

53. Positive self-representation in public discourse: A critical discourse analysis of denial strategies in Ekşi Sözlük

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Abstract

In today's society, racial and ethnic biases / concerns can be shown in a variety of ways. Members of the majority group primarily shape public discourse by expressing their ethnic perspectives in various ways. They may show, hide, and/or deny negative feelings against minorities, immigrants, refugees, and/or the others. In this regard, the present study attempts to examine and explore denial of unfavorable ethnic attitudes, biases, and worries voiced in public discourse regarding Turkey's Armenian minority. Within the framework of the study, I will investigate what kind of denial strategies may be found in the posts (comments) under the headings "Ermenilerden özür diliyorum" [I apologize to Armenians] and "Hepimiz Ermeniyiz" [We are all Armenians] posted on Ekşi Sözlük "Sour Dictionary" (one of the largest collaborative online communities in Turkey) between 2007-2008 years, shortly after the assassination of Hrant Dink (a journalist and member of the Armenian minority group living in Turkey) in 2007. Accordingly, I will discuss the sample entries within the scope of Critical Discourse Analysis and Teun van Dijk's denial strategies, which aim to show how ideology and ideological processes reveal themselves as linguistic systems. Then I will present my analysis of the most frequently used denial strategies observed in these entries. I will examine the denial methods used in the text and determine how racial or ethnic biases and concerns (at the macro level) are expressed in the text through word choice, sentence structure, hierarchy, and context (micro level). In this way, we will be able to see macro-level goals in the text through micro-level structures.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis, denial strategies, public discourse, ethnic biases, Ekşi Sözlük

Kamusal söylemde olumlu benlik temsili: İnkâr stratejilerinin eleştirel söylem analizine Ekşi Sözlük'ten örnekler

Öz

Günümüz toplumunda ırksal ve etnik önyargılar / kaygılar çeşitli şekillerde ortaya çıkabilir. Çoğunluk grubun üyeleri, etnik bakış açılarını farklı biçimlerde ifade ederek kamusal söylemi büyük oranda şekillendirebilir. Bu grubun üyeleri azınlıklara, göçmenlere, mültecilere ve/ya kendi gurubuna ait olmayan diğer insanlara karşı olumsuz duygularını söylemlerinde gösterebilir, gizleyebilir ve/ya inkâr edebilirler. Bu bağlamda, çalışmamız Türkiye'deki Ermeni azınlıklarına ilişkin kamusal söylemde dile getirilen olumsuz etnik tutumların, önyargıların ve/ya endişelerin inkârını tanımlayıp incelemeye çalışmaktadır. Araştırma çerçevesinde Türkiye'deki Ermeni azınlık grubuna mensup gazeteci-yazar Hrant Dink'in 2007 yılında uğradığı suikasttan kısa bir süre sonra, 2007-2008 yılları arasında Türkiye'nin en büyük ortak çevrimiçi topluluklarından biri olan *Ekşi Sözlük*'te

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"Ermenilerden özür diliyorum" ve "Hepimiz Ermeniyiz" başlıkları altında yapılan paylaşımlarda (yorumlarda) ne tür inkâr stratejilerinin bulunabileceğini inceleyeceğiz. Bu doğrultuda, ideoloji ve ideolojik süreçlerin dilsel sistem ve süreçler olarak kendilerini nasıl ortaya koyduklarını göstermeyi amaçlayan Eleştirel Söylem Analizi ve Teun van Dijk'in inkâr stratejileri kapsamında örnek girdileri tartışacağız. Ardından, bu girdilerde en sık kullanıldığı gözlemlenen inkâr stratejilerine ilişkin analizimizi sunacağız. Metinde kullanılan inkâr yöntemlerini inceleyip ırksal veya etnik önyargıların ve kaygıların (makro düzeyde) metinde sözcük seçimi, cümle yapısı, hiyerarşi ve bağlam (mikro düzeyde) aracılığıyla nasıl ifade edildiğini belirleyeceğiz. Bu sayede metindeki mikro düzeydeki yapılar aracılığıyla makro düzeydeki hedefleri görebileceğiz.

Anahtar kelimeler: Eleştirel söylem analizi, inkâr stratejileri, kamusal söylem, etnik önyargılar, Ekşi Sözlük

1. Introduction

Ethnic and racial prejudices are mostly acquired and developed by the dominant group of a society through everyday conversation and institutional texts/talks (van Dijk, 1992a-b, 1997). Van Dijk (1992a, 2000) argues that the discourse analysis of such texts/talks shows that they serve to express, convey, legitimate, conceal or deny negative ethnic attitudes about the other groups such as minorities, refugees, immigrants etc. Van Dijk (1987a-b, 1992b) refers to 'elite' ways of ethnicism which are conveyed to the society in more indirect and novel forms such as positive self-presentation (which is used to create impression on people as positive as possible and to refer to oneself as superior to others) and indirect negative other-presentation (which is used to regard others as inferior) since to be labeled as a 'racist' is face-threatening against the positive self-image in a society and creates a negative reflection in a situation. Accordingly, denial of racism is also a kind of positive self-presentation. At this point, "denials" such as mitigation, hedging, distancing, using reported speech, excuses, politeness and ambiguity are valid strategies to protect one's self-image/self-esteem (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Guerin, 2003). Van Dijk (1992a) argues that denials, which are used when negative attitude is found unacceptable in a group and racism is denied, have two dimensions at discourse level: (i) daily (informal) conversation and (ii) public discourse such as education, (social) media, digital forums etc.

In the present study, I aim to discuss denial of the negative ethnic attitudes given in public discourse towards the Armenian minority group living in Turkey, whose estimated population is between 50.000 to 70.000. Since the topic is too broad to be discussed in the present study, I will just focus on what kind of denial strategies are observed in the entries (comments) under the titles (i) "Ermenilerden özür diliyorum" [I apologize to Armenians] and (ii) "Hepimiz Ermeniyiz" [We are all Armenians] posted on *Ekşi Sözlük* "Sour Dictionary" (one of the largest collaborative online communities in Turkey). The period of the entries is between the years 2007-2008, just after the assassination of Hrant Dink (the journalist-the Armenian minority group member living in Turkey) in 2007. I will present my analysis on the most frequently used denial strategies observed in these entries by discussing the sample entries within the scope of Critical Discourse Analysis and denial strategies of van Dijk (1987a-b, 1992a-b, 1993a-b, 1997, 2000). Some of the denial strategies in the given entries are minimizing, ignoring, blaming the third party, partial excuse, humiliation, polarization, reversal, denial of responsibility, the topic shift, hostility and counter attack, which are connected to each other and work together to disguise biases and anxiety. The present study supports van Dijk (1992a) in that the denial strategies are used in public discourse to protect users' social self-image while at the same time managing some other aims such as ideological or political.

The article is organized as follows: In the second section, I provide a brief literature review on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and denial strategies. The section 3 refers to the data and the methodology of the analyses. In the fourth section, I present my data analyses and discussion on the denial strategies. Conclusion part summarizes the study.

2. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Denial Strategies

As stated above, I aim to analyze and discuss the use of denial strategies in the denial of negative ethnic attitudes towards the Armenian minority group living in Turkey given in the entries (comments) posted on *Ekři Sözlük*. Our study will be based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of van Dijk (1984, 1987a-b, 1991, 1992a-b, 1997), which argues that ethnic/racial biases are born and developed within discourse and communication. Let us first begin with the definition of CDA and denial strategies in general in sections 2.1 and 2.2, respectively.

2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

CDA, developed at the end of 1970s, aims to show how ideology and ideological processes reveal themselves as linguistic systems and processes (Fowler et. al., 1979:180). Fairclough (1993) and Fairclough and Wodak (1997) define CDA as a discourse analysis method whose goal is to examine how the practices, events and texts are formed by power relations. Wodak (2000, 2002) and Wodak and Meyer (2016) also note that ideology, power, hierarchy, gender and sociological variables are related to the interpretation and explanation of a text in CDA, which is based on rhetoric, text linguistics, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics and pragmatics as an interdisciplinary approach (Meyer, 2001).

According to Teun van Dijk, who is one of the most well-known CDA practitioners, CDA should address the issue of "power abuse" and "the injustice and inequality that results from it" in the discourse. In CDA, which puts a great emphasis on *control*, *action*, *cognition* and *hegemony*, it is necessary to analyze the relationship among text/talk, social cognition, power, society and culture (van Dijk, 1993a-b).

For van Dijk (1993a), *controlling* discourse means *controlling* social actions and the minds of *the others* (those who are not affiliated with the dominant social group). Socially shared information, attitudes, and ideologies are influenced by prevailing discourses, which means that texts/talks can indirectly influence the audience. Thus, the followers of CDA, who are curious about how discursive structures and strategies play a role in the process, especially focus on the relationship between discourse and cognition and ask how discourse of dominant social groups shapes negative attitudes and ideologies in the audience. The mission of CDA is to identify implications from everyday conversation, political discourse, textbooks or news reports, stories, semantic moves, vocabulary choice, grammar, the semantic study of local meanings (the propositional structures of clauses and sentences, relations between propositions, implications, presuppositions, vagueness, indirectness) and other structures: i.e. *over-completeness* is commonly used in discourse to indicate the irrelevant negative categorization of participants in order to delegitimize or marginalize their opinions or actions (van Dijk, 1993a:275). According to van Dijk (1993a), undesirable information is typically given in less depth, whereas desirable information is described in "over-complete" detail.

Briefly, CDA lets us study the ideologies (macro level) implied in the text through the selection of words, sentence structures, hierarchy, and context (micro level) (van Dijk, 1992b). In this regard, critical

discourse analysis of denial strategies allows us to see macro-level relationships through micro-level structures. In 2.2, we will briefly discuss denial strategies.

2.2. Denial Strategies

As a major management strategy, which may be related to personal/ institutional strategies or social impression or ideological self-defense or sociopolitical issues, the denial of racism, as in “*We are not racists but...*”, “*I have nothing against blacks but ...*”, is a sign of racism and/or (re)production of racism according to van Dijk (1992a:87). There are different types of denial (1a-d):

- (1) a. act-denial ('I did not do/say that at all');
- b. control-denial ('I did not do/say that on purpose', 'It was an accident');
- c. intention-denial ('I did not mean that', 'You got me wrong');
- d. goal-denial ('I did not do/say that, in order to ...').

(van Dijk, 1992a:92)

Van Dijk states that negative acts might be accepted and forgiven with excuse strategies as in (1a-d). Most prominent excuse strategies are *provocation* and *blaming the victim*: “*Young black males can be treated cruelly because of negative actions of them*”. One of the strongest denial strategies is *reversal*: “**We** are -not guilty of negative action, **they are**” and “**We** are not the racists, **they** are the *real* racists” (van Dijk, 1992a:94) (emphasis mine).

Moreover, *mitigation* (a way of downtoning), *minimizing* and/or using *euphemisms* (*apparent sympathy, fairness, justification* and *reversal*) while defining someone's negative actions, are other forms of denial: i.e. “*I did not threaten him, but gave him friendly advice*”, “*I did not insult her, but told her my honest opinion*” etc. (van Dijk, 1992a:92). Besides, *counter-attack and offence* are the other denial forms. In the former one, the speaker emphasizes the truth and the denial leads to a strategic reversal move: “Not *we*, but *they* are the ones who are intolerant”. In latter, on the other hand, denial is not only for self-defense and positive self-presentation but also to attack against opponents. Furthermore, van Dijk (1992a) refers to the subtle denials such as the use of quotation marks and words like ‘claim’ or ‘allege’, which are strategies usually used by the journalists.

Section 4 will discuss the denial strategies and denial of racial anxiety and biases in the light of my data analyses but let me first present my data and methodology in section 3.

3. Data and Methodology

In the present study, the source of the data is an internet forum *Ekşi Sözlük* “Sour Dictionary” (<http://sozluk.sourtimes.org>), in which the “*susers*” (dictionary users/writers) write entries (which include definitions and comments given by the users) under a nick name. There are about 400,000 registered users and 110,000 writers in *Ekşi Sözlük*, which was founded by Sedat Kaplanoğlu in 1999. The entries are checked by the moderators and can be eliminated from the dictionary if the dictionary rules are violated.² However, this does not mean that the forum is ‘edited’ in nature, which means that being objective and encyclopaedical is not required. Any topic can be selected and discussed from any

² See http://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ekşi_Sözlük.

point of view. In addition, slang is frequently seen in the dictionary despite the efforts to restrict the use of hate speech through a censorship operation since 2011.³

The reason why I have chosen *Ekşi Sözlük* as the source of my data is that data flow is more controlled compared to other (social) media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook since the *Ekşi Sözlük* users must fulfill some conditions in some specific periods to be accepted as the authors, which means that to sign up to the site is not enough to compose comments unlike Twitter or Facebook.

My data analysis focuses on the denial strategies used in the discourse of the entries, which have some racial biases and/or racial anxiety towards Armenians living in Turkey. I specifically focus on two titles in *Ekşi Sözlük*: (i) “Ermenilerden özür diliyorum” [I apologize to Armenians]; (ii) “Hepimiz Ermeniyiz” [We are all Armenians], which are thematically related to each other. I scanned about 700 entries especially written between 2007-2008 years under these titles since they were composed after the assassination of Hrant Dink in 2007 and in the course of on-going heated debates in 2008.

The first title, *Ermenilerden özür diliyorum* [I apologize to Armenians], is related to the issue which goes back to 1915 when many Armenians passed away, which has always been a controversial topic in Turkey (and in the world). Some groups call this sad event the destruction/genocide of the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire during the World War I (Baker, 2005; Lewy, 2005; Akçam, 2006). According to some other groups, there is no genocide but it was the result of an emigration (Atnur, 1991, 1994, 2005). In 2008, following the assassination of Hrant Dink, some academicians, politicians and journalists from Turkey and Armenia initiated an online campaign *Özür Diliyorum* [I Apologize], which aimed to show regret of Turkish people regarding the events of 1915. Some supported the campaign while some others criticized the apology and condemned the signatories of the apology for “betraying” the Turkish nation.⁴ Following that, the title *Ermenilerden özür diliyorum* [I apologize to Armenians] appeared in *Ekşi Sözlük*, along with entries that represented many points of view on the subject.

The second set of data comes with the title *Hepimiz Ermeniyiz* [We are all Armenians], which was the slogan appeared in the funeral ceremony of Hrant Dink, who was assassinated in 2007. I analyze the entries under these two titles *Ermenilerden özür diliyorum* [I apologize to Armenians] and *Hepimiz Ermeniyiz* [We are all Armenians] since they are very related to each other and both titles appeared after the assassination of Hrant Dink.

My data analysis is based on the CDA, which aims to identify how language, power and ideology are related to the social practices (van Dijk, 1997). In this regard, I will present the critical discourse analysis of the denial of Armenian problem and the “hidden” strategies under the denials given under these titles in the light of van Dijk (1992a-b, 1993a-b, 1997, 2000).

4. Analysis and Discussion

Van Dijk (1992a-b) states that the general norms forbid the forms of ethnic prejudice and discrimination; therefore, the members of the dominant group (politically, ideologically etc.) do not want to be seen as ‘racists’ since they are aware of the fact that they may break the social norms if they make negative statements about the minorities. If they have some negative criticism on the minority group members, they will tend to use denial strategies in their utterances for the sake of their positive

³ See <https://eksisozluk.com/eksi-sozluk-nefret-soylemi-denetim-projesi--2875131>.

⁴ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/harut-sassounian/turks-apology-for-armenia_b_151959.html.

self or in-group presentation: i.e. the speakers may deny the verbal act itself and/or underlying intentions; they may start to defend themselves in order to keep their face and positive in-group presentation. In the present section, I will analyze the frequently used denial strategies in the selected *Ekşi Sözlük* entries given under the above-mentioned titles. I will also discuss the purpose of the use of these particular strategies under CDA. In the following sub-sections, I will exemplify the most extensively used denial strategies observed in the above-mentioned entries: *minimizing, ignoring and blaming the third party* (4.1); *partial excuse, humiliation, polarization and reversal* (4.2); “no problem!” (4.3); *denial of responsibility* (4.4); *the topic shift, hostility and counter attack* (4.5).

4.1. Minimizing, ignoring and blaming the third party

Some of the denial strategies I observe in the entries are *minimizing, ignoring the topic* and *blaming the third party*. Consider the entry given in (2), in which the user presents himself/herself as tolerant/friendly to Armenians by minimizing and ignoring the issue and blames the organizers of the campaign for destroying the friendship between two parts by keeping the topic on the agenda.

(2) galahad-05.12.2008: **ermeniler ile alıp veremediğim yok, sokaktan geçen herhangi bir insandır benim gözümde. yatağımı da paylaşırım, yemeğimi de, ağlarsa gider teselli ederim, dost olurum, arkadaş olurum. hrant için sesimizi de kısıtık, helali hoş olsun. ancak rahat bırakın bizi artık yav. ben ermeni arkadaşlarım ile sürekli bir soykırım meselesi yüzünden içim buruk dolaşmak istemiyorum, bu konu ortada yokken güllük gülistanlık olan ortam, bu konu gündemde olduğu zaman soğuk olsun istemiyorum. kardeş kardeş yaşamak istiyorum bu insanlarla, neden hala kaşınır durur bu konu, bunu bilemem. illa toplumu kutuplaştırıp pazarı karıştırmanın ne gereği var?... (emphasis mine)**

[I have nothing to do with Armenians. They are indifferent from any person passing by on the street for me. Even I can share my bed and food with them. If one of them cries, I can go and console him/her. I can be a friend of them. We have also shut up for the sake of Hrant. We don't want to be rewarded for what we've done but it is enough, don't bother us anymore. I don't want to be on bad terms with my Armenian friends because of the genocide issue. The atmosphere is the bed of roses when the topic is not on the agenda. I don't want the bed of roses to be disrupted when the topic is on the agenda. I would like to live with these people without fighting. I can't understand why this topic is still reawakened. What's the point of polarizing the society and creating a stir?] (translation mine)

In (2), we observe a neat example of positive self-representation. The user begins his/her wording by stating that s/he is never against Armenians. In Turkey, sharing a bed and food is very important and symbolizes sincerity, love and friendship, so the user tries to imply that Armenians are her/his brothers/sisters. At this point, her/his aim is to “*change the mind of others in his own interests*” (van Dijk, 1993b). By trying to seem positive and kind towards Armenians, s/he is trying to save her/his positive self-representation. Also, the user refers to self-sacrificing protests against the assassination of the Armenian journalist *Hrant Dink*. S/he wants to control the minds of others by creating a very positive and modest self-image. In fact, s/he means that there should be no doubt about the sincerity of the aims of the group to which s/he belongs because they are such lovely people.

The sentence beginning with “*ancak*” (but) signals the pieces of negative ethnic attitudes. The user tries to say that s/he wants to be in peace but it is not clear what peace means for her/him? S/he says that s/he does not want the topic *genocide* to be on the agenda (ignoring) but s/he does not say there is not such genocide of Armenians. On the contrary, s/he means that it is none of other's business to question such a problem. “*Biz*” (we) and “*rahat*” (peace) are in the same sentence control the minds of the ‘others’.

By her/his wording “*bu konu ortada yokken güllük gülistanlık olan ortam*” [*the atmosphere is the bed of roses when the topic is not on the agenda*], s/he desires to diminish the size of the problem

(minimizing). Besides, s/he emphasizes her/his wish to live with those people peacefully (*kardeş kardeş yaşamak istiyorum bu insanlarla*) in that her/his demonstrative preference “*bu*” (this) implies *humiliation and othering*.

4.2. Partial excuse, humiliation, polarization and reversal

In (3), we see positive self-representation as in (2), but this time it is combined with the negative 'other' image and reversal strategies.

(3) solak-05.12.2008: *bugün farkettim ki, hrant dink cinayetiyle karıştırılıyor bu özür. hrant dink'in ailesinden özür dilenmesine saygı duyuyorum, ama ermenilerden genel bir özür dilenmesi -ve hatta milletçe, devletçe dilenmesi gerektiğini savunmak- çok komik...* (emphasis mine)

dipnot: geçmişte olanlara tek taraflı bakmamak lazım, ermeni çeteci diyince sadece hocah gelmiyor akla. mevzu bahis yıllarda, ermeni çetecilerin ruslarla bir olup yaptıklarını merak eden varsa, "hakan gezik - buz yarası" adlı kitap iyi bir başlangıç olabilir, devamı gelir zaten, ezbere konuşmanın anlamı yok. (emphasis mine)

[Today I realized that the apology ['We apologize' campaign] is confused with the assassination of Hrant Dink. I respect the apologies to Hrant Dink's family, but it is very funny to argue that we have to apology to all Armenians as the nation and state...

Footnote: the past shouldn't be viewed solely from one perspective. When we refer to the Armenian gangster, Khojaly is not the only one that comes to our mind. If anyone wonders what the Armenian gangs were doing by collaborating with Russians in those years, the book called *buz yarası 'Ice Wound'* by Hakan Gezik might be a good introduction.] (translation mine)

The entry above begins with a partial excuse as a proper strategy. Since Hrant Dink Assassination was condemned so much in the media, s/he does not want to seem to ignore the issue. The user says that s/he can show respect for the apologies to Hrant Dink assassination. In his following utterance “...*ama ermenilerden genel bir özür dilenmesi -ve hatta milletçe, devletçe dilenmesi gerektiğini savunmak- çok komik*” [but it is very funny to argue that we have to apology to all Armenians as the nation and state], on the other hand, s/he humiliates the 'others' by saying apology for the all Armenians is so funny. S/he rejects to apologize and mocks those who participate in the apology campaign. In this way, s/he creates pressure on the minds of the audience in that s/he controls the behaviors of the receivers with her/his humiliating wording “funny”. Also, when s/he says “... *milletçe, devletçe ...*” [as the nation and state], s/he implies that the nation and state are like two halves of a unit, which means the state belongs to the Turkish nation not to the others. The “we” vs. “they” polarization and implicit discrimination sound to be imposed to the others.

As the footnote “*geçmişte olanlara tek taraflı bakmamak lazım*” [the past shouldn't be viewed solely from one perspective], s/he seems to accept the claims for the past but s/he justifies them by using a reversal strategy. Also, s/he includes euphemism to her/his discourse at this point by omitting the taboo words such as “*genocide*” and just saying “*geçmişte olanlar*” [the things that happened in the past]. In the rest of the footnote, her/his wording “*ermenilerden genel bir özür dilenmesi -ve hatta milletçe, devletçe dilenmesi gerektiğini savunmak- çok komik*” [but it is very funny to argue that we have to apology to all Armenians as the nation and state], s/he refers to the massacres and Armenian gangs. S/he implies what happened in the past is related to a kind of revenge.

4.3. “No problem!”

Van Dijk (1992a) describes “seeing racism where there is none” as the core part of so-called racism in the modern world in that, as a denial strategy, the minorities may be seen as oversensitive, intolerant and exaggerating. Accordingly, consider the sample entry given in (4).

(4) ibn i batuta-04.12.2008: *hala insanların nasıl desteklediğini anlayamadığım kampanya. misal ben bakırköy'luyum, çocukluğumda her yer **ermenî doluydu**. meger ki **bu adamların** soyu kirildi, bu kadar **ermenî** nereden çıktı? meger **bu adamların** malları taksim edildi, neden benim tanıdığım ermenilerin hepsi hali vakti yerinde kişiler idi? önce bunlara **cevap verin!** (emphasis mine)*

[It is the campaign, which I still do not understand how people support it. For instance, I'm from Bakırköy. When I was a kid, everywhere was full of Armenians. If those guys had died out, where would so many Armenians have come from? If the goods of those men had been confiscated, why were all the Armenians I knew well-off people? Answer these questions first!] (translation mine)

In this quotation, the user defines the campaign from her/his own perspective. S/he imposes the idea that the ones who support the campaign are oversensitive. Then, s/he gives a personal anecdote to support her/his thesis. S/he says there were many Armenians in her/his neighborhood in the past and claims that if those had been destructed, why there were so many Armenians in her/his neighborhood. S/he means that there is no genocide but this is just an example of ‘exaggeration’ by the ‘others’ because of their ‘oversensitive’ attitudes. S/he also asks why Armenians were so rich if the goods of the Armenian people had been shared out by Turks. S/he tries to disprove all the claims about the destruction. Thus, her/his implication is that there is no genocide at all, but this is just over-sensitivity and exaggeration. S/he intends to support her/his view with using humiliation wording and demonstrative adjectives (*ermenî dolu* ‘full of Armenian’, *bu adamlar* ‘those guys’) and refusal strategies in her/his questions (*meğer ki bu adamların soyu kirildi, bu kadar ermenî nereden çıktı? [...If those guys had died out, where would so many Armenians have come from?]*).

4.4. Denial of responsibility: Am I responsible?

The denial of responsibility is an escape strategy which means “even if there had been bad effects, I couldn't do anything about them because I did not have control” (van Dijk, 1993a-b). Consider (5):

(5) scipio africanus.05.12.2008: ... **hangi ermenilerden** özür dileyeceksin? 1915'de yaşananlardan zarar gören ermeniler çoktan **toprak oldular**. çocukları da öyle. belki torunlarından birkaçı yaşıyordur. ama eminim ki 1915'de olup bitenler onların da **s.kinde değildir**. ama sen yine de özürünü dile. belki ermenî diasporasından okkalı bir aferin alırsın. adın demokrata çıkar. hiçbir şey olmasa **o..ruktan bir nobel ödülü garanti**. (emphasis mine)

[Which Armenians will you apologize to? The Armenians, who were suffered from the events in 1915, already died. So, did their children. Maybe some of their grandchildren are still alive. But I'm sure they don't care what happened in 1915. Nevertheless, feel free to apologize. Perhaps the Armenian diaspora will congratulate you. Maybe you will be called a democrat. Even if all else fails, a shit Nobel Prize is definitely yours.] (translation mine)

In (5), the user implies that there are no Armenians we can apologize to. In his words “1915'de yaşananlardan zarar gören ermeniler çoktan toprak oldular” [*The Armenians, who were suffered from the events in 1915, already died*], s/he does not sound to deny what they happened at that time but s/he does deny the responsibility of the issue. S/he says that even their children died, so s/he implies there is no responsibility of her/his part to apologize to anyone for anything because nobody witnessed what happened in the past. Also, s/he is very sure about her/his claim that even their grandchildren do not care about what happened to their grandparents. S/he humiliates the other part by using slangs

“s.kinde değildir” [(probably they) do not care)] “o..ruktan bir nobel [a shit Nobel Prize]”, which is a strategy to harass the other. Here the user also refers to the Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk’s receiving the Nobel Prize. The user implies a connection between receiving the prize and the political ideology in that Orhan Pamuk made use of the word *genocide* for what happened to Armenians in 1915 and then he was able to receive the prize due to his views. With all her/his wording, s/he pushes pressure on the ones who participate in the campaign and even who think of apologizing. In the following entry (6), it is also possible to see a similar case.

(6) solak-05.12.2008: ...iki değişkene sahip özür icraatı. birincisi, soykırımı **kabul ediyor musun? buna "evet" diyorsan, ikincisi, türkiye cumhuriyeti'nin, osmanlı'nın devamı olduğunu ve icraatlarının sorumluluğunu taşıması gerektiğini düşünüyor musun? iki soruya da samimi olarak "evet" diyen varsa bireysel olarak özrünü dilesin tabii, bizi bağlamaz. ama bu özrün bütün türk milleti ve türk devleti tarafından dilenmesi gerektiğini savunursan, orda sert tepki göreceksin, eşyanın tabiatı...** (emphasis mine)

[...the apology campaign with two dimensions. First, do you accept the claim of the Armenian genocide? If you say "yes", secondly, do you think that the Republic of Turkey is the continuation of the Ottoman Empire and that it needs to take responsibility for the Ottoman's actions? Anyone who sincerely says "yes" to both questions can apologize individually, of course, it does not matter to us. But if you argue that the Turkish nation and the Turkish state must apologize, you will face harsh reactions there, by nature...] (translation mine)

In this statement, the user analyzes the dimensions of the campaign. Firstly, s/he denies the action itself by giving the answer “yes” in quotations mark which indicates that the affirmative answer of “do you accept the claim of the Armenian genocide?” does not belong to her/him or to those who think in a similar way with her/him. Secondly, s/he directly denies the responsibility of the event in her/his wording “türkiye cumhuriyeti'nin, osmanlı'nın devamı olduğunu ve icraatlarının sorumluluğunu taşıması gerektiğini düşünüyor musun?” [do you think that the Republic of Turkey is the continuation of the Ottoman Empire and that it needs to take the full responsibility of the Ottoman's actions?]. “Gerektiğini” (need) is an important word since it implies that there is no need at all. S/he does not say “do you think Turkish Republic has the responsibility for the actions of Ottoman Empire?” but s/he says ‘need to or not’. S/he imposes her/his view to the others and gives the answers of her/his own questions. In the following sentence, s/he uses “iki soruya da samimi olarak "evet" diyen varsa” [anyone who sincerely says "yes" to both questions], which implies that it is not easy to give the answer ‘yes’ sincerely. This is a valid example of mind controlling, which puts the pressure on the reader.

In her/his utterance “ama bu özrün bütün türk milleti ve türk devleti tarafından dilenmesi gerektiğini savunursan, orda sert tepki göreceksin, eşyanın tabiatı” [But if you argue that the Turkish nation and the Turkish state must apologize, you will face harsh reactions there, by nature...], the user frees those who want to apologize while threatening the others who believe that the Turkish nation state must also apologize. At this point, we see the signs of discrimination since s/he implies that ‘we’ do not care ‘those’ who apologize since they are not one of ‘us’ but the others. Besides, s/he integrates the concepts ‘Turkish Nation’ and ‘Turkish State’, which sounds to identify the state with the Turkish race rather than the others.

Briefly, we have observed denial of responsibility in these two examples. In both cases, the users try to control the minds of ‘others’ (van Dijk, 1993a-b). In the next section, I will continue with some other denial strategies: the topic shift, hostility and counter attack.

4.5. The topic shift, hostility and counter attack

In the entries, we can also observe some other denial strategies such as the topic shift of the discourse to a secondary point, hostility and counter attack. Consider the entry given in (7).

(7) kendinesosyalist-27.01.2007: ...**ırkçılığa karşıyım, şiddetten nefret ediyorum ama popülizmi de sevmiyorum.** *eminim ki aranızda hakikaten tüm bu olanları dert eden, düzelmesi için başından beri çabalayanlar var ama hrant dink'in adını öldüğü gün duyup da "hepimiz ermeniyiz" diye sokağa dökülen o çığırkanların seslerine dayanamıyorum.* (emphasis mine)

[I'm against racism, I hate violence, but I don't like populism either. I'm sure there are some among you who are really worried about all these and have been trying to fix them from the beginning, but I can't stand the voices of those screaming people who heard the name of Hrant Dink on the day of his death and hit to the streets saying "We are all Armenians".] (translation mine)

In (7), we have an example of shifting the topic of the discourse to a secondary point. Here the user means that "I am against racism, but I am against populism, too." The user fills the 'but' part of the sentence with another shifting device and tries to show that empathy shown to *the others* is an example of populism. The user also implies that s/he is not against showing empathy for the *others*, but s/he is against populism. S/he seems to deny his/her negative attitudes towards the other by referring a third topic in this case.

In (8), on the other hand, blaming the other is observed as another denial strategy: to blame the other for being hostile and prejudiced (van Dijk, 1993b). Consider (8) where the user reminds the reader a fact about the Turkish diplomats who were assassinated by an Armenian terrorist organization *Asala*:

(8) turk-182, 24.01.2007: ..sonuçta **bir türk gazetecisi öldürülmüştür** ve fikirlerin her ne şekilde olursa olsun susturulması **kabul edilemez**, ki zaten fikirler de susmaz... her seviyede kınanması gereken menfur bir olaydır... **ancak 34 diplomatımızın kanı yıllar boyu kanarken hepimiz türküz dediğini, ondan da geçtim knadığım hatırlayamayan benim için hepimiz ermeniyiz sloganı abesle iştigaldir...** (emphasis mine)

[As a result, a Turkish journalist was assassinated and it is unacceptable to shut the ideas up in any way, which is not the case... It is an unacceptable case that should be condemned at every level... However, the slogan "We are all Armenians" means nothing for me since I cannot remember that they condemned the assassination of our 34 and that he said all of us said Turkish.] (translation mine)

In this case, the 'but part' of the utterance is filled by a historical fact as a denial strategy. The user reminds us the assassinations of Turkish diplomats by the Armenian Terrorist organization *Asala* (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia). The purpose is to blame the others for being hostile and prejudiced. The user considers showing empathy for them is in vain since they are more hostile and they did not say "We are all Turks" at those times. Note that the vocabulary choice plays a role in this case. The use of "*abesle iştigal*" (a fool's errand) supports the attitude of the user against the slogan "We are all Armenians": the user seems to humiliate the people who show empathy to *the other* (Armenians in this case).

The hostile attitude of the others is also exemplified in another entry. Consider (9).

(9) master of puppets-24.01.2007: ... *erivanda yaşayan kardeşlerimiz "hepimiz ermeniyiz" diyerek hrant dink'i son yolculuğuna uğurladığımız dakikalarda soykırım anıtı önünde "türkiye'nin ab de yeri yok" pankartı taşıyorlardı...*

[... Our brothers living in Yerevan were carrying a banner "Turkey has no place in the EU" in front of the genocide monument at the moment when we said "We are all Armenians" and said goodbye to Hrant Dink on his last journey...]

In (9), the “others” are accused of being hostile to “us” (counter attack). The user means that despite her/his empathy, the people-he considers his brothers in Yerevan-say, "Turkey has no place in the EU". The purpose of the user is clear: s/he wants to show that s/he is not racist, but *the others* are racists.

In brief, I discussed the topic shift, hostility counter attacks as denial strategies in light of the sample entries given above, which are based on the positive self-representation, which is a macro strategy used to keep one's face or manage one's impression, and negative other representation, which is another macro strategy used to deal with in-groups and out-groups and to present the other as inferior (van Dijk, 2004).

5. Conclusion

In the present study, I have tried to critically analyze and discuss the denial strategies used in the discourse of the entries given under the titles "Ermenilerden özür diliyorum" [I apologize to Armenians]; and "Hepimiz Ermeniyiz" [We are all Armenians]. I have observed many denial strategies in the given entries: e.g. minimizing, ignoring, blaming the third party, partial excuse, humiliation, polarization, reversal, “No problem!”, denial of responsibility, the topic shift, hostility and counter. I have analyzed and explained these denial strategies through CDA (van Dijk, 1984, 1987a-b, 1988a-b, 1991, 1992a-b, 1993a-b, 2000), in that we have showed that denial strategies are a way of disguising racial biases and/or racial anxiety in denial as van Dijk (1992a-b) argues. Note that the denial strategies are connected to each other and work together to disguise biases and anxiety: i.e. the partial excuse may trigger one/some or many other denial strategies such as humiliation, polarization, reversal denial of responsibility, the topic shift, hostility and counter attack as the domino effect. Regardless of any differences in the social groups, such strategies can be observed at any social or cultural level and in any sociocultural settings which means that both 'ordinary' citizens and ‘elites’ (in van Dijk’s terms) try to protect their social self-image while at the same time managing their macro level aims.

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