# The Discourse of 'Betrothal' in Turkish Culture: An Ethnographic Perspective

Hatice ÇUBUKÇU*

### Abstract

The ultimate goal of Ethnography of Communication  is an exhaustive description of all 'systematically differentiated' units, namely the 'speech events' of communities, towards a fuller understanding of local and universal features of human communication. However, this relatively young field seems to be yet far from accomplishing this goal, despite the relatively large bulk of  existing literature. The present  study  attempts  to investigate  the discourse of the *betrothal*  ceremony, or  so called '*sözkesme*' in Turkish, as a distinct speech event,  which is one of the most commonly used traditional marriage arrangement  practices in Turkey. *Sözkesme* events, the announcement of the formal agreement made by  the families on the prospective marriage,  constitute the  final phase of the marriage arrangement procedures. The data, comprising eleven audio recordings of sözkesme rituals, have been analyzed based on Hymes  SPEAKING Grid. The verbal and non verbal  components  of the event  have been described  with specific focus on the conversational *act sequences*. The findings suggest that the discourse   is highly formulaic and strictly structured, as generally expected in ritualistic events. A model for the act sequence has been proposed at the end of the study.

**Key words:** Speech community, Speech event,  SPEAKING Grid,  Betrothal ceremony. Etnography of Communication.

### Öz

Bir söylem  inceleme yaklaşımı  olarak 1960'lı yıllarda ortaya çıkan  İletişim Etnografisi, insan iletişimin, yapıları toplumsal / kültürel uzlaşımlar yoluyla kurulan  iletişim birimleri olan 'dil olayları' yoluyla gerçekleştiği görüşünü taşımaktadır. Buna göre, dil olaylarını oluşturan ve  belli bir düzen içeren etkileşim yapılarının, o dil  topluluğuna özgü geniş ölçekli toplumsal yapılanmaları  yansıttığı ileri sürülür. O nedenle, insan  iletişiminin evrensel niteliklerinin tam olarak  belirlenmesinin  ancak farklı  dil topluluklarına özgü tüm 'dil olaylarının' betimlenmesi ile olanaklı olduğu savunulur.  Ne var ki,  bu genç araştırma alanı

*   Assist. Prof. Dr., Çukurova University, Faculty of Education, English Language Teaching Department.
    hcubukcu@cu.edu.tr

içerisinde yapılmış olan çalışmaların bu anlamda yetersiz kaldığı da söylenebilir. Bu görüşten yola çıkan bu çalışmada, Türk kültüründe evlilik öncesi süreçlerin önemli bir aşamasını oluşturan 'söz kesme' töreni bir 'dil olayı' olarak betimlenmektedir. Söz kesme törenleri, gençlerin aileleri arasında, kız isteme törenleri ile başlatılan görüşmelerin olumlu olarak sonlandırıldığı, başka bir deyişle, gençlerin evlenmelerine ilişkin kararlarının resmen alındığı ve duyurulduğu törenlerdir. Bu çerçevede, doğal ortamda kaydedilen onbir *sözkesme* töreni örneği, Hymes'ın SPEAKING Ölçeği çerçevesinde çözümlenmiştir. Çalışmada, öncelikle *sözkesme dil olayı*nda toplumsal/kültürel bağlamı oluşturan 'sözdışı' ögeler, ve dil olaylarının başlangıç ve bitiş sınırlarını oluşturan, ayırt edici söylemsel belirtkeler tanımlanmıştır. Son aşamada ise, bu araştırmanın temel odağını oluşturan etkileşimsel yapılar betimlenmiştir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Dil Topluluğu, Dil Olayı, SPEAKING Ölçeği, Söz Kesme Töreni, İletişim Etnografisi.

## Introduction

One basic premise of Ethnography of Communication[1] is that human communication is composed of 'more or less well-identified units' namely, speech events that are constrained by social and cultural norms rather than of 'undifferentiated strings of discourse.' To put it in Hymes'(1962, p.132) words "the community is organized as systems of speech events". Bakhtin (1986, pp.126-128), further claims that "speech genres (events) organize our speech in almost the same way as grammatical forms do," suggesting that understanding communication necessitates investigation of speech events. However, despite the large bulk of literature on speech events, this relatively young field is yet far from attaining its "ultimate goal" which is "an exhaustive description of speech acts and speech events of a particular speech community"[2] (Coulthard 1997). In line with this view, this paper aims to describe one of the highly ritualistic speech events in Turkish culture, namely, the **betrothal ceremony**, so called *sözkesme töreni* in Turkish. This ceremony which constitutes an important phase of traditional marriage practices signifies the formal agreement between families for the marriage of the young couple. The betrothal speech event occurs within the wider context of a specific type of **speech situation,** the **betrothal visit.** The **betrothal visit,** as the final occasion in marriage arrangement negotiations, also includes other speech events such as 'exchanging wishes of well-being,' 'presentation of gifts' etc., which remain out of the focus of this study.

---

[1] Initially, Hymes (1962) names this enterprise as Ethnography of Speaking, however, in his later (1974) works, he calls it Ethnography of Communication. Currently, both labels are used by scholars ( Philipsen & Coutu 2005).

[2] "A community sharing rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety" (Hymes 1974, p.54).

Two important points motivate the choice of this topic in the study:

1) Description and analysis of highly ritualistic or official speech events are suggested by researchers to be better choices for the initial stage, since they seem to have clearer and more "self –contained sequences, thus, more easily identifiable patterns" when compared to those of everyday conversation, with less predictable structures (Saville-Troike 1989).

2) The reason why this specific speech event has been selected among other possible choices is that *sözkesme* event is a widely used ritualistic practice in Turkish society, which is one of the rare customs that have been preserved and practised symbolically both in traditional (family-initiated) and couple - initiated marriages. Moreover, it is assumed that the rich literature that exists in the fields of sociology and social-psychology on traditional marriage practices in Turkey (e.g. Duben and Behar 1982; Hortacsu 1997; Kağıtçıbaşı 1991; Timur 1972) will provide a rich context for the interpretation of the betrothal speech event as well as being complementary for those studies.

Many descriptions and analyses of individual ritualistic speech events in diverse communities have appeared in collections by Bauman and Sheerer (1974), by Tanen and Saville-Troike (1985) also by Philipsen and Coutu (2005). Various ceremonies such as condolence events, politeness rituals as well as marriage arrangement practices in different cultures (e.g. a viewing visit in Newari culture, a marriage proposal in a Japanese village) are included in these studies. Hill and Hill (1986) present both ritualistic and official events such as a fortune telling or an interrogation of a witchcraft in the Calu community in Panama and by natives in Mexico. Related literature in Turkish culture includes works on various features of interactions in certain speech situations such as on work place discourse (Toksöz 2000), doctor-patient talk (Açıkalın 2002; Duman 2000), courtroom trials (Acar 1997), traditional shopping encounters (Çubukçu 2001), etc.; however, ritualistic speech events as a part of traditional practices, seem to have been largely overlooked. Exceptionally, as a guideline to ethnographic studies in Turkish speech community, Demircan (1990, pp. 89-94) provides a list of 49 traditional speech situations such as 'funerals,' 'fortune telling,' 'betrothal visits.' The text also presents a series of possible speech events fitted in the 'circumcision speech situation' some of which are the 'preparation of the special bed,' 'circumcision operation', 'serving of food and drinks' and the 'presentation of gifts.'

## Method of Analysis

### Data

The data comprising of 11 different cases of *söz kesme* events were obtained between the years 2001 and 2006. The data gathering process has expanded over a

considerable period of time; since *söz kesme* is a special and private occasion, the researcher could only gather the data whenever she came across an opportunity to participate in one of these occasions as a guest, a relative or a friend. Five events were recorded in Adana, 4 in Ankara and 2 in İstanbul. Five of the speech events took place in strictly traditional (family-arranged) settings, and six cases occurred in 'couple-initiated' marriages. However, the effects of the differences in geographical locations and socioeconomic features were not considered in the study. It is believed that examining multiple cases would contribute to the quality of interpretation, since ethnographic descriptions are mainly based on the researcher's knowledge of the culture and on the experiences as a 'participant-observer' in the event (Schiffrin 1994)[3]. **Betrothal speech events**, as the object of this study, were transcribed and analyzed based on the ethnographic method developed by Hymes (1962,1974) and encoded following similar studies, namely, those of Nwoye (1985) and Schiffrin (1994). The other speech events within the **betrothal visit** have remained out of the focus of this paper.

### *Ethnographic analysis*

Ethnography of Communication views language as a system of use of which rules and norms are an integral part of culture and that culture is continually created, negotiated, and redefined in the concrete acts between persons who are participating in some kind of interactive situation. Thus, the way we communicate is constrained by culture, but it also reveals and sustains culture (Malinowski 1978, in Saville-Troike 1989). In other words, by studying the language we use in speech situations, we can realize the cultural norms that underlie the way we act towards one another. To this end, Hymes (1962,1974), who has adapted this view into an approach to discourse analysis, categorized communication into hierarchical units namely; **a) speech situation:** the nonverbal context in which the verbal interaction takes place and that characterizes the verbal features (e.g. a birthday party, a meeting), **b) speech event:** a speech that occurs in a speech situation with recognizable boundaries (e.g. a conversation at a birthday party, a joke at a meeting), **c) speech act**: individual functions of utterances. Hymes (1962, p.132) also, identified the speech event as the "primary object of analysis" and proposed an ethnographic framework which takes into account the various factors involved in speaking, with the help of a classificatory scale known as the SPEAKING Grid.

---

3 Although in earlier ethnographic studies, scholars obtained data as 'participant-observers' while conducting research in cultures other than their own, with the help of a native 'informant' who informed them about the cultural norms; in later studies, the advantages of doing research in the researchers' own culture were emphasized. This role has been defined as the 'native-informant' (see Saville-Troike 1989; Schiffrin 1994).

*Speech Events*

The term **speech event** is used interchangeably in related literature, with other terms such as 'communicative event,' 'spoken genre' or 'speech genre,' even though they may show slight changes in meaning when defined technically[4]. According to Hymes (1974, p.52) the term speech event is "...restricted to activities or aspect of activities that are directly governed by rules or norms for use of speech. An event may consist of a single act; but will often comprise of several."

Some basic features of speech events may be listed as follows (Coulthard 1988; Hymes 1974; Saville-Troike 1989):

- Speech events are the largest units for which one can discover linguistic structures.
- The relationship between speech events and speech acts is hierarchical.
- Speech events take place within the context of **speech situations.**
- Speech events can occur sequentially or simultaneously within a speech situation. For example, in a courtroom trial, the 'examination of the defendant' and 'announcement of the verdict' take place in a linear order.' On the other hand, parallel conversations at a party with different participants, manners, relationships may occur simultaneously.
- Speech events may take place with no speech at all.[5]
- There may be "mixed" or 'hybrid' events which embody the characteristics of more than one event.

### The SPEAKING Grid

The SPEAKING Grid which is used as the tool for analysis in this study helps to uncover potential verbal and nonverbal features of distinct speech events, and also to understand how these features are related to one another. Each letter in the acronym S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G stands for one possible component of the communication to be analyzed (Wardaugh 1997, pp.245-247):

(**S**) **Setting/scene**: While **setting** refers to physical circumstances eg. time, place in which the event takes place, **scene** refers to pschological/ abstract settings. For instance, the scene of the president's new year message would largely differ from the scene of a message following a disaster that hits the country.

(**P**) **Participants** involve various combinations of speaker-listener, sender-receiver, addresser-addressee, etc., and they usually fill socially specified roles. Eg. A prayer

---

4 See Coulthard (1988 ) for distinctions.
5 E.g as described by Nwoye (1985, p.179) of a 'condoling' event on occasion of a premature death among Igbo peple, Nigeria.

makes a deity participant. Or, in a classroom setting,  the teacher's question followed by a student's answer does not only involve the two interactants, but it assigns the role of 'attentive listeners' to the rest of the class.

(**E) Ends** refers to the conventionally recognized and expected outcomes or purposes of the event but it also includes  specific goals of the interactants. Eg. A trial in a courtroom has a recognizable social end  but  different participants (eg. defendants or  prosecutors) also have their  own goals.

(A)**Act-sequence** refers to the actual form and content of what is said. This part is the basic  aspect  of  speech events with which linguists interest themselves (*as in this study*).

(**K) Key**  refers to the tone and manner or spirit in which a particular message is conveyed. Some examples may be light-hearted, serious, sarcastic etc.

(**I) Instrumentalities**  has  to do with the  channel (verbal/non-verbal), physical forms of  speech, written or oral etc. A single event  may involve using multiple instrumentalities; e.g., oral and written modes, or switches across languages.

(**N) Norms of interaction and interpretation** refer  to specific properties attached to speaking concerning cultural beliefs, attitudes and  styles by the speech community .

(**G)Genre** refers to clearly categorized  textual categories, such as, poems, jokes, sermons, lectures.

**Findings**

Following the analysis of  each conversational text based on the SPEAKING  grid, nonverbal and verbal  components have been described  in section 3.1. as the potential[6] **communicative components   of the "söz kesme"  speech event**. The label 'potential' is used following Hasan (1978), since the inventory of components presented in this study contain some of  the normative features as well as some uncommon/exceptional ones. The label also helps  validate the tentative findings  based on the limited scope of the data.  Also,  as the main focus of this  study,  a model for  the potential generic **act sequences**  has  been presented (3.2). These include  the (speech) acts detected in the conversational corpus.  In section 3.3. the  acts are  illustrated in different excerpts. Finally, one of the speech events in the data has been  presented as an example to a possible act sequence.

*Potential   Generic Components of  "söz kesme" speech event*
**Setting**: Location: the girl's house.
         Time: (usually) evening

_____

6    Hasan (1978) suggests that speech events (or written genres) have some basic features that characterize the event as well as  some 'potential' of optional components.

**Participants (P)**:

> P1: father of the boy
> P2: mother of the boy
> P3: third parties, e.g. some elderly people from the family
>   (common but optional)
>   P4: father of the girl
>   P5: mother of the girl
>   P6: the girl
>   P7: the boy (optional)

**Ends**: Recognition of formal consent by families  for the marriage of the couple.

**Act-sequence**:

> 1- The spokesperson ( SP) from the boy's side asks for formal consent for the betrothal
> 2- SP from the girl's side accepts the request
> 3- Couple receives congratulations and blessings (See section 3.2 for a detailed description)

**Key:**  highly formal, polite, serious (sometimes humor used to decrease tension)

**Genre:**  marriage arrangement discourse

**Instrumentalities**: verbal, nonverbal, specific idiomatic expressions

**Norms for interpretation**: Although commonly shared cultural norms characterize the verbal and non verbal aspects of *sözkesme* rituals,  details of the procedures  seem to show some  variations across different  households. Particularly, strictly family-initiated marriages allow for a more suitable medium for practicing traditional rituals more  extensively (Kağıtçıbaşı 1974; Stirling 1965). However, the conventional discourse used during the ritual has been preserved even in modern settings since *sözkesme* ceremonies  constitute the formal and  symbolic  aspect of the marriage arrangement process.   The   norms for interpretation related to each component of the event are presented below:

**Setting**: During these visits that usually take place in the girl's house, the importance of the occasion is normally reflected in the physical appearance of the household and especially of the prospective bride, who is elegantly dressed.  Unexpected physical conditions/appearances on the other hand, may be interpreted as a negative message, such as a sign of   forced consent or reluctance.

**Participants:** Apart from the presence of parents and family members on both sides, usually some third parties such as a senior in the family or a reputable friend highly respected by both sides are expected in the company. These people may act as the 'spokesperson,' a role which is usually performed by the father of the boy. In the absence

of the father, an uncle, an elder brother or the mother may take over the role. However, there may be exceptional practices; for example, (in text no:7) it seems possible to have the mother as the spokesperson despite the presence of the father. As another uncommon practice, the prospective groom may take part in the request-making act for betrothal addressing the girl, following the spokesperson (text no.7). Also, in example 10, where the girl and the boy are relatives, and the spokesperson is the grand uncle of the young couple, the relationship allows him to act on behalf of both sides and creates an exceptional and interesting situation. He both makes the request for the betrothal and then gives the consent for the marriage, which is ratified by the father of the girl once more. Generally, the boy and the girl are present during the occasion. However, some conservative households may require both the girl and the boy to remain outside the room while the request for the betrothal is being made, and they are summoned afterwards.

**Ends:** The purpose of the betrothal event is mutually shared by both families. Initially, the acceptance of the visit by the girl's family normally implies their approval of the betrothal. The event fulfills the following social functions:

a) taking the formal consent of the girl's family for the marriage
b) marking the explicit recognition of the couple by both families and relatives and the community.
c) Optionally, becoming a medium for wearing engagement rings.

**Key:** The delicate nature of the occasion is clearly evident in the behaviors of the participants, accordingly the discourse is highly formal and serious. However, humor is commonly used to decrease the tension in the atmosphere. The girl and the respective young ones are not expected to participate in the talk unless asked for.

**Instrumentalities**: Highly conventionalized language is used especially when making the request for the girl's hand. The idiomatic expression, "*allahın emri ve peygamberin kavliyle*" (with the command of God and the word of the prophet) always accompanies the request. Non-verbal communication is also significant, especially when reflecting respect and polite behavior. The serving of special desserts or traditional sweet drink[7], sherbet, may be regarded as instrumental elements when it takes place as a complementary act (i.e., immediately after the agreement of betrothal).

Customs related to the types of desserts and drinks seem to vary largely across different families. For example, in some regions, boy's family is expected to bring the sugar and other ingredients to make a special sweet drink whereas sherbet is not served at all in some households. However, the boy's side is always expected to bring some

---

7    See, HYPERLINK  < http://www.sandıklı.com> for customs in Sandıklı, Afyon.

kind of dessert or sweets as a part of the tradition; i.e., 'eating sweets' is associated with 'having a sweet mouth' which means 'having a happy and peaceful life.'

### *The Act Sequence*

The act sequence presented in section 3.1, has been further investigated in this section, as the main focus of this study. This three -step act sequence suggests that a successful realization of the event requires, 1) an explicit request by the SP on boy's side, for the hand of the girl, 2) an explicit declaration of the acceptance by the girl's family, followed by, 3) congratulations and blessings by the SPs and other people present in the occasion, respectively. However, it has also been observed that this basic act sequence is generally embedded in some other acts to ensure a more effective and socially appropriate interaction. Hence, for a more comprehensive picture of the conversational sequences the acts that have been identified in the corpus have been grouped into six broader categories each of which constitutes a phase in the speech event, as shown in the model below:

**Act Sequence in Betrothal Speech Event:**
A. Opening Acts
B Head Act 1
C. (Supportive acts)*
D Head Act 2
E. (Supportive Acts)
F. Complementary (closing) Acts.

*(optional acts are shown in brackets):

Each category proposed above is presented in more detail in tables 1/ A, 1/B, 1/C, 1/D and 1/E including the generic[8] and optional conversational acts involved in the speech event. These findings suggest that the speech event stars with the Opening Acts ( 1 /A) performed by the spokesperson on the boy's side, and this group is comprised of at least one main act which is the 'expression of intent' (reminding the purpose of the visit) that is usually embedded in potential acts such as 'appraisals' and **'summation of background story.'** These are clearly preparatory steps towards the Head Act (Table 1 /B) which is composed of a single act: 'asking for the formal consent for the girl's hand' or the **request for the betrothal.** Supportive Acts (1/C) to follow constitute an optional category that embody acts such as 'restatement of the request.'

---

8 Generic acts are highlighted in bold print.

'expressing hopes' etc. The second head Act (1/D) is realized by the spokesperson from the girl's family through an expression that functions as an 'approval' or 'consent'. Complementary Acts (1/E) develop around 'congratulations' and 'blessings' that the couple receives. 'Kissing the hands of the elderly participants' is a common practice as an expression of respect and gratitude, however, it has also been depicted as an optional nonverbal act in this study since in some cases, it was performed later , following the engagement ceremony (which constitutes a different speech event). As a final comment, in cases where a single utterance performed more than one act (multifunctionality), only the primary function has been considered (Shiffrin,1994). To illustrate, a response such as "it's our honor to accept your request" (text no:4) has been regarded as an example of 'accept' category, although it also bears an expression of respect (belonging to the 'compliment' category).

**Table 1 /A** Opening Acts

| Participants | Acts |
|---|---|
| - family members on both sides | exchange compliments |
| -Spokesperson from the boy's side | **reminds the general purpose of the visit** |
| -Spokesperson from the boy's side | summarizes the background story |

As seen in Table 1/A above, the opening phase of the event has been realized by means of a small set of acts, namely, **a)** complimenting, **b)** reminding the general purpose of the visit and **c)** summarizing the background story . The compulsory acts have been highligted in bold print. The acts have been illustrated in excerpts from the data. Participants have been encoded based on their roles during the speech event rather than as particular persons and expressed in abbreviated forms in the following manner: Spokesperson (SP), boy's father (BF), boy's mother (BM), girl's father (GF), girl's mother (GM). The numbers of the related texts in the data are also indicated. For example, SP 3 refers to the spokesperson in text no 3 as shown in example 1 below.

• **Act: Complimenting**
This act in the data includes appraisals as well as various expressions of respect and affection for the girl , the boy, and/or for the families.
Example 1
SP 3: *Evinizin nadide çiçeği bizim evimizin de çiçeği olacaktır,*
"The precious flower of your house will be the flower of our house indeed."

Example 2

SP 1: *Gerçekten  ikisi de  pırıl pırıl gençler, gurur duyuyuyoruz hep kendileriyle*

   "Actually they are very bright kids, both of them (.)  and we are always proud
    of them."

Example 3

SP 10: *Büyüklerimizden, hep büyüklerden,  duyardık sizleri, hep methederlerdi*

   "We have always heard from the elderly in the family about you, they have
   always praised you."

### • Act: Summarizing background story

It has been observed  in  all of  the cases in the corpus  that SPs have  initiated the request  with   some kind of  narrative  related to one of  the following  topics : a)the development of the relationship between the couple, b) the procedures involved in this arrangement, or c) history of the  relationship between the  families.

Example 4

SP 6: *Dünyanın iki ayrı ucunda doğup da, komşu evlerde yaşayıp her sabah aynı otobüse binmeleri, ıı, sonra da evet,  sonra da  aynı üniversite di'mi? Bu her'alde kaderin onlara hazırladıkları diye düşünüyorum.*

   "Being ,yeah, their being born in two different corners of the world, but then living as neighbours, getting     on the same bus every morning then, yeah , the same college (laughter) I guess this is how the fate has woven  their future."

Example5

SP 11:*Esasen (..)biraz enteresan oldu. Şimdi, bana kızımız Hilkat'i isteme görevi verdiler. Memnuniyetle dedim, ama sonra düşündüm kimden isteyeceğim yani ben,  yani iki taraf da bizim. Onun için söyle demeye karar verdim.*

   "Actually, (.)  it was  also kind of interesting . When I was given the task to be the SP for   this event, I said 'it's my pleasure", but then I said to myself 'who will  I make the request to?' Both sides are our family. So, I decided to say it  like this."

### • Act: reminding purpose of the visit

Although the purpose of the visit is clear to everyone in the company, ıt has been observed that  SPs in all the texts either implied  or stated explicitly  the very reason for their visit before making the request formally.

Example 6

SP7: *Bugün burada oluş nedenimiz (..) sevgili Meltemi Ekmekçi ailesinde  ee,
    ailemize gelin olarak görmek*

   "The reason why we are here today is(..) we'd like

   to have  dear Meltem in Ekmekçi family as a daughter-in -law."

55

Example 7

SP11: *Ziyaret sebebimiz hepimizin malumu. Hayırlı bir niyetle geldik.*
    *Gençlerimizin mutluluğu için*
    "The reason  for this visit is apparent to
    everybody. We are here for a very good intention( ..)an intention  that is
    related to the  happiness of our children."

**Table 1 /B            Head Act 1**

| Participant(s) | Act |
|---|---|
| -Spokesperson from the boy's side : | **request for the betrothal** |

**Act: Request for the betrothal**

This special request always included the formulaic expression accompanied by a grave tone and  slow pace with adequate bodily positions reflecting the importance of the occasion. In two of the cases (examples 8 and 10), the SPs were observed to be standing while making the speech.

Example 8

SP 7*: Allahın emri ve  peygamberin  kavliyle  Meltem'i İsmail'e eş olarak istiyoruz.*
    "With the command of God and the words of the Prophet  we ask for the hand
    of Meltem,  to be the wife of İsmail."

Example 9

 SP 10:*. Allahın adıyla başlayalım,, Allahın emri ve   peygamberin kavliyle değerli*
    *kızımız Şeyma hanımı oğlumuz Süleyman'a istiyoruz.*
    "Let us start with the name of God. With the command of God and the words
    of the Prophet  we   ask for the hand of your precious daughter, Miss.Şeyma
    for our son   Süleyman."

Example  10

SP 11: *Tüm aile adına, güzel yeğenim Hilkat'ı, yakışıklı yeğenim Tayyar'a*
    *istiyorum.,. Allahın emri ve   peygamberin  kavliyle.(gülerek) ve eğer  eee,*
    *anne babasının da bir  itirazı olan yoksa (.) onlar adına veriyorum.*
    "On behalf of the family members   I ask , with the command of the God and
    words of the prophet, for the hand of my lovely niece Hilkat for my handsome
    nephew Tayyar (..)and (smiling) if nobody objects to it,  I do give the consent."

**Table 1 /C** Supportive Acts

| Participants | Acts |
|---|---|
| -both family members: | exchange compliments |
| -Spokesperson from the boy's side  (or another member): | praise the boy /girl |
| -Spokesperson from the boy's side  (or another member): | reinforces/restates or repeats  the request |
| Spokesperson from the boy's side  (or another member): | expresses hopes and good wishes for the future |

Just following the request, the spokesperson or other third parties in the corpus usually provided support to reinforce the request by means of acts namely: a) compliments  -for the couple or the girl's family, b)expresses  of hopes -for  a good future, c) the  restatement of the request. However, these  actually seem to function more as  gap fillers  rather than  having a 'persuasive' purpose because   the SP on the girl's side does not tend to respond  immediately  and  remains silent  for a while.

**Act: Restating the request**

Example 11

SP 3: *Şimdi bize bu konuda olumlu bir cevap vermenizi rica ediyoruz*
    "Now, we do ask you to give us your positive  word."

**Act: expressing   hopes/good wishes**

Example 12

SP 10: *Allahın izniyle iyi geçineceklerine , huzurlu bir yuva kuracaklarına güveniyoruz..*

"We believe, with the permission of God, that they will  get along well  and (..) we are confident that they will make a peaceful home."

**Table 1/ D** Head  Act II

| Participant(s) | Act |
|---|---|
| Spokesperson from girl's side | **accepts  the request** |

**Act: Accepting**

Since the explicit performance  of this  act is crucial for the successful realization of the  betrothal event,  usually some  tension in the atmosphere  was felt, which reached its peak  during the  pause  that the  SP  made before providing the response.  In one of the cases (example 15 ), the silence extended  for a few minutes because the father of the girl  was too nervous(almost blocked) to answer. In that  exceptional case, instead of replying, he asked his older sister to speak on his behalf. The tension was dissolved only when the aunt  performed the act.

Example 13

**SP 9:** *Bütün gönlümüzle onaylıyoruz (..) ve biz de bu yeni akrabalıktan onur duyuyoruz.*

"We accept it with all our heart (..)and we do feel the honour of being related to you."

Example 14

**SP 4:** *Ne diyelim, biz de?  Allah yazmışsa, bize de evet demek düşer.*
  "What shall we say? if this is  God's will, we can only say but yes"

Example 15

SP 2: (.................) (kendi kendine) *şimdi ne diy'cez?*  (eşine dönerek) *ablam*
    *konuşsun*
    (following a long silence) ( speaking to himself) "what shall we say now?"
    (to his wife) "let's have  my sister talk"
The aunt: (ön tarafa geçerek) *Evet verdik gitti!*
(approaching) "Yes, she is, now,  yours!"

**Table 1/E** Complementary (closing) Acts

| Participants | Acts |
|---|---|
| -Guests: | applaud (non verbal) |
| -(not significant) | summons the couple |
| -The young couple | kiss  hands of the elderly |
| The young couple: | thank |
| **SP/Guests** | **give blessings** |
| -Guests | praise the couple |
| -(not significant) | serves sherbet or/and desserts |
| -Both families | exchange  compliments |

In our data, the positive response of the SP from the girl's side  has usually been acknowledged with expressions of gratitude by the boy's side and also with  blessings and congratulations from all the participants which usually  took  place in  a hierarchical order. Congratulations, usually realized (or accompanied by) through  the idiomatic expression 'hayırlı olsun' ("may it bring well- beings") or  its variations  uttered by the spokespersons of both sides and   congratulatios from the participants  seemed to mark the terminal boundary of the speech event. Although,  hand- kissing normally took place at the end of this event, it was not identified as a compulsory  feature in this study  because it was delayed when there was an engagement ceremony to follow. Applauds by the guests were also described as  another optional   feature encountered in the closing phase of the event.

### Act :Congratulating
Example 16
*Guest 7 : Tebrik ediyoruz  canım (kucaklar)tüm gönlümüzle*
      "We cogratulate you dear (hugging the couple) most sincerely"

### Act:Blessings
Example 17
GF 6: *Hayırlı uğurlu olsuuun, evet (.) tüm aileye*
    "Yeees, may it bring well-beings and good  luck to all the family"

58

Example 18

  *Uncle 8: Allah tamamına erdirsin inşallah*

   "May God make this everlasting "

Example 19

GM 10: *Allah mutlu etsin i'şallah, sonuna kadar*

   "I wish ( with the will of God) that God makes you happy to the very end (of your lives)"

### Act: Complimenting

Example 20

Guest 9: *Nasıl yakıştılar maşallah birbirlerine di'mi?.*

   "see how they suit each other so well,?"

**Table 2** A Sample Analysis Of The Betrothal Speech Event (Text no:5)

| | Speech | Speech acts |
|---|---|---|
| A. Opening Acts | *SP: Gençlerimiz, evet (..) en kıymetli varlıklarımız.* **"Well, yes, our kids are most precious to us"** *Aslında ben mahallede oynadıklarını biliyorum , (sesini hafif alçaltarak), duymasınlar, ben onları daha oyun çocuğu zannediyordum. Meğerse büyümüşler çoktan, daa,* **"As a matter of fact, I remember the times they played in the backyard (lowering his voice) and I was still thinking they were small children. Grown up witout us noticing them(.) look at them now",** *bir de 'bizi evlendirin ' diyorlar…(gülüşmeler)* **"they say 'we want to marry' (laughter )"** *Tabii, ıı, bu, bizim için çok mutlu bir görev* **"this is a very joyful task for us indeed"** | **APPRAISALS** **BACKGROUND STORY** **REMINDING THE PURPOSE OF THE VISIT** |
| B. Head Act | *Evet geleneksel sözlerimizleifade edelim, Allahın emri ve peygamberin kavliyle, sevgili kızınız Funda'yı, sevgili oğlumuz Serhan'a istiyoruz.* **".. let me express it in traditional words, we ask your consent for the hand of Funda, your precious daughter, for our beloved son Serhan, with the command of God and the words of the Prophet".** | **REQUEST FOR THE BETROTHAL** |
| C. Supporting Acts | *Sizin ve eşiniz sayın han'fendinin müsaadelerini diliyoruz.* **"We expect your permission and that of your distinguished wife"** *Buna olumlu bakmanızı rica ediyoruz.* **"We ask that you consider it positively"** | **EXPRESSING HOPE** **COMPLIMENTING** **RESTATING THE REQUEST** |
| D. Head Act II | HF: *Biz de Mutlu olsunlar diliyoruz* *efendim* " we also wish them happiness, sir" | **ACCEPTING THE REQUEST** **BLESSING** |
| E. Complementary Acts | **GUEST1:***Kutluyoru z gençleri(.) ve her iki aileyi de tabii, çok iyi bir iş yaptılar* **"we congratulate the young couple, ee, and the families naturally(.) they did a very good job"** (The young couple kiss hands and receive congratulations and blessings) | **CONGRATULAT ING** **(KISSING HANDS)[9]RECEIVINGC ONGRATULATIONS** |

## Conclusion

In its attempt to investigate the nature of traditional marriage–arrangement discourse in Turkish culture, this study describes the potential components of the *sözkesme* speech event while proposing a model for the generic action pattern. It has been concluded that *sözkesme* speech event is realized through a small number of acts that are strictly structured. The language is also highly formal and ritualized supporting the findings reported in similar studies in some other cultures (eg.Nwoye 1985; Tannen and Saville-Troike 1985). Speakers often use formulaic expressions concerning blessings or wishes which include religious expressions such as" God", " the prophet" or "the fate" although the atmosphere of the ceremony is not necessarily religious. In other words, both the verbal and non verbal aspects of the event seem to be determined by the norms of the speech community. However, it should be noted that the model proposed is a tentative one taking into consideration the limits of our data and also the existence of the large variety of possible practices within the culture. Also it is suggested that similar studies can be carried out on natural discourse for stronger conclusions. As envisioned by Saville-Troike (1989), studies of ritualistic and official events will become a ground for investigating speech events that are a part of the everyday conversation and that are more loosely structured and therefore less predictable. Finally, research on the typical linguistic features of the discourse in these rituals, such as idiomatic expressions might also provide useful insights towards a broader understanding of the event and the culture in which it is embedded.

## References

Acar, G. (1997). Duruşmalarda kullanılan dilin dilbilimsel özellikleri. D. Zeyrek ve Ş. Ruhi (Haz.) *XI. Dilbilim Kurultayı Bidirileri* (s.71-83). Ankara:Ortadoğu Teknik Üniversitesi Yayınları.

Açıkalın, I. (2002). Kadın ve erkek hastaların vizit sırasında sergiledikleri dilsel farklılıklar. G. König, N. Büyükkantarcıoğlu ve F. Karahan (Haz.). *Bildiriler. XVI. Dilbilim Kurultayı* (s.174-181). Ankara:Hacettepe Üniversitesi Yayınları.

Arıkdal, A.U. (2006). *A Conversation Aanalysis of Classroom Discourse in ELT Context*. Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Çukurova Üniversitesi, Adana.

Applebaum, K.D. (1995). Marriage with the proper stranger: Arranged marriage in Metropolitan Japan. *Ethnology,* (Winter,95), 34,1,167-198.

Bakhtin, M.M. (1986).The problem of speech genres. A. Coupland and N. Jaworsky (Eds.) (2005). *Dıscourse Reader* (pp.121-133). New York:Routledge.

Bauman, R. and  Sherzer,J. (Eds.) (1974). *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Coulthard, M. (1988). *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis*. London:Longman.

Çubukçu, H. (2001). Nasıl beğendiriyoruz? Alış–veriş ortamında 'beğendirme' dil olayı. Ö. Demircan ve A. Erözden (Haz.).*Bildiriler*. (s.187-196). İstanbul: Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi Yayınları.

Duben,A and Behar,C. (1991). *Istanbul Households:Marriage, Family and Fertility,1880-1940*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Duman, S. (2000). Doktor –hasta ilişkisinde hastaların sorduğu sorular. F. Ö. Ekmekçi, S. Zinzade,T., N. Aslan ve T. Bulut (Haz.) *Bildiriler. XIV. Dilbilim Kurultayı* ( s.64-74). Adana: Çukurova Üniversitesi Yayınları.

Demircan, Ö. (1990). *Yabancı-Dil Öğretim Yöntemleri*. İstanbul: Ekin Eğitim Yayıncılık.

Hasan, R. (1978).Texts in systematic functional model.  W.V. Dressler (Ed.). *Current Trends In Textlıguistics* (pp.123-167). Berlın:De     Gruyer.

Hortacsu, N. (1997). Family and Couple Initiated Marriages in Turkey. *Genetıc, Socıal And General Psychology Monographs,* (Aug. 97), 123 ( 3), 325-354.

Hill, J.H  and  Hill,K.C. (1986). *Speaking Mexicano*. Tuscon: University of Arizona Press.

Hymes, D. (1962).*The Ethnography of Speaking* T. Glandunt and  W. Stewart (Eds.), *Anthropology And Human Behavior*(pp.13-53).

Washıngton,D.C: The Anthropology Society of Washington.

Hymes, D. (1974). *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic approach*. Philledelphia: University of Pennsilvania Press.

Milroy, L. (1987). *Language and Society Networks*. (Second Edition) .Oxford : Basil Blackwell Nwoye, G. O. (1985). The eloquent silence among the Igbo of Nigeria.  D.Tannen and M. Saville-Troike (Eds.). *Perpectives On  Silence*  (pp.185-190). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Nwoye, G. O. (1993). An Ethnographic Analysis of Igbo Greeting . *Afrıcan Languages And Cultures*, 6 (1) , 37-48.

Philipsen, G.and Coutu, L. M. (2005). The ethnography of speaking.  R. Sanders and  K. L. Fitch (Eds.). *Handbook  Of  Research  On Language And Socıal Interactıon*  (pp. 355-379). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum

Saville-Troike, M. (1989).The analysis of communicative events.  A.Coupland and N. Jaworsky (Eds). (1997). *Sociolınguisiıcs: A Reader* (pp.126-145). New York: St. Martin's Press.

Schiffrin, D. (1994). *Approaches to Discourse*. Cambridge:Mass.:Basil Blackwell.

Sherzer, J. (1983). *Kuna Ways of Speaking*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Stirling, P. (1965). Turkish village. *The Nature Of Human Socıety*. Centre for Social Anthropology and Computing:Kent University Publications.

Şen, M. (2000). Dilin sınıfiçi kullanımı ve dilsel değişkenlerin işlev ve anlam açısından değerlendirilmesi:edimsel bir yaklaşım. F. Ö. Ekmekçi, S. Zinzade,T., N. Aslan ve T. Bulut (Haz.). *Bidiriler XIV. Dilbilim Kurultayı* (s.123-134). Adana:Çukurova Üniversitesi Yayınları.

Timur, S. (1972). *Türkiyede Aile Yapısı*. Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi Yayınları.D-15.

Toksöz, N. (2000). İncelik ve yönetici söylemi: Söz kesme ve sözel örtüşme. F. Ö. Ekmekçi, S. Zinzade,T., N. Aslan ve T.Bulut(Haz.). *Dilbilim Kurultayı* (s.134-147). Adana: Çukurova Üniversitesi Yayınları

Wardough, R. (1997). *An introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.