

Dr. Alev Bulut

A lecturer at Istanbul University, Department of Interpreting and Translation. She has held this position since the year 2000, precisely when the English division was founded.

Linguistics is her field of specialization, and she teaches interpreting skills. Dr. Alev participated in the course for training community interpreters CCIP conducted in Istanbul in co-operation with Bilgi University and Helsinki Citizens Assembly. I interviewed her to share with you information about community interpreting in Turkey and how the subject is dealt within academia.

I did some work on community interpreting because there is a group in our university called “Voluntary Relief Interpreting at Times of disasters”. We include interpreting skills in our courses; teaching as well as practice.

Can you tell the readers in more details about the Interpreting and Translation Department at Istanbul University ? What are the courses offered and what languages it deals with?

We have three divisions at our department; English, French and German. The German is the oldest one. It started in 1993. We have joint masters program in German since 1997. The English and the French started together in 2000. We have also many joint courses given in Turkish. Our main objective is to give the students a good foundation in Turkish to be able to perfectly communicate – write, read and speak – in this language. During the first two years of studies, students concentrate mainly on the building of skills for written and oral types of translation and interpreting. During the third and fourth years, the students specialize in a specific field. We adjust the contents of each specialization each year after discussing it with the faculty members and the experts whom we can get. We have three modules focusing on law, medicine and economics. Though we keep the specialization we can change their contents when necessary. We start consecutive interpreting in the three fields since the third year, after giving the students the basic skills in the first two years. We also have a selective module for conference interpreting, which we do not often open if there is a lack of instructors or if not enough students are ready. In the fourth year, we offer a specialization in conference interpreting. The first group has graduated last year. We now are doing it for the third year. We give the students directions about their competency to help them choose. But to be honest, conference interpreting is not our strongest point. We are better in community interpreting.

So, your department mainly offer specialization in community interpreting!

We have it as part of the completion projects in the fourth year. And since we have this other project in cooperation with the Civil Defence directorate and governorate of Istanbul and other colleagues from different places, we took it as a chance to introduce it in our classes as well, Because we specialize in consecutive interpreting. We also train voluntary interpreters each year to be ready for relief at times of disasters. It is in a way similar to the program you offer for refugees. We encourage our students to pick up community interpreting for their last year projects and to build on earlier projects done in the field.

You work mainly on English, French and German language, what about other languages that are very important in the field of interpretation like Farsi, Kurdish, Somali, Amharic, just to mention some?

We would really like to have these languages as part of our department's divisions. But we are now under the department of Western Languages and Literature. Once the structure gets changed, if we can become a separate and independent department then we can have other divisions and sections. We already include other languages and their literature in our school like Arabic, Russian, Slavic but Kurdish is not offered in our school. We would like to include western and eastern languages, and all sorts of languages useful in interpreting covered as part of our education. We do not want to be limited only to western languages. This is the continuation of the old philology structure and we want to change it of course in the future with the help of the school and the new structure that might be offered by them.

**Can you give our readers an idea about the community interpreting project
“Interpreters in Aid at Disasters” you started up?**

We started our voluntary relief interpreters' project right after the earth quake disasters in 1999. In the first group - where we discussed initial ideas about the project - there were people who really went and served as interpreters in the Marmara earthquake, and the Bolu earthquake a few months after. We thought to make a project out of it to be better planned and organized for any disasters to come in the future. Then we thought that we would work better if we go under an official structure. We signed a protocol in 2001 but the city Civil Defence directorate, the Istanbul governorate, and our school was part of it under the Association of Translators. So, the University provided the education but its official identity is under this association. So far we have regular programs that last for 90 hours; seminars and practical sessions. There is a good number of interpreters we trained through our program. But we hope to increase in number because at times of disaster we do not how many of these people would be available. We want to be always ready

**Are there any exchanging programs between Istanbul University and other universities
in or outside Istanbul ?**

We have bilateral agreements within the content of EU exchange programs. For other projects we usually apply for funds to the research office. We give our reasons for possible cooperation with another university. If they decide to support it then there will be an exchange of students and certificates. It is not as widespread as the EU ones but its possible for a researcher to apply and get funds to conduct his research in another country for example.

Can you envision future co-operation or exchange program with our program in Cairo ?

We would really like to, knowing that you have a program for training community interpreting. If we could arrange a topic for cooperation and establish the objectives we can get funds. Since you have an already established course, our university might host you, or one of our assistants to run one of your programs. It is possible and would be a good step.