Studying attitudes related to several discourse particles in Istanbul

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Abstract

Discourse particles (DP) are highly frequent in daily language and people's attitudes towards their usage differ. I study attitudes of native Turkish speakers, living in Istanbul, towards various DPs, utilizing a custom variant of the Matched-Guise Technique (MGT). A survey is conducted with 38 participants to gather their impressions on variants with presence and absence of certain DPs, e.g. *şey* 'uh'. Their impressions are filled in Likert scales of 1 to 6. I analyze the responses with 2 statistical hypothesis tests, namely the Wilcoxon signed-rank and the Mann-Whitney U tests. The results show that the survey participants found the variants with more DPs as more pleasant, less linguistically competent and less professionally formal in general.

Introduction

Istanbul hosts more than 15 million people, natives of the Turkish language, giving way to much linguistic variation with its highly populous and complex layout. Linguistic variation comes with perception variation where speakers have perceptible and varied attitudes towards different sociolinguistic variants. One type of variation is highly contentious among speakers where there is bound to be subconscious attitudes taken against its usage, while contention is unfolded and made obvious with conscious debate: discourse particles (DP), e.g. *like*, *you know* in English. DPs generally do not change the truth condition of utterances but are used very frequently for various linguistic functions, like adding a dint of politeness.

Turkish has several discourse particles (Yılmaz) at its disposal, such as *işte* 'you know' and *şey* 'uh'. In this study, I present the results of a survey designed to elicit perceptions towards the usage (presence or otherwise) of various discourse particles of Turkish: *işte* 'you know', *şey* 'uh', *yani*

'I mean'[1], etc. The survey is based on the matched-guise technique (MGT) where native speakers are made to listen to audio stimuli in which the selected particles are present or absent. After listening to stimuli, they're made to fill out a questionnaire in Likert scale format where they evaluate the speech in the audios with regard to various traits, such as linguistic competence. The statistical results show that the participants found the DP usages to be more pleasant, less competent and less formal in general.

In the next section, I review related work on language attitude studies; in the 3rd section, the method of the study is detailed, and in the 4th, the results are reported with some future directions. In Section 5, the paper is concluded.

Related work

There are various methods employed to determine language attitudes towards variation reported in the literature. One method is presenting questionnaires where speakers are asked to evaluate variants directly (Ladegaard), a method criticized for response and social desirability bias where participants may not answer the questions truthfully when they think carefully about the presented questions or they simply want to be good subjects. Another method is the Implicit Association Test (IAT) (Rosseel et al.) within which participants are presented stimuli in various media and asked to react in a quick fashion, aiming to expose subconscious associations that participants may have.

The Matched-Guise Technique (MGT) is a method where participants take part in a survey in which they listen to audios of variations. In the audios, same speakers produce the variants without participants' awareness of this fact. The technique was introduced into language attitude studies in 1960 (Lambert et al.) where the variation producers were bilingual speakers of English and French. Many other studies leveraged this technique for assessing attitudes towards variation with much lower resolution, e.g. phonemic. In one work using MGT, Díaz-Campos & Killam study perceptions

[1] Translations are from Altıparmak 1.

towards deletion of syllable-final /ɾ/ and intervocalic /d/ in Venezuelan Spanish, reporting that even though previous production studies labeled the retention of the mentioned consonants as prestigious, their results show that speakers are more tolerant of retention than previously made out to be.

There have also been studies of discourse particles in Turkish. One study (Altıparmak) tested whether there is a difference of DP preference related to educational status of speakers, reporting indeed such a difference. In another study, researchers studied the function of *şey* 'uh' in secondary school students (Özdemir & Kuruoğlu), finding that it mostly marked hesitation. Still another variationist study investigated the factors influencing /r/ deletion in the progressive affix *-yor-* in Turkish (Rahymov), with the general result that style is the most important influencer.

There are also matched-guise studies in Turkish, one of which studied the sociophonetic variables /ɾ/ and /k/ (Yağlı) by a survey of 228 people, with the finding that certain variants of the variables get associated with distinct personae. Another study utilizing MGT aims to find whether attitudes differ as to guises of 'standard' vs Kurdish-accented varieties (Schluter). They find that the standard guises are perceived as much younger, attractive and successful. This is a highly important study, showing the highly substantial residues of ideas, sometimes assumed to be long gone. Several of the mentioned studies have been influential in the preparation of the following method of the current study.

Method

In this study, a variant of MGT is used as it's widely leveraged in attitude studies, with its limitations acknowledged in the discussion section. A survey is prepared for participants, Turkish natives currently living in Istanbul, where they are presented different audios in order and asked to evaluate the speakers in the audios in Likert scales from 1 to 6. Scale of 6 is selected as it's an even number, preventing the participants from making neutral choices. The factors that they are asked to

evaluate are “linguistic competence”, “pleasantness”, “professional formality”, and “extroversion”: 2 solidarity and 2 status traits[2], alternating one by one in order.

At the start of the survey, participants are presented with information about and instructions of the task. They are asked to respond fast, relying on their feelings stimulated by the audios. After the first section, their age, gender, hometown and educational status are gathered.

The audios in the survey are 18 in count, taken from various podcasts in Turkish, all of high voice quality. Variants of original audios are created by manually editing out some parts of the audios. 7 are selected without regard to DPs and used only to confuse the participants and hide the survey’s goal. The remaining 11 are variants of 4 original audios and used to actually determine the attitudes towards the corresponding DPs present in the audios. DPs in these audios are *şey* ‘uh’, *yani* ‘I mean’, *aslında* ‘in fact’, and *böyle* ‘such’. The difference in the 11 audios is that, in some of them, some parts with DPs are removed, with making them as natural as possible in mind, similar to the study of Labov in 2011. You can see the sentences uttered in the 4 original audios (henceforth *testing*) and the others with removals of certain utterances (e.g. *işte* ‘you know’) in Table 1[3]. The 7 audios used for eluding purposes also include variants of the same audio by presence or absence of entire sentences.

It is argued in this paper that the desired confusion is necessary for MGT to work. Many works using MGT only include *testing* audios, easily exposing the study’s purpose. Since it’s almost impossible for participants to forget audios previously listened to within such a short amount of time as usual MGT surveys (e.g. 20 minutes), I recommend including confusing audios that also recur. I continue with the descriptions of the speakers in the *testing* audios.

2 of the 4 testing audios are by 1 woman (Woman 1 in Table 1) in her early 30s with an MA degree. The other 2 are by 2 different men. One is a practicing psychiatrist (Man 1) in his early 30s,

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[2] Kircher (2015), p.201

[3] Translations of the sentences can be found in the appendix.

with a graduate degree; and the other is a sports commentator and speaker (Man 2) in his late 30s, with an undergraduate degree.

Table 1

Audio	Utterance	Count	Speaker
1	Bunun tabii psikolojik bir tarafı olabileceğine dair bir, şey de aslında, yani buradaki meselenin sadece eve belli bir miktarda para girmesi ve iş bölümü olması değil, maddi gücün, aslında, kimin tarafından getirildiğiyle de ilgili bir şey var.	2	Man 1
2	O arkadaşın evine gittik. İşte giderken şey dedi, "Bu arkadaşım hemşire, e entellektüel bir insandır, şu an bir kitap yazıyor, şiirleri çok sever." dedi.	3	Woman 1
3	Mesut, böyle, kırklı yaşlarda, hem Bandar Abbas'ta hem de Qeshm Island'da yaşayan birisi. Çok kibar birisiydi ya böyle ve çok eğlenceli birisiydi.	3	Woman 1
4	Ve şey de olmadı yani, arada çok iyi maçları oldu ama bir türlü, ya mesela bir tane şeyi unutmuyorum, o Thunder maçı mıydı, şeye götürdüğü, kazandırdığı ya da uzatmaya götürdüğü bir maç vardı.	3	Man 2

Utterances used to determine attitudes related to certain DPs in Turkish. Colored parts are removed in some instances of the audios in order to determine people's attitudes toward their presence or absence. Darker red is meant to show those parts are removed in all the instances of the corresponding audio with removals; while lighter red shows the highlighted part is removed only in 1 instance. All the audios were included in their entirety in one instance. Count shows how many variants of an audio is present in the entire survey. Speaker shows the name, given in the paper, of the original sound's producer.

At the end of the survey, participants are asked of what they think the study was about. This is to ensure that data of participants who understood the study's goal is not included in the eventual analysis and discarded of.

Findings and Discussion

The survey has been prepared on a digital form platform. It was disseminated to various sections of the author's academic institution, friends and family. Informed consent were taken from the participants at the start of the survey about their data being included in the analysis and not elsewhere. There has been 38 responses to the survey. No participants responded to the last question about their impressions of the study's purpose with the actual goal, resulting in no discards

and usage of all the gathered data. The demographical information of the participants are detailed in the next paragraph.

The ages of the participants vary from the lowest 20 to the highest 60 with the mean 30.7 and the variance 151.2. Out of 38 participants, 18 identify as female, while 20 identify as male: almost equal in percentage. The participants reported to have grown up in various parts of Turkey, widely covering the landscape. Educational status of the participants are mostly of higher education level (e.g. bachelor's, master's), making the data very skewed in this regard, while middle / high school graduates and current undergraduate students also participated.

The responses to the survey, detailed in the previous section, are evaluated as to their statistical significance. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test is used to determine whether two dependent groups of samples are of the same distribution. For analyzing the responses, this test is used on each pair of audios of testing relevance with corresponding traits. For example, one pair of groups are Audio 1's original version and its another version with the first highlighted part in Table 1 removed. For the pair, "linguistic competence" constitutes one test, while "extroversion" another.

The assumption here is that responses on variants of audios depend on each other. The experience gathered from the participants is that they are able to recognize there are "same" audios reoccurring throughout the survey—even though this is not exactly true—, causing them to try to answer similarly as they did to a previous variant of the current audio. This is actually a limitation of MGT, explained below.

The crux of MGT studies is that participants are not aware that they are listening to the same speaker within regular intervals. In such short times as 20 minutes, it's highly difficult for people to forget the qualities of voices they have just heard. I continue with the results of the statistical tests.

Each pairs of variants and traits are tested with both the Wilcoxon signed-rank test and the Mann-Whitney U test. I first report the results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test in Table 2 below,

including only the results with *p*-values lower than 0.1. There are 3 highly statistically significant test results in the table. In the first row, *p*-value for the Audio 1's variants is reported and the *p*-value is lower than 0.005, corresponding to an immensely significant statistical result. The participants found the variant with *şey* and *aslında* more pleasant. The second and third significant results are of Audio 4: the participants found the variant with only 1 *şey* (2 removed) linguistically more competent than both the original version (3 *şey*'s) and the variant with 2 *şey*'s. While the variant with 3 *şey*'s is found as more competent than the variant with 2 *şey*'s regarding the mean values of the responses, it's not a significant result of this test.

Table 2 (Wilcoxon signed-ranked test results)

Audio 1	Audio 2	Mean 1	Mean 2	Trait	*p*-value
1 with *şey* and *aslında*	**1** without *şey* and *aslında*	4.474	3.895	Pleasantness	0.0020
3 with only 1 *böyle*	**3** without 2 *böyle*'s	2.263	2.605	Formality	0.0180
3 with 2 *böyle*'s	**3** without 2 *böyle*'s	3.684	3.974	Competence	0.0333
3 with 2 *böyle*'s	**3** without 2 *böyle*'s	2.342	2.605	Formality	0.0686
4 with 3 *şey*'s	**4** with only 1 *şey*	3.026	3.632	Competence	0.0003
4 with 3 *şey*'s	**4** with only 1 *şey*	3.816	4.158	Extroversion	0.0457
4 with 2 *şey*'s	**4** with only 1 *şey*	2.974	3.632	Competence	0.0003
4 with 2 *şey*'s	**4** with only 1 *şey*	3.816	4.158	Extroversion	0.0479
4 with 3 *şey*'s	**4** with 2 *şey*'s	2.789	3.053	Formality	0.0940

Audio 1 and *2*s represent the tested audio variants. *Traits* represent the traits considered in the corresponding tests. *Mean 1* and *2*s represent the mean values of the responses for the corresponding traits and audios. *p*-values represent the test results. *p*-values below 0.005 are highlighted red as they're the most significant statistically.

All the reported tests in Table 2 show that the participants found the variants with more DPs as more pleasant and less DPs as more formal and competent. With regard to the extroversion, the participants found the variants with more DPs as less extroverted for some reason.

I now report the results of the Mann-Whitney U test in Table 3 below. As can be seen, no *p*-value is reported below 0.005, i.e. no immensely significant result of the test. There are 3 *p*-values

reported, all below 0.05, of highly significant results. In the first audio, the participants found the variant with DPs more pleasant; in the second (Audio 4 in Table 1), they found the ones with more DPs less competent.

Table 3 (Mann-Whitney U test results)

Audio 1	Audio 2	Mean 1	Mean 2	Trait	*p*-value
1 with *şey* and *aslında*	**1** without *şey* and *aslında*	4.474	3.895	Pleasantness	0.0190
4 with 3 *şey*'s	**4** with only 1 *şey*	3.026	3.632	Competence	0.0307
4 with 2 *şey*'s	**4** with only 1 *şey*	2.974	3.632	Competence	0.0157

Structure is the same with Table 2.

A further analysis of the gathered data as to how the participants' and the speakers' different or intersecting demographic information relates to their attitudes towards various considered traits (e.g. pleasantness) could be conducted to see whether attitudes change significantly based on participants' and speakers' demographic information. Another further direction would be to conduct a similar survey with a larger number of participants coming from a wider variety of backgrounds.

Conclusion

In this study, I wanted to show how attitudes of Turkish native speakers, currently inhabiting Istanbul, change based on various DP usages. MGT has been useful for attitude studies for a long time from its first introduction into the field (Lambert et al.), proving useful in this study as well, admittedly with big assumptions. Via a survey, 38 people's attitudes were gathered on variants of the same audios where DPs were either present or removed. The outcome of the results is that people within a certain demographic, mostly academic people, whether young adult or adult, found the variants using DPs more pleasant, and less competent and formal.

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Appendix

Table 4 (Translations)

Audio	Utterance	Translation
1	Bunun tabii psikolojik bir tarafı olabileceğine dair bir, şey de aslında, yani buradaki meselenin sadece eve belli bir miktarda para girmesi ve iş bölümü olması değil, maddi gücün, aslında, kimin tarafından getirildiğiyle de ilgili bir şey var.	Of course, there is, something, really, I mean, a psychological aspect to this, it's not just about a certain amount of money coming to the house and the division of labor, but also about, something like, really, who brings in the financial power.
2	O arkadaşın evine gittik. İşte giderken şey dedi, “Bu arkadaşım hemşire, e entellektüel bir insandır, şu an bir kitap yazıyor, şiirleri çok sever.” dedi.	We went to that friend's house. You know, as we were going, he said like, “This friend of mine is a nurse, so an intellectual, currently writing a book, loves poetry a lot.”
3	Mesut, böyle, kırklı yaşlarda, hem Bandar Abbas’ta hem de Qeshm Island’da yaşayan birisi. Çok kibar birisiydi ya böyle ve çok eğlenceli birisiydi.	Mesut is like, in his forties, someone who lives in both Bandar Abbas and Qeshm Island. He was like a very polite person and a very fun person.
4	Ve şey de olmadı yani, arada çok iyi maçları oldu ama bir türlü, ya mesela bir tane şeyi unutmuyorum, o Thunder maçı mıydı, şeye götürdüğü, kazandırdığı ya da uzatmaya götürdüğü bir maç vardı.	And […] didn't happen, like, he had some very good performances but somehow, like I don’t forget one thing, that Thunder match, was it, the one he took to […], won or took to overtime, there was such a match.