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# Classical Turkish Literature and Corpus Linguistics: A Case Study on Darir's Poems\*

Klasik Türk Edebiyatı ve Derlembilim:

Darir'in Şiirleri Üzerine Örnek Durum Analizi

## ABSTRACT

Historical corpora, the topic of this paper, is one of the research areas in corpus linguistics. In this paper, I will attempt to apply corpus linguistics to analyze the poems of Darir, in order to find his authorship fingerprints and identify his literary style. Darir is a poet who lived during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Siretü'n-Nebi is his major work which narrates Prophet Muhammad's life. His other works include Fütuhu's-Şam, Yüz Hadis Yüz Hikaye and Kissa-i Yusuf. However, recent publications have shown that the content of Yüz Hadis Yüz Hikaye is very similar to another book titled Ferahname written by Hatiboğlu Muhammed. Similarly, another recent study has proved that Kissa-i Yusuf does not belong to him but to Yusuf-ı Meddah. This study aims to compare his other poems with Kissa-i Yusuf in regard to word usage and detect the authorship. The result showed that original authorship can be traced by comparing the word frequency of the original and non-original works.

## KEY WORDS

Corpus linguistics, classical Turkish literature, Islamic literature, Ottoman poetry, Erzurumlu Mustafa Darir.

## ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın konusunu oluşturan tariht derlembilim, derlembilimin araştırma alanlarından biridir. Bu çalışmada derlembilim, XIV. Yüzyıl şairlerinden Darir'in şiirlerini analiz etmek ve böylelikle onun edebî tarzını ve şairliğinin kendine özgü yansımalarını aydınlatmak için kullanılacaktır. Darir, XIV. yüzyılda yaşamış bir şairdir. Onun en önemli eseri Hz. Muhammed'in hayatını anlattığı Siretü'n-Nebi'sidir. Şairin ayrıca Fütuhu's-Şam, Yüz Hadis Yüz Hikaye and Kissa-i Yusuf adlı eserleri de vardır. Bununla birlikte son arařtırmalar Darir'e ait olduğu düşünölen Yüz Hadis Yüz Hikaye'nin Hatiboğlu Muhammed'in Ferahâme'si ile çok büyük benzerlikler bulunduğunu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bir başka çalışma ise Kissa-i Yusuf'un Darir'e değil, Yusuf-ı Meddâh'a ait olduğunu ispatlamıştır. Bu makale, Kissa-i Yusuf'un Darir'e ait olup olmadığını anlamak için, şairin diğer şiirlerinde kullandığı kelimeleri Kissa-i Yusuf'ta kullanılan kelimelerle karşılařtırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Derlembilim temelli arařtırma sonucunda, Darir'e aidiyeti kesin olan şiirlerdeki kelimeler, ona ait olmadığı kesinleşen diğer şiirlerde kullanılan kelimelerle karşılařtırıldığında, Darir'in yazarlığının izlerine rastlanabileceği gözlenmiştir.

## ANAHTAR KELİMELEER

Derlembilim, Klasik Türk edebiyatı, İslamî edebiyat, Osmanlı şiiri, Erzurumlu Mustafa Darir.

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## 1. Introduction

Corpus linguistics methods have been applied to literature recently. However, there are a number of differences between literary corpus and corpus linguistics. Lüdeling and Zeldes (2008: 1-16) point out several of them. First, a literary corpus focuses on particular texts. For this reason, “making predictions outside of the corpus for a new input” is not possible. Secondly, because they also use non-standard language such as dialect corpora, standardisation is a problem for linguists. Moreover, literary corpora are unique and not “interchangeable with other comparable corpora in the same language”. Furthermore, a literary corpus is closed; it is not possible to add new data to it.

Using quantitative data for literary analysis is a relatively new approach. However, using quantitative data does not mean that qualitative data should be neglected. Balossi, who conducted a study on Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*, states, “quantitative methods, such as word frequencies, provide a global insight into the linguistic or stylistic features of a text and help identify those worth considering in greater depth through qualitative methods” (2014: 51). Carter also argues that, “corpus stylistic analysis is a relatively objective methodological procedure that at its best is guided by a relatively subjective process of interpretation” (2010: 67).

It is a fact that quantitative and qualitative methods should be used together for more accurate results. Corpus studies of a literary work can especially reveal “less obvious” and “less observable” features (Culpeper 2009: 53), which I also personally observed in this study. Even though my doctoral thesis was on Darir and I read all his works repeatedly, I didn’t recognise many of his commonly used words before carrying out a corpus analysis.

The researcher should be aware of the fact that using only corpus data might misguide the literary researcher, since different texts have different content and vocabulary which makes them unique. Moreover, the volume of the literary book is important. Furthermore, comparing only the number of words can misguide the researcher; specific words should be chosen for comparison. For example, Burrow (1987), in his work

on Jane Austen's novels, states that function words are the best indicators of authorial style. Words that are not directly related to the content might also help the researchers to define the poet's literary style.

## 2. Literature Review

There are many literature-focused corpus studies, especially in English. Some studies focus on the relationship between lexical diversity and genre (e.g. Sotov 2009, Moskowicz 2017), while others focus on literary influence between authors (e.g. Ruano 2017) or only one author's literary style (e.g. Lorenzo 2016, Balossi 2014) or one book (e.g. Culpeper 2009). An interesting study in this area was conducted by Arthur M. Jacobs. Jacobs (2018) used the Gutenberg English Poetry Project corpus, which contains over 100 poetic texts from about 50 authors, for his neurocognitive poetics study.

There are also several studies about how to detect unique authorial fingerprints using a corpus. One of the recent studies was conducted by Burrows, who suggested using DELTA, which he developed to measure stylistic differences and guide researchers to the likely authorship (Burrows 2002). Hoover also used it for his study on Henry James (Hoover 2014). In addition to authorship research, forensic linguistics use computational methods to identify the author; however, they focus on no more than two or three texts, and these are typically no more than a few hundred words in length (Olsson 2008: 23).

Unfortunately, there is only a small number of studies carried out in regard to corpus-based literary analysis in Turkey. For example, only two theses focus on children's literature (Bulundu 2016, Gündoğdu 2012), and one article focuses on a nationalist book written in 1956 (Sis & Bulundu 2017).

## 3. Purpose and Methodology

Darir, a poet from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, was blind since his birth as we understand from his works. Because he was blind, he used the pseudonyms "Darir", "Dariri" and "Gözsüz" (blind). He travelled to

Anatolia, Egypt and Syria. According to literary history books (Kocatürk 1970, İz & Kut 1985, Banarlı 1987, Şentürk & Kartal 2010, etc.), he wrote four books: *Siretü'n-Nebi*, *Fütuhu'ş-Şam*, *Yüz Hadis Yüz Hikaye* and *Kıssa-i Yusuf*.

*Siretü'n-Nebi*, his major work and one of the masterpieces of early classical Turkish literature, narrates Prophet Muhammad's life in poesy and prose in six large volumes. *Fütuhu'ş-Şam* is about the conquest of Damascus by Muslims. *Yüz Hadis Yüz Hikaye* is the compilation of 100 sayings of Prophet Muhammad in prose. However, recent publications showed that the content of this book is very similar to another book titled *Ferahname* written by Hatiboğlu Muhammed (Coşan 2008: 106). Similarly, another recent study (Yazar 2018) proves that *Kıssa-i Yusuf* does not belong to Darir but to Yusuf-ı Meddah.

This study aims to develop a corpus-based study of Darir's poems. My PhD thesis was on his poems in *Siretü'n-Nebi*, and I mentioned there my doubts about the authorship of *Kıssa-i Yusuf* (Egüz 2013 and 2017). Because the last publication (Yazar 2018) also proved that *Kıssa-i Yusuf* is not one of Darir's works, I would like to compare these books using a corpus analysis. My aim is to compare his other poems in regard to word usage with *Kıssa-i Yusuf* to detect the authorship.

For this study, I used Sketch Engine (n.d.) and Excel software to analyse my corpus. I used three texts written by Darir. The first includes Turkish poems from *Siretü'n-Nebi* (SN), which has 506 poems. The second one is Turkish poems from *Fütuhu-ş-Şam* (FŞ); this has 35 poems. The third one is *Kıssa-i Yusuf* (KY), which contains 2,126 couplets.

First, I created word-frequency lists individually and compared the words manually. Secondly, I used Sketch Engine's Compare Corpora Module to compare two corporas. Since Sketch Engine does not allow the user to compare more than two texts, I also transferred the data to an Excel spreadsheet in order to compare the words in the three books.

#### 4. Results

To compare the three books, those words that are not directly related to the content but show the poet's literary fingerprint, such as

conjunctions, exclamations, adjectives, adverbs and nouns, were selected. The word-frequency list below shows the different results in the three different books regarding the use of conjunctions. Although these words are the most frequently used conjunctions by Darir; they are not used often in KY.

TABLE 1: THE FREQUENCY OF THE USE OF SOME CONJUNCTIONS

	Siretü'n-nebi		Fütuhu'ş-Şam		Kıssa-i Yusuf	
	Frequency	Frequency/ Million	Frequency	Frequency/ Million	Frequency	Frequency/ Million
<i>kaçan</i> (whenever)	129	1,423	7	1,497	1	40
<i>çü</i> (because)	134	1,478	7	1,497	2	81
<i>hermişe</i> (every time)	52	573	1	214	0	0
<i>egerçi</i> (if)	40	444	1	214	0	0

Moreover, the frequency of the use of exclamations is different in KY as shown below. In particular, addressing the reader as *dedem* never occurs in Darir's original works. Furthermore, *zihî* and *yoldaş* are used frequently in the original books but not in KY.

TABLE 2: THE FREQUENCY OF THE USE OF SOME EXCLAMATIONS

	Siretü'n-nebi		Fütuhu'ş-Şam		Kıssa-i Yusuf	
	Frequency	Frequency/ Million	Frequency	Frequency/ Million	Frequency	Frequency/ Million
<i>zehî / zihî</i> , (how nice!)	140	1,543	2	428	0	0
<i>yoldaş</i> (fellow!)	17	187	7	1,497	0	0
<i>dedem</i> (grandfather!)	0	0	0	0	5	202
<i>eyâ</i> (hey!)	1	11	0	0	19	767
<i>sâkî</i> (cupbearer!)	2	22	0	0	27	1,090

Besides conjunctions and exclamations, we can also look at several specific nouns and adjectives used frequently by Darir. As shown below, the words *issi*, *Çalab*, and *sehel* are used commonly in the original books;

in contrast, the frequently used words in *KY* are not used in the original books.

TABLE 3: THE FREQUENCY OF THE USE OF SOME NOUNS AND ADJECTIVES

	Siretü'n-nebi		Fütuhu'ş-Şam		Kıssa-i Yusuf	
	Frequency	Frequency/ Million	Frequency	Frequency/ Million	Frequency	Frequency/ Million
<i>issî</i> (possessor)	118	1,301	5	1,069	1	40
<i>Çalab</i> (God)	43	474	2	428	0	0
<i>sehel</i> (easy)	12	132	1	214	0	0
<i>niğâr</i> (woman)	0	0	0	0	29	1,171
<i>âfitâb</i> (sun)	2	22	0	0	13	525
<i>nâzenîn</i> (indulged)	0	0	0	0	8	323
<i>mihribân</i> (compassionate)	1	11	0	0	8	323
<i>bî-karâr</i> (indecisive)	1	11	0	0	14	565
<i>murassa</i> (gem- set)	0	0	0	0	10	404

The frequency of the use of some adverbs is different in *KY*. In particular, *nâgehân* and *bâ-şitâb* occurs in *KY* more often than it does in the other works.

TABLE 4: THE FREQUENCY OF THE USE OF SOME ADVERBS

	Siretü'n-nebi		Fütuhu'ş-Şam		Kıssa-i Yusuf	
	Frequency	Frequency/ Million	Frequency	Frequency/ Million	Frequency	Frequency/ Million
<i>nâgehân</i> (suddenly)	3	33	0	0	13	525
<i>bâ-şitâb</i> (in haste)	0	0	0	0	5	202

Another difference between the three books is the frequency of the use of pseudonyms. While 'Darir' is used 52 times in *SN* and 3 times in *FŞ*, it is used only twice in *KY*. Because Darir means 'blind', it is possible that the word was used in its actual meaning in *KY*, which might have

caused problems regarding authorship before. Darir also uses another pseudonym, *Gözsüz* (blind), from time to time. *Gözsüz* is used 59 times in *SN* and 3 times in *FŞ*. Although it is used 4 times in *KY* as well, it is used in relation to its real meaning within the context of the book.

TABLE 5: THE FREQUENCY OF THE USE OF POETIC APPELLATIONS

	Siretü'n-nebi		Fütuhu'ş-Şam		Kıssa-i Yusuf	
	Frequency	Frequency/ Million	Frequency	Frequency/ Million	Frequency	Frequency/ Million
Darir	52	573	3	641	2	81
Gözsüz	59	651	3	641	4	161

Furthermore, Darir uses many images and metaphors about the eyes and vision and creates metaphorical expressions about blindness. Although he mentions the eyes as a part of the face, he also focuses on the 'spiritual eye' or 'the eye of the heart' (Egüz 2016) and uses the words *göz* (eye) and *gör-* (to see) frequently in his works. The table below shows the frequency of the poet's use of words related to *seeing* which is characteristically more frequent in his original books, *SN* and *FŞ*.

TABLE 6: THE FREQUENCY OF THE USE OF WORDS RELATED TO SEEING

	Siretü'n-nebi		Fütuhu'ş-Şam		Kıssa-i Yusuf	
	Frequency	Frequency/ Million	Frequency	Frequency/ Million	Frequency	Frequency/ Million
<i>kör</i> (blind)	23	254	2	428	0	0
<i>gözlü</i> (eyed)	9	99	0	0	0	0
<i>gör</i> (see)	147	1,621	7	1,497	20	807
<i>görelere</i> (let them see)	15	165	0	0	0	0
<i>göremez</i> (s/he can't see)	10	110	0	0	0	0
<i>göz ile</i> (by eye)	6	66	0	0	0	0

<i>göze</i> (to eye)	6	66	0	0	0	0
<i>görüpdür</i> (s/he sees)	6	66	0	0	0	0
<i>görüniüz</i> (see)	6	66	0	0	0	0
<i>görgil</i> (see)	6	66	0	0	0	0
<i>gözün</i> (the eye)	12	132	0	0	1	40
<i>göresin</i> (let you see)	23	254	0	0	3	121
<i>göründi</i> (was seen)	36	397	0	0	5	202
<i>görürsün</i> (you see)	7	77	1	214	0	0
<i>görüp</i> (by seeing)	11	121	0	0	0	0
<i>göricek</i> (when s/he sees)	34	375	4	855	0	0
<i>görmedi</i> (s/he didn't see)	13	143	0	0	1	40
<i>görmedin</i> (without seeing)	3	33	1	214	1	40
<i>görmeyiser</i> (s/he	3	33	1	214	1	40

won't see)						
<i>görmegil</i> (don't see)	3	33	1	214	1	40

## 5. Challenges

During the research, I encountered several problems that are classified and explained below.

- Obtaining electronic copies: Most studies of classical Turkish literature are in the form of theses or academic articles. *KY* and *FŞ* were prepared as theses before. Although there is a thesis database, older theses especially were scanned and uploaded to the system as JPEG files. For this reason, I had to type the poems in *FŞ* as well as the full text of *KY*. Fortunately, the poems in *SN* were the topic of my PhD thesis, and I already had these in electronic format.

- Editing the text: I edited *SN* before undertaking a corpus analysis. I removed the footnotes, transcription scripts, edition critique notes, and description about the content and the meter manually.

I also standardized the spelling in the three texts. As known, there is no standard spelling in the historical texts. All books were copied by hand until almost the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and spelling often differed from copyist to copyist. Moreover, copyists might misspell a word. Because researchers of linguistics tend to keep all the errors in the original manuscript, there may not be a standard orthography, even in recently published studies. This results in problems for a corpus-based study. Furthermore, we don't have any standardization tool for historical Ottoman Turkish yet.

There were also problems regarding the accuracy of the text. I had several disagreements with researchers who study *KY* and *FŞ*. Since the poems were written in the Turkish language but in Arabic script, short vowels of Arabic and Persian words were not shown in the script. This situation often results in reading errors. In this case, if the text is in the form of poetry, we can check the accuracy by controlling meter and

rhyme. For this reason, especially for *FŞ*, I had to correct several words in the manuscripts considering the rules of meter.

- Analysing the corpus: I faced several problems after I created the corpus. The first one involved added words and suffixes to the original text by the researchers who study *KY* and *FŞ*. This occurs as a text repair in the published studies. If there is an error made by the copyist that affects the rhyme or meter, researchers repair the error by adding a suffix, a conjunction or another word. After I created my corpus, I saw that these added words affected the word list. For this reason, I had to select and remove them from the list.

The second problem was in regard to considering different versions of the same word. In classical poetry, the author can use different versions of the same word to adjust it to the meter or rhyme. The meter depends on open and closed syllables. For example, if the author wants an open syllable, which must end with a vowel, he or she may prefer to say 'i' instead of the original version 'iy', which is an exclamation word. In this situation, even though we see them in different categories in the corpus, we should accept these two words as the same word by using lemmatization. It is necessary to know these rules to make a corpus study of historical texts.

The third problem involved comparing the three texts. Since Sketch Engine doesn't allow users to compare more than two texts, I had to create an Excel spreadsheet document and compare them. Even though different methods, such as Delta (Burrows 2002), can help us compare more than two texts, these programs require knowledge about computer science.

## 6. Discussion

In this paper, Darir's original poems were compared with the non-original work, *Kıssa-i Yusuf (KY)*, in terms of word usage to detect the authorship. The words in *KY* which are directly related to the content, such as *zindan* (prison), *habs* (imprison) *sarây* (palace), *tâc* (crown), *Mısır* (Egypt), *buğday* (wheat), *düş* (dream), *azat* (setting free), *esir* (captive), *gulam* (male slave), *karavaş* (female slave), *baba* (father) and *kardaş* (sibling), were omitted. Commonly-used verbs, such as *gel-* (to come), *al-* (to take),

*ko-* (to put/ to leave), *di-* (to say), *eyit-* (to say), *söyle-* (to tell), *işit-* (to listen) and *bil-* (to know) were also excluded. Finally a few words that are used more in *mathnawi* (series of couplets in rhymed pairs) form, such as *dâsitân* (story) and *âgâz* (to start) were removed.

When we look at the remaining words, there are significant differences in using words related to *seeing* between the original books and *KY*. These words were used more frequently in the original books. There were also other words, such as *nigâr* (woman), *âfitâb* (sun) and *nâzenîn* (indulged) which were commonly used in *KY*, but not used in the original books. A notable difference was observed with the use of conjunctions and exclamations between *KY* and the original books. These were not seen when we compared the two original works.

The result showed that authorship can be traced by comparing the word frequency of the original and non-original works. In this case study, conjunctions and exclamations usage particularly vary between works. Words related to the *eye* and *seeing* were remarkably more frequent in the original books.

However, having background knowledge about the author and his literary style is still necessary. In this case, knowing that the poet is blind and that he uses many images and metaphors about the eyes and vision guided us to focus on words about *seeing*. Moreover, knowledge about literary forms helped distinguish those words which are more specific to the *mathnawi* forms and not seen in other forms very often. Similarly, editing the texts, standardising the spelling and text repairing in the published books required familiarity with classical Turkish language and literature. In this case, many benefits can be obtained for both fields if linguists and classical Turkish literature researchers work collaboratively.

In sum, the classical Turkish literature discipline has been using qualitative methods for a long time. Although qualitative methods offer many benefits, using a quantitative method and especially corpus linguistics will open new doors to researchers and give them opportunities to explore new features of texts and help them prove their results through a traditional method of analysis.

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