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**A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF  
AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER NEWS IN  
TURKISH ONLINE MEDIA<sup>1</sup>**

**TÜRK ÇEVİRİM İÇİ MEDYASINDA YER ALAN  
OTİZM SPEKTRUM BOZUKLUĞU  
HABERLERİNİN ELEŞTİREL BİR SÖYLEM  
ANALİZİ**

**ABSTRACT**

A neurodevelopmental condition known as autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is commonly seen throughout the world. The news about this topic is included in various media forms worldwide. The mission of the media in creating perceptions about any issue is an undeniable fact. Therefore, news about individuals with ASD may have a potential effect on people's perceptions of these individuals. This study deals with the media portrayal about individuals with ASD. More specifically, this research employed critical discourse analysis in order to figure out the way individuals with ASD are portrayed in news articles in Hürriyet, which is among the most often visited news websites in Türkiye, according to Similarweb statistics. The news published in Hürriyet on April 2, 2023, Autism Awareness Day, was analyzed based on the model developed by van Dijk (2001). The analysis indicates that despite the inclusion of professional opinions in the news articles, commonly used terms linked with ASD, such as "disabled" and "treatment," only serve to enhance the existing negative and prejudiced societal perception.

**Keywords:** Discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Turkish Online Media, News Articles

**ÖZET**

Otizm spektrum bozukluğu (OSB) olarak bilinen nörogelişimsel durum tüm dünyada yaygın olarak görülüyor. Bu konu hakkında basında yer alan haber metinleri dünya çapında çeşitli medya organlarında karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Medyanın herhangi bir konu hakkında algı yaratmadaki rolü ise yadsınamaz bir gerçektir. Bu bağlamda, otizm spektrum bozukluğu ve otizimli bireyler ile ilgili basında yer alan haberlerin insanların algıları üzerinde etkili olduğu sonucuna ulaşılmaktadır. Bu çalışmada OSB'li bireylere ilişkin medyada yer alan tasvirler ele alınmaktadır. Daha özel olarak, çalışma, Similarweb istatistiklerine göre, Türkiye'nin en sık ziyaret edilen haber sitelerinden biri olan Hürriyet'teki haberlerde OSB'li bireylerin nasıl tasvir edildiğini anlamak için eleştirel söylem analizini uygulamıştır. Hürriyet'te 2 Nisan 2023, Otizm Farkındalık Günü'nde yayımlanan haberler, van Dijk (2001) tarafından geliştirilen model esas alınarak analiz edilmiştir. Analiz, haberlerde mesleki görüşlere yer verilmesine rağmen, OSB ile bağlantılı olarak yaygın olarak kullanılan "engelli" ve "tedavi" gibi terimlerin toplumdaki olumsuz ve önyargılı algıyı güçlendirmeye hizmet ettiğini göstermektedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Söylem, Eleştirel Söylem Analizi, Otizm Spektrum Bozukluğu, Türk Çevrim İçi Medyası, Haber Metinleri

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## Introduction

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is counted as a commonly observed neurodevelopmental state and it has attracted greater interest in recent years. As a result, news about ASD has become increasingly common in both print and online media. Therefore, media portrayal about ASD is crucial in shaping the public perception related to it. The objective of this research is to illustrate the representation of ASD in Turkish internet media. For this aim, the articles on ASD published in *Hürriyet* were examined. The website of this newspaper is one of Türkiye's most widely read news sites according to the Similarweb (n.d.) statistics. Numerous research has been conducted to figure out how ASD is presented in the international press, but just a few investigations have been done regarding this issue in Türkiye. Therefore, studies are needed to reveal the media portrayals of ASD in Türkiye to understand how these reports affect public perception of ASD in the Turkish context. The study aims to investigate the news reports about ASD in Turkish online media.

Consistent with this objective, this study intends to answer the questions below:

1. How is ASD portrayed in online news articles in *Hürriyet* published on April 2, 2023, Autism Awareness Day?
2. How do online news articles support or challenge the common stereotypes and ideologies about autism?

This study organized as follows: next section briefly introduces critical discourse analysis and the approach introduced by van Dijk (2001) and the subject of autism is covered in general terms. The media and news discourse are next discussed. Followed by the study's methodology, a section where news texts are analyzed follows and finally, the conclusion is presented.

## Critical discourse analysis and van Dijk model

Regarding media studies, primarily van Dijk's technique in critical discourse analysis (CDA) is employed to investigate the way language is used to produce social inequalities (van Dijk, 1985). Power abuse, the resulting perception building, and manipulation in society reveal the power of the media. CDA investigates the way text or speech in political and social settings keeps and opposes injustice, dominance, and power abuse (van Dijk, 2001, p. 352). Moreover, CDA seeks to comprehend the relationship between discourse and power in society (van Dijk, 1995, p.84).

The model by van Dijk (2001) was employed in this study's news analysis. Because it is the basis for CDA, and this method has gained popularity in the study of news media. The texts in this model are examined under two main headings: macrostructure and microstructure. Özer (2022) illustrated the application of van Dijk model to critical discourse analysis of news texts. In addition, elements that are specifically important for macrostructure and microstructure are mentioned.

Macrostructure examines the thematic and schematic frameworks of news taking a broader view of the content itself. It includes the thematic structures, the images used, the presentation of the main event, its connection to earlier events, and the reactions of news individuals to the situations. These are examined by looking at the headlines and news entries (van Dijk, 1988b, p.30).

As for microstructure, several linguistic categories are analyzed. First, the analysis is carried out by using syntactic categories to examine active and passive structures. Coherence is frequently used to describe cause-and-effect interactions. Moreover, word choices have a significant impact

on how ideology is reflected. In addition to reflecting the positive or negative approaches to the topics, the word choice gives an indication of how we want to convey these approaches to society. Lastly, the impact of expert statements or the use of visuals is assessed from a rhetorical standpoint (van Dijk, 1988a, p. 11).

### **An overview of autism spectrum disorder**

One type of complicated neurodevelopmental variation is ASD which has recently become more common and an outline of this phenomenon will be provided in this part. First of all, it can be claimed that The American Psychiatric Association's DSM V classification identified autism as a neurological disorder (APA, 2022). Besides, the ASD is not a disorder that deteriorates over time. Instead, it can improve throughout life, albeit not completely (APA, 2022). Today, it is a lifelong process that is getting better due to increased rehabilitation opportunities.

Furthermore, the ASD is triggered by a varied combination of environmental and genetic variables. Kim (2016, p. 28) argues that it is triggered by both biological and psychological causes. In short, it is a multidimensional condition influenced by genetic, external, and neurological factors which involves a careful examination of behavior, developmental history, and communication skills using both clinical observations and standardized tests.

### **Media and news discourse**

The impact of media on people is undeniable; therefore, it is imperative to recognize the significance of media discourse. In other words, people are influenced by what the majority of media allows them to hear, see, as well as read, and media greatly influences societal perceptions (Shojaei & Laheghi, 2012, p. 2535). The ASD is increasingly being discussed in media and news, affecting people's opinions. The interaction between the ASD, media, and news discourse has effects on the perception along with awareness of ASD. The way the media portrays the ASD influences how people perceive it. Given all of this, examining media and news discourse becomes essential. Discourse analysis on the news reports reveals valuable understanding and insight of media viewpoints, and it investigates the way meanings conveyed in media texts (Peterlicean & Berariu, 2020, p. 156). Similarly, van Dijk (2001, p. 359) argues that the media's influence has led to critical studies in areas such as linguistics, semiotics, pragmatics, and discourse studies. The primary objective of media discourse research, according to Cotter (2001, p.420), is to identify the ideology, biases, and power structure in language.

The negative attitude that the media provides promotes social exclusion, which in turn supports the emergence of ableist stereotypes and continued existence of this prejudice. Hamilton (2019) argues that the language used in the media when portraying disadvantaged groups, including individuals with the ASD is generally negative. Barnes (1992, p.19) claims that along with the media's negative portrayal of this issue, it serves as the foundation for systemic biases against disadvantaged groups.

### **Methodology**

This study tries to reveal how the ASD is depicted in *Hürriyet*. This study is qualitative research as its primary objective is to give insight into how ASD is represented in Turkish online news texts using CDA. Since qualitative research seeks to provide detailed descriptions of issues

using non-numerical data (Oranga & Matere, 2023, p. 1). Common approaches in this type of research include document review, observations, and interviews (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, p. 46).

### Sample and data collection procedure

The news, published on the second of April, 2023 (Autism Awareness Day), was gathered from the website of *Hürriyet* which is among the most popular websites in news publishing. Moreover, confirming Similarweb (n.d.) data, Kaya and Çakmur (2010, p. 525) indicate that *Hürriyet* is among the most read newspapers in Türkiye.

Then, keywords such as autism and autistic were typed into the search engine of this online news website. After searching for the news about the ASD, a total of five news articles was chosen for analysis.

### Data analysis

van Dijk's (2001) CDA formed the foundation for the examination of news texts. In this context, the texts were studied under two primary headings: macrostructure and microstructure, and they were thoroughly investigated together with their sub-items.

### **Findings**

The news articles published on Autism Awareness Day are examined along with their English translations to find out how ASD is depicted in Turkish setting in *Hürriyet*.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> news article

Bakan Yanık: Otizmliler için 78 faaliyeti hayata geçireceğiz

... '3 Aralık Dünya Engelliler Günü'nde ilan edilen 'Engelli Hakları Ulusal Eylem Planı' ile engelli vatandaşların toplumsal hayata tam ve etkin katılımını sağlamak için büyük bir adım atıldığını söyleyen Yanık, ...

Otizm spektrum bozukluğu olan bireylere yönelik '2'nci Ulusal Eylem Planı'nı anlatan Yanık, "Planımıza, otizmliler için kapsayıcılık anlayışıyla ayrımcılığa uğramadan, erken tanı, erken müdahale, bakım, eğitim, sağlık, sosyal hizmet ve aile desteği gibi hizmetlerin sunumunda kapasite artırıcı etkili politikaları belli başlı amaçlar olarak belirledik" ... (Otizmliler için 78 faaliyeti hayata geçireceğiz, 2023).<sup>2</sup>

The news headline states that 78 activities will be implemented for individuals with autism. The fact that it is reflected here as the minister's word is intended to increase credibility in rhetorical sense which is reflected as an expert opinion. The theme of the facility opening is emphasized in the news.

When considered at the micro level, news does not have a complex structure as it consists of syntactically active structures as well as the transfer of expert opinions. Among the information

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<sup>2</sup> Minister Yanık: We will implement 78 activities for individuals with autism... Yanık said that a great step has been taken to guarantee the effective and complete participation of individuals with impairments in social situations with the 'National Action Plan on Disability Rights' announced on December 3, World Disability Day ... Explaining the '2nd National Action Plan' about people with autism spectrum disorder, Yanık said, "Our plan includes capacity building in the provision of services such as early diagnosis, early intervention, care, education, health, social service and family support, without discrimination, with an understanding of inclusiveness for individuals with autism." ... (Otizmliler için 78 faaliyeti hayata geçireceğiz, 2023). (The English translation is provided by the author.)

conveyed, plans are frequently included, political messages are incorporated into the news, and the perception that as long as we continue to rule, these services will continue. When examined in terms of word choices, the expressions 'care' and 'inclusion', which are frequently used with autism, cause negative associations with autism. Similarly, an attempt is made to affirm the action plans announced within the scope of '3 December World Disability Day' by mentioning them again during autism awareness week, but using the words autism and disability side by side in this way reflects the subconscious belief of the listener that autism is a barrier to everyday life.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> news article

Bir gün değil her gün gerek

Bugün 2 Nisan. Dünya Otizm Farkındalık Günü. Söz, Hürriyet'te uzun yıllar birlikte çalıştığımız, şimdi yazılarıyla Milliyet'i şenlendiren, otizmlili evlat sahibi Fedai Ünal'da:

...

### BİR TEBESSÜM BİR MERHABA

Sadece otizmlili bireyler değil, tüm engel grupları için aynı şey geçerli. ... Onlarla karşılaştığında o ortamın terk edilmesi, uzak durulması yerine, minik bir tebessüm, bir merhaba bekliyorlar.

### ŞOVDAN ÖTEYE GİTMİYOR

... Bizlerin çocukları ve yakınlarıyla özel günlerde bir araya gelen birçok kişinin çıkarıcı tutum sergilediğini gördük, görüyoruz. Mesela engelli haftası, otizm farkındalık günlerinde sözü geçen yetkililer bol bol fotoğraf çektirir, diğer günlerde pek ilgi göstermezler çocuklarımıza. Elbette işini hakkıyla yapanlar var. Onlara teşekkür ederim.

### BAZEN ÖĞRETMENLER İSTEMİYOR

Özellikle 'normal' okullarda eğitim gören kaynaştırma öğrencileri birçok sorun yaşıyor. Birçok okulda ailelerin yanında bazen öğretmenler bile istemiyor çocuklarımızı. Bazen başarıları gölgeleniyor. Çok başarılı olup, birinci olan çocuklarımıza 'alelacele', basit bir kağıda sarılı hediye verilirken, okul ikincisi çocuk için 'aslında birinci bu, diğeri engelli' havası yaratılıyor. Üstelik tüm koşullar eşitken yapılıyor ...

### BİZLER GÖÇÜNCE ONLARA NE OLACAK

Ülkemiz genelinde başta otizm olmak üzere, engelli çocukların çoğunlukla anneleriyle yaşadığını biliyoruz. Bu sebeple, çocuğunu kimseye bırakamayan aileler için gündüz, günlük, saatlik bakım evleri istiyoruz ki; o insanlar da kendilerine zaman ayırabilsin. (Bir gün değil her gün gerek, 2023).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Not just one day but every day

Today is the second of April. World Autism Awareness Day. The floor goes to Fedai Ünal, who has a son with autism, people we collaborated with for a long time in Hürriyet, and who now cheers up Milliyet with his articles: ...

A SMILE AND A HELLO

The same is true for all disability groups, not just individuals with autism. ... When they encounter them, instead of leaving that environment and staying away, they expect a little smile and a hello.

IT DOESN'T GO BEYOND THE SHOW

... We have seen, and still see, that many people who come together with our children and relatives on special occasions display self-interested attitudes. For example, on disability week and autism awareness days, the authorities

The headline of the news article highlights the social deficiencies regarding individuals with autism by saying that it is necessary every day, not just one day. By emphasizing that the interest and concern that exists due to the awareness week should not be monopolized only on one day but on every day, it means how much other days are neglected. Considering the news from a rhetorical perspective, the credibility was tried to be increased by conveying the parents' statements first-hand. As background information, the previous relationships of the author, who is a parent, and the author who wrote the article are mentioned. By mentioning autism and disabled groups together, the perception that autism is a disability is reflected.

The credibility effect is also increased by giving examples based on experiences. Frequent use of negative expressions such as "ortamın terk edilmesi ve uzak durulması (leaving that environment and staying away)" and these experiences create the image in the eyes of the reader that "most people stay away from autistic people and this is a situation that should be kept away and avoided".

Many examples are given in the content in a local context, and the most striking ones are discussed, and it is mentioned that the authorities put on a 'show'. It is stated that this situation is used emotionally and pragmatically by criticizing the 'self-interested' approaches taken on special occasions. It is possible to see that, from an ideological standpoint, the authorities view this scenario favorably; otherwise, this "self-interested" attitude would be meaningless. It is also an important detail to emphasize that even educators portray individuals with autism as 'disabled' in their schools, in terms of awareness that there is no disability here. Placing the word 'normal' in quotes when choosing words strengthens this awareness with the perception of what is normal according to whom. The quotations based on first-hand experience and the author's narrative in this news are important in shedding light on the current situation regarding autism.

In the section where the demands from the authorities are mentioned, it is emphasized in the background how little work has actually been done. By saying 'children with disabilities, especially autism', the terms 'autism' and 'disability' are used side by side in word choices, and the negative impact of this situation is reinforced in society.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> news article

Otizmle mücadelede erken tanı ve eğitim büyük rol oynuyor. Tohum Otizm Vakfı Genel Müdürü Burçak Karakaya "3-4 yaştan önce haftada en az 20 saat yoğun özel eğitim alan çocukların yaklaşık yarısında otizmin belirtileri kontrol altına alınabilmekte" diyor.

...

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who speak take lots of photos, but on other days they do not pay much attention to our children. Of course, there are those who do their job properly. Thank them.

#### SOMETIMES TEACHERS DO NOT WANT

In particular, mainstream students studying in 'normal' schools experience many problems. In many schools, families and sometimes even teachers do not want our children. Sometimes their achievements are overshadowed. While our very successful children who come first are given a simple paper-wrapped gift 'hastily', an atmosphere of 'this is actually the first one, the other one is disabled' is created for the child who comes second in the school. Moreover, it is done while all conditions are equal ...

#### WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THEM WHEN WE PASS AWAY?

We know that throughout our country, children with disabilities, especially autism, mostly live with their mothers. For this reason, we want daily and hourly care homes for families who cannot leave their children to anyone; so that those people can also spare time for themselves (Bir gün değil her gün gerek, 2023). (The English translation is provided by the author.)

-Türkiye’de bugün otizm spektrum bozukluğuyla ilgili farkındalık ne aşamada?

... Neredeyse yüzde 90’ı eğitime erişemiyor. Toplumsal hayata katılımlarını sağlamanın tek yolu erken tanı ve özel eğitim. Özellikle de erken müdahale hizmetlerinin önemi büyük.

-Erken tanı ve özel eğitimin dışında en çok neye ihtiyaçları var?

Park, toplu taşıma ve mahalle gibi kamusal alanlarda ayrımcılık önlenmeli. ... Otizmlili bireyler yaşamlarına ilişkin alınacak bireysel ve kamusal kararlarda söz sahibi olmalı. Bireye uygun koşullarda istihdam ve eşit ücret sağlanmalı. Yoğun desteğe ihtiyacı olan otizmlili bireyler için bakım merkezleri açılmalı.

...

-Erken tanıya da özellikle vurgu yapıyorsunuz. Neden önemli?

Erken tanı ve eğitimle otizmlili bir çocuk yeniden doğabilir. 3-4 yaştan önce haftada en az 20 saat yoğun özel eğitim alan çocukların yaklaşık yarısında otizmin belirtileri kontrol altına alınabilmekte. Hatta bazı otizmlili çocuklar ergenlik yaşına geldiklerinde akranları gibi yaşamlarına devam edebilir. Dolayısıyla otizmlili çocukların erken dönemde (18 ay civarı) tanı almaları önemli ... ('Erken tanı ve eğitimle otizmlili bir çocuk yeniden doğabilir', 2023).<sup>4</sup>

It aims to rhetorically increase credibility on the part of the reader by including expert opinion in quotation marks in the news headline. A statement such as 'With early diagnosis and education, a child with autism can be reborn' reflects negatively on individuals with autism at a time such as awareness week. By saying 'they can be reborn', this is said to be a favorable opportunity, and more importantly, it is necessary to be reborn, meaning that people with autism need to be reborn. However, like every group in society, the ideology of accepting them as they are and integrating them into society should be included, but here, through factors such as 'early diagnosis' and 'education', they can be 'reborn' which means that individuals with autism who are not diagnosed at an early age and education miss the 'opportunity' of being born again and will reap the consequences throughout their lives.

<sup>4</sup> Early diagnosis and education play a big role in the fight against autism. Burçak Karakaya, General Manager of Tohum Autism Foundation, says, "The symptoms of autism can be controlled in approximately half of the children who receive at least 20 hours of intensive special education per week before the age of 3-4." ...

-What is the level of awareness about autism spectrum disorder in Türkiye today?

... Almost 90 percent cannot access education. The only way to ensure their participation in social life is early diagnosis and special education. Especially early intervention services are of great importance.

-What do they need most, apart from early diagnosis and special education?

Discrimination should be prevented in public spaces such as parks, public transportation and neighborhoods. ... Individuals with autism should have a say in individual and public decisions regarding their lives. Employment and equal pay must be provided under suitable conditions for the individual. Care centers should be opened for individuals with autism who need intensive support. ...

-You also particularly emphasize early diagnosis. Why is it important?

With early diagnosis and education, a child with autism can be reborn. The symptoms of autism can be managed in roughly 50% of children who receive at least 20 hours of intensive special education per week before the age of 3-4. Some children with autism can even continue their lives like their peers when they reach adolescence. Therefore, it's critical that children with autism be diagnosed early (around 18 months) ... ('Erken tanı ve eğitimle otizmlili bir çocuk yeniden doğabilir', 2023). (The English translation is provided by the author.)

In the news' opening section, early diagnosis and education were emphasized by referring to expert opinion. An effort is made to boost the news's credibility throughout the text with the perception that 'This is not our opinion as journalists, but the viewpoint of experts on the subject. If not us, believe them'. In the remaining news, an attempt is made to increase credibility with scientific and statistical data.

In terms of word choices, although the general awareness level seems to be high with the news expert answers, there are still expressions in the questions that have a negative association with autism. In the remaining news, the concept of awareness is provided as an answer to questions about autism, revealing that the approach of experts to the subject is more sensitive and accurate.

#### 4<sup>th</sup> news article

... Binbir emekle büyüyen, tedavi gören, sadece bir kez 'anne', 'baba' desin diye yıllarca rehabilitasyona giden otizmliler. Deprem ile birlikte bunca yılın emeğinin çöp olduğunu söylüyor aileler.

... Malatya'da yaşayan Abdullah Polat ise 11 yaşındaki ağır otizmliler Kübra'nın babası

...

#### "HALİMİZ İÇLER ACISI"

... Onların çabaları ile Kübra çok büyük ilerleme kaydetti. Daha sakin bir çocuk oldu, konuşmaya başladı. Mesela tuvalet gibi ihtiyaçlarını gidermekte sorun yaşıyordu ancak tüm bu sorunları aşmıştık ...

#### DEPREM BÖLGESİNDE 114 BİN OTİZMLİ ÇOCUK OLDUĞU TAHMİN EDİLİYOR

...

Depremde afet durumunda bu çocuklarımız diğer çocuklara oranla 3-4 kat daha fazla etkileniyor, ebeveynler çocukların problem davranışlarıyla başa çıkmaya çalışıyor ve dışlanıyorlar ... (114 bin otizmliler çocuk deprem bölgesinde, 2023).<sup>5</sup>

Stating the population only as a number without specifying the total population or giving any proportional information is used to make the situation more dramatic. Likewise, giving the number of children rather than individuals with autism was done to attract attention and increase interest.

The main event in the news is to convey the difficulties experienced by children diagnosed with autism in the earthquake zone, and for this purpose, first-person statements were used to

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<sup>5</sup> ... Children with autism who grew up with a lot of effort, received treatment, and went to rehabilitation for years just to say 'mom' and 'dad' just once. Families say that after the earthquake, all their years of effort were thrown away. ... Abdullah Polat, who lives in Malatya, is the father of 11-year-old Kübra with severe autism ...

"OUR SITUATION IS DEEPEST"

... With their efforts, Kübra has made great progress. "She became a calmer child, he started talking. She was having problems, for example, going to the toilet, but we overcame all these problems ...

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT THERE ARE 114 THOUSAND CHILDREN WITH AUTISM IN THE EARTHQUAKE AREA ...

In the event of disasters like earthquakes, these children are affected 3-4 times more than other children, parents try to cope with their children's problematic behavior and are excluded ... (114 bin otizmliler çocuk deprem bölgesinde, 2023). (The English translation is provided by the author.)



increase the seriousness of the situation. Emotional content that aims to empathize with the reader takes this meaning one step further. Children with autism who are mentioned with expressions such as ‘grew up with a lot of effort’ or ‘went to rehabilitation for years just to say ‘mom’ or ‘dad’ once’ are exposed to discriminatory language. It is completely ignored that autism is a spectrum and has different subheadings, and the perception that they all need to be rehabilitated is reflected by thinking that they are all under one roof. The fact that this distinction is not made even in this news text published during the awareness week confirms the negative perception of autism in the view of the public.

The statements from the parents' own mouths were included in the following parts of the news, and the objective was to boost the reliability of the other party rhetorically. An attempt was made to provide credibility by following the logic that "This is not said by the person who prepared the news, but by the parents of children diagnosed with autism in the area’.

As we examine the word choices used with the expression autism, the negative aspect of this concept is attributed to the whole phenomenon of autism by saying 'Kübra with severe autism' and no detailed explanation is given about it. While they are subjected to alienation by calling them ‘severely autistic’, on the opposite end of the spectrum who can be integrated into social life are not mentioned positively, and this reflects the news' ideological perspective on the situation. It affirms perceptions such as autism is used in a negative sense, needs to be avoided at all costs, or ought to be treated.

#### 5<sup>th</sup> news article

Ankara Müzik ve Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi’nde 2 Nisan Dünya Otizm Farkındalık Günü dolayısıyla çoğunluğunu otizmlilerle gençlerin oluşturduğu orkestra ‘farkındalık konseri’ verdi.

Ankara Müzik ve Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi Sürekli Eğitim Uygulama ve Araştırma Merkezi bünyesinde çalışmalarını sürdüren Bizim Orkestra, müzik eğitimi alan otizmliler ve görme engelli gençlerden oluşuyor. ... Ankara Müzik ve Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi Rektör Yardımcısı ve Öğretim Üyesi Prof. Dr. Zafer Kurtaslan, otizmliler ve görme engelli gençlerden oluşan orkestranın farkındalık yaratmak amacıyla etkinlik düzenlediğini belirterek şunları söyledi:

#### ARKALARINDA AİLE DESTEĞİ VAR

“Amacımız farkındalık yaratmak ve bu öğrencilere mentörlük yapmak. Hepsi birbirinden yetenekli ... Bizim en büyük mesajımız ötekileştirmemek, ayırtmamak, etrafımızda farklı öğrenenlere, engellilere karşı daha hassas, anlayışlı ve sabırlı olmak, sevgi ve hoşgörüsüyle onları kucaklamak.” (Otizmlilerle yeteneklerden farkındalık konseri, 2023).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The orchestra, mostly composed of young people with autism, gave an 'awareness concert' at Ankara Music and Fine Arts University on the occasion of April 2 World Autism Awareness Day.

Our Orchestra, which continues its work within the Ankara Music and Fine Arts University Continuing Education Application and Research Center, consists of autistic and visually impaired young people who receive music education. ... Ankara Music and Fine Arts University Vice Rector and Faculty Member Prof. Dr. Zafer Kurtaslan stated that the orchestra, consisting of autistic and visually impaired young people, organized an event to raise awareness and said:

THEY HAVE FAMILY SUPPORT BEHIND THEM

It is highlighted in the news headline that the activity mentioned as an awareness concert from autistic talents was held during autism awareness week, and it was highlighted that the people who performed this were also individuals with autism. Here, we want to emphasize that an event such as a concert can be given even if an autism diagnosis has been made, so it does not constitute an obstacle which is compatible with the content of current awareness week.

Key information like the number of individuals in the orchestra, which is the main subject of the event, and how many of them are young people with autism, are not included here. The absence of this information has a detrimental effect on news rhetoric; the vagueness of the information damages, or at least decreases the perception that people with autism can perform. During the presentation of the event, while talking about the groups that make up the orchestra, it was stated that they were made up of individuals with autism and visually impaired individuals. Here, autism and visually impaired people are evaluated together and a harmony has been established, and the status of being 'disabled' is also reflected in the view of autism. In the last part of the news, the aim is to increase credibility through expert opinion by rhetorically quoting the teachers' opinions.

### **Conclusion and discussion**

The study's primary objective is to investigate how ASD is portrayed in Turkish online news articles. Regarding the first research question, the reflection of autism during the awareness week in online media news texts in Türkiye is generally associated with negative expressions. Despite some negative reviews, it is clear that the news articles released during awareness week are meant to increase public awareness of the situation as well.

Considering the second question, the way that the ASD is addressed in online news articles already supports the widespread stereotypes that currently exist about this topic. This negative perception is only heightened by their allegation that autism is a condition that requires 'treatment' and that it typically goes hand in hand with the word 'disabled'. In addition to their aim of enlightening the society and raising awareness, the expressions were also used to reinforce this negative perception in society about autism. In particular, the use of the word 'autism' together with other 'disability conditions' in news texts and the frequent use of the expression 'treatment' mean that it is something that requires 'medical attention'. When applied in this manner, the perception of the difficulty of integrating individuals with autism into society without treatment is transferred to the reader. In addition, since in the perspective of society, it is an issue of concern, there is also a situation where the authorities use this situation for their own interests through media power. Especially on important days such as awareness day, efforts are made to reinforce the importance given to this situation with statements and activities, but the lack of any progress afterwards shows that this situation is being used indirectly.

Khalil (2020, p. 102) examined the ideological aspect of autism-related online news by implementing Van Leeuwen's social actor determination method to evaluate how a global discourse portrays a sensitive group, specifically autistic people. According to the study's findings,

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"Our goal is to raise awareness and mentor these students. They are all talented ... Our biggest message is not to alienate or discriminate, to be more sensitive, understanding and patient towards those around us who learn differently and those with disabilities, and to embrace them with love and tolerance." (Otizmli yeteneklerden farkındalık konseri, 2023). (The English translation is provided by the author.)

the examination of ten BBC News online news texts indicates an actual social problem since the articles depict autistic people in a more general way, yet their social standing is connected to negative social positions. Similarly, this study also acknowledges that the negative image of people with ASD in Turkish online news media persists. Another related study looks at how mainstream newspaper articles portray autism. The study states that the media's representation of autism as disability depends on standards as well as a prejudiced perspective, and that normalizing disability can create and maintain discriminatory barriers (Hamilton, 2019, p. 20).

Besides, Yılmaz Altuntaş & Öney Doğanığiit (2021, p.2) conducted a similar study, analyzing how autism-related articles are included and defined in Turkish print media through applying a qualitative examination of articles from local newspapers. In contrast to the results of the current study, autism is represented in a positive way in the media due to societal and charitable support. While autism is typically portrayed unfavorably in news articles, as this study shows, it is also seen to be positively depicted in other studies, as evidenced by the findings of prior studies (Yılmaz Altuntaş & Öney Doğanığiit, 2021, p.2).

According to this study, news in the sample contains expert comments on ASD. There is also news on parenting experiences. Although articles with professional perspectives address the subject more carefully, terms like 'disability' or 'treatment' are also frequently used in the texts. These and other negative phrases lead to Türkiye's current bias towards ASD. Based on these findings, it is recommended that such news stories regarding ASD be both informative and unbiased.

Lastly, it has been stated before that there is little discourse research on ASD. Consequently, it is expected that this research will assist to fill up the hole in the literature on ASD news, especially in Turkish online media.

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**Ethical Statement/Etik Beyan:** It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited. / Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.

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