BORDER
CROSSING

Masculine Features in the Speech of Turkish Female Teenagers

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Abstract

Female and male speakers show differences in the use of language connected with gender. In fact, gender surrounds individuals since their birth and they are conditioned by a social construction to behave in a certain pattern. In other words, people's beliefs, actions and desires about sexual difference give way to the differences between female and male speakers and individuals are coded about behavior and identity of a specific gender. This coding affects their language use which conforms to the gender they belong to, as well. However, recently teenage female speakers have shown the tendency of using masculine features in their speech. This study aimed to bring these features into light. In data collection two sources were used: a corpus generated from the conversations of teenage speakers and a focus group carried out with a small group of these speakers. The corpus was comprised 20 female and 15 male Turkish subjects' conversations. The conversations took place in the same sex group as well as mixed sex group in formal contexts such as classroom, office meetings, etc. and informal contexts such as social gatherings, chatting in cafes, etc. In the analysis of the corpus data the choice of lexical items, grammatical structures and level of formality were examined. The results of the study revealed that some female speakers produce words and structures peculiar to the male speech. This study considers the findings of the study and draws some conclusions from these findings.

Keywords: *gender differences: language use; lexical choice.*

Introduction

The distinction between sex and gender is important as it makes clear which aspects should be considered in the investigation of language use. This distinction, as pointed out by Shapiro (1981), relies on the contrast between biology and cultural facts: '[Sex and gender] serve a useful analytic purpose in contrasting a set of biological facts with a set of cultural facts. Were I to be scrupulous in my use of terms, I would use the term "sex" only when I was speaking of biological differences between males and females and use "gender" whenever I was referring to the social, cultural, psychological constructs that are imposed upon these biological differences.'

According to Shapiro, sex is different from gender, since it is natural, but gender is formed through social interaction. That is, gender is quite important for individuals as they are conditioned by a social construction in which they

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live, to behave in a certain pattern. The differences between the female and male arise from people's beliefs, actions and desires about sexual difference and these differences are learned. Simone de Beavoir draws attention to this issue with her famous words "Women are not born, they are made." (cited in Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003:15). Children are exposed to gender differences through role models. While the mother or other female persons may act as a female role model for a little girl, the father or other male figures around may be taken as a model by a little boy in the development of behaviours and identity beside the use of language.

Gender difference is seen in every aspect of social life, and it is impossible to avoid it. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) point out this and argue that (2003:36),

> *Gender consists in a pattern of relations that develops over time to define male and female, masculinity and femininity, simultaneously structuring and regulating people's relation to society. It is deeply embedded in every aspect of society – in our institutions, in public spaces, in art, clothing, movement. Gender is embedded in experience in all settings from government offices to street games. It is embedded in the family, the neighborhood, church, school, the media, walking down the street, eating in a restaurant, going to the restroom. And these settings and situations are all linked to one other in a structured fashion.*

Since their early childhood children are coded about emotion and desire forms they can show through media and people around them for matching with certain behaviours. For example, they learn that men do not usually show their fear or tears, but women do. The former group is required to control their emotions, whereas the latter is encouraged to show their feelings.

Realizing this situation, many researchers have investigated the differences between women and men and carried out studies dealing with issues relating gender differences. Mulac et al. (1988) have shown that differences exist between women and men in the use of language. Women use questions (e.g. 'Does anyone want to get some food?'), but men produce driectives telling the listener to do something (e.g. 'Let's go get some food') in interactions. However, a later study carried out by Mulac, Seibold, and Farris (2000) has presented the opposite results showing that men ask questions and use negations more than women. In addition, women utter more directives in their explanations concerning some criticism about a role play and use longer sentences compared with men. Although the difference between these studies are attributed to the type of data collection methods, they still imply that the stereotypical expectations concerning women's use of indirective speech (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003) can change in different tasks.

One striking feature of the women's language is that they refer to emotions frequently, but men do not (Mulac, Seibold, and Farris, 2000). Mehl and Pennebaker (2003) point out that men do refer to emotions yet they use

references to negative emotion (e.g. anger), whereas women do the opposite and refer to positive emotions.

Goodwin (1990) challenges the general trend of the language and gender studies looking at cultures, groups and individuals and proposes activities as the basic units of analysis for studying interactive phenomena. She has carried out some studies examining activities and found that girls and boys sometimes build different social organizations and gender identities and sometimes similar structures in their talk (Goodwin, 2001 and 2002). In view of her findings she reports that typical features of women's speech may not be seen in the examination of talk in different activities as the same individuals will alter their talk and gender in accordance with the activity to construct social personae being in harmony with the event of the activity.

Some studies approached gender differences from a different perspective and addressed the issue of strong language use. Earlier studies provided evidence that girls do swear when conversing with other girls beside other boys; however, the rate of the swear words used by them is lower than that of the ones used by the opposite sex (Stenström, 1999, cited in Dewaele, 2004:206). As regards age, Stenström (1995) found no difference between female and male teenagers in choice and frequency of swear words, but some differences have found between adult women and men. In a later study Stenström (2006) compared the conversations of middle/upper class teenage London and Madrid girls to find out the similarities and differences. She found that both groups used words making sexual reference to bodily functions. Nonetheless, the London girls included more taboo words in their conversations whereas the Madrid girls preferred sexual words in their productions. In view of the qualitative analysis of the data, Stenström (2006) argued that the use of taboo words including dirty slang and swear words is regarded as a way of opposing authority and provoking the older generation. In addition, teenagers use these words to strengthen the feeling of solidarity and group identity.

According to earlier studies (see Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003), female and male speakers of a language have some striking features which are related to their gender in the use of language. However, recently it has been observed that the usual trend of adopting striking features of their gender group is quitted by teenage female speakers. They show a tendency of using words and structures mostly produced by men in their speech production. This study aimed to investigate whether there is evidence supporting this observation.

Methodology

Subjects

The participants of the study were 20 female and 15 male Turkish subjects whose age range was between 17 and 52. Although the participants of the study had a wide age range, the study mainly focused on the utterances produced by teenagers to find out the specific items and structures used by this age group. They were mostly freshman university students having middle or upper middle

class social background and attending departments relating social sciences such as economics, international relations, law, literature, etc. and also engineering and science. Data used in this study were collected between April and July in 2014. During data collection participants were not informed about recordings of conversations to have a natural data set; however, after completing the data collection the whole procedure was explained to them and their written consents were taken for the use of data in order to carry out scientific research.

2.2 Materials: Data Analysis

The conversations of the participants were recorded in the same sex and mixed sex groups in different contexts such as classroom, social gatherings, talking to each other in cafes, etc. There were twenty recordings. Their length changed from four or five minutes to forty six minutes as some of these recordings were carried out during break times or social gatherings lasting for a short time. The recorded conversations sometimes included just a conversation between two speakers, sometimes a larger group consisting of nine or ten speakers. These larger groups usually involved students discussing a topic in the classroom context.

The recordings were transcribed by taking features, such as overlaps, pauses, omissions, etc., associated with spoken language into account. Some extracts from the transcriptions are presented in examples given below. On the top of each extract, specific information is given about the date of data collection, the participants of the conversation, the theme they discuss and the location of the conversation.

A small corpus including approximately 10.000 words was generated from these conversations. This corpus was created from the parts of recorded conversations directly connected with the topic under investigation. It did not contain all the conversations recorded. For that reason, only qualitative analyses were carried out on the data set to give an insight on the trend of producing language forms and expressions preferred by male speakers in the speech of female teenagers.

In addition to the corpus data, a focus group was carried out with the five female participants of the study to understand the reasons behind the uses of certain lexical items and structures in different contexts.

Results and Discussion

The material used in this study was a small portion of the data collected from the participants. Therefore, the current study presents only the qualitative preliminary analyses of the data. The analyses of the corpus data focused on the choice of lexical items, level of formality, and sentence structures to find out whether female speakers differ from male speakers in the use of language.

The qualitative analyses of the conversations in the same sex group and mixed sex groups showed that the female speakers aged 18 or 19 produced some colloquial address words such as *my son, mate, man, brother*, etc. and also some slang items such as *idiot, retard, maniac, animal, bear*, etc. In Example 1,

while a group of participants were talking about Marmaray with a small group of participants in a mixed group, the female speaker called the male participant as 'mate' and the colloquial expression 'man' was produced. There was one overlap and the male speaker spoke at the same time with S2 to say something about the situation of explosion. He wanted to make comment on the topic, just before the end of the current speaker's turn. After the comment made by the speaker, S2 got angry and called him as 'idiot, fool', since he didn't take the comment seriously.

Example 1

<Date: July 24, 2014>

<Participants: S1: Female speaker at the age of 19, S2: Female speaker at the age of 18, S3: Female speaker at the age of 20, S4: Male speaker at the age of 18>

<Theme: Talking about Marmaray>

<Location: House>

K4: Sandalye getirseydin K2.

S4: You had brought a chair S2.

K2: yo, yo iyiyim, iyiyim. Biraz ayakta duruyim.

S2: no, no, I'm OK, I'm OK. Let me stand up for a while.

K3: Bir tane daha yapacaklar dedi. Bahçelievler'le Söğütözü mü bir şe'

S3: "They'll build one more", it said. A line between Bahçelievler and Söğütözü or somethin' like that,

K4: Bir de araba yolu yapacaklar

S4: They'll build a car road as well.

K2: Nereye?

S2: Where?

K3: Paralel tüp geçit.

S3: A parallel tube way

K2: Oğlum, çok tırsmış yaa. Allah korusun bak, Marmaray'ın bir yerlerine bir şey olsa, bir yerden su girse, pof. Aynı anda varya // katliam lan.

S2: Mate, it is so scary wow. Look, God saves, if something happens in any part of Marmaray, water leaks from somewhere, it'll explode. At the same time, it is going to be// a massacre, man.

K4://yapacak bir şey yok, idarenin hizmet kusuru.

S4: //there is nothing to do, it is the defency of the management.

K2: Niye ki, gerizekalı, aptal hizmet kusuruymuş.

S2: Why, idiot, fool how come it is the defency of the management.

A similar case to Example 1 was observed in Example 2 in which a friend's family is compared to the speaker's family. Speaker 1 addresses other speakers with the address form 'brother' which is a male oriented expression in daily conversations. In fact, in the preceding part of the same line the speaker produced another slang item 'go away', which is quite common in male speech, especially in argument positions. This conversation included an argument

between the speaker and the speaker's mother so it was said to give the message 'don't try to push me.' In other words, it showed a challenge to the authority in this conversation. Since the mother realized that her daughter got angry with her, she ended the argument with the approval of the thing she said. An overlap took place as Speaker 5 wanted to give support to the previous utterance of Speaker 2, this was the confirmation of the usual pattern that women complete each other's conversation in overlaps for showing "solidarity or closeness" (Yule, 1996:74).

Example 2
<Date: July 28, 2014>
<Participants: S1: Female speaker at the age of 22, S2: Female speaker at the age of 19, S3: Female speaker at the age of 18, S4: Female speaker at the age of 52, S5: Female speaker at the age of 37>
<Theme: Talking about a friend's family>
<Location: House>
Turkish & English
K2: //yani
S2: //well
K5: //yok yok onların adamları var. Sana tamamen katılıyorum. Yüzde bin katılıyorum.
S5: // no no they have many acquitances. I completely agree with you. I strongly agree with you.
K1: onların var bizim yok
S1: they have we don't have …
K4: ama giricen, sınava giricen, biraz daha gayret edicen.
S4: but you'll take, you'll take the exam, you'll work a little bit more
K5: çok zor
S5: too difficult
K1: Yürü git ya, istemiyorum işte. Biraz daha gayret biraz daha, yok ya yok Abi.
S1: Go away, I don't want it. A little bit effort, a little bit more, it doesn't happen, Brother.
K4: Peki
S4: Alright.

In Example 3, in a partially formal context, that is a classroom context in a private English course, students were indicating their ways of stress relief in association with a listening passage in which workers of some companies destroy some old cars or the walls of an old building. In general, male students made few comments and they were all related to certain sport or intellectual activities. As to female students, they were at ease in explaining their opinions and used expressions fillings words such as well, you know, namely, etc. (i.e. ya, hani, yani) quite a lot. A female student gave examples from the sports she was doing and she indicated that destroying something is not the solution for getting

rid of stress. However, another female student expressed her reaction in a violent way to show how tough she is in such situations:

Example 3
<Date: May 26, 2014>
<Participants: S1: Female student at the age of 18, S2: Female student at the age of 19, S3: Female student at the age of 17, S4: Lecturer at the age of 46>
<Theme: Discussing ways of stress relief>
<Location: Classroom of a private English course>
Turkish & English

K3: Ya şöyle kurtulamıyoz hani antrenmandaysan kurtulursun ama içindeki stresden kurtulurken ya nasıl yenildim, nasıl böyle oldu stresine giriyo'sun o yüzden (0.2) ben bir şe'i yıkmanında çözüm olduğunu sanmıyorum

S3: Well, like that we can't get rid of stress, if you're in practice you can lose your stress but when you get rid of stress within you, you have the stress of how I was beaten, you feel the stress of how it happened, and hence I don't think that destroying somethin' is a solution

K1: Hocam, ama sinirlenmek çok farklı bir şey. Mesela, sinirlendiği zaman hani (0.1) //yani

S1: Ma'm, but losing temper is a very different thing. For example, when one gets angry //namely

K4: //gözün bir şeyi görmüyor

S4: //your eyes don't see anything else

K1: Evet, görmüyo. Mesela, birşe' okumuştum. Sinirlenince ya da üzülünce surat asmak işte yüz tane kasın hareket etmesiyle oluşuyo ama karşısındaki insana yumruk atmak daha az. Yani, bence, hak ediyo'sa dövüceksin, Hocam. Yemin ediyorum, hak ediyosa ağzını burnunu dağıtacaksın.

S1: Yes, they don't see anythin'. For instance, I have read somethin'. When getting angry or being sad, being sulky is formed by the movement of a hundred muscles on the face, but punching a person in front causes fewer than these. That is, in my opinion, if someone deserves, you'll hit the person, Ma'm. I swear, you'll break his nose and jaw.

The extract in Example 4 is from a conversation about working conditions in a foreign country in a mixed group. This dialogue included a swear word produced by a female speaker. After S1's comment for the necessity of such a system in our country, S3 who started working as a civil servant used a swear word to emphasize how hard work conditions could be in such a situation. The swear word implied the existence of a close relationship among the speakers. It might be related to the peer solidarity, as well.

Example 4
<Date: June 24, 2014>

<Participants: S1: Female speaker at the age of 19, S2: Male speaker at the age of 18, S3: Female speaker at the age of 22, S4: Female speaker at the age of 46, S5: Male speaker at the age of 20>

<Theme: Talking about working conditions in a foreign country>

<Location: Cafe>

Turkish & English

K4: Nasıl bi çalışma var biliyo musun? Arı gibi çalışıyolar.

S4: Do you know how hard they work? They work like a bee.

K3: Bize lazım işte o.

S3: It is necessary to us.

K4: Arı gibi çalışıyorlar, //müthiş bi'şe'.

S4: They work like a bee, it's so amazing.

K1: //bize lazım.

S1: //We need it.

K3: bizimde g…müze motor takarlar.

S3: they insert an engine to our a..

K5: ama insanların yüzü gülmüyo'

S5: but the face of the people doesn't smile

Subsequent to data collection, the existence of the masculine features such as the use of male address words, insertion of colloquial expressions, swear words, etc. were discussed with a small group of participants to find out the reasons behind such preferences. Surprisingly, participants said that they do not use them consciously. One of the participants' answers was as follows:

> *The words I use seem so natural to me. Most of my friends, girls or boys use them. I wasn't aware of the gender bias of the word 'brother' as I produce it while talking to both female and male friends. For me, there is no difference between them.*

Another student's reaction was a simple sentence summarizing the whole tendency: 'We all produce such expressions in our communication. What other words I can use.' These explanations implied the existence of group solidarity and the effect of peers on each other.

Conclusion

The main concern of this study was to examine the masculine features used by female teenage speakers in their conversations in mixed and single sex groups. Therefore, the conversations in formal and informal contexts were recorded and analysed. The results of the study showed that although female and male speakers used different forms and lexical items in their production, some female speakers imitated certain features of male speech in both the same sex groups and mixed groups to have group solidarity. They used lexical items, such as addressing words, swear words, etc. preferred by male speakers as expressions providing strength to their characters as well as the ideas they

express. They did not change the language they used in accordance with the contexts since they integrated expressions implying violation into formal contexts (e.g. in the classroom conxtexts) besides informal contexts. However, the results obtained from the focus group revealed that they include these items unconsciously in their production and do not see them as expressions having masculine connotations.

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