




Gender related differences in using intensive adverbs in Turkish

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Abstract

This study aims to find out whether there is a gender based difference between male and female native speakers of Turkish in using intensive adverbs in Turkish. To achieve this, 182 voluntary native speakers of Turkish (89 female/93 male) with age ranging from 18 to 22 were asked to complete a photo description task. The task required choosing one of the statements in Turkish to describe twenty photos taken from International Affective Picture System (IAPS-Lang, Bradley & Cuthbert, 2008). Each set of statements were nominal affirmative sentences and they included a description of the photo with a normal adjective and another one re-written to include an intensive adverb to modify the adjective in the previous statement. Results revealed no statistically significant difference between male and female participants in total. Yet, female participants used intensive adverbs more for certain photos. Discussion of the results and suggestions for future research are presented.

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Keywords: Turkish; intensive adverbs; gender differences; photo description task

1. Introduction

It is now widely accepted that language use differs according to gender and much research provide findings to comply with this fact (see Sunderland, 2006 for a review of relevant studies). In addition to the differences from a macro level, there is a growing body of research focusing on more specific or micro aspects of language use such as the differences on the use of sentences or phrases (Mulac et al., 2001). For instance, as known, an adverb is the part of speech which “describes the circumstances of an action: where it is done (here, elsewhere, overhead), when it is done (tomorrow, often, rarely, never) or how it is done (fast, well, carefully, dramatically, resentfully)” (Trask, 1999: 3). Along with other uses of adverbs, intensive adverbs such as *very*, *really* and *quite* are used to denote stronger action and/or to modify adjectives and much research can be found to focus on the gender differences in the use of intensive adverbs in English (Crosby and Nyquist, 1977; Lapadat & Seesahai, 1978; McMillan et al., 1977; Mulac & Lundell, 1986; Mulac et al., 1986; Mulac et al., 1988; Turner et al., 1995). Turkish utilizes adverbs in a similar fashion to that of English: to provide further specification of the meaning of a verb, an adjective, another adverb or a whole sentence (Göksel and Kerlslake, 2006: 51). However, although there are studies concerning the differences in gender related language

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use in Turkish (e.g. Bikmen and Marti, 2013; Tabar, 2012, etc.), to the best knowledge of the researcher, there has not been any research focusing on the gender based difference in the use of intensive adverbs in Turkish.

This study aims to reveal, if there is any, the gender related differences in native speakers of Turkish in terms of using intensive adverbs. Therefore, this paper seeks to answer whether a gender related difference is present or not in using intensive adverbs in Turkish. The outline of the paper is as follows: the theoretical framework and previous studies regarding the gender related differences in the use of intensive adverbs are presented in the next section. The participants, data collection methods and data analysis procedure is explained in the methodology section, which is followed by the section where the results are analyzed. The paper ends with a discussion and conclusion section in which the implications of the results with suggestions for future research are presented.

1.1. Literature review / Theoretical background

Adverbs have various roles. Apart from modifying verbs, adjectives and adverbs, intensive adverbs such as *very*, *really*, *quite* add another semantic level to an adjective and make it stronger and extraordinary (Demir, 2004) and much research reveal a gender based difference in intensive adverbs. For instance, in a study by Crosby and Nyquist (1977), it is seen that females show a tendency to use intensive adverbs more than males during dual conversations. Similarly, both Mulac et al. (1988) and Turner et al., (1995) show that women use more intensifiers than men in dyadic interactions. Parallel results are also seen in group discussions. For example, Lapadat and Seesahai (1978) report that women use intensifiers more than men in group discussions. McMillan et al. (1977) also point to a significant difference in the use of intensifiers in favor of women during group discussions, which can be regarded as a strategy to express feelings better. Gender related differences in the use of adverbs also seem to take place during monologues such as public speeches. For example, in one study, Mulac et al. (1986) focus on the use of intensifiers in male and female public speeches and find a significant difference as women use intensifiers more than men do. In another study, Mulac and Lundell (1986) analyze the speeches of men and women during describing photographs. The analysis shows that women use more intensifiers than man for depicting the photos.

In fact, depending on the listener/reader, the amount of intensive adverbs used seem to differ as well. For example, Thomson et al. (2001) report that when male and female participants in their study reply to written messages, they use more intensive adverbs if they write to the female-style written messages. In another study, Keikhai and Shirvani (2014) analyzed the written texts and find that women participants intensive adverbs more than men. This might also show that in a deeper level, speakers/writers are aware of the difference between male and female listeners/readers and may feel the urge to address to them accordingly.

Although the studies mentioned above seemed to focus more on specific linguistic aspects, the results seem to comply with presumed qualities of female and male speech. For instance, according to Haas (1979), women are more expressive about emotions and are more supportive in their speeches whereas men seem to be more directive. Similar to this notion of supportiveness seen in female speech, another feature of female speech is cooperativeness and being other oriented while male speech is more competitive and individualistic (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). In addition to these features, Önem (2016) reports findings of which women seem to have a tendency to include more details than men in their speeches, which also emphasizes being more expressive and cooperative in terms of language use since the reason for utilizing more details might the result of psychological and social processes women want to address to. The mental organization in women's language seems to be different from that of men's. For instance, in a research by Shirzad et al. (2013), it seen that the

structure of women's written language in texts are more complex than men's in terms of the level of syntactic complexity, means of integrating cited information, and organizing arguments. In other words, women use language in a more sophisticated manner than men and add more dimensions to their language. In fact, in a research conducted out of large corpora by Newman et al. (2008), it is found that women use words related to psychological and social processes, while men refer more to object properties and impersonal topics. Therefore, it can be argued that women use a more layered language and as mentioned above, intensive adverbs might be used to create one of those layers.

To categorize the linguistic variations between users of language with different genders, a framework which incorporates twenty one gender related language variables categorized under six main titles including sentences, clauses and phrases, verb phrases, modifiers, references and miscellaneous was found in the literature (see Mulac et al., 2001 for a review of the framework). In that framework, Mulac et al. (2001) present intensive adverbs, hedges and justifiers as subcategories of modifiers and this study is based on the analysis of the use of intensive adverbs under the light of this categorization.

1.2. Research questions

This study aims to find out whether there is a gender related difference in the use of intensive adverbs in Turkish present or not.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The aim of this study was to find out whether male and female native speakers' use of intensive adverbs in Turkish differed or not. To achieve this, 182 undergraduate students (89 female/93 male) studying at a state university in Turkey participated in the study. Their ages ranged from 18 to 22 and all of the participants were native speakers of Turkish.

2.2. Instrument

The participants voluntarily completed a photo description task, which was prepared by the researcher in Turkish. The task was composed of two sections: the first section included demographic information about the participants' age and gender and the second section included the questionnaire consisted of photos, which were taken from the International Affective Picture System (IAPS-Lang, Bradley & Cuthbert, 2008), and statements describing the photos.

As mentioned in the website of the Center for Emotion and Attention (CSEA) at the University of Florida, "IAPS is a set of normative emotional stimuli for experimental investigations of emotion and attention. The goal is to develop a large set of standardized, emotionally-evocative, internationally-accessible, color photographs that includes contents across a wide range of semantic categories."[†] In other words, IAPS includes a set of wide variety of photos used as visual stimuli for emotion and attention research. The photos do not have any special features and they are ordinary photos such as a baby smiling or a snake that can be found everywhere. However, the affective norms (ratings of pleasure, arousal and dominance) of each picture in IAPS have been rated and recorded as references for both male and female participants separately as well as in total. Therefore, twenty photos with highest arousal mean scores from IAPS among similar photos were used in data collection process of

[†] <http://csea.php.ufl.edu/Media.html#topmedia>

this study. Since IAPS is provided only upon request to researchers and because of copyright restrictions, photos are not allowed to be distributed. Yet, the specific IAPS picture numbers, the description of the objects in the photos as well as arousal mean and standard deviation scores are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Information related to the photos used in the study

IAPS picture numbers	Objects in the photo	Arousal mean and standard deviation scores
1463	kittens	4.76 (2.19)
1200	spider	6.03 (2.38)
2214	neutral man	3.46 (1.97)
1440	seal	4.61 (2.54)
1710	puppies	5.41 (2.34)
2311	mother	4.42 (2.28)
5950	lightning	6.79 (1.98)
5910	fireworks	5.59 (2.55)
2301	kid crying	4.57 (1.96)
6900	aircraft	5.64 (2.22)
7330	ice-cream	5.14 (2.58)
8260	motorcyclist	5.85 (2.18)
2458	crying baby	5.28 (1.88)
5010	flower	3.00 (2.25)
1931	shark	6.80 (2.02)
2040	baby	4.64 (2.54)
1303	dog	5.70 (2.04)
5600	mountains	5.19 (2.70)
2037	woman	3.35 (2.04)
2100	angry face	4.53 (2.57)

2.2.1. Questionnaire

Below each photo, two statements in Turkish describing the photos were included and the participants were asked to choose the statement they thought that described the photo best. All statements were nominal affirmative sentences only and statements for each photo included two versions. First version of the statements were nominal sentences such as “(onlar) güzel kediler” (*these are beautiful kittens*) or “(o) hızlı bir motorsiklet sürücüsü” (*that is a fast motorcyclist*). Second version of the statements for each photo were rewritten to consist Turkish intensive adverbs such as “çok” (*very*), “gerçekten” (*really*), etc. (Demir, 2004; Göksel and Kerlsake, 2006). As a result, second version of the statements included sentences such as “(onlar) çok güzel kediler” (*these are very beautiful kittens*) or “(o) gerçekten hızlı bir motorsiklet sürücüsü” (*that is a really fast motorcyclist*), etc.

2.3. Data collection procedures

All of the photos in IAPS are in color and as the best way to present them as they were to the participants would be on computers, the questionnaire was administered to the participants at the computer laboratory of the department of the university. Participants were asked to provide demographic information and choose the statement that they thought would describe the photo best. The data collection process took two months.

2.4. Data analysis

To see whether there was a difference in the use of intensive adverbs in Turkish between male and female participants, participants' selections of the statements to describe the photos were compared in respect with their gender via independent samples t-test on SPSS 22. Comparison of the scores involved both the total scores given for the all photos in the questionnaire and for each photo separately.

3. Results

When the statements chosen for the photos in total were compared, data analysis showed that there was no statistically significant difference between male ($M = 26.47$, $SD = 4.29$) and female participants ($M = 27.52$, $SD = 3.48$) in terms of selection of the intensive adverbs in Turkish ($t(180) = 1.80$, $p = .74$), which meant both male and female participants in the study chose similar statements to describe the photos in general.

On the other hand, an interesting finding of the results revealed that in terms of some photos, the statements chosen differed significantly. For instance, a statistically significant difference was seen for the photo of a spider between male ($M = 1.15$, $SD = .36$) and female participants ($M = 1.46$, $SD = .50$, $t(180) = 4.81$, $p = .000$, $r = .34$). Similarly, the differences in the statement selection for the photo of a motorcyclist (male: $M = 1.23$, $SD = .42$, female: $M = 1.46$, $SD = .50$) and an aggressive dog (male: $M = 1.40$, $SD = .49$, female: $M = 1.57$, $SD = .50$) were also statistically significant (motorcyclist: $t(180) = 3.43$, $p = .001$, $r = .25$, aggressive dog: $t(180) = 2.39$, $p = .018$, $r = .18$).

To sum up, it can be said that male and female participants selected similar statements to describe the photos in the task in general. However, when the mean scores were examined, female participants had a tendency to choose the statements including intensive adverbs to describe photos of a spider, a motorcyclist and an aggressive dog.

4. Discussion

This research aimed to see whether there was a gender related difference in the use of intensive adverbs in Turkish and the results could be considered as interesting since the findings revealed both differences and similarities in comparison with the studies in the literature.

The results of photo description task showed that both male and female participants' choice of selection for the photos in the study did not reveal any difference in terms of all the statements for the photos compared together. In this sense, the results could be regarded to be different from most of the studies in the literature stating that women have a tendency to use intensive adverbs more than men (e.g. Crosby and Nyquist, 1977; Keikhai & Shirvani, 2014; Lapadat & Seesahai, 1978; McMillan et al., 1977; Mulac & Lundell, 1986; Mulac et al., 1988; Mulac et al., 1986; Thomson et al., 2001; Turner et al., 1995). Also, most of the studies in the literature focused on English and studies in Turkish in terms of intensive adverbs were limited. Yet, the different result obtained in this study could not be based solely on the differences in languages' being English and Turkish. This was, in fact, an unexpected outcome. The reason for this might have two explanations: First, the results' being different from the literature may be related to the design of the present study since this study differed in the methodology to be a two choice questionnaire. For instance, instead of showing pictures on computers and asking the participants to choose between the statements, which differed in only the inclusion of intensive adverbs, they could have been asked to provide their own statements to describe the photos and then

their statements could have been compared in a more qualitative manner. Yet, due to the limitations of the study, such an approach was left for a future study. Secondly, the similarity in the age range of the participants might be another reason. Since all of the participants were of similar age and as “often a youth culture with identifiable youth norms is referred to as though young speakers formed a homogeneous group by virtue of their being ‘young’” (Llamas, 2007: 71), the participants in this study might have displayed similar linguistic behaviors. This might have affected the similarity of the selection scores of intensive adverbs. In a future study, a wider range of participants from different age groups could be studied to see whether age plays a role or not.

On the other hand, as mentioned above, the selection of the statements regarding the description of the photos including a spider, a motorcyclist and an aggressive dog revealed a statistically significant difference and female participants selected intensive adverbs more than males. In this sense, although the difference was limited to only three photos among twenty, it might still signal a gender difference in using intensive adverbs and, in a way, Turkish might not be an exception to the results found in English. Apart from the reasons given for gender related linguistic differences in the literature such as attitudes towards directness or cooperativeness during language use (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Sunderland, 2006), another reason for women to use intensive adverbs more than men might be related with women’s interest in details (Önem, 2016). By including more intensive adverbs in their language for description, women might think that a more lively description could be reflected. The photos including the spider and the aggressive dog were very vivid. The photo of the spider was taken close up and the aggressive dog photo was showing a German shepherd dog barking and showing its fangs. Therefore, female participants might have felt more intimidated and reflected this in their choice of selection.

However, this situation called for more interesting questions. For instance, as mentioned, the photos were selected from the IAPS database in respect to their arousal mean scores and the arousal mean scores of the spider and aggressive dog was high, as seen in Table 1. Yet, the mean score of the shark photo was even higher but such a statistically significant difference was not found. Another interesting result is related to the other photo, the motorcyclist, where female participants preferred to use intensive adverbs to describe the photo more than males do. Although the task included a photo of an aircraft (a fighter jet) with very close arousal mean score to that of the motorcyclist, no statistically significant difference was seen.

In a way, photos depicting everyday objects might have had an effect on the differences in gender in this study. For example, a spider, a barking dog or a motorcyclist might be a common object to be seen every day more than a fighter jet or a shark and this might have triggered a more negative reaction towards them resulting in a difference in terms of describing them with more intensive adverbs. As part of the limitations of the study, only twenty photos were included in the task but in a future study, more, related photos especially, could be used to see whether there is an internal similarity or difference among the photos and intensive adverbs. Similarly, in a future study, after a description task, participants can be asked to provide reasons for choosing intensive adverbs or they can be asked to think aloud during the selection process and answers can be compared to see whether there is a systematic pattern present in terms of selecting intensive adverbs more often. Therefore, a better understanding of the gender related linguistic differences not only for intensive adverbs but also language use in general can be reached.

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Türkçe yoğunluk zarfları kullanımında cinsiyet ile ilişkili farklılıklar

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı ana dili olarak Türkçe konuşan erkek ve kadınların yoğunluk zarfları kullanımında farklılık olup olmadığını ortaya koymaktır. Bunun için yaşları 18 ile 22 arasında değişen toplam 182 (89 kadın/93 erkek) gönüllü ana dili konuşucusundan bir fotoğraf tanımlama görevi tamamlamaları istenmiştir. Görev, Uluslararası Duyuşsal Resim Sistemi (International Affective Picture System; Lang, Bradley & Cuthbert, 2008) veri tabanından alınan yirmi fotoğrafı tanımlamak için verilen birer set ifadelerden birini seçmek üzerine kurulmuştur. Her set ifadeye sadece olumlu tümceler bulunmuştur ve tümcelerden biri ilgili fotoğrafın normal bir sıfat kullanılarak tanımlandığı bir tümceyken diğeri aynı tümcenin bir yoğunluk zarfı kullanılarak yeniden yazılmış halinden oluşmaktadır. Sonuçlar kadın ve erkeklerin yoğunluk zarfları kullanımında toplam tüm fotoğraflar bazında aralarında istatistiksel olarak farklılık olmadığını ortaya koymuştur. Ancak, kadın katılımcılar belirli fotoğraflar için daha fazla yoğunluk zarfı kullanmıştır. Çalışmanın sonunda elde edilen sonuçlar ve ileriki çalışmalar için tavsiyeler sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Türkçe; yoğunluk zarfları; cinsiyet farklılıkları; fotoğraf tanımlama görevi

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