

## An Overview of the Vocabulary of B1/B2 Level Students in Turkish Education for Foreigners

(Yabancılara Türkçe Öğretiminde B1/B2 Düzeyi Öğrencilerinin Kelime Hazinesi Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme)

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### Abstract

Teaching Turkish as a foreign language gains more importance day by day. Within the process, the ability to use the four basic skills in the best way possible is closely related with teaching vocabulary. Due to this reason, the study was conducted in order to determine the vocabulary level of students at B1-B2 level in the Turkish Education as Foreign Language classes of the Turkish Application and Research Center under Mersin University. Within the scope of the study, in different weeks the students were presented with the topic titles of "1- Narrate a day where your dreams come true; 2- Describe a match of a different branch of sports you have watched; 3- Write an essay concerning your opinions on brand enthusiasm; 4- Imagine that you are an entity other than human and write down your feelings" and were asked to write essays on these. In order to be able to obtain data from the essays written by the students, the essays were transferred into computerized environment, and the word lists of each topic title were created via the software Simple Concordance 4.07. Final lists were obtained by removing the inflexional suffixes of the words included in these lists. While it was determined that a total of 3575 words were used in the essays, removing the duplicated words resulted with a total of 782 different words. Afterwards, these words were categorized according to their types. In conclusion, it was determined that the sources used in teaching Turkish to foreigners are not subjected to an evaluation in terms of active vocabulary. This conclusion was found important not only because it sets forth the original aspect of the study, but also in terms of its quality that would serve as a guide to further studies to be carried out.

**Keywords:** Active vocabulary, frequency, teaching Turkish to foreigners.

### Özet

Yabancı dil olarak Türkçe öğretimi, her geçen gün önem kazanmaktadır. Dil edinimi sürecinde, dört temel becerinin en iyi şekilde kullanılabilir hale gelmesi sözcük öğretimi ile yakından ilgilidir. Bu sebeple araştırma, Mersin Üniversitesi, Türkçe Uygulama ve Araştırma Merkezi, Yabancılara Türkçe Öğretimi sınıflarından B1-B2 düzeyindeki öğrencilerin aktif söz varlığını tespit etmek amacı taşımaktadır. Araştırma kapsamında öğrencilere farklı haftalarda verilen, hakkında yazılı metin oluşturmaları beklenen konu başlıkları; "1-Hayallerinizin gerçekleştiği bir günü anlatın. 2- Farklı spor dallarında izlediğiniz bir maçı tasvir edin. 3-Marka düşkünlüğü üzerine fikirlerinizi anlatan bir kompozisyon oluşturun. 4- İnsan dışında bir varlığın yerine kendinizi koyup, hissettiklerinizi yazın" şeklindedir. Verilerin öğrencilerin hazırladığı yazılı metinlerden elde edilebilmesi için, bu metinler bilgisayar ortamına aktarılmış, Simple Concordance Program 4.07 programı ile her bir konu başlığına göre ham kelime listeleri oluşturulmuştur. Listelerde yer alan sözcüklerden çekim ekleri silinerek tam listeler elde edilmiştir. Yazma metinlerinde ham olarak toplam 3575 sözcük tespit edilirken, tekrarlı olanlar çıkarıldığında birbirinden farklı 782 sözcük elde edilmiştir. Daha sonra bu sözcüklerin türlerine göre sıklık sayımları yapılmıştır. Genel olarak yabancılara Türkçe öğretimi çalışmalarında, kaynakların kişisel ve aktif söz varlığı açısından değerlendirmeye tabi tutulmadığı anlaşılmıştır. Bu durum çalışmanın özgün yönünü ortaya koyarken akabinde yapılacak çalışmalara kaynaklık etmesi bakımından önem taşımaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Aktif söz varlığı, sıklık, yabancılara Türkçe öğretimi.

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## **Introduction**

The number of the people speaking Turkish all around the world is increasing day by day and this increase is taking the lead in teaching Turkish as a foreign language and in the increase in the institutions and organization in this field. Kılınç (2011:39) has stated that the total number of those speaking Turkish all around the world is 220 million. The increase in this number has led not only to the increase in both the private and public institutions and organization related to teaching Turkish as a foreign language and the introduction of undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs related to this field in higher education. There are many headlines related to language acquisition in the teaching programs applied in these institutions.

Teaching vocabulary items ensures the formation of the personal vocabulary of the student in target language. *“Vocabulary of a language sheds light on the history of that language on a vast scale, reflects the changes of sound, style, syntax and semantics revealing during centuries and shows what kind of changes have been realized with the impact of various languages (Aksan, 1996, p.11)”*

In teaching Turkish as a foreign language, the course books prepared according to the language levels determined within the frame of the European language portfolio are the primary sources in the formation of individual and active vocabulary of the students. However, in these sources prepared by the different institutions and organizations, there is not a common vocabulary reservoir according to the levels and frequency of vocabulary items for the formation of personal vocabulary. This situation is valid not only in teaching Turkish as a foreign language, but also in teaching Turkish as a mother language. However, Karakuş (2000,128) says *“they have detected that a person uses 3000 vocabulary items as maximum in his/her life daily, a highbrowed person should have and use approximately 22000-27000 vocabulary items in his/her mental lexicon and a person who has improved himself/herself should know 40000 vocabulary items and they have shown it as a target in education”* in the teaching of mother language in many countries in Europe. Depending on this, Tosunoğlu (2000, 144) also mentions that there are studies on ‘*list of basic vocabulary items*’ in language teaching in abroad.

The basic material of the language is vocabulary items and active usage of these vocabulary items that have been acquired increases the power of communication and positively supports the language acquisition. While the vocabulary items that are understood by the person when s/he only reads and hears are called *“passive vocabulary wealth”*, all of the vocabulary items used by the person easily while speaking and writing after knowing the meaning are called *“active vocabulary wealth”* (Karakuş, 2000, 128-129).

When the studies conducted in our country are reviewed, teaching Turkish both as a foreign language and mother language, the fact that the basic vocabulary could not be detected according to the levels has caused the assessment stages of the studies to be weak. For this reason, the studies could not go further than examining the situations existent during the teaching of Turkish.

In his study, Barın (2003) mentions the importance of the basic vocabulary in teaching Turkish to the foreigners and he has stated that many studies could be made such as reading books according to the

age group and solving puzzles to develop the knowledge of vocabulary items in the mother language of the individual, but he also has expressed that such kinds of studies are hard to conduct in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. He has attributed the reason of this hardness to the fact that the basic vocabulary has not been determined well in teaching Turkish as a foreign language.

Arslan & Durukan (2014) have analyzed the beginner, intermediate and advanced level books of Hitit Yayinlari from which they have taken samples in their study in which they have examined the elements of vocabulary in the course books.

Ülker (2007), Keskin (2010), Akpınar (2010) have made determinations by assessing the property of Turkish in transfer as a foreign language to be the conveyor of culture with the literary texts, books, idioms and proverbs etc.

In their study in which Özbay, M., Melanlıoğlu, D. (2008) mention the importance of vocabulary knowledge in teaching Turkish as a mother language, they have expressed that which vocabulary items shall be taught to the children in which age group at schools and what the number of these vocabulary items shall be have not been clearly determined and in addition, they have stated the number of the studies conducted on what the personal vocabulary of the students at certain ages are in teaching of mother language and how much of them are active and how much of them are passive is not sufficient. They have emphasized that the improvement of the vocabulary knowledge of the students is necessary and emphasized in Turkish Teaching Program, but there is no information about the issue of which vocabulary items shall be taught and which methods shall be used.

In the study conducted by Demir (2006) related to the personal vocabulary in teaching Turkish as mother language, he has cited that there is no basic vocabulary expected to be gained to the students in Turkish and literature programs and in addition to this, it is behind many countries in abroad in terms of vocabulary in teaching Turkish as a mother language.

Within the scope of the study, it is also known that the studies conducted on the determination of the basic vocabulary in the field of teaching Turkish to the foreigners as well as the frequency count related to the basic vocabulary continue. Frequency count means “*the determination of the vocabulary items mostly needed by the learner*” (Aksan, 1990,19). Within this scope, by looking at the examinations conducted by J.E. Pierce, an index with a wider scope peculiar to the field of teaching Turkish to foreigners out of the frequency system having been realized for Turkish and transferred by Aksan (2003: 21-22) should be formed. Because, teaching of the vocabulary items whose prioritizations have been determined to the student at the first stage shall accelerate the active usage of Turkish and at the same time, it shall ensure the student to rapidly adapt to the environment to which s/he is not acquainted.

The purpose of the study is to conduct frequency counts of these data attained from the written texts as well as determining the personal and active vocabulary by setting off from the texts written by the students themselves at B1-B2 level by Mersin Turkish Application and Research Center constituting the study group. The study is authentic because it is the first sample in the field and it has the aim of shedding light on the next studies.

## Method

The document review method from the qualitative research methods has been used in the study. Document review covers the analysis of the written materials including information about the fact or facts aimed to be studied (Yıldırım ve Şimşek, 2011: 187). In the qualitative study, document review could also be used as a data collection tool all alone. The data of the study have been attained from the written texts of the students at B1-B2 level studying in “Mersin University Turkish Application and Research Center”. Out of the written texts having been examined; a total of 45 texts as 10 within the scope of 1<sup>st</sup> activity, 10 within the scope of 2<sup>nd</sup> activity, 10 within the scope of 3<sup>rd</sup> activity and 15 within the scope of 4<sup>th</sup> activity have been assessed in terms of vocabulary frequency and types of vocabulary items and within this scope, the personal vocabulary of the students have been tried to be determined.

The data attained from the study have been analyzed with the content analysis method. The primary aim in the content analysis is to reach the concepts and relations that could explain the collected data (Yıldırım ve Şimşek, 2011: 227). The vocabulary items written by the students and which are within four separate text group have been classified according to their types and their frequency analysis has been conducted. The data attained as a result of the analyses have been presented in tables.

Table 1

*The number of Written Texts According to the Activity Topics*

Name of Activity	Number of Voc. Items	Number of Texts
1- Narrate a day where your dreams come true.	1007	10
2- Describe a match of a different branch of sports you have watched	745	10
3- Write an essay concerning your opinions on brand enthusiasm	1082	10
4- Imagine that you are an entity other than human and write down your feelings	741	15

In order to be able to obtain data from the essays written by the students, the essays were transferred into computerized environment and the list of raw vocabulary items have been formed according to each headline of topic with Simple Concordance Program 4.07.

## Findings

Within the scope of the study, the headlines of the topics with which the students have been requested to form a written text in different weeks are as follows: “Narrate a day where your dreams come

true. 2- Describe a match of a different branch of sports you have watched 3- Write an essay concerning your opinions on brand enthusiasm 4- Imagine that you are an entity other than human and write down your feelings”. The writing texts formed in a total of 4 different topic headlines have been assessed and both the active and individual vocabulary has been determined. Within this scope, the raw data according to the vocabulary types are shown in the following table.

Table 2

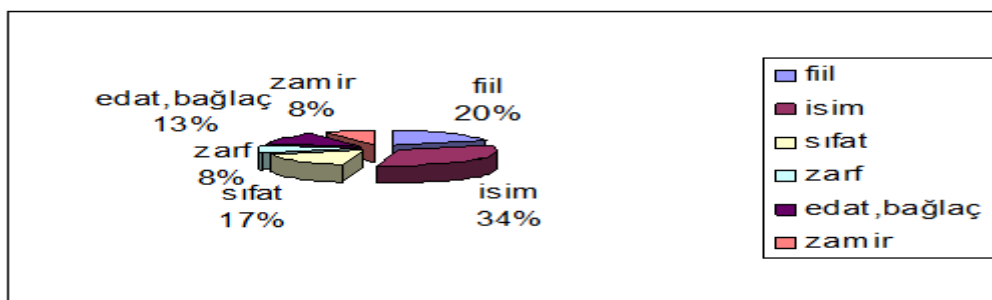
The Raw Data According to the Vocabulary Types and Topics

Vocabulary types	Verb	Noun	Adjective	Adverb	Postposition- conjunction- Exclamation	Pronoun
<b>1.Subject</b>	219	305	171	73	161	78
<b>2. Subject</b>	116	243	165	62	114	45
<b>3. Subject</b>	235	435	151	91	111	59
<b>4. Subject</b>	132	232	133	46	83	115
<b>Total</b>	702	1215	620	272	469	297

When Table 2 is examined, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> topic headline “Write an essay concerning your opinions on brand enthusiasm”, most data have been attained both in the nouns (435) and verbs (235). In the 4<sup>th</sup> topic headline “Imagine that you are an entity other than human and write down your feelings”, less data have been attained with 232 in nouns and 132 in verbs. According to these results, it has been seen that the personal vocabulary primarily changes according to the topics that catch the attention of the students. This situation is also an indicator for the fact that the students meet the vocabulary items they use within their needs in these topic headlines.

Table 3

Percentile of the vocabulary types



In Table 3, when the total data are assessed according to the vocabulary types, while the nouns are mostly used with 34%, the verbs are used with 20% and the adjectives are in the third rank with the ratio of 17%. In this situation, it could be stated that the noun-derived words have a higher ratio when compared to the verbs.

Table 4

*The verbs, nouns and adjectives mostly used in written texts and their frequencies*

Order	Verbs	f	Nouns	f	Adjectives	f
1	Be	82	Human	90	A	125
2	Take	25	Dream	55	Each	59
3	Do	23	Thing	40	Branded	35
4	Want	22	Match	36	This	30
5	Start	19	There is	35	That	30
6	Go	19	Product	32	Important	21
7	Realize	18	Day	31	Some	19
8	Throw	15	Brand	28	good	19
9	Use	14	Time	24	Big	17
10	Study	13	Team	22	Two	12
11	Wear	13	Galatasaray	20	Qualified	12
12	Live	13	Goal	16	None	10
13	Play	12	Life	16	Expensive	10
14	Think	11	Audience	14	Different	9
15	Understand	10	Chelsea	13	All	8
16	finish	10	Friend	12	Second	8
17	Win	10	Minute	12	Many	7
18	Stay	9	Dress	12	Beautiful	7
19	See	8	Player	12	New	7
20	Love	8	World	11	Lots of	6

Within the scope of the study, the frequencies of the vocabulary items have been examined later on and an assessment has been tried to be reached on the personal and active vocabulary of the students. For this reason, the frequencies of the vocabulary items have been determined with the frequency values. The first 20 words according to the frequency values and vocabulary types are given in Table 4.

**Table 5**

**Adverb/Postposition/Conjunction/Pronoun Frequency values**

Order	Adverbs	f	Postposition/ Conjunction	f	Pronoun	f
1	Many	69	And	124	I	134
2	Later	23	For	51	They	29
3	The Most	21	But	45	Everyone	16
4	More	18	Because	34	Himself/ herself	14
5	Good	13	At	30	S/he/It	19

In Table 5, 5 words having the highest frequency value have been determined in terms of the frequency values of adverbs/postpositions/conjunctions and pronouns except for the nouns, adjectives and verbs. “I” (134) having the highest frequency value among the pronouns has taken place in the active vocabulary of the students in the ways it gets the inflexional suffixes. Among the adverbs, “many” (69) having the highest frequency value is from the words actively used by the students. “and” (69) is in the first rank with its frequency value under the headline postpositions and conjunctions. The easiness of usage in the sentence and little problem in perception are important for “and” to take place in the active vocabulary.

Table 6

*Total Non-Recurring Vocabulary Knowledge According to Vocabulary Type*

Vocabulary Type	Net word number
Verbs	140
Nouns	359
Adjectives	127
Adverbs	74
Postpositions-Conjunctions- Exclamations	51
Pronouns	31

In Table 6, the raw data have been processed within the scope of the study. After that, non-recurring vocabulary has been reached and these have been sequenced according to vocabulary types. According to Table 6, the written texts have been assessed within the scope of the study and a total of 782 vocabulary reservoirs of B1-B2 level study group whose active vocabulary has been tried to be

determined and that is non-recurring and actively used have been formed and these consist of 140 verbs, 359 nouns, 127 adjectives, 74 adverbs, 31 pronouns, 51 postpositions-conjunctions-exclamations.

### **Results and Suggestions**

The word ability specified in the European Common Frame Program is the knowledge of vocabulary including the vocabulary of a language and the grammatical elements and the skill to use them. Within the scope of this skill, the parts assessed in the same program are examined in two sections as the fixed expression and basic vocabulary types (Yıldız; 2013). Within the scope of this study, the basic vocabulary types have been assessed by starting from the writing texts of the students. When the data related to this are examined, it has been seen that the students have reached the correct and active usage.

The situation of the students according to their levels related to the use of vocabulary could be followed from the word control table specified in European Common Frame Program. When the explanations such as at B1 level, "While controlling the basic word knowledge very well, s/he makes significant mistakes while expressing the complex ideas or while talking about the topics and situations that is foreign for him/her"; and at B2 level, "the ratio of using correct word is generally high; but, wrong word selection could be made in a way that it shall not prevent the communication" are assessed, it has been seen that within the scope of the study, the students have tried to express themselves with the correct words in the desired topics and they have become successful in this. However, the fact that there have been some kind of mistakes supports the explanations in the control table.

The aim of the study is to assess the active vocabulary of the students at B1-B2 level in teaching Turkish to the foreigners. Within this scope, it has been detected that the students have the properties of B1-B2 level according to the word knowledge and being able to control this information. It has been understood that they have made certain mistakes in the fixed expressions in which they use the vocabulary types actively. When the data in the writing texts related to the active vocabulary of the students are examined, 3575 vocabulary items have been detected as the raw data and when the recurring ones are extracted, 782 words different from one another have been attained. After that, the frequency counts of these vocabulary items have been conducted.

The study sets an example for the studies to be conducted in the future in terms of being the first study in the field of teaching Turkish to the foreigners and it is also important in terms of revealing the deficiencies in the field. The following suggestions are presented for the purpose of being able to form the assessment parts of this study and the studies to be conducted in the future to become stronger:

1-Firstly, in teaching Turkish as a foreign language, the words necessary to be given according to the levels specified in European Common Frame Program should be determined. Needs analysis should be conducted for this and these detections should be assessed by those expert in this field.

2- It should be determined for which purposes the foreigners are learning Turkish; and which words are primary according to the target mass should be determined by the experts.



3- At the first stage, the words taking place in the basic vocabulary determined according to the target mass and their levels should be examined, at the second stage, the frequency values should be examined and the frequency system should be formed. Both systems which have been formed should take place at the end of all course books related to teaching Turkish to the foreigners as a common attachment.

4- Following this, the words taking place in these systems in the contents of the course books being the primary source in vocabulary teaching should be used for the purpose of facilitating the vocabulary learning in different scopes.

Consequently, the realization of the specified suggestions shall lead to more different studies related to the personal and active vocabulary. In this way, the units teaching Turkish as a foreign language shall have the opportunity of reaching a scalable assessment on the personal vocabulary of their students and they shall be more successful in teaching vocabulary items.

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