



Child-Directed Speech of Turkish Mothers and Fathers: A Comparison Based on the Dimorphous Verbal Expression Use

Türk Anne ve Babaların Çocuklarına Yöneltiltikleri Dil: Çift-Biçimli Sözel İfadeler Üzerinden Bir Karşılaştırma

Filiz ÇETİNTAŞ YILDIRIM **

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ABSTRACT: The differing Child-Directed Speech (CDS) features of mothers and fathers have been gaining attention of researchers since thirty years. This study also tries to describe mother and father CDSs from the framework of addressing terms to children. The dimorphous verbal expressions uttered by Turkish mothers and fathers are compared on the basis of a data base created from interviews with fifty parent pairs (a hundred participants in total). Qualitative results from those parent interviews are described. According to the results, both mothers and fathers use positive verbal expressions which convey positive emotions to their children. Parents from two genders also use nicknames which can be considered as swearwords. Thirty mothers and fourteen fathers used dimorphous verbal expressions in their CDS; this can be interpreted that when compared to fathers, mothers reflect positive emotions to children in a reverse manner more often.

Keywords: Child-directed speech, dimorphous verbal expression, mother-father differences

ÖZ: Çocuğa Yöneltilen Dil (ÇYD) kullanımlarında anne ve baba farklılıkları, son otuz yıldır araştırmacıların dikkatini çekmektedir. Bu çalışma da anne ve baba ÇYD kullanımlarını çocuklara seslenme biçimleri çerçevesinden betimlemeye çalışmaktadır. Türk anne ve babaların kullandıkları çift-biçimli sözel ifadeler, elli çift ebeveyn (toplam yüz katılımcı) ile yapılan görüşmeler sonrasında oluşturulan veri tabanı üzerinden karşılaştırılmıştır. Ebeveyn görüşmeleri üzerinden betimleyici sonuçlar çıkarılmıştır. Sonuçlara göre, hem anne hem de babalar çocuklarına olumlu duygular aktaran olumlu ifadeler ile hitap etmektedirler. Her iki cinsiyetten ebeveynler çocuklarına hakaret sayılabilecek türde takma adlarla da hitap etmektedirler. Otuz anne ve ondört baba ÇYD'lerinde çift-biçimli sözel ifadeler kullanmışlardır; bu, annelerin babalarla karşılaştırıldığında, olumlu duygularını çocuklarına daha agresif bir tavırla yansıttıklarını göstermektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Çocuğa yöneltilen dil, çift-biçimli sözel ifadeler, anne-baba farklılıkları

** Asst. Prof. Dr., Mersin University, English Language and Literature Department, filizyildirim@gmail.com

Introduction

Undoubtedly, every child who undergoes a healthy maturation process acquires one or more languages without explicit instruction, with the help of both their genetic makeup for a predisposition to acquire natural languages and sufficient environmental input provided by the interaction with other language speakers. As Fernández and Cairns (2010: 106) state language acquisition is facilitated by interactive experience within a language society.

Although the stages of language acquisition are similar for children from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, some other variables may affect the observable language output of them. For instance, the Socio-Economic Status (SES) of families has an effect on vocabulary development of children (Rowe, 2008). Hoff (2006:72) emphasizes that parents are the immediate model of language use for children; they introduce a wide variety of linguistic information to the new generation. Any difference in the linguistic input provided to children creates a change in the outcomes as well. When comparing the linguistic abilities of children raised by older and adolescent mothers, Hoff (2006: 66) concludes that “adolescent parenting may negatively affect children’s language development”, in accordance with the observations of Tamis-Le Monda et al (1998). Linguistic competence of children who are being raised by “responsive mothers” develops sooner and their lexical development is faster than children who are neglected in some way. Just as Hoff’s (2006:63) findings about that ethnicity directly affects the social environment in which language acquisition process is realized, Vogt et al (2015) also conclude that different language learning environments trigger stages of language acquisition differently. Children get varied degrees of linguistic input from different SES group caregivers (342). They state that “the amounts of declaratives and questions addressed to children in Western cultures typically exceeded the use of imperatives” and the rate of declaratives decreases while the rate of imperatives increases in lower SES groups (345). When compared, caregivers (those need not to be only parents, because in rural and urban Mozambique, siblings and other family members undertake the duty of caring the infant when parents are away for work) from Netherlands encode more cognitive intentions, but caregivers from rural and urban Mozambique use more imperatives and encode more socio-emotional intentions in their Child-Directed Speech (CDS) (354). As a result of this, it can be said that cross-cultural differences highly affect CDS’s communicative intentions. SES of caregivers also affects their interaction with children. The mistakes made by children during a child-caregiver conversation are more corrected by adults who are parents than by adults who are not parents, which results in more positive evidence coming from parents to children (Bohannon and Stanowicz, 1988).

The gender of the child to whom CDS is directed can be considered as another factor which has an influence on the CDS content. However, Leaper and Gleason (1996: 689-690) clearly state that females express “more affiliation and expressiveness”, and males demonstrate more “self-assertion and task orientation” during the play activities with their parents. It is not the gender of the child, but the gender of parents which affects the interaction between the two speakers; “parent gender functioned as a contextual influence

on children's behavior" (Leaper and Gleason, 1996: 697). A more recent study of Clearfield and Nelson (2006), on the other hand, brings out contrary results. They found out that there are no gender differences in infant behavior when infant gender is considered. Yet, there are observable differences in mothers' verbal responses related to the gender of infants (127). The way mothers interact with their children verbally changes according to children's gender (128); verbal interaction directed to female children is multiplied by mothers. Additionally, most of the topics covered in verbal interactions between the mother and child promote gender socialization, thus leading to an expectation of girls' being "more verbally expressive than boys" (135). It is seen from previous findings that both child and parent gender have effects on the verbal interaction between the two. The question which is needed to be answered further is how parent gender affects CDS's semantic content.

The Effects of Parent Gender on CDS

Although mothers are assumed to be the primary caregivers to infants and children, the roles of fathers are incontrovertibly important in child development. Not only providing essential supplies for everyday needs, but also interacting with children socially in home environment is considered as the responsibility of fathers. Lewis and Lamb (2003: 211) characterize three important features of father-infant interaction. Firstly, children feel emotionally closer to their mothers because fathers are sensitively more distant to their children. Secondly, fathers are taking an active role in daily lives as playmates for children rather than supplying their self-care needs. Lastly and most importantly, the style of father's play has a direct effect on children's socio-emotional development, which results in an adjustment on children's later personal behavior. As Lamb and Lewis (2010: 94) state, child development cannot be described comprehensively enough without identifying the contribution of fathers to this process. Davis et al (2010: 613) emphasize that "fathers' speech and language interactions with infants have been positively associated with language development, and paternal depression has been shown to adversely impact this process". Depressed fathers participate less in joint attention activities; for instance, reading to their children, which assists vocabulary development. In their comparison of fathers' and mothers' speech with children, Golinkoff and Ames (1979:28) found out that during tripartite conversations (in mother, father and child interactions), fathers do not tend to speak much and do not adjust their speech according to their children as mothers do. Although the grammatical complexity of utterances produced by mothers and fathers are the same, fathers use more imperatives and threats in CDS. Differing paternal and maternal CDS features have different influences on language acquisition processes (Rondal, 1980: 353). Researchers argue that the environmental experience provided to the child by his parents affects his linguistic performance.

Mothers are seen to provide more linguistic support for the child, tuning their language to the child's needs, whereas fathers are seen to be less sensitive to the child's linguistic abilities, putting more demands on the child, in so doing, raising up performance. (McLaughlin et al, 1983:245)

The results of Hladik and Edwards' (1984:325) study demonstrate that in dual joint interaction with their children (mother-child or father-child), there is not a significant difference between mother and father CDS; utterance length and complexity are similar,

which seems as a contradictory conclusion with the findings of McLaughlin et al. What is different is that when they are in a tripartite interaction, fathers talk less to their children and draw themselves away from conversation, leaving the interactional management to mothers. Papoušek et al (1987: 500) found no differences between mothers and fathers when linguistic complexity of their CDS was considered; both sides put an emphasis on lexical development of the child and adjust their speech according to the age and needs of the developing infant. Fathers' Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) is fewer in number and they stay silent longer during father-child interactions (Warren-Leubecker and Bohannon, 1984: 1380; Papoušek et al, 1987: 503). While vocal behaviors are promoted by mothers, motor behaviors are promoted by fathers.

In home environment, mothers can be labeled as “initiators” of conversation and fathers as “reactors” to child performances (Hladik and Edwards, 1984:329). The specialized mediation of mothers and fathers to language acquisition process is also emphasized by Döpke (1990: 112). Fathers were reported as being more effective communicators in father-child dyads, for although mothers are more “child-centered in play activities”, children can get more linguistic information from father CDS. Father CDS is “less in quantity but qualitatively better”. It can be concluded that fathers are also important mediators of linguistic information and that their CDS should be inspected closely in order to have an adequate insight for natural language acquisition processes.

Dimorphous Verbal Expressions in Mother and Father CDS

In CDS, parents use some special verbal expressions for getting the attention of the child during a conversational interaction. What Warren-Leubecker and Bohannon (1984: 1381) define as “name calling” is to utter the child’s name or nickname in order to draw the attention of the child. A special kind of such expressions are termed in Çetintaş Yıldırım’s (2017) study as dimorphous verbal expressions, based on the conclusions of Aragon et al (2015). Dimorphous verbal expressions constitute a significant proportion of all CDSs and they convey very dense semantic contents. In order to maintain their physiological and emotional balance, caregivers can utter expressions which seem to have negative and very aggressive attitudes towards children. Those utterances do not reflect the feeling that caregivers experience at the time of speaking; on the contrary, they can be thought as abuses to small children to whom they are directed. Examples (1) and (2) are only two instances of dimorphous verbal expressions taken from genuine conversations between caregivers and children of Turkish origin.

(1) Öldürürüm seni lan! (I will kill you, man!)

(2) Nasıl bir manyaksın sen! (What kind of a maniac you are!)

The actual feeling of caregivers in these two utterances is not negative, but there is a reverse reflection of a very dense positive feeling to a very negative expression.

The aim of this current study is to describe the CDS features of Turkish mothers and fathers on the basis of verbal expressions which contain both positive and negative attitudes (those will be called as *dimorphous verbal expressions* from now on). The questions which motivate the research are as below,

- What are the positive verbal expressions frequently used by Turkish mothers and fathers in their CDS?
- What are the dimorphous verbal expressions frequently used by Turkish mothers and fathers in their CDS?
- Are there any differences between Turkish mothers and fathers in terms of using dimorphous verbal expressions?

Answers to those questions will be provided by qualitative results obtained from parent interviews.

Methodology

50 pairs of parents (100 participants in total) were interviewed by the researcher for eliciting “name calling” expressions which include dimorphous expressions. Demographic information like genders and educational levels of parents and the number and ages of children was noted down. The demographic information is given in table 1 below.

Table 1. Demographic information about parents

Number	Parent Gender	Educational Levels of Parents		
		Elementary Education	High School	University
50	Female	6	5	39
50	Male	2	1	47

Most of the parents who participated to the study voluntarily are from higher SES background (86 participants in total). So, a comparison between SES groups will not give significant results; SES background will be left outside of the study focus.

The child number and gender distributions and the mean age for children are stated in table 2 below.

Table 2. Child number and gender distributions and mean age for both genders

Number of Children	Gender of Children	Mean Age
31	Female	4.2
29	Male	4.8

Numbers of male and female children can be regarded as equal; the mean number of children per parent pair is 1.2. The mean ages of female and male children are similar, with a slight increase in male children age; the mean age for both groups is 4.5.

Mothers and fathers were directed three questions during the interview. Those questions are,

- What names or nicknames are they using to get attention of their child(ren) during their interaction with them?
- What verbal expressions (phrases or clauses which are formed by more than one word) are they using to interact with their child(ren) during a joint activity?
- What are the feelings that parents are experiencing during the interaction with their child(ren)?

The samples elicited from parents will be taken under qualitative evaluation; merely a frequency analysis of dimorphous expressions' distribution to parent gender groups will be given in quantities.

Findings and Discussion

Parents reported that they use a vast number of nicknames for getting the attention of their child(ren). From the noted down data, it is also seen that parents, at the same time, use various dimorphous verbal expressions which can be misunderstood as insults. Below, there are instances of nicknames given to children, and positive and dimorphous verbal expressions used by mothers and fathers.

Nicknames Given to Children by Their Parents

Five of the fifty female parents preferred to use nicknames to draw the attention of their children. Most of the nicknames are derived from the proper names of children; in addition, some of the nicknames are epithets which are derived from different idiosyncratic origins.

- (3) Ayşe-cik (Little Ayşe)
- (4) Hebek, Komitov, Neník(o), Gudík
- (5) Kuzumenim (My lamb), Anacan (Soul of the mother)
- (6) Aşkitopum (My love ball), Aşkitellam (My love nutella)
- (7) Deli Dumrul (Mad Dumrul), Lokum Ağa (master Turkish delight)

The verbal expressions stated above illustrate the use of nicknames by mothers. The nickname in (3) is a derived form, with the addition of diminutive suffix to the name of the male or female parent. Nicknames in (4) are *nearly* meaningless epithets, because they evoke the words şebek (gibbon) and komutan (commander) in Turkish. Neník(o) and Gudík, in this example, are epithets with no overt meaning. In the database, there are also compound nouns which are used as nicknames, as shown in example (5). Kuzu (lamb) and benim (a Turkic form of 'my') are attached to each other to form a compound nickname. Ana (mama) and can (soul), again, came together to form a compound here with the meaning of 'soul of the mother'. In (6), blends are used as nicknames; Aşk (love) and topum (my ball) are added to each other with the combining letter. The same procedure is valid for the blend formed by the words aşk (love) and tellam (my tella, clipped form of nutella). Nicknames given in (7) are direct proper names taken from the Turkish folk tale character Deli Dumrul (Mad Dumrul) and from a documentary TV serial character Lokum Ağa.

Four of the fifty fathers used nicknames to address their child(ren). The principles in forming nicknames are similar to mothers'.

- (8) Fıstı-lığ-ım (My peanut-ness)
- (9) Denden, Ubuduk
- (10) Çılgınbebo (Crazy baby)
- (11) Çukutu (chocolate box)

In (8), the derivational suffix –*Ilk*, which forms a noun in this example, is used with the noun *fıstık* (peanut), and the possessive suffix –*Im* (my) is added to the derived word. The nickname *Denden* in (9) is the blend formed from the name of the child (*Deniz* is the full proper name). *Ubuduk* is a meaningless epithet which is used idiosyncratically by the father. In (10), *çılgın* (crazy) and *bebo* (a shortened form of *bebek* [baby]) are used adjacently in a compound. Lastly, *Çukutu* (chocolate box) in (11) is a blend of *çikolata* (chocolate) and *kutu* (box). Fathers did not prefer using proper names taken from folk tales or TV serials as nicknames to their children.

Positive Expressions of Mothers and Fathers

Both mothers and fathers use positive verbal expressions commonly in their joint interactions with children. Most of those positive expressions are in a single word form, but phrases and clauses are also used by parents.

(12) *Yavrum* (my offspring), *bebeğim* (my baby), *aşkım* (my love), *canparem* (part of my soul), *annem* (my mother)

(13) *Akıllı oğlum* (my smart son), *becerikli kızım* (my skillful daughter), *mis kokulu kızım* (my fragrant daughter), *hayatımın aşkı* (lover of my life), *canım benim* (my life), *güzel gözlüm* (my beautiful-eyed)

(14) *Minik kuşum* (my little bird), *cimcimem* (my small watermelon), *çiçeğim* (my flower), *arlanım* (my lion), *prensesim* (my princess), *koca bebeğim* (my big baby), *meleğim* (my angel), *can yoldaşım* (my faithful friend)

Phrases directed to children by their mothers mostly contain positive expressions which are the reflections of positive emotions. One word expressions in (12) resemble nicknames in that they are used for addressing the child. Those contain names with the possessive suffix, which convey the ownership of mothers over children. Multi-word expressions in (13) are positive qualifications of children. Positive characteristics of children are emphasized by mothers in their CDS. The positive expressions in (14) draw attention to the resemblance of children to cute and sympathetic entities like birds, flowers and angels, and those are mostly attributed to female children. For male children, names of strong and mighty animals are used.

Fathers' uses of positive verbal expressions are similar with the uses of mothers.

(15) *Babacığım* (my daddy), *hayatım/ömürüm* (my life), *canım* (my soul), *oğluşum* (my sonny), *tatlım* (my sweetie)

(16) *Güzeller güzeli* (the most beautiful one), *babasının arslanı* (lion of his father), *tıpkı babası* (just like his father), *güzel kızım* (my beautiful daughter)

(17) *Kuşum* (my bird), *kuzum* (my lamb), *cücüğüm* (my bud)

In (15), expressions containing positive emotional reflections are used with possessive suffix, which can be considered as having the implication of ownership. In (16), the expressions contain adjectives which modify the child in a good manner. The expression 'tıpkı babası' (just like his father) attributes good qualities to the father, too. The uses of simile in (17) are, again, in the direction of praising the child.

In the data base, some special routines are observed. Those routines are used by parents for showing interest in and affection to the child in focus, and they are repeated by both mothers and fathers.

- (18) Kurban olurum sana (I sacrifice myself for you), iyi ki varsın (so glad I have you), kokuna bayıldım (I love your smell), ne kadar tatlısın (how sweet you are), ölüyorum sana (I'll die for you), sen benim birtanemsin (you are my only one)

The speech routines exemplified from mother and father CDS above include compliments and expressions of self-sacrifice and gratitude. All of the mothers and fathers used such expressions for conveying their feelings to offspring.

The positive verbal uses of parents are widespread in the data base, but there are some other verbal expressions which seem contradictory to the feelings of parents at first sight.

Dimorphous Verbal Expressions of Mothers and Fathers

As defined in Çetintaş Yıldırım (2017), although dimorphous verbal expressions convey negative and aggressive attitudes, they are actually reflections of dense positive emotions. Nearly half of the mother and father CDSs include such kind of expressions in the data base. Thirty mothers and fourteen fathers uttered dimorphous verbal expressions while addressing to their children, both mothers and fathers exhibited extreme aggressive attitudes. On the other hand, fifty-six parents never used dimorphous verbal expressions. Below, there are instances of dimorphous verbal expressions selected from mother CDSs.

- (19) Zilli (shrewish) / zibidi (punk) / şaşkın ördek (goofy duck) / şebelek (gibbonish) / aptal seni (you fool) / eşşoğlu eşşek (donkey's child) / sıpa (donkey-foal) / böcek (bug) / tipsiz (minger) / şerefsiz (ignoble person)
- (20) Seni yer bitiririm (I will eat you till the end)
- (21) Ağzını / burnunu / tontiş ayaklarını / göbüşünü yerim (I will eat your mouth / nose / plump feet / belly)
- (22) Yanaklarını / ayaklarını / totişini ısırırım. (I will bite your cheeks / feet / butt)
- (23) Koparıyorum dudaklarını (I will cut off your lips)
- (24) Parçalarım seni (I will tear you down) / Gebertirim seni (I will bump you off) / Döverim seni (I will beat you) / Ezerim seni (I will crush you)
- (25) Defol git buradan (duck away from here)

The dimorphous verbal expressions in (19-22) indicate that mothers are showing extreme aggressive attitude towards their children. In (19) there are epithets which can be regarded as swearwords. In (20) and (21), the act of eating comes into prominence; especially, eating different body parts of the child is a commonly used dimorphous verbal expression by mothers. The mothers utter their desire to eat the body part which seems cute or fatty to them. Related to the act of eating, there are also expressions about the act of biting in (22). Several different body parts of the child may be the object of biting. Cutting off the body parts is another dimorphous verbal expression, as in (23). Expressions in (24), which are acts of violence and torture, such as killing, crushing and beating the child, are very

conspicuous in the data base. Act of dismissing the child is another kind of such expressions, as exemplified in (25).

Father CDSs also contain such expressions which seem contradictory with their emotional contents.

(26) Nasıl bir manyaksın sen (what kind of a maniac you are) / eşşoğlu (baby donkey)

(27) Yerim seni (I will eat you)

(28) Isırırım seni / yanaklarını / bacaklarını (I will bite you / your cheeks / your legs)

(29) Öldürürüm seni lan (I will kill you, man) / Seni gebertirim, ama öperek (I will bump you off, but with kisses)/ Tekmeyi vuracağım şimdi (I will kick you now)

One of the fathers named his child as a ‘maniac’; except from eşşoğlu (baby donkey) this is the only marginal epithet uttered by a father. Twelve fathers used the dimorphous verbal expression conveying the act of eating, as in (27). In (28), biting different body parts of the child is the emotional reflection of fathers. Verbal expressions including physical violence like killing and kicking the child is another reflection of dense positive emotion. One of the fathers preferred to emphasize that he will realize the act of bumping off the child by giving kisses to him. The phrase ‘with kisses’ is uttered by the father with a smile and a change in intonation.

All of the dimorphous verbal expressions used by Turkish parents seem violent and inadmissible, but in fact, they convey a very deep love towards the offspring. The participants of this study, including the ones who uttered the expressions illustrated above, stated that they love their children extremely. As an answer to the question of how they are feeling when they are with their children, all parents said that they want to hug and embrace their children. Some of the parents stated that they want to take the children into their rib cage and keep them safe there. Parents like the smell of their children, and want to “inhale their fragrant smell”.

Results and Conclusion

Interviews with Turkish parents indicate that dense positive emotions of parents can be reflected by a reverse verbal behavior as insulting the child and uttering the desire to kill or torture the child in several ways. This observation is compatible with the findings of Aragon et al (2015), in which behavioral attitudes are defined. Although most of the parents did not utter dimorphous verbal expressions in their CDS, the number of parents who use such expressions is also worth noting.

Both mothers and fathers address their female children with nice and gentle epithets like ‘flower’ and ‘princess’ and with adjectives like ‘skillful’, which puts responsibilities on the child. Male children are addressed with epithets like ‘lion’ and with adjectives like ‘strong’, which brings self-reliance into the forefront. As Clearfield and Nelson (2006:136) states, “this might reinforce a sense of independence in boys that is not reinforced in girls”.

The conclusions of this study support the claims of Warren-Leubecker and Bohannon (1984: 1383) that mother and father CDSs do not have a significant difference

when the use of “attentional words or name calling” is considered. As being the primary caregivers in two parent families, mothers’ use of dimorphous verbal expressions increases slightly. It can be said that Turkish mothers feel such strong positive emotions towards their children that they have to adjust their verbal behavior in a reverse direction. This is agreeable with the observation of Lamb and Lewis (2010: 101) that mothers are the “preferred attachment figures” of children because they undertake the responsibilities of the offspring most often. This constitutes a closer and stronger connection between the mother and child.

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