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ETHNIC TERMS IN TURKISH: BETWEEN NEUTRALITY AND OFFENSE

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the complex phenomenon of Ethnic/Social Terms used as Insults (ESTIs) in Turkish, focusing on ethnic terms such as 'Ermeni' (Armenian), 'Yunan' (Greek), 'Rum' (Greek), and 'Yahudi' (Jew/Jewish). These terms uniquely function as both neutral ethnic descriptors and pejoratives for slurring. This research investigates the linguistic characteristics and pragmatic functions of ESTIs focusing on their dual derogatory nature in being both non-referential and restricted referential in their derogation. It also explores their pragmatic characteristics focusing on derogatory autonomy, negation, and rejection, by discussing their similarities and differences with typical slurs.

Keywords: ethnic slurs, insults, hate speech, neutral counterparts, Turkish language

TERMINI ETNICI IN TURCO: TRA NEUTRALITÀ E OFFESA

SINTESI

Questo articolo esamina il fenomeno complesso dei termini etnici/sociali usati come insulti (Ethnic/Social Terms used as Insults, ESTI) in turco, concentrandosi su termini etnici quali 'Ermeni' (armeno), 'Yunan' (greco), 'Rum' (greco) e 'Yahudi' (ebreo/ebraico). Questi termini funzionano in modo unico sia come descrittori etnici neutri sia come peggiorativi per offendere. Questa ricerca indaga le caratteristiche linguistiche e le funzioni pragmatiche degli ESTI concentrandosi sulla loro duplice natura derogatoria nell'essere sia non referenziali che limitatamente referenziali nella loro denigrazione. Esplora inoltre le loro caratteristiche pragmatiche concentrandosi sull'autonomia derogatoria, sulla negazione e sul rifiuto, discutendo le loro somiglianze e differenze rispetto agli insulti tipici.

Parole chiave: insulti etnici, offese, discorso d'odio, controparti neutre, lingua turca

INTRODUCTION

Ethnic/Social Terms used as Insults (ESTIs) in Turkish present a unique and complex linguistic phenomenon that challenges traditional understanding of pejorative language. Terms such as 'Ermeni' (Armenian), 'Yunan' (Greek), 'Rum' (another word for Greek), and 'Yahudi' (Jew/Jewish) serve a dual function in Turkish discourse: they act as standard, ostensibly neutral ethnic descriptors while simultaneously possessing derogatory potential for slurring.[1] There are no alternative terms which may function as descriptors in Turkish, while there are no other ethnic slur terms[2] typically used for these groups.

The pejorative use of these terms is deeply rooted in historical and sociopolitical contexts, with evidence of their dual nature dating back to at least the 16th century Ottoman period (Erkek, 2009).[3] The multi-ethnic and multi-religious structure of the Ottoman Empire already indicated a divided society along religious and ethnic lines, where Islam and later Turkish ethnic identity represented both the majority and the hegemonic group wielding political power. This hierarchical social structure created the foundational conditions for the development of group-based pejorative language that would target minority communities based on their ethnic, religious, or tribal affiliations. The situation deteriorated significantly during the transition period leading to and throughout the independence war that established the Turkish Republic, as nationalist movements intensified ethnic and religious divisions. The historical trajectory from the diverse Ottoman millet system to the more homogeneous nation-state project of the Turkish Republic created particular sociolinguistic conditions where terms that could function as neutral identifiers in certain contexts simultaneously carried the potential for derogatory and exclusionary usage. This dual functionality reflects the broader dynamics of power relations and social hierarchies that have persisted across different political formations, making these terms particularly complex examples within the hate speech literature.

Currently, a similar phenomenon has been discussed in the context of European Spanish by Castroviejo et al. (2021), focusing on the term 'gitano' (Romani). In fact, this article adopts the ESTI abbreviation from their research on polysemous terms which are used both pejoratively and non-pejoratively (as descriptors for social categories). Similarly, Bordonaba Plou and Torices Vidal (2021) focused on the word 'menas'[4] discussing whether it is a slur or an ESTI. On the other hand, Zerbudis (2024) proposed that the use of these terms as insults has to be understood as metaphoric uses of the terms which ascribe a certain property usually associated with the social group denoted by the term to an individual who does not belong to that group, and thereby reinforce certain social stereotypes. Although for practical reasons and for connecting with the previous research on similar phenomena in different languages, this article adopts the abbreviation ESTI, its central argument is that ESTIs are a borderline phenomenon in pejorative language, which extends beyond the personal insults and show more similarities to slurs than insults. Terminological challenges are not limited to unique characteristics of ESTIs but also arises from the fact that Turkish language has no equivalent term for slurs, but insult (*hakaret*) is used for both insults and slurs.

In the Turkish language, ESTIs can serve as powerful vehicles for discrimination and hate speech particularly through weaponization of ethnic, religious, or national identities. In this sense, this article argues, they operate, in certain contexts, similarly to conventional slurs which are explicitly derogatory expressions that represent paradigmatic examples of hate speech. Despite their frequent derogatory use, these terms have received limited scholarly attention. This article, although clearly situated within the hate speech literature, has a specific focus on slur theories and aims to approach the issue from this perspective. The central research objective is to identify the multifaceted nature of Turkish ESTIs, focusing on their distinctive linguistic properties, their social implications, and the challenges they pose to existing theories of slurs.

Starting from Matsuda's (1989) foundational work in the late 1980s, slurs have been recognized as exemplar cases of hate speech (Brown & Sinclair, 2023, 72)—with words like 'nigger' serving as clear-cut examples that demonstrate the core characteristics of hate speech. What makes slurs paradigmatic is their group-based nature: they attack people based on their membership or perceived membership of a group. Unlike general insults or personal pejoratives

1 Warning: This paper contains slurs and offensive language used solely for academic analysis. These terms are mentioned, not endorsed, and appear only when necessary for scholarly examination. I apologize for any unintentional offense and any discomfort caused.

2 Exceptions may be *gavur* and *kafir* which means 'non-muslims' in Ottoman Turkish. But they are not commonly used anymore. Some other slur candidates are *kizilbas* (redhead) for Alevites and also *kilicartigi* (sword remnants) for all ethnic minorities in Turkey (especially for Greeks and Armenians).

3 For example, court cases in kadi judgements in local contexts from Anatolia clearly show that calling Muslims with non-Muslim ethnic terms are judged as epithets (Erkek, 2009).

4 *Menas* is an acronym for 'Menores Extranjeros No Acompañados' (Unaccompanied Foreign Minors), that is, boys and girls under 18, non-European migrants, who are separated from their parents and are not in the care of any other adult in the host country (Bordonaba Plou & Torices Vidal, 2021).

such as 'dickhead' or 'asshole,' group-based slurs like 'nigger' inherently contain accusations that certain undesirable qualities are possessed by all or nearly all members of the target group. This research question becomes particularly relevant given that slurs create "exclusion and intimidation against people on the basis of a protected characteristic, often because these words are tied to historical discrimination, oppression, and violence" (Brown & Sinclair, 2023, 65). While it will not be possible to go into details of hate speech definitions and discussions around it due to the space limits, it is largely agreed in the literature that slurs fulfill most of the criteria for hate speech by derogating and disparaging certain individuals on the basis of their group membership (Technau, 2018). In this context, insofar as ESTIs share these characteristics with slurs, they are also candidates for being prototypical examples of hate speech together with slurs.

Within this context, this article first focuses on the dual nature of these terms, which can function both as neutral ethnic descriptors and as pejoratives for slurring. After a brief overview of ESTIs and their dual uses in Turkish, the article explores their unique pattern of in-group derogatory usage, where certain segments of the Turkish population employ these terms to target other Turkish individuals. This creates a pragmatic phenomenon characterized by both non-referential and referentially restricted uses—specifically, the individual target of an ESTI often does not belong to the ethnic group referenced by the term (non-referential use), while the derogatory force is limited to a specific subset of Turks rather than the entire Turkish population (referential restriction).

Second, the paper investigates the pragmatic aspects of ESTIs, drawing on authentic language data from social media interactions to gain insights into the real-world usage of ESTIs. The pragmatic analysis of real-world language focuses on three key dimensions typically explored in slur research: derogatory autonomy, negation, and rejection. Special attention is paid to the complexities of negation, where the dual nature of these terms—as both neutral ethnic descriptors and potential insults—creates unique linguistic challenges. Additionally, the study examines rejection strategies, particularly through the lens of metalinguistic negation, as mechanisms for contesting the derogatory deployment of ESTIs. This article contributes to newly occurring interest in derogatory use of neutral terms within the context of hate-speech and attempts to provide critical insights into existing slur theories through an examination of ESTIs in Turkish.

ESTIS IN TURKISH: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THEIR DUAL USES

In the Turkish context, prominent examples of ESTIs include 'Ermeni' (Armenian), 'Yunan' (Greek), 'Rum' (another Turkish word for Greek), and 'Yahudi' (Jew/Jewish). These terms share a common characteristic in that they all refer to ethnic or religious minorities residing within Turkey. It is crucial to note the complex historical and political background associated with these terms.[5] Paradoxically, these words also serve as the standard, ostensibly neutral, ethnic descriptors for these minority groups, which simultaneously function as referents to nationalities (e.g., 'Yunan' for Greeks in Greece, 'Ermeni' for Armenians in Armenia, and 'Yahudi' for Jews globally). The Turkish language lacks alternative terms for these groups, creating a linguistic ambiguity between neutral reference and potential pejorative use. Despite the widespread use of these terms as pejoratives in everyday Turkish discourse, there is very limited academic research focusing on these terms as examples of pejorative language (for an exception, cf. Altun, 2009), particularly regarding their semantic or pragmatic characteristics. While civil society organizations frequently include and categorize these terms in their reports as examples of hate speech, such publications generally lack in-depth linguistic analysis (for example, the Hrant Dink Foundation Reports (Hrant Dink Foundation, 2024) or the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Reports on Hate Speech in Cyprus (The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2021)).[6]

This section focuses on the pragmatics of ESTI with data from authentic contexts of use in order to provide an accurate view of language-in-practice (Technau, 2018). In order to better understand the dual use of these ethnic terms, I compiled a small corpus of real-world examples from X (formerly Twitter) comprising approximately 1,800 words across 150 tweets, by using the search function of the X application and by searching for the ethnic terms in Turkish (*Yahudi*, *Ermeni*, *Rum*, *Yunan*), with efforts made to maintain a balanced distribution among the four search terms (approximately 35 tweets per term). All search results were included without any specific selection criteria regarding neutral or derogatory uses, ensuring a representative sample of naturally occurring usage. The collected tweets were subsequently anonymized and categorized into three types: neutral, derogatory, and ambiguous uses. Additionally, tweets that generated under-tweet discussions about the semantic meaning of the terms—where discussants debated whether the usage was insulting or constituted hate speech—were

5 A very brief but comprehensive explanation by Turkay (2022, 1221–1222) is as follows: "The anxieties inherited from the Ottoman dissolution seem to have shaped Turkish nationalism, which trusts Muslim Turks as the dominant group whose privileges could be threatened by minorities' desire to become independent under the sponsorship of foreign powers."

6 Interestingly, there are examples for the use of ethnic terms as insults both in Greek and Turkish in this report. Similarly, Baider (2017) underlines that 'Turkish seeds/sperm' is an important part of the offensive language in Greek Cypriot extreme right party supporters.

also collected and further analyzed, on the basis of pragmatic approaches to slurs (cf. section 5). From this corpus, I will start by giving examples of their uses as neutral terms (translations belong to me):

1. *İzmir'in farklı semtlerinde yaşayan Ermeni, Rum, Yahudi ve Türklerin dükkanları çarşıda yanyana yer alırdı*. [Shops owned by Armenians, Greeks, Jews and Turks were located side by side in the bazaar in different districts of Izmir.]

2. *CHP ile Ermeniler arasında milletvekilliği seçimlerinde olmayan işbirliği, geçmişte Şişli ve Bakırköy belediyelerinde yaşandı. Peki bunca zaman geçmişken şimdi Adalar'ın yeni başkanı neden bir Ermeni, bir Rum veya bir Yahudi olmasın?* [While there wasn't cooperation between CHP and Armenians in parliamentary elections, it happened in the past at Sisli and Bakirkoy municipalities. So after all this time, why shouldn't the new president of Adalar be an Armenian, Greek or Jew?]

In their non-derogatory uses, ESTIs mostly collocate with origin and citizen, in examples such as: 'Ermeni kökenli vatandaşımız' (our citizen with Armenian roots) or 'Ermeni asıllı Turkiye vatandaşı' (Turkish citizen with Armenian origin).[7] This type of use is more formal, more inclusive and leaves no doubt about the non-derogatory intention of the speaker, as seen in the following examples (3–4):

3. *Yunan ve Ermeni kökenli vatandaşlarımız aşağılanmıştır. Kredi kartı borcunu ödemeyene Yunan veya Ermeni demek bu vatandaşlarımıza hakaret demektir*. [Our citizens of Greek and Armenian origin have been degraded. Calling someone who doesn't pay their credit card debt 'Greek' or 'Armenian' is an insult to these citizens.]

4. *Nobel Ekonomi Ödülü Ermeni asıllı Türkiye Cumhuriyeti vatandaşı Daron Acemoğlu'na verildi. Ermeni nefreti saçan Mustafa Destici, bu ödüle ne diyeceksin?* [The Nobel Prize in Economics was given to Daron Acemoglu, a Turkish Republic citizen with Armenian descent. Mustafa Destici, who spreads hatred against Armenians, what will you say about this prize?]

Conversely, these same terms can function as pejoratives in specific contexts. The following analysis presents ESTIs in Turkish within the broader framework of hate speech, demonstrating how they intersect with and are often combined with other forms of verbal abuse. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how ESTIs operate within the larger ecosystem of offensive language in Turkish discourse.

5. *Kancıksın, Ermenisin*. [You, bitch. You, Armenian.]

6. *Şerefsiz bu ülkeye gelme lan sen. Aşağılık herif. Sen **kesin** ermenisin. Bunu paylaşandan da şüphe ederim*. [Scumbag, you, don't come to this country. You wretch. You're **definitely** Armenian. And I am also suspicious of anyone who shares [reposts] this.]

The term 'Armenian' is used alongside other pejoratives such as swear words and expressives in (5) and (6), suggesting it carries a similarly derogatory meaning. Based on its contextual usage, we can reasonably infer that the speakers intend it to be at least as offensive as the other pejoratives employed in the sentence.

However, ESTIs are not always used as stand-alone pejoratives but also combine a general-purpose insult with an ethnic label (7). As Jeshion (2021, 212) argues, "pejorative lexical items can also be formed from combining individual words. Nouns combined with certain pejorative adjectives and expressives generate complex expressions like 'dirty Jew', 'stinking Chinese', 'goddamn liberal' that derogate in many of the ways that slurs do."

For example:

7. *Sen de Nişanyan gibi yavşak bir ermenisin*. [You are, like Nisanyan, a toady Armenian.]

ESTIs function not only as stand-alone nouns but also as pejorative noun-noun compounds, forming established compound racial epithets (cf. 10–12 below). Examples include 'Rum dölü' (Greek spawn), 'Ermeni dölü' (Armenian Spawn), 'Rum kırması' (Greek half-breed), 'Ermeni tohumu' (Armenian seed), 'Yunan tohumu' (Greek seed), 'Ermeni evladı' (Armenian son), and 'Ermeni çocuğu' (Armenian child). These compound forms are unambiguously derogatory, leaving no doubt about their pejorative intent[8] However, this paper focuses on the pejorative examples of ethnic terms in their stand-alone form. In the compound forms, ethnic terms are paired with words like 'döl' (spawn/offspring), 'tohum' (seed), 'kırma' (mix-breed), or 'evlad' (son), all of which reference the racial origins of the insult's target.

7 Although this type of formulaic expression is also subject to debate in terms of its discriminatory potential, I cannot go into details in this paper.

8 It's worth noting that in Turkish, there is no specific term equivalent to the English word 'slur'; instead, these expressions are broadly categorized as insults or swear words.

'Döl' (spawn) and 'tohum' (seed) are metaphorical terms for sperm, while 'kırma' typically refers to a canine half-breed. Additionally, they appear to be the modified versions of pejorative phrases and swear words such as son of a "whore" ('orospunun cocugu') and spawn of a "whore" ('orospunun dölü')—which makes their pejorative meaning even more explicit.[9]

8. *Kahrolsun Kemalizm diyen* ***Fransiz dölleri***, ***Yunan tohumları***, ***Ermeni evlatları***. *Ulu Önder Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk'ün gencliği hala burada dimdik ayakta ananızı siktirmeyin saygınızı bozmayın.* [**French offspring**, **Greek seeds**, **Armenian sons (offspring)**, saying 'Down with Kemalism'. The youth of the Great Leader Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is still standing tall here, don't make us fuck your mother, don't break your respect.]

9. *Yahudi sensin lan itin soyu.* ***Yunan kırması*** *Memleketi ne hale getirdiniz. Sen misin lan insan Senin koydugun fotoğrafa bak mağara kaçkın suratlı. Maymun senden daha güzel duruyor.* [You are the one who is Jew, you son of a bitch. You, **Greek bastard** (a Greek half-breed). Look at what you've done to this country. Are you even human? Look at the picture you posted, you cave-dweller face. Even a monkey looks better than you.]

Another notable characteristic of ESTIs in their pejorative use is that speakers often employ them interchangeably and frequently in combination. As seen in example (8), it is common for multiple ESTIs to be used together in a single utterance. This pattern is also evident in the following examples:

10. *Taraf olmayanların hepsi ya yunan ya ermeni ya yahudi yada ingilizlerin beslediği orospu dölüdür araştırmaya gerek bile yoktur.* [All those who are not taking sides are offspring of either Greek, Armenian, Jewish, or whores, fed by the British. There's no need to even investigate.]

11. *30 ağustos zafer bayramı bütün TURK milletinin kutlu OLSUN. Ayrıca bütün ATATURK DUSMANI* ***YUNAN tohumları*** *da ya da* ***ermeni ingiliz fransız dölleri*** *de kudursun.* [Happy August 30 Victory Day to all the TURKISH nation. Also, may all the **GREEK seeds** who are ENEMIES OF ATATURK, or the **Armenian, English, French spawns** go rabid.]

One particularly common characteristic of insults in Turkish is that they often take the form of rhetorical questions (Altun, 2009).

12. *Yunan mısın lan amcık* [Are you Greek, you fucking cunt?]

13. *Doğruyu söyle ismin yazmıyor zaten yahudi misin ermeni misin? Bilelim oğlum karşımızda hangi soysuz milletten bir ibne var Yoksa yunan yahudi ermeni üçü birden karışımımısın.* [Tell me the truth, your name isn't written. Are you Jew or Armenian? Let's know we're dealing with a faggot from which degenerate nation. Or are you a mix of Greek, Jew and Armenian, all three?]

ESTIS IN TURKISH AND SLURS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

ESTIs and slurs: theoretical framework and comparative features

Before starting my comparative discussion on ESTIs, I would like to note that, for the rest of this paper, the term ESTI will only be used to refer to ESTIs in Turkish and, also only for the terms specified in the previous section (i.e. Armenian (Ermeni), Jew (Yahudi), Greek (Yunan/Rum)). Additionally, I will only focus on their stand-alone use, leaving aside noun-noun compounds which are explicitly pejorative and have no non-pejorative uses. With this limited focus, this section discusses in which dimensions ESTIs come close to and diverge from slurs as they are described in most slur theories (Cepollaro & Thommen, 2019; Hom & May, 2013; Potts, 2007; McCready, 2010; Bolinger, 2017; Nunberg, 2018; Bianchi, 2018; Popa-Wyatt & Wyatt, 2018; Camp, 2018; Jeshion, 2021).

Slurs may be defined as conventionally pejorative lexical items which refer to social groups and convey derogation and negative attitudes toward those groups and their members on the grounds of race, gender, social status, sexual orientation or religion, among other social identities (Hess, 2021). The paradigmatic examples of slurs include racist epithets such as 'nigger', 'chink', anti-Semitic ones like 'kike', or homophobic ones like 'faggot'. Slurs function to derogate or dehumanize and signal that their targets are unworthy of equal standing or full respect as persons, that they are inferior as persons (Jeshion 2013). There is an extensive literature with a wide array of theories (Hess, 2021; Cepollaro & Thommen, 2019; Jeshion, 2021) concerning the nature of slurs' meaning, the mechanisms by which

9 These are noun-noun compounds (compound nouns) in the sense that originally Ermeni'nin dölü/tohumu (spawn/seed of Armenian) but lost the (in) suffix (Kunduraci, 2013).

they are communicated, their various properties, as well as the boundaries of the category. One significant question that these theories attempt to answer is the source of the derogatory meaning of slurs. Scholars have analyzed and 'located' the pejorative content of slurs in various ways (Cepollaro & Thommen, 2019).[10]

Slur theories generally identify several key characteristics of slurs as distinct pejoratives, though scholars debate their precise definitions and importance. These commonly discussed features include group derogation, derogatory autonomy, embedding failure, and insulation (Hess, 2020; 2021; Bolinger, 2017), though no unified theoretical consensus exists regarding their exact nature and definition. Group derogation indicates that slurs derogate on a group basis. Derogatory autonomy refers to the characteristic that slurs are offensive even when the speaker does not intend the use to be derogatory. The offensiveness of slurs projects out of various forms of embedding, including indirect reports, negations, and mentions. Insulation is, in some contexts, possible, i.e. slurring terms can occasionally occur inoffensively.

Group derogation is an important common characteristic that ESTIs share with the slurs. Unlike other pejoratives, such as personal pejoratives and swearwords, which do not derogate on group basis (social categories), ESTIs derogate and offend their referents, and at the same time derogate and offend the entire target group which the term refers to. ESTIs can be extremely offensive since they derogate a whole group, defined by a factor such as (perceived) race, ethnicity, or religion. Thus, ESTIs, like slurs, "express prejudice toward the target groups which accounts for their extreme offensiveness" (Hess, 2021, 452).

However, their group derogation characteristic is peculiar. On the one hand, they both derogate their referent and a target group on an ethnic or religious basis. On the other hand, ESTI's individual referent frequently does not belong to the target group being derogated (their non-referential uses are the main use).[11] More clearly, Turkish ESTIs are generally used against non-members of the ethnic group that the ESTI specifically refers to. This is a characteristic shared by ESTIs in Spanish (Castroviejo et al., 2021; Bordonaba Plou & Torices Vidal, 2021). In other words, they are usually directed at people not in their neutral extension (Castroviejo et al., 2021). This brings them closer to non-referential uses of the slurs such as uses of 'retard' and 'faggot' in reference to non-members of the group by extension (non-referential uses). In such cases, most scholars argue that speakers typically draw a connection to certain stereotypes about the group and apply them to a target that is not a group member (Technau, 2018; Croom, 2013; Orlando & Saab, 2020). In fact, Castroviejo et al. (2021) argues for the ethnic terms like gitano that its pejorative meaning builds upon a negative stereotypical representation of the Romani community.

Concerning derogatory autonomy, using a racial slur remains offensive regardless of the speaker's intentions or attitudes, even if meant positively or used to educate about racism. Even if the speaker does not actually hold a negative attitude toward the slur's target or perhaps intends to convey something positive about them, the slur remains equally offensive. For example, the sentence 'so I have nothing but respect for chinks' still derogates Chinese people, even if it is uttered sincerely (Hess, 2021). Or saying "'Chink' is a slur for the Chinese." with the intention to raise awareness of racism can still offend a hearer who finds hearing the slur traumatizing.

On the other hand, it is hard to argue that ESTIs have derogatory autonomy due to their dual use—a missing characteristic which sets them apart from the typical slurs. ESTIs are both used to refer 'neutrally' to different ethnic groups in Turkey and within insulting speech acts pejoratively. However, when they are used in the contexts and syntax typical for pejorative utterances, i.e. conventional ways of their pejorative uses, they show typical signs of derogatory autonomy in the sense of being offensive independent from the speaker's intentions (cf. section 5).

Furthermore, they have no neutral correlates or at least, there is no other term which may be used as a 'more' neutral alternative to them. From the perspective of typical slurs, it may even be argued that they are the candidates for being the neutral correlates for the slurs which could be used for the groups they refer to. If their use for derogatory speech acts is a sign of a pejoration process of otherwise neutral terms, as Bordonaba Plou and Torices Vidal (2021) argued for the word 'menas' in Spanish, there are no other candidates in Turkish to replace them, at least for the time being. It is known that these words have been used as both insults and descriptive terms

10 Unfortunately. it is not possible to discuss these theories in detail here due to space limits. Cepollaro and Thommen (2019, 334) list some of the well-known approaches as follows: at the level of truth-conditions (Hom, 2008; Hom & May, 2013), presuppositions (Cepollaro, 2017a); conventional implicatures (Potts, 2007; McCready, 2010), contrastive choice signals (Bolinger, 2017), group affiliation (Nunberg, 2018), speech acts (Bianchi, 2018; Popa-Wyatt & Wyatt, 2018; Camp, 2018; Kukla, 2018), expressive content (Jeshion, 2013; 2021).

11 Despite its focus on non-referential uses, the discussion in this paper in no sense entails that ethnic minorities in Turkey are not subject to derogatory language. On the contrary, it is primarily the members of these groups who are mostly and widely targeted and attacked with several types of linguistic tools for derogation—in addition to the fact that they are also derogated indirectly by the non-referential uses of ESTIs.

at least since the 16th century, thanks to extensive research on the judicial registry and literature in the Ottoman period (Erkek, 2009; Karakulak, 2023; Araz, 2008).[12] On the other hand, extraordinarily, there are no slurs (cf. footnote 2) in Turkish used for these groups except some compound racial epithets mentioned above where no words in these combinations are semiotically pejoratives in their separate and stand-alone meanings.

Slurs' pejorative content projects out of embeddings under negation or modals, in conditionals, attitude reports, etc. (Hess, 2020; 2021). This embedding failure is manifest in the following examples: 'Sara's friend could very well be a Chink', 'She is not a Chink', 'If he is a Chink, then he won't come to the party', and 'Becky told me that she was a Chink'. Since ESTIs' offensive force is dependent on context, one would expect that they would not share, with slurs, the characteristics of the embedding failure. However, there is no straightforward answer to the question of whether they scope out of the lexical contexts they are embedded in, or in other words, if they have the characteristic of projection, as I discuss in the following sections. Similar to ESTIs in Spanish, ESTIs in Turkish show context-dependent offensiveness and mixed embedding behavior (Bordonaba Plou & Torices Vidal, 2021), in the sense that ESTI's pejorative content also projects out, but not always (see section 5).

With these preliminary comparative results, one may hastily conclude that these ESTIs are definitely not slurs. In fact, many scholars have already argued that it is possible for all kind of words, including neutral ones, to take on an ad hoc pejorative role in slurring acts or insulting acts. Some other scholars have underlined that pejorative uses are dependent on the polysemous nature of the relevant term (Stojić & Pavić Pintarić, 2014; Jeshion, 2021; Castroviejo et al., 2021). Similar uses of 'Foreigner' and 'Protestant' in German and 'Jew' in Polish have been interpreted as metaphoric uses of otherwise these neutral lexemes (Stojić & Pavić Pintarić, 2014). Bordonaba Plou and Torices Vidal (2021) argued for 'menas' that this could be a pejorative process, i.e. a slur-in-progress. However, I would like to take another path just to understand ESTIs' derogatory nature better. In order to do that, I will draw from the current discussions and approaches which are critical in the so-called neutral counterpart thesis of slurs. This current literature challenges the most commonly agreed characteristics of slurs, while providing alternative explanations for derogatory meaning and different sets of criteria to define and categorize slurs.

Challenging the neutral counterpart thesis

In the growing literature on slurs, the concept of 'neutral counterparts' has become a cornerstone assumption, widely accepted across various theoretical approaches (Falbo, 2021; Hess, 2020). Neutral counterparts are group terms referring to the group targeted by a slur without any offensive power (Diaz Legaspe, 2018). The idea of the counterpart condition posits that for every slur there exists a neutral counterpart denoting the very group that is the target of the slur (Hess, 2021, 6). For instance, the neutral counterpart of the slur 'nigger' is typically considered to be 'African-American'. The neutral counterpart is understood to be a non-evaluative, co-extensional expression that picks out the same set of individuals as the slur but without the associated derogatory force. However, the counterpart condition is not without its challenges and critiques.

Most of the slur scholars actually presuppose that actual or potential neutral counterparts determine if a slur is correctly applied, or not, by a speaker. For example, calling someone who is not African-American 'nigger' is counted as failure either in linguistic (the speaker does not seem to know what 'nigger' means) or epistemic competence (she mistakenly believes that the target is African American). However, certain uses of slurs challenge these assumptions, particularly non-referential and referential-restricted uses. Non-referential uses refer to cases where a slur is applied to a target that does not belong to the group paradigmatically associated with it. Scholars such as Jeshion (2013) and Croom (2011; 2013) were among the first to draw attention to non-referential uses of slurs. Jeshion provides an example: a racist who knows his taxi driver is Arabic, not African-American, asserts, 'I don't tip Niggers.' In this example, the speaker knowingly and intentionally applies 'Nigger' in a fashion contrary to the conventional use governed by the norm to apply it exclusively to African-Americans. Some theorists (e.g., Anderson & Lepore, 2013; Jeshion, 2013) classify the non-referential cases as exceptional, by arguing that these are non-literal or metaphoric uses and therefore not proper examples for slur theories in general. Some other scholars (Croom, 2011; 2013) contend that there are meaningful and felicitous uses of racial and sexist slurs that do not necessarily target individuals belonging to the groups typically associated with those slurs.

Another challenge for slur theories comes from referential-restricted uses. These occur when slurs are used to refer only to a subset of their neutral counterpart, as in the statement 'I love black people, but I hate niggers.' This usage seems to challenge

12 For example, Ottoman Court records from 1546 show 'Yahudi' used as severe verbal abuse across religious communities, with legal frameworks recognizing terms like 'godless,' 'Jew,' 'impure,' or 'infidel' as offenses when directed at Muslims (defining them epithets). Modern Turkish Court of Cassation decisions confirm this pattern: the 2015 case (Yargıtay 4. CD Esas: 2014/15126) upheld convictions for 'pis Ermeni' (dirty Armenian), while the 2016 ruling (Yargıtay 18. CD Esas: 2015/28988) confirmed 'Ermeni devşirmesi' (Armenian devshirme) as actionable 'insults'.

the correct application criterion for a slur which is determined by its neutral counterpart (all African-descendants can be correctly called 'nigger'). Referential-restricted uses, similar to non-referential uses, are mostly—implicitly or explicitly—seen as deviations from typical slur uses by most scholars. On the other hand, Ashwell (2016) and Diaz Legaspe (2018) argue that there are slurs which always have a more restrictive reference than their neutral counterparts. For example, referential restriction is neither optional nor contextual for gendered slurs such as 'slut' or 'bitch' (Diaz Legaspe, 2018).[13]

ESTIs in Turkish provide an interesting case study both in their non-referential and referential-restricted uses. As mentioned in the previous section, Turkish ESTIs are generally used against non-members of the ethnic group that the ESTI specifically refers[14]—mostly against people who identify themselves as a Turk. This is a characteristic shared by ESTIs in Spanish (Castroviejo et al. 2021; Bordonaba Plou & Torices Vidal, 2021). In this sense, ESTIs may be understood as a non-referential derogatory use of a particular neutral ethnic term for a referent who is not a member of the group that the concerned ethnic term refers to. Referential derogatory uses of ESTIs (when it is applied to the members of a concerned ethnic group- correct application) are generally performed in its more explicitly derogatory forms such as noun-noun compounds, combined epithets or combined with other pejoratives.

When it comes to referential-restricted uses, ESTIs present another interesting paradox. On the surface, there is seemingly no problem since the pejorative itself (e.g., Armenian, Jewish, Greek) derogates the entire ethnic group without any exception. Yet this may be misleading, because the ESTI's referent is generally not the member of ethnic group in its extension. In other words, this is a derogatory in-group use against a sub-set of Turks by some other Turks. ESTIs share these peculiar characteristics—non-referential uses, referential-restricted uses, and non-existence of neutral counterparts—with some other pejoratives, such as ableist slurs and gendered slurs. A more apt comparison might be the uses of gendered slur by women to derogate another woman, or use of male gendered pejoratives like 'sissy' or 'faggot' and of seemingly neutral gender terms (such as 'girl' or 'woman') against men. In fact, slurs against man's masculinity show the most important similarity to ESTIs in their double derogation for both in-group (men) and out-group (women). Like gendered slurs, ESTIs as pejorative refer to a normative dimension in the sense that derogated sub-group fail to fulfill the norms of being a 'proper' Turk and recategorized as inferiors, if not as enemies, compared to the 'real' Turks.

Yet neither gendered slurs nor ableist slurs are the only examples challenging the majority of slur theories. Recent analysis of slurs in real world contexts show that slurs are used in non-derogatory and non-referential forms as much as in their referential derogatory weapon uses (Retta, 2023; Technau, 2018). Technau (2018; 2020) identifies in German a certain group of slur terms that do not have non-pejorative counterparts and that are generally applied to non-group members, just like ESTIs in Turkish. His examples for German are *Bauer* (farmer), *Hippie*, *Jude* (Jew), *Kommunist* (communist), *Mädchen* (girl) and *Nazi*.

Pragmatics of ESTIs in Turkish language

This section focuses on the pragmatics of ESTI (derogatory autonomy, negation and rejection) with data from authentic contexts of use in order to provide an accurate view of language-in-practice (Technau, 2018). As mentioned above, compound forms of ESTIs project out from all embedding constructions and they have derogatory autonomy.[15] However, ESTIs in their stand-alone form project out only in certain contexts, due to the ambiguity arising from their non-pejorative uses—a peculiar style of projection which arises from their dual type of uses (or meanings). ESTIs in Turkish also show the signs of derogatory autonomy contextually. Bolinger (2017) argues that a slur offends without needing the speaker's illocutionary intent, due to both its inappropriateness and its offensive associations. Therefore, in general, not only slurs but also rude expressions have derogatory autonomy. The terms which are closely associated with abhorrent attitudes or practices and with various forms of racism, sexism or more generally with a threatening program of discrimination, constitute a deep offense. Within the light of offensive associations, the following example from X may challenge the idea that ESTIs may not have the derogatory autonomy just because they are also used as ethnic neutral terms:

13 This leads some authors either to sever the connection between slurs and neutral counterparts altogether or to argue that if gendered, pejoratives are not technically slurs. Some scholars explicitly reject categorizing them as slurs. For example, Camp (2018) argues that, in contrast to (other) 'thick' terms, like 'slut' or 'snitch', slurs' descriptive and attitudinal aspects are easily disentangled. Similarly, for Nunberg (2018), they are hybrid words, not slurs proper, in the strict sense.

14 Although it is needed to have more research on this claim, this is at least my observation from my limited corpus in this study and my experience as a native speaker who lived in Turkey for 40 years.

15 Due to space limitations, this cannot be discussed further.

A: *Bu hesabın sahibi çok yüksek ihtimal Ermeni*. [There's a high possibility that this account is Armenian.] (Targeting B.)

B: *Ermeni anandır, orospu çocuğu seni*. [Your mother is Armenian, you son of a bitch.] (B takes offense at being called Armenian, recognizes A's derogatory intent, and retaliates using the same term.)

A: *Tam size yakışan bir ahlaksızlık olmuş. Ama ben delikanlı olduğum için ananı karıştırmam*. [This kind of immorality is just like you. But because I'm a gentleman, I won't bring your mother into this.]

At this point, some other people join into this discussion:

C: *E*meni demekle ırkçılık yapıyorsun. Irkçılık Kur'an'da yasaklanmıştır, o demek ki sen müslüman değilsin. B doğru demiş senin anan da baban da e*menidir.*[16] [By saying Armenian, you're being racist. Racism is forbidden in the Quran. That means you're not Muslim. As (B) says, it's the other way around—your mother and father are probably Armenian.] (C adopts a contradictory stance by first condemning the racist usage of 'Armenian' while simultaneously employing the same term pejoratively against A.)

A: *Ben Ermeni diye hakaret mi ettim? Siz Ermeni dedim diye hakaret gibi algıladınız*. [Did I use Armenian as an insult? You perceived it as an insult when I said Armenian.] (Person A exploits the ambiguity arising from the dual use of ethnic terms to deny his intention to offend. His argument exemplifies a claim of unwarranted offense, where the speaker deflects responsibility by attributing the offensive interpretation to the hearer's perception rather than acknowledging the contextual markers that signal pejorative use.)

Five more X users get involved in discussion, by arguing that Armenian is an insult in Turkish and rightly so:

D: *Her Türk ermeni denilince bunu haklı olarak hakaret olarak algılar.* [Every Turk rightfully perceives being called Armenian as an insult.] (D explicitly frames 'Armenian' as inherently insulting and positions himself as complicit with the bigoted worldview by using the qualifier 'rightfully.' This demonstrates the clear offensive associations of ESTIs, as described by Bolinger (2017) in her analysis of terms with abhorrent attitudinal connections.)

E: *Ben sana hakaret edeyim şimdi ama sakin yanlış anlama e mi?* [Let me insult you, and you just don't take it the wrong way, okay?] (E highlights the contradiction in A's position: even without explicit derogatory intent, taking offense at terms with established pejorative associations is rational, as Bolinger (2017) argues regarding the inherent offensiveness of slurs and similar derogatory expressions.)

F: *Gerçek Türkler için Ermeni kelimesi zaten hakarettir. Sen bizi devletsizlerle, bu coğrafyaya ait olmayanlarla bir tutamazsın*. [The word Armenian is indeed an insult for real Turks! You can't equate us with the stateless, those who don't belong in this geography.] (F explicitly articulates the ultranationalist ideology underlying ESTI usage, revealing how ethnic terms become weaponized through exclusionary rhetoric that positions minorities as inherently foreign and inferior. This response demonstrates the specific stereotypical content and territorial claims that fuel the pejorative meaning of ESTIs for bigoted speakers.)

As Bolinger (2017) argued for slurs, ESTIs seem to warrant a deep offense independently from the speakers' intentions (although, hearers in this example do not seem to be truly convinced that the speaker's intention was not to insult). So at least in the contexts similar to the examples above, ESTIs seem to have a derogatory autonomy. As may be understood from the following comments from the hearers, ESTIs come to be associated with abhorrent attitudes or practices. This certainty about the offensive usage is also puzzling in the sense that exactly the same terms are the 'neutral counterparts'. However, it also indicates that the use context is very well established so that any proficient Turkish user would understand when it is used with an intention to offend.[17] However, this does not mean that the hearers who recognize its derogatory meaning are not bigots. On the contrary, as may be seen clearly in F and D response and implicitly in E, they are complicit in the use of ESTIs.

Concerning negation, slur theories relying on the identity thesis argue that when ethnic slurs are negated, only the truth-conditional content is affected, leaving the derogatory content intact. For example:

16 Note the deliberate insertion of an asterisk in 'e*meni' by the original poster, a common social media practice that simultaneously acknowledges and perpetuates the pejorative potential of ethnic terms through performative censorship.

17 A broader research is needed with a larger corpus to lay down what are the pragmatical conditions which fix its perception pejoratively.

Speaker A: Henrik is a kraut.

Speaker B: Henrik is not a kraut.

According to some scholars, Speaker B's statement can only mean 'Henrik is not German,' while the slur's evaluative dimension remains unaffected. However, negation can operate on two distinct layers depending on the speaker's intention and meaning-creation. The first layer concerns the ethnicity of the person in question, while the second layer addresses whether the slur is applicable to that person. Thus, Speaker B's statement could alternatively mean that Henrik cannot be classified as a 'kraut' even though he is German. However, this interpretation is only viable if the theory accepts referentially restricted uses of slurs as felicitous and valid—such as 'I love Jews but I hate kikes.'

ESTIs' negation patterns are not expected to align with those of ethnic slurs, given that their primary use is already non-referential. Nevertheless, since these same terms also function as ethnic descriptors, a similar layered negation pattern does emerge in certain contexts. For example:

A. *Soyadım oğlu ile bitiyor ama ben Ermeni değilim, bana Ermeni diyemezsin, duydun mu beni?* [My surname also ends with 'oğlu' (son of) but I'm not Armenian, you can't call me Armenian, did you hear that?]

In this example, the target clearly takes offense (Bolinger, 2017) at being called 'Armenian.' However, asserting that she is not Armenian does not negate the derogatory force of the ESTI, paralleling the behavior of slurs and other offensive expressions. Consider a modified version that more closely resembles standard examples of slur negation failure:

B. *Soyadı oğlu ile bitiyor ama o Ermeni değil, ona Ermeni diyemezsin, duydun mu?* [Her surname ends with 'oğlu' [son of] but she is not Armenian, you can't call her Armenian, did you hear that?]

This represents a negation directed against someone using 'Armenian' pejoratively. As evident in this example, Speaker B simultaneously disputes the target's ethnicity (she is not Armenian) and challenges the applicability of the ESTI in its evaluatively negative sense (she cannot be called Armenian). However, like ethnic slurs, 'Armenian' projects out of negation because what is being disputed appears to be the applicability of this derogatory term to this specific person (not only because she falls outside the ESTI's extension, but because evaluatively she is not contemptible enough to warrant the ESTI). Crucially, neither the target nor the defender can use negation to reject the pejorative use of ethnic terms in general, even if such rejection might be their underlying intention.

This is also a problem of complicity (Cepallaro, 2017a; Nunberg, 2018). The hearer (B) and the person insulted (A) are taken to endorse the derogatory content of ESTIs in the absence of objections, no matter what they think or what their intentions are. "In other words, when a slur is used literally in a context, if speakers do not object it, they are responsible for letting the derogatory content in the common ground" (Cepollaro, 2017a). Slurs make non-prejudiced hearers feel complicit in the speaker's way of thinking (Camp, 2013, Cepollaro, 2017b). Cepollaro argues that this is beyond a feeling but brings upon a responsibility of objection to hearers. ESTIs have a similar pattern of complicity. Because negation may refer to either denial about the ethnicity of the target or about whether the ESTI's derogatory content is applicable to this specific person (evaluative), or both. However, in none of these cases can negation solve the problem of complicity.

In fact, just like the slurs, rejecting the pejorative content necessitates an extra cognitive effort. For a successful rejection, either "one can explicitly articulate the derogatory presupposition and reject it or simply refuse the use of the term metalinguistically" (Cepollaro, 2017b). Her examples are as follows:

A - Peter's boss is a chink, isn't she?

B - Peter's boss is Asian and there is nothing bad in that.

C - I don't allow you to use racist words in my presence.

Similarly, for a successful rejection of ESTI, metalinguistic denial is needed, where the dispute is about if the employment of the term with pejorative meaning is appropriate or whether there is something like being bad on the basis of being Armenian. A real-world example for successful metalinguistic denial from the target as follows:

The target: *Ben Ermeni değilim ama sen kesin ırkçısın. Konu Ermeni, Rus veya Türk olmak değil: önce, düzgün bir insan olmak lazım.* [I am not Armenian, but you are definitely a racist. It's not about being Armenian, Russian, or Turkish; first, one needs to be a decent human being.]

or

The target: *Bana Ermeni diyerek, bana hakaret ettiğini sanıyorsun. Ermeni değilim ama olabilirdim de. Önemli olan etnik köken değil. Ermeni olmak utanılacak bir şey mi?* [By calling me Armenian, you wrongly think you're insulting me. I'm not Armenian, but I well could have been. What matters is not ethnicity. Is being Armenian something shameful?]

ESTIs in Turkish differ from the slurs regarding who is expected to feel complicity and to take responsibility for rejection as well. Nunberg (2018) claims that the hearer who feels a sense of complicity in the speaker's attitude is not going to be a person that the word targets, who is more likely to feel a victim of the act than a party to it. Yet, for ESTIs in Turkish, the responsibility does not only belong to the participants of conversation or just hearers but also to the targeted person. So, primarily the insulted person should object to the ESTI and while doing that she should assert to metalinguistic devices. ESTI has arguably a more complex semiotic mechanism compared to slurs: in the sense that a non-bigot would not only reject its use for a slurring act but also would reject becoming offended even if a bigot uses it with the intention to offend. This arises from the fact that these are terms which are also used to refer to an ethnic group. To get offended by being called an ethnic group member xyz would suggest that the referent also accepts that being part of this ethnic group is a reason to be contemptible and s/he shares the negative stereotypes with the bigot or ultra-nationalist. Expected denials of ESTIs are always metalinguistic and only then is it possible to reject complicity with the bigot. As Cepollaro (2017b) states, metalinguistic negation is not a device that operates at the propositional level, but it would operate at the level of discourse representations.

CONCLUSION

This article has explored the complex linguistic phenomenon of Ethnic/Social Terms used as Insults (ESTIs) in Turkish, focusing on terms such as 'Ermeni' (Armenian), 'Yunan' (Greek), 'Rum' (Greek), and 'Yahudi' (Jew/Jewish). Through detailed analysis of their usage patterns and pragmatic features, this article findings may be summed up as follows. First, the study has revealed the unique dual nature of ESTIs in Turkish, functioning both as standard ethnic descriptors and potential pejoratives for slurring. The analysis has also uncovered distinctive characteristics in how ESTIs function compared to traditional slurs. While they share the feature of group derogation with slurs, their usage patterns differ significantly. ESTIs are frequently employed in non-referential contexts, meaning they are often used to demean individuals who do not belong to the referenced ethnic group. This distinguishes them from typical slurs and brings them closer to non-referential uses of slurs like 'retard' or 'faggot' when applied to non-group members. Furthermore, this pattern most closely parallels masculine slurs, where men use feminine-connoted terms like 'sissy' or seemingly neutral gender terms like 'girl' or 'woman' to derogate other men. In both cases, the mechanism involves in-group members (ethnic Turks for ESTIs, men for masculine slurs) using terms associated with an out-group (ethnic minorities for ESTIs, women for masculine slurs) to insult members of their own group. This creates a unique form of derogation that simultaneously demeans both the immediate target and the referenced out-group.

Another finding concerns the pragmatic behavior of ESTIs, particularly regarding derogatory autonomy and projection. Unlike typical slurs, ESTIs exhibit context-dependent derogatory autonomy, meaning their offensive nature is not inherent but depends on the context of use. Similar to slurs, this creates challenges in negation contexts, where the denial of an ESTI can refer either to the target's ethnicity or to the applicability of the term's derogatory content to the target. The study has also highlighted important implications regarding complicity and rejection. Successfully rejecting an ESTI requires metalinguistic denial, where the dispute centers not on ethnic identity, nor the use of this term in general but on the appropriateness of using ethnic terms pejoratively. This creates a more complex responsibility structure compared to typical slurs, as both hearers and targets must actively reject complicity in the bigoted worldview that makes such terms offensive.

These findings contribute to broader theoretical discussions about pejorative language, challenging traditional assumptions about slurs and their neutral counterparts. This study shows that ethnic terms in Turkish are far from being purely descriptive terms of social categories. Even if this paper does not argue that ESTIs are slurs, their conventional and almost formulaic use for slurring sheds doubt on the claims that ethnic slurs have purely descriptive counterparts. The analysis of ESTIs in Turkish hate speech also reveals their function as "double-edged swords" in discriminatory discourse. These terms not only derogate ethnic and religious minorities through their conventional pejorative use but also serve as weapons against ethnic Turks who express democratic values or oppose ultranationalist ideologies. In online spaces and political discourse, terms like 'Ermeni' or 'Yahudi' are frequently deployed to simultaneously question someone's "Turkishness" while reinforcing negative stereotypes about minority groups. This dual targeting mechanism makes ESTIs particularly potent tools in hate speech, as they effectively marginalize both minority communities and those advocating for their rights or expressing liberal democratic values. Further research could explore how similar phenomena manifest in other languages and cultural contexts, particularly in societies with complex historical relationships between majority and minority ethnic groups.

ETNIČNI IZRAZI V TURŠČINI: MED NEVTRALNOSTJO IN ŽALITVIJO

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POVZETEK

Namen prispevka je izboljšati naše razumevanje semantike in pragmatike ESTI (etničnih/socialnih izrazov, uporabljenih kot žalitve), in sicer tako, da jih preučujemo v njihovem edinstvenem turškem družbeno-kulturnem okolju. Ti izrazi, ki lahko v določenih kontekstih nosijo žaljiv pomen, povezan z narodnostjo, etnično pripadnostjo in religijo, delujejo podobno kot konvencionalne žaljivke – eksplicitno žaljivi izrazi, ki predstavljajo paradigmatične primere sovražnega govora. Kljub njihovi pogosti prisotnosti v kontekstih sovražnega govora in njihovim pragmatičnim podobnostim s konvencionalnimi žaljivkami so ti izrazi deležni omejene znanstvene pozornosti. Članek raziskuje zapleteno naravo ESTI v turščini, preučuje njihove jezikovne značilnosti, njihove družbene implikacije in izzive, ki jih predstavljajo obstoječim teorijam o žaljivkah. Po kratkem pregledu ESTI in njihove dvojne uporabe kot nevtralnih etničnih izrazov in pejorativov v turščini članek raziskuje še eno pomembno značilnost ESTI v turščini: njihovo žaljivo uporabo znotraj skupine (tj. podskupino Turkov, na katero ciljajo nekateri drugi Turki). To ustvarja še eno dualnost v pragmatični naravi ESTI, ki se kaže v njihovi tako nereferenčni kot referenčno omejeni uporabi. Nadalje članek raziskuje pragmatične vidike ESTI, pri čemer se opira na avtentične jezikovne podatke iz interakcij na družbenih omrežjih, da pridobi vpogled v resnično uporabo ESTI. Analiza se osredotoča na tri ključne dimenzije: žaljivo avtonomijo, negacijo in zavrnitev. Raziskana je kompleksna problematika negacije, ki prikazuje, kako dvojna narava ESTI kot nevtralnih etničnih izrazov in pejorativov ustvarja edinstvene izzive v kontekstih negacije. Prav tako se poglobi v proces zavrnitve, zlasti skozi prizmo metajezikovne negacije, kot strategije za izpodbijanje žaljive uporabe ESTI.

Ključne besede: etnične žaljivke, žalitve, sovražni govor, nevtralni ekvivalenti, turški jezik

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