



## On the Unintended Consequences of the Turkish Mistranslation of E.K. Hunt's *History of Economic Thought*

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### Abstract

E. K. Hunt's *History of Economic Thought: A Critical Perspective* (HET), first published in 2002, is widely used in courses on the history of economic thought. HET was translated into Turkish in 2005, albeit quite poorly. Despite the multitude of deficiencies of the Turkish translation, numerous teachers in Turkey, including myself, have since begun to use HET. Unfortunately, the translational problems are so severe that using the Turkish translation of HET presents a wide range of "interesting" problems for both the student and the teacher. The article will focus on the *unintended consequences* of HET's erroneous translation on three levels: Hermeneutical, pedagogical and heuristic. On the *hermeneutical* level, the article will discuss the possible misinterpretations of HET. For example, the Turkish version of HET uses the word "good" for the English word "commodity". Evaporating the difference between these two words, this error leads to a misreading of Marx and his explanation of the historical specificity of capitalism. On the *pedagogical* level, the article will survey various experiences of teachers using the Turkish translation of HET and discuss some of the strategies employed to circumvent the translation's deficiencies. This second part will focus on the effects of a misleading translation on the teaching of history of economic thought. On the *heuristic* level, the article will discuss the effects of the Turkish translation on student understanding of the material and on classroom performance. Comparing student performances in my previous years of history of economic thought courses taught simultaneously yet separately both in English and Turkish, one can get a blurred image of the unintended heuristic consequences of a poor translation. To sharpen this blurred image, I plan to implement a series of comparative classroom exercises (e.g., descriptive questions, interpretative essays and oral presentations) in the upcoming semester's courses, intended as "experiments" to understand the workings of a misleading translation on student performance.

