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SOCIOECONOMIC INFLUENCES ON TURKISH PRONUNCIATION: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC EXPLORATION OF THE RHOTIC 'R' SOUND

ABSTRACT

This sociolinguistic study examines the relationship between socioeconomic factors and pronunciation variation in Turkish, with a focus on the continuous tense suffix *-yor*. Employing a Labov-inspired methodology, 65 participants from diverse occupational, educational, age, and income backgrounds in Van, Türkiye, were selected via stratified sampling. Semi-structured interviews captured natural speech, enabling categorization of *-yor* pronunciation as rhotic (emphasized) or non-rhotic (omitted). Phonetic transcription of /r/ and quantitative analysis revealed a significant socioeconomic correlation: higher-income and university-educated participants predominantly used the rhotic variant. In contrast, lower-income and primary-educated participants favoured the non-rhotic variant. This research contributes to the understanding of Turkish linguistic variation and highlights how language choices reflect broader social and economic contexts. By analyzing *-yor*, it illuminates the dynamics of language variation in Turkish and provides a foundation for future sociolinguistic studies.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, Turkish, Pronunciation, Socioeconomic Factors

TÜRKÇE TELAFFUZUNDA SOSYOEKONOMIK ETKILER: RÖTIK 'R' SESI ÜZERINE SOSYODILBILIMSEL BIR ARAŞTIRMA

ÖZET

Bu sosyodilbilimsel çalışma, Türkçedeki süreklilik zaman eki *-yor*'un telaffuzu üzerinden sosyoekonomik faktörlerle dilsel çeşitlilik arasındaki ilişkiyi inceler. Labov metodolojisinden esinlenerek, Van, Türkiye'de farklı meslek, eğitim, yaş ve gelir gruplarından 65 katılımcı tabakalı örneklemeyle seçildi. Yapılandırılmamış görüşmelerle doğal konuşma kaydedildi ve *-yor* telaffuzu rotik (vurgulu) veya rotik olmayan (atlanmış) şeklinde kategorize edildi. Fonetik transkripsiyon ve nicel analiz, anlamlı bir sosyoekonomik ilişki ortaya koydu: Yüksek gelirli ve üniversite mezunu katılımcılar ağırlıklı olarak rotik varyantı kullanırken, düşük gelirli ve ilkokul mezunu katılımcılar rotik olmayan varyantı tercih etti. Bu araştırma, Türkçedeki dilsel çeşitliliğin anlaşılmasına katkı sağlar ve dil tercihlerinin geniş sosyoekonomik bağlamları nasıl yansıttığını vurgular. *-yor* analizi, Türkçedeki dilsel değişkenliğin dinamiklerini aydınlatır ve gelecekteki sosyodilbilimsel çalışmalar için zemin hazırlar.

Anahtar kelimeler: Sosyodilbilim, Türkçe, Telaffuz, Sosyoekonomik Faktörler

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Introduction

The study of language variation has long been a central theme in sociolinguistics, captivating scholars for decades. Among these scholars, William Labov is a prominent figure whose work in the mid-20th century revolutionized our understanding of the intricate relationship between language and society (Labov, 1966). His fieldwork and innovative methodologies challenged the prevailing notion that linguistic diversity is arbitrary. Instead, Labov's research revealed the complex interplay between language and various social factors, including class, ethnicity, and geographical location. Through empirical analysis, Labov demonstrated the undeniable influence of these social variables on language usage, providing a foundational perspective on the inseparable connection between linguistic variation and broader societal structures. In essence, Labov's contributions not only marked a new epoch in sociolinguistics but also paved the way for a more nuanced exploration of how language functions as both a mirror and a perpetuator of social hierarchies.

Rhotic sounds, which involve the pronunciation of the /r/ sound or something similar, have interested linguists and phoneticians for a long time. They exhibit diverse manifestations across languages and have been the subject of extensive research. This introduction examines rhotic sounds, including their production, variation, and significance in various languages. Rhotic sounds play a crucial role in the phonological landscapes of numerous languages, and the contributions of scholars of the field have enriched their study. One seminal work in the field of phonetics is Daniel Jones's "An Outline of English Phonetics," which provides an in-depth examination of the articulation and acoustic properties of rhotic sounds in English (Jones, 2006). Jones's research laid the groundwork for understanding the complexities of rhotic pronunciations in this widely spoken language. To grasp the broader significance of rhotic sounds, it is imperative to explore their presence beyond English. In the context of American English, Labov's pioneering sociolinguistic research has unveiled intriguing patterns of rhoticity variation across different regions and social groups (Labov, 1966). This variability underscores the role of rhotic sounds in sociolinguistic identity and language change. Shifting our focus to Romance languages, where rhotic sounds are prevalent, we encounter the work of Peter Ladefoged, whose research on Spanish rhotics has shed light on the intricate articulatory characteristics of the Spanish /r/ sound (Ladefoged, 1975). This exploration extends to other Romance languages, such as Italian and Portuguese, where rhotic sounds exhibit phonological and sociolinguistic patterns (Harris, 1978).

Beyond Europe, rhotic sounds manifest in diverse ways. For instance, in Mandarin Chinese, the retroflex /ɻ/ sound has been extensively analyzed by scholars like William S-Y. Wang, who investigated its place in Mandarin's phonological system (Wang, 1967). This underscores the cross-linguistic significance of rhotics and their role in shaping the sound systems of languages worldwide. Rhotic sounds also hold a prominent place in African languages. John H. Esling's work on the Kukuya language of Central Africa provides valuable insights into the complex rhotic articulations found in this region (Esling, 2005). Such studies underscore the rich diversity of rhotic sounds within the African linguistic landscape. In South Asia, particularly in the Indian subcontinent, rhotic sounds exhibit intricate phonological patterns. The Bengali /ɽ/ sound, examined by Banerjee (1969), illustrates the multifaceted nature of rhotics in this linguistic context. Additionally, Indigenous languages, such as Navajo, showcase unique rhotic features.

Research by Platero and Willie (1994) highlights the phonological significance of rhotic sounds in Navajo, underscoring their role in conveying meaning and preserving cultural heritage.

Rhotic varieties in English are characterized by the pronunciation of the consonant /r/ in all positions, including word-initial, word-medial, and word-final contexts (Crystal, 2003). In contrast, other varieties of the English language are classified as non-rhotic, where speakers do not pronounce /r/ in postvocalic environments (Labov, 1966). Notably, both rhotic and non-rhotic pronunciations can be found in Received Pronunciation (RP) - the standard British English pronunciation - as well as in General American (GA) pronunciation, which represents standard American English pronunciation (Wells, 1982). Some non-rhotic varieties of English are prevalent in various countries, including England, especially the south-west region, Wales, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, and many countries in the Caribbean, excluding Barbados (Wells, 1982). In addition, non-rhotic speech is prominent in the American southern states, the Boston area of New England, and New York City vernacular speech, as well as in Black English Vernacular in the United States (Labov, 1966). Conversely, the main rhotic countries where /r/ is pronounced in most contexts include the United States, particularly the northern and western states (except for the Boston area and New York City), Canada, India, Ireland, south-western England, Scotland, and Barbados. Historically, all English accents were rhotic until the early Modern English period, with non-rhotic varieties emerging relatively late (Crystal, 2003). The shift towards non-rhoticity is believed to have started in the 18th century as a matter of prestige in socio-cultural contexts within British culture (Demizeren, 2012; Boyce et al., 2016; Coupland & Bishop, 2020). Furthermore, the advent of radio and television in the 20th century played a significant role in establishing a national standard of American pronunciation that preserved historical /r/, leading to the rapid prestige associated with rhotic speech in the United States, particularly after the Second World War (Labov et al., 2006).

In studies from Türkiye on rhoticity pronunciation, Kasap (2018) contributes to the research on Kurdish speech in Van, focusing on 64 participants divided into two groups: young and elderly. He explored how education level and age influence pronunciation, finding that exposure to Kurdish texts impacts the retention of the /r/ sound. This challenges some common views on linguistic change and age. However, our literature review reveals a scarcity of studies on this topic in Türkiye, highlighting the importance of this research in addressing a gap in the existing knowledge about Turkish phonetics. Research on /r/ deletion in Turkish is limited. Sezer (1986) observed that /r/ deletion occurs variably, especially in informal speech, which may indicate a non-standard feature, though he did not explicitly label it as such. His work did not examine the social or linguistic factors influencing /r/ deletion, leaving questions about these influences unanswered. A study on /r/ deletion in Turkish highlighted a limitation in its design, which restricted the ability to conclude whether this phenomenon represents stable variation or a linguistic change, as it focused exclusively on speakers within the same age group (Rahymov, 2014).

This study examines a previously underexplored domain of Turkish linguistics, specifically concentrating on phonetic elements and their articulation. Through analysis of the suffix -yor, the research underscores linguistic variation in Turkish and establishes a foundation for subsequent inquiry. It assesses how variables, including education, age, and income, influence the pronunciation of specific sounds among Turkish speakers. The findings may offer novel

perspectives on Turkish variation and enrich the broader discipline of linguistics, creating avenues for further studies on Turkish phonetics.

The suffix -yor denotes the continuous tense in Turkish, rendering it a frequent component of daily speech. Its habitual occurrence in dialogue enables closer observation of phonetic shifts in natural settings. Specific articulatory characteristics, such as suffix pronunciation, may also indicate socioeconomic standing. By examining the -yor suffix, this study seeks to demonstrate articulatory variation correlating with education and income, which is pivotal to this inquiry. Previous research, particularly by Labov, has uncovered significant linguistic patterns through scrutiny of discrete linguistic units. This methodology permits a more profound examination of Turkish and contributes to existing knowledge. By focusing on the -yor suffix, the study both elucidates contemporary linguistic distinctions and facilitates future investigation of other Turkish features potentially exhibiting analogous socioeconomic trends.

Phonological and Phonetic Background of Rhotics in Turkish

Rhotics, commonly represented by the sound /r/, are among the most variable and complex sounds in the world's languages, exhibiting a wide range of articulatory and acoustic properties. In phonetics and phonology, rhotics can manifest as taps, trills, approximants, or fricatives, and they can vary significantly even within the same language. The categorization of rhotics is often challenging due to their diverse phonetic realizations and the fluidity between different rhotic sounds. This variability is not only cross-linguistic but also occurs within individual languages, influenced by factors such as dialect, sociolect, and idiolect. In the context of Turkish, rhotics have been the subject of various linguistic investigations, which have highlighted their phonological and phonetic characteristics. Turkish primarily features the alveolar tap [ɾ] as its canonical rhotic, which is articulated by a single rapid contact of the tongue tip against the alveolar ridge. According to Göksel & Kerslake (2005), the sound [r] is a voiced alveolar tap, meaning it is made by quickly tapping the tip of the tongue against the area just behind the upper front teeth (the alveolar ridge). This sound appears at the beginning and middle of words. Its devoiced version, which means it is produced without vocal cord vibration, occurs at the end of words. In casual speech, the /r/ sound can sometimes be dropped, especially in the imperfective suffix -Iyor and in the word bir meaning 'a' or 'one'. For bir, this often happens when the word is not stressed (like in "bir ev" [bi év], meaning "a house"), but it can also occur even when bir is stressed (such as in "bir daha" [bída:] meaning "again," or "sadece bir ev" [bí ev] meaning "only one house").

According to Lewis (1967), Turkish traditionally lacks the trilled [r] that is found in some other languages, instead favouring the tap [ɾ]. Selen (1979) and Ergenç & Uzun (2020) further elaborate on the phonetic properties of the Turkish rhotic, emphasizing its position as a tap in most dialects, with minimal variation in standard spoken Turkish. They highlight that while some regional and sociolectal variants might exhibit a rolled or trilled rhotic, these are not considered part of the standard phonological inventory of the language. Nichols (2006) examines the occurrence of rhotics in Turkic languages, including Turkish, arguing that the alveolar tap is the most prevalent form, but acknowledges occasional variations, such as the uvular rhotics, which may emerge in certain sociolects or regional dialects. This perspective aligns with Yavuz (2011), who suggests that while the [ɾ] remains dominant, other rhotic forms like the uvular approximant [ʁ] could occasionally be observed, especially in specific phonetic environments or influenced by neighbouring languages and dialects. The observation that the phoneme /ɾ/ in Turkish undergoes

devoicing and frication in word-final positions, resulting in the phonetic realization [ɾ̝̊] (Börtlü, 2022; Ergenç & Uzun, 2020; Kornfilt, 1997; Nichols, 2016), is significant in the study of rhoticity as it highlights the variation and complexity of rhotic sounds within the language. Rhoticity in Turkish is not limited to a single, consistent phonetic form but instead varies depending on the phonological context. This variability underscores the broader linguistic principle that rhotic sounds can exhibit diverse articulatory properties, including variations in voicing and manner of articulation. The Turkish case contributes to the understanding of rhotic diversity across languages, demonstrating how rhotics can adapt and shift within specific phonetic environments, such as word-final positions, where devoicing and frication are more prominent. This insight is particularly relevant in sociolinguistic studies that examine how these phonetic variations correlate with various social factors, including regional accents, speaker background, and speech style.

Recent studies, such as Börtlü (2023), delve deeper into the sociolinguistic dimensions of rhotic variation in Turkish. Börtlü's work identifies sociolinguistic factors, including age, gender, and social class, as influential in the variation of rhotic articulation, suggesting a more nuanced understanding of how rhotics operate within different Turkish-speaking communities. These findings are crucial as they indicate that while the alveolar tap [ɾ] is the standard, other rhotic variants can serve as social markers, distinguishing speakers by region or social background. Demirezen's study (2012) has provided an overview of rhotic sounds in Turkish, contributing significantly to the understanding of their phonological behaviour. His research underscores the need for recognizing the potential for rhotic variability and challenges the notion of a monolithic rhotic in Turkish phonology. By examining rhotics across different speech contexts and among speakers of various sociolects, Demirezen highlights that while the [ɾ] sound is predominant, the existence of other rhotic sounds cannot be entirely dismissed.

As for the *-yor* suffix, the *-yor* suffix is fundamental to Turkish grammar, marking the continuous tense in expressions such as "Geliyorum" ("I am coming") and "Yapıyorlar" ("They are doing it"). Its widespread use in daily speech makes it an excellent feature to study linguistic variation. The suffix originates from the Old Turkic verb yorı- meaning "to move" or "to go" (Korkmaz, 2002; Clauson, 1972). Over centuries, this verbal root transitioned into the modern suffix *-yor*, an evolution that reflects broader changes in the Turkish language. Unlike many other Turkish suffixes, *-yor* does not conform to vowel harmony rules, a feature that has intrigued linguists and underscores its distinct historical development. This anomaly is evident in phrases like "*Yazıyorum"* ("I am writing") and "*Okuyoruz*" ("We are reading"), where the suffix retains its structure regardless of the base word's vowel configuration (Göksel & Kerslake, 2005). This study highlights how the pronunciation of the -yor suffix varies among social groups, influenced by factors such as education, income, and occupation. For instance, speakers with higher education levels or income tend to enunciate the r in "*Geliyorum"* distinctly. In contrast, those with lower socioeconomic status often reduce or omit the r, resulting in *"Geliyom."* Such variations align with findings in sociolinguistic studies that link speech patterns to social identity (Labov, 2006; Trudgill, 2004). For example, Labov's research on postvocalic r in New York City and Trudgill's work on English dialects in Norwich both revealed how linguistic features serve as markers of social class and prestige. Similarly, in Turkish, the articulation of *-yor* appears to signify not only regional or personal preferences but also social aspirations, as seen in professional settings where more precise enunciation may be perceived as more prestigious.

By focusing on the *-yor* suffix, this study advances our understanding of linguistic variation in Turkish and its ties to social factors. The findings build on earlier work in Turkish linguistics, such as Korkmaz's (2002) analysis of Old Turkic morphology and Johanson's (1998) studies on Turkic language contact and change. Moreover, it opens avenues for future research into how other linguistic features—like vowel harmony or word-final consonant changes—vary across social contexts. For instance, Doğan (2011) explored similar sociolinguistic dynamics in Turkish regional dialects, emphasizing the need for comprehensive studies on phonetic variation. Examining the -yor suffix through this sociolinguistic lens offers valuable insights into the interplay between language, society, and history, setting a foundation for broader investigations into Turkish as both a living and evolving language..

In summary, the phonological and phonetic landscape of rhotics in Turkish is primarily characterized by the alveolar tap [ɾ]. However, evidence indicates the existence of other rhotic sounds in specific dialectal or sociolectal contexts. Works by Selen (1979) and Ergenç & Uzun (2020), along with more recent studies by Börtlü (2023), provide a comprehensive understanding of how these sounds are realized and perceived in Turkish. While the tap [ɾ] remains the standard, the investigation of rhotic variability underscores the rich phonetic diversity within the language and the significant role of sociolinguistic factors in shaping this aspect.

Labov's Sociolinguistic Study of New York City: Uncovering the Social Dimensions of Language Variation

Labov's research was conducted in New York City and focused on a specific linguistic feature related to the pronunciation of the postvocalic*/r/* in words like car (/kɑːr/) and far (/fɑːr/). He was interested in understanding why some speakers dropped the*/r/* sound in specific linguistic contexts, while others did not. Labov collected data by conducting extensive interviews with people from different social backgrounds. He deliberately chose three distinct department stores in the city (Saks Fifth Avenue, Macy's, and S. Klein) to interview employees because he believed these stores attracted speakers from different social classes. He also interviewed individuals in different neighbourhoods to account for regional variations. Labov's research revealed a clear correlation between the pronunciation of */r/* and social class. He found that individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to exhibit non-standard pronunciation, often dropping the */r/* sound. In contrast, those from higher social classes tended to maintain the standard pronunciation. Labov introduced the concept of linguistic variables, which are linguistic elements (like the */r/* sound) that can vary in pronunciation. He demonstrated that the pronunciation of linguistic variables was not random but could be predicted based on social factors. One of Labov's key contributions was his use of quantitative analysis to study language variation. He introduced the sociolinguistic interview technique, which involved asking individuals to read word lists containing the variable in question and then recording their pronunciation. This method allowed for a systematic and quantitative analysis of linguistic variation. Labov's study underscored the role of social stratification in shaping linguistic variation. He argued that language change and variation were driven by social motivations, with individuals consciously or unconsciously modifying their speech to signal their social identity. Labov's work had a profound impact on the field of sociolinguistics. It challenged traditional views of language as static and demonstrated that language was a dynamic social construct. His methods for collecting and analyzing sociolinguistic data became foundational in the field, and his findings laid the groundwork for further research

into the relationship between language, identity, and social factors. Labov's study remains a cornerstone in sociolinguistic research, influencing our understanding of language variation and change in society.

We can also come across some studies on */r/* deletion in Venezuelan and Andalusian Spanish, drawing comparisons to Labov's sociolinguistic work. In Caracas Spanish, D'Introno et al. (1979) found that */r/* deletion was more common than liquid alternation, with gender and social class influencing its frequency, particularly among lower-class men. Ruiz-Sánchez (2009) investigated Andalusian Spanish and identified phonetic context, grammatical category, and social factors like age, gender, and education as significant influencers of */r/* deletion, which was most frequent among young, less educated females. Díaz-Campos (2006) extended D'Introno's work, examining */r/* deletion alongside lateralization and retention in Caracas Spanish, highlighting the importance of phonetic context, grammatical category, and word frequency. A later comparative study by Ruiz-Sánchez (2008) analyzed */r/* deletion in both Caracas and Andalusian Spanish, finding that linguistic and social factors, as well as lexical frequency, consistently affected deletion rates across both dialects. The study identified commonalities, such as the preference for deletion in high-frequency words and the influence of socio-economic class and education level, aligning with the broader sociolinguistic patterns observed by Labov.

Building on Labov's framework, this research aims to apply these principles to the Turkish language. Specifically, this study focuses on sociolinguistic variation in the pronunciation of the */r/* sound, a prominent feature within Turkish phonology. The */r/* sound presents an intriguing case for investigation due to its potential sensitivity to sociodemographic factors. By examining the extent to which socioeconomic variables, such as education and income, impact speakers' rhoticity patterns, this study endeavours to shed light on the nuanced interplay between language and society in the Turkish context. In essence, this research contributes to our broader understanding of language variation within Turkish society while also advancing the general principles of sociolinguistic variation. By investigating the factors that shape how individuals pronounce the *r* sound in Turkish, we gain insights into the complex relationship between language and social identity, ultimately enriching our knowledge of how linguistic diversity reflects and drives social dynamics in multilingual communities.

Methodology

This study employed a stratified sampling method to examine the variation in the pronunciation of the /r/ sound within the Turkish-speaking community of Van, Turkey. A total of 65 participants were stratified based on key socioeconomic variables: occupation, education level, age, and income.

The decision to select 5 participants per stratum was made to ensure a statistically viable subgroup size for cross-comparison while maintaining a balanced distribution across diverse socioeconomic profiles. This sample size per group is consistent with those used in foundational sociolinguistic studies (e.g., Labov, 1972; Trudgill, 2009) and aims to strike a practical balance between achieving qualitative depth and allowing for meaningful quantitative comparison. Participants were recruited from 13 predefined occupational categories—including academic, doctor, engineer, nurse, teacher, university student, business owner, freelance worker, blue-collar worker, waiter, unemployed, retired, and homemaker—to ensure a representative sample of the

local community's social structure. The selection process within each stratum was designed to be as random as possible, utilizing local registries, social networks, and field surveys to identify potential participants. To control for confounding linguistic variables, all participants were required to be native monolingual speakers of Turkish, acquired from early childhood, with no dominant proficiency in another language. This methodological approach ensures that the analysis of rhoticity is based on a reliable and comparable dataset, strengthening the validity and generalizability of the observed correlations between linguistic variation and socioeconomic factors.

Ethical approval for this study, titled "Socioeconomic Influences On Turkish Pronunciation: A Sociolinguistic Exploration of the Rhotic 'R' Sound," was granted by the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee at Van Yüzüncü Yıl University (Decision No. 2025/03-27, dated February 7, 2025), confirming compliance with relevant ethical standards and Turkish legal frameworks for research involving human participants.

Participants

The study included 65 participants, all native speakers of Turkish, who had Turkish as their mother tongue, having acquired it from early childhood. The selection criteria focused specifically on individuals for whom Turkish is the sole primary language, ensuring a precise analysis of rhoticity within monolingual Turkish speakers. While this choice limits the inclusion of bilingual individuals, it enables a focused investigation of rhoticity in Turkish without introducing additional linguistic variables that bilingualism may bring. Among the participants, 35 are originally from Van and have lived there continuously since birth. These individuals represent the younger generation of locals in Van, whose linguistic behaviour reflects contemporary patterns in Turkish. It is acknowledged that this sample may not fully capture the linguistic diversity of older generations in Van, some of whom might have bilingual proficiency in Kurdish and Turkish. The remaining 30 participants come from other cities across Türkiye and currently reside in Van for educational or occupational purposes, with varied lengths of stay ranging from 2 to 10 years.

Table 1 Participant Demographics by Occupation, Education Level, Age, and Income

Occupation	Education Level	n	Age (Years)	Monthly Income (TL)
Academicians	University degree	5	45, 34, 38, 49, 29	45,000
Doctors	University degree	5	45, 34, 38, 49, 29	55,000
Engineers	University degree	5	39, 41, 39, 41, 39	55,000
Nurses	University degree	5	42, 40, 42, 40, 42	35,000
Teachers	University degree	5	32, 41, 37, 55, 29	30,000
University students	University degree	5	21, 22, 23, 22, 22	5,000
Business owners	High school diploma	5	46, 42, 39, 58, 46	65,000
Freelance workers	High school diploma	5	28, 31, 27, 33, 35	24,000

Occupation	Education Level	n	Age (Years)	Monthly Income (TL)
Workers	High school diploma	5	29, 31, 28, 36, 29	20,000
Waiters	High school diploma	5	26, 24, 26, 24, 26	10,000
Unemployed	Primary school	5	28, 19, 33, 19, 28	6,000
Retired	Primary school	5	62, 57, 62, 57, 62	7,500
Homemakers	Primary school	5	50, 48, 50, 48, 50	3,000

The table provides a comprehensive overview of the study's participants, offering insights into their diverse demographics, occupational backgrounds, educational levels, ages, and reported incomes. One prominent trend is the correlation between education and income. Categories like "Teachers," "Academicians," and "Doctors," primarily consisting of university graduates, report higher incomes, aligning with the typical higher earning potential associated with advanced degrees. Conversely, the "Unemployed" category, comprising individuals with primary school education, reflects lower income levels, underscoring the financial challenges they may face. The "Freelance Job" participants, a mix of high school graduates, highlight the income diversity that characterizes the freelance job market, influenced by the flexible nature of such work. "University Students" naturally report lower incomes as their primary focus is on education, while "Workers" with high school degrees maintain moderate incomes. The "Housewives" and "Retired" participants, generally older, feature lower incomes, consistent with their life stages, while "Waiters" show relatively higher incomes, possibly due to tips in the service industry. "Engineers" and "Nurses" as high-earning professionals with university degrees further emphasize the education-income connection. Lastly, "Businessmen" reveal an interesting mix of ages and relatively high incomes, reflective of their diverse entrepreneurial ventures.

The table also reveals an age diversity among the participants. "Housewives" and "Retired" participants tend to be older, indicating their life stages. In contrast, "University Students" are typically younger, reflecting their focus on academic pursuits.

Income disparities are evident across the categories, with some, like "Teachers," "Academicians," and "Doctors," reporting higher incomes, while others, such as "Unemployed" and "University Students," report lower incomes. This wealth of data within the table provides a foundation for further analysis and discussion within the essay, enabling more profound insights into the socioeconomic dynamics and diversity among the study's participants.

The Process

In the study, participants were chosen using a systematic stratified sampling method to ensure diversity. This involved identifying individuals from diverse backgrounds, including various occupations, educational levels, ages, and income levels in the Van, Türkiye region. After identifying potential participants, they were contacted and provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose and the interview process. It was important for them to understand their rights, and their confidentiality was assured. Once they agreed to participate, the interviews took place

Conducting Personal Interviews

In Turkish, the way the */r/* sound is pronounced can be a unique marker of speech. The study aimed to explore how people handle this aspect of speaking. Personal interviews were conducted in comfortable and private places. They began with a friendly atmosphere to help participants feel at ease. Introductory questions about their backgrounds and experiences were asked to build rapport. Participants were encouraged to share freely about their language choices, especially regarding the */r/* sounds. Follow-up questions were used to delve deeper into their responses, and all interviews were recorded with their permission for later transcription and analysis. 1. Daily Routine: Can you describe what you typically do during a regular weekday morning? What activities are you "doing" (-yor) as part of your routine?

1. Hobbies and Interests: Tell me about a hobby or activity you enjoy. What are you "currently doing" (-yor) related to this interest?

2. Future Plans: Are there any upcoming events or plans in your life? What preparations or arrangements are you "making" (-yor) for those occasions?

3. Work or School: If you have a job or are a student, what tasks or assignments are you "working on" (-yor) at the moment? Can you describe a typical day at work or school and what you're "engaged in" (-yor) during that time?

4. Social Activities: When you meet up with friends or family, what kind of conversations or activities are you "engaging in" (-yor)? Can you share a recent social event or gathering where you were "participating" (-yor)?

Conducting Interviews and Data Analysis

During the semi-structured interviews, we arranged convenient meeting locations to ensure a comfortable and relaxed environment for participants. Each interview began with a brief introduction to establish rapport and trust. Participants were encouraged to speak naturally and spontaneously about their experiences with language, including their use of rhotic and non-rhotic pronunciations. Open-ended questions were used to prompt discussion, and participants were given the freedom to share their thoughts and experiences. We actively listened and took notes to capture interesting linguistic features and responses related to rhoticity. All interviews were recorded with participants' consent to facilitate accurate transcription and analysis.

After the interviews, the recorded sessions were carefully transcribed to accurately capture how participants spoke, focusing on differences in pronouncing /r/ sounds. The transcribed data were organized and labelled for easier analysis. To protect privacy, names and personal details were removed from all transcripts and records. Patterns in the use of */r/* sounds were examined, considering factors like job, education, age, and income**.**

Findings

Participants who emphasize the /r/ sound are categorized as "Rhotic," while those who do not emphasize it are categorized as "Non-Rhotic." This table provides a clear visual representation of the division between the two groups:

Table 2 Participant Pronunciation Patterns in Turkish: Rhotic vs. Non-Rhotic

Participant Category	Occupation	Education Level	Income	Pronunciation
Rhotic	Teachers	University Graduate	30,000 TL	Emphasize /r/
Rhotic	Academicians	University Graduate	45,000 TL	Emphasize /r/
Rhotic	Doctors	University Graduate	55,000 TL	Emphasize /r/
Rhotic	University Students	University Graduate	5,000 TL	Emphasize /r/
Rhotic	Engineers	University Graduate	55,000 TL	Emphasize /r/
Rhotic	Nurses	University Graduate	35,000 TL	Emphasize /r/
Rhotic	Businessmen	High School Graduate	65,000 TL	Emphasize /r/
Non-Rhotic	Unemployed (Primary)	Primary School	6,000 TL	Omit /r/
Non-Rhotic	Freelance Job	High School Graduate	24,000 TL	Omit /r/
Non-Rhotic	Workers	High School Graduate	15,000 TL	Omit /r/
Non-Rhotic	Housewives	Primary School	3,000 TL	Omit /r/
Non-Rhotic	Retired	Primary School	7,500 TL	Omit /r/
Non-Rhotic	Waiters	High School Graduate	10,000 TL	Omit /r/

This table provides a clear distinction between participants who emphasize the */r/* sound (Rhotic) and those who do not (Non-Rhotic). It allows for a visual representation of the pronunciation patterns based on occupation, education level, income, and overall pronunciation behavior. Participants in the "Rhotic" category are those who emphasize the*/r/* sound in their pronunciation. This group comprises individuals from diverse occupations, including teachers, academicians, doctors, university students, engineers, nurses, and business professionals. Notably, these participants have higher education levels, mostly as university graduates. This aligns with our earlier observations that individuals with more formal education often retain rhotic speech patterns (Labov, 1966). On the other hand, participants in the "Non-Rhotic" category are those who do not emphasize the */r/* sound in their pronunciation. This group comprises individuals with various occupations, including unemployed individuals (with primary school education), freelance

workers (with high school education), workers (with high school education), housewives (with primary school education), retired individuals (with primary school education), and waiters (with high school education). Most notably, this group includes participants with lower incomes, earning less than 20,000 TL annually. Participants with higher incomes, such as doctors, engineers, and businessmen, predominantly exhibit rhotic speech. Conversely, those with lower incomes, including unemployed individuals, freelance workers, and housewives, are more likely to have non-rhotic pronunciation patterns. This income-based division aligns with the broader sociolinguistic concept that socioeconomic factors play a significant role in language variation (Trudgill, 2009).

Education levels also play a role in pronunciation choices. University graduates, regardless of occupation, tend to be in the rhotic pronunciation group. This highlights the influence of formal education in maintaining specific pronunciation patterns (Labov, 2006). Interestingly, the businessman category presents a unique pattern. These high-income participants, despite having a high school education, tend to emphasize the */r/* sound. This deviation from the general trend suggests that occupation can also be a powerful determinant of pronunciation, even when formal education levels differ (Eckert, 2000). The table highlights the rich sociolinguistic landscape of Turkish pronunciation, underscoring the intricate interplay between income, education, and occupation in shaping language variation. It demonstrates that linguistic choices are not isolated but intertwined with individuals' broader sociocultural contexts. In summary, the table provides a structured view of how participants in Turkish society exhibit diverse pronunciation patterns in relation to sociolinguistic factors. It provides a foundation for further exploration of the complex relationship between language, identity, and socioeconomic conditions in Turkish-speaking communities.

Table 3 Exemplifying Rhotic and Non-Rhotic Usage by Participants

Rhotic Verbs (Turkish)	**Non-Rhotic Verbs (Turkish)**	**English Meanings**
Hazırlanıyorum	Hazırlanıyo-m	I am preparing
Uğraşıyorum	Uğraşıy-um	I am dealing with / I am busy
Çalışıyorum	Çalışıyo-m	I am working
İlgileniyorum	İlgileniyo-m	I am interested / I am involved
Yapılıyor	Yapılıyo-	It is being done
Konuşuyoruz	Konuşu-yoz	We talk
Dönüyor	Dönüyo-	It is turning / It is changing
Bir gün	Bi- gün	One day

The table illustrates the distinction between Rhotic and Non-Rhotic verbs in Turkish, providing insight into the linguistic variation observed in the participants' responses during the study. The use of Rhotic verbs, such as "Hazırlanıyorum" (I am preparing), "Çalışıyorum" (I am working), and "Konuşuruz" (We talk), indicates a clear pronunciation of the /r/ sound. On the

other hand, the Non-Rhotic verbs, like "Hazırlanıyo-m" (I am preparing), "Uğraşıy-um" (I am dealing with/I am busy), and "Yapılıyo-r" (It is being done), demonstrate a tendency to omit or soften the /r/ sound.

This observation aligns with the findings of the sociolinguistic study, where participants from different socioeconomic backgrounds exhibited distinct pronunciation patterns, particularly in relation to the /r/ sound. The use of Rhotic or Non-Rhotic forms of verbs can be linked to factors such as education, income, and occupation, highlighting the intricate relationship between language variation and sociodemographic characteristics. For instance, participants with higher education levels or higher incomes may lean towards Rhotic forms, consistent with Labov's sociolinguistic theories, which associate certain linguistic features with social status. The variation observed in the participants' language choices adds depth to our understanding of how sociolinguistic factors contribute to linguistic diversity within the Turkish-speaking community. Further exploration of these patterns could provide insights into the nuanced ways in which language reflects social dynamics and individual identity within the Turkish context.

While the study's participant pool included individuals from a broad spectrum of age groups, statistical analysis of the data determined that age was not a significant independent variable in unpredicting the use of rhotic pronunciation. The patterns of speech variation did not align consistently or significantly with generational differences. For instance, younger university students were consistently found in the rhotic group, aligning with their higher education level, while older retired individuals with primary education were consistently non-rhotic. This indicates that their pronunciation was likely influenced more by their educational background or income than their age.

Discussion and Conclusion

Language is a dynamic and evolving aspect of human interaction, influenced by various factors, including sociodemographics, geography, education, and culture. This study examines language variation within Turkish through a sociolinguistic lens, exploring how societal factors shape the use and evolution of the language. This approach contributes to understanding language as a reflection of identity, social context, and cultural diversity in Turkish-speaking environments.

The data reveal a strong connection between socioeconomic factors and the use of the /r/ sound in Turkish pronunciation. Higher-income individuals and university graduates frequently emphasize the /r/ sound, whereas those with lower incomes and non-university backgrounds tend to omit or downplay it. Notably, high-income businesspeople, despite primarily holding high school diplomas, tend to emphasize the /r/ sound. This pattern underscores the influence of occupation and professional identity on speech patterns, as individuals may adopt linguistic features that align with perceived social prestige or professional norms. These findings are consistent with sociolinguistic research emphasizing the interplay between social class, occupation, and speech patterns (Labov, 2001; Holmes, 2008; Derwing, 2016). Income emerges as a significant determinant of rhoticity. High-income participants, such as businesspeople and professionals, display a tendency for rhotic speech, contrasting with the non-rhotic patterns of lower-income groups, including freelancers, workers, and housewives. This observation aligns with studies highlighting the role of socioeconomic status in shaping linguistic variation (Eckert, 2018; Chambers, 2003). Similarly, education plays a crucial role, with university graduates,

including teachers, doctors, and engineers, demonstrating a high level of literacy. These findings resonate with theories on the impact of formal education on linguistic behaviour, such as Labov's (1966) work on social stratification and Giles and Powesland's (1975) Communication Accommodation Theory, which suggests individuals adapt their speech to align with social norms and expectations.

Interestingly, the high-income, non-university graduate participants challenge conventional assumptions about the correlation between education and linguistic patterns. Their adoption of rhoticity underscores the multifaceted nature of language variation, influenced not only by education but also by factors such as income, occupation, and social aspirations. This dynamic aligns with broader sociolinguistic frameworks emphasizing the intersectionality of linguistic and social variables (Eckert, 2012). While the study provides valuable insights, some conclusions remain hypothetical and should be framed as areas requiring further testing. For instance, the pronounced rhoticity among high-income businesspeople could be further explored by investigating workplace-specific linguistic norms or the role of professional networks in shaping speech. Similar patterns have been documented in other languages; however, robust evidence for Turkish is limited, necessitating further research. Future studies could employ longitudinal methods to examine how speech patterns evolve within occupational groups over time or experimental designs to test the influence of professional identity on pronunciation.

The lack of significant variation based on regional origins, such as being from Van or other cities, is another noteworthy finding. This suggests that, in this study, factors such as geographic mobility or regional background had a negligible impact on rhoticity. However, this observation could differ in studies focusing on other linguistic features or regional accents. Future research might explore whether regional factors play a more pronounced role in other sociolinguistic contexts within Turkey. The findings underscore the importance of considering multiple intersecting factors, such as income, education, and occupation, to capture the complexity of language variation. This approach aligns with sociolinguistic principles that view language as a product of diverse and overlapping influences (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Beyond academic implications, the study offers practical insights for language policy and education programs. Understanding the socioeconomic dimensions of language variation can inform strategies to promote linguistic inclusivity and address language education inequalities (Fishman, 1991; Trudgill, 2009).

Pronunciation choices extend beyond linguistic boundaries, reflecting broader social and economic dynamics within Turkish society. This highlights the potential of sociolinguistic research to reveal the intricate relationships between language and social context. As such, this study serves as a foundation for further exploration into the sociolinguistics of Turkish, with potential to deepen our understanding of the interplay between language, identity, and society. While this study does not include bilingual speakers, the complexity of the sociolinguistic landscape in Van, including the historical presence of bilingualism involving Kurdish and Turkish, is recognized. Future studies could expand on this foundation by exploring the interplay between monolingual and bilingual speakers, providing a broader understanding of linguistic variation in the region. By explicitly focusing on monolingual Turkish speakers, this study provides a baseline for examining rhoticity in Turkish, offering insights that can be further contextualized in subsequent research.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of research on sociolinguistic variation in Turkish, emphasizing the roles of socioeconomic status, education, and occupation in shaping pronunciation. While some conclusions remain hypothetical, they pave the way for future investigations to validate and expand upon these findings. By situating Turkish within a sociolinguistic context, this research highlights the dynamic and multifaceted nature of language variation, offering valuable insights into the interplay between language and social factors.

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Ethical Statement/Etik Beyan: It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited. / Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur. (Ethical approval for this study, titled "Socioeconomic Influences On Turkish Pronunciation: A Sociolinguistic Exploration of the Rhotic 'R' Sound," was granted by the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee at Van Yüzüncü Yıl University (Decision No. 2025/03-27, dated February 7, 2025), confirming compliance with relevant ethical standards and Turkish legal frameworks for research involving human participants.)

Declaration of Conflict/Çatışma Beyanı: It is declared that there is no conflict of interest between individuals or institutions in the study. / Çalışmada kişi ya da kurumlar arası çıkar çatışmasının olmadığı beyan olunur.