WHAT ABOUT GENDER BASED PSEUDONYMS IN BLOGS?*

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ABSTRACT

In computer mediated communication there are no visual or auditory clues to indicate speaker's gender. Usually pseudonyms are used by the participants to hide explicit identity. In blogs (which are personal journals or reversed chronological commentaries) pseudonymous usage is very common. However, pseudonyms may give clues on the gender of a blogger. So, this study aims at investigating the following hypothesis: Males prefer to use pseudonyms whose connotative meanings refer to power, fear and authority, whereas females prefer to use pseudonyms about domestic issues, style and names concerning nature with positive meanings. 40 male and 40 female pseudonyms chosen by the bloggers are taken into consideration. The demographic information concerning their real gender was available on their home page. The results of the study showed that the connotative meaning of pseudonyms used in blogs reveal the gender differences no matter how hard they try to hide their gender identity.

Keywords: *Pseudonym, blogs, linguistic gender differences*

BLOGLARDA CİNSİYET BELİRLEYİCİ TAKMA ADLAR

ÖZ

Yüz yüze iletişimde cinsiyet farklılıkları işitsel ve görsel ipuçları ile hemen ortaya çıkar. İnternet ortamında, bloglarda bu ipuçları söz konusu değildir; iletişim sadece yazılı olarak sağlanır. Kişisel günlük tutma ve karşılıklı haberleşmeyi amaçlayan blog kültüründe yazışmalarda takma ad kullanımı yaygındır. Kişiler takma ad kullanarak kendilerini daha rahat hissetmekte ve gerçek kimliklerini saklamaktadırlar. Ancak, seçtikleri takma adlar cinsiyetleri ile ilgili ipucu verebilmektedir. Bu çalışma, aşağıdaki hipotezleri araştırmak için yapılmıştır: Erkekler takma ad seçiminde güç, kuvvet ve korku ifade eden sözcükleri seçerken, kadınlar ev ortamı ile ilgili, kendi becerilerini ortaya koyan ve olumlu anlam taşıyan doğa ile ilgili sözcükleri tercih etmektedirler. 40 erkek ve 40 kadın blogcu değerlendirmeye alınmış ve blogcuların gerçek cinsiyetlerine kendi sayfalarındaki kimlik bilgileri aracılığıyla ulaşılmıştır. Sonuçta takma adların, taşıdıkları çağrışımsal anlamlarla cinsiyet özelliklerini ortaya çıkardığı saptanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Takma ad, blog, dilsel cinsiyet farklılıkları*

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1. INTRODUCTION

In face to face communication gender is one of the most obvious factors that affects perception of what people say and do with the help of visual and auditory clues. In the world of computer mediated communication (CMC) there are no visual or auditory clues to indicate speaker's gender. In this type of communication the process of one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many discourses using a computer-based channel is predominantly a text based medium. Users do not see each other's faces or hear each other's voices. Kiesler et al. (1984) describe CMC as a channel which "depersonalizes" communicants since they cannot exchange paraverbal cues such as facial expressions or vocal pitch; they assert that there is a resulting social anonymity around which communicants must imagine their audience. This is also true for blogs as they are personal journals or reversed chronological commentaries written by individuals and made publicly accessible on the web. Blogs and their associated technologies have unique characteristics as a conversational medium, which make their capabilities quite different from other Internet technologies such as mailing lists and newsgroups. It has been emphasized that blogs are situated on an intermediate point between standard web pages and asynchronous computer-mediated communication along dimensions of frequency of update, symmetry of communicative exchange and multimodality (Herring et al., 2004). Moreover, weblog technologies include comment facilities which permit readers to engage in a discussion about particular blog entries, track back facilities to find out when blog entries have been referred to, and news aggregators that collect entries from webloggers and news sources and put them in one place for review.

Most blogs share similar functionalities. However, blogs can be used to support very different types of conversation depending on the context in which they are used (Moor and Efimova, 2004); for example in an individual blog basically anything goes. It is bound to the person who owns it. It is argued that the true power and uniqueness of blogs is in the individual blogs where the individual authorial voice is very much present (Winner, 2003, c. in Moore and Efimova, 2004).

According to Huffaker and Calvert (2005:3) blog features include:

1. Ease of use because users do not need to know other web programming languages to publish onto the Internet;

2. Ways to archive information and knowledge;

3. Opportunities for others to comment or provide feedback for each blog post, and

4. Linking to other 'bloggers' to form online communities.

Bloggers provide explicit demographic information on their home page, where blogger's sex and profession is given and in this page also a code is required. Blog authors either provide a proper name, or a pseudonym for this requirement.

1.1. Anonymity Of Bloggers

A number of tools and techniques have been proposed and deployed to address the privacy concerns of Internet users. To place privacy in perspective, it is important to understand the two primitives, anonymity and pseudonymity, that are considered to be the core building blocks of most privacy solutions (Rao and Rohatgi, 2000)Anonymity refers to the ability of an individual to perform a single interaction with another entity without leaking any information about his/her identity. While anonymity

is very effective at protecting the identity of an individual, its ephemeral nature makes it ill-suited for most kinds of web interactions. This shortcoming is addressed by the concept of pseudonymity, which enables an individual to participate in a series of web interactions, all linkable to a single identifier, also known as a pseudonym with the guarantee that the pseudonym cannot be linked back to the individual's identity (Rao and Rohatgi, 2000).

Thus, the use of pseudonyms in blogs enables bloggers to hide their explicit identity, yet at the same time reveals a personal facet of the author. Pseudonymous communication makes participants more comfortable and may foster social interdependence.

According to Mathesan and Zonna (1992, p.7, c. in Jaffe et al., 1995, p.7) individuals feel less of a personal risk in disclosing personal information when ''real'' identities are not revealed.

1.2. Gender Differentiation Of Bloggers

As far as terminology is concerned gender rather than sex will be the key category. Sex refers to a biological distinction while gender is the term used to describe socially constructed categories based on sex. In most of the societies, there are clear male/female differences in the language. In a society where gender is a highly significant category, language has a key role to play in the contribution of the category (Coates, 1993). It is a well known fact that women's conversational style is based on solidarity, while men's is based on power (Holmes, 1993), difference arising from women's and men's membership of a patriarchal society. This is evidenced from the childhood games, boys and girls play hierarchically-structured outside games with rules, boasts and winners and losers, while girls tend to play indoor games without orders or winners and losers (Tannen, 1990). Therefore, gender differentiation in language does not exist in a vacuum: it interacts in a complex way with other kinds of social differentiation. Thus it has been claimed that, gender variation in the use of particular linguistic features is as indicative as gender-differentiated patterns of interaction.

1.3. Purpose Of The Study

In asynchronous CMC, gender is often visible on the basis of features of a participant's choice of pseudonyms. These pseudonyms are chosen voluntarily and may have connotative meanings which bloggers may not be consciously aware of. Therefore, although it has been claimed that Internet equalizes gender-based power and status differentials, the purpose of the study is to examine the extent to which connotative meanings of pseudonyms used by the bloggers are gender based.

The study aims at investigating the following hypotheses:

H1: Males prefer to use pseudonyms which can negotiate their power and self-confidence; they prefer to use words whose connotative meanings refer to power/authority and violence.

H2: Females prefer to use pseudonyms which express support and whose connotations manifest aligned orientation and express solidarity mostly in domestic issues.

2. METHODOLOGY

To explore the connotative meanings of pseudonyms that are gender based the blogs that take place on the Internet are taken as basis.For the study, 40 male and 40 female total 1018 blogs are chosen randomly. In this study the use of pseudonyms is investigated due to topics of each blog, and the demographic information of the bloggers within reach. So the data are collected according to these criteria, they are classified according to the male and female sexes given in their home page of the bloggers; then pseudonyms are matched with the real sexes;hence, 40 male and 40 female pseudonyms are taken into consideration according their sexes written in their home pages.

Topics of the blogs are miscellaneous including cooking instructions, cars, photographs, social or political issues on the newspapers.

The data are analyzed according to the following:

> a. pseudonyms emphasizing manhood, fear, and power

> b. pseudonyms concerning domestic issues, indicating style, and related to topics about nature

3. RESULTS

When we look at the results, it is apparent that males are in favor of using pseudonyms indicating manhood, atmospheric events, fear and power as it is shown in Figure 1.

For males among 40 pseudonyms (Figure 1):

- *7 of them referred to manhood, to traditionally male professions and titles:* godfather, niceman, redboy, sanal korsan, kaptan, Mr. Metal, e-FENDY

- *10 of them referred to atmospheric events indicating horror and to compounds made with animals*: thunderness, hurricane, fırtına, freewind, paratoner, midnight, Kerimboğa, kılıçbalığı, thunderdress, dostdark

- *11 of them carry the meaning of fear:* skullhunter, demonic dreams, Pckopatghost, cryflower, death, danger, cryne, Williamdyer, sessizöfke, fire and devil

- *12 of them concerned with power:* küçük prens, Champion_Ufuk, infinite, powerbyAydin, Kanuni Mimar Sinan , unbeaten, dobra, paranteziçihayatlar, maskeli duygular, freedom and unfearful.

When we look at the results of females, it is evident that they preferred to use pseudonyms related to domestic and feminine issues, style and names in nature as it is shown in Figure 2.

As for females among 40 pseudonyms (Figure 2):

- *16 of the 40 pseudonyms have the associative meaning related to domestic and feminine issues:* cicibişey, tahtakaşık, tatlı Serap, sevgi yumağı, dost cadı, minik patikler, sick princess, ev perisi, şekerpare, Izmir'in kuğusu, yemek ve biz, ev kedisi, ev perisi, mutfak meleği, ören mademoiselle, and hayal perisi.

- *9 of the names refer to the style of the blogger.* In Turkish morphology -ce and -ca suffixes are added to the end of the names to indicate the style: Nazlica, Serpilce, Elifce etc.

• *15 of the pseudonyms are related to the names in nature*. These are flower names, insect names with positive reference and colors: bahar guneşi, hobi bahçesi, begonya, tembel karınca, gece, gün, gelincikler, kelebek, çayçiçeği, beyaz zambak, yeşil erikler, vahşi gül, rosy, turuncu defter, tarçın.

4. EVALUATION OF THE RESULTS

When the results are evaluated the following conclusions are reached:

4.1. Males

This study contributes to the statement that males prefer to use pseudonyms negotiating their power and manhood: 7 of the examples referred to manhood and professions and titles used only by men. As a matter of fact, they emphasized and used directly names or titles indicating their sex: godfather, niceman, red boy, sanal korsan, kaptan, Mr.Metal, e-FENDY.

The use of atmospheric events of which people are usually afraid (n:7) gives the idea of unlimited power and frightful sensation: thunderness, hurricane, fırtına, freewind, thunderdress, and paratoner indicate or refer to the presence of thunder, hence lightening, midnight somehow cause fear again.

On the other hand, the compounds made with animal names (n:2) carry a kind of physical appearance and power: Kerimboğa, kılıç balığı. In both of the examples the animals denoted are the symbols of strength, sexual power (boğa) and instrument for defense and power (kılıç).

The example "dostdark" is an example of male directness, but the underlined meaning might be to maintain self-confidence and not to bother for the solidarity with the people around them, this may be the cause for using this paradox.

The names carrying the concept of fear are 11 in number where fire has a direct meaning and the others either denote skeleton or death: skullhunter, death, cryne, Williamdyer; in some of them, the performer of the action seems to be the blogger, and sometimes bloggers seem to refer to psychological states: Pckopatgoast, sessiz öfke and cry flower express melancholy. We can classify the other examples according to the presence of creatures after death: demon dreams, and devil which give clues on death.

The words which emphasize power plainly are the following: küçük prens, ChampionUfuk, powerbyAydın, Kanuni Mimar Sinan (here we have double emphasis on power Kanuni being the most powerful emperor of the Ottoman Empire, combined with the name of the most famous Turkish architect), unbeaten, unfearful are also the examples chosen by the bloggers to show their power. In paranteziçihayatlar, maskeli duygular, on the other hand male bloggers seem to be insensitive to outsiders, because for them it may not be easy to show their feelings. This may be interpreted as a way to escape from expressing their true feelings, and trying to reflect their powerful vision. For freedom, and dobra again they try to be free and direct, keeping their feelings to themselves.

4.2. Females

This study contributes to the statement that females used pseudonyms that have associated meanings related to domestic and feminine issues. The most striking examples of women included adjectives which are only attributed to women: cici (cicibişey), tatlı (tatlı Serap), minik (minik patikler); they also used such nouns and compounds that are only used by women: ev kedisi, ev perisi, sick princess, tahtakaşık, mutfak meleği, ören mademoiselle, hayal perisi, dost cadı (cadı and peri, although may be thought of sexless, are usually believed to be feminine), İzmir'in kuğusu (kuğu is the symbol of elegance which is used also for women). This category has 16 examples.

Nine of the examples contributed to the statement that women used their own style as pseudonyms. Women are fond of doing or creating hand made objects or meals. In their blogs, they tried to display either their needlework or cookies or other things they tried in their home or kitchen. These works illustrated their own style and gusto. Hence they used -ce or -ca suffixes at the end of their names to indicate that they are unique.That is, this is their own way of doing the things and they wanted to share them with the other bloggers.

It is also apparent in the study that females preferred to use names from nature.15 examples referred to this issue. The names concerning nature, bahar güneşi (carry the meaning of warmth and embracing atmosphere), hobi bahçesi (has the connotative meaning of handmade organic products, used also as a name of a magazine for women), and the flower names begonya, gelincik, çay çiçeği, beyaz zambak, vahşi gül, and the fruit yeşil erik denote the products of nature by carrying the meaning of delicacy, beauty, and attractiveness. Insects as tembel karınca and kelebek are the symbols of naive creatures like women. Gece and gündüz are the time limits of nature symbolizing the naive and strong or dark and brilliant sides of women. Colors also reflect the beauty of nature symbolizing women. The spice 'tarçın' giving a good taste is also used for the ingredient of perfumes same as white lilly, rose etc., the odor of such are carried by the breezes.

5. CONCLUSION

This study presents the results of the descriptive study conducted to determine to what extent the connotative meaning of pseudonyms used in asymmetric communication in blogs are gender-based.

It has been stated in the first hypothesis that males prefer to use pseudonyms which can negotiate their power and self-confidence. In the heart of men lies power. This power takes its roots from being a 'male' and this is apparent on the connotative meaning of pseudonyms such as godfather, kaptan, and Mr. Metal.

On the other hand, males identified themselves with the atmospheric events causing horror: hurricane, fırtına, freewind which are irresistible events of nature; and the compounds made with the animal names show their power towards others where they try to be competitive and individualistic, at the same time they stress their physical strength.

By using names associated with fear, they try to indicate their relations with others which are situated on the equilibrium of power hence with a competitive relationship with others they try to emphasize their self-confidence.

The second hypothesis stated that females prefer to use pseudonyms which express support and whose connotations manifest aligned orientation and express solidarity in domestic issues. Hence, this statement has been verified in the survey.

Female bloggers used pseudonyms referring to domestic issues which are attributed to feminine usage (mutfak meleği, ev perisi, tahta kaşık) or adjectives which would be absurd for male usage (tatlı Serap, cicibişey, dostcadı).

They also emphasized and shared their style in their blogs by adding suffixes to their names (Elifce, Serpilce). This sharing may be sign of productivity and it is frequent in domestic issues. By referring to insects or flowers, which are in nature, females try to make alignment with nature and this means they are part of it which is a sign of fecundity or fertility.

Another difference between male and female bloggers is that male bloggers used English names and compounds such as godfather, hurricane, midnight or skullhunter etc. This may be due to their reading practices of American originated comics during their childhood, which are still significant for them. In conclusion, although bloggers try to be anonymous in their blog communication by using pseudonyms, the connotative meanings of such pseudonyms reveal their gender according to the characteristics used by male and female users.

So as a booming technology, the internet provides opportunities for both male and female users, but does not appear to alter linguistic gender differences.

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APPENDIX

English Version of Pseudonyms Used in Turkish

Sanal korsan	: imaginary pirate
Kaptan	: captain
e-Fend	: addressing type used for men (efendi)
fırtına	: storm
paratoner	: lightning conductor
boğa	: bull
kılıçbalığı	: swordfish
dostdark	: friendlydark
sessiz öfke	: silent anger
küçük prens	: little prince
dobra	: blunt
paranteziçihayatlar	: lives in parenthesis
maskeli duygular	: masked feelings
cicibişey	: pretty thing

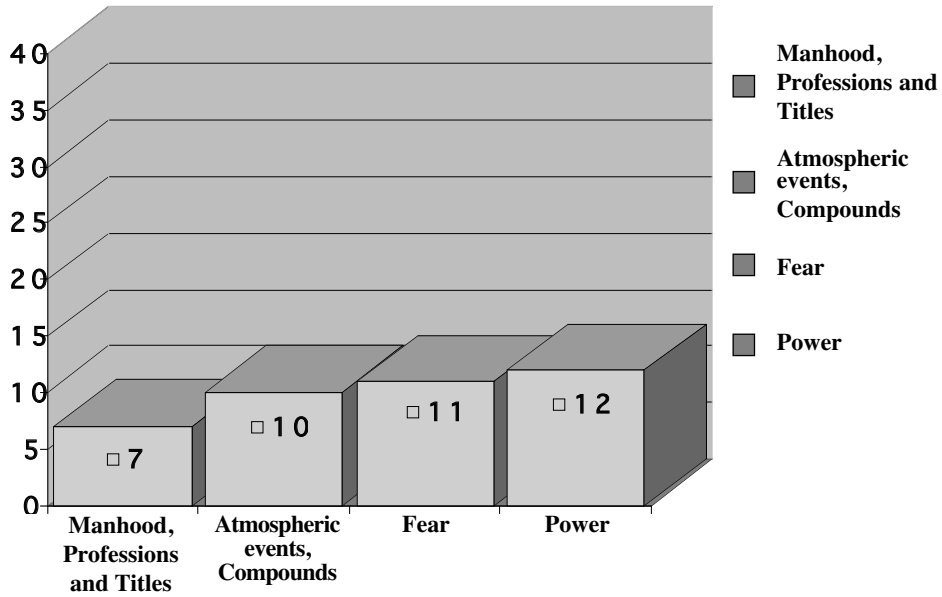|	
tahtakaşık	: woodenspoon
tatlı	: sweet
sevgiyumağı	: affection ball
dostcadı	: friendly witch
minik patikler	: tiny shoes
şekerpare	: a kind of dessert
kuğu	: swan
yemek ve biz	: meal and us
ev kedisi	: domestic cat
ev perisi	: domestic angel
mutfak meleği	: kitchen angel
ören mademoiselle	: knitting lady
hayal perisi	: fantastic angel
bahar güneşi	: spring sun
hobi bahçesi	: hobby garden
begonya	: begonia
tembel karınca	: lazy ant
gece	: night
gün:	: day
gelincik	: poppy
kelebek	: butterfly
çayçiçeği	: tea flower
beyaz zambak	: white lilly
yeşil erik	: gren plum
vahşi gül	: wild rose
turuncu defter	: orange notebook
tarçın	: cinnamon

Figure 1. Pseudonyms used by males

Figure 2. Pseudonyms used by females