

REAPPROPRIATION OF WORDS ABOUT BLINDNESS IN TURKISH AS A COUNTER-RHETORICAL STRATEGY AGAINST EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE

Melisa YILMAZ¹

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to establish a theoretical framework concerning epistemic violence and its relationship with the reappropriation of words as a rhetorical strategy to combat such violence. Moreover, the study aims to provide specific instances of word reappropriation pertaining to blindness in the Turkish context. To achieve these objectives, the content analysis method was employed to examine materials from five different blind activists, as featured in various Turkish digital media platforms.

The findings demonstrate that the process of reappropriation of words related to blindness in the Turkish language is currently underway and remains an ongoing endeavor. Although not yet fully completed, it is evident that blind activists in Turkey have embraced and engaged in efforts towards linguistic reclamation as a means to challenge epistemic violence.

Keywords: Epistemic Violence, Reappropriation of Words, Blindness, Epistemic Resistance

TÜRKÇE'DE KÖRLÜKLE İLGİLİ KELİMELERİN EPİSTEMİK ŞİDDETE KARŞI BİR RETORİK SÖYLEM OLARAK YENİDEN SAHİPLENİLMESİ

Melisa YILMAZ

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı, epistemik şiddete ilişkin kuramsal bir çerçeve sunmak, epistemik şiddete karşı kullanılabilir bir retorik strateji olarak sözcüklerin yeniden sahiplenilmesini tanıtmak ve körlükle ilgili sözcükler aracılığıyla sözcüklerin yeniden sahiplenilmesine Türkçe'de örnekler vermektir. Bu amaçla Türkiye dijital medya araçlarında yayınlanan beş farklı içerikten örnekler seçilmiş ve beş farklı kör aktiviste ait bu içerikler içerik analizi yöntemiyle analiz edilmiştir. Sonuç olarak, körlükle ilgili kelimelerin Türkçe'de yeniden sahiplenilme sürecinin devam ettiği, henüz tamamlanmadığı, ancak yeniden sahiplenme çabasının Türkiye'deki kör aktivistler tarafından açıkça benimsendiği saptanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Epistemik Şiddet, Kelimelerin Yeniden Sahiplenilmesi, Körlük, Epistemik Direniş

¹ ORCID: 0000-0003-2975-5418, miesal48@gmail.com

Araştırma Makalesi/Research Article, Geliş Tarihi/Received: 09/06/2023–Kabul Tarihi/Accepted: 31/07/2023

INTRODUCTION

Epistemic violence encompasses the ways in which specific forms of knowledge production and dissemination perpetuate harm, inequality, and injustice by suppressing, erasing, or devaluing the knowledge, experiences, or perspectives of marginalized individuals and groups (Fricker, 2007; Dotson, 2011). This form of violence operates within knowledge systems and is perpetuated by those who hold power in society. Numerous manifestations of epistemic violence exist, such as the erasure of histories, cultures, and languages, or the marginalization of certain knowledge systems and ways of knowing (Spivak, 1988). Testimonial injustice (Fricker, 2007, pp. 9-30), hermeneutical injustice (Fricker, 2007, pp. 147-152), epistemic erasure (Lugones, 2003, p. 50), epistemic exploitation (Berenstain, 2016), and epistemic silencing (Dotson, 2011) are among the various types of epistemic violence discussed in the literature.

Similar to other forms of violence, individuals or groups develop various defense mechanisms against epistemic violence. One powerful defense mechanism is the reappropriation of words, which involves marginalized groups reclaiming words or terms that were originally used to marginalize or stigmatize them. By doing so, marginalized communities can challenge and subvert dominant narratives and power structures (Alcoff, 2005).

This study aims to explore the process of reappropriation of words as a rhetorical strategy employed against epistemic violence and to investigate its utilization in Turkish digital media, specifically concerning terms related to blindness. The first part of the study will provide a detailed definition of the concept of epistemic violence and examine key ideas from the literature in this field. Subsequently, the second part will explore various forms of epistemic violence, while the third part will review several defense mechanisms that can be employed against it. In the fourth part, a theoretical framework for reappropriation of words will be presented, along with concrete examples of how words about blindness are reappropriated by disabled activists in Turkey, drawn from digital media sources. Finally, the last part will be dedicated to the discussion and conclusion of the study.

To achieve its objectives, this study will employ content analysis, a qualitative research method. Through this approach, the study intends to establish a framework for the utilization of reappropriation of words as a rhetorical strategy against epistemic violence and to contribute to the existing literature by offering examples specific to words about blindness in the Turkish context.

1. DEFINITION OF EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE

The term "epistemic violence" has emerged as a means of describing the harm and oppression that occurs when individuals or groups are denied access to knowledge or when their ways of knowing are marginalized or invalidated (Mignolo, 2002). In "*The Wretched of the Earth*," Fanon argues that colonialism is not solely a political or economic system but also a system of knowledge production that oppresses colonized peoples (Fanon, 1963).

Quijano also contends that colonialism and capitalism have been instrumental in creating and sustaining a global system of power relations that prioritize Western perspectives and experiences while marginalizing and oppressing the knowledge and ways of being of non-Western peoples (Quijano, 2000).

Tuhiwai Smith is another significant contributor to the development of the concept of epistemic violence. In her book "*Decolonizing Methodologies*," Smith critiques the use of Western research practices to extract knowledge from indigenous communities while erasing indigenous ways of knowing (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Santos argues that colonialism and Western modernity have led to the erasure and suppression of non-Western knowledge systems, resulting in what he calls "epistemicide" or the murder of knowledge (Santos, 2014).

Michel Foucault's work on power and discourse is also often referenced in discussions of epistemic violence. He posits that power is not confined to individuals or institutions but is embedded in language and discourse, shaping what can and cannot be known (Foucault, 1980). In her influential essay, "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*," Spivak argues that the voices of marginalized people are often silenced or ignored in dominant systems of knowledge production, as their speech is always-already mediated by the dominant discourses of power (Spivak, 1988, p. 306).

Feminist thinkers frequently employ the term "epistemic violence." For instance, Lugones argues that feminist theory and practice must be decolonized to genuinely address the experiences of marginalized women (Lugones, 2010). As a Black feminist writer, Lorde emphasizes that marginalized people, especially women, cannot employ the same systems of knowledge and power that oppress them to achieve liberation (Lorde, 1984, p. 112).

In social psychology, theories of stigma, social exclusion, and marginalization shed light on the perpetuation of epistemic violence, and in some cases, these mechanisms can be considered forms of epistemic violence themselves. Stigma refers to negative attitudes and beliefs that society holds toward individuals who are perceived as different in some way, such as people with mental illness, LGBTQ+ individuals, or those belonging to specific racial or ethnic groups (Link & Phelan, 2001). Social exclusion refers to the processes by which individuals and groups are excluded from social, economic, and political participation in society (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Marginalization refers to how certain groups are relegated to the margins of society and denied access to resources and opportunities (Hall & Carlson, 2016). These phenomena are all connected to epistemic violence in that they illustrate how knowledge production and dissemination can be utilized to exclude and marginalize certain groups.

Epistemic violence remains a topic of significant interest to researchers and continues to be investigated in various contexts, with numerous recent studies focusing on it. For instance, in her doctoral thesis, Alexander (2020) explored the awareness of a group of academics regarding the concept of decolonization, revealing diverse perspectives on the meaning of this concept and emphasizing the importance of decolonization awareness in combating epistemic violence in higher education.

Sarah Ahmed explores how feminist knowledge is often marginalized and excluded from dominant discourses, which she views as a form of epistemic violence perpetuating inequality and oppression (Ahmed, 2016). Neilson (2021) discusses how epistemic violence persists and intensifies during the Covid-19 pandemic through the imposition and accumulation of knowledge.

2. SOME COMMON FORMS OF EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE

Conducting research on the manifestations of epistemic violence is of paramount importance, enabling the definition and categorization of this phenomenon. Moreover, such research fosters the promotion of diverse counter-strategies, both in theory and practice, driven by heightened awareness. While contextual, cultural, and various other factors may lead to variations in the forms of epistemic violence, certain shared manifestations can still be identified:

Testimonial injustice: This form of epistemic violence arises when an individual's credibility or veracity is undermined due to their identity, rather than the substance of their statements (Fricker, 2007, pp. 9-30). For instance, a female victim reporting instances of sexual harassment may encounter dismissal or skepticism solely due to her gender.

Hermeneutical injustice: This form pertains to a circumstance wherein an individual's experiences or societal identity are inadequately acknowledged or comprehended due to the absence of appropriate language or framework to articulate them (Fricker, 2007, p. 147-152). For instance, a non-binary individual might encounter challenges in expressing their experience in a world predominantly defined by gender binaries.

Epistemic erasure: Epistemic erasure denotes the systematic removal or marginalization of specific forms of knowledge, experiences, or epistemologies. This erasure manifests when dominant social groups impose their own viewpoints, values, and beliefs as the standard, consequently dismissing or invalidating the knowledge and experiences of marginalized groups (Lugones, 2003, p. 50). For instance, in the context of education, the Eurocentric curriculum frequently expunges the contributions of non-European cultures and perpetuates the notion that European knowledge holds superiority (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Epistemic exploitation: Epistemic exploitation can be defined as a phenomenon where an individual unjustly exploits others by leveraging their capacity to acquire knowledge. This exploitative practice can manifest in two fundamental manners: firstly, when a person takes advantage of situations where they possess little or no knowledge, and secondly, when one exploits the information needs or dependencies of others (Berenstain, 2016).

Epistemic silencing: Epistemic silencing pertains to a form of marginalization and exclusion prevalent within knowledge-production processes. It is a conceptual framework employed to comprehend the systematic suppression and devaluation of knowledge belonging to specific groups, particularly marginalized individuals and communities.

Epistemic silencing operates within structures of power and privilege, where dominant groups assert their authority to dictate what qualifies as legitimate knowledge. This phenomenon involves the active suppression, dismissal, or neglect of the epistemic contributions and perspectives of marginalized individuals and communities. Various manifestations of epistemic silencing exist, such as the exclusion of certain voices from academic discussions, the discrediting or trivializing of their experiences, and the classification of their knowledge as irrelevant or untrustworthy (Dotson, 2011).

It is feasible to exemplify various manifestations of epistemic violence across diverse contexts, cultures, and academic inquiries, while also discerning instances where these manifestations diverge. The epistemic violence forms elucidated in this section represent the most prevalent and widely acknowledged ones in the existing literature.

3. DEFENSE MECHANISMS AGAINST EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE

As is the case with all forms of violence, individuals and groups may develop defense mechanisms in response to epistemic violence. Promoting these mechanisms can be instrumental in eradicating epistemic violence (Medina, 2012). These strategies are designed to challenge dominant knowledge systems and power structures that perpetuate epistemic violence, fostering more inclusive and equitable spaces that acknowledge and value diverse ways of knowing. For instance, Cudd suggests that victims of oppressive violence can employ strategies such as constructing theories and ideas that expose oppression, advocating for laws that alleviate oppression, and creating counter-images through art and media to combat oppressive stereotypes (Cudd, 2006, p. 193).

The defense mechanisms developed against epistemic violence may vary and become diversified due to various factors, particularly the context and culture in which the epistemic violence occurs. Nonetheless, the defense mechanisms that have been widely identified and discussed in the literature are as follows:

Counter-storytelling: Counter-storytelling is an approach that enables individuals or communities to express their own narratives and experiences in reaction to prevailing discourses that may perpetuate epistemic violence. Through counter-storytelling, one can challenge the prevailing norms and values that reinforce epistemic violence (Delgado, 1998). This method offers a platform for marginalized voices to be heard and for alternative perspectives to be acknowledged, thereby fostering a more inclusive and equitable understanding of knowledge and lived realities.

Decolonization: This process endeavors to contest the Eurocentric hegemony prevalent especially in the Western educational paradigm. The objective of decolonization is to establish an inclusive environment for non-Western knowledge, ensuring its recognition and esteem within academic establishments (Tuck & Yang, 2021).

Critical pedagogy: Critical pedagogy is an educational framework that accentuates the significance of interrogating and scrutinizing power structures, encompassing those that sustain epistemic violence. Its fundamental aim is to empower students as critical thinkers and catalysts for transformative action (Freire, 2018).

Intersectionality: Intersectionality represents a theoretical framework that recognizes the interrelatedness of diverse social identities and experiences, encompassing race, gender, class, and sexuality. It offers a means to comprehend how various forms of oppression converge and potentially contribute to epistemic violence (Crenshaw, 2021).

Epistemic resistance: Epistemic resistance pertains to the methodologies employed by marginalized individuals and communities to defy their subordination by interrogating prevailing epistemologies and forging their distinct knowledge systems. This process entails scrutinizing and contesting the mechanisms by which knowledge is generated, disseminated, and validated within society, while simultaneously formulating alternative epistemologies that embody the experiences and viewpoints of historically oppressed groups (Medina, 2012).

In the context of subjective defense mechanisms and acts of resistance against epistemic violence, individuals and groups employ a counter-hegemonic rhetorical strategy, exemplified by the reappropriation of words. This strategy involves the active reclamation, transformation, acceptance, or reversal of terminologies and stigmatic labels employed by dominant groups (Galinsky, Hugenberg, Groom & Bodenhausen, 2003). From one perspective, the reappropriation of words can be viewed as an aspect of epistemic resistance. However, it entails distinct mechanisms that warrant specific examination. In the subsequent chapter of this study, the reappropriation of words will be examined as a rhetorical strategy and defense mechanism against epistemic violence, specifically focusing on Turkish words related to blindness.

4. REAPPROPRIATION OF WORDS, AND THE WORDS ABOUT BLINDNESS IN TURKISH

This section aims to illustrate the reappropriation of words pertaining to blindness in Turkish. To achieve this, the process of reappropriation will be elucidated by drawing upon relevant literature studies. Additionally, a comprehensive overview of disability-related terminology in Turkish will be presented. Subsequently, the examination of the reappropriation process of words concerning blindness in Turkish will be conducted, supported by examples sourced from digital media platforms.

4.1. An Overview of Reappropriation of Words

Reappropriation of words, commonly referred to as linguistic reclamation, is a process through which marginalized groups reclaim a historically oppressive term, transforming it into a source of empowerment and self-identification (Galinsky, Hugenberg, Groom & Bodenhausen, 2003). This transformative act imbues the term with new, positive connotations that reflect the experiences and perspectives of the marginalized group (Jackson, 2007).

The reappropriation of words serves as a powerful tool for challenging dominant discourses and existing power structures, enabling marginalized groups to assert their identities and reclaim their narratives (Jackson, 2007; Lorde, 1984). Additionally, it fosters solidarity and community among individuals who share a common marginalized identity.

The concept of reappropriation was first explored by Audre Lorde (1984), who used the term "reclaiming" to describe how marginalized groups can take ownership of their identities and challenge prevailing narratives. Reappropriation, however, is not solely a linguistic process but also entails political and social transformation. Throughout history, it has been utilized by various marginalized groups as a means of resistance, empowerment, and identity formation (Jackson, 2007).

A notable successful example of reappropriation is the former slur "queer," which the LGBTQ+ community has embraced to celebrate their identities and counter homophobic discourse (Hall, 2020). Similarly, Black Americans have reappropriated the term "nigga" (though this is subject to ongoing criticisms and debates) as a tool for empowerment and solidarity, confronting the legacy of racism and oppression (Smith, 2019). Feminists have engaged in reappropriating the term "slut" as part of the SlutWalk movement, aiming to challenge victim-blaming and slut-shaming attitudes toward sexual assault victims (Noe, 2016). The punk rock movement has also employed reappropriation by embracing derogatory terms like "punk" and "anarchist" as part of their countercultural ethos (Hebdige, 1979).

4.2. A Brief Overview of Disability and Blindness in Turkish Literature

In Turkish, the terms "impairment" (yeti yitimi), "handicap" (özürlülük), and "disability" (engellilik) are commonly used to refer to disabled individuals (Kahraman-Güloğlu, 2022). The term "impairment" specifically denotes the long-term or permanent loss or limitation of a physical, mental, or sensory function, emphasizing the individual's bodily aspect of disability (UNICEF Innocenti Research Center, 2007, p. 2). "Handicap," on the other hand, is understood as the reduction or loss of one or more functional abilities, primarily related to self-care, highlighting the individual's functional limitations (Rimmerman, 2013, p. 26). However, this term inadequately addresses the social dimension of disability in Turkish because it implies that the problem lies with the individual, requiring treatment, support, and assistance (Kahraman-Güloğlu, 2022). In contrast, the concept of "disability" is considered a more inclusive term in Turkish, encompassing both individual and social aspects of disability (Taşç1, 2018, p. 120).

In the Turkish language, there are several words used to describe blindness, depending on the context and severity of the condition. Commonly used words for blindness include "kör" (blind), "görme engelli" (visually impaired), and "âmâ" (also meaning blind). "Kör" is the most widely used term for total loss of vision (Buyurgan & Demirdelen, 2009). People with significant visual impairment, defined as having 40% or more vision loss, are referred to as "görme engelli" (BlindLook, 2022).

Additionally, the word "âmâ" is derived from Arabic and is often used in religious contexts in Turkey to describe blindness. It is also used metaphorically to describe those who are spiritually blind or ignorant (Bayram, 2017).

The use of these words in Turkish should be considered together with social transformations and social conditions (Şişman, 2012). For example, when naming education programs in Turkey, the word "disabled" is mostly used, while other expressions such as "handicap" are used in non-governmental organizations serving in this field (Şişman, 2012, p. 71-72).

However, the use of so many different words to describe the situation does not prevent the society from using these words in hurtful, negative, humiliating and offensive meanings. In Turkish, the words about disability and blindness are used in many cases in stigmatizing and discriminatory ways (Kahraman-Güloğlu, 2022). The word blind itself takes place in many proverbs and idioms in Turkish and these expressions are mostly used in negative meanings in society (Yaralı-Akkaya, 2018).

As rights-based approaches in the field of disability came to the fore in Turkey, it was thought that some words about blindness could not explain the situation adequately. For disabled people who advocate a rights-based approach, the words "visually impaired" and "handicapped" draw attention to the inadequacy of the individual against the social order. Whereas it should be the opposite, because it is the social order itself that makes the individual disabled (Bezmez, Yardımcı, & Şentürk, 2011, p. 24). According to this point of view, deficiencies and inadequacies in the social order prevent people and restrict their access.

This perspective, increasingly adopted by disabled activists, draws attention to the mechanisms within the individual-society binary and how society plays a role in defining an individual as disabled. This aligns with Foucault's framework of epistemic violence, where social power mechanisms are positioned as discourses that produce knowledge about the individual and subject them to oppression in this way. The experience of disability becomes one of the "problematic areas where knowledge and power axes intersect in practices," as Foucault defines the "dispositif" for historical analysis (Foucault, 2000, pp. 11-24). Therefore, if the social order and society itself are responsible for producing the knowledge mechanism underlying the identification of an individual as "disabled," and the individual claims rights and demands based precisely on these social conditions, it becomes impossible to overlook the epistemic resistance.

In their significant research examining the relationship between disability and epistemic violence, Ymous, Spiel, Keyes, Williams, Good, Hornecker, and Bennett (2020) emphasize that individuals with disabilities face systematic belittlement, disregard, erasure, and dehumanization in the epistemic representation of physical, sensory, cognitive, or psychological conditions. They underscore that, according to the ableism perspective prevailing in society, disability is portrayed as a diminished state of being human.

Consequently, disabled individuals are consistently subjected to epistemic oppression, epistemic injustice, testimonial injustice, and epistemic marginalization. Thus, due to epistemic violence, the mechanisms of knowledge production and the freedom to express knowledge for disabled individuals are constrained, suppressed, and silenced.

Another noteworthy study conducted by Branson & Miller (1993) reveals that deaf individuals who receive education within the mainstream education system and use sign language are subjected to epistemic violence and epistemic oppression. This finding is also supported by the study of Snoddon (2020).

Based on the literature review, no specialized research or studies conducted within Turkey associating blindness with epistemic violence were found. However, it is acknowledged that the situation regarding disability is also applicable to blindness. In the forthcoming section, while discussing the epistemic resistances of blind activists, a close examination can be made of how they simultaneously and inevitably allude to the epistemic violence they experience. Recently, these activists have undertaken efforts to reclaim the term "blind," contending that it does not carry vulgar or offensive connotations, but rather denotes the medical condition of blindness; thus, it should be preferred over other euphemisms. Specifically, blind activists in Turkey are presently engaged in endeavors to reappropriate the term "kör" (blind) and similar words associated with blindness, such as "körleşme" (becoming blind). This process of reappropriation, akin to other instances, involves a form of social resistance—a defiance against being defined by societal norms. For these activists, society's act of identification and labeling is perceived as a manifestation of epistemic violence, warranting resistance.

4.3. Examples of Reappropriation through Digital Media

In preceding sections, we discussed the role of reappropriation of words as a rhetorical strategy employed by activists to resist epistemic violence and challenge the stigmatizing terminology applied to individuals with disabilities. The subsequent examples are drawn from digital media platforms to illustrate the ongoing process of reappropriation of words related to blindness by blind activists in the Turkish context:

Example 1: Interview with blind activist Engin Yılmaz: Being Blind Doesn't Mean the Feeling of "You Can't Do It" that Destiny Gives You! (Kör Olmak, Sana Kaderin Verdiği “Yapamazsın” Duygusu Demek Değil!)

In this interview, Engin Yılmaz mentions that he has been working in the field of blindness at Boğaziçi University, one of the most important universities in Turkey, since 1990, that he is now an academician at the same university and that he carries out projects on blindness in various non-governmental organizations. While talking about the project named GETEM, which he led, the interviewer asks the meaning of the name. When Engin Yılmaz mentions that the word "visually impaired" is used in the expansion of this name GETEM, the interviewer asks whether the use of this word causes discomfort in some communities.

Engin Yılmaz's answer is as follows:

"It was built that way, of course, we can't change it now, but I call myself "kör(blind)". This is a matter of preference, so there may be people who call themselves "görme engelli(disabled)" or those who call themselves "görme özürlü(visually handicapped), but I prefer to say "blind". There is a simple reason for this. Because society imposes on me that not seeing is an obstacle, that is, blindness is an obstacle. How do you know it's an obstacle? For example, I ask a dark-haired person, "Do you call yourself a blond disabled person?" Or does a tall person define himself/herself through shortness? And does he/she call himself/herself "not short"? Why do I have to define myself through my opposite? That's my point. So I'm blind. It's like having the flu, being blonde, being brunette, or being tall for me. The society that defines it as an obstacle or a special situation. ... You will say that it is a shame to say blind. For example, I ask my students in class: "When you leave here, will you say we have a blind teacher or a visually impaired teacher?" They say, "Of course, we will say visually impaired." Why? Because it's a shame. ... In the past, there was no such perception about blindness. There is Koroğlu, there is Topaloğlu Osman (former Turkish folk poets). People see blindness as a trait and define it. To talk about that person, they just used blindness as one of his/her adjectives. ... I've been blind for 40 years, so I'm a person who has coped with this experience, so I know how to live like this. I'm not visually impaired, I'm not handicapped, I'm blind, I say. Because blindness has certain limitations and advantages, but being a woman or a man has its own limitations too. For example, should we say that men are disabled, just because the male body cannot give birth to children? Of course we won't. That's why I describe myself as blind."

In this passage, it is clear how Engin Yılmaz tries to reappropriate the word "kör(blind)". He explains why the word blind has historically been used in Turkish society for a long time, but over time it has become an insulting word that is considered shameful, but he explains why this is wrong and emphasizes that he defines himself as "blind". As an activist, what Engin Yılmaz is trying to do here is to reappropriate, re-meaning the word blind and to encourage its reuse by the blind community. In addition, while Yılmaz's statements explain how the society's impositions and definitions about blindness occur, he emphatically uses the word blind as a form of resistance to this situation and reveals that he defines himself as a "blind" against these stereotypes. This is a very concrete example of how reappropriation of words can be a strategy of rhetorical resistance against perceived epistemic violence.

Example 2: Review by activist Mihri İlke Çeperli: Frequently Asked Questions about Blinds and Blindness (Körlere Ve Körlüğe Dair Sıkça Sorulan Sorular).

Written by another blind activist, Mihri İlke Çeperli, in 2018 in Gaia Magazine, one of Turkey's leading activist digital magazines, this article is a personal compilation of frequently asked questions about blindness. The first question compiled is about the confusion regarding blindness, and the activist's answer is as follows:

“In Turkish, a person who cannot see is called "blind". We define people by what they have, not by their inadequacies. Would you describe a short friend of yours as "the person who can't reach the top shelves"? “Görme engelli(Visually disabled)” is such a definition. It sounds like there is a phenomenon that prevents us from seeing, which means blindness.”

In this passage it is possible to see how blindness was reappropriated for a very similar reason to Yılmaz’s example. Here, the activist defines herself as "blind" and opposes the judgments imposed on her by the society through this word. The second answer of the activist is directly addressed to the question of whether the word blind is shameful:

“The use of blindness as a contempt speech in Turkish is a result of the society's view of blindness. scapegoating a word and replacing it with an alternative is not the solution in the long run. Today, the word "disabled" is also used as an insult, especially in social media, and there are even social media users who celebrate their ex-lovers' Valentine Day as disability day. As you can see, changing words does not change the mindset.”

This response from the activist is a prime example of why reappropriation of words is necessary and how it works. Here, the activist argues that the problem is not in the word, but in the meaning attributed to the word, by referring to the process of turning words into insulting words by the society, and how these words reflect social stigmas. According to her, the reason why the words about blindness is perceived as a shame in Turkish society is not the words themselves, but the point of view directed to the blind people by the society that has taken over these words. It is precisely for this reason that the activist reappropriates the word blind and makes it clear that she identifies herself as a "blind" person.

Example 3: By Selim and Kerim Altınok: Blind, Visually Handicapped, Visually Disabled or Âmâ? (Kör mü, Görme Özürlü mü, Görme Engelli mi, Âmâ mı?)

The twin brothers and two of Turkey's most famous blind activists, Kerim and Selim Altınok, use the following statements in an article they published directly on this terminology problem on their website:

"Our choice is blind. This is the only word that describes the situation in the shortest and without different connotations, no one should hesitate to use it."

Here, the twins appeals to anyone who hesitates to use the word blind and states that the use of the word is not shameful, on the contrary, it is a very simple and necessary definition. Activists who make it clear that they describe themselves as blind are reappropriating the word blind as a form of self-identification, not as something shameful.

Example 4: Digital magazine article written by activist Meral Sözen: Fagots and Blinds(İbneler ve Körler)

This article, published in 2019 by blind activist Meral Sözen in EEH, one of Turkey's leading digital magazines in the field of accessibility, links the LGBT movement with the disability movement and finds these two counter-movements similar in terms of reappropriating the words "faggot" and "blind". . Sözen's article begins with the following statements:

"Do you think it would have been more elegant if I had said "Gays and Visually disabled" instead of "Fags and Blinds"?"

With this beginning and throughout the article, Sözen explains how the words blind and fag are victims of social judgment in Turkey, they are turned into insulting words by the society, and how both the LGBT community and the blinds are trying to reappropriate these words. Sözen's article continues with the following statements:

"It is very shameful and hurtful to call a blind person "blind". This nonsense is caused by the perception of sexual orientation as a kind of vulgarity, and the lack of sight as a misery or indulgence. ... Leave the blind and fags alone. It's not the words that need to change, it's your minds."

What the activist is emphasizing here is quite clear: she emphasizes that the disturbing meaning that society attaches to the word is not the word itself, but the social point of view, in other words, because of the epistemic violence that society inflicts on marginalized groups, and that this is exactly what needs to change. Thus, she appropriates the word blind as a way of opposing this violence, reappropriates it, and insists on a change of meaning by defining herself as a blind person.

Example 5: Interview with Sadriye Görece, founder of BlindLook Initiative: Blind or Visually Disabled?(Kör mü Görme Engelli mi?)

In this interview with Sadriye Görece, who has become one of the most important blind activists and entrepreneurs in Turkey with her application called BlindLook by İlker Canikligil in the last days of 2022, for the FluTV YouTube channel, Sadriye Görece defines herself as a blind person and talks about the application she is the founder of. Later, the following dialogue takes place between the two:

"Canikligil: Calling someone blind is politically incorrect, right?"

Görece: No. We say also "visually disabled". Actually, not seeing it is not an issue. The point is that life was not designed for the blinds.

Canikligil: That's true for many disability groups, right?"

Görece: Yes. ... In communities where communication was simpler, blind, deaf, mute, these were said as they are. Then these words started to be insulting. ... And we began to shy away from saying blind. In fact, who is called blind and who is visually disabled? A person who cannot see

at all is called blind, a person who can partially perceive colors, perceive light at a certain point, can see but can see with an obstruction, is called visually disabled."

As seen in this dialogue, activist Görece also embraces the word visually disabled along with the word blind, and states that the reason why these words are perceived as shameful words is social design and social order. Görece, who constantly and openly uses the word blind in the initiative she founded, reappropriates the words about blindness by emphasizing their technical meanings and places this opposition among the basic principles of her commercial business.

In these examples, it is possible to see how words related to blindness in Turkish are reappropriated and used in different contexts in different ways, how they are positioned as a counter-discourse and how they are persistently adopted by activists.

Activists' expressions can also shed light on their perceptions regarding society's portrayal of them as "blind" individuals and its oppressive tendency to define them solely through a stigmatizing disability label. In essence, this societal pressure suppresses, marginalizes, and silences the knowledge possessed by blind individuals concerning blindness, as well as their mechanisms of knowledge production and dissemination. Consequently, it is in this context that epistemic violence emerges, and the manifestation of epistemic resistance becomes evident through the process of reappropriating words.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this study was to position the phenomenon of reappropriation of words as a rhetorical strategy and investigate its function as a defense mechanism against epistemic violence. Subsequently, the study sought to provide examples of this phenomenon specifically concerning words related to blindness in Turkish. To achieve this goal, the aforementioned examples were selected from articles and interviews featuring activists engaged in the field of blindness in Turkey, representing diverse spheres of the counter-movement, including academia, commercial entities, and non-governmental organizations. The rationale behind selecting these activists as the sample is due to their significant representation and prominence within the mentioned domains, as well as their recognition in the digital media landscape.

The examples emphasized how words related to blindness, particularly the term "blind," have gradually acquired negative connotations in Turkish over time. This shift is attributed entirely to the societal perspective, as the negative meanings do not originate from the words themselves. Instead, activists argue that these words merely serve as straightforward descriptors of the condition, but society attaches negative or offensive meanings to them. Such a perspective results in the marginalization, labeling, prejudice, and social exclusion of blind individuals. Activists express discomfort with this societal outlook, rather than with the words themselves, and as a response, they engage in the reappropriation of words about blindness, actively opposing the negative societal viewpoint.

By openly identifying themselves as "blind" and casually employing other words related to blindness, they are aware of the transformative potential of reappropriating language to challenge and overturn this prevailing perspective.

Currently, blind activists and other disability counter-movements in Turkey continue to actively endeavor to reappropriate words related to blindness, particularly the term "blind," employing digital media platforms extensively for this purpose. It is crucial to note that the process of reappropriation is ongoing, and the strength of the movement remains significant.

However, this study primarily focused on placing the reappropriation of words about blindness in Turkish within a theoretical framework and presenting illustrative examples, as there are no previous theoretical investigations on this specific topic. Future research might explore how the reappropriation movement impacts and is perceived by others, addressing both actual and potential reactions to this linguistic transformation.

Additionally, it is essential to acknowledge the limitation of this study, which involves the personal translation of the example contents from Turkish to English. Employing more professional and linguistic translation methods could potentially offer a deeper understanding of the issue in English.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. (2016). *Living a Feminist Life*. Duke University Press.
- Alcoff, L. M. (2005). *Visible identities: Race, gender, and the self*. Oxford University Press.
- Alexander, I. (2020). *Dismantling epistemic violence? exploring education academics conceptual understanding of decolonising the curriculum in higher education* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Altınok, K., & Altınok, S. Kör mü, görme özürlü mü, görme engelli mi, âmâ mı? Retrieved from <http://selimkerim.com/kormugormeengellimiamami.html>
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological bulletin*, 117(3), 497.
- BAYRAM, E. (2017). Kur'an'da "âmâ" kavramı. *Akademik Bakış Uluslararası Hakemli Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, (64), 414-424.
- Berenstain, N. (2016). *Epistemic Exploitation*. *Ergo, an Open Access Journal of Philosophy*, 3.
- Bezmez, D., Yardımcı, S. ve Şentürk, Y. (drl.). (2011). *Sakatlık Çalışmaları Sosyal Bilimlerden Bakmak*. İstanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları.
- BlindLook. (2022, March 10). Görme engelli kime denir? BlindLook. Retrieved from <https://www.blindlook.com/tr/blog/detay/gorme-engelli-kime-denir>
- Branson, J., & Miller, D. (1993). Sign language, the deaf and the epistemic violence of mainstreaming. *Language and Education*, 7(1), 21-41.
- Buyurgan, S., & Demirdelen, H. (2009). Total kör bir öğrencinin öğrenmesinde dokunma, işitsel bilgilendirme, hissetme ve müze. *Türk Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi*, 7(3), 563-580.
- Crenshaw, K. (2021). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *Droit et société*, 108, 465.

- Cudd, A. E. (2006). *Analyzing oppression*. Oxford University Press.
- Çeperli, M. İ. (2018). Körlere ve körlüğe dair sıkça sorulan sorular. *Gaia Dergi*. Retrieved from <https://gaiadergi.com/korlere-korluge-dair-sikca-sorulan-sorular/>
- Delgado, R. (1998). Storytelling for oppositionists and others. *The Latino/a condition: A critical reader*, 259-270.
- Dotson, K. (2011). Tracking epistemic violence, tracking practices of silencing. *Hypatia*, 26(2), 236-257.
- Dotson, K. (2012). A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 33(1), 24-47.
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth*. Grove Press.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*. Vintage.
- Foucault, M. (2000). *Özne ve iktidar*. (Trans. I. Ergüden, O. Akınhay). Istanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları.
- Freire, P. (2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury publishing USA.
- Fricke, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford University Press.
- Galinsky, A. D., Hugenberg, K., Groom, C., & Bodenhausen, G. V. (2003). The reappropriation of stigmatizing labels: Implications for social identity. In *Identity issues in groups* (Vol. 5, pp. 221-256). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Görece, S. (2022, December). Kör mü, görme engelli mi? - Aydaki Adam: İlker Canıklıgil - Konuk: Sadriye Görece. [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Az_fUROj_qY
- Hall, J. M., & Carlson, K. (2016). Marginalization. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 39(3), 200-215.
- Hall, N. (2020). "We're here, we're queer, we will not live in fear!": A Content Analysis Exploring Gender Disparity in the Public Reappropriation of LGBTQ+ Slurs. *Capstone Showcase*. 1. retrieved from https://scholarworks.arcadia.edu/showcase/2020/soc_anth_cj/1/
- Hebdige, D. (1979). *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Methuen & Co. Ltd., London.
- Jackson, J. M. (2007). Reclaiming queerness: Self, identity, and the research process. *Journal of Research Practice*, 3(1), M5-M5.
- Kahraman-Güloğlu, F. (2022). Engellilik hakkında kavramsal karmaşanın nedenleri ve Türkiye'deki durum. *Toplum ve Sosyal Hizmet*, 33(1), 291-315. DOI: 10.33417/tsh.989123
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465-491.
- Link, B. G., & Phelan, J. C. (2001). Conceptualizing stigma. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27(1), 363-385.
- Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches by Audre Lorde*. Crossing Press.
- Lugones, M. (2003). *Pilgrimages/peregrinajes: Theorizing coalition against multiple oppressions*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Lugones, M. (2010). Toward a decolonial feminism. *Hypatia*, 25(4), 742-759.
- Medina, J. (2012). *The epistemology of resistance: Gender and racial oppression, epistemic injustice, and resistant imaginations*. Oxford University Press.
- Mignolo, W. (2002). The geopolitics of knowledge and the colonial difference. *The south atlantic quarterly*, 101(1), 57-96.
- Neilson, D. (2021). Epistemic violence in the time of coronavirus: From the legacy of the western limits of Spivak's 'can the subaltern speak' to an alternative to the 'neoliberal model of development'. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 53(8), 760-765.

- Noe, S. C. (2016). Slut pride: The reappropriation attempt by SlutWalk. *Quercus: Linfield Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 2(1), 3.
- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International sociology*, 15(2), 215-232.
- Rimmerman, A. (2013). *Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities National and International Perspectives*. The USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Santos, B. D. S. (2014). *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide*. Routledge.
- Smith, H. L. (2019). Has nigga Been Reappropriated as a Term of Endearment? A Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis. *American Speech*, 94(4), 420-477.
- Snoddon, K. (2020). The social and epistemological violence of inclusive education for deaf learners. *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, 9(5), 185-213.
- Sözen, M. (2019, August 19). İbneler ve körler. *EEH Dergi*. Retrieved from https://eeh.engelsizerisim.com/yazi/78/ibneler_ve_korler
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271-313). University of Illinois Press.
- Şişman, Y. (2012). Özürlülük alanında kullanılan kavramlar üzerine genel bir değerlendirme. *Sosyal Politika Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 7(28), 69-85.
- Taşcı, F. (2018). *Sosyal Politikada Dezavantajlı Gruplar: Tarih, Yaklaşım ve Uygulama*. İstanbul: Kaknüs.
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2021). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Tabula Rasa*, (38), 61-111.
- Tuhiwai Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.
- UNICEF Innocenti Research Center. (2007). *Promoting the Right of Children with Disabilities*. Retrieved from http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/children_disability_rights.pdf
- Yaralı-AKKAYA, A. (2018). DİLDE DİĞERLEŞTİRME; TÜRK Atasözü ve Deyimlerde Sakatlık Tanımları. *Osmaniye Korkut Ata Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 2 (1), 89-98.
- Yılmaz, E. (2019, May 14). Kör olmak, sana kaderin verdiği “yapamazsın” duygusu demek değil! Interview with Merve Yavuz. Retrieved from <https://www.gencyorumdergisi.com/2019/05/kor-olmak-sana-kaderin-verdigi-yapamazsin-duygusu-demek-degil/>
- Ymous, A., Spiel, K., Keyes, O., Williams, R. M., Good, J., Hornecker, E., & Bennett, C. L. (2020, April). " I am just terrified of my future"—Epistemic Violence in Disability Related Technology Research. In *Extended Abstracts of the 2020 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 1-16).

APPENDICES: ORIGINAL CONTENTS OF WRITTEN SAMPLES IN TURKISH

Example 1(Turkish): Kör Olmak, Sana Kaderin Verdiği “Yapamazsın” Duygusu Demek Değil!

Öyle kurmuşlar tabii, şimdi onu değiştiremiyoruz, ama ben kendime kör diyorum. Bu da tercih meselesi, yani görme engelli diyen de var görme özürlü diyen de var, ama ben kör demeyi tercih ediyorum. Bunun kendi adıma basit bir nedeni var. Çünkü görmemenin engel olduğunu, yani körlüğün bir engel olduğunu toplum bana empoze ediyor.

Nereden biliyorsunuz engel olduğunu? Mesela esmer birine soruyorum, ‘Siz kendinize sarışın engelli diyor musunuz?’ Ya da uzun boylu biri, kendini kısa boyluluk üzerinden tanımlayıp da kısa boylu olmayan biri diye adlandırmıyor. Niye ben kendimi karşıtım üzerinden tanımlamak zorundayım? Derdim o. Körsem körüm yani. Bu grip olmak, sarışın olmak, esmer olmak veya uzun boylu olmak gibi bir durum benim için. Bunu engel ya da özel bir durum olarak gösteren toplum. Ben öyle görüyorum, anlatabiliyor muyum, herkes böyle görmek zorunda değil. Ha diyeceksiniz, kör demek ayıp kaçır. Mesela derste siz öğrencilerime soruyorum: ‘Buradan çıktığınızda kör bir hocamız mı var diyeceksiniz, yoksa görme engelli bir hocamız mı?’ ‘Ya Hocam olur mu, görme engelli diyeceğiz tabii’ diyorlar. Neden? Çünkü ayıp, yani kör denir mi, aaa! Kör kuyu bilmem ne! Aslında buradaki amaç, iade-i itibar. Eskiden körlükle alâkalı böyle bir algı yokmuş aslında. Köroğlu var, Topaloğlu Osman var. İnsanlar onu bir özellik olarak görüp tanımlıyormuş, anlatabiliyor muyum? O kişiden bahsetmek için, onun sıfatlarından biri olarak.

....

Ben 40 yıldır körüm, bu durumda bu deneyimle başa çıkabilmiş bir insanım, yani böyle yaşamayı biliyorum. Görme bozukluğu olan biri değilim, görme engelli değilim, körüm, diyorum. Çünkü körlüğün belli sınırlılıkları, avantajları vardır, ama kadın ya da erkek olmanın da kendi içinde sınırlılıkları vardır. Mesela erkek bedeni çocuk doğuramaz diye, doğurma engelli mi diyeceğiz erkeklere? Demeyeceğiz elbette. Bu nedenle kendimi kör olarak tanımlıyorum.

Example 2(Turkish): Aktivist Mihri İlke Çeperli'nin makalesi: Körlere ve körlüğe dair sıkça sorulan sorular

Türkçede gözleri görmeyen kişiye ‘kör’ denir. İnsanları sahip olduklarıyla tanımlarız, yetersizlikleriyle değil. Kısa boylu bir arkadaşınızı ‘Üst raflara uzanamayan’ diye mi tanımlarsınız? ‘Görme engelli’ de böyle bir tanım. Görmemize engel olan bir olgu var, o da körlük, gibi bir anlam çıkıyor.

...

"Türkçede körlüğün ‘Kör müsün?’, ‘Kör tuttuğunu, topal yakaladığını...’ gibi aşağılama söylemi olarak kullanılması toplumun körlüğe bakışının bir sonucu. Bir sözcüğü günah keçisi ilan etmek ve yerine alternatif bir sözcük koymak uzun vadede çözüm değil. Günümüzde özellikle sosyal medyada ‘engelli’ sözcüğü de hakaret amaçlı kullanılıyor, hatta eski sevgililerinin engelliler gününü kutlayan sosyal medya kullanıcıları bile mevcut. Görüldüğü gibi sözcükleri değiştirmek zihniyeti değiştirmiyor."

Example 3(Turkish): Kör mü, Görme Özürlü mü, Görme Engelli mi, Âmâ mı?)

Bizim tercihimiz kör. Durumu en kısa ve farklı çağrışımlara götürmeden açıklayan tek sözcük budur, bunu kullanmaktan kimse çekinmemelidir.

Example 4 (Turkish): İbneler ve Körler

“İbneler ve Körler” yerine, “Eşcinseller ve Görme Engelliler” deseyseniz daha mı sık olurdu sizce?

...

Kör birine “kör” denmesi çok ayıp ve incitici bulunuyor. Cinsel yönelimlerin bir tür alçaklık veya adilik, görme yetisinin bulunmamasının ise bir zavallılık veya düşkünlük olarak algılanması sebep oluyor bu saçmalıklara. ... Körleri de ibneleri de rahat bırakın artık. Değişmesi gereken sözcükler değil, sizin kafalarınız.