and February are moderately busy while July and August are quite scarce.

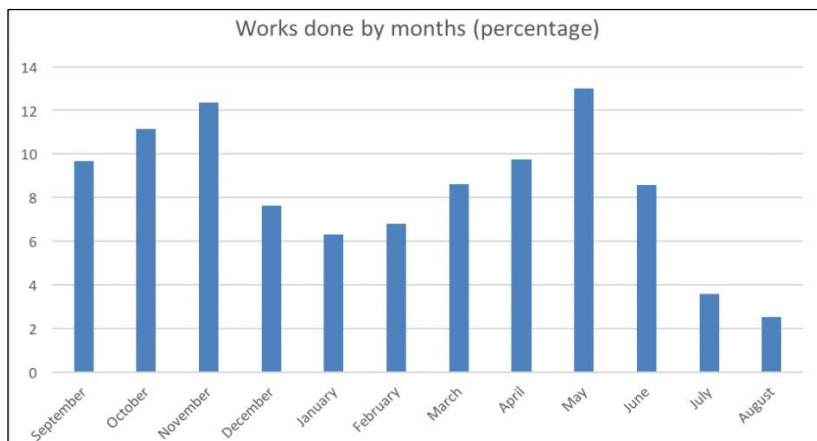


Figure 11: Percentage of works I've done by months of the year.

Survey results display a similar tendency peaking in September, October, going quite high in March, April, May, and June, and hitting bottom in winter and summer vacations.

When the interpreters were asked about how often they receive documents and information about a conference they would interpret 14% gave 1 point (very rare) and 4.3% gave 5 pts (very often). Most (41.9%) gave 3 pts and only 13% gave 4 and 5 whereas 30.1% gave 2 pts. Also under the light of my own experience, I can conclude that giving preparatory documents beforehand is not a very common practice in Turkey and needs improvement. An interpreter must be insistent to get any document or information from the conference organizers or the intermediary companies. Very often you would know beforehand only the very general subject topic (e.g. "It is a medical or IT job"), occasionally the full title of the event, and even sometimes only the venue and time of the work. Most interpreters are flexible enough to provide a decent interpretation in any major field without previous preparation, but this indispensably should have some negative ramifications on quality issues.

Interpreters were also asked about the time they dedicate to their professional development in general and to prepare for conferences in particular. The majority (38.7%) gave 4 over 5 ("I dedicate a lot.") Only 16.2% gave 2 or less whereas 25.8% gave 3 and 19.4% 5. We can conclude that interpreters in Turkey are keen on their professional practice and development.

⁹ The graphic on the left is based on real data whereas the one on the right is based on multiple estimates of interpreters, so the scale changes but the result doesn't.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Being descriptive as it is, this study needs no long a conclusion, but I would like to reemphasize some of the points we had been through.

Firstly, I can say that my experiences vastly overlap with the experiences of my fellow-interpreters.

Secondly, translation and interpretation schools are very important, but still, at least one-third of the job market is occupied by people coming from other disciplines. In my experience, being an “outsider” is an advantage because I draw upon a wide vocabulary coming from my civil engineering, theatre, philosophy, and political science educations. However, from time to time, I feel the deficiency of a theoretical background in translation studies, which I try to close the gap with additional readings.

Thirdly, written translations are not very common among experienced interpreters in Turkey, which might cause certain dead spots and weaknesses in linguistic skills because interpreting involves much less reflective and analytical thinking compared to translation. Gillies emphasizes the versatility needed in simultaneous translation: “It is less easy to isolate the component skills in simultaneous than in consecutive”,¹⁰ and, in any case, written translations will surely contribute to any of these skills.

Fourthly, the professional life in Turkey needs many improvements in terms of organizational structure and networks, conference organization and ethics, and, of course, payments!

I wish, this study will be complemented with a wider international study one day as such a study can give a much more holistic view of our profession’s existence in the global community.

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10 Gillies, Andrew. 2013. *Conference Interpreting*. London: Routledge.