

***INTERACTION, GENDER AND CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS IN A TURKISH  
MARRIAGE TV SHOW***

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**Abstract**

In recent years, ethnomethodological approaches of Conversation Analysis (CA) and Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) have been applied to the study of gender and language. This yielded to discussions among scholars across the social sciences as to what extent CA\MCA can inform gender studies. In this paper, this question is addressed by providing data from my corpus of interactions in a Turkish marriage show. The data is analyzed by focusing specifically on two facets of MCA suggested by Schegloff (1991): 1) category-bound activities, and 2) being protected against induction. In relation to these, the analysis shows 1) how ‘asking for possessions’ is treated as an activity bound to the gender category ‘women’, 2) and how after ‘asking for possessions’ is established as a category-bound activity, interactants tend to protect this knowledge when a need arises to revise this knowledge.

**Keywords:** *gender; conversation analysis (CA); membership categorization analysis (MCA); cultural values; reality TV.*

## **Introduction**

For many decades, the utility of ethnomethodological approaches of Conversation Analysis (CA) and Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) for gender studies has been an area of discussion among academics in the fields of anthropology, linguistics, sociology, and feminist studies. As the socio-constructionist paradigm, which perceives gender as an ongoing accomplishment of interaction, gained popularity in gender research, CA and MCA started to be considered as viable methodologies to do research on gender.

In this paper, how two facets of membership categorization analysis suggested by Schegloff (2007) – 1) being protected against induction, and 2) category-bound activities – can be applied to gender and language research will be explicated by using the data from a Turkish ‘marriage show’. Two excerpts from the show will be provided. In the first excerpt, the focus will be on how category-bound activities are socially constructed through the interaction and the second excerpt will be analyzed to display how these categories are protected against induction by providing a sample when the knowledge about a category needs to be revised. The analysis will show how this Turkish TV show perpetuates the perceptions on gender, expectations about gender roles and gender-related behaviors in Turkish society.

## **Literature Review**

The study of language and gender has stimulated debate across the social sciences. The roots of this debate lie in the distinction between the two different approaches to the study of gender; essentialism and socio-constructionism. Essentialists perceive

gender as a “fixed trait” or “property that resides in individuals” (Stokoe, 2000: 553). This approach to gender assumes that gender identities exist independent of talk. In their research on gender and language, scholars in the essentialist paradigm attempt to find out how gender identities are reflected in talk by focusing on whether women and men talk differently and/or who dominates the conversation (Fishman, 1983; Lakoff, 1975; Tannen, 1991). This approach to language and gender studies has been criticized mainly because it presumes gender duality (e.g. Stokoe & Smithson, 2001). Stokoe (1998) argues that focusing on difference and dominance in gender and language studies assumes essentialism and that this has been completely counterproductive for feminism.

In the 1990s, socio-constructionist scholars began to challenge the idea of gender as a fixed trait and they argued that the construction of gendered identities occurs in situated social practice (Edley & Wetherell, 1997). In the socio-constructionist paradigm, the focus of research has shifted to how gender is produced by people through their talk and interaction with each other (e.g. Cameron, 1998; Kitzinger, 2000; Speer, 2005; Stokoe and Smithson, 2001; Weatherall, 2002; Garfinkel, 1967; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Within the socio-constructionist view of gender, Conversation Analysis (CA), developed by Harvey Sacks in 1969, started to gain attention as a viable methodology to use in language and gender studies (e.g. Kitzinger, 2000, 2008; Stokoe, 2000, 2006; Stokoe and Smithson, 2001; Weatherall, 2002). Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008) define CA as the study of recorded, naturally occurring talk-in-interaction which aims to discover how participants understand and respond to one another in their turns at talk, with a central focus on how sequences of action are generated. For gender and

language studies, conversation analytic mentality means limiting the analysis to the moments when gender is demonstrably relevant to the interaction (Weatherall, 2002 ). This enables researchers to refrain from essentialist presumptions (gender duality) and focus their work on gender as an ongoing accomplishment of interactions

There have also been arguments against using CA in doing gender studies (Wetherell, 1998; Billig, 1999; Speer, 1999; Wowk, 2007). The main objection to using CA in gender studies has been that CA approaches interaction only at ‘micro’ level, exclusively concentrating on participants’ perspectives. CA’s focus on ‘micro’ level is seen as problematic for feminist research as it does not enable the researcher to comment on the issues at macro-level, such as patriarchy or oppression which are essential to feminist research (Speer, 1999).

To be able to effectively integrate CA with gender studies, Stokoe (2006) suggests that the problems can be avoided by using membership category analysis in the study of gender. “Membership categorization analysis (MCA) is a form of conversation analysis that has developed for analysing when members treat categories (e.g. mothers, fathers, babies) as belonging together and as being linked to certain activities” (Hester and Eglin, 1997; quoted in Weatherall, 2002: 775).

The basic difference between CA and MCA is that CA is concerned with sequential organization and turn design whereas MCA’s main concern is speakers’ local management in categorizing themselves, and others, as a member of a group (Francis and Hester, 2004).

Schegloff, one of the leading figures in CA research, does not oppose application of CA methodology to gender studies and states that categories should be understood

within the context and through interactants' display of their understandings of emergent social actions (1991). Schegloff (2007: 469) defines three facets of membership categories; a) inference richness; b) protected against induction: "when a member of a category contravenes what is 'known' about members of that category, then people do not revise that knowledge, but see the person as 'an exception', 'different', or even a defective member of the category"; c) category-bound activities: "among the items that compose category-based common-sense knowledge are kinds of activities or actions or forms of conduct taken by the common-sense or vernacular culture to be specially characteristic of a category's members". The knowledge of category-bound activities enables people in a society to treat certain activities as bound to certain categories and this knowledge provides a common sense understanding of the world (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998).

### **Research Context**

In the last few years in Turkey, there has been a growing interest in a new type of television show which aims to help single people meet someone to whom they would like to get married. People who want to get married are invited to the studio and they talk about their expectations of marriage and to describe the kind of person that they would like to get married to. People who are interested in these guests call the show and are invited to the studio as well. Then the two people come together and talk about their expectations and decide whether they want to know each other more or not. The statistics reveal that currently there are three different marriage shows, all of which have the same format, on different channels. The time allocated to these shows in total is 10 hours daily, and 50 hours weekly. So far, 124,000 people applied to

appear on the most popular of these shows and, 44,000 to the second most popular show. So far, 135 marriages have resulted from the shows.

It is important to note here that these shows are not similar to the dating shows in Western countries. Firstly, there is nothing marginal about the participants of these marriage shows in Turkey, they all come from different backgrounds, social classes, education levels, etc. The age level ranges between 18 and 90. There have been many participants who are more than 70 years old. The only common feature of all the participants is that they want to get married.

Though there is an existing body of research on how media reflects society (e.g. Ohara&Saft, 2003), or more specifically on ‘dating shows’ (Ferris et al, 2007), the marriage shows which constitute an important part of social life in Turkey have remained uninvestigated so far. A television show which has led to more than a hundred marriages so far and being watched by millions of people everyday undoubtedly plays an important role in the construction of the social life and perceptions of the people.

The 3 minute data used in this paper is collected from one of these shows, which airs on a Turkish TV channel every day from 3pm to 6.30pm. The excerpt was transcribed using CA conventions (e.g. Jefferson 2004). Each line of conversation is composed of three lines of transcript. The first line is the original Turkish that was spoken. The second line is a word-by-word literal translation into English. The final line (shown at the end of a complete turn) is an English gloss, which tries to convey the overall meaning of the turn. This format was taken from an earlier CA paper which analyzed Turkish interaction (Steensig, 2001).

The conversation in the data being used takes place among three people, the presenter and two participants. Participant E is the presenter of the show. Participant A is the man who wants to get married and participant P is A's friend who sits among the audience and participates in the conversation to talk about his friend's expectations. The candidate bride is also present in the show when this conversation takes place; however, she does not participate in the conversation at all. Thus, the conversation occurs between the presenter E and two participants, A and P.

In these shows, it is quite common for female guests to expect to meet a husband-to-be who has enough money to allow them to live comfortably. However, in the data used for this paper there is a male participant who wants to get married to a woman who is wealthy and has a lot of possessions. This paper will show how asking for possessions before getting married is treated as a category-bound activity attributed to 'women' as a gender category and how categories are protected against induction.

## **Analysis**

In the below excerpt, the presenter puts forward her own ideas about the issue of men asking for possessions from the woman that they would like to get married to. Just before this excerpt begins, participants A and P had a dialogue in which A states that he doesn't necessarily ask for a car or a house from the candidate brides whereas his friend, P insists that the candidate bride who wants to get married to A should have a house and a car. After this exchange between A and P, the presenter states her own opinion on the issue by explicitly referring to gender categories.

### **Excerpt 1**

- 79 benim kendim+e göre [bi yaşantı+m var]  
]  
my myself+DAT as to life+1s have  
*If she does, it would be better of course. I have my own life.*

80 E: [ya bana bu erkek+ler+in bu kadın+lar+ın ]=  
Oh I-DAT man+PL+ABL this woman+PL+ABL

81 A: [benim ke- esra hanım benim kendim+e göre yaşant+ım var] (.)  
Esra (honorific) my myself+DAT as to life+1s have

82 E: =[ ev+i arabas+ı olması çok çirkin geliyo ya ]  
House+OBJ car+OB be very unpleasant find  
*I find it so unpleasant when men want a house and car like women do.*

83 P: Niye çirkin olsun↑=  
Why unpleasant be  
*Why would it be unpleasant?*

84 E: =[yap+mayın Allah aşkına ya ]=  
Do+NEG+2S for God's sake  
*Oh! Come on , for God's sake.*

85 A: [ benim ev+im de ol+acak ]  
My house+1s also be+FPP  
*Esra Hanım I have my own life. I will also have my own house*

86 P: =Ama [kadın erkek eşit di-yor-sunuz]  
But women men equal say+PRS+2S  
*But you claim that women and men are equal.*

87 S: [Üzeyir Bey de kendi kararını kendi versin ] paravan açılsın(.)



Üzeyir Bey too own decision own give+PRS paravane open+PRS  
*Üzeyir Bey should make his own decision when the paravane is open*

88 E: neden(.) erkekler de kadınlar gibi mal mülk  
ister+ler?

Why man+PL also woman+PL like goods possession want+3p

89 E: Nolur biri ban+a bunun cevabı+nı versin=  
Please someone I+DAT this answer+OBJ give+PRS  
*Why (.) do men also ask for possession as women do?*  
*Please explain this to me*

In line 80, the presenter starts her sentence with the word ‘ya’ which can be used either as a discourse marker or an exclamation marker in Turkish. Based on its location and pronunciation, ‘ya’ in this line, appears to serve as a discourse marker which introduces a new topic by disapproving the previous topic. The presenter terminates the discussion between A and P on whether the candidate bride should have some possessions by her overlapping turn in line 80 which starts with ‘ya’.

E displays her disapproval of P’s expectation of possessions from the candidate bride for his friend A by explicitly referring to this as ‘çok çirkin’ (very unpleasant). Moreover, E also emphasizes the words ‘çok çirkin’ which all make the statement sound stronger.

She states that she finds it so unpleasant when men want a house and a car like women do. This statement suggests that the reason for her disapproval is ‘asking for possessions before getting married’ is an activity attributed to the ‘women’ as a gender category. The reason for E to find this situation so unpleasant is that a man performs a category-bound activity which is not attributed to his own gender category.

In lines 79, 81 and 85, A attempts to defend himself by denying that he has performed a category-bound activity attributed to women by stating that he has his own life and he will have his own house. Before these turns he also wants to make it clear that having a house and a car is not a necessary feature that he is looking for in candidate bride. However, all his attempts remain unattended by the participant E and she keeps talking without responding to any of the statements made by participant A.

In line 83, Participant P shows his disagreement with E by asking her why this would be unpleasant. Unlike A, participant P displays disagreement to general acceptance of ‘asking for possessions’ behavior as a category-bound activity attributed to ‘women’.

In her response in line 84, E does not treat the question asked in line 83 as a real question as she does not provide any answer. By responding to his question with ‘Oh! Come on, for God’s sake’, E treats this question as an unacceptable question. This turn displays that for E, even questioning the behavior regarded as a category-bound activity is unnecessary to discuss as she does not provide any reasons for her statement that this behavior is unpleasant. This displays the strength of her position.

In line 86, P continues his argument by saying ‘but you claim men and women are equal’. In this sentence, he does not make it clear whether he addresses E when he says ‘you’ or he addresses the ‘women’ in general. However, as there is no claim made by E in previous turns about equality between men and women, this use of ‘you’ can still be interpreted as a way of talking about all women. He starts his turn with ‘but’ to indicate that there is a contradiction. In so doing, he criticizes that even though women claim to be equal to men, they still do not accept having the equal

rights in all aspects of life. He supports his idea that men should have a right to ask for possessions before marriage by referring to the equality between men and women.

In line 88, there is no response provided to the claims made by P and E asks the question ‘why do men also ask for possessions as women do’? In this line, E attempts a second time to assure that ‘asking for possessions’ is a category-bound activity attributed to women. By so doing, she co-constructs a category-bound activity associated with a gender category.

In line 89, she expresses that she needs someone to answer this question. Using ‘nolur’ (please) at the beginning of line 89 indicates that she really wants to know the answer to this question as she has no idea about it.

In this excerpt, it has been seen that a particular activity can be attributed to the incumbents of a certain category which leads that activity to be regarded as a category-bound activity. In this excerpt, initially the activity of ‘asking for possessions’ is socially constructed as a category-bound activity attributed to women through the interaction. When this attribution is challenged by one of the participants, there arose a need to revise the category. As suggested by Schegloff (2007), other participants in the interaction did not revise that knowledge about the category, but instead treated the participant as “an exception”.

In the following excerpt more examples of how co-construction of categories occurred in conversation will be shown and how category-bound activities are sustained by participants’ orientation to gender categories will be displayed.

## **Excerpt 2**

In Excerpt 2, the interaction occurs between P and E. Before this excerpt, participant E displays her strong disagreement with P's ideas as seen in Excerpt 1 and in the below excerpt, the discussion on men's right to ask for possessions before getting married continues.

98 E: ama

*But.*

(.)

99 P: öyle bir gelin [adayı bekli+yor+uz↑]=

Such a bride candidate expect+PRS+2PL

*We are expecting this kind of candidate bride*

100 E: [ birşey söyleye+cem ]

Something say+FPP+1S

*I will say something*

101 P: = bizim de istemeye hakkı+mız yok mu yani↑=

We also ask for right+1P have+NEG QPC I mean

*I mean don't we have the right to ask for it too?*

102 E: =ya sizin isteme+ye hakkı+nız var da↑ [evi arabası olacak]

Oh you ask for+DAT right+2p have \* house car be+FPP

*Oh! You have the right to ask for it but, she will have a house and a car-*

103 P: [ bayan çıkıyo orda ]=

Woman come there

- 104 P: =bun+u isteye+bili+yo (.)[biz de isti+yor+uz]  
 this+OBJ ask for+CAN+PRS we also want+PRS+1P  
*A woman can come here and ask for these things.*  
*We also want these things.*
- 105 E: [ birşey söyli+ce+m]  
 Something say+FPP+1S
- 106 [evi arabası olup da erdemsiz]  
 house car be but immoral
- 107 P: [ inaudible ]
- 108 erdemsiz onursuz biri ol+ur+sa ne ol+acak?  
 Immoral dishonorable one be+PRS+if what be+FPP  
*I will say something. What if she has a house and car,*  
*but she is an immoral person?*
- 109 P: yok onun yanında (1.0) o o+na birşey diye+mi+yor+um  
 No him next to that+DAT something say+NEG+PRS+1S  
*She won't be with him. I cannot say anything else.*
- 110 E: yani (.) kadın+ın err var+sa zaten orta+ya koy+ar  
 I mean woman+3S have+if anyway middle+DAT put+PRS
- 111 ama(.) bu+nu istemek ban+a yanlış geli+yo  
 but this+OBJ ask for I+DAT wrong seem+PRS  
*I mean (.) if the woman has things, she will share them but to ask for*  
*it seems wrong to me.*

112 P:     yo bana   doğru geli+yo  
          No I+DAT right seem+PRS  
          *No it seems right to me.*

Excerpt 2 starts with Line 98, when E starts her turn with ‘but’ which indicates that she wants to continue speaking. However, she cannot continue her argument as P starts speaking by interrupting E, even though there is not a transition relevant place (TRP) at this point. Starting from this point, from Line 97 to 106, E and P compete for the floor since they both try to defend their own point of view on the issue of men asking for possessions. The overlapping talk that occurs frequently which display that both participants try to speak and present their own ideas and they do not tend to listen to the other participant.

In Line 99, P says ‘we are expecting this kind of a candidate bride’ and before he completes his turn E attempts to take back the floor by explicitly stating that she will say something. However, it is clear in Line 101 that P does not want to lose the floor and he does not acknowledge E’s pre-announcement that she will say something, and he asks the question ‘I mean don’t we have the right to ask for it too’. It is important to note here that P uses ‘too’ while asking the question. The use of ‘too’ in this question treats it as fact that women already have this right. At this point P agrees with E’s previous argument that asking for possessions is an activity performed by women. He does not state any opposition to women asking for possessions but he rather challenges the idea that this activity should be classified as a category-bound activity that can *only* be performed by women. In other words, the activity associated

with women as a gender category is co-constructed in the conversation, but the improbability of its association with men is challenged. He ends his turn by 'YANI' (I mean) which is used as a discourse marker in Turkish. The use of 'yani' at utterance-final position can function as adding an emotive effect, trustworthiness or credibility to the sentence (Yılmaz, 2004). Using 'yani' at the utterance-final position also helps hearer to pay extra attention to what has been said. In line 101, the use of 'yani' at the final position functions primarily as adding credibility to the whole unit which emphasizes that 'they actually have this right'.

In Line 102, E agrees that they also have the right to ask for it, but then indicates that she will add an opposing idea as 'da' gives the meaning 'but' in this sentence. In English, turns composed of "'yeah' *agreement* + 'but' *disagreement*" are typical argument formulations, and the same is true in Turkish. After she agrees that they also have the right, an overlapping talk occurs before she starts her sentence with 'but' and P does not appear to acknowledge the part after 'but'.

In Lines, 103-104 P challenges and questions whether 'asking for possessions' should be a category-bound activity that can only be attributed to women as a gender category. He states that a woman can ask for possessions and if so, men can also ask for some possessions. In this statement, he repeats his agreement that women perform this activity and the association of this activity with women as a gender category is co-constructed by his agreement.

In Line 105, E explicitly attempts to take back the floor by announcing a second time that she will say something, however, the overlapping talk between Lines 103 and 104 indicates that P still does not attend to what E is saying.

In Line 108, E gains the floor again and she emphasizes the first two words which enables her to continue her speech without being interrupted. In the lines before 108, E never suggests any reasons for regarding men asking for possessions as unpleasant even though P suggests some reason to defend himself by claiming that if women and men are equal and if women have this right, men should have that right as well. In Line 108, instead of explaining her reasons, E shifts the topic into another concept, 'being immoral' and asks what if the woman has possessions but she is immoral. In this statement, she emphasizes that having possessions is not the expected feature of this gender category as the more important feature to expect from a woman is being moral.

After this line, the overlapping talk terminates and in Line 108, P's orientation to the question asked in Line 108 indicates that he is not willing to argue about the newly suggested topic on women being immoral. He states that he cannot discuss this issue any further.

In Line 110, E starts her turn by using 'yani' which functions as a topic expansion discourse marker in this unit as using 'yani' TCU-initially signals that its producer will expand her/his utterance in the previous line (Yılmaz, 2004). In this line, E tries to expand her claim made in Line 110 by adding that of course a woman will share the things she has. In this statement, she associates another behavior with women as a gender category that 'any woman will share her possessions'. This again exemplifies how activities are associated with a gender group through interaction.

In Line 111, E continues with 'but' and states that she finds it wrong when men ask for possessions. In all previous lines, she never provides a justification for



why she finds this behavior wrong and it is important to note here that she reduces the strength of her statement in Line 82 when she strongly emphasizes that she finds this behavior very unpleasant and in Line 111 she states her opinion on the issue as ‘I find it wrong’. This change in her statement displays an important point in association of activities with gender categories as it shows that category-bound activities can be socially co-constructed through interaction.

In Line 112, P only states that he finds it right and as there is no reason suggested by E to support her own ideas, P does not provide any more explanations. Since E’s argument is reduced to ‘I find it wrong’, the only required counter argument by P is basically, ‘well I find it okay’.

## **Discussion**

In this paper, I provided some samples of a Turkish interactional context collected from a popular TV show. Based on the socio-constructionist understanding of gender, the traces of how gender categories and category-bound activities are socially co-constructed are displayed by referring to the data analyzed. The analysis revealed that two facets of membership categories suggested by Schegloff (2007) – 1) category-bound activities, and 2) being protected against induction) – are applicable to gender categories.

The two excerpts provided in this paper show that participants have the common-sense knowledge of certain activities bound-ness to certain gender categories. Specifically, in these excerpts, ‘asking for possessions’ is treated as an activity bound to the ‘woman’ gender category by participant E and co-constructed

through the interaction between E and P. This knowledge is treated as the common-sense knowledge about the characteristics of a category's members (Schegloff, 2007).

Participant P contests the belief that this particular activity is bound to only the category 'women', and he suggests a revision of this knowledge about this category-bound activity. The display of disagreement to P's suggestion of revised knowledge of a category-bound activity supports the claim made by Schegloff (2007) that membership categories are protected against induction. P, who contradicts with the knowledge about a particular category-bound activity, is seen as an exception.

Being one of the most popular TV shows in Turkey, these marriage shows play a significant role in perpetuating the perceptions about gender categories in Turkish society. In this paper, how 'asking for possessions' is treated as a category-bound activity attributed to women is exemplified. By this attribution, women are implicitly placed in a position which makes it culturally acceptable (and even culturally *expected*) for them to be financially dependent on men. The microanalysis of interaction shows the relationship between interaction and culture. Further research is needed to explore other aspects of the complex relationship between interaction, gender and cultural values.

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