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POLITENESS IN YOUNG CHILDREN'S (BETWEEN 4;3 - 5;7) SPEECH IN TURKISH: AGE AND GENDER

4;3 - 5;7 Yaş Arası Türk Çocuklarının Konuşmalarındaki Nezket İfadeleri: Yaş ve Cinsiyet

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Abstract: Having the knowledge of a language is not limited to acquire the phonology, morphology and syntax of that language. Being a competent language user, children must acquire how to use the grammar of a language to communicate appropriately in a great variety of communicative situations. It means that language acquisition includes not only linguistic competence but pragmatic competence as well (Ya-ting, 2008). Thus, pragmatic competence has an important place in the children's language acquisition process. This paper is related to children's pragmatic development which brings together

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linguistic pragmatics and child development. Turkish children's language in play was analysed and the results were presented, focusing on the use of politeness phenomena. The results of the study were compared with the previous ones made in different languages. By contrast with the results of these studies, the present study found no significant differences in boys' and girls' use of mitigation. The girls and the boys often used an assertive, unmitigated style at the same level in their play, however, in other studies; girls appeared to be politer than boys when they played. This article re-emphasized the need for language and gender research on children to be thoroughly contextualized and the importance of considering the socio-cultural context in research on children's language. Indeed, the results are used to express the link between children's acquisition of pragmatic competence and crucial social, cultural and educational implications.

Keywords: *Pragmatics, Children's language, Linguistic politeness, Mitigation, Language and gender*

Öz: Bir dilin bilgisine sahip olmak, o dilin ses-bilgisi, biçim-bilgisi ve sözdizimini edinmekle sınırlı değildir. Yetkin bir dil kullanıcısı olan çocuklar, bir dilin gramerini, çok çeşitli iletişimsel durumlarda, uygun şekilde iletişim kurmak için nasıl kullanacaklarını öğrenmelidirler. Bu, dil ediniminin yalnızca dilsel yeterliliği içermemesi, aynı zamanda edim bilim yeterliliği de içermesi anlamına gelir (Ya-ting, 2008). Dolayısıyla pragmatik yetkinlik, çocukların dil edinim sürecinde önemli bir yere sahiptir. Bu makale, "dilbilimsel pragmatik" ile "çocuk gelişimi"ni birlikte içeren "çocukların dil bilimsel pragmatik gelişimi" ile ilgilidir. Mevcut çalışmada, sonuçlar, Türk çocukların oyun esnasında kullandıkları dil analiz edilerek ve nezaket olgularının kullanımı göz önünde bulundurularak sunuldu. Çalışmanın sonuçları, daha önce farklı dillerde yapılmış olan çalışmalarla da karşılaştırıldı. Bu çalışmaların sonuçlarının aksine, mevcut çalışmada, erkek ve kız çocuklarının yumuşatma (mitigation) kullanımlarında anlamlı bir farklılık bulunamadı. Diğer çalışmalarda, genellikle, oyun esnasında kızlar erkeklerden daha kibarken bu çalışmada, kızlar ve erkekler aynı seviyelerde iddialı ve sert bir stil kullandılar. Bu makale, çocuklar üzerine yapılan dil ve cinsiyet araştırmalarının kapsamlı bir şekilde bağlamsallaştırılmasının gerekliliğini ve çocuk-dili araştırmalarında sosyo-kültürel yapıyı göz önüne almanın önemini yeniden vurgulamaktadır. Sonuçlar, çocukların pragmatik yeterlilik kazanımı ile önemli sosyal, kültürel ve eğitimsel etkiler arasındaki bağı ifade etmek için de kullanılmıştır.

Anahtar sözcükler: *Edim bilim, Çocuk dili, Dilbilimsel kibarlık, Dil ve cinsiyet*

1. INTRODUCTION

From his/her birth, every child tries to be a member of a society which s/he belongs to. Also, Ochs and Schieffelin (1984) support this idea by saying that children can socialize through language and using the language within a community. Social interaction is a vital element for children to improve language ability because knowing only all range of grammar and rules of a language is not enough for an effective communication. In order to communicate appropriately in a great variety of communicative situations, a competent language user also needs communicative competence. According to Schiefelbusch and Pickar (1984), communicative competence is the totality of knowledge that provides a speaker to produce structurally well-formed, referentially accurate and contextually appropriate utterances. Moreover, it gives the ability of comprehending the speech of others in respects of the structural characteristics and social context (Schiefelbusch & Pickar, 1984).

Hymes (1972) suggests that communicative competence also includes the social knowledge. A speaker's social knowledge is related to the social status, social distance and social conventions (Hymes, 1972). In that sense, social-cognitive knowledge has an important place in language acquisition. Children can develop social-cognitive knowledge through interaction with other people in various real-life situations. By the help of this knowledge, they can interpret the others' messages, transfer their messages to the others and maintain an appropriate communication in different contexts (Hasslett & Samter, 1997).

The development of social-cognitive ability depends on the children's communication with others in a wide variety of situation and, as a result, children's use of language would become more socially appropriate (Dimitracopoulou, 1990). To sum up, being a competent speaker of a language requires children to acquire not only the grammar of the language but also the hidden social aspects of the language such as values, conventions, beliefs and politeness.

Using politeness norms in appropriate contexts has been regarded as a symbol of a child's communicative competence (Gleason & Perlman, 1985). According to Lakoff (1990), politeness is a fundamental component of one's ability to communicate with others and for this reason it is a communication phenomenon recognized across cultures (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 2006). However, politeness is defined differently by various researchers that change according to the

theoretical framework and goal of research. For instance, the theory of linguistic politeness, suggested by Brown and Levinson (1978), is referred to as the 'face-saving' theory of politeness. Face is adopted from Goffman's (1967) notion of face and the English folk term in expressions such as "save somebody's face" and "lose somebody's face". Face is thus defined as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.61). Face is made up of two aspects which can be restated in terms of basic face wants described by Brown & Levinson (1987, p.62): negative and positive face. In their model, they focus on the speaker rather than hearer.

On the other hand, Leech (1983) explains politeness in terms of the Politeness Principle. For Leech (1983, p.1), politeness principle suggests that one has to "maximize the expression of polite beliefs, minimize the expression of impolite beliefs". Politeness principle contains six maxims: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement and sympathy. Leech (1983) also postulates two sets of rhetorical (conversational) principles that have the potential to constrain the communicative behaviour of rational interlocutors: Textual Rhetoric and Interpersonal Rhetoric.

Unlike from these aspects, from a pragmatic perspective, Lakoff (1990, p.34) defines politeness as "a system of interpersonal relations designed to facilitate interaction by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange". In her view, there are some pragmatic rules that underlie the choice of linguistic expression. Lakoff's (1973) assumption is that pragmatic competence encompasses two general sets of rules: "Be clear" and "Be polite". Being polite is composed of other sub-rules that represent Lakoff's own conceptualization of politeness: Don't impose, give options and make (the hearer) feel good.

2. RELATED RESEARCH

Research related to children's development of politeness starts after the realization of the idea that pragmatic competence, with a specific emphasis to politeness, is a fundamental component to communicate with others (Nippold, Leonard & Anastopoulos, 1982). Despite the drastic changes that the field in its entirety has undergone and the ongoing debate, some certain topics with which research into politeness is concerned continue to exist. These topics include the acquisition of

linguistic politeness behaviour by children, the interaction of gender with politeness and cross-cultural use of politeness forms.

In the light of this approach, researchers have tried to determine how and when politeness is acquired by children. As Küntay, Nakamura & Şen (2014) mention in their research, the studies on the subject of politeness have initially carried out mostly with English-speaking children, focusing on the acquisition of politeness routines such as “thank you”, “please” and “I’m sorry” (e.g., Gleason & Weintraub, 1976) and the studies with children from other cultures have also showed similar results, indicating that “they are also socialized in politeness routines at an early age” (p. 324) (e.g., Bates & Silvern, 1977 with Italian children; Schieffelin, 1990 with Kaluli-speaking children; Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1986 with Kwara’ae-speaking children, Wilhite, 1983 with Cakchiquel-speaking children; and Nakamura, 2002b with Japanese-speaking children).

Some other studies have focused on understanding of how children make use of and comprehend a variety of polite forms in speech. In the sense of usage, the word “please” (Read & Cherry, 1978); indirect requests (Bock & Hornsby, 1977; Ervin-Tripp, 1982; Garvey, 1974) and politeness devices (Bates & Silvern, 1977) have been analysed. In these studies, it is clear that “please” appears very early in children’s speech; indirect requests and politeness devices are used with increasing age. In the comprehension part, the understanding of “please” and formal “you” have been analysed. It has been seen that children’s ability of making judgements based on politeness increases with age (Bates & Silvern, 1977). Children at very early ages judge the word “please” as a polite form, however, the use of formal “you” judged as a polite form can be observed much later (Bates, 1976). The analysis of children’s speech has also shown that they use polite forms according to the needs (Maratsos, 1973) and the age (Shatz & Gelman, 1973) of the listeners. It suggests that even young children are sensitive to their listeners. Küntay, Nakamura & Şen (2014; p. 324) state that numerous studies regarding production of politeness forms have been also conducted on other languages like Japanese, “a language well-known for its complex politeness system” (e.g., Clancy 1985; Cook 1996; and Fukuda 2005) and they suggest that “young children have early tacit socio-cultural knowledge of the verb forms in different contexts”. Clancy (1985) and Nakamura (1996, 2006) have also showed that Japanese-speaking children are also socialized in the use of greetings and polite expressions, formal language (teineigo), honorific

(sonkeigo) and humble language (kenjoogo) at very early ages. The proper usages of these complex structures in appropriate situations increase over time with growing age. Moreover, these studies also express the similar findings like children are sensitive to speaker-hearer characteristics, context and topic of conversation.

With a specific focus on the relationship between gender and politeness, as Holmes (1995) states, the question “Which gender is more polite?” is a very complex one to give an easy or a quick answer. The answer given to the question can change according to several variables. For example, it depends on how politeness is defined, the social class, and ethnicity. There are a lot of examples of differences in men’s and women’s language; for instance, Holmes (1995) suggests that sociolinguistic literature gives the idea that women’s use of language appears to be politer than men’s. On the other hand, some examples of no gender differences are also available in the literature (Bergvall et al., 1996). A lot of studies have focused on the gender differences in children’s usage of polite forms (Miller et al., 1986; Sachs, 1987; Austin, 1987; Sheldon, 1990). Populations of these studies are mostly American, and their results are that girls usually prefer to use collaborative and inclusive structures with a lot of mitigation; on the other hand, boys are more assertive with little or no mitigation (Ladegaard, 2004). Nevertheless, in her study, Sheldon (1992, 1996) has stated that the girls frequently use “double-voice discourse” (in which words embody more meaning than just the simple meaning that they appear to have on the outside). According to her, this helps them to “confront without being confrontational; to clarify without backing down; and to use mitigators, indirectness, and even subterfuge to soften the blow while promoting their own wishes” (1996, p. 61).

Moreover, some other research (Thorell, 1998; Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998) on children’s language and gender has also made with non-American populations and it has been emphasized that girls’ co-operative and mitigated language use as a cultural universal is a questionable generalization. For example, Kyratzis and Guo (1996, 2001) compared Mandarin speaking pre-school children in China and English-speaking pre-schoolers in the USA. They found that while the American girls preferred indirect, polite conflict strategies the Chinese girls were very direct and highly assertive.

In Turkish contexts, the research on pragmatic competence tends to focus on investigating Turkish adult students in foreign language

learning settings (e.g., for requests Kılıçkaya, 2010; Kanık, 2010; and Kahraman & Akkuş, 2007). In the literature, there emerges a few studies which investigate the topic in the field of first language acquisition (e.g., Martı, 2006; Zerey, 2014; and Altınkamuş, 2017). Moreover, Küntay, Nakamura & Şen (2014) present the detailed collection of the studies, which include crosslinguistic and cross-cultural approaches to pragmatic development, with their work covering also the different perspectives related to politeness concept beside the other topics under the title of pragmatic development.

The need of having specific knowledge about Turkish children's acquisition and use of polite forms in terms of age and gender, and, also, being aware of its importance in family and educational settings urged the researcher to conduct the present study. Thus, the present article includes an analysis of the language use in children's play in the context of Turkish pre-school classes. This descriptive study is an attempt to have a general idea about Turkish children's pragmatic development by analysing pre-school children's language in play and focusing on the possible gender and age differences (or similarities) in their use of polite forms. In the light of these points the following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. Are there any differences/ similarities in Turkish children's use of polite forms (mitigated and unmitigated obliges) according to their age?
2. Are there any differences/ similarities in Turkish children's use of polite forms (mitigated and unmitigated obliges) according to their gender?

Additional purpose is to suggest that learning about the preferences and tendency of children in their use of polite forms according to their age and gender may also provide illuminating points not only in the field of linguistics but also in the fields of education and child development. For this purpose, the results of the study will be reinterpreted in the discussion section of this study within the framework of these two issues.

3. METHOD

3.1 PARTICIPANTS

The participants of this study were 15 boys and 15 girls playing with conventional toys or Lego in a class of a public kindergarten. They

belong to middle-class families and their fathers work in the same business. Their ages are between 4;3 and 5;7 years. After their parents' consent were affirmed by "Parent Information and Approval Form", the playgroups (including two children) were formed on the basis of acquaintance and matched for age considering the different gender combinations (boy-boy, girl-girl or boy-girl).

3.2 PROCEDURE

The children were video recorded in their kindergarten (during fall semester in 2018). Each group was recorded while they were playing with conventional toys or Lego. The conventional toys consisted of cars, motorbikes, airplanes, dolls and doll's house equipment, various animals and building blocks. The children were asked to sit down at a table and were given the toys. The researcher told the children that they could play with the toys in whichever way they wanted. No particular play theme was explicitly suggested or encouraged; and the researcher did not interfere in the children's play but was either standing behind the video-camera or sitting quietly in a corner of a room. Each recording lasted about 30 minutes.

The animals, and to some extent the cars and airplanes, were often used in the children's play. There was no clear correspondence between the children's sex and their use of 'gender- appropriate' and 'gender-inappropriate' toys (Ladegaard, 2004; p. 2008). For example, the boys were just as likely as the girls to play with the doll's house equipment, irrespective of age, and the girls would frequently include the cars, motorbikes and airplanes in their play. The typical flow of the play was that the girls would play with the dolls and the doll's house equipment first, and then play with the motor vehicles and airplanes second. The boys would also play in reverse manner. This tendency for the children to play with 'gender- appropriate' as well as 'inappropriate' toys is contrary to the results reported in studies from countries, including the USA (Lloyd & Duveen, 1993) and Japan (Nakamura, 2001).

In the present study, a total of 15 play scenes were selected for analysis, involving 30 different children. 12 play scenes with conventional toys were selected for the analysis instead of the ones with Lego (3 play scenes). The reasons of this orientation can be given as:

- (1) they had the most amount of pretend play, a form of play which has been used in many previous studies because it is likely to elicit the linguistic features which are suitable for an analysis of linguistic politeness;
- (2) there was more parallel play in the Lego-scenes, for

example, two children each building their house while talking about their activity, but usually not negotiating and arguing to the same extent as in the conventional toy scenes (Ladegaard, 2004; p. 2008).

Approximately 30 minutes of plays with detailed notes about the children's verbal and non-verbal behaviours (children's movements, posture and other non-verbal behaviour such as facial expression, pointing and gazing, and acting with the toys) were transcribed.

3.3. CODING

The data was coded using the framework proposed by Sachs (1987) and DeHart (1996). They suggested that some obliges are definitely mitigated (question directives, joint directives, pretend directives, tag questions, and state questions) and others are unmitigated (imperatives, prohibitions, and declarative directives). Information questions and attentional devices are coded as neither mitigated nor unmitigated. However, in the coding system used in this study, some modifications were made depending on Ladegaard's study (2004). In his study, he mentions that

An oblige is an utterance that demands a response (a reply or behaviour) from the listener. This means that an oblige will usually take the form of either a question ("What was your name boy?"), a directive ("They all have to sit down"), a prohibition ("Don't take it"), or an imperative ("Sit down!"). A fifth, less frequent category is the attentional device ("Look at me eh"). An oblige can be either mitigated i.e., softened, indirect, polite, or it can appear in the most direct form, i.e., unmitigated (Ladegaard, 2004; p. 2009).

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Table 1. Mitigated Obliges (adapted from Ladegaard, 2004)

<i>Linguistic Category</i>	<i>Turkish Example</i>	<i>English Translation</i>
Imperatives	"Onları bana ver, tamam mı"	"Give them to me, will you"
Prohibitions	"Lütfen eşyalarımı	"Please, don't take my

	alma”	stuff”
Directives	“İstersen kimildat”	“If you’d just move it then”
Questions	“Evet, anne şimdi çıkabilir miyiz?”	“Oh yes mum may we go now?”
Attentional Devices	“Bana bak, tamam mı”	“Take a look at me, will you?”
Tags	“Komikti, değil mi?”	“That was fun, wasn’t it?”

Table 2. Unmitigated Obliges (adapted from Ladegaard, 2004)

<i>Linguistic Category</i>	<i>Turkish Example</i>	<i>English Translation</i>
Imperatives	“Oraya otur”	“You sit there”
Prohibitions	“Hayır bunu yapma”	“No, don’t do that”
Directives	“Şimdi gidiyoruz”	“We’re leaving now”
Questions	“Seninkiler bunu yapabilirler mi?”	“Can yours do that?”
Attentional Devices	“Bak bu kız”	“Look that’s the girl”

The data transcribed from the children’s play were analysed to group mitigated and unmitigated obliges in general according to two tables given above and they were our categories of focus. After connecting the preliminary findings to the theoretical framework developed by Sachs (1987) and DeHart (1996) with some modifications proposed by Ladegaard (2004), the researcher returned to the data to verify to what extent the findings could be supported by statistics (numbers and percentages) and actual examples in the data. Besides, the coded data were cross-checked by a colleague who is interested in qualitative research and no major discrepancies were identified (A random selection of 30% of the total number of 261 obliges was coded and only 5 cases out of 78 was evaluated differently by the second coder. This means that the two analyzes are 93.6% consistent with each other and with this result, inter-rater reliability can be stated as high for this study).

The percentage frequencies of the mitigated and unmitigated obliges used by girls and boys, and ANOVAs were calculated with SPSS 15 to reveal the children’ preferences of the usage in their plays.

4. RESULTS

In the play scenes, there was a total of 261 obliges and the most prominent category was directives. Table 3 gives the numbers and percentages of mitigated obliges and Table 4 gives the numbers and percentages of unmitigated obliges in various categories for boys and girls. Also, Table 5 gives the total numbers and percentages of mitigated and unmitigated obliges in various categories.

Table 3. Numbers and Percentages of Mitigated Obliges for Boys and Girls

<i>Category</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
Imperatives	3 (3.0)	10 (10.0)	13 (13.0)
Prohibitions	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Directives	34 (34.0)	32 (32.0)	66 (66.0)
Questions	4 (4.0)	15 (15.0)	19 (19.0)
Attentional Devices	0 (0)	2 (2.0)	2 (2.0)
Total	41 (41.0)	59 (59.0)	100 (100)

Table 4. Numbers and Percentages of Unmitigated Obliges for Boys and Girls

<i>Category</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
Imperatives	19 (11.9)	18 (11.2)	37 (23.1)
Prohibitions	4 (2.5)	8 (4.9)	12 (7.4)
Directives	34 (21.1)	36 (22.3)	70 (43.4)
Questions	7 (4.3)	4 (2.5)	11 (6.8)
Attentional Devices	13 (8.0)	18 (11.2)	31 (19.2)
Total	77 (47.8)	84 (52.1)	161 (100)

Table 5. Total Numbers and Percentages of Mitigated and Unmitigated Obliges Used by Both Girls and Boys

<i>Category</i>	<i>Mitigated</i>	<i>Unmitigated</i>	<i>Total</i>
Imperatives	13 (4.9)	37 (14.1)	50 (19.0)

Prohibitions	0 (0)	12 (4.5)	12 (4.5)
Directives	66 (25.2)	70 (26.8)	136 (60.0)
Questions	19 (7.2)	11 (4.1)	30 (18.3)
Attentional Devices	2 (6.1)	31 (11.7)	33 (17.8)
Total	100 (38.3)	161 (61.7)	261 (100)

From Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5, it is seen that the unmitigated obliges are higher in number (unmitigated obliges: 166; mitigated obliges: 100). Also, another inference that can be reached by looking at three tables is the small difference between the numbers of obliges uttered by boys (118; 45.2%) and girls (143; 54.8%).

However, to have a more detailed opinion about the results, one-way ANOVAs (five mitigated and five unmitigated linguistic categories by gender; $P < 0.05$) were performed. The results of the ANOVAs showed that no significant gender differences were found for any of the 10 categories of mitigated and unmitigated obliges.

It is commonly suggested in the literature that the use of polite forms is parallel to age of the child (Ervin-Tripp, 1982). Therefore, in this study, a second set of ANOVAs was performed (five mitigated and five unmitigated linguistic categories by age group; $P < 0.05$). The children were divided into two age groups (AG 1: 4;0-5;0 years; AG 2: 5;0-6;0 years). ANOVA results showed no significant difference, but only for one of the five mitigated linguistic categories, namely the mitigated question, a small difference was observed considering their means (Mean= AG 1: 0;6 AG 2: 2;8). For this category, the older children use more mitigated forms than the younger ones. In other four categories, the younger children use more mitigated forms than the older children with small differences in their means. However, they are not significant differences in any cases.

Furthermore, for the unmitigated categories, no significant difference has been observed. However, only for two of the five unmitigated linguistic categories, namely the unmitigated questions (Mean= AG 1: 0;7 AG 2: 1;5) and the unmitigated attentional devices (Mean= AG 1: 2;3 AG 2: 3;2), a small difference has been shown considering their means. The older children use more unmitigated obliges than do the younger children for these two categories. In other three categories, the younger children use more unmitigated forms than the older

children with small differences in their means. Finally, it can be concluded that the parallelism between the polite use of language and age did not confirmed by the participants of this study.

To make a more detailed analysis and have specific results, an example of the children's play is given below:

Sude (4;5) and Pelin (4;7)

- (1) P: Aaaa, havuç! (Aaaa, a carrot!)
- (2) S: [takes the carrot from P's hands]
- (3) P: Yaaa, onu ben buldum. (I found it.) [reaches out for the carrot and takes it] [...]
- (4) S: Yaaa, Pelin bana ver. (Give it to me, Pelin) [reaches across P for the carrot]
- (5) P: Sen bi tane daha bul. (Find another one.) [does not give the carrot to S]
- (6) S: Ya, Pelin ver. (Ya, Pelin give it to me.) [takes the carrot]
- (7) P: Tamam! Bi sen bi ben, tamam mı? (OK! You and then me!)
- (8) S: Tamam! (OK!)

In the dialog above, it is seen that Pelin finds the carrot and plays with it; however, Sude takes the carrot from Pelin's hands. When Pelin takes the carrot again Sude uses an unmitigated language, namely a directive sentence. Although it is unfair to behave like that Sude keeps on using such an unmitigated and assertive language. In this example, it is clear that both girls use a very direct, assertive and unmitigated language and as Sheldon (1992; 1996) stated they use mitigation to be assertive and to control the other person. For example, in line 7, Pelin says that "Bi sen bi ben, tamam mı?" (You and then me, OK?). The aim of using such a question is not related to the desire of getting a confirmation from the other person, otherwise, she tries to be accepted her own opinion to the other girl and make her to act accordingly.

Consequently, from the dialogs analysed in this study, 13 examples of "Would you like....?" or "Do you want....?" questions were observed and only one of the participants responded the question with saying "Evet, lütfen" (Yes, please). In the other twelve examples, the response was just "Evet" (Yes) or "Hayır" (No) instead of "Evet,

lütfeñ” (Yes, please) or “Hayır, teŖekkürler” (No, thank you). As it is known, this kind of questions and their related answers are also other indicators of polite behaviour.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study of child pragmatic development encompasses different traditions and theoretical perspectives on language and social interaction: socioculturally informed research such as developmental pragmatics (Ervin-Tripp, Guo, & Lampert, 1990; Ninio & Snow, 1996; Blum-Kulka & Snow, 2002), sociolinguistics (Kyratzis & Guo, 2001), language socialization (Ochs & Shieffelin, 1984), and developmentally informed approaches to child language acquisition (Berman & Slobin, 1994). As it is mentioned in Ladegaard’s study (2004), the present study also tries to show the importance of the context in language and gender research on children. Although significant differences were found between boys and girls in terms of their use of politeness phenomena in their play by other studies (most of them were performed in the USA with middle-class pre-school children), in this study, no significant differences in boys’ and girls’ use of mitigation was observed. The girls and the boys often used an assertive, unmitigated style at the same level in their play irrespective of their gender, however, in other studies; girls appeared to be politer than boys when they played. The studies (Goodwin, 1980; 1990; 1998; and Cook-Gumperz & Szymanski, 2001) on children’s play outside of the white, middle-class context (again in the USA) showed that even though the girls (Afro-American, Spanish-English and Latino with working-class families) used more mitigation overall than the boys, the girls were also capable of using a more assertive, unmitigated style in mixed-sex groups. Some other research (Kyratzis & Guo, 1996; 2001; Farris, 1991; 2000; Thorell, 1998 and Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998) performed in non-American contexts also displayed the similar results with the present research. For example, the Chinese girls were very direct and highly assertive during their play dialogues; irrespective of gender, Swedish children used assertive as well as non-assertive styles, and Italian and Swedish boys as well as girls were generally seen as co-operative as well as competitive. With the evidence, it is possible to draw at least two preliminary conclusions: first, the variability may arise because of cultural and contextual factors and thus, related research will have to take it into account and second, if a generalization is made “with the majority of studies, irrespective of cultural context and socio-economic group, there is

evidence that girls are more likely to prefer—but do not always use—a more indirect, polite speech style” (Ladegaard, 2004; p. 2008).

Moreover, when the age of children is considered as the second factor affecting their use of mitigated or unmitigated obliges it is concluded that the parallelism between the polite use of language and age (4;3-5;7) did not confirmed by the participants of this study. Mastering and developing sophisticated and varied conversational skills require a long period of time for children compared with their development of grammar and syntax. Even if basic pragmatic skills can be observed at quite early age, they are refined and developed throughout preadolescence and adolescence over time. With the adequate and effective use of these skills, the child can get the opportunity of attending in a constantly broadening range of social activities, and becoming a full-fledged member of the culture, society and educational settings. Thus, the importance of socio-cultural context is emphasized by this study because children’s behaviours change (positively or negatively) according to the environment they exist in. Examples from their dialogs show that the participants of the present study have a high degree of pragmatic competence. It has been discussed in results that they use mitigation to be assertive and to control the other person not to be polite. For example, Sheldon (1992, 1996) also found that the girls frequently use what she calls a “double-voice discourse”. This assertive negotiation style allows them to “confront without being confrontational; to clarify without backing down; and to use mitigators, indirectness, and even subterfuge to soften the blow while promoting their own wishes.” (Sheldon, 1996; p. 61) as we observe the similar use in the present study.

Although not focused in this study, the other two highly considered points that should be emphasized are the roles of parents and peers in children’s early socialization and pragmatic development. There have been various cross-cultural studies related to maternal speech to infants in different countries (e.g., Bornstein et al., 1992; Toda, Fogel & Kawai 1990; Crago 1992; and Crago, Annahatak, & Ningiuruvik, 1993). As summarized in Küntay, Nakamura & Şen (2014; p. 328), the role of maternal speech to infants “in the socialization of culturally appropriate communication” was examined by numerous studies; and cultural differences were revealed as well as “similarities pointing to the universality of maternal speech to infants” (e.g., Clancy, 1986; Fernald & Morikawa, 1993; Morikawa, Shand, & Kosawa, 1988; Toda,

Fogel, & Kawai, 1990). Although the cultural differences (caused by attitudes, beliefs, expectations, and etc.) in parent-child interaction can be observed, there is a common tendency among mothers from different cultures and regions: they are generally eager “to socialize their children to be active conversational participants” (Küntay, Nakamura & Şen, 2014; p. 328) (e.g., Demuth, 1986; Schieffelin, 1979; Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1986; De Leon, 2012; Stephens & Matthews, 2014; Otomo, 2001; and Takada, 2012). There are also some studies which compare the parents’ interactional and communicative styles (e.g., Tryggvason, 2006; Blum-Kulka, 1997; and Bellinger & Gleason, 1982), analyse the patterns of language use (Bellinger & Gleason, 1982) and show the effect of the parental input on forming gender-based language usage by children (e.g., Andersen, (1996); Ely, Gleason, & McCabe, 1996; Gleason, Ely, Perlmann, & Narasimhan, 1996; and Gleason, Perlmann, Ely, & Evans, 1994). Gleason (1987) suggests that there is a relationship between children’s language and the same-sex parent’s language. She found that children prefer to use similar linguistic features with their same-sex parents. For instance, fathers and sons prefer to use direct imperatives and, mothers and daughters prefer to use indirect imperatives. Beside this, they have to learn some different dimensions of use in order to form and perform suitable polite statements. For example, they need to be aware of different degrees of politeness, the pragmatic conditions and the results (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Related research shows that children at the age of four or five start to be aware of some pragmatic conditions and they arrange their politeness behaviours according to these conditions (Maratsos, 1973; Shatz & Gelman, 1973; Garvey, 1974; Bates & Silvern, 1977; Bock & Hornsby, 1977; and Ervin-Tripp, 1982). They are conscious about that greater status calls for more politeness. In Horn and Ward’s study (2006), children are politer when they have less powerful roles (e.g. a child talking to an adult; a woman talking to a man and etc.) and they are less polite when they perform more powerful roles. Likewise, in Andersen’s study (1990), it is clear that children made doctors less polite to nurses, men less polite to women, and adults less polite to children.

On the other hand, Ely & Gleason (1995) argue that “the attention researchers have paid to socialization that takes place within family interactions has tended to overshadow the role that others, including peers, may play in children’s socialization”. They further argue that in today’s world, children spend more time outside than in their homes (This is not only true for children from many other countries but,

increasingly, it is also true for Turkish children). Thus, the importance of peer group influence on children's early socialization and linguistic development should be taken into consideration according to current living conditions and lifestyles (Corsaro, 1997; Nakamura, 2001). There is no doubt that in the context of the kindergarten and the pre-school class, children socialize each other, for example in establishing and maintaining their gender identity (Cahill, 1986), in the acquisition of social routines (Preece, 1992; Rice 1992), and in the acquisition of socio linguistic competence, such as standard and non-standard language behaviour for girls and boys respectively (Ladegaard & Bleses, 2003).

Another point, not within the direct scope of this study but necessary to talk about, is the effects of culture on the pragmatic development, language use and language preferences of children. In short, what politeness means in a culture shapes all of the related issues such as status, power, age and gender. Relationships between people are formed according to these norms in a culture. What is called as a polite behaviour in one culture is not always accepted by another culture. Thus, politeness is a culture specific phenomenon, and, in all cultures, children have to learn how appropriately they behave as a male or a female, as a child or as a relative.

Some cultures pay more attention to the relationship among people, especially with a crucial emphasis on being polite, and they see children as the beginning points to build and establish the politeness phenomenon and polite behaviour. For example, cultures like Japanese give importance very much to children's socialization by using politeness routines from infancy. Burdelski (2010, p. 1607) mentions that

Mothers say polite expressions for children who cannot yet speak on their own (Okamoto, 2001) and instruct children in what to say (Clancy, 1986; Kobayashi, 2001; Nakamura, 2006). Caregivers use honorifics in addressing children in various contexts such as role-play activities (Nakamura, 2002) and when quoting the speech of adults outside the home such as teachers and doctors to index social relationships (Cook, 1997). Caregivers also guide children in embodied politeness, such as pressing a hand on a child's head to encourage bowing (Hendry, 1986). In preschools, teachers encourage children to use polite expressions such as greetings and formulaic responses (Peak, 1991), and guide them to participate in activities through the body (Ben-Ari, 1997).

Also, in Turkish culture and education, politeness routines need to be seen central in working towards some goals in that these routines encourage positive, other-oriented behaviours such as greeting others, sharing toys, and apologizing when committing an offense, and to be explicitly socialized in everyday interaction. Another approach in Japanese folk theories of teaching and learning is "... the body learns first and then the mind and heart come to understand (Hare, 1996, p. 340)". In the light of this view, Ben-Ari (1997, p. 1) suggests "teachers view children's bodies as malleable material goods that can be shaped and moulded". Moreover, Hendry (1986, p. 75-76) has observed that Japanese caregivers teach children to "discipline" and "control" their bodies. In the day care, teachers socialize children's bodies within various 'participation frameworks' (Goffman, 1981) that include triadic arrangements and the entire class. Towards these ends, teachers use directives, modelling, and somatic means and, also, verbal strategies such as prompting and reported speech. As a concern of the present study, it can be offered that, in Turkish educational settings, teachers can also spend some deal of time, effort, and patience in socializing politeness routines. Certainly, this can cause a great deal about children's cultural and social learning.

In general, findings show that children are active participants instead of being passive recipients of socialization in politeness routines. Preschool contexts, including socialization into politeness, are very convenient for children to learn politeness routines not only through direct participation, but also through indirect participation by listening and observing their teachers or peers applying these routines at first, and then repeating them. With these means, they both acquire language and understandings on how to use language to index culturally meaningful realities such as social action, activity, stance, and identity (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). Gaining a broader picture of socialization into politeness in general entails prolonged and repeated interactions with others in contextualized and consequential social actions. This study presents a step in this direction revealing the need for language and gender research on children to be thoroughly contextualized and the importance of considering the socio-cultural context in research on children's language.

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