

Discourse Markers in Turkish and English: A Comparative Study

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This is a brief summary of my PhD thesis which is a comparative study of discourse markers in Turkish and English casual conversation. The study is descriptive in nature and aims at finding whether discourse marker use is among the language universals or particulars with reference to the two languages under investigation.

Özbek, Nurdan. (1995). Discourse Markers in Turkish and English: a comparative study. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. University of Nottingham, UK.

Scope of the Study

This study concerns the contrastive analysis of spoken-language particles and expressions, such as well you know, actually in English, and yani, iste, sey, ya in Turkish. Comparable examples from other languages are doch, halt, ja, eben in German, dan, toch, maar, wel, eens, even in Dutch, vel, vissti, nok, da in Norwegian (Jucker, 1993: 436), donc, alors, eh bien, bon in French, no, niin, tota in Finnish. These expressions are commonly known as *discourse markers*. The data for the study consists of audio recordings of naturally occurring conversations in English and in Turkish, in informal and friendly settings.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

The Turkish data was collected by recording native speakers of Turkish in everyday situations. A personal audio recorder with an external microphone was used, and in the case of surreptitious recordings the recorder and the microphone were hidden to maximise the naturalness of the data.

As for the English data, taken from the Nottingham University Spoken English Corpus¹ (hereafter NUSEC) and from Crystal and Davy (1975), these were collected by recording the speakers either surreptitiously or unsurreptitiously as in the case of Turkish data. Of the four

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conversational extracts by Crystal and Davy, in two of them the speakers were aware of being recorded and in the remainder of the extracts they were unaware.

The duration of the data (Turkish) collected was 187 minutes (over three hours) and the data consisted of 30 different conversations. Of the data collected, 25 conversational extracts (16,822 words in total) were chosen. Of these extracts 12 are in Turkish (8233 words) and 13 are in English (8589 words)². Since it was not always possible to control the variables, the length of the conversations used vary between 142-1577 words. For instance in the narrative data we have extracts ranging between 153-1291 words; narratives, by definition, have no prescribed length. Of the three data types (casual, narrative, discussion) casual is the most in quantity and discussion is the least, while narrative falls in between. It is assumed that this fairly represents the actual case in everyday communication.

The data collected fall into the following categories: casual, narrative and discussion. The following is a sample framework for the analysis of the data and it shows the functions of the discourse markers their realisations in Turkish or English depending on the data analysed and whether a discourse marker occur as a right hand or a left hand discourse marker (irhdm or lhdm).

Turkish Realisations	Discourse function	English Realisations	Context/Co-text
1. ee	topic-introducing	so/well	marks the beginning of F's conversation. lhdm/turn-initial
2. ya	marker of focus	well	introduces N's answer to F's question. rhdm/turn-medial
4. iste	refers to mutual knowledge	you know	rhdm/medial
6. yani	indicates self-clarification	I mean	follows a restatement of F's own question as N does not understand the question. rhdm/turn-final
8. yani	introduces assumed background knowledge	you know	follows N's answer to F's question. rhdm/turn-medial

A SAMPLE OF ANALYSIS BASED ON THE FRAMEWORK

In this study, all the discourse markers that fit into our definition have been analysed in both languages as shown in the table above.

²The difference in data length between Turkish and English (356 words) is not thought to affect the quantitative analysis. Since it is the English data which is slightly longer than the Turkish, this difference makes up for the presence of short words in English (such as *articles* a/an, the and the *prepositions* such as to, in on etc.) which are also counted as words. In Turkish however, because of the agglutinative nature of the language, such words are part of the agglutination process (as explained in chapter 1) and are not separately counted as words.

Results and Discussion

The following two tables show the overall distribution of the markers in Turkish and English:

Markers	No. of occurrence	Markers	No. of occurrence
1. yani	168	33. mi/mi	4
2. da/de	148	34. (bi(r)(de)baktim	4
3. þey	91	35. degil	3
4. ama	77	36. artik	3
5. iþte	60	37. anladim	3
6. ya	50	38. aman	3
7. tabii (ki)	49	39. var ya	3
8. böyle	44	40. tam(da)	2
9. ondan sonra	38	41. sonra	2
10. e	31	42. o yüzden	2
11. ha(a)	30	43. meger	2
12. þimdi	30	44. hatta	2
13. tamam	27	45. fakat	2
14. ay	20	46. böyle etti	2
15. canim	17	47. bi de þey	2
16. ki	15	48. efem/efendim	2
17. zaten	14	49. tam daha	1
18. yo/yok	12	50. yalnız	1
19. neyse	11	51. ve sonra	1
20. bi(r)de	11	52. vallaha	1
21. ve	11	53. tamam mi	1
22. öyle	10	54. peki	1
23. çünkü	10	55. hem	1
24. aslında	10	56. halbuki	1
25. mesela	10	57. evet ha	1
26. hayir	9	58. düþünsene	1
27. o zaman	9	59. daha dogrusu	1
28. hani	9	60. böylece	1
29. ee	7	61. biliyosun	1
30. anlıyorum	6	62. biliyor musun	1
31. sonuçta	5	63. bak	1
32. gerçi	5		
33. demek ki	5		
34. bi dakika	4		
Total:			
1126 occurrences			

TABLE 7.4 MARKERS AND THEIR FREQUENCIES IN THE TURKISH DATA

Markers	No. of occurrence	Markers	No. of occurrence
1. and	169	27. really	3
2. yeah	126	28. though	3
3. but	55	29. now then	2
4. you know	53	30. O.K.	2
5. well	52	31. ah yeah	1
6. so	46	32. aha	1
7. oh	42	33. all right	1
8. I mean	25	34. also	1
9. yes	21	35. and also	1
10. no	18	36. are you with me?	1
11. actually	17	37. as you know	1
12. because	17	38. aye right	1
13. cos	15	39. but then	1
14. and then	11	40. I says	1
15. of course	9	41. in other words	1
16. then	9	42. look	1
17. you see	7	43. mind you	1
18. ah	6	44. no hang on	1
19. oh yeah	5	45. oh yes	1
20. right	5	46. otherwise	1
21. whereas	5	47. say	1
22. anyway	4	48. see	1
23. now	4	49. what's more	1
24. aye	3	50. yet	1
25. I see	3	51. you know what I mean	1
26. in fact	3	52. you mean	1
Total: 762 occurrences			

Markers and their frequencies in the English data.

Analysis of the data revealed both points of parallelism and differences in terms of discourse marker use between English and Turkish. The results indicated that discourse markers are highly interactional particles in discourse and that they have several functions, and that their main function is to help the communication flow smoothly and make it more orderly by managing a complex set of activities involving all elements of discourse. In sum, this study showed that for Turkish and English discourse markers are among the language universals and they seem to operate at similar levels of discourse.