Chapter 15
Turkish Heritage Speakers' Reasons for Code-Switching in the United States

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores first- and second-generation Turkish speakers' reasons for code-switching in the United States (U.S.) as well as the effects of social variables (age of arrival and length of residence in the U.S.) on the speakers' reasons for code-switching. The speeches of Turkish speakers were analyzed via interviews, focusing on their reasons for code-switching. A total of 20 Turkish speakers participated in the study. The study adopted a qualitative research approach to determine the reasons for code-switching. The data were based on spontaneous corpus data consisting of 10 hours of interviews with the Turkish speakers. According to the results, the participants used code-switching for the following reasons: lexical need, emphasizing and clarifying a particular point, and filling a gap in speech. Significant effects of length of residence on the use of code-switching were also observed suggesting that the longer the speakers lived in the U.S., the less items they recalled in Turkish.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of Turkish communities in the United States (U.S.) dates back to the 1820s when almost 300,000 Turkish people emigrated to the U.S. from what was then called the Ottoman Empire (Karpat, 2004). Since this period, the number of Turkish immigrants in the U.S. has continued to rise due to social, political, economic, and educational reasons, resulting in over one million Turks and the maintenance of Turkish. The continuous growth of the Turkish population in the U.S. and the maintenance of Turkish to a large extent, therefore, make the U.S. an ideal place to study language contact between Turkish and English.

There is now a large body of studies about Turkish as an immigrant language in contact with Dutch, German, Danish and English. For almost three decades, scholars in Europe have been inquiring into

the changes that occur in the speech of bilingual Turkish speakers, largely seeking possible explanations for how and why different generations and age groups code-switch. For instance, Backus (e.g. 1996, 1998, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2012), who has written several books and countless articles on diaspora Turkish, analyzed the code-switching patterns in the speech of Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands; Pfaff (2000) in Germany, Jørgensen (2010) in Denmark, Kurtböke (1998) in Australia, Türker (2000, 2005) in Norway; and Boeschoten and Verhoeven (1987) in the Netherlands as well. The scholars also examined topics such as ethnic identity, maintenance of Turkish and the degree of proficiency in Turkish and host languages. Despite the considerable number of studies conducted in Europe, particularly in the Netherlands, Germany, France, and Norway, there is a lack of grammatical and sociolinguistic studies of code-switching found in the speech of Turkish speakers living in the U.S.

The present study thus aims to fill this gap by focusing on a highly important and recurring topic in contact linguistics, code-switching. The study explores Turkish heritage speakers' reasons for code-switching from a sociolinguistic perspective. The paper is organized as follows. The following section provides a brief history of Turkish immigration to the U.S. and the current Turkish communities in the U.S. while section 3 provides an overview of functions of code-switching followed by research questions and methodology. Section 5 offers an analysis of the functions of code-switching found in the speech of Turkish-English bilingual speakers followed by a discussion of the findings. The study concludes with recommendations for further research on Turkish-English code-switching.

Turkish Communities in the U.S.: A Brief History

A detailed account of Turkish immigration to the U.S. has been provided by scholars (e.g., Akçapar, 2009; Karpat, 2004). In summary, Turks migrated to the U.S. in three consecutive periods due to social, political, educational, and economic reasons. The largest immigration movement from the Ottoman Empire to the U.S. occurred in the 1820s. It involved Turks, as well as Armenians, Jews, and Greeks. Most of the immigrants in this group were low-skilled men. They generally lived in Boston, New York City, Los Angeles, Houston, Detroit and Chicago. Although the majority of Turks went back to Türkiye after 1923, some settled in the U.S. for good but due to their lack of English skills, they could not integrate into the society. Their children, on the other hand, were able to assimilate into the American society socially and culturally as they did not have strong connections with acquaintances in Türkiye and got married with men and women of ethnic groups other than Turkish (Karpat, 2004).

The end of 1940 marked the beginning of another period of immigration, which, unlike the first group of immigrants, involved open-minded, high-skilled workers such as academics, engineers, and doctors as well as students who went to the U.S. for educational purposes. In this period, nearly 15,000 Turks immigrated to the U.S. This group was able to visit Türkiye mostly during summer holidays. The last period of immigration to the U.S. occurred in the late 1980s and increased rapidly in the 1990s. This group included Turks from different educational, demographic, and socio-economic backgrounds, migrating through the Diversity Visa Immigrant program to obtain permanent residency, scholarship programs for master's or doctorate degrees and family reunification. There were also Turks who emigrated to the U.S. to seek asylum (Karpat, 2004).

Today, there are, conservatively, 350,000 Turks living in the U.S., although numbers that also include Turkmen, Uzbeks, Uyghurs, Azerbaijanis and other Turkic ethnic groups estimate them to be close to 500,000 ("The Turkish-American Community," 2020). The former United States Secretary of Commerce John Bryson estimated this number to be at least 1,000,000 ("U.S. Agrees to Cash Transfer to Help Sta-

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