

Analysis of Discourse Particles in Relation to the Information Structure of Texts & Dialogues: Examples from Turkish

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ABSTRACT

The main topic of our study is the relation between the DPs and the information structure of the dialogues/texts. We mainly claim in our study that there is a close relation between these two. However, we claim that what determines which kind of information status will occur which DP depends on the function of the DP in content domain. We analyze the two DPs used in Turkish, namely *zaten* and *ya*, in relation to the functions they serve and the information status of the utterance they are used in. At the end of our analysis we found out that the function of the DP and the information status of the utterances are in close relation. We suggest that a further detailed analysis should be made on other particles to build up a better understanding of the nature of DPs.

1. Introduction

Our main subject matter in this study is the discourse particles (DPs) in discourse, and the relation between the functions they serve in texts/dialogues and the kind of information expressed by the sentences/utterances they are used in. There have been made studies on the relation of the DPs and the information status of the sentences (Karagjosova, 2003; Göksel & Özsoy, 2003 etc.) We mainly analyze the two DPs in terms of the functions they serve in the content domain. The content domain functions are defined in terms of Lenk (1998, in Yılmaz, 2004) and Sinclair and Coulthard (1975 in Yılmaz 2004) as the textual or context situational organization of parts of the texts/dialogues. Here a distinction is made between the discourse coherence in global and local contexts. Yılmaz (2004) names this distinction and defines content functions in global domain as *frame functions*, and the ones in local domain as *qualifying functions*. We are also going to use these definitions of functions under different domains to analyze the DPs in relation to the information organization of the texts/dialogues in our analysis.

Our main question of research at the very beginning was “what are the functions of DPs in Turkish?” and we especially aimed at defining the functions of *zaten*. During the analysis it appeared that this particle is in close relation to shared information between the speakers or the characterizing sentences which also signal the “generally known” status of the information given in the sentence. Thus, our question turned out to be “is there a relation between DPs and a special kind of information in texts/dialogues. We claim here that there occurs such a relation between DPs and the kind of information that the sentence codes. However, what we claim here is that the functions of the DP at the content domain determine the kind of information that it is going to be in relation to. We suggest that since DPs are defined as “tiny pieces of language” which is difficult to assign a clear semantic value do not have the ability to assign a particular meaning or function to the sentence/utterances. As indicated by definition they rather serve as function words in the language which make the already existing relation between sentences explicit. Therefore, we are going to define them as underspecification elements in language. We mainly claim in our study that they may underspecify a certain kind of information expressed in sentences/utterances in context.

For our purposes, we analyze the two particles in Turkish, namely *zaten* and *ya*, in terms of their function in the content domain and the kind of information they underspecify.

We take only these two items since we do not have enough space to exemplify and explain our claim by all of the functions served by DPs, which needs to be done as future work.

2. Content Domain Functions of Two DPs in Turkish: *Zaten*, *Ya*

The content domain of the text/dialogue is defined as the main domain where the cohesive structure of it is built up. Lenk (1998, in Yılmaz, 2004) and Sinclair and Coulthard (1975 in Yılmaz 2004) analyze the two sub-domains of the content domain as global and local content domains. Within this distinction the functions of the DPs are also named differently. Yılmaz (2004) names the functions under the global content domain as frame functions and the ones under local content domain as the qualifying functions. The frame functions as listed by Yılmaz (2004: 45) are shown in the following.

- i. ‘marking transitions’ (e.g. topic shifts, introducing a new aspect of the topic, opening and closing conversation)
- ii. ‘introducing an explanation, justification, background’
- iii. ‘introducing or closing a digression’ (push-markers, return-pops)
- iv. ‘self-correction of the message information’
- v. ‘introducing direct speech’

The qualifying functions on the other hand are as follows.

- i. ‘indicating agreement/disagreement’
- ii. ‘response to a question’ (a request)
- iii. indicating comparison or contrast’
- iv. ‘listing’ (Yılmaz, 2004: 46)

In this section, we are going to define the functions of *zaten* and *ya* within these of content domains and show the relation between the informational statuses of the sentences and the functions of these DPs. We also suggest that the stress patterns of the particles and the intonation patterns of the sentences can be evaluated as distinctive features of the different types of information denoted by the sentences.

2.1. *Zaten*

Although defining semantic content for the particles is not an easy task to do, we can have a rough definition of *zaten* to get a better understanding of its functions. *Zaten* is, at the same time, a verb adverb borrowed from Persian. The English equivalent of it is “*already, in actual, anyhow, in any rate*” as a DP, *zaten* carries this meaning, thus it can be paraphrased as “*it is already known to the speaker that p*” or “*it is a generally known fact that p*”. These semantic implications of the particle make us judge that it has to be in relation to the old-information within the dialogue/text. However, in the analysis we see that there may be uses of the DP in the other way. Before that, we should define the functions of the particle in the content domain. In the global content domain frame functions of the particle can be defined as topic closure, topic expansion (explanation, justification, background). The qualifying function of *zaten*, on the other hand, is contrast (expressing a contradictive idea to the presupposition of the previous speaker).

- (1) *Speaker*: Hangi şarkıyı söyleyeceksiniz bize?
Which song are you going to sing for us?

- Singer: 'Neler oluyor bize'nin provasını yaptık arkadaşlarla.
We have rehearsed 'Neler Oluyor Bize' with the friends.*
- Speaker: Biz de onu istiyorduk zaten. **Background**
That was what we also wanted ZATEN.*
- (2) *Interviewer: Göçebe senin parçan sanırım.
The song Göçebe is yours, I think.*
- Singer: Müziği bana ait. Sözleri Günay Çobana ait. Zaten 6 şarkı Günay Çobana ait.
background
The music is mine. Verse belongs to Gülay Çoban. ZATEN 6 songs belong to Gülay Çoban.*
- (3) *Yasemin: Hmm. Selim Bey verdi biletleri öyle mi?
Hmm. Selim gave you the tickets, right?*
- Esmâ: Yasemin sakın Selim beyle ilgili herhangi bir imada bulunma! Sonra kalbini kırarım.
Zaten Burak saçma sapan konuşup sinirlendiriyor beni! **justification**
Yasemin, don't you imply anything about Selim! I may break your heart. ZATEN Burak makes me mad by his silly words.*
- (4) *Gül: Abla, Ayşe'yi gezdirmeye ben gidebilir miyim?
Mam, may I be the one to take Ayşe out?*
- Suzan: Tamam tamam hadi git. Zaten yaptığın iş ürküttüğün kurbağaya değmiyor.
Background
Ok, ok, go! ZATEN you do not do anything here.*
- (5) *Reviewer: Bu sözlerle ilgili karşı bir şeyiniz var mı?
Do you have anything against these words?*
- Singer: Evet onla ilgili zaten. **Background**
Yes. It is exactly what I will say about ZATEN.*
- (6) *Tutor: Hala insan beyni daha iyi.
Stil human brain is better.*
- Student: Zaten ben de o görüşteyim yani. (contradictory to the presupposition of tutor)
ZATEN I share the same idea.*
- (7) *Öncesinde zaten söyliyiceni söyledin sen anlatıcını anlattın. Ona örnek veriyosun. Artık bunu söylemene gerek yok ki. **Justification**
You have ZATEN expressed what you want to say, you told what you wanted to. You are exemplifying now. You don't need to say this anymore Kİ.*
- (8) *Çiçek: Babacığım ben size gelmeyin demiştim.
Daddy, I told you not to come!*
- Baba: Olsun kızım. Öbür türlü zaten içimize sinmezdi. (justification)
Doesn't matter my dear. The other way would not make us feel ok ZATEN.*
- (9) *Behiye: Kızını görmek isteyen adam 8 yıl ortadan kaybolmaz Ömer. Arar kızını.
A father who wants to see his daughter does not disappear for 8 years, Ömer. He seeks her.*
- Ömer: Adam anlattı zaten durumu Behiye. **justification**
The guy explained the situation ZATEN Behiye!*
- Behiye: Fark etmez. Hem zaten 3 kuruşluk bir gecekonduya oturuyor kendi çocuklarına zor bakıyor.
It doesn't matter. What's more, He ZATEN lives in a cottage. He hardly looks after his own children.*
- (10) *Speaker: E renk katacak beşiktaşa..
E He is going to make Beşiktaş alive.*
- Gürest: E tabii. Gayet tabii. Olmalı zaten. **contradictory to the presupposition of speaker**
E of course. Certainly. He should ZATEN.*

The analysis of the examples (1) –(10) show that *zaten* serves as a specifier of the old information. However, we should distinguish between the two definitions of the old information that is signaled. As defined by Vallduvi (1992) the old information can be analyzed in terms of the hearer old-discourse new and discourse old- hearer new and hearer

new-discourse new or hearer old-discourse old. *Zaten* in Turkish may specify discourse old-hearer new information, which refers to the shared knowledge between the speaker and the hearer. Or, it may signify hearer old-discourse new information where it refers to some old information to the previous discourse. Thus, our analysis shows that the old information specified by *zaten* can be defined in both ways: piece of an older discourse or shared knowledge.

The relation between *zaten* and the old information originates from its semantic references. But how can we explain the relation? We suggest here that *zaten* functions as a modal particle expressing the epistemic truth and assertion of the speaker to the truth of the utterance. In Frawley's definitions *zaten* denotes that the speaker commits himself to the truth of the proposition expressed by the utterance. The epistemic center, though, may change. If the speaker codes himself as the epistemic source then the utterance codes hearer-old discourse new information. On the other hand, if the epistemic center is somebody except from the speaker, then *zaten* codes hearer new-discourse old information. And this discourse old information usually as evidence which comes out as background information.

In reply to a question of "is there an observable difference among these different functions of the particle?" we may consider the stress patterns of *zaten* as appropriate. The *zaten*s in (1)-(8) are in "/U" stress pattern whereas the others ,(9)-(10), show "/ \'" stress pattern, unless they appear in sentence final position and are affected by the intonation pattern of the sentence (Corcu, 2004).

2.2. *Ya*

Ya is the second DP that is subject to our analysis. *Ya* is an item which can also be used as an exclamation marker in Turkish. However, the stress patterns of the items are again a clear distinctive feature of the item. DP *ya* is marked with a short duration (shorter than 1second) while exclamation marker *ya* needs a longer duration (3 seconds) with different stress patterns used for different emotional states to be expressed. The stress pattern of short durated DP *ya* also differs according to its function, which we will be dealing with at the end of the section.

DP *ya* serves at the global domain in dialogues with the frame functions of topic shift (& foregrounding), introducing a new topic, topic expansion (explanation, justification). Its qualifying functions at the local content domain are disagreement and response to a question.

- (11) Tutor: Kediler çok sosyaller yani.
The cats are very social YANİ.

...

Student: Hocam **az önce** ses sesbirim farklı dediniz ya. Buna bi örnek verebilir misiniz? Yani.
(internal topic shift)

Mam, you have just told that phone and phoneme are different. Can you explain it? YANİ...

Tutor: Ses birim soyut. Yani...

Phoneme is abstract. YANİ...

- (12) Tutor (to Aygül): Bi yerden form alsak. Belki katılabiliriz.
We shall get a form somewhere. Maybe we can attend.

Cem: Hocam ben getirdim. Geçen haftaki şeyler [ses kayıtları] vardı ya, onları. Dinleyebiliriz isterseniz.

- Mam, I brought the things [voice records] we talked about last week YA. We can listen to them if you like.*
- (13) *Tutor: En iyi yalan söyleyen kişi avukattır. (external topic shift)*
The best liars are advocates.
Demet: Onunla ilgili şey var ya... Film. Yalancı yalancı.
There is a film on that YA: Liar liar.
Aygül: Aaaa, evet.
Oh, yes.
- (14) *Demet: Kim bu konuşan?*
Who is this talking?
Baran: Bu şey o.. Bir İstanbul masalı dizinde evden kaçan oğlan var ya, evden kaçıp yeni ev tutan, işte o yani. (topic expansion)
This is... ŞEY...The boy who has ran away from his hme and rented himself another hause in 'bir İstanbul masalı' YA. İŞTE it is him YANİ.
Aygül: Haaaa!
Ohhh!
- (15) *Tutor: Birincide hani görüntüde bi anormallik var ya? (foregrounding)*
There is some anomally in the first YA?
Cem: Evet Hocam.
Yes, mam...
Tutor: Orada değerlik....
It is the value there
- (16) *Sosyal süreç şeyi etkiliyor, şey diyolar ya, olan türünden şeyleri insanlaşıyolar deniyo ya! Bence yaşadıkları sosyal süreç. Hani doğduğundan beri civcivleri görüyo. Aslında onun kodlanması var... (disagreement)*
It affects the social processes there. They say ŞEY (thing) YA, it is said that they are affected YA, I think, it is a social process they experience. HANİ it sees the chikys at the moment they born YA. There is such a coding in fact.
- (17) *A: Bu işlev konuşmalarda çoktur.*
This function is frequent in speeches.
B: Biliyorum
I know.
...
C: Şimdi coca cola'nın reklamı var ya? Hani su diyet kola reklamı. (introducing a new topic)
Nowadays, did you see the commercial of coca-cola YA? HANİ the diet coke commercial.
D: Hımm!
Yes?
C: Sizce orada kadın ne diyo?
What do you think the hearer says there?
E: Ben orada ne dediğini anlamadım.
I did not understand what she said there.
D: Şöyle diyo ya! Geceleri öyle uyurum demiyo mu?
She makes like this YA! Doesn't she say that I sleep like this?
...
(18) *Ekrem: Pastalar da çok güzelmiş.*
The cakes are really good.
Tutor: Hmm. Öyle.
Aha, yes.
...
Aygül: Hocam bilgisayarım bozuldu ya! Allah kahretsin! N'apcam bilmiyorum. (introducing a new topic)
My computer broke down YA! Damn. I don't know what to do.

- (19) *Cem*: Kedimi çıkardım yağmurda yıkansın diye
I took my cat out in the rain for it to bath.
Demet: Kediler nefret eder ıslanmaktan ya! Yağmurda niye bıraktın... **(justification)**
Cats hate rain YA! Why did you leave it under the rain?
- (20) *Demet*: Bi tıslamayı anlayamayan alet nasıl konuşacak, benim dediğimi nasıl anlayacak. 50 yıldan önce olmaz bu ya! **(justification)**
How come a machine that can not record even a whistling is expected to speak, or understand what I say. This can not be made before 50 years.

In the information structure of the dialogues *ya* specifies discourse-old hearer-new, hearer-old discourse-old information, when used with topic expansion and disagreement and response to a question functions. It will signify hearer-new discourse-new at the external topic shift and the new topic introduction functions. The two *yas* signaling different informational status can be distinguished in the same way *zaten* can be in terms of its stress patterns. When introducing a new information, *ya* has frequent co-occurrence with *hani* (in the way as ‘*hani*...sentence *ya*’) and it necessarily appears at the end of the sentence. *Ya*, in this use, ends with a high stress which indicates that the speaker has introduced the new topic or shifted to a new topic and is going to say more about it. In the old-information signifying functions on the other hand *ya* has a falling stress pattern and usually appears at the beginning of the sentence. This functions as a signal for the listener that the speaker is going to talk about some shared knowledge or comment on the present topic.

In example 15 the disagreement is specified by the use of ‘*aslında (in fact)*’, which is a concessive DP in Turkish (Kerslake, 1992: 91). The sentence with *ya* turns out to be the anti-thesis when followed with ‘*bence (according to me)*’ and ‘*aslında*’ in the following part of the utterance. In the topic shifts, either external or internal, *ya* is of equal value to *hani* in the paradigmatic constraint. It is also interesting to note that *hani* and *ya* can even be used within the same utterance, *hani* as the initial element and *ya* being the sentence final element necessarily. When used with or instead of *hani*, *ya* signals the external or internal topic shift or new topic introduction. If the information expressed in the utterance is discourse new – hearer-old, then *ya* functions as a foregrounding element.

3. Conclusion

In our study, we mainly analyzed the relation between the information status of the utterance in discourse and the function of the DPs in natural language. We analyzed *zaten* and *ya*, two Turkish DPs, in terms of the content functions they serve in language. Our findings are as follows:

- i. *Zaten* can have topic closure, topic expansion (explanation, justification, background), contrast (expressing a contradictive idea to the presupposition of the previous speaker) functions.
- ii. The utterances that *zaten* is used in can express discourse-old hearer-new information or hearer-old discourse new information.
- iii. *Zaten* also serves as an epistemic modal particle which differs in terms of the epistemic center in terms of the informational status of the utterance. Discourse-old hearer-new utterances assign the other as evident in Frawley’s definition of the deictic structure of the epistemic modals. On the other hand, discourse-new hearer-old information signifies that the self is the deictic center.

- iv. *Ya* also has relations to the information structure of the utterances. It may denote discourse-new hearer-new information in external topic shifts, or the topic introductions. It may also be used in utterances with discourse-new hearer-old information is coded, as in topic expansions. Finally, in the disagreements *ya* signals that the utterance codes discourse-old hearer-old information.

We suggest here that a deeper research on the DPs requires that their functions and the relation of these functions with the information status of the utterances should be used as devices for the implementation of the DPs. The findings in the analysis of the DPs *zaten* and *ya* are also supported with the prosodic difference between the different functions of the particles

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