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DISCOURSE FUNCTIONS OF “BİLMEM” IN TURKISH

Türkçede “Bilmem” İfadesinin Söylem İşlevleri

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Abstract: Pragmatic markers are units of talk that serve a number of purposes in a conversation such as marking the illocutionary force, the commentary on the basic message and its relation to the wider discourse. This study focuses on the Turkish pragmatic marker *bilmem* (lit. I don’t know) and its functions in a conversation. The word was examined through the Turkish National Corpus (TNC). It was found that *bilmem* served the functions of avoiding explicit disagreements and commitment, marking uncertainty, complaining, checking the background knowledge of the listener, directing their attention, speaking of hypotheticals, dismissing excuses and counter-arguments. It is also used as filler and in place of *vb.* (*etc.*) and exact numbers.

Key words: Pragmatic markers, Corpus, Discourse markers.

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Öz: Edimsel belirleyiciler bir konuşmada eyleyici güç, temel iletinin ve onun söylemin geneli ile ilişkisi üzerine yorum yapma gibi birtakım işlevleri olan konuşma birimleridir. Bu çalışmanın konusu Türkçe bir edimsel belirleyici olan *bilmem* sözcüğüdür. Bu çalışmada *bilmem* sözcüğü Türkçe Ulusal Derlemi yardımıyla çözümlenmiş ve sözcüğün net anlaşmazlıklardan kaçınma, kararsızlığı işaretleme, konuşma arasındaki boşlukları doldurma, şikayetlenme, dinleyicinin arkaplan bilgisini ölçme, dinleyicinin dikkatini belli bir yere çekme, olasılıklardan bahsetme ve mazeretleri ve karşı argümanları reddetme işlevlerine sahip olduğu görülmüştür. *Bilmem* aynı zamanda *vb.* ve tamı tamına sayı vermek yerine de kullanılır.

Anahtar sözcükler: *Edimsel belirleyiciler, Derlem, Söylem belirleyicileri.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Pragmatic markers are defined by Schiffrin who, instead, uses the term discourse markers, as “members of a functional class of verbal and non-verbal devices which provide contextual coordinates for the ongoing talk” (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 31). Fraser (1996) defines them as signals that correspond to different types of direct messages a sentence may convey. These devices serve a number of purposes such as marking the illocutionary force, the commentary on the basic message and its relation to the wider discourse.

This study examines the pragmatic marker *bilmem* with respect to its discourse functions. The semantic meaning of *bilmem* is literally *I don't know*. However, the expression gains a whole host of pragmatic functions in a conversation. Some of these functions *bilmem* possesses and others it gains when used to form a phrase with its collocations.

Though there have been many studies in Turkish on discourse markers as will be seen later, *bilmem* and other discourse markers derived from the verb *bil-* (to know) such as *ne bileyim* (lit. *what/how am I supposed to know*) or *bilemedim ki* (lit. *I could not know*) have not yet been studied despite being very commonly used in daily speech. So, this study will serve as a starting point for future studies on these markers. Additionally, this study can also contribute to future studies on Turkish phrases with the data it provides on the phrases formed with *bilmem* and its collocations.

The following section lays out the conceptual framework of this study and reviews previous relevant studies. It is followed by the method section explaining the data collection and analysis processes along with a brief explanation of the Turkish National Corpus (TNC). The conceptual framework section includes the explanation of the concept of face (Goffman, 1967; Brown and Levinson, 1987) in addition to those of pragmatic markers and corpus linguistics. The reason for this is that a good number of *bilmem*'s functions are face-related, as will be seen further into the study. Section 4 consists of the presentation of the study's results and the explanations regarding the functions of *bilmem* and it is followed by the conclusion section which contains the author's final thoughts and the study's potential benefit for future work.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. PRAGMATIC MARKERS

Fraser (1996) defines pragmatic markers as signals that correspond to different types of direct messages a sentence may convey. Pragmatic markers are separate from the propositional content of the sentence and are clues to the speaker's potential communicative intention. Fraser divides pragmatic markers into *basic markers*, *commentary pragmatic markers*, *parallel markers* and *discourse markers*. Basic markers signal the illocutionary force of the sentence such as in “Tell me the answer” or “I promise I will be there on time”. Commentary markers represent that the message is meant to function as a commentary on some aspect of the basic message such as with “Frankly, I think we're lost” or “Reportedly, the game was postponed because of rain”. Parallel markers signal an entire message on top of the basic message such as with titles (Mr. President, what position are you taking today?) or displeasure markers (Get your damned shoes off the table). Finally, there are the discourse markers which express the relation of the basic message to the rest of the ongoing discourse such as with “After all, she was sick” or “Speaking of Marsha, where is she these days?”.

While Fraser (1996) was the first to come up with such a systematic categorization of pragmatic markers, Schiffrin (1987) mentioned them as a separate category and she analysed quite a few of them before him. The major difference between Schiffrin and Fraser's categorizations is that Schiffrin's use of the term *discourse marker* corresponds to Fraser's

pragmatic marker whereas Fraser considered discourse markers a category under pragmatic markers. Schiffrin defined discourse markers as units of talk rather than a more finely defined unit such as a sentence, proposition, speech act or tone unit. They are considered “members of a functional class of verbal and non-verbal devices which provide contextual coordinates for the ongoing talk” (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 41). These markers are also structurally independent, which means their removal from a sentence leaves its structure intact.

In her book, Schiffrin describes the markers *oh*, *well*, *and*, *but*, *or*, *so* and *because*. She explains that *oh* is a marker of information management. It marks shifts in speaker orientation (objective and subjective) to information which occur as speakers and hearers manage the flow of information produced and received during discourse. *Well* anchors its user in a conversational exchange when the options offered through a prior utterance for the coherence of an upcoming response are not precisely followed. *Well* locates a speaker as a respondent to one level of discourse and allows a temporary release from attention to others. *And*, *or* and *but* parallel their grammatical roles as conjunctions. All three of these act as *coordinates*. *And* is used for organizing idea units and allowing the speaker to continue their turn in speech. *But* is also a coordinator, however, it marks an upcoming unit as a contrasting action. *Or* differs from *and* and *but* in that it is more hearer-directed. *And* marks a speaker’s continuation, *but* marks a speaker’s return to a point whereas *or* marks a speaker’s provision of options to the hearer. *So* and *because* are markers of result and cause which may be fact-based or knowledge-based. The temporal adverbs *now* and *then* are markers of discourse time. *Now* marks a speaker’s progression through the discourse and *then* creates a bridge to a prior point in the discourse. *Y’know* is used in situations where the speaker knows that a hearer shares knowledge about a particular piece of information (Schiffrin, 1987, see also recognitional deixis in Enfield, 2003).

2.2. CORPUS LINGUISTICS

Tognini-Bonelli (2001) defines *corpus linguistics* as an empirical method that uses authentic data to describe language use as realised in text(s). The titular *corpus* is what drives this methodology. Originally meaning “body” in Latin, in linguistics, corpus is a term which refers to a collection of texts stored electronically (Hunston, 2002). Instead of relying on intuition or guesswork, a corpus gives a researcher a large

amount of language data on real language use (which could be millions of words) in order to make generalizations (Sinclair, 2003).

The chief tool of analysis in a corpus is *concordance lines* or *concordances*. Also known as *key words in context* (KWIC), concordances are lines of data with the searched *node word* in the middle and a small context of a few words (up to 5 in the Turkish National Corpus) to the left and right-hand side (Stubbs, 2002). This allows examining words with their *collocations*. Stubbs (1995) defines collocations as the habitual co-occurrence between words. The aforementioned words on both sides of the node word constitute its *collocates*. According to Sinclair (1991), collocations illustrate the *idiom principle* which is “that a language user has a number of semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices that appear to be analysable to segments” (Sinclair, 1991, p. 110) i.e. some words seem to frequently co-occur despite there being no grammatical incentive for them to do so. An example to this would be words with strong collocations such as the word *hard* with *hard work*, *hard luck*, *hard facts* and *hard evidence*. Even though each of the words that constitute these phrases are still their own syntactic components, *hard* and its collocates occur together so frequently, practically speaking, the phrases they form might as well be considered compounds. These patterns in which words seem to prefer certain other words with certain semantic features would lead to the coining and study of the concepts of *semantic preference* and *semantic prosody* (Louw, 1993; Sinclair, 1998; Partington, 2004; Hunston 2007) which have been the subject of many a corpus-based research.

2.3. FACE

While it is not part of the study’s main focus, a brief explanation for face as defined by Brown and Levinson (1987) will be given because of its relevance to the face-saving functions of *bilmem*. Brown and Levinson derive the concept of face from Goffman (1967) (Brown and Levinson, 1987). They define face as the image every member of the society wants to claim for themselves. This face manifests as two types: the positive face and the negative face. Positive face is a person’s need to be accepted and appreciated by those they interact with while negative face is their want for independence, individuality and freedom from restrictions.

Brown and Levinson (1987) describe a person’s face as something that is in constant need of attendance. It can be lost, maintained and

enhanced. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), in a given interaction, everyone's faces are in a state of "mutual vulnerability" meaning that one person's face depends on everyone else's being maintained. This is because when their face is threatened, they may have to harm the face of another in order to defend theirs. Thus, it is in the participants' best interest to maintain each others' face. Face is threatened by so-called *face-threatening acts* (FTAs). These FTAs do not necessarily have to be committed with the express intent of harming someone's face but intrinsically threaten the other participant's face nonetheless, such as criticism, interrupting their talk or even making a request since it puts pressure on them to do something, threatening their negative face. In such a situation, where an act committed by a participant constitutes a potential FTA, the participant would attempt to counteract that face damage by giving face to the other person they are interacting with through *redressive action*, while *saving* their own (Brown and Levinson, 1987). This redressive action can take the form of an apology, or a linguistic or non-linguistic deference or any other mechanism to make it clear that no face damage was intended (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

2.4. PREVIOUS STUDIES

Tsui (1991) was the first to analyse the English phrase *I don't know*. She used gathered data from face-to face and telephone conversations, two other corpora that consist respectively of telephone conversations and face-to face conversations, as well as the *Birmingham Collection of English Texts* corpus which also consists of face-to-face conversations. She found that *I don't know* was used for avoiding assessments, prefacing disagreements, avoiding explicit disagreements, avoiding commitment, minimization of impolite beliefs and to mark uncertainty.

Diani (2004) also examined *I don't know* but this time through the COBUILD/Birmingham Spoken Corpus. Using Tsui (1991)'s analysis as a starting point, she further analysed *I don't know*'s functions when it co-occurs with the discourse markers *well, oh, I mean* and *you know*.

Yılmaz (2004) analysed the pragmatic markers (called discourse particles in the study) *yani, işte* and *şey* for their functions from different perspectives. He classified the functions of these markers under three domains: *The conversational domain, the interpersonal domain and the content domain*. Conversational domain contains functions that are related to conversational management such as floor-holding, i.e. signalling the addressee that the speaker is not yet finished, "to initiate

and close conversations and to signal conversational repair” (Yılmaz, 2004, p. 52). The conversational domain functions also include *pause-markers* and *fillers* to buy the speaker time while they plan out how to further their speech. Pragmatic markers in the interpersonal domain are used to express “attitudes, feelings and evaluations” (Yılmaz, 2004, p. 56), as markers of uncertainty and appeals to the hearer for confirmation. Face-saving, politeness and indirectness also fall under this domain (Bazzanella 1990, as cited in Yılmaz 2004). Content domain is related to the coherence of the conversation. Markers under the contain domain function on both the local level, helping the hearer understand the topic at hand and at the global level, making transitions between different topics.

Uçar (2005) analysed the discourse marker *işte* through recordings taken from radio, television and telephone and casual conversations. She analysed *işte*’s functions in three categories in accordance with its placement in the sentence; sentence-initial, mid-sentence and sentence-final positions.

Corcu (2006) examined the Turkish discourse markers *zaten* and *ya* and their relation to the information structure of an utterance. She found that these two markers have functions related to an utterance’s informational structure such as topic introduction, external topic shift and contrasting. Thus, she concluded that discourse markers are closely related to an utterance’s informational structure.

Ruhi (2013a) proposes the use of the term *interactional marker* to include, along with pragmatic markers, non-lexical devices such as laughter or gestures and prosodic features that may signal affective and social meanings. Ruhi (2013b) examined the functions of the interactional marker *tamam* using the Spoken Turkish Corpus (STC). She also compared it to *peki* in terms of their role in relational management. She found that *tamam* was used much more frequently than *peki* and attributes this to the changing culture and concept of politeness.

Adıgüzel (2015) examined the discourse functions of *hele*, its collocational patterns, semantic prosody and preference using the TNC. As will be seen with *bilmem*, *hele* serves many different functions depending on its collocations in a given utterance.

Baş (2021) examined *pardon* (lit. *I’m sorry*), also using the TNC and did a frequency analysis on its functions and found that the word occurred much more as a discourse marker than as an apology.

Finally, Adıgüzel (2023) examined the functional spectrum *ya* using the TNC. He found that *ya* could take on different functions depending on its position in the utterance, collocations and the speaker's intonation.

Diani (2004), with inspired this study with the choice of the pragmatic marker as *bilmem* closely resembles *I don't know* in its semantic meaning. It and the rest of the studies provided insight for the methodology for a corpus-based research. The review of the existing literature revealed that while studies on pragmatic markers are plentiful in both the foreign and domestic literature, *bilmem* has never been studied before. This study seeks to lay out the functional spectrum of *bilmem* which the author believes will be a valuable contribution to the existing literature due to just how varied *bilmem*'s functions are, particularly with its collocational phrases as will be seen in section 4.

3. METHOD

This is a qualitative study, done using the Turkish National Corpus (TNC), a balanced, synchronic corpus of modern Turkish that contains approximately 50 million words from written and verbal texts belonging to various different fields. Encompassing a 24-year period from 1990-2013, TNC is the primary point of reference when it comes to the modern Turkish language as spoken in Turkey. The word *bilmem* was searched in the TNC using the standard search function under the "basic query" section which contains all of the written and spoken texts in the corpus database; with a window span of 5 words to the left and 5 words to the right which is the widest possible window span. There was no limitation set on the *year of publication* (origin. *yayın yılı*), meaning all texts from 1990 to 2013 that featured *bilmem* were included. The query resulted in 2857 concordance lines, 355 of which were verbal texts, while the rest 2502 were written. A list of the concordances were then downloaded in the .xlsx (Microsoft Excel Table) file format. After discarding the duplicate lines and unrelated homographs, the remaining concordances amounted to 2792, with 269 of them being verbal texts and the remaining 2523 were written. These were examined with regards to the context of the node word within the concordance line or the larger co-text when needed to determine the pragmatic function of *bilmem* when used on its own and along with its collocations. Intercoders were also employed as needed.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section begins with the examination of *bilmem*'s functions when used on its own and later move on to its functions when it is used to form phrases with its collocations.

4.1. *BİLMEM* ON ITS OWN

On its own, *bilmem*'s functions all seem to be face-related. What is interesting is that *bilmem* can be used to both save and threaten face as it can be used to avoid explicit disagreement and to avoid a definitive answer but also to shut down the addressee's attempts to initiate a meaningful exchange of information by making it clear that they are not welcome. In (1), the second speaker challenges the proposition that babies with a blue line crossing between their brows are boys by bringing up their older sister, causing an FTA but softens the disagreement with “*I don't know but my sister also had a vein between her brows*”. In (2), the speaker does not want to answer Sinan's question (the reason for this is unclear from the text present in the corpus) and so Sinan tries to avoid giving an actual answer by saying that he lacks the necessary knowledge about the subject to discuss it. In (3), the speaker all but performs a bald FTA. Similar to (2), the speaker does not want to answer the speaker's question so her answers are short and uninformative, meant to quickly put end to the conversation and get rid of the addressor, making it a face attack:

- (1) "A aaa! Kız bunun arkası oğlan. Baksana belcesinde masmavi damar var."

Nesibe, “*Bilmem* ki, ablamın da iki kaşının arası damarlıymış ama ondan sonra anam beni doğurmuş.” [TNC: W-SA16B2A-1070-1047]

(Hey! Sweetie this is a boy that's coming. Look, he has a vein in between his brows. Nesibe (says), “*I don't know*, my sister also had a vein between her brows but then my mum had me.)

- (2) “...Bütün aşklar er ya da geç aynı sonla yüzleşmek zorunda kalmazlar mı?” Sinan'ın dikkatle yüzüme bakmasından, sorunun bana yöneltilmiş olduğunu sanıyorum. “*Bilmem*, aşk konusunda ne yeterli bilgiye ne de deneyime sahibim” diyorum. “Sözün gelişi sordum zaten” diyor Sinan, içimden benden kuşkulandı mı diye geçirirken o sözlerini sürdürüyor. [TNC: W-SA16B4A-0047-1625]

(“...Doesn’t every love come to an end? From Sinan’s careful look at my face, I assumed that the question was directed at me. I say “*I don’t know*, I have neither the sufficient knowledge, nor the experience on the subject of love”). “I’m just saying” says Sinan. And while thinking about whether or not he suspected anything, he continues on.”)

- (3) Çaldım kapıyı. Yaşlı bir kadın çıktı. "Hakkı Gündüz burada mı oturuyor?" "Burada oturur." "Evde mi?" "Yok." "Nerede bulabilirim?" "*Bilmem*. Ya iştedir, ya kahvede." "Sakat değil mi kendisi? Almanya'da çalışmadı mı?" "Çalıştı. Sakat da. Para bağlamadılar kardeş." "Sakatlığı ne?" "Sinir." "Peki... Biz sonra geliriz." [TNC: W-TI19E1A-4044-2002]

(I knocked on the door. An old woman showed up. “Does Hakkı Gündüz live here?” “He lives here.” “Is he home?” “No.” “Where can I find him?” “*I don’t know*. He is either at work or at the cafe.” “Isn’t he injured? Didn’t he use to work in Germany?” “He did. And he is injured. They didn’t pay him, buddy.” “What is his injury?” “Annoyance.” “Okay... We’ll come back later.”)

Bilmem is used as a displeasure marker for complaining. In (4), the speaker is complaining about having to deal with people making a mess in her shop just as she was getting used to there being a small amount of work. In (5), the speaker is complaining about their tendency to make promises they cannot keep:

- (4) “Her kitap alışımızda, "Artık çocuklar kitap okumuyor, dükkân da dağılmıyor derken siz nereden çıktınız *bilmem*." diye söyleniyor.” [TNC: W-TI19E1A-4044-942]

(Everytime we were shopping for a book she would grumble “Just when I was saying children don’t read anymore and the shop doesn’t get messy and I don’t know where you popped out!”)

- (5) “Ya ben niye böyle sözler veriyorum *bilmem ki*.” [TNC: W-VI45F1D-4788-918]

(*I don’t know* why I even make such promises.)

Bilmem can also be merely acting as filler. In (6), the expression serves no purpose since the speaker has the necessary information:

- (6) "Sen ne yapıyorsun şimdi?" "*Bilmem*... Sahildeyim... [W-RA16B4A-0885-2318]

(“What are you doing right now?” “*I don’t know*... I’m at the beach...”)

Bilmem can also be used to express the speaker’s avoidance of certain things as in (7) and (8):

- (7) “Bakın ben sigara, içki, uyuşturucu, kumar *bilmem*.” [S-ADBBAo-0443-180]
[lit. Look, *I don’t know* (I have nothing to do with, avoid) smoking, drinking and gambling.]
- (8) “Yalan nedir, hiç *bilmem*. Doğruyu söyler dilim” [W-TI22E1B-2913-2322]
(lit. *I don’t know* at all what lying is. My tongue speaks the truth.)

4.2. *BİLMEM* AND ITS COLLOCATIONS

Up to this point, the cases in which *bilmem* was used alone have been presented. However, in addition to these, *bilmem* has several more functions when certain phrases are formed with it.

4.2.1. *BİLMEM* Mİ (DON’T I KNOW IT?)

The phrase *bilmem mi* is formed with the word *bilmem* and the question marker *mi*. It functions as a rhetorical question signaling that the speaker is very much in the know of the subject in question:

- (9) “Puşt” diye söylendim, “günahı kadar sevmezdi Arifi.” “*Bilmem mi ya*” dedi Erol, “senin gibi Arif’in de ayağını kaydırmaya çalışıyordu orospu çocuğu. [W-OA16B3A-0043-1803]
 (“Prick”, I said to myself, “he hated Arif like his sin” “*Don’t I know*” said Erol, “the son of a bitch tried to spike Arif’s guns like he did to you.”)
- (10) “Şimdiki gençler dert dağıtmak için yok Bodrum, yok Antalya, oralara gidiyorlar. Yurt dışına bile gidenler var. Ben *bilmem mi*... Pek çok arkadaşımın torunu böyle yapıyor.” [W-QA16B4A-0299-613]
(Young people go to places like Bodrum and Antalya nowadays. There are even those that go abroad. *Don’t I know* it... A lot my friends’ grandchilderen do so.)

4.2.2. *BİLMEM* + X + QUESTION MARKER/X + QUESTION MARKER + *BİLMEM* PHRASES

4.2.1.1 *BİLMEM ANLATABİL-* (I DON'T KNOW IF I (AUX) ABLE TO EXPLAIN...)

Using the expression *Bilmem anlatabildim mi/anlatabiliyor muyum?* [*I don't know if I was clear*, lit. *I don't know if I was/am able to explain (it)*] the speaker makes themselves responsible for the listener to understand the information. This is another face-related function of *bilmem* as the speaker avoids faulting the addressee in an event of misunderstanding, thereby avoiding a potential FTA. This can be seen especially in utterances such as (11). Also, by including a question at the end, they are also engaging the listener, keeping them active in the conversation:

- (11) Herkesin kafası işler işlemesine ama, maksat kafayı işletirken küpü doldurmayı da bilmek. *Bilmem anlatabildim mi?..* [TNC: W-EA16B3A-1146-2490]
 (lit. Everyone's head (i.e. mind) functions of course but what is important is to know to fill the cup (i.e. mind) while keeping the head functioning. *I don't know if I was clear.*)
- (12) Yani bu sistemi insanlar, kendi kendilerine öznel bir deneyimle, bir yaşantı ile temellük ederler, bu beni ilgilendirmiyor. *Bilmem anlatabiliyor muyum?* [TNC: W-PG37C3A-1420-738]
 (lit. So the people appropriate this system with an experience, a living all of their own. *I don't know if I was clear.*)

4.2.1.2. *BİLMEM FARKINDA MI-* (I DON'T KNOW IF (PRONOUN) NOTICED)

Bilmem farkında mı-? is a way to direct the listener's attention such as in (13) where the speaker attempts to get the listeners to pay attention to a certain fact. It may also act as a reprimand as in (14) where the speaker is blaming the listener of being unaware of their mistake:

- (13) ... *Bilmem farkında mısınız?* Facebook, Myspace gibi uluslararası sosyal medyalarda Türkler, ya ikinci ya da üçüncü sıradalar. [TNC: W-VI45F1D-4720-1196]
 (*I don't know if you've noticed*, on international social media such as Facebook and MySpace, Turks are in second or third place (in usage).)

- (14) ...Yaptığınız büyük hatanın *bilmem farkında mısınız?*... [TNC: W-HE39C4A-1359-2127]
(*I don't know if you've noticed the grave mistake you have made...*)

4.1.2.3 BİLMEM FOR CHECKING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Bilmem anımsa-/izle-/bil etc.-X-misin? (*I don't know if you remember/follow/know*) are used to check the background knowledge of the listener. In (15), the speaker checks whether or not the listener remembers the past event in question. In (16), the speaker checks if the listener is aware of a certain source of information regarding the topic at hand and in (17), the speaker relates a piece of information that they think the other person may not be aware of. Also, the following response from the other speaker shows that it can also be used to initiate a conversation:

- (15) Bir keresinde de Londra'dan apar topar Sarıkamış'a gitmem gerekmişti yıllar önce... Bilmem anımsıyor musun... Yoksa birlikte değil miydik o zaman? [TNC: W-FA16B2A-0998-1049]
(Once, years ago, I had to go to Sarıkamış in a hurry... *I don't know if you remember...* Or were we not together then?)
- (16) Yeni A dergisinin son iki sayısında çok özlü örnekler vardı, *bilmem izliyor musunuz?* [TNC: W-JE39C2A-0422-109]
(I mean, the A magazine had very succinct examples, *I'm not sure if you follow it.*)
- (17) *Bilmem bilir misin* Çetin, seni çok severdi. Ben de onu severdim Selçuk, ne mert kızdı. Nereden karıştı bu işlere? [TNC: W-JA16B4A-0347-2273]
(*I don't know if you know* Çetin but (he) loved you very much. I loved her too, Selçuk. What a brave girl she was... How did she get involved in these things?)

4.2.1.4 BİLMEM GEREK VAR MI? (I DON'T KNOW IF IT'S NECESSARY TO..)

Bilmem gerek var mı? is a rhetorical question used to emphasize the speaker's message. Here, instead of avoiding a potential FTA, the speaker uses *bilmem gerek var mı* to indicate that the point is so obvious, it is actually not even necessary to bring it up as can be seen in (18) and (19):

- (18) Otele ulaştığımızda, ne durumda olduğumuzu *bilmem* anlatmama gerek var mı?" [TNC: W-EA16B2A-1205-1333]
(lit. *I don't know if it's necessary to tell you about the state we were in when we made it to the hotel.*)
- (19) "*Bilmem*, saptamalarımı tartışmaya hazır olduğumu eklememe gerek var mı?" [TNC: W-MI37E1B-3057-1796]
(lit. *I don't know if it's necessary to add that I'm ready to discuss my findings.*)

4.2.1.5. STATING GUESSES AND MARKING NON-COMMITMENT

The *Bilmem* + X + QM/X + QM + *Bilmem* pattern also functions as a marker of non-commitment which makes it clear that the speaker is stating a possibility and not a certain fact:

- (20) "Havadan mıdır *bilmem*, yorgun ve bitkin hissediyordum." [TNC: W-TA16B4A-0910-740]
(lit. *I don't know if it's the weather but I feel tired and exhausted.*)
- (21) "Türkiye Genelkurmay Başkanı Orgeneral Necip Torumtay, BAE'yi ziyaret etti. Aynı Dubai Şeyhinin davetlisi olarak. *Bilmem*, merkezi Dubai'de olan "Emirates" hava yollarının işlerini mi konuştular?" [TNC: W-EE09C3A-3304-1930]
(lit. Chief of the Turkish General Staff Full General Necip Torumtay visited the UAE. As the invited guest of the self-same city of Dubai. *I don't know if they talked about the matters regarding the "Emirates" Airlines?*)

4.2.2. *BİLMEM NE DER-/DİYOR/DÜŞÜNÜR/DÜŞÜNÜYOR* [I DON'T KNOW WHAT (PRONOUN) WOULD SAY/WHAT (PRONOUN) THINK]

Bilmem (pronoun) *ne der-* and *I don't know what* is another way to avoid commitment. As can be seen in the examples below, the speaker uses the phrase *bilmem ne der* as a hedge, i.e. a softening mechanism for the proposition:

- (22) "Ben daha çok mantığın rehber olduğu aşktan yanayım. *Bilmem, ne dersiniz?*"
(lit. I'd rather love guided by logic, *I don't know what you'd say*) [TNC: W-RI22C3A-0520-2329]

- (23) “...bu ilk ıslama suyunun dökülmesi ile tohumdan gereksiz yere uzaklaştırılmış oluyor. *Bilmem siz ne dersiniz?* “
 (lit. With this first wetting water, (X) is needlessly driven away from the seed. *I don't know what you'd say.*) [TNC: W-SI44F1D-5101-914]
- (24) Sen ne düşünürsün *bilmem*, ama bence, ben çok uygar buldum.
 [W-FD03A4A-0255-1357]
 [*I don't know what you think* but me, I found (it) to be very civilized.]
- (25) Daha doğrusu ben öyle sanıyorum. *Bilmem* siz bu konuda ne düşünüyorsunuz?
 [Or rather, it's my opinion. *I don't know what you think* (I want to know you thoughts) on this subject?]

4.2.3. BİLMEM + INTERROGATIVE PRONOUN

Bilmem can be used instead of *vb.* (lit. *etc.*) as seen in (28) and unknown or hypothetical people or things with the words *kim* (*who*) and *ne* (*what*). The speaker can use the resulting recognitional deixis (see Enfield, 2003) instead of giving specific details such as with (26), (27) and (28). These two examples also illustrate that the speaker may use *bilmem kim* (lit. *I don't know who*) and *bilmem ne* (lit. *I don't know what*) when they feel that the details are unimportant. This is also true for other constructions where *bilmem* co-occurs with a question word or phrase such as *bilmem kaç* (lit. *I don't know how many*) as seen in (27), *bilmem nere-* (lit. *...I don't know where...*) in (30) and *bilmem ne kadar* (lit. *I don't know how much*) in (28). Also, in (25), *bilmem ne* is used like the recognitional deixis *You-know-what* in English (as defined by Enfield, 2003) in that the speaker deliberately avoids saying something and they and the listener know (Enfield, 2003), though in the case of (25), the reason for avoidance is that the actual expression is considered vulgar. (26) also illustrates another function of *bilmem kaç* which is to convey the magnitude of the situation i.e. whatever the number is, it is very high or even too high. For instance, in (26), *bilmem kaç* is used to convey the absurd lengths the person went to in order to get a cigarette:

- (26) Sonunda da seçilebilen *bilmem kimin* ekibi ya da adamı diye tanımlandırılır. [TNC: W-ID37C3A-1061-1105]
 (And the person elected is described as the team or man of whoever.)

- (27) Biz milletin *bilmem neresindeki* kazığı çıkarmaya çalışırken...
[TNC: W-DH42C2A-0980-925]
(While we are trying to remove the stick up the nation's *I don't know where* (i.e. *wherever*) ...)
- (28) Şimdi Romanya desen, Romanya'da *bilmem ne* ekolü vardır, bu işler oradan sorulur denir. [TNC: W-NE09C0A-0260-464]
(Now you say Romania and someone will say there is the *whatchamacallit* school in Romania.)
- (29) İşte böyle bir köye, *bilmem nereden* göçmüş birkaç aile iskan edilir. [TNC: W-SI22C4A-0822-147]
(And so, a few families were brought in *from I don't know where*) to settle in such a village.
- (30) İçinde *bilmem ne kadar* vitamin olan bu zımbırtıyı yerseniz...
[TNC: W-UI22C1A-0430-1575]
(If you eat this thingamajig with *I don't know many* vitamins...)

4.2.4. PRONOUN + *BİLMEM*

4.2.4.1. BEN *BİLMEM* (LIT. I DON'T KNOW BUT WITH THE EMPHASIS ON I, I.E. I DON'T CARE)

Ben bilmem is a phrase that functions as a dismissal, signaling that the speaker does not care about what the addressee has to say as seen in (31) and (32):

- (31) "KARAGÖZ: Vay vay vay... Açık göz'üm, başbekçim amirim, özür dilerim, bi bi bilmiyordum yahu.
HASO: Ben *bilmem* bilmiyordum, yürü." [TNC: W-TA14B1A-1590-1183]
(lit. KARAGÖZ: Well, well, well, my Açık göz, my chief watchman, my commander, I'm sorry, I-I didn't know, I'm telling you.
HASO: *I don't know* (care) that you didn't know, move.)
- (32) "Yaa baba... Öğrenci İşleri yapıyor o işi dedim ya kaç kere. Allah A)llaaah?" "Ben *bilmem*, söylüyorum. 'Asker kaçığımı arıyoruz' diye gelmesin de kapıya polisler. [TNC: W-QA16B2A-1435-513]

(*lit.* But daad... I’ve told you a bunch of times that the Student Affairs handles that, my God... I don’t know, I’m just saying that there better not be any police ending up at our door saying ‘There’s a draft dodger’.)

4.2.4.2. *SENİ/SİZİ/BİLMEM* (+AMA) (I DON’T KNOW ABOUT YOU + BUT...)

Seni/sizi/onu bilmem is a pattern that occurs at the start of an utterance and seems to serve the function of appealing to the positive face of the addressee. The pattern is almost always followed by the conjunction *ama* and then the statement of an idea or opinion. By starting the utterance with *seni/sizi bilmem (ama)*, the speaker signals that they are open to contribution from the addressee, appealing to their positive face (33, 34):

(33) “*Seni bilmem ama bu okuduklarım bana çok ilginç geliyor.*”
[TNC: W-GA16B2A-0460-1490]

(*I don’t know about you but these things that I’ve read sound very interesting to me.*)

(34) “*Sizi bilmem ama bana burada emperyalizm, piyasa paylaşımı ve hegemonya gibi kavramları içeren bir paradigmayla karşı karşıyayız gibi geliyor.*” [TNC: W-MI39C3A-1951-1946]

(*I don’t know about you but it seems to me that we’re up against a paradigm that involves concepts such as imperialism, market sharing and hegemony.*)

4.2.4.1 *ONU BUNU BİLMEM* (LIT. I DON’T KNOW ABOUT THIS OR THAT I.E. I DON’T CARE)

Finally, *onu bunu bilmem* is used to dismiss excuses and counter-arguments as can be seen below where in both the sentences, the speaker “does not care about this or that”, meaning they will not be dissuaded by anything the other person might say:

(35) Ben *onu bunu bilmem*. Bu evde gereksiz para harcanyor.
[TNC: W-KA16B4A-0470-1886]

(36) (*lit. I don’t care about this or that*, people are wasting money in this house.)

Ben *onu bunu bilmem* hanım, kendi okulumdaki bir öğrenciye ders veremem o kadar. [TNC: W-SA14B1A-1586-394]

(*lit. I don’t care about this or that wife*, I cannot give (private) lessons to a student from my own school and that is final.)

4.2.5. *BİLMEM... BİLMEM*

Bilmem... *Bilmem* is also used to mark uncertainty, however, structurally, it acts as a conjunction can be seen in (37) and (38):

- (37) “Hop, elimle ağzımı kapatıverdim, *bilmem* mutluluktan kapattım, *bilmem* korkudan.” [W-FA16B2A-0578-1764]
(And just like that, I closed my mouth, could have been hapiness, could have been fear.)
- (38) “İddianame dosyasının” birinci sayfasına bir göz attı: *Bilmem* beğendi *bilmem* beğenmedi, ama “Çok güzel” dedi.” [W-ND39C4A-1760-1919]
(He took a look at the first page of the “Indictment case”. Maybe he liked it maybe didn’t but he said “Very good”.)

4.2.6 MARKING CONFUSION AND DESPAIR WITH *BİLMEM(Kİ)*

Bilmem can be used to mark the speaker’s confusion and despair (39, 40). While not necessary the pattern *bilmem ki* occurs in almost half of the concordances that contain the despair function:

- (39) “Of ayy ay Allahım yarabbim bu aşırı o zaman içiyo be teyzecim. Bu kadar yani kendi vücudunu mahvediyor gencecik. Ne gerek var yani nası edecez *bilmem*.” [S-BEABXA-0145-126]
(My God, auntie, this guy drinks so much. So much, I mean he is ruining his body in his young age. What’s the point, I mean, *I don’t know* what we’re going to do”.)
- (40) “Askerlik meselesi de var. *Bilmem ki* şimdi ne yapsam?” [W-RI22C3A-0520-258]
(There is also the issue of military service. *I don’t know* what I’m supposed to do now.)

The phrases formed with *bilmem* are summarised below as follows along with the frequencies and functions of the *bilmem* phrases:

Table 1. The frequency of *Bilmem* collocational phrases

Patterns	Frequency	Functions
<i>Bilmem</i> + Verb + QM/Verb + QM + <i>Bilmem</i> (anımsa-, anlat-, yanıl-, başla-, sez-, inan-, yanıl-, fark et-, fakında mı-, dikkat et/çek, izle-)	60	Checking the background knowledge, engaging the addressee, mitigating action, directing attention, reprimand
<i>Bilmem</i> + QM (bilmem mi)	9	Signaling awareness of the subject
<i>Bilmem</i> gerek var mı?	9	Emphasizing importance
<i>Bilmem</i> + Verb + Interrogative/Interrogative + Verb + <i>Bilmem</i>	9	Hedge
<i>Bilmem</i> + Interrogative pronouns (ne, kim, kaç etc.)	873	Recognitional deixis
Pronoun + <i>bilmem</i> (ben bilmem, seni/sizi bilmem, onu bunu bilmem)	39	Appeal to positive face, dismissal

Table 2 includes the results of the frequency analysis per function:

Table 2. The frequency of *Bilmem*’s pragmatic functions

Function	Frequency	Pattern
Appeal to positive face	2	<i>Pronoun + Bilmem (Seni/Sizi bilmem)</i>
Avoidance	11	<i>Bilmem</i>
Avoiding explicit disagreement	7	<i>Bilmem</i>
Avoiding a definitive answer	19	<i>Bilmem</i>
Avoiding FTA	30	<i>Bilmem</i>
Checking background knowledge	72	<i>Bilmem</i> + Verb + QM (<i>Bilmem</i> anımsa-, tanı- etc.)
Complaining	31	<i>Bilmem</i>
Directing attention	9	<i>Bilmem</i> + Verb + QM (<i>Bilmem</i> fark et-, fakında mı-, dikkat et/çek)
Dismissal	37	<i>Bilmem</i> , Pronoun + <i>bilmem</i> (<i>Ben bilmem, onu bunu bilmem</i>)

Engaging the addressee	111	<i>Bilmem</i> + Verb + QM (<i>Bilmem</i> fark et-, fakında mı-, dikkat et/çek)
Filler	13	<i>Bilmem</i>
Giving examples	35	<i>Bilmem</i>
Hedge	9	<i>Bilmem</i> + Verb + Interrogative/Interrogative + Verb + <i>Bilmem</i> (<i>Bilmem ne der-/diyor-/düşünüyor-</i>)
Mitigating action	34	<i>Bilmem</i>
Recognitional deixis	873	<i>Bilmem</i> + Interrogative pronouns (ne, kim, kaç etc.)
Signalling awareness of the subject	9	<i>Bilmem</i> + QM (<i>bilmem mi</i>)

5. CONCLUSION

This study was a corpus-based analysis of the Turkish pragmatic marker *bilmem*. The word was examined with regards to its pragmatic functions through the TNC. It was found that *bilmem*, when used on its own, serves mainly face-related functions of avoiding explicit disagreement, definitive answers and to perform explicit face attacks and as a displeasure marker. However, it can also be used as a filler or when expressing confusion and despair. When used with its collocations, it gains the additional discourse functions of checking the addressee's background knowledge, directing the addressee's attention, signalling the speaker's awareness of the subject at hand and emphasizing the importance of the object of discussion. Additionally, it can be used as a conjunction through the *bilmem... bilmem...* pattern. *Bilmem* also gains new face-related functions of dismissal, reprimand and appealing to the addressee's positive face and hedging. As stated in section 4, *bilmem* is interesting in that it serves contradictory face functions simultaneously. It can be used as a hedge but also to dismiss the other participant's proposals or counterarguments. It can be used to soften disagreements and save face but also as a reprimand that threatens the face of the addressee. This could be compared with a pragmatic marker of similar meaning from other languages such as I don't know in English to see if this phenomenon is unique to *bilmem* or if expressions of similar or identical semantic meaning function similarly in a conversation. It was also found that *bilmem* does not function only as a pragmatic marker but also as a recognitional deixis which is entirely contradictory to its

semantic meaning which denotes a lack of information since, as mentioned earlier in section 4, recognitional deixis point to possession of information.

For future studies, other discourse markers with the same literal meaning could be analysed. *Bilmiyorum* (lit. I don't know) could be examined and later compared to *bilmem* for its similarities and differences in function, their frequency of use for a given function and whether their grammatical features have anything to do with these differences. Such a comparative frequency analysis could shed light on the native speaker preferences when choosing between *bilmem* and *bilmiyorum* for a shared function. There are also *ne bileyim* (lit. what should I know) and *nereden bileyim* (lit. from where should I know) which are also frequently used discourse markers in daily speech that could be analysed. Future studies on Turkish phrases may also generally benefit from the data and the analysis provided in this study.

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List of abbreviations

TNC- Turkish National Corpus
lit. - literally