

Turkish Textbooks Dialogues and Comparable Authentic Conversations

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Abstract: *This study investigates the discourse features of dialogues in textbooks of Turkish dialogues as a foreign language. These dialogues seem to be different from their authentic equivalents in terms of length, terminal overlap, latching, hesitation devices, and false starts, repetitions, and pragmatic appropriateness of a conversation. The implications of the inclusion and absence of these features are discussed and for future textbooks of Turkish, as a promising foreign language, the use of more natural discourse features are suggested.*

Key Words: *Teaching Turkish, textbook, authenticity, textbook dialogues.*

Ders Kitabı Diyalogları ve Karşılaştırılabilir Orijinal Diyaloglar

Özet: *Bu çalışma, Türkçenin yabancı dil olarak öğretildiği ders kitaplarında geçen diyalogların söylemsel özelliklerini araştırmaktadır. Bu ders kitaplarında geçen diyalogların, uzunluk, durak, konuşma sırası, duraksama araçları, hatalı giriş, bağlama, tekrarlama ve konuşmanın pragmatik uygunluğu açısından gerçek hayatta geçen diyaloglardan farklı olduğu görünmektedir. Bu konuşmalarda geçen özelliklerin varlığı ya da yer verilmeyişi tartışılmış, yabancı dil olarak öğrenimi önemli ve gelecek vadeden Türkçenin ilgili ders kitaplarında daha orijinal ve doğal söylem özelliklerine yer verilmesi önerilmektedir.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Türkçe öğretimi, ders kitabı, orijinallik, yabancı dil ders kitabı diyalogları.*

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I. Introduction

Turkish, so called a less commonly taught language in academic settings in the United States, has recently attracted ongoing interest on the part of students. This increasing interest in learning Turkish as a foreign language has heightened the need for emphasis on certain communicative areas and competencies. Therefore, this study aims to examine the conversational dialogues and scaffolding in Turkish textbooks in terms of authenticity, focusing on certain discourse features. Many studies investigating second and foreign language textbook dialogues, particularly in English, in the ensuing twenty years, have given new insights and shed light on the curriculum development and materials design in language teaching. For this reason, it would be beneficial for researchers and teachers to embark on a study of the materials for the teaching of Turkish especially the development of Turkish textbooks.

This study deserves noteworthy consideration for several reasons. Firstly, Turkish has recently been offered at more than fifty American colleges and universities (NCOLCTL). Secondly, there seems to be a consensus in Turkish teaching programs that most materials that are available are teacher-developed and appear not to be compatible with the contemporary communicative language teaching trends. Finally, with a more visible position in academic settings in the United States, new approaches and methods on the basis of current research studies are needed. A number of studies based on second and foreign language textbook dialogues, particularly English, have found that textbook dialogues considerably differ from their authentic equivalents across some discourse features. The findings suggest that the structures and certain expressions, which native speakers use, are of considerable importance. However, the discrepancies that arise between foreign language materials and real life situations are often caused by the material writers' linguistic reflections. Moreover, dialogues in textbooks do not reflect naturally occurring interactions and are mainly designed to present new grammatical and/or lexical units. As a result, learners encounter certain difficulties in understanding socio-pragmatic norms of the target language and the cultural differences of speakers' verbal behavior. Therefore, the research findings in the area of conversational analysis are considered to provide teachers and textbook designers with new insights for combining authentic dialogues and pedagogical purposes. In this study, textbooks of Turkish, as a foreign language, are investigated in terms of terminal overlap, latching, hesitation devices, false starts, repetitions, and pragmatic appropriateness examining opening and closing parts of a dialogue. The implications of the research findings are discussed and suggestions are made based on new perspectives.

II. Background

The language teaching profession has entered the twenty-first century with a clear precedence over meaning, much more than over structural knowledge of language. The significance of meaningful and contextual language use at diverse stages in the acquisition of communicative skills has been widely recognized by language teachers, methodologists,

and material writers around the world. Moreover, a number of studies into different areas of communicative competence through several fields of study emphasize reconsideration of language instruction:

Awareness of discourse and a willingness to take on board what a language-as-discourse view implies can only make us better and more efficient syllabus designers, task designers, dialogue writers, materials adaptors and evaluators of everything we do and handle in the classroom. Above all, the approach we have advocated enables us to be more faithful to what language *is* and what people use it for. The moment one starts to think of language as discourse, the entire landscape changes, usually, forever (McCarthy & Carter, as cited in Gilmore, 2007, p. 99).

The key issue, herein, is due to the fact that most students expect to be able to use the target language outside the classroom; in other words, in order to be communicatively competent, they need not only grammatical structures and the vocabulary necessary to fill them, but a range of communication skills which go beyond the simple learning of word forms as well.

It is clear that language instruction has many important components, but the essential constituents of foreign or second language classrooms and programs seem to be the textbooks and instruction materials, which are crucial tools used by language instructors. As Hutchinson and Torres (1994) suggest:

The textbook is an almost universal element of [English language] teaching. Millions of copies are sold every year, and numerous aid projects have been set up to produce them in [various] countries... No teaching-learning situation, it seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook (p.315).

As for less commonly taught languages, for instance Turkish, the role of textbooks from Turkish as a Foreign Language perspective in enhancing students' communicative awareness becomes more important. Wong states textbooks' optimum communicative role as follows: "If one of the goals of language education is to teach our students to be communicatively competent, perhaps we ought to consider whether our textbooks model for language learners the sorts of discourse patterns and sequence structures that recur in ordinary [...] interaction." (Wong 2002:38). To realize this goal, namely to manage causal conversation effectively in the target language, Brown & Yule (1983, p.52) have already pointed out learners need to have realistic models of proficient users doing the same thing.

However, a cursory glance over the second language (L2) textbooks, including Turkish textbooks, confirms that foreign language teaching considerably relies on the intuitive perceptions of how textbook writers see the nature and structure of language. Such an

intuition leads to an impression of problem-free communication among the speakers and an authentic language communication in a native speaker environment could be established. On the other hand, there seems to be a remarkable discrepancy between the language, which learners confront in L2 textbooks and the one they are most likely to face when communicating in target language in real-life situation. Many research studies, Gilmore (2007) notes, summarize that despite recent progress to provide a balance between the languages of real life and textbook, there remain numerous gaps. Still, considering the less commonly taught languages, in this case Turkish, the inadequacy of such research studies requires concrete findings displaying the current situation and suggestions for future applications.

Authenticity has been examined through a considerable range of perspective, and the question of authenticity in the language classroom is considerably discussed, yet there seems to be a contradictory situation and somewhat ambiguous in most teachers' minds. Though complete authenticity, in other words, natural occurring language, is impossible to achieve in classroom setting, engaging in an authentic activity encompassing structures and vocabulary used in real life talk is deemed important for learners (McCarthy, 1991).

In fact, authenticity is entirely a relative matter and has different aspects in different degrees. According to McDonough and Shaw (1993:43), authenticity can be described as "a term which loosely implies as close an approximation as possible to the world outside the classroom, in the selection both of language material and of the activities and methods used for practice in the classroom." Authentic materials have been defined, "as those which have been produced for purposes other than to teach language" (Nunan 1988, p. 99). Nunan (1999) argues authenticity within language materials as not a specific part of language teaching, yet he defines authentic materials whether spoken or written as products of genuine communication. Widdowson defines authenticity as "not a quality residing in instances of language but as a quality which is bestowed upon them, created by the response of the receiver. He further points out that we do not recognize authenticity as something there waiting to be noticed, we realize it in the act of interpretation" (Widdowson, 1979, p. 165). Gilmore (2007) collected several proposed definitions and interrelated meanings of authenticity. This relevance ranges in meaning from text itself "the qualities bestowed on a text by the receiver, in that it is not seen as something inherent in a text itself, but is imparted on it by the reader/listener" (Widdowson 1978/9; Breen 1985) to a social or cultural situation and purposes of the communicative act, "the language produced by a real speaker/writer for a real audience, conveying a real message" (Morrow 1977; Porter & Roberts 1981; Swaffar 1985; Nunan 1988/9; Benson & Voller 1997), "the social situation of the classroom" (Breen, 1985; Arnold 1991; Lee 1995; Guariento & Morley, 2001; Rost 2002); and "culture, and the ability to behave or think like a target language group in order to be recognized and validated by them" (Kramsch, 1998). Though a consensus has not been reached on the meaning of authenticity, this study regards authenticity in the same way as Morrow defines it (1977), "an authentic text is a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of

some sort”. Therefore, in the light of this consideration, whether a text is authentic or not can be identified referring to certain discourse features.

Through the purpose of developing language learners’ communicative competence with not only linguistic accuracy but also with skills providing the learners with appropriate language use during real-time interactions, authentic materials have been argued to play an essential role. Particularly textbook dialogues are one of the primary opportunities, presumably the first and the easiest way to meet the cultural specific knowledge and particular social situations for foreign& second language learners who have different social conventions and different linguistic performances in specific contexts. Therefore, textbooks have a role of guide to proper language use.

Brosnan, Brown and Hood (1984) justify the importance of the use of authentic language and materials in the classroom by preserving naturalness of language without altering it we do not remove the clues in the meaning furthermore provide students with complete and meaningful messages (cited in Oura, 2007, p.69). They, besides, argue that as for the printed materials not neglecting the authenticity of language provides students with the opportunity to make use of non-linguistic clues for an optimum mutual understanding.

Despite the many arguments in favor of the authentic materials, including text authenticity and other materials, more empirical studies from diverse perspectives are needed. Therefore, this study aims to examine to what extent the textbook conversational dialogues reflect the comparable authentic interactions.

III. Methodology

Service encounters in the Turkish textbooks dialogues, the conversations which a learner will most probably face in target language context were chosen to investigate. In many research studies, service encounters are commonly preferred, since they are most easy to replicate outside the classroom and such conversations avoid elaboration. In the listening exercises including visual excerpts from different Turkish textbooks, presumably all the available course books have been examined; certain functional language under certain contexts is displayed. The sources for the samples are shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1. Source materials and the contexts for the dialogues

Textbook	Context
Elementary Turkish – A complete Course Book for Beginners	Asking for a book at the bookstore
Gokkusagi Turkish Seyir Dunyasi I	Asking for direction
Let’s Learn Turkish	Hotel reception
Hitit Turkish Language Teaching	Souvenir shop

In the study, the dialogues were recorded, transcribed and compared in terms of certain discourse features of the textbooks' materials versus authentic materials. Between these two sets of data, according to the questions aimed to answer, how much detail would be recorded is based on our predictions on the points where differences were likely occur. Therefore, our study has only answers to the questions that we ask. Thus, Figure 2 displays the information which was sought to examine and the research questions which were investigated:

Figure 2. Information recorded and the research questions

Information recorded	Research question
Speakers (S1) or (S2)	Is turn taking between (S1) or (S2) similar between two data?
Terminal overlap and latching	Do speakers in both textbook and authentic data make mistakes with regard to transition relevance places?
Back channels	Does back channeling occur in both sets of data?
Openings and closings	Do both conversations have appropriate openings and closings?
Pauses in conversation (seconds)	Are there any differences between textbook and authentic data recorded in terms of number of pauses?
Hesitation devices (erm, er, etc) (u, ar, imm)	Is the frequency of hesitation devices close in both sets of data?
Exact words spoken	How often do repetitions take place in the two sets of data? Do false starts occur in both sets of data?

IV. Results and Discussion

Eight different discourse features were taken from four textbook dialogues and their real life equivalents were compared. The relevant samples from the textbooks were analyzed, since the authentic interactions were longer than the contrived equivalents, the number of instances of each feature through these data was recalculated considering this difference. The result of the analysis is seen below:

Figure 3. Comparison of frequency of target discourse features in samples of 357 words from textbook and authentic data

Target Discourse Feature	Textbook Data	Authentic Data
False Starts	0	3.07
Pauses	3	6.92
Repetitions	3	13.08
Terminal Overlap	0	12.30
Latching	3	13.07
Back channels	2	16.15
Hesitation Devices	0	9.23
Openings	4	4
Closings	1	4

False starts and repetitions are most common performance errors during natural interlocutions though such utterances are expected to be minimized, Figure 3 displays that textbook dialogues are neat and tidy, seemingly perfect, in contrast to authentic data. This unrealistic and unattainable language presented can demotivate students since they are unable to reach such perfect language use. In addition, unpredictable social talks include many redundant utterances, which most learners have considerable difficulties in understanding. Nevertheless, students seem to be deprived of such an opportunity to develop since every utterance is tidy and important.

Pauses are meanwhile common communicational occurrences in replying a question, give some information, or take the floor in authentic discourse. However, textbook dialogues rarely or too shortly include pauses to reflect the natural conversation.

Occasional overlaps of turns appear to be most common during a natural conversation though these interruptions are considered as undesired violations of speaking; on the other hand latching takes place when there are no gaps in transitions between participants' turns. As figure 3 displays, the authentic and textbook dialogues appear to have considerable differences, since the dialogues in the textbooks are most clean and neat. This prevention of naturally occurring conversation; in other words, filtering the real life interaction, may hinder learners from noticing the authentic language.

Hesitation devices such as 'ır' 'ımm' (in Turkish) are most frequent in natural conversations as one of the interlocutors tries to maintain the floor. Nevertheless, figure 3 shows that there are a small number of instances of this natural device. If learners saw these varieties more frequently in Turkish, they could use them more easily in similar situations.

Words and phrases such as 'anlıyorum' (I see), hımm, 'öyle mi!' (really!) used by the listeners to convey the message of acknowledgment and response to the speaker

are referred to backchannels . In many situations, backchannels are regarded as an important affective role as a sign of responsive and sympathetic approach. If they are regarded important for affective and effective conversations between interlocutors, then the textbook dialogues involved might seem to be cold, not authentic and somewhat inappropriate due to inattentiveness towards the speaker. Moreover, if learners are not adapted to such an instance of interaction outside the classroom they will likely have difficulty in self-expression and mutual understanding.

Considering cultural norms, i.e. what can be said and what should and should not be said in certain situations, (Thorsten Huth and Carmen Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006) as in all societies, Turkish society has some conventions such as appropriate openings and closings e.g. ‘Merhaba’ (Hello), ‘İyi günler’ (Have a good day), ‘Kolay gelsin’ (May it come easy) ‘Güle-güle’ (Goodbye) are regarded as indispensable parts of nearly all kinds of authentic conversations and especially service encounters. However, in the transcript of the textbook dialogues, in contrast to the openings, appropriate closings are almost never included, whereas such socio-pragmatic points deserve to take place in L2 textbook dialogues. If what learners ultimately learn in the target language and how they learn to do it are closely related to the quality and quantity of opportunities they are given to develop the competency, these authentic interactional moments based on socio-cultural norms can be more prominently included.

V. Conclusion

Most contemporary foreign language materials publishers, including well known and most preferred names, try to impose that their materials reflect authentic language which seems to be regarded as a useful and important dimension of language learning at a satisfactory extent. In fact, considering many empirical studies so far concerning the authenticity of language in L2 textbooks, it has been widely recognized that real life language has been poorly represented. However, in the ensuing materials seem to be made more effort for reflecting more authentic language containing certain discourse features like the items examined above.

As for, Turkish, as a less commonly but showing a promising taught language, it is noteworthy that Turkish textbooks have nearly the same features in comparison with most L2 textbooks, especially EFL/ESL textbooks. If our goal is to be able to use the target language outside the classroom, then at some point we should show our students the real nature of language. Therefore, it is important that more empirical research studies on Turkish materials including textbooks be conducted and in this way, the findings and suggestions involved can contribute to better teaching materials with the help of teacher-researcher-textbook writer cooperation.

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