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Developing National Standards and Qualifications for Sign Language Interpreting in Turkey

Türkiye’de İşaret Dili Çevirmenliği için Ulusal Standart ve Ulusal Yeterlilik Çalışmaları

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Abstract: In 2012-2013 Turkey began working on drafting a national standard for translators and interpreters, including sign language interpreters. By 2017-2018, the same group moved on to drafting their national qualifications. In 2020 the National Standard was enlarged to include a wider scope for sign language interpreting and the National Qualifications for Sign Language Interpreters were approved and published. These developments marked an important step for sign language interpreting in Turkey, shedding light on realities of professionals in the country. The results of this long and carefully planned process led to the drafting of two documents that will hopefully contribute to sign language interpreting. The standard and qualification referred to may be able to lead to steps to improve the professionalism of the sign language interpreters, the recognition of the skill sets of interpreters, areas of expertise in sign language interpreting, life long learning in sign language interpreting, the importance of the recognition of training in the field and studies in sign language interpreting. The following paper summarizes this long process, and outlines the model and rationale behind the model that Turkey embraced. The paper aims to a) provide an overview of sign language interpreting in Turkey; b) model the process for similar endeavours; and c) explain the importance of such initiatives for improving the practice of sign language interpreting. The intention of this primarily descriptive paper is to promote an awareness of the developments in Turkey; the hope is that this awareness will promote cooperation, which will further contribute to the profession.

Structured Abstract: In many countries there is extensive research in the field of sign language interpreting, and there are established programs and schools that develop both the practice and the quality of the practice. In countries like Turkey, the situation is different.

Since sign language interpreting is essentially linked to a disabled individual’s right to access services and information it requires greater attention if a part of the native community of a country are to have access to services, information etc. in the society that they are an integral part of.

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Though there have always been proficient SLIs in Turkey, and some research on the subject, sign language interpreting was not even near the top of the agenda when compared to the developments in other countries.

In Turkey, the drafting of a national standard for translators and interpreters began in 2012-2013, and in 2016-2017 there was progress in drafting the national qualifications. These two documents marked a development for sign language interpreting in Turkey.

Since the national standard is a broad document, kept concise and short, and sets preliminary norms for the standard of the practice of the profession this document was further elaborated in 2020. The revised standard went on to include other specifics about sign language interpreting and has been published on 16.05.2020

Following this, the drafting of a qualification was defined as ‘formulating an objective model of an examination procedure for the evaluation of all the definable basic and other skills and knowledge necessary for the practice of a profession’.

The document to be drafted would have to reflect the realities of the practice of the profession, the different language combinations, and the different ways the profession is practiced in the market. In order to do this, market research was needed. The testing had to be done with academically valid, objective methods which reflect practice; the ‘pass grade’ would have to be the average of the quality present on the market. The evaluation procedures, the texts, the evaluator profiles, the checklists detailing the evaluation criteria, and everything to do with the process would have to be listed and explained in a way that was understood by all professionals. A pilot study had to be conducted. The resulting drafts had to be comprehensive and fair; they could not prioritize training, but not disregard it either.

There were certain criteria set to select individuals who would be able to provide the best input. In Turkey, the best candidates were found among CODA as well as among the Deaf interpreters actively working in special niches in the market.

The qualifications are composed of compulsory modules, which each candidate has to pass, and elective modules, which the candidate can choose to take to show their specialization. According to MYK traditions in Turkey, each qualification has a compulsory unit for occupational health and safety.

Another aspect of qualification that needed careful planning was designing the certification board. In the case of sign language interpreting, interpreters felt that the Deaf community could not be represented only by the hearing sign language interpreters. The drafting team decided that no matter the language combination of the candidate, there would always be two deaf interpreters (with a combination of TİD and another sign language) on the evaluation board.

Finally the final version of the draft was discussed in a meeting with the relevant sector committee where the draft was read through and approved. Finally the MYK officially published the qualification.

In conclusion, working on drafting the national translation and interpreting standard and qualifications have either led to, or were designed to encourage, the following developments in Turkey:

First, SLIs (as expressed during the meeting with NGOs and during the pilot exam) further embrace their ‘interpreter’ status. This development is important in and of itself; but it is also important because SLIs have found that there is strength in unity. This will hopefully lead to further integration and cooperation among colleagues.

Second, the process this paper discusses leads to certification, which ensures quality in interpreting for clients. Without closing doors on lifelong learning, this process weeds out unqualified self-proclaimed interpreters who will have to improve their skills to acquire the right to practice the profession.

A third development is the importance of recognition of expertise. With determining divisions between fields of sign language interpreting through the elective modules in the qualification, it becomes clear that the knowledge and skills necessary for different settings and modes do not overlap (as detailed in the control check lists of the elective modules). The sector hopes that this will lead to either interpreters specializing in a certain field or interpreters acquainting themselves with the necessities of each type of interpreting.

A fourth development is that good practice standards have been determined through research and deliberation and the experience SLIs and deaf interpreters. Both younger interpreters entering the market as well as clients can see a road map to 'good interpreting practices' more clearly. This process has raised awareness for all parties involved.

A fifth development is that clients now have a centralized system for recruiting SLIs. Certification ensures a certain quality in applicants.

An sixth point is that the sign language interpreting qualification sets an example for other forms of accessibility like audio description and subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing.

Furthermore, both the standard and the qualification may be revised and updated in accordance with sectoral needs at any time. This also will evolve with time. Drafting the standard and qualification have contributed and hopefully will continue to contribute to the sector and the end-users' needs. Eventually, as it gains momentum, the lessons and information gleaned from the process will hopefully pave the way for other developments. The pace and style of these developments will always be determined by the Deaf community and the SLIs themselves.

Keywords: sign language interpreting, Turkish sign language interpreters, national qualifications, national standards, European Qualifications Framework, Deaf community.

Öz: 2012-2013 yıllarında, işaret dili çevirmenliği de dahil olmak üzere, çevirmenlik alanında bir mesleki standart oluşturma çabaları başladı. 2017-2018 döneminde ise çalışmaları yürüten ekipler ulusal mesleki yeterlilikler üzerinde çalışmaya başladılar. 2020 yılına gelindiğindeyse Çevirmenlik Meslek Standardı rezive edilmiş ve kapsamı genişletilerek işaret dili çevirmenliğine daha geniş yer verilmiştir; ayrıca İşaret Dili Çevirmeni Mesleki Yeterliliği onaylanmış ve yayımlanmıştır. Bu gelişmeler Türkiye'de işaret dili çevirmenliği için önemli olmanın yanı sıra işaret dili çevirmenlerinin mesleki gerçeklerini de ortaya koymakta yardımcı olmuştur. Uzun ve dikkatli bir çalışmanın ürünü olan bu iki belge işaret dili çevirmenliği alanına katkı sağlayabilecek niteliktedir. Söz konusu standart ve yeterlilik belgeleri Türkiye'de işaret dili çevirmenliğinde çevirmenlerin profesyonelliği, çevirmenlerin becerilerinin tanınması, işaret dili çevirisinde uzmanlaşma, çevirmenlerin yaşam boyu gelişimi, işaret dili çevirmenliği eğitiminin öneminin tanınması ve işaret dili çalışmaları alanının ilerlemesi konusunda önemli adımlara vesile olmuştur. Çalışmada bu uzun süreç anlatılmış ve Türkiye'de benimsenen modellemenin mantığı açıklanmıştır. Çalışmanın amacı a) Türkiye'de işaret dili çevirmenliği ile ilgili bilgi paylaşmak; b) benzer süreçler için bir modelleme örneği sunmak; c) işaret dili çevirmenliği açısından benzer girişimlerin önemini anlatmaktır. Özünde betimleyici bir yaklaşımı benimseyen çalışmanın kaleme alınma nedeni ise alandaki gelişmeler hakkında farkındalık yaratmak ve mesleği daha da ileriye götürecek başka girişimler için işbirliği olanaklarını düşündürmektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: işaret dili çevirmenliği, TİD çevirmenliği, ulusal mesleki yeterlilik, ulusal mesleki standart, Avrupa Yeterlilik Çerçevesi, Sağır topluluk.

Introduction

In many countries there is extensive research in the field of sign language interpreting, and there are established programs and schools that develop both the practice and the quality of the practice. In countries like Turkey, the situation is different. Research into sign language interpreting is sparse, and interpreting and translation are not professions with relevant chambers. This has paved the way for self-proclaimed practitioners.

Since sign language interpreting is essentially linked to a disabled individual's right to access services and information (see: UNCRPD- United Nations- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>). It requires greater attention if a part of the native community of a country are to have access to services, information etc. in the society that they are an integral part of. A lack of legal recognition and certification of any profession is something to be lamented, but in sign language interpreting there are severe implications related to this deficit.

In Turkey, various employers feel that sign language interpreters (SLIs) need only ‘a good grasp of sign language’. In many cases, the interpreter is viewed as a mediator for the Deaf.

The lack of recognition of the skills of SLIs, (both by the clients and in many cases also the end-users), the lack of extensive research in the field, and the differing ‘role’ of the interpreter who in practice fits into moulds as designated by the clients’ needs, are all important issues that need to be addressed. In the Turkish case, it becomes clear that in most cases a SLI is a ‘self-proclaimed professional’: A practitioner who has not objectively proven/displayed that they have the skills and the knowledge to practice the profession.

In many countries in Europe and worldwide where there are training and university programs for sign language interpreting, there are clear requirements for the knowledge and skill sets that an interpreter needs. For example, in government office job postings for SLIs, the Turkish state claims that they comb through applicants carefully, but the preliminary criteria set for application is quite vague and the examination procedure does not test specific sign language interpreting skills. In *Recruitment for Contract Personnel- Ministry of Family and Social Policies*, published in 2014, application criteria included compliance with certain requirements for civil servants under set laws and stated that: the applicant must hold a certificate defined within the scope of the 2nd Provisional Article of the Regulation as regards the determination of the rules and procedures for the practice and the formulation of the Turkish sign language system and a high school or equivalent degree. The vocational exam tests whether the applicant has: a specific level of knowledge of Turkish sign language (the ability to understand, summarize, and express); self-confidence and the ability to represent; general skills and culture; and openness to following scientific and technological advances. That is not to say that the interpreters recruited under this application were deficient; on the contrary they are among the best sign language interpreters in Turkey. The example is given to explain the lack of clear requirements.

In other countries, the practice of sign language interpreting has been detailed and supported for a long time. Oral (2017), one of the first Turkish sign language interpreting academics, underlines that Turkish sign language interpreting studies lag behind practices in Europe:

[...] in Europe work was undertaken on the subject in the 1980’s. SLI in Europe worked to draft the laws and the regulations governing the practice and the professional vocational profiles. Benoît Kramer (1987, p. 77), a member of AIIC accentuated the SLIs’ role as an interpreter versus a moderator. In order to outline the interpreters’ profile and what the work entailed, the European Parliament, with the instigation of the European Union of the Deaf, accepted sign language as the natural language of the Deaf. (93)

Many countries, in line with their own administrative systems, history, and culture, have embraced various strategies to acknowledge Deaf communities, their languages, and their needs. European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (EFSLI) was established in 1988 to promote professionalization; the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) was established in 2003 (Oral, 2017, p. 94). In 2012, the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) recognized SLI as their own, stating that:

AIIC recognizes that conference interpreters use spoken and/or sign languages. All of AIIC members are conference interpreters, engaged in conference interpreting, irrespective of whether they do so by means of spoken languages only, sign languages only, or a combination of both.

Though there have always been proficient SLIs in Turkey, and some research on the subject, sign language interpreting was not even near the top of the agenda when compared to the developments in other countries. One positive development was the ratification of *The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* of the United Nations. Turkey ratified the document in

question on 27/5/2009 as published in the Resmi Gazete (Official Gazette). The Convention brought issues regarding disability under closer scrutiny.

Currently, one training opportunity in Turkey is the Ministry of Education approved certification program. The Training for Sign Language Trainers and Interpreters Program (*İşaret dili öğretici ve tercüman eğitimi*), initiated in 2011, is a general training program which aims to teach sign language. The training level is officially undesignated, but approximately corresponds to Level A1/A2 (See: European Language Portfolio). An important development has been the two new graduate programs that have been initiated at the Ankara University and Hacettepe University in 2018-2019. These master programs without a thesis concentrate on training researchers, interpreters and other experts who may develop the field.

In recent years, scholarly work in sign language interpreting in Turkey has also gained momentum. Yet, still most of the work undertaken in the field has been concentrating of the study of Turkish sign language (the official acronym is TİD): its structure, history, and the end-user community.

Against this backdrop, drafting a national standard for translators and interpreters began in 2012-2013, and in 2016-2017 there was progress in drafting the national qualifications.

In the Turkish model, a national standard is primarily a descriptive document that details the basic terms, skills, process steps, and areas of expertise of a profession. The national standard forms the basis of the national qualification. National qualifications are documents that detail the scope of a profession, or expertise within a profession, and set examination procedures to certify individuals who cannot otherwise through certification prove that they have the skills and knowledge necessary to practice professionally. Acceptance of a qualification is followed by establishing certification centres where professional examiners conduct strenuous examinations in accordance with the norms set in the qualification. This is followed by certifying the practitioners who pass the exams. This system allows individuals who would otherwise not have the opportunity to certify their proficiency to attain a legal document that proves they are capable of practicing a profession. Qualifications are usually necessary either when there are no official recognized training opportunities (for example, no training at undergraduate level in the interpreters' language combination), or the sector feels the need for further regulation in a profession.

These two documents marked a development for sign language interpreting in Turkey. In explaining the underlying logic of the process, the following were important:

1) The National Occupational Standards and The European Qualifications Framework, which provide the drafting rationale behind the two documents, can be found on the Europa website. The sections about *Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe - Descriptors defining levels in the EQF* underline that every country must draft documents in line with their own realities and needs. Thus, a study of the process highlights the situation of the profession in a country, as well as serving as a comparison with others.

2) During the drafting of the two documents decisions had to be made with the community in question, as the process would entail formulating astute projections for the future of the profession.

3) Before drafting, it was necessary to conduct extensive research to model the process. It was relatively easy to find material from other countries. There are examples of standards and qualifications from other countries, like the work undertaken by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Qualification in Wales and others (e.g., see: *British Sign Language Qualifications; Qualification Specification- Level 6 NVQ Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting*). There are also many examples of how different countries designed their national vocational qualifications system (e.g., see: *National vocational qualifications system- Referencing national vocational qualifications*

to the Slovenian qualifications framework - 2017; CILT-the National Centre for Languages- National Occupational Standards in Interpreting- 2006; Ministry of Labour and Social Policy- Poland; National Vocational Training System- National Vocational Qualification Standards - Warsaw 2006). There are examples of degree courses that detail the skills and knowledge necessary for the profession, ranging from Level 6 courses (e.g., see the list for *Colleges for Aspiring ASL Interpreters 2018*) to shorter courses (e.g., see *Actual signs Deaf Interpreting Course Signature Level 6 NVQ Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting 2011*). There are further examples of standards like the *National Standard Guide for Community Interpreting Services* published by the Healthcare Interpretation Network – HIN Toronto, Canada in 2007, or on a related subject, the *Vocational Qualification in Sign Language Instruction*- Finnish National Board of Education 2010. There are also examples of interpreter certification opportunities (e.g., see: Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf- *National Interpreter Certification [NIC]*- 2013 or also see: Centre for Assessment of Sign Language Interpreting- *Certified Deaf Interpreter Exam*). There are hundreds of research papers and projects on the core issues of qualifications, such as competences and national designs (for random examples see Lester & Religa 2017; Brockmann, M., Clarke, L. and Winch, C. 2009; Allais, S., Marock, C. & Molebatsi, P. 2014; CEDEFOP 2009; Fretwell, D., Lewis, M. and Deij, A. 2001; Lester, S. 2014a, 2014b, 2015a, 2015b; Tijdens, K., De Ruijter, J. and De Ruitjer, E. 2012; Young, M. 2011). The information used in the process of drafting the documents came from many sources. But, there was a very limited amount of material which specifically explained the process involved. This article aims to provide preliminary information on all of the above.

Drafting the National Standard

The process that led to establishing the Vocational Qualifications Authority (*Mesleki Yeterlilik Kurumu*- MYK) in Turkey began with the support of the Turkey Business Association (İŞKUR) and the support funds of the World Bank within the scope of the Employment and Training Project (EIP). The Vocational Qualifications Authority Act Bill was referred to the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 2006, and the MYK was established under Law 5544. Currently, the education and employment relations in Turkey are covered by the MYK within the scope of the European Qualifications Framework, the National Employment Strategy, the Lifelong Learning Strategy, the Strengthening of the Employment, and the Vocational Education and Training Action Plan.

In response to the general need and specifically the public sector's needs the MYK embraced the idea of forming a working committee to develop a national standard for translators and interpreters.

The members of the working committee were experienced individuals from the translation and interpreting departments of prestigious Turkish universities and associations that had a history of contributing to the sector.

The academic expert practitioners worked on a voluntary basis following preliminary training on drafting a standard. The training was called *Training for the Drafting of Vocational Standards- Ankara, Turkey. Seminar course: 10-11.May 2012*. The trainees were brought together with MYK experts in a workshop, and developed a draft standard. This was sent to all of the concerned parties (NGOs, universities, organizations, public offices, etc.). It was also posted for comments on the MYK webpage for one month (up to 6/7/2012). The first draft of the standard is unfortunately no longer available on the MYK website.

Acting upon the suggestions of the Conference Interpreters Association of Turkey, Translation and Interpreting Association Turkey and representatives of Boğaziçi University sign language interpreting was included in the standard. At the time, only SLIs who were members of associations were present to assist the drafting process.

During the workshop it became clear that an initial change of perspective was necessary, and that the SLIs in question would be considered *practicing professional interpreters* versus *mediators for the Deaf community*.

Another first for the whole community (the SLIs) was the selection of a common terminology that would explain the profession in Turkish. Negotiating a common discourse in Turkish went surprisingly quickly as SLIs were willing to embrace the terms set by other interpreters, even though they had not previously used them to describe their work in Turkish.

Since the national standard is a broad document, kept concise and short, and sets preliminary norms for the standard of the practice of the profession (translation and interpreting), sign language interpreting could not be explained in detail in the first draft. This document was further elaborated in 2020 when the updating of the National Standard was undertaken by Hacettepe University. The revised standard went on to include other specifics about sign language interpreting and has been published on 16.05.2020 (see: <file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/12UMS0274-6%20Rev%2001%20%C3%87evirmen.pdf>)

TİD has not been studied as diligently as its counterparts in other parts of the world, as an overview of the developments concerning TİD exemplifies. In 1983, the Turkish Ministry of Education acknowledged they did not have a reference book on TİD, and how this impacted the Deaf community; with this acknowledgement they started working on creating one (Özbaykal as cited in Akalın, Oral & Cavkaydar 2014, p.48). The state-owned TRT television channel began raising awareness about TİD by airing a 15-minute news reel every Sunday (Akalın, Oral & Cavkaydar, 2014, p. 45). In 1995 the Ministry of Education published *Sign Language Handbook for Adults*, which contains two thousand words, phrases, and expressions in sign language. The same year, Hasan Şevki Kobal and Şermin Şenturan published the *Turkish Sign Language Alphabet* (Kobal & Şenturan, 1995).

Academic began studies on TİD at the start of the millennium, concentrating on the syntax and grammar of the language. The first academic works in Turkey on the subject are Açı (2001), Zeshan (2002, 2003), and Arık's (2003) graduate theses. A list of all academic work on the subject is compiled in *Türk İşaret Dili Kaynakçası (Turkish Sign Language Bibliography)* (Arık, 2012-2015).

TİD was officially recognized on 7/7/2015 when Law 5378 was published in the Official Gazette. In the 15th article there is reference that TİD is formulated by the Turkish Language Association, and that work on the formulation and use of TİD is to be coordinated by the Association through a joint effort with the Ministry of Education, Social Services and Child Protection Institution, and Prime Ministry Department of the Administration for the Disabled (Akalın 2014, p. 49).

As of 2013, there were two doctoral theses on the subject (Açı 2007; Arık 2009), and nine masters' theses (Açı 2001; Arık 2003; Sevinç 2006; Kubuş 2008; Gökgöz 2009; Dikyüva 2011; Makaroğlu 2012; Taşçı 2012; Özkul 2013) (Arık & Dikyüva & Makaroğlu 2015, p. 54).

In addition to these developments, in 2014, Eskişehir Anatolian University and Hacettepe University cooperated with CODA (Children of Deaf Adults) and Deaf community representatives to compile work on the history of TİD, the training of TİD as a foreign language, and the preparation of videos for a TİD manual.

The drafting of the standard, represented a step forward in the professionalization of SLIs. In Turkey, a national standard has to be reviewed by all concerned actors before it is ratified. The draft was submitted for scrutiny to all NGOs, universities, and public institutions that dealt with Turkish sign language interpreting. The NGOs representing the Deaf community and SLIs deemed the document adequate.

Drafting the National Qualifications

The preliminary training on drafting the national qualifications, and information about the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), were provided by the MYK. The group of experts gathered under the İstanbul University who would coordinate the drafting of the national qualification. The Coordination Group that had drafted the standard (with a few additions and exceptions) gathered in a workshop to work on the qualifications, several decisions had to be made.

First of all, they had to determine the level of the qualifications. It was decided that the first qualifications would be drafted at Level 6 (approximately equal to undergraduate training- for further details consult *the levels of the EQF as defined by the European Commission*). Employment opportunities in the public services would initially require expertise at this level. Lower and higher levels could be added later, if and when it was necessary.

Second, they needed to select the specific fields of expertise the drafts would cover. These were determined through discussions and market research.

In the first session, the conference interpreters and the SLIs had hoped to draft a single qualification for interpreting. After an initial joint meeting it became apparent that a document that would set the scope and the criteria for the evaluation and certification of Level 6 experts in sign language interpreting would require detailed planning. The SLIs felt that a joint checklist (where the minute details of testing criteria are listed) could not be devised and the jury design would differ for sign language interpreting.

The first draft of the qualification for sign language interpreting was an adequate document. Although the MYK originally accepted the document and put it online to for draft opinions, in the final evaluation they found that it had fallen short in some instances in setting comprehensive assessments in testing criteria and procedures. Drafting a national qualification ‘Turkish style’, the way MYK expected, meant detailing comprehensive learning outcomes, qualification criteria, checklists and designs of the evaluation settings, documents to be used, and the set-up of the evaluation board, and so on and so forth. This type of detailed modelling requires academic experience in testing at this level (Level 6).

The initial draft of the SLI qualification were not able to move forward and further steps to establish testing centres for certification did not occur.

In 2017, the translation and interpreting participating partners decided to continue via another channel. The İstanbul University established a Translation and Interpreting Qualifications Coordination Group. The group upon the request of the MYK (which had approved this initiative), also took on redrafting qualifications for SLI.

By 2017, a translation and interpreting expert (an Associate Professor at Hacettepe University, Ankara) had completed her specialization in sign language interpreting and was in the process of designing a masters’ program for sign language interpreting. She had experience working with the Deaf community and with SLIs. She had also conducted extensive research on the international norms and standards for training SLIs. The Group recruited her for the SLI qualification. In addition to Deaf interpreters and SLI other translation and interpreting experts were assigned to assist her throughout the process.

Initially, the drafting of a qualification was defined as ‘formulating an objective model of an examination procedure for the evaluation of all the definable basic and other skills and knowledge necessary for the practice of a profession’. During the formulation of the document, the EQF, the previous qualifications published by the MYK (the approved language/style/discourse of the MYK), and the framework were used as a basis.

The document to be drafted would have to reflect the realities of the practice of the profession, the different language combinations, and the different ways the profession is practiced in the market. In order to do this, market research was needed.

The testing had to be done with academically valid, objective methods which reflect practice; the 'pass grade' would have to be the average of the quality present on the market. National qualifications are drafted for objectively testing and certifying that those individuals who are practicing the profession do so at an acceptable standard.

The evaluation procedures, the texts, the evaluator profiles, the checklists detailing the evaluation criteria, and everything to do with the process would have to be listed and explained in a way that was understood by all professionals.

A pilot study had to be conducted. The realities of Turkey had to be considered (i.e. exactly how many evaluators fit the criteria set in the qualification, and how much would it cost to conduct the outlined evaluation.)

The resulting drafts had to be comprehensive and fair; they could not prioritize training, but not disregard it either. They needed to answer the needs of the employers and employees in the market. A scale that balances the views and consideration could be visualized as follows:

Figure 1: The 'drafting scale'

In view of these basic principles, the SLI qualification process commenced from the beginning in this second phase.

Drafting of the SLI national qualification: The team and the work flow.

There were several issues to consider in recruiting a team to contribute to drafting the qualification. Since the study of sign language interpreting as a profession at the undergraduate level is not an option in Turkey, one of the first difficulties was locating practicing SLIs who could draft a Level 6 qualification. Selecting a 'good interpreter' who had no knowledge of what was required for the academic testing of Level 6 proficiency may have resulted in the drafting of a lower or higher level qualification. The make-up of the drafting team could be visualized as follows:

Figure 2: The drafting team make-up.

There were certain criteria set to select individuals who would be able to provide the best input. In Turkey, the best candidates were found among CODA as well as among the Deaf interpreters actively working in special niches in the market. The following is an example outline of the draft requirements for CODA members working on the drafting:

Figure 3: The qualifications of the CODA team members

Grids for requirements for all team members (like the one presented above as an example) were drafted and the team was recruited accordingly. The translation and interpreting expert, with expertise in TİD interpreting, coordinated between the actors and outlined the way and speed at which the work would be conducted.

At this stage several points became apparent: a) there would be specializations under sign language interpreting; b) the qualification would encompass the realities of the country as well as the wishes and needs of the sector and end-users, but would prioritize the interpreters' position in doing so; and c) this document would not concentrate on sign language but sign language interpreting and interpreters.

Modules of the National Qualification

The qualifications are composed of compulsory modules, which each candidate has to pass, and elective modules, which the candidate can choose to take to show their specialization. According to MYK traditions in Turkey, each qualification has a compulsory unit for occupational health and safety. Other compulsory modules may be added (for details of the MYK regulation see: *Ulusal Yeterlilik Tanımı ve İçeriği*-<https://www.myk.gov.tr/index.php/tr/ulusal-yeterlilik-tanm-ve-cerrii>). The sector deemed it necessary to add a compulsory module aimed at evaluating occupational development of a SLI. This module was devised in the form of a multiple choice exam and a short answer exam designed to evaluate the following:

Figure 6: Summary of compulsory module

The aim of this compulsory module (which can be taken in the written format or recorded in TİD) is twofold. Initially it was designed in line with the interpreters' wishes to promote good practice. Experienced SLIs felt these steps were necessary to ensure quality of interpreters and interpreting. Second, research shows that such a module endorses progressive practices and accentuates the need for practices to ensure quality.

The second sets of modules in the qualification are the elective modules. A candidate has to pick at least one elective module to be eligible for certification as a SLI. The candidate can pick and choose the area of expertise where they want to certify, or could choose to certify in some or all or of them. The elective modules were designated as follows:

Figure 7: Summary of elective modules

These four elective modules (originally drafted in detail and spanning 30 pages) as explained succinctly, provide an overview of the testing process. These modules were designed following market research to pinpoint the need for SLIs in certain services. For example, though the use of sign language in conferences is not as widespread in Turkey as it is in European countries, there have been systematic developments. Since 1996, TİD interpreting has been used regularly at political parties' rallies and meetings (Akalın, Cavkaydar & Oral, 2014, p. 49). Whereas the addition of the first two (community interpreting and conference interpreting) elective modules probably require no explanation, the other two were designed to meet the needs of the Turkish market.

With the initiation of a long process by the state, the Deaf were given the opportunity to train in Turkish universities within the scope of the Accessible Universities Project. The 42nd article of the Constitution states that the government must take all steps to ensure the education of the disabled community. In 1985, new rules were adopted to ensure that disabled individuals are not at a disadvantage when taking the centralized university entrance examination. In 2005, work started on a new regulation for disabled university students. In 2006, universities started to establish special units to assist disabled students; currently these units exist in 80 universities. Law 5378 stipulates equal rights in education for all citizens, and Article 4 of this law underlines that universities must see to the needs of disabled students. (For details of the endeavour by YÖK -the Board of Higher Education- Turkey see: http://www.yok.gov.tr/documents/10279/29816/engelsiz_universite_aysegul_ataman.pdf/2699c543-0e76-417c-b0bc-a855062c92fb). In line with this law, the Board enacted a special regulation in 2010 to ensure the facilitation of disabled students when continuing their higher education; this was further amended and enlarged in 2013. (For details of access to higher education for the disabled see: <http://www.yok.gov.tr/web/engelsizyok/hakkimizda>).

This development led to the need of specifically trained SLIs to meet this demand. An interpreter must accompany Deaf students to courses and exams, interpret all classroom interaction and training, and assist with material outside of the classroom. A module like the one presented above is seen as an integral part of the process to ensure the success of a venture in this field.

The implementation of the audiovisual elective module was also a new development. Currently several television channels provide the option of sign language interpreting in an array of programs (Okyayuz & Kaya, 2017). The state-owned TRT (Turkish Radio Television Network) started sign language interpreting for news reels in 1984, and currently its channels air hundreds of TV series, cartoons, shows, films, and documentaries in VOD (Video on Demand) with sign language interpreting (for examples see TRT page: <http://engelsiztrt.tv/>). With the assistance of SEBEDER (an NGO which provides access to disabled communities), private channels have also been providing sign language interpreting since 2011 and have increased efforts in the last two, three years (For details of SEBEDER see: <http://sebeder.org/hakkimizda.php>). Furthermore, RTÜK, the regulatory organ for broadcasting in Turkey held a series of workshops in 2018-2019 which resulted in a declaration (see: <https://www.rtuk.gov.tr/assets/Galeri/Haberler/sagirlarin-isitme-ve-gorme-engellilerin-gorsel-isitsel-medya-hizmetlerine-erisiminin-iyilestirilmesi-calistayi-sonuc-bildirisi.pdf>) and then led to the drafting and ratification of a Directive for providing accessible broadcasts (see: <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2019/10/20191011-15.htm>) that included the mandatory use of sign language by national broadcasters at an increasing rate. The need for specialized interpreters in this field has increased. The quality of sign language interpreting for the media in Turkey is indisputably high, and in order to maintain this standard, a qualification enabling certification of the self-proclaimed professional is an important step.

Designing the evaluation board.

Another aspect of qualification that needed careful planning was designing the certification board. In the case of sign language interpreting, interpreters felt that the Deaf community could not

be represented only by the hearing sign language interpreters. The drafting team decided that no matter the language combination of the candidate, there would always be two deaf interpreters (with a combination of TİD and another sign language) on the evaluation board. The rest of the evaluator profiles were designed in line with the realities of Turkey:

Figure 8: Overview of the evaluation board

The logic behind the design of the board is that the Deaf community would be represented and given priority and a place in all efforts in regards to Turkish sign language interpreting. Historically sign language interpreting was legally instigated for access to state services and rights. SLIs with the most experience and those aware of state policies supporting good practices would be represented. Furthermore an expert SLIs from the specific fields would be represented in that the design of the board also acknowledges that there are Turkish SLIs with specific expertise.

Approval of the Experts and Sector, Support of NGOs and the Pilot Exam

The final step in the drafting of the qualification entailed three stages. In the first stage the Qualification was opened to comment by academics, NGO's, government organs, and others wishing to comment. All suggestions for revision were taken into consideration. In the case were a revision was not made even though there was a suggestion or comment on the issue, the drafting team had to explain in detail and with relevant information why the suggestion was not integrated. In cases where the suggestion entailed an issue that had been overlooked by the group, this was integrated into the draft. All of this process was checked and approved by the MYK to ensure the group heeded suggestions and comments. Several meetings were also held to explain the details of decisions to the MYK experts.

In the second stage a meeting was organized by Deaf interpreters with representatives from the major NGOs representing the D/deaf and hard of hearing community, including the NGOs for sign language interpreters. During this meeting the draft was examined in detail, all the suggestions of the NGOs were integrated into the document. All NGOs signed a document stating that they approved and supported the draft.

In the third stage a pilot examination (an actual simulation of the all the exams and modules) was held which adhered to the letter of the final draft. Each stage was recorded, all documents were approved by the MYK. MYK representatives also attended the pilot exam and checked that everything was done by the book.

Finally the final version of the draft was discussed in a meeting with the relevant sector committee (see: Medya, İletişim ve Yayıncılık Sektöründe İşaret Dili Çevirmeni (Seviye 6) Ulusal Yeterliliği Kabul Edildi- <https://www.myk.gov.tr/index.php/tr/haberler/83-medya-letiim-yaynclk-sektoer-komitesi-haber/3930-medya-letiim-ve-yaynclk-sektoeruende-aret-dili-cevirmeni-seviye-6-ulusal-yeterlili-kabul-edildi>) where the draft was read through and approved. Multiple questions had to be answered and the qualification had to be explained in detail.

Finally the MYK officially published the qualification.

Conclusion

In conclusion, working on drafting the national translation and interpreting standard and qualifications have either led to, or were designed to encourage, the following developments in Turkey:

First, SLIs (as expressed during the meeting with NGOs and during the pilot exam) further embrace their ‘interpreter’ status. This development is important in and of itself; but it is also important because SLIs have found that there is strength in unity. This will hopefully lead to further integration and cooperation among colleagues.

Second, the process this paper discusses leads to certification, which ensures quality in interpreting for clients. Without closing doors on lifelong learning, this process weeds out unqualified self-proclaimed interpreters who will have to improve their skills to acquire the right to practice the profession.

A third development is the importance of recognition of expertise. With determining divisions between fields of sign language interpreting through the elective modules in the qualification, it becomes clear that the knowledge and skills necessary for different settings and modes do not overlap (as detailed in the control check lists of the elective modules). The sector hopes that this will lead to either interpreters specializing in a certain field or interpreters acquainting themselves with the necessities of each type of interpreting.

A fourth development is that good practice standards have been determined through research and deliberation and the experience SLIs and deaf interpreters. Both younger interpreters entering the market as well as clients can see a road map to ‘good interpreting practices’ more clearly. This process has raised awareness for all parties involved.

A fifth development is that clients now have a centralized system for recruiting SLIs. Certification ensures a certain quality in applicants.

An sixth point is that the sign language interpreting qualification sets an example for other forms of accessibility like audio description and subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing. The second draft of the standard has already been revised to include these modes of translation. Hopefully qualifications for these two fields will be drafted in the very near future as other actors working in media accessibility have seen an example of the benefits.

Furthermore, both the standard and the qualification may be revised and updated in accordance with sectoral needs at any time. This also will evolve with time.

Drafting the standard and qualification have contributed and hopefully will continue to contribute to the sector and the end-users’ needs. Eventually, as it gains momentum, the lessons and information gleaned from the process will hopefully pave the way for other developments. The pace and style of these developments will always be determined by the Deaf community and the SLIs themselves.

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