

## A STUDY ON THE USE OF ACTIVE TURKISH VOCABULARY IN THE WRITTEN EXPRESSION

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### Abstract

One of the prior conditions for Turkish to be used effectively and efficiently in written expression is that a language has rich vocabulary. The aim of this study is to put forth the relationship between different variants and active use of words in the 6th grade students in the primary education. It is also aimed to lead the work of teaching Turkish as mother tongue. In this study, first and foremost, the past and current situation of teaching vocabulary is to be dealt with. Furthermore, the issue of teaching Turkish vocabulary will be discussed. Before teaching vocabulary in mother tongue in class, a student's active vocabulary is to be determined, and the content of the vocabulary education is to be shaped according to the data obtained from this study. In this research, a qualitative study has been used, and this research has been designed as a case study. The target group of the research consists of 37, sixth-grade primary school students, whose parents have declared personal information in forms, two written expression papers per student and also researcher's observation notes have been analysed.

The data obtained from the research are interpreted under these categories: 1. A total number of words used in the written expression of students, 2. The average number of words used by each participant, 3. the number of the words most frequently used, 4. The number of the words used by boys and girls, 5. Numbers for the parts of speech in use. Moreover, the issues related to the educational and income status of parents, whether the mother works or not and the number of siblings are compared with the data obtained.

**Keywords:** Vocabulary, Teaching Turkish Vocabulary as Mother Tongue, Written Expression

### INTRODUCTION

Words express the dimensions of our perception of the word, people, objects, and events. In order to maintain the vocabulary which does not exist in our daily lives, we are supposed to be present in the environments that are enriched with skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. Students are to be given essentially the chance of making more of their experiences so as to improve their vocabulary.

The researches show that the number of words which a student has is in direct proportion to the success at school (Yavuzer, 2001: 92). There is a huge contribution of the rich vocabulary of the people who comprehend what they read and listen to accurately and express themselves accurately into their success.

We can exemplify this with the study by Dr. Johnson O'Connor from Stevens Institute of Technology, which was conducted on 100 students in business management studies including the chief executives. These 100 students are given a vocabulary test. In the re-examination of them after five years, it is seen that the ones who take higher scores from the test have become chief executives (Özdoğru, 1958: 19-20).

The words in a language have come into the general use of that language through centuries by the people who speak it. There is a collective toil on these words. When the issue is vocabulary, merely a collection of root words should not come to mind. Considering that a villager has a knowledge of 500 words and Shakespeare 20.000 words, there has become a need in determining who uses which words and the frequency of these words in use. For the first time in the US, the study which was conducted to scan 4-5 million words in every kind of written works is assumed to be the first of all by using a scientific method (Thorndike, Horn, Gates, Dolch, Buckingham, Hillyer lists). Another important study is by one of Columbia University, E. L. Thorndike's *The Teacher Word Book of 30.000 Words*, published in 1944. In this study, every word is ordered by its frequency. C. K. Ogden, who established "Basic" system, thinks that everything can be expressed with 850 words. As for M. West, this number is 1490, and for Ward, it is 2000. Not only for lexicography but also for all reading books, it is a must to ensure having word counts and determining which words to use for age groups. Since there is no statistics for words, writers of reading books may include one word in their books and ignore the other one with more frequency.

In Turkey, the first person who was concerned with word-count studies is Ömer Asım Aksoy in his book, *Bir Dili Öğrenmek İçin En Lüzumlu Kelimeler* (1936).

Studies for word count are also of importance in writing course books. Firstly, *Recueil de Mots Français*, written by a Swedish teacher called B. Pautex was revised and completed by the Swedish linguist Ch.Bally. In this study where there include no technical words, 11971 words are classified under 37 titles in accord with their subjects. The French have used this work in their schools as well. *Der Deutsche Wortshatz Nach Sachgruppen* by F. Dornseiff in Germany and in England *A Classified Word List* by M. West which comprises 40 chapters in 7 groups are examples of similar studies. It is also likely to see illustrated ones among these (Dilâçar, 1954: 570-574).

According to the studies, the vocabulary a person maintains is comprised of two layers. The first layer is passive. The words which build this layer up are called listening and reading words. These words are the words a person can know and understand within the context. The second layer is the active layer. The words which build this layer up are called writing and speaking words. The words we know the meaning of and use accurately are active words. A person's passive vocabulary is always more than their active vocabulary (Sezer et. al, 1991: 214). We may not remember and accurately use a word that we have heard and looked up in a dictionary during the time we speak and write. It would be a wrong action to expect a student to use a word that they have just heard to use accurately (Alperen, 2001: 41).

Thus, one of the reasons why our classical studies of teaching words fail are our expectations from the student to know a word that they have heard for the first time. However, without enough exercises, without using more effective methods of teaching vocabulary, without creating various ways of using the words, these words cannot be placed in the passive vocabulary. There is also a need to examine the frequency of exercises related to repeating and strengthening the words in the course book for teaching vocabulary (Karatay, 2007, s.152). Words are firstly placed in the passive vocabulary. Furthermore, it is needed to determine the readiness of the students based on ages, on the social, cultural and economic situation of regions and to teach vocabulary in the light of these studies. The students in different age groups and from different regions, social and cultural and economic levels carry differences. The exercises for teaching vocabulary sometimes cause a waste of time and are occasionally ineffective.

## **1. THE IMPORTANCE AND THE AIM OF THE STUDY**

Nurdan and Ahmet Orhan Oğuz Grammar School of Ministry of Education in Karadeniz Ereğli district in Zonguldak, where we have conducted the case study has a principal who values academic work and invites academics to their school for studies to increase the success of students. The researcher has been encouraged to do academic studies in this school and share the results of the study with them by the principal. There have been two meetings with the school principal and teachers of the Turkish language. In both meetings, it has been agreed to do a research on the students' skills of written expression.

It is essential to use a language efficiently in written expression and has an active vocabulary. Individuals can use their wealth of active vocabulary in all skills of speaking, writing, listening and reading whereas they use their wealth of passive vocabulary in skills of reading and listening. The aim of the study we conducted in the light of this information is to lead teaching vocabulary in Turkish language courses, make them more

effective and increase the number of words actively used by means of determining the students' current wealth of vocabulary in their written documents in relation to students' social, cultural and economic levels.

There are also studies evaluating written expression skills through the titles such as paper organization, writing letters correctly and legibly, use of paragraphs, handing in clean and proper papers, writing titles related to the subject, using spelling rules and punctuation correctly (Deniz, 2003). However, in this study, only words are of concern.

## **2. METHOD**

In our study, the qualitative research method is used. The qualitative research method is known to be preferred because of a need in studying a certain group or system, determining variables that cannot be measured at ease and in the cases of a complicated subject to be comprehended in detail (Creswell, 2013, s.48). Furthermore, the qualitative research methods are used in order to describe a certain situation in relation to different variants as well. In this study, the qualitative research method and the case study pattern are used in order to have the personal information forms and students' writings analyzed in detail and to benefit from the researchers' observation notes. The case study is identified as describing and analyzing a limited system in depth. For a situation to be a case study, it is anticipated for a certain program or a certain group of students to be dealt with and a unit of analysis to be constructed. Data gained by case study is more tangible, more contextual and more open to reader's interpretation (Merriam, 2013, s.41). Data gained is interpreted through both numerical value and descriptive analysis.

## **3. STUDY GROUP**

The study group of the study is comprised of 37 students from Nurdan and Ahmet Orhan Oğuz Grammar School of Ministry of Education in Karadeniz Ereğli district in Zonguldak. In the research, all 74 students of 6th grade are involved, yet some students have not participated in the whole research process, some have not filled the forms completely or they have not handed in their writings, which are the basis of the research data. Thus, 37 students, 21 girls, and 16 boys, who have given surveys and writings wholly, have been included in this research.

## **4. TOOLS FOR COLLECTING DATA**

The data used in the research, the information form which is applied to determine the socio-economic levels of students, two compositions whose topics the students have chosen and researcher's observation form have been obtained.

### **4.1. Personal Information Form**

The parents of the students are given an information form, which includes questions under the titles such as the parents' education level and income level, the number of students they have, whether the mother works or not, etc., in order to determine the socio-economic levels.

### **4.2. Documents for Written Expression**

74 students who have taken part in our research have been asked to write two essays, the topics of which they decided their own, in the Turkish language course. The students have been given 40 minutes for each essay. These essays have been analyzed considering the total number of words used, the number of words used per person, most frequently used words, the parts of speech of the words, words used separately by girls and boys, the topics the students have chosen.

### **4.3. Researcher's Observation Notes**

The research lasts 4 weeks in total. During this four-week process, observation notes designed by the researcher have been kept in order not to intervene with the natural flow of the research. That is, it has not been an observation with the predetermined categories and classification, but a natural and open-ended type of observation. The aim of this way of observation is to allow certain categories and classification to shape at the time of research (Punch, 2014, s.176). There have been structured observation notes regarding the processes of informing the school management, the time spent with teachers out of meeting and case study time, process of case study, the time after the case study, presentation of the research results to the school management, presentation of results along with the data.

## **5. DATA ANALYSIS**

The data collected aiming at the sub-questions within the scope of the research has been transferred to

computers. In order to analyze the data, Qualitative Data Analysis Software MAXQDA 12 has been used. MAXQDA, a qualitative research software, has been of benefit in the classification, comparison and archiving of intense data.

## **6. DISCOVERIES AND INTERPRETATION**

### **6.1. Documents for Written Expression**

#### *6.1.1. Total number of words*

We have determined that 37 students used 4931 words in total in 74 essays. After that, we have pointed out the use of active vocabulary by subtracting the repeated words, proper names, and numbers. It is seen that 1467 different words out of 4931 are in use.

Among the words determined, “with” [“ile”], “until” [“kadar”], “as/like” [“gibi”], “but” [“ama”], “however” [“fakat”], etc. do not carry meanings, yet they do function as grammar. It should not be forgotten that these words function as connecting, comparing and relating to a means (Kurudayioğlu ve Kardağ 2005, s.299). Therefore, these words have also been involved in the total number of words in our research.

#### *6.1.2. The number of words per person*

The total number of words used by 37 students in their essays is 4931. And the number of words per person is 133 accordingly. This number is too low to consider the writing as an essay.

#### *6.1.3. Most frequently used words*

163 words out of 4931 words the students have used are either proper name or dates. The most used in these 163 words is the proper name “Atatürk”. The most frequently used 12 words of all 1467 different words are as follows: People [İnsan] 135, We [Biz] 103, Book [Kitap] 91, I [Ben] 79, Mother [Anne] 74, Love (n.) [Sevgi] 68, Love (v.) [Sevmek] 66, There is/are [Var] 63, Do/Make [Yapmak] 61, Time [Zaman] 54, Come [Gelmek] 52, Give [Vermek] 50.

It is also necessary to deal in a different category with the words actively used and shown in the research and how frequent they are going to take place in exercises of repeating. It is possible to have studies regarding the issues of encouraging the use of these words, using the synonyms and antonyms of them, enabling the repetition and strengthening of the words, listing the books proper for each level, finding enjoyable and educational activities, following up the use of them (Karatay 2007, s.150-151).

#### *6.1.4. The numbers related to the parts of speech*

According to this, out of 1467 words, 776 are nouns, 241 are adjectives, 360 are verbs, 38 are adverbs, 22 are pronouns, 16 are linking words, 1 is a gerund, 8 are prepositions, 6 are interjections.

#### *6.1.5. Topics of essays*

The most frequent topics in 74 essays are nature, love, books and sports. Related to the most common topic of nature, the students only mention the consciousness of nature.

## **6.2. The Relationship between Parents’ Educational Level and the Student’s Wealth of Vocabulary**

It is a known fact that as the education level of parents decreases, physical stimulant increases, and as the education level increases, the verbal stimulant increases. It has been found that there are significant relationships between the total number of words the students use and the average length of sentences and socio-economic variants such as parents’ education level, their professions and income levels (Karacan, 2006).

There has been a meeting organized by the researcher on the demand of the school management to share the results of the research with the parents. In this meeting, the parents have been informed about both the findings of the research in general and the student’s personal results. As a result of this meeting, the observation notes kept by the researcher are as follows:

“The meeting started 30 minutes after the designated time. Parents never asked questions. Even though I said that I could take their questions, there was no question from the parents. Only a question was asked by the school principal thinking that the answer would enlighten the parents. After the meeting was over, I talked to three parents who wanted to talk in person. Their questions were regarding how they could increase their students’ success at school. I asked the names of their children. When I examined their personal information

forms, I saw that all three were graduates of primary schools and they were the parents of the students who use a higher number of words than the average of the class. The conscious parents who have not had a good education tend to benefit more from the education opportunity bestowed through this meeting for their children.”

This situation has made us head towards the factors influencing the function of families. One of the essential factors that influence the function of families is the environment. While in the country, where the the father has the authority, families have maintained their traditional function in the issues such as relationships with relatives, families in the slums have been a source of high expectations from children (Kongar 1998, s.599). Even though the school is not in the slums, the fact that the region where the school is placed is close to one of the industrial establishment of the region and that mothers are just mothers while fathers are workers have shown that the families keep high expectations for their children.

Despite a number of researches claiming that language skills are related to socio-economic factors, there are researches showing no meaningful relationship between writing skills and socio-economic factors (Özbay ve Zorbaz, 2012).

Of 37 students from Nurdan and Ahmet Orhan Oğuz Grammar School who have taken part in the study only, 5 students have a parent who is a graduate of the university. The students' wealth of vocabulary in relation to their mothers-fathers/either of their education is demonstrated in Table 1. However, in contrast to the general opinion, it is seen that the number of words used by the students are not related to their parents' education. This is because the students whose mothers-fathers or either of them are graduates of high school use 162 words in writing, which is a huge difference compared to the class average of 133 words, according to the results of the study. These students are followed by the ones whose mothers-fathers or either of them are graduates of the primary school and then the ones who are the graduates of university and finally the graduates of elementary education.

**Table 1**

| SCHOOL                                 | University Graduates |      | High School Graduates |      | Elementary Graduates |      | Primary Graduates |      | No Education |      |
|--|----------------------|------|-----------------------|------|----------------------|------|-------------------|------|--------------|------|
|  | Girls                | Boys | Girls                 | Boys | Girls                | Boys | Girls             | Boys | Girls        | Boys |
| Nurdan ve Orhan Oğuz Grammar School    | 5                    | -    | 4                     | 5    | 4                    | 6    | 9                 | 4    | -            | -    |
| <b>Number of words used per person</b> | <b>124</b>           |      | <b>162</b>            |      | <b>117</b>           |      | <b>129</b>        |      |              |      |

### 6.3. Students in Relation to the Income of Families

The students whose families are in good socio-economic conditions are proven to be good regarding the length of sentences, number of questions and vocabulary as a result of several types of research. Moreover, it is also realized that they have a better syntax and sentence structures (Çelen 1993, s.86). It is inevitable for the children who have advantages of more technologies and who are involved in social life to master at more concepts in the language. It is because vocabulary is like an archive where the data as a result of life experiences is gathered and labeled. Economic opportunities mean making more of life experiences and being exposed to more and more colorful and diverse stimulants for the students.

Of 37 students from Nurdan and Ahmet Orhan Oğuz Grammar School who have taken part in the study 8 are children to families with high-income, 29 to the ones with low-income. The students whose families' incomes are 3000 Turkish Liras and more are considered to be high-income, and the students with minimum wages are considered to be in a low-income group. While 8 students in the high-income group write with 1554 words, the 29 students in the low-income group write with 3377 words. Considering that the average of the class is 133 words, it becomes obvious that the students in the high-income group write with 194 words, the ones in the low-income group write with 116 words and that there is a meaningful relationship between the number of words used and the income levels.

The notes kept by the researcher regarding the income of the family are as follows:

“At the first meeting I had with the school principal, I learned that the majority of the parents are workers in the industrial establishment, which is close to the school district. Most of the parents' incomes are more than the workers' of other industries as iron and steel industry is a heavy industry.”

We are going to mention that the girls use more words than boys in the following chapters. Nevertheless, since of the 8 students in high-income group 6 are girls, we are in need of considering the results under the title of gender factor.

**Table 2**

| SCHOOL                                 | University Graduates |      | High School Graduates |      | Elementary Graduates |      | Primary Graduates |      | No Education |      |
|--|----------------------|------|-----------------------|------|----------------------|------|-------------------|------|--------------|------|
|  | Girls                | Boys | Girls                 | Boys | Girls                | Boys | Girls             | Boys | Girls        | Boys |
| Nurdan ve Orhan Oğuz Grammar School    | 5                    | -    | 4                     | 5    | 4                    | 6    | 9                 | 4    | -            | -    |
| <b>Number of words used per person</b> | <b>124</b>           |      | <b>162</b>            |      | <b>117</b>           |      | <b>129</b>        |      |              |      |

#### 6.4. Students in Relation to the Number of Children the Family Has

In contrast to the idea that in crowded families the language development is fast, in the study we conducted on 37 students from Nurdan and Ahmet Orhan Oğuz Grammar School it can be seen that the number of words used by the children of families with fewer children are more than the others. It is more difficult to the parents in crowded families to communicate with their children more meaningfully and more often in relation to the parents with fewer children. Furthermore, it is a known fact that the children who have grown up in an environment where language is used continuously as a tool for disputes are unwilling to use the language (Davaslıgil 1982, s. 25).

In the language development, it is essential for fathers to take care of the child closely, for children to be given the chance to express their thoughts and to be appreciated for their ideas, to repeat the same speeches at once and to get them encouraged by keeping a budget for them. And in the crowded families, this special way of communication cannot be provided.

In our study, it is also observed that the more crowded the family gets, the less the number of words used gets.

**Table 3**

| SCHOOL                                 | 0-2 Children |      | 3-4 Children |      | 5-6 Children |      |
|--|--------------|------|--------------|------|--------------|------|
|  | Girls        | Boys | Girls        | Boys | Girls        | Boys |
| Orhan Oğuz Grammar School              | 10           | 8    | 7            | 8    | 4            | -    |
| <b>Number of words used per person</b> | <b>145</b>   |      | <b>128</b>   |      | <b>101</b>   |      |

#### 6.5. Students in Relation to Whether Mother Works

According to the study conducted on 37 students from Nurdan and Ahmet Orhan Oğuz Grammar School, 2 students have working mothers. We have analyzed the influence of the communication on the number of words used regarding the time spent with mothers during the day or the more time spent in the kindergarten by students whose mothers work. We have seen that the students whose mothers work use a few more words

than the average of the class.

The notes kept by the researcher as a result of the parents' meeting are as follows:

“The meeting which was held on a weekday at the working hour for all 6th-grade parents was attended completely by mothers. We saw that who follow the students' education are mothers and these mothers are 95% housewives.”

**Table 4**

|                                 | 0-2 Children |      | 3-4 Children |      | 5-6 Children |      |
|---------------------------------|--------------|------|--------------|------|--------------|------|
| SCHOOL                          | Girls        | Boys | Girls        | Boys | Girls        | Boys |
| Orhan Oğuz Grammar School       | 10           | 8    | 7            | 8    | 4            | -    |
| Number of words used per person | 145          |      | 128          |      | 101          |      |

## 6.6. Students in Relation to Gender

The concept of gender, which does not point to any influence from birth to adolescence in the matter of language development, shows its influence on the power of intelligence, especially in the adolescence. In that period, bio-physiological development starts earlier in girls than in boys. And that points out that girls are ahead of boys in language development.

Stone and Barker conducted a study on the differences between girls in puberty and girls not in puberty, and they claimed that girls in puberty are far more superior to girls not in puberty considering intelligence (Varış, 1968: 100-101). This situation is inevitably influencing the language development.

In a study, the communication of 14 female and 14 male babies when they are 6, 9 and 12 months old with their mothers during free play time of 4 minutes is observed, and it is seen that there is no difference between the genders. However, it is of notice that baby girls react to verbal stimulants while baby boys react to visual stimulants (Karacan, 2006).

Furthermore, the studies show that considering the distribution of the average number of repeated and non-repeated words in the written expression tasks in relation to gender variant, the girls are noted to use more newly learned words in written expression than the boys do (Anılan ve Genç 2011, s.127).

In the case study of the research, the observation notes kept by the researcher is of importance as it shades light into the gender aspect of the study:

“I was introduced to the class by the teacher as a guest who was going to take part in Turkish language classes for a couple of weeks. The students were assigned to work on free essay topics; however, the class started to write effectively after 15 minutes. The teacher warned the students to keep calm for three times. Most of the girls started writing earlier; the male students seemed to have got bored of writing through the end of that time. Some female students asked for extra time to transfer what they have written to the paper they were given to; that had used another piece of paper for the draft.”

Of 37 students from Nurdan and Ahmet Orhan Oğuz Grammar School who have taken part in the study 21 are girls and 16 boys. While the number of words per person among female students is 137 words, it is 129 among male students. The female students use words over 133, the class average. This is related to the fact that the bio- physiological development starts earlier in girls than in the boys.

Table 5

| SCHOOL                          | 0-2 Children |      | 3-4 Children |      | 5-6 Children |      |
|---------------------------------|--------------|------|--------------|------|--------------|------|
|                                 | Girls        | Boys | Girls        | Boys | Girls        | Boys |
| Orhan Oğuz Grammar School       | 10           | 8    | 7            | 8    | 4            | -    |
| Number of words used per person | 145          |      | 128          |      | 101          |      |

## RESULTS

Considering the essays and socio-economic variants of the 6th-grade students' in Nurdan and Ahmet Orhan Oğuz Grammar School of Ministry of Education, we have analyzed the words they use actively. As it is a case study, the results have been compared before and after the situation.

37 students (21 girls, 16 boys) have been realized to use 1467 different words out of 4931. Moreover, it has been seen that the students' essays are comprised of 133 words. In the students' wealth of vocabulary, nouns take a great part. The most frequently used proper noun is "Atatürk". The first four subjects of 74 essays in total are nature, love, books, and sports.

In our research, it has been observed that there is no increase in the students' wealth of vocabulary in parallel with the increase in the educational levels of parents and that the wealth of vocabulary is closely related to the factors such as the income of the family, number of siblings, gender, etc.

The children of families with high-income know more words than the children of families with low-income do. Accordingly, high-income is an important factor in students' enriched vocabulary. The students of families with only child or two children know more words than the students of families with 3-4 children or 5-6 children. The students of families with 3-4 children use more words than the students of families with 5-6 children. The students with working mothers use more words than the students with non-working mothers. Female students write with more words than the male students do.

Teachers of mother-tongue or experts of testing and evaluation can match the personal information forms that they are going to give to the parents at the beginning of the semester with the essays of students on a software program, and then they can lead ways of teaching vocabulary considering the results of this matching. Thus, not a conventional way of vocabulary teaching dependent on course books but a way of vocabulary teaching focused on the real interests and needs of the students.

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