

# Instructors' Perceptions of Students' Google Translate Use in Language Learning\*

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## Abstract

Online machine translation has become increasingly popular among university students, and Google Translate (GT) is one of the most popular applications due to the availability of mobile devices with access to the internet. This mixed-method study aims to examine university prep school instructors' attitudes and perceptions about GT's effectiveness, ethicality, frequency, and the reasons students use it. A questionnaire was administered online to 46 instructors, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 instructors. Results indicate that nearly all of the participants' students use GT regularly. It has also been discovered that many students use GT in their reading and writing classes. Students use GT far more than just a dictionary function, and this overuse dramatically decreases instructors' perception of GT's effectiveness and ethics. Despite instructors' concerns about its long-term usage and adverse effects on students' learning, they do not favor banning its use in language classes due to its simplicity and practicality. Therefore, it is essential to create a working policy to minimize the harmful effects of GTs and to use them effectively.

**Keywords:** google translate, effectiveness, ethics, perception, foreign language teaching

## ÖĞRETİM GÖREVLİLERİNİN ÖĞRENCİLERİN DİL ÖĞRENİMİNDE GOOGLE ÇEVİRİ KULLANIMINA İLİŞKİN ALGILARI

### Öz

Çevrimiçi makine çevirisi, üniversite öğrencileri arasında çok yaygın olarak kullanılmaya başlamış ve internet erişimi olan cep telefonlarının yaygınlaşması nedeniyle Google Çeviri (GT) bunların arasında en popüler hale gelmiştir. Bu karma yöntemli çalışma, üniversite hazırlık okulu öğretim görevlilerinin, öğrencilerin Google çeviriyi ne sıklıkta ve hangi amaçla kullandığını, bu kullanımın etkililiğine ve etikliğine yönelik tutum ve algılarını araştırmıştır. 46 öğretim elemanına çevrimiçi anket uygulanmış ve 11 öğretim elemanı ile yarı yapılandırılmış mülakatlar gerçekleştirilmiştir. Sonuçlar, katılımcı öğretim elemanlarının öğrencilerinin neredeyse tamamının sıklıkla GT kullandığını göstermiştir. Bir diğer önemli bulgu ise birçok öğrencinin bu uygulamayı okuma ve yazma becerileri derslerinde kullandığıdır. Sonuçlar ayrıca öğrencilerin GT'yi bir sözlük işlevinin çok ötesinde kullanma eğiliminde olduğunu ve bu aşırı kullanımın öğretim görevlilerinin GT'nin etkililiği ve etikliğine ilişkin algısını olumsuz anlamda etkilediğini ortaya koymuştur. Öğretim görevlileri, uygulamanın sözlük amacı dışında daha uzun dil yapılarının çevirisi için kullanılmasından ve öğrencilerin öğrenmesi üzerindeki olumsuz etkilerinden endişe duysalar da sadeliği ve pratikliği nedeniyle yabancı dil derslerinde kullanımını yasaklamayı veya sınırlamayı tercih etmemektedir. Bu

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nedenle GT'nin zararlı etkilerinden kaçınmak ve bunları dil derslerinde etkin bir şekilde kullanmak için işleyen bir politikaya ihtiyaç vardır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** google çeviri, etkinlik, etik, algı, yabancı dil öğretimi

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, dictionaries have been a standard tool for learning languages, but current language teaching practices have reduced their use. This is partly due to the continuous development of online machine translation tools (OMT) and the availability of mobile devices with internet access. Consequently, online dictionaries and user-friendly software applications supporting OMT online have become more attractive to language learners. Machine translation applications such as Google Translate (GT) have become one of the most commonly used language classes. Its user-friendly design, speed, and practicality have made GT popular among university students.

It is significant to note that scholars and educators have different views on how these tools can be used in foreign language education. Some instructors prohibit students from using these applications entirely for academic integrity reasons, while others have reservations about using these tools in class or for assignments. However, others have analyzed effective ways to employ these tools (Benda, 2014, p.318; Garcia & Pena, 2011, p.479).

Despite a growing interest in the field, most universities have not yet developed a set of rules regarding students' use of these applications and have not outlined the potential benefits of using such tools. (Glendinning, 2014, p.7). The increased use of these applications in the classroom also challenges language teachers. In addition, there is only limited empirical evidence concerning the usage of OMT in foreign language teaching. Some studies have attempted to describe how learners and educators use these tools (Clifford et al., 2013, p.108; Jolley & Maimone, 2015, p.181; O'Neill, 2019, p.154). Some others investigated suitable ways of using these applications for computer-assisted language learning (CALL) (Benda, 2014, p.318; Chandra & Yuyun, 2018, p.228.; Lee & Briggs, 2021, p.18). Google Translate is the most popular application in this respect, and no specific study investigates its usage in language classes. This indicates a substantial lack of documentation regarding applying the GT in the EFL field, particularly in Türkiye.

This study investigated university prep school instructors' perceptions and attitudes toward GT use in language classes regarding its effectiveness, ethicality, and frequency of occurrence. The research questions of the study are as follows:

1. How often and for what purposes do EFL learners use google translate?
2. What are instructors' attitudes and perceptions about the effectiveness and ethicality of GT in language classes?

The study results will provide insight into how students use GT and how instructors perceive it. Additionally, this information will guide language educators and administrators when making policies regarding using similar applications in EFL education.

## 1. PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON USING GOOGLE TRANSLATE IN LANGUAGE CLASSES

No specific research focuses on GT, but several scholars have examined how students and instructors perceive OMT use. Students' and instructors' attitudes toward OMT use in the United States were investigated by Clifford et al. (2013, p.109). The results showed that almost all participants used these applications in their language classes. In the next phase of the study, 43 instructors were interviewed, and nearly half thought using OMT tools was cheating. For lower-level students, nearly half of the participants said it was "not useful" or "somewhat not useful." According to Clifford et al. (2013, p.116), foreign language education policies should be proactive and based on a forward-thinking approach.

Jolley and Maimone (2015, p.181) investigated Spanish learners' and instructors' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about GT regarding ethicality and quality. The results suggest that nearly all students have used GT language learning at varying frequencies. The results revealed that 65.08% of students use GT as a dictionary. In other words, GT is used to interpret the meaning of individual words. Most students believe GT is helpful for their learning and wish teachers provided more alternatives for its successful implementation. Teachers also considered using GT for individual unknown words to be more appropriate for language learning.

It should be noted, however, that more than half of the instructors viewed the use of GT for longer texts as a barrier to language learning as well as unethical. As Correa (2011, p.65) indicated, higher-level students used OMT less for structures longer than a word because they viewed it as misleading and ineffective. Ducar et al. (2018, p.781) examined the perception of academic dishonesty among FL teachers. The results showed that over half of the instructors considered GT's use as academic dishonesty, especially if it was used for multiple words. Knowles (2016, p.13) asked instructors about their perceptions of the use of machine translation. About half of the participants considered machine translation to be a fraud, while a few considered it ethical. The literature on GT use in language learning generally shows that while learners find it ethical, language instructors have serious concerns. Ata and Debreli (2021, p.104) researched students' and instructors' perceptions of using OMT tools and found that 94% of students use OMT tools frequently. Students primarily use these tools to translate single words or phrases. Participants felt that the quality of these tools' output was inadequate and that their ethicality depended upon how they were applied.

This study adds to previous literature research to better understand instructors' perceptions and attitudes toward using GT tools in language classes in prep schools.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The present study adopted a mixed-method research design. In order to collect quantitative data, participants were asked to complete online surveys using Google Forms. A pilot study of the questionnaires was conducted at four universities. A questionnaire was administered after the suggested modifications were made. Afterward, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eleven instructors in order to understand the topic better.

A total of 46 instructors working at three different state universities in Turkey participated in the study. Nineteen instructors held a Master's degree, and four held a Ph.D. There were thirty

female participants and sixteen male participants. All the participants were native speakers of Turkish. Their working experience ranged from 7 to 29, with a mean of 16.

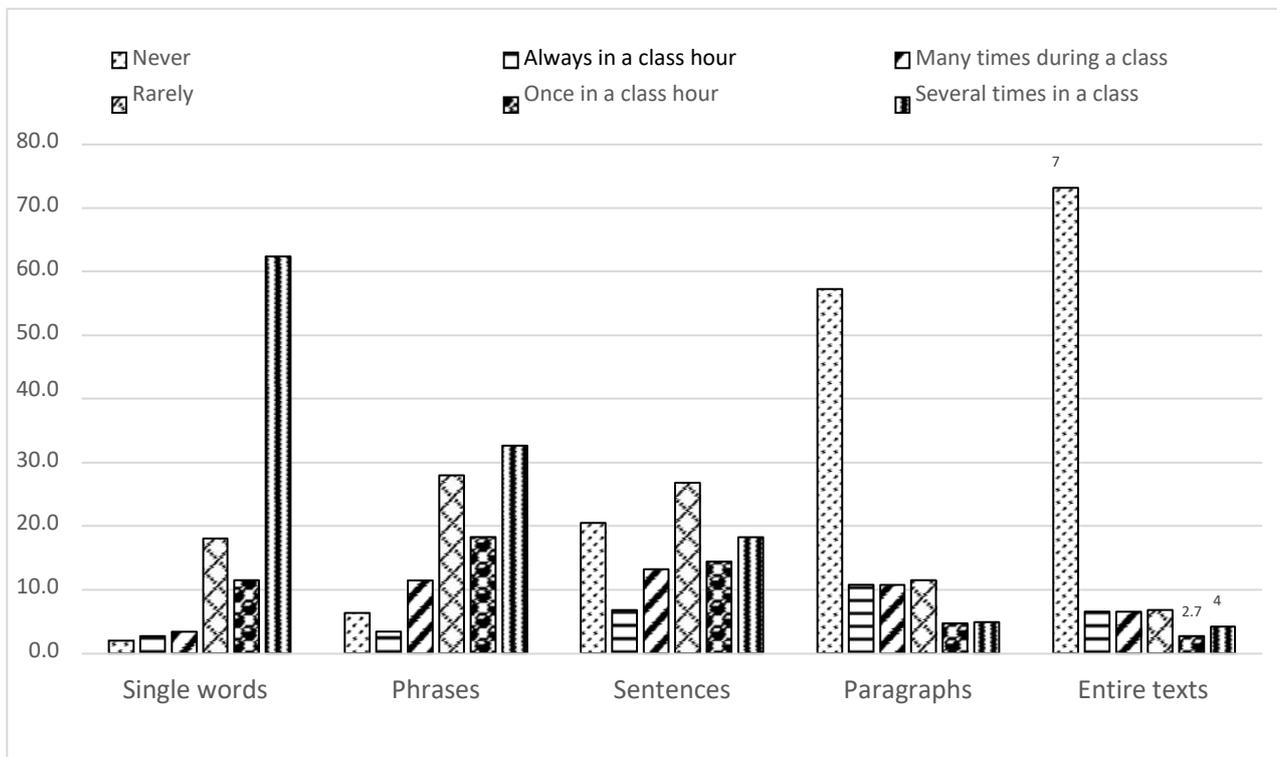
The questionnaire used in the present study was adapted from the study conducted by Jolley and Maimone (2015, p.197). Author permission was granted to use the instrument, and five items were modified to suit Turkish EFL education.

The online questionnaire had 30 items under three headings. The first section was designed to collect demographic information. The second section was about instructors' views on students' habits of GT use. Thirdly, the section included items that examined how the instructors observed students' use of GT in English classes regarding the length of patterns and ethics.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A majority of instructors (94.4%) reported that their students used Google Translate (GT) in their classes. Among the features of GT that students prefer, 84.7% selected written translation (a single word or more). In addition, almost half of all instructors (43%) reported that their students used GT to ensure correct pronunciation. Among the participants, 9.6% reported using GT to translate images and videos; 4.5% translated handwriting; 3.4% translated conversations, and 2.2% translated uploaded documents.

**Figure 1.** Frequency of Students' GT Use by Different Segment Lengths



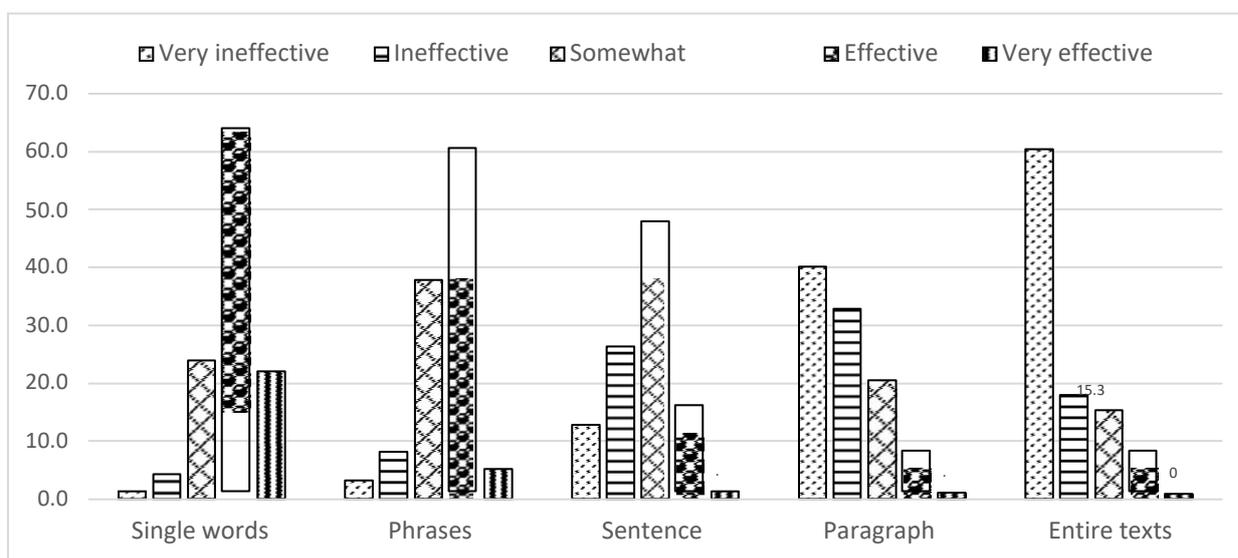
Participants reported that most of their students (84.2%) used GT multiple times during class. On the other hand, only 8.9% of instructors reported that their students never or rarely used

these tools. Additionally, GT was found to have a high frequency when categorizing answers as less or more frequent.

Based on the length of the translated segments, instructors reported a decrease in GT usage. A majority of participants (87.6%) report that their students use GT for the meaning of unknown words several times during class. The percentage of frequent users decreased to 65.6% for phrases. For sentences, 48.4% of participants stated that their students used GT several times during a class hour. Students rarely or never used GT for translating paragraphs or extended texts, according to instructors (8.4%).

There is no clear consensus among participants regarding GT's effectiveness. No participant viewed GT's output as entirely ineffective. However, only 6.8% of participants described GT output as very effective. There was much uncertainty about this issue among instructors.

**Figure 2.** Instructors' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of GT for Different Segment Lengths



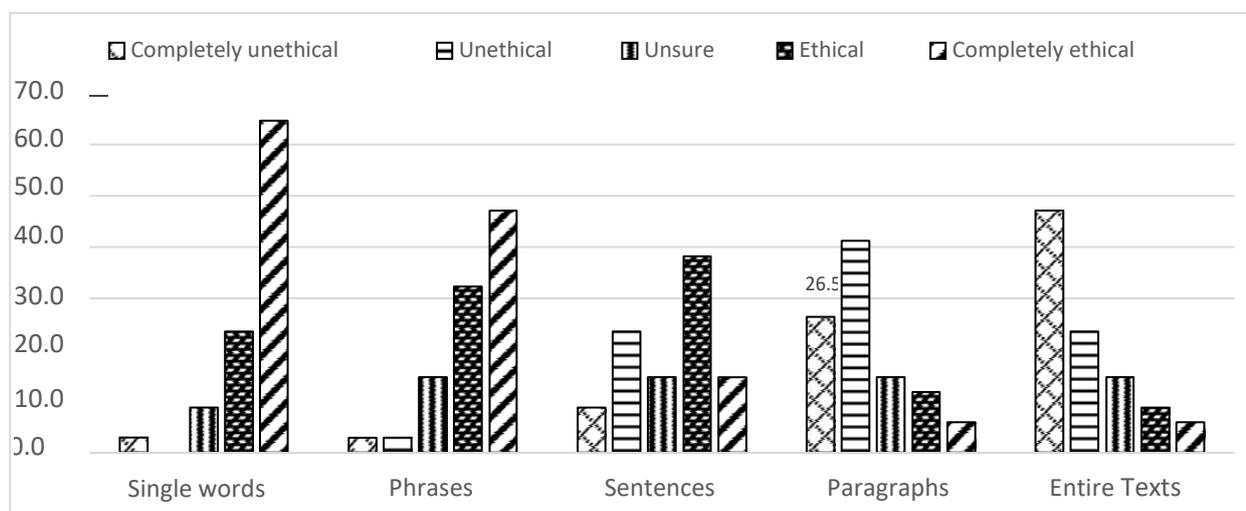
As a result of the data collected from participants about their perception of the effectiveness of GT, 60 percent of participants considered GT practical or highly effective when it was used as a dictionary for the meaning of one unknown word, in terms of perceived effectiveness, GT was perceived to be 52.4% effective for phrases, 41.2% effective for sentence translations, and 9.6 effective for paragraphs and full-texts.

These findings were significant, as they demonstrated the only increase in perception of the effectiveness of different segments of different lengths of the GT tool. Thus, the instructors rated sentence translation as more effective than phrase translation. In the case of longer segments, GT was perceived as less effective.

In response to the ethicality of the students using the GT for English tasks, 2,9% of participants reported that it was ethical, whereas none considered it completely unethical. Regarding whether GT is ethically used for English tasks, 72 percent of instructors stated that it depends on how and for what purposes, while 26 percent were unsure whether GT is ethically used for English tasks. The findings indicate that most participants hold a solid view of GT's ethical use. It is crucial to note that the absence of ethical judgment on the part of the instructors

was one of the key findings, as 84.2 % of students had used these tools multiple times during a class hour.

**Figure 3.** *Instructors' Perceptions of the Ethicality of Students Using GT for Different Segments*



More than half of instructors (56.7%) found GT primarily ethical when reading activities. On the other hand, 72.6% of instructors considered GT to be unethical when used in writing activities. Only 8.8% of participants considered GT to be completely ethical or ethical when used as a tool in writing classes. Most participants were unclear regarding the ethics of grammar classes; 44.1% voted for the ethical side, while 32.6% voted that GT was unethical. With 24.3% of participants unsure about the ethicality of using GT in language assignments, this category had the highest percentage of unsure participants. For presentation assignments, 46.4% of participants found GT use unethical or completely unethical. However, 38.2% found GT ethical or completely ethical.

The results indicate that participants tolerated GT for single words and did not consider it unethical. A total of 91.2% of respondents found GT use entirely ethical or ethical, while 2.9% found it completely unethical. In using GT for phrases, instructors' tolerance level decreased, and 44.7% of participants deemed GT use completely ethical or ethical, while 35.4% deemed it completely unethical or unethical. Regarding sentences, 77.4% of instructors considered GT use unethical or completely unethical. GT use was found to be entirely or partially unethical by 97.6% of participants. Longer segments of GT usage were perceived negatively by instructors.

This study demonstrated that many students use GT to perform tasks beyond simply translating one word, which is not provided by traditional dictionaries. Similar research findings have been reported in the literature (Clifford et al., 2013, p.109; Jolley & Maimone, 2015, p.196; O'Neill, 2019, p.155). Previous studies have found that most students prefer GT in writing and vocabulary, following the results of the present study. Additionally, the findings regarding the frequency of GT used for different lengths correspond with those of Jolley and Maimone (2015, p.196) and Chandra and Yuyun (2018, p.229), which suggested that students sometimes use GT not only for single words but also for longer segments. This may be related to students' language proficiency since lower-level students are rarely exposed to complicated language structures and do not need to use GT for longer segments.

The results of this study are similar to those of Jolly and Maimonie (2015, p.108) regarding GT's effectiveness. As the segment length increased, the perception of effectiveness decreased. For the different lengths of texts concerning ethics, a similar trend was observed regarding the frequency and effectiveness of GT use. For shorter text segments, instructors have a positive attitude toward GT in terms of ethicality. The perception of ethicality declined dramatically as the objective of using GT increased to more than one word. In other words, the ethical judgment was based on how students used GT, unlike Clifford et al.'s (2013, p.120) finding that instructors considered online machine translation cheating. It was found that participants in this study considered GT ethical when it came to short segments, such as words or phrases, but considered it unethical when it came to longer segments and writing activities. The majority of instructors have a negative attitude towards the use of GT in the classroom since writing is a productive skill that is expected of students. There may need to be new regulations introduced by instructors to limit students' use of GT in language classes. Hence, they assist their students in producing their work and improving their language skills.

The findings indicated that students used GT so frequently that instructors viewed it as a threat to their students' language proficiency. Furthermore, similar to Jolley and Maimone's (2015, p.191) study, most instructors reported that GT was not helpful to students. It was also reported that students were increasingly using GT in language classes, even though they were aware of their instructors' negative attitudes towards GT. If instructors know and accept students' learning attitudes and habits, they can guide them and foster their language skills in classes. They may handle the problems arising from GT use more effectively if they have detailed information about why and how they use GT. GT can even be effectively integrated into classes in a controlled manner.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to provide a concrete understanding of how GT is used in an English as a Foreign Language university prep school and how instructors perceive its use. One significant finding was that most EFL prep school students used GT frequently in class. All stakeholders in language education should pay closer attention to GT because of its prevalence and students' dependence on it. It was also found that many students used GT in reading and writing classes. Since GT is widely available and easy to access, instructors do not prefer to ban or discourage it because it is widely available and easy to use even on smartphones. However, their displeasure stems from students' increasingly frequent use of GT, which often extends beyond the dictionary. There are concerns among instructors regarding its use for longer segments and its adverse impact on student learning. Limiting or prohibiting such a widely adopted tool is not always possible in language classes. Therefore, instructors need to find creative ways to incorporate GT into language classes that do not negatively affect learning. According to Tuzcu (2021, p.47), using online machine translation (OMT) increases students' creativity and improves their fluency in writing activities when using such tools. As part of another study conducted in the Korean context, Lee and Briggs (2021, p.30) found that using OMT in writing classes was effective

in helping students distinguish their errors. These findings may be promising for the instructional use of GT in language classes. Prep school students are digital natives who are familiar with such tools and can receive information in a timely manner. GT's popularity in language classes may be attributed to its generational qualifications. Accordingly, all education stakeholders should understand that millennials place a high value on speed and accessibility. Additionally, the results showed that instructors did not have a framework for using GT, which can be distracting. Instructors could have working policies on GT use if seminars or workshops are provided on the subject.

The sample size and type of setting can be considered as the limitations of this study. Due to the study's limited sample size, the findings are not generalizable to other state university preparatory schools. A larger sample size from different kinds of universities may provide more generalizable results.

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Başka Bir Tarih Hayal Etmek

# TÜRK EDEBİYATINDA ÜKRONYA

MURAT GÜR



  
Günce Yayınları

# Edebiyat Üzerine Söyleşiler

MAKSUT YİĞİTBAŞ



  
Günce Yayınları

FEMİNİST EDEBİYAT KURAMI BAĞLAMINDA

# GÜLTEN AKIN ŞİİRİ

GÖKAY DURMUŞ

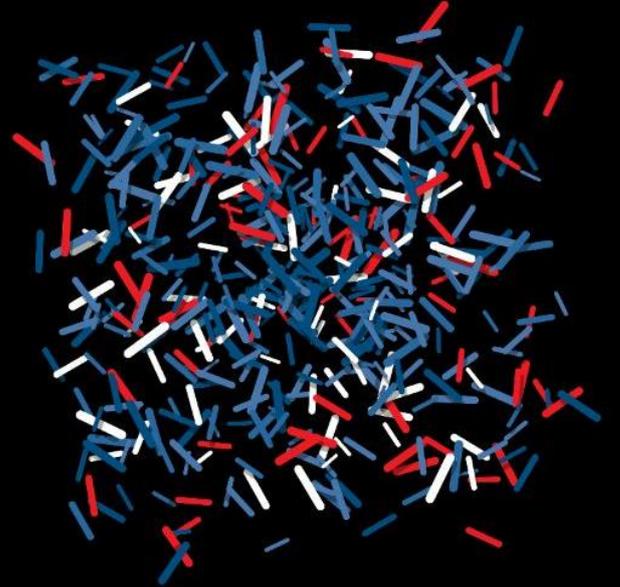


  
Günce Yayınları

# FRANSIZCA VE TÜRKÇENİN SÖZDİZİMİ

KARŞITSAL VE DAĞILIMSAL BİR ÇÖZÜMLEME

*Dr. Yusuf Topaloğlu*



  
Günce Yayınları