

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE USE IN IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION  
AMONGST LGBTQI+  
YOUTUBERS

by

SEZGI ACAR

ROBERT POOLE, COMMITTEE CHAIR  
DOROTHY WORDEN CHAMBERS  
BEDRETTIN YAZAN

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## ABSTRACT

The majority of previous studies of sexual orientation and phonetic variation are based on speakers of North American English. The nature of social scientific theory can be founded exclusively on people from western, educated, industrialized, prosperous, and democratic societies (Henrich et al., 2010), which calls for further cross-linguistic examinations. Moreover, studies that examine identity construction through linguistic markers primarily focus on phonetic variation while overlooking other language phenomena such as translingual practices. This study aims to address these two issues in the research as it seeks to expand the diversity of the literature by observing Turkish speakers within the LGBTQ community in Turkey.

The study first explores the effect of sexual orientation on speech production and how sexual orientation contributes to identity construction among LGBTQ persons on the video-sharing platform YouTube. Additionally, the study investigates the role of translingual practices between Turkish, English, and *Lubunca*, the gay slang of Turkey. Using digital ethnography, the first analysis was conducted on the speech production of five gay male youtubers through the data collection of 10 vlogs selected based on popularity and recency. The phonetic variables of the informants, flapping [r], the prolonging of the vowels /o/, /ö/, /a/, /i/ including the hyper-articulation of /yor/, and the aspirated /s/, were acoustically measured using Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 2017). The second investigation explored the same data to analyze translingual practices within the LGBTQ youtuber community in an attempt to discover its relation to self-representation. The findings confirm the existence of salient variables that correlate with sexual

orientation. While the use of Lubunca seems to be effective in expressing membership, for visibility and entertainment, the effects of translingual practices between Turkish and English reflect a more westernized and global identity.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the LGBTQI+ community in Turkey, who are currently fighting for their rights.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

From a sociolinguistic perspective, language use is a way of enacting identity. Speakers employ linguistic variation and different linguistic resources to signal their identification with one social group and their difference from other groups (Cameron & Kulick, 2003). Although mostly in North America, researchers observed this relationship through looking into sociodemographic characteristics such as region, race, gender and sexual orientation since Labov's (1966) pioneering study. I would like to emphasize North America because, as Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan (2010) claims, the world's most popular journals mostly draw from "Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies"; more specifically Europe and North America including Canadian and American English (p.1). While their focus is on behavioral science, the study of variation is no exception. In fact, Stanford (2016) clearly states the gap in literature and posits the lack of linguistic diversity by reviewing articles during the years 2006–2015 of the journal *Language Variation and Change*. He argues new data from a range of languages should continually be explored. Although there has been an increase in the language diversity represented in studies of the language use and sexual orientation (Levon, 2010; Boellstorff, 2004), Scholars (Stanford, 2016; Henrich, Heine & Norenzayan, 2010) show that the majority of research in the area is based on speakers of North American English, and therefore reliable cross-linguistic generalizations are not possible. Exploring linguistic variation in under-researched languages will enable the study of diachronic variation. Therefore, this study

aims to further the diversity of the literature by observing the speech patterns of Turkish LGBTQ speakers, which as a whole seem to be almost absent from the literature.

Additionally, Turkey is in a unique position linguistically because of the existence of a LGBTQ slang variety created as a secret code by the members of a sexual minority group. Being ranked the 2<sup>nd</sup> most restrictive country on gay rights in Europe, Turkey is not the most welcoming place to live for lesbian, gay, bi, trans and queer persons (Hurriyet, 2019). As a result, the marginalized communities tend to search for an alternative way to construct, negotiate, and perform their identities. The use of phonetic variables is only one way in enacting identity. Another way seems to be the deployment of a queer slang variety of Turkey called Lubunca. The language, which was once only known by a few people, has been brought into the spotlight by the gay social media influencers who are now publicly using the language.

Secret gay languages have been brought to attention by various scholars over the years with regard to its implications in identity enactment, such as Kaliardà (Montoliu, 2005), Polari (Baker, 2002), Bahasa Gay (Boellstorff, 2004), Oxtchit (Levon, 2010), Pajuba (Da Cruz & de Paola Tito, 2016). However, the studies have remained relatively limited. For example, Bucholtz and Hall (2004) attempts to present a framework for the semiotic study of social intersubjectivity in theorizing language and sexuality. For this purpose, they touch upon gay slang varieties, Indonesian Bahasa Gay (Boellstorff, 2004), British Polari (Baker, 2002), and Indian Hindi-based Farsipoken by sexual minorities for the purposes of “both secrecy and solidarity” (p.500). The article was published in 2004, and only a few more studies on the subject have been added to the list since then e.g., Levon (2010). Lubunca has not made the list because it has been examined only as a linguistic phenomenon by Kontovas (2012), who focused on the language within its morphological, semantics and phonological characteristics in a historical narrative. Despite its

deep-rooted historical presence, Lubunca's role in performing identity remains relatively under-researched in academics. This study thereby takes an initial step to expand the current discussion of the role of LGBTQ slang varieties by offering an analysis of Lubunca for identity construction within its local context.

This study also explores the deployment of English, in addition to Lubunca, in identity construction. The reasons for mixing languages vary greatly; it could be an urge to belong to a marginalized group or a desire to exclude oneself from the majority group (Auer, 2005). Sociolinguistic research suggests identity is formed through the differences that community members distinguish between themselves and others, especially through the differences of speech patterns (Gal and Irvine, 2019). Therefore, identity cannot solely boil down to one aspect of a range of linguistic choices. Sexual identity, in intersection with other dimensions of identity, can be constructed through discourse and diverse patterns of linguistic variation. Even within a particular community, there are differences in speech that index different type of identity, whether be it ideological, performance based, or sexually oriented. For this very reason, this study combines two of the major linguistic features of the selected speakers, phonetic variation and translingual practices, in explaining identity construction before coming to conclusion that certain linguistic variables or language use index sexual identity.

With this in mind, the present study suggests that examining one's language choices and linguistic features allow us to investigate how an individual negotiates and constructs their persona on a digital platform. My ultimate goal with this thesis is to identify the common linguistic variables among gay youtubers and look into how translingual practices are employed between Lubunca, English and Turkish in identity negotiation. In doing so, I aim to provide a brief description of the LGBTQ community in Turkey, a linguistic and historical overview of

Lubunca, and how youtubers deploy these linguistic features in their speech. This is important for sociolinguistic research as I will explore the dynamic intersection between language and identity through sociophonetic variation and translingual practices. It contributes to the diversity of the subsequent literature review.

I have developed the chapters that follow to accomplish these goals. Chapter 2 details the development of the sociolinguistic variation as a field and presents previous research. It later gives an overview of translingualism with previous research in translingual practices and identity construction. Along with a brief history of the role of the LGBTQ community in Turkey, Chapter 2 also provides a description of the complex history of Lubunca and linguistic aspects of it in relation to sexual identity. This is intended to enable the reader to understand the context of the Turkish LGBTQ community and Lubunca while providing an important foundation for the rest of the chapters.

As another goal is to apply and expand on existing sociolinguistic research in sociophonetic variation, language use and identity, in Chapter 3, I introduce the theoretical framework I use to define and explore linguistic variables and language choices in identity enactment. Specifically, I use computer-mediated discourse analysis as an overarching approach and support it with the theory of indexicality and digital ethnography to provide an explanation and model for indexical and ideological relations between language choices, variation and indexing membership to the LGBTQ community.

Chapter 4 presents the specific linguistic features I focus on for review: hyper-articulation of the fricative /s/, vowel lengthening and the slightly rounded [r]. I expand on the concepts previously introduced in earlier chapters and provide examples of how the informants, youtubers, may orient to or away from a sexual identity. I provide examples of informants' linguistic

features, which leads me to discuss their use of language in relation to identity negotiation. Using Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 2017), I perform acoustic phonetic analysis of informants' use of fricative /s/, vowels, and [r] sound to reach conclusions. I later move on to the results of translingual practices and discuss the implications that this analysis may reflect for our understanding of the relationship between identity and code-mixing. I focus on the pragmatic and social functions of Lubunca and English use in LGBTQ youtubers' digital practices in terms of negotiating their identities and sexualities to index membership and as a form of mockery and entertainment.

Lastly, in Chapter 5, I briefly discuss the limitations, then conclude the chapter with implications and future directions of the study.

### **1.1 Research Questions**

This study investigates the following two research questions:

1. What are the common phonetic variables LGBTQ youtubers employ in Turkish and how may these features index sexual orientation within the community?
2. What translingual practices are evident in LGBTQ youtubers' language use and how do these practices reflect identity construction?

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **2.1 Overview**

Three main areas have been identified to inform the present study, namely, variationist sociolinguistics, translingual practices in identity construction and the linguistic features of the LGBTQ slang variety of Turkey, Lubunca. Therefore, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first part will provide a historical overview of the sociolinguistic variation, language, gender and sexuality. It will later look into previous studies that specifically examine phonetic variation by sexual orientation and touch upon its relation to identity. The second part will explore translingual practices and code-mixing; it will also look into studies that investigate the relationship between translingual practices and identity construction. Lastly, the final part will introduce the LGBTQ community in Turkey and the historical and linguistic overview of Lubunca.

#### **2.2 Sociolinguistic Variation**

“The simplest and yet most important contribution of sociolinguistics [and similar disciplines willing to go under that flag] to social scientific knowledge is its insistence on recognizing the considerable variation in the speech that exists within even the most homogeneous of societies. The second important contribution is the insistence that this variation is neither trivial nor a pale reflection of 'real' language. It is systematic, and that the systematicity of linguistic variation is an imperative object of study in itself. Having recognized that different people talk differently and that the same people talk differently at other times, a central problem of sociolinguistics is – or ought to be – to understand why

people speak the way they do. It then becomes clear that the research questions of sociolinguistics are preeminently social” (Woolard, 1985, p. 738).

In her article “Society and Language Use,” Jaspers (2010) quotes Woolard (1985) to highlight, even after an almost half a century, the analysis of linguistic variation is vital to understand the societies we live in. In other words, the intertwined relationship between language use and society constitutes the basis of sociolinguistics, hence the variation. Studying the social benefits of language is conducted primarily by observing language use in natural social contexts and categorizing the linguistic variants according to their social disposition. From its launch, sociolinguistics has been concerned with the functions that language fulfills in social organizations and society. Therefore, the most productive studies in sociolinguistics have stemmed from pinning down the social evaluation of linguistic variants (Chambers et al., 2002).

The most fundamental assumptions about the sociolinguistic variation were first identified by Labov's study of Martha's Vineyard (1963). Labov asserts that “the point of view of the present study is that one cannot understand the development of a language change apart from the social life of the community in which it occurs” (1963, p.3). As can be inferred from his words, his study demonstrates the relationship between language and society. He later suggests that the centralization of the diphthongs (ay) and (aw) -the overall results of the study- can be explained if the detailed formation of this sound change is to be studied against social forces which profoundly affects the life of the islanders. His study was groundbreaking in sociolinguistic variation because it showed that locally constructed social meaning could serve as motivation for sound change. It also proved that the language is not a homogeneous entity, and it is influenced by both internal and external factors, such as regional elements like Labov's study. His research in Martha's Vineyard

was later followed by the study of the social stratification of (r) that took place in three department stores in New York City, which is also known as reformatory in sociolinguistic variation.

Over the past six decades, since Labov's revolutionary works, sociolinguistic research has correlated linguistic variation with sociodemographic characteristics of speakers such as, broadly, social background, class, gender, age, and many aspects of social behavior. From this perspective, it is evident that languages are heterogeneous and evolving systems due to their internal dynamics, contact with other language varieties, and their connection to social organization, which in itself is evolving, compound, and multi-layered. This notion launched the field of sociolinguistic variation, and numerous research studies led to the expansion of the field.

Having briefly looked at some of the pioneering work, I will now turn to some relatively recent studies within the perspective of three waves of the variationist research.

### **2.3 Three waves of sociolinguistics**

The development of sociolinguistic variation occurred in three waves over the years, which have not necessarily happened in chronological order, as proposed by Eckert (2005). The fundamental goal of sociolinguistics is to study how linguistic variation reflects different aspects of a person's identity. While each wave explores how language variation indexes social identity, they are different in terms of methodology and in their conception of how language choice and social identity are interrelated (Eckert, 2005). The first wave is mostly concerned with explaining the large-scale motives behind variation using either on-the-spot questions or formal interviews. The second wave addresses how each individual plays a role in variation using qualitative ethnographic methodologies to define locally constructed meaningful social categories, and lastly, the third wave studies view performance as the primary factor behind linguistic variation to investigate the relationship between linguistic variants and a speaker's style (Eckert, 2005).

### ***2.3.1 The First Wave***

The first wave of studies “sought to establish correlations between predetermined macro-level social categories – socioeconomic class, age, race/ethnicity, and sex – and particular linguistic variables” (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015, p.170). Broadly, the studies that define the first wave dealt with socioeconomic groups, age and gender. Starting with Labov’s (1966) study in which he examined whether socioeconomic class and age differences affect the pronunciation of /r/, the first wave also include studies that look into gender variation, such as Fischer’s study (1958) of the /n/ variable. Fischer (1958) conducted the study with young children, twelve boys and twelve girls, noting their use of -ing [ŋ] and -in’ [n]. This study shows how the first wave perceives gender uniformly defined as male and female.

Since then, a significant number of studies has been conducted in other languages and dialects, the majority of which focused on the socio-phonetic variation that patterns with a certain social category or gender, though only as binary (e.g., Trudgill, 1972; Macaulay, 1977). Overall, studies in the first wave exhibits the correlation between linguistic variables and the speaker's social characteristics and shows that social meaning is based on the socioeconomic hierarchy (Eckert, 2009).

### ***2.3.2 The Second Wave***

First wave studies focus largely on speech as an inspiration for variation within one speaker’s performance; however, the second wave studies put speaker agency in the center. Positioning vernacular speech in the center, these studies seek answers to identify variation through social groups and cultural norms (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). Linguistic variation is considered to be related to speakers’ social characteristics. It differs from the first wave methodologically

since it adopts an ethnographic approach to seeking answers to why certain groups employ certain variables and avoid others (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015).

Ethnographic research allows researchers to avoid using predetermined social groups and enables them to investigate social groups formed by, and relevant to, the speakers themselves (Eckert, 2009). Broadly, studies in the second wave look into why phonetic variables are associated with social groups and provide agentive use of variation. For example, the work of Milroy and Milroy (1985), which looked at certain aspects of speech in three working-class areas in Belfast, Northern Ireland using ethnographic methodology, is credited as the beginning of the second wave (as cited in Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015) and a great example of the agentive use of variation.

### ***2.3.3 The Third Wave***

The first and the second wave studies perceive sociolinguistic variables as reflected to a social category, whereas the third wave studies view social style as central (Drager, 2009). The third wave studies differ from the second wave studies by the shift in perspective from scrutinizing how language indexes social identity in terms of membership in certain social groups to how linguistic practices are “the means through which speakers position themselves as social beings” (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015, p. 189). More specifically, how speakers employ linguistic and non-linguistic factors in constructing and presenting their style forms the core of the third wave (Eckert, 2009).

Studies in the third wave delve into “how linguistic variants contribute to an individual's collection of styles and the construction of their social personae; they focus on social meaning where social meaning is not defined through belonging to a social group but through the individual's stance and the expression of their agency” (Drager, 2009, p.15). The focus is on the

“moment-to-moment negotiation of selves as personal and individual dynamic” (Eckert, 2009, p.27). In other words, the third wave studies assume that speakers use linguistic variables to construct identities positioned within local and social contexts. Eckert (2005) suggests that variation should be studied as it unfolds in discourse because social meaning is a driving force in social change. The variables become more specific and meaningful in the context of discourse and the construction of styles.

#### ***2.3.4 Gender Variation***

As discussed above, researchers focused on language use in everyday practice that constitutes speakers’ class-based social membership and identity in the community. Studies were mostly concerned with a social group and membership, wealth and the linguistic domain and local identity (Eckert, 2008). The study of the biological categories of sex in sociolinguistics did not receive as much attention (Eckert, Edwards & Robins, 1985). The first wave of research on sex viewed variation in terms of differences in female and male language use (Bucholtz, 2002). The reason for that is sex is a biological category that serves as a key foundation for the variation of roles, norms, and expectations in all societies whereas gender encompasses these roles, norms, and expectations.

Therefore, before moving forward, it is crucial to define gender, sex, sexuality and the distinction among them. While the term “sex” is the oldest of these three words, sexuality and gender were later introduced to make explicit distinctions. McConell-Ginet (2011) explained the distinction as follows, “Sex was to be reserved for biological/bodily classification of living beings as female or male; gender for sociocultural practices, conventions and ideologies clustering around the biological classification, and sexuality for sexual practices and erotic desires” (p.6). More specifically, sex is defined as “the biological differentiation of individuals into a dichotomy

between female and male,” gender as “the social differentiation of individuals within a continuum between feminine and masculine” and lastly, sexuality as “based on the gender of one’s erotic attachment and one’s orientation to sexuality: sexual(ized) practices and ideologies that shape daily life including gender” (Bucholtz, 2002, p. 37).

In the next section, I will discuss how gender and sexuality have come into the equation of the binary sex dilemma and changed the direction of research on gender variation within sociolinguistics.

## **2.4 Language, Gender and Sexuality**

In 1973, Robin Lakoff published an article entitled “Language and woman’s place,” which explored the characteristics of women speech in middle-class Western society. Lakoff’s work mainly focused on phonetic or phonological variables; she was interested in variation at all levels of linguistic structure. In her study, she revealed normative differences between women and men’s language use, such as curse words, adjectives and etc., and the types of sentence structures, such as tag questions or particular intonation patterns. She also looked into irregularities in the ways that terms referring to women and men were used. Lakoff’s work illustrated a connection between the gender differences she believed existed, and where middle-class white American women were placed socially in society at the time, she was conducting the study (Ehrlich, Meyerhoff & Holmes, 2014). Lakoff’s work stimulated a large number of empirical responses in the subsequent decade as her work galvanized researchers all over the world into the unexplored territory of women’s speech. Men, however, remained unexamined for much longer; the reason for that was man and person were often considered as interchangeable concepts. However, in the last decades, men’s perception of themselves has shifted from viewing themselves as “unmarked representatives of the human race to focusing on themselves as men” (Coates, 2004, p.14).

That shift was salient when Labov's study of black male adolescents in Harlem (Labov, 1972) took place as another milestone in early sociolinguistic works. The title of the study was "Language in the Inner City", which disregards the fact that the language analyzed in the book is male language. Later, in the 1990s, a collection of articles was published under the title "Language and Masculinity" (Johnson & Meinhoff, 1997), which is considered to be the first to put emphasis on men and language. As can be seen from the focus of the studies, researchers mostly analyzed language and sex. After 1990s, researchers started to walk away from the term sex and adopted gender as a replacement.

Although the addition of sexuality to the study of language and gender is relatively a recent development, the first study on homosexual language, which mostly looked into describing and documenting homosexual argots, can be traced back to the 1920s. However, the early inquiry into the language use of English gay men was conducted by William Leap in 1996. Since then, there has been a great increase in the number of researches on language and sexuality.

#### ***2.4.1 Recent Research on Language and Sexuality in North America***

The early explorations of language and sexuality were mainly about lexical matters. Lexical choices in the context of sexual orientation were mostly present for categorical purposes. The research into lexical issues is considered to be the easiest one for exploring the language use of queer communities since these lexical issues, such as naming certain queer individuals as lesbian or dyke, render LGBTQ community social recognition. In this regard, a lexical choice of one term over another might be used to indicate the speaker's ideological orientation (Pan, 2018). Research on gay men's speech focus on identifying the features that constitute a speech variety. Therefore, the first conducted studies mainly focused on the lexical features (e.g., Crist, 1997; Leap, 1996) (Podesva et al., 2001).

Later research investigates how individuals use linguistic variation to index sexual identities and social meanings. The perceptual evaluations, requesting participants to guess to which gender and sexual orientation the speech they listen to belongs, has been the center orientation of most of the research studies. Gaudio (1994), in his work on sounding-gay, invited participants to assess various features of eight male speakers. Each individual read the same reading passage, and participants distinguished gay men from straight men by listening to the recordings. After the initial evaluation, Gaudio measured the pitch properties of the gay participants as compared to those of the straight ones. Consequently, he did not find any significant difference in pitch and pitch range between gay and straight speakers.

Crist (1997) conducted similar research investigating phonetic variation with a different methodology from Gaudio's. Gaudio recorded gay and straight men speaking in their ordinary voices and then compared the two groups. Unlike Gaudio, Crist (1997) investigated the speech patterns of four gay and two straight American English speakers by having them read a passage in their "ordinary" and then in "the queeniest, most flaming gay stereotype" voice (p.53). The findings showed differences in the duration of onset consonants between the two contexts. Crist (1997) concluded that listeners could identify the sexual orientation of speakers accurately on the basis of phonetic cues. In a similar study, Linville (1998) recorded five gay and four straight men reading a monologue and concluded that gay men had higher peak frequencies and longer durations for tokens of /s/ compared to straight men.

While all the studies up until 2007 focused on sounding gay and speech perceptions in controlled environments, Podesva (2007) took a different approach focusing solely on the speech of just one gay man in uncontrolled environments. Heath – an educated white male residing in the U.S.- recorded himself in the conversations wherever and whenever he and his fellow converser(s)

felt comfortable with the intention to produce “more naturalistic, less self-conscious recordings” (p.483). As an outcome of the study, Podesva suggests the longer-duration word and word-final alveolar plosives reflect primness, which is considered as some kind of gay stereotype. Podesva (2007) indicates that Heath tended to produce wider-ranging fundamental frequency in natural conversation settings to create a diva persona and a gay identity. Similarly, Podesva (2011) later explored the speech of Regan, a bilingual Asian American gay man born of Vietnamese immigrants, using a similar methodology to his earlier research in 2007. He looked at intraspeaker variation and its relation to the construction of a gay identity. He argues that Regan employs advanced markers of the California Vowel Shift (Eckert, 2008), which gives the impression of being laid back and cool, in indexing gay identity. Moreover, he concludes that the features of a regional accent may also index sexual orientation.

These studies of Podesva (2007, 2011) are important for the sake of this study because of how they reveal different outcomes due to the uncontrolled environment setting. While the earliest studies focus mostly on the speech perception of sounding gay in controlled environments with informants using a gay voice or/and a more robotic voice, the latest studies of Podesva demonstrate relatively different outcomes when it comes to variation in natural settings. Podesva’s studies resemble Labov’s variationist studies of Martha’s Vineyard and New York department stores in terms of the way they were conducted. As can be seen from these studies, speech patterns in natural settings might reveal different outcomes, such as Regan’s employment of California vowel shift in the construction of a gay identity. Since the current study occurs on YouTube, in which informants converse in a natural setting, it can be said that the outcomes of the Podesva’s studies may serve as a guide for the current study.

### ***2.4.2 Global Research on Language and Sexuality***

Despite the scarcity of research into speech production and sexual orientation in the global literature, Munson and Babel (2007) comment that the topic gay language differs from other areas in sociolinguistics because many people, regardless of their professions, have an opinion about the notion of sounding gay based on their observations. However, despite this clear interest, many of the world languages including Turkish language lack the core sociolinguistic research. Since this study contributes to the literature by answering Stanford's (2016) call for more diverse variationist data, and by exhibiting the importance of linguistic markers in language variation in a relatively under-researched language, Turkish, it is vital to look into the studies that dealt with variation and sexual identity globally.

Mack (2010) conducted research among 58 female and 30 male Puerto Rican Spanish speakers on implicit and explicit relationships between sociophonetic variation and sexual orientation. The purpose of her study was to document the existence of a speech stereotype associated with gay males and to identify what specific patterns of speech variation are indexed in it. She interviewed the participants to reflect on speech stereotypes related to five social classifications: age, gender, male sexual orientation, social class, and the existence of a regional variety of Spanish specific to Puerto Rico. Mack (2010) confirmed the existence of a stereotype of gay male speech. Her study showed that the majority of respondents consciously identified the gay speech stereotype; however, the respondents could not identify the speech stereotypes of gender, age or regional origin. In another similar study among French speakers, Suire et al. (2020) investigated potential differences in acoustic features of speech between homosexual and heterosexual French men. Conducted among 48 heterosexual men, 58 homosexual men, and 54 heterosexual women, Suire et al. (2020) investigated whether homosexual native French men

showed a trend toward feminization by comparing theirs to that of heterosexual native French women. They found that homosexual men demonstrated considerably higher pitch frequency patterns and less aspirated speech compared to heterosexual men, with values leaned toward those of heterosexual women, which resembles the results of a few studies conducted in North American English (Crist, 1997; Linville, 1998).

Kachel et al (2018) studied the collection of recordings provided by 25 gay and 26 straight German speakers to explore the speech stereotypes toward German gay and straight men, whether there is a connection between actual and perceived sexual orientation, and how this may relate to masculinity/femininity. Seventy-four listeners categorized speakers as gay or straight based on the same sentence. They concluded that speech stereotypes encompass voice pitch, nasality, chromaticity, and smoothness. Additionally, they found evidence that actual masculinity/femininity and the degree of sexual orientation were indexed in gay and straight men's speech. This study also can be credited as a global example of speech perception which took place in late 1990s in North America.

Although limited, similar research occurred in the context of Turkish sociolinguistics, too. Kosaner & Sargin (2016) conducted a study on gay male language in Turkey and uncovered that gay male and female speech in Turkey differed from heterosexual male and female speech with regard to intonation and pitch range. Kosaner & Sargin (2016) conducted the study using manipulated sound recordings from five male heterosexuals, five male homosexuals, and five female heterosexuals. As a result of these manipulations the incentives comprised of 15 original voice recordings, 15 voice recordings manipulated with regard to F0 fundamental frequency, and another 15 voice recordings manipulated with regard to both F0 fundamental frequency and pitch range. 30 (15 male and 15 female) participants rated the recordings and listed the linguistic

markers to identify speech as gay or straight. Kosaner & Sargin (2016) found that there is a fair agreement between the raters with regard to the gender of the speaker of the voice on the recordings. The raters were able to identify the gender of the speaker on the voice recordings. The answers given to the question “What are the reasons that make you identify the speaker's identity as homosexual in the voice recordings you have rated as homosexual sound?” is important for the current research, too. Raters noted that the following features influenced their decisions: the prolonging of vowels/rounded vowels /syllables (vowel/syllable duration), rounding of sound "r" (flapping, producing [ɾ] instead of [r] sound), rises and falls in the sound, moving or vibrant speech (pitch range), softer voice, difference in stress and intonation, flirtatious/effeminate speech, wider [e] sound (wider acoustic vowel space), similarities with previously heard homosexual speech, higher speech production rate, salient breathing at the end of the utterances (aspiration), more treble voice (higher F0 fundamental frequency), exaggerated stressing, producing [n] sound and –  
yor (progressive aspect) morpheme more stressed (hyperarticulation).

Ay (2016) also examined whether sexual orientation can be identified from monologue readings and narration. She conducted her research with 10 Turkish-speaking openly gay men and 10 straight men who recorded a scientific passage, a poem and a narration. 30 participants listened to these recordings for the evaluation of perceived sexual orientation. Participants could identify gay-sounding speech better in the poem and the narration. Scientific passage confused the participants in understanding the sexual identity. She used Praat to accurately measure the pitch frequency, intensity and the duration differences between the readings of the three different genres. The result of the study showed that participants accurately identified the sexual orientation of these speakers at a rate of 80%. However, the results of acoustic measurements did not show any particular pattern that could be identified as an indicator of the sexual orientation of the speaker.

Ay's (2016) study is important in terms of sexual perception in different genres; however, she has not discussed the linguistic variables that led the participants to the conclusion. Therefore, this study cannot be taken as a reference point for the salient linguistic variables, but a source for Turkish speech analysis in Praat.

These studies demonstrate that there have been a few attempts to analyze the linguistic variables of the gay speech in Turkish. The first study (Kosaner & Sargin, 2016) identifies linguistic variables through an interview followed by a gay speech perception study. The second study mostly focuses on the perceived sexual orientation and concludes that there is no particular pattern as an indication of sexual orientation of the speaker. Drawing on these two studies, this thesis will look into the linguistic variables of the LGBTQ youtubers and seek out whether the results correlate with Kosaner & Sargin's study and its implications in identity construction. Kosaner & Sargin's study attempt to scratch the surface of the sociolinguistic variation in Turkey in relation to gender; however, as can be seen from the studies, sociophonetic variation in identity negotiation has not been explored.

## **2.5 Language and Identity**

Identity has gained popularity as a concept and has been explored in multiple social sciences including sociolinguistics. The field is concerned with the linguistic production of culture which entails a concern with the variety of culturally specific dispositions that speakers enact through language (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). Sociolinguistic research has predominantly focused on how language variation relates to speakers' identities. Various researchers describe identity as being related to the dialectics of sameness and difference (e.g., Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). In other words, individuals observe similarities and differences between them and those around them to define particular identity categories (Hadodo, 2020). Identity work may often involve discovering

differences among those with a common identity, but it may also serve to create or emphasize differences between in-group members and those outside the group (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). Moreover, identity is not a fixed entity, in fact it is constantly constructed through a variety of resources, many of which are linguistic, including word choice, pronunciation, voice pitch, language use as well as the content of the speaker's discourse. Individuals consciously seek to borrow the linguistic features of other groups in order to construct their identities or to express membership to these particular groups (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004).

Linguists have approached studying identity in various ways. It has often been examined within the scope of practice, performance, indexicality, and ideology, which do not necessarily operate separately in the creation of identity. Broadly, identity is often constructed and reconstructed through policies based on ideologies (Recinto, 2009 as cited in Hadodo, 2020). Ideology is produced through practice, the combination of which facilitates indexicality. The semiotic concept of indexicality as employed by Ochs (1992), and later many others has been fundamental in understanding identity and language usage, with the production of specific linguistic features indexing membership to diverse social groups (Hadodo, 2020). These semiotic processes provide a clear understanding of how social identities are formed through language.

## **2.6 Translingual Practices**

This section will review the theoretical background behind the current study of translingual practices. This thesis takes the term “translingualism” as the umbrella term that overarches all other related terms, such as code-mixing, language-mixing, or code-switching to refer to the languaging practice. However, it will adopt the term “code-mixing” to refer to the languaging activities of the informants.

### ***2.6.1 The Overview of Translingualism and Translanguaging***

Translanguaging, “trawsieithu”, was first coined in Wales by Williams (1994) to refer to an educational concept which sustains the development of language skills through the concurrent use of two languages in the classroom. This original theory of translanguaging contributed to laying the foundation of a change regarding how multilinguals actively construct their everyday language practices within and outside the classroom (Mazzaferro, 2018, p.2). Garcia (2009) later extended the term beyond its original meaning and context, describing translanguaging as the act performed by multilinguals using various linguistic features and various semiotic modes in order to maximize a meaningful communication. In this sense, construction of meaning has been acknowledged as the key purpose for multilinguals to engage in daily communicative practices by drawing on all the resources of their linguistic repertoire. Broadly, translanguaging represents the immaculate and usual mode of communication as well as the only way to make meaning (Garcia & Wei, 2014).

As mentioned above, the concept of translingualism originated in the field of education; however, the term has been taken up by various fields, such as second language writing, applied linguistics, and sociolinguistics etc., with different term and definition adaptations. To put it within the field of sociolinguistics, speakers draw on all linguistic resources as a repertoire in their everyday communication transcending systematic languages and words through meshed semiotic codes. In this sense, speakers’ main purpose is to make meaning in social contexts, and, to do so, they utilize linguistic features based on specific sociocultural and linguistic circumstances (Duranti, 1997). The prefix *trans-* here is an evident reminder that translingualism sees individual languages not as “separate, firm entities but as dynamic, fluid states” (Mazzaferro, 2018, p.2). It is vital to understand that translanguaging is not a product, but a constant process; henceforth, the way how certain groups translanguage can go through change based on social context, time, and

identity. Especially, recent forms of globalization have given more visibility to such forms of communication because diverse cultural, economic, and social realms have escalated the interaction between languages and language groups, hence emphasis on negotiation of meaning gained more significance.

Thus, although various scholars have employed the term in many different ways, there is still no particular meaning of translanguaging. The precise description is "still unsettled" (Horner & Tetreault, 2017, p. 4). Therefore, this thesis takes the term "translanguaging" as the umbrella term that overarches all the related terms, such as code-mixing, language-mixing, or code-switching to refer to the languaging, which is utilizing all the accessible linguistic resources to construct meaning (Pennycook, 2016).

### ***2.6.2. Code-Mixing***

This thesis will use the term code-mixing to discuss the general phenomenon of language mixing (Muysken, 2000) because the term code-mixing, a hyponym to cover both code-switching and borrowing, encompasses a wide range of integration, from a single word from one language into another to syntactical and phonological integration of both languages (Jacinto, 2015).

The informants in this study are speakers of Turkish and deploy Lubunca or English as intra-sentential, and one common feature is that both Lubunca and English are embedded within a more broadly used language, the matrix language (the Matrix Language Frame (MLF) as introduced by Myers-Scotton (1993). The MLF in general helps to examine intra-sentential code-mixing, or language shift within a sentence. Myers-Scotton (1993) affirms when an intra-sentential code-mixing occurs, the distribution of two languages is asymmetrical, as in the case of gay slang varieties. The dominant language is called the matrix language. The embedded language is the other language that is inserted into the framework of the matrix language

(Jacinto, 2015). In this case, the matrix language is Turkish, identified as the first language of the speaker, and the embedded languages are Lubunca and English.

In the next section, the article provides a brief overview of code-mixing as it has been treated in the sociolinguistic literature and describes how code-mixing has been mostly described as a way to create a third space, resisting the oppression suffered by gay men in society. It also briefly discusses the implications this analysis may reflect for our understanding of the relationship between identity and code-mixing

### ***2.6.3 Code-mixing in the Negotiation of Identity***

The use of code-mixing in sociolinguistics has been documented in many contexts, and there is a range of different types of code-mixing studies. The studies that are discussed in this section are not necessarily concerned about syntactic rules of how and where a switch occurs, instead they focus on the reasons for the switch and its implications in identity negotiation.

One of the most recent studies on code-mixing regarding gay language, focuses on English, has been conducted by Dovchin (2019) among gay men in Mongolia through the use of social media. This study is important because it demonstrates the importance of a discursive place that opens a room for translingual practices and identity negotiation. She explores the role of English in enacting one's sexuality or gendered identities in the Facebook groups of gay Mongolian men. Facebook serves as a digital medium among the gay community to liberally construct and enact their identities by networking, interacting, and connecting. Similar to Dovchin (2019), Lee (2004) also asserts the significance of K-Pop as a discursive space for South Korean youth to assert their self-identity, "create new meanings, challenge dominant representations of authority, to resist mainstream norms and values, and reject older generations' conservatism" (p.211). These studies

indicate how self-identity is formed, negotiated, and expressed on digitally based platforms and the importance of conducting research in these digital spheres.

To expand further, common debates focused on gay language, mostly the slang varieties, were found mono-dimensional in explaining social identity by heavily centering on specific linguistic aspects and features that might exclusively belong to only gay communities (Milani, 2018). That being said, Levon's (2010) study particularly stands out, because it represents the shift from a mono-dimensional approach. In his study, he interviews 57 gay participants in Israel who deploys Oxtchit, the gay slang variety in Israel, in their speech and examines the representations of Oxtchit/Oxtchot in Israeli cinema. He finds that not every gay man uses Oxtchit. In fact, Gay men's use of Oxtchit is the presentation of a figural voice of alterity in interaction, and there are many other factors in indexing sexual identity. Rather than labeling Oxtchit as antilanguage, he challenges the notion with further investigation and finds not every gay slang variety is an antilanguage and therefore, cannot be taken as a straight-forward identity affirming domain.

In a similar study, Boellstorff (2004) looks into the Indonesian gay community employing Bahasa gay, a gay slang variety based upon Bahasa Indonesia with derivational processes including unique suffixes and word substitutions. In his study, he argues that Bahasa gay appears as a register of belonging within gay communities and in popular culture. Contrary to popular belief, Bahasa gay is not a secret language since every gay person is aware of it, and it has been appropriated by social media and the popular culture. Hetero Indonesians also deploy translingual practices of Bahasa gay to be hip, not queer; it marks them not as gay but as in tune with popular culture. Its referent is coming to be the user more than the context of use. Bahasa gay indexes two domains of Indonesian life that appear opposed: "the world of gay life, still lived largely in secrecy

and shadow, and the dominant world of popular culture” (Boellstorf, 2004, p.264), proving it is not a sole domain for sexual identity register.

## **2.7 LGBTQ in Turkey**

The Republic of Turkey is often considered as an example of a modern Muslim state, with a secular democracy since 1923, after its foundations by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Although Islamic values are entrenched in most of the country's social organizations, as a result of its geographical position, located between Asia and Europe, and Ataturk’s modernization reforms, Turkish culture is deeply influenced by European/Western values. While European values can be seen and experienced throughout the country, “gender inequality and hetero-normative value system persist in Turkish society” (Engin, 2015, p.838).

The emergence of non-heteronormative identities might be assumed to have occurred in the early 20th century as a result of rising globalization and urbanization in contemporary Turkey. However, the acceptance of homosexuality dates back to the time of the Ottoman Empire. In 1914, Hirschfeld (2000 as cited in Zulfikar, 2016) referred to Istanbul as “the homeland of a European *Urnig Colony*.” There was even a famous brothel named “Ottoman Bank” (Zulfikar, 2016, p.12). Many people from Europe visited the Ottoman Bank without having to fear arrest, persecution, or imprisonment due to the strict regulations in European countries against homosexuality. However, after the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, male brothels were ordered to be closed in order to fit the standardizations of Europe.

LGBTQ persons enjoyed great freedoms until the 1960s simply because the Republic of Turkey ignored them. At the time, European countries were strict towards homosexuality, hence the emergence of the secret gay language Polari in England; however, Turkey did not make homosexuality a criminal offense. For instance, it was very acceptable for trans persons to perform

in theatres, music venues, and nightclubs. Although not identified as a trans person, a primary example of this is the extremely famous singer Zeki Müren, “whose songs and effeminate appearance remain in the public memory to this day” (Zulfikar, 2016, p. 7). Even today, Müren is still recognized as a model for many LGBTQ persons because “he called heteronormative gender images into question with his actions, his speech”, and his art and his style (Zulfikar, 2016, p. 7).

In early 1980s, effeminate men, wearing women’s clothing working at night clubs, so called transvestites, were issued a performance ban by the Minister of the Interior. This ban also affected Turkey’s most famous trans singer Bulent Ersoy, and to outwit the ban, Ersoy underwent sex reassignment surgery (from male to female). Ersoy later filed a petition to be given a “pink” I.D. card-which at the time was assigned with a color based on gender, as in pink for females and blue for males-to have her gender officially recognized as female. Ersoy’s fight lasted for almost a decade, and she finally had her civil status changed to female gender and was also able to perform again. The 1980s witnessed new regulations in Turkish law: gender reassignment measures were legalized when proven by at least one medical commission.

While this was the highly publicized case for what trans persons were going through in Turkey, non-famous trans persons had different troubles. Many transgender women were, and still are, unable to find work because of discrimination (Kontovas, 2012). Therefore, they turn to sex work out of survival and financial needs. However, they have been working illegally due to the fact that legalized prostitution in Turkey only allows sex workers who are assigned women at birth to register legally, which results in transgender persons working on the streets as unregistered sex workers. As labeled unregistered, sex workers who work outside the legal brothel sector have been subject to criminal charges. Therefore, sex workers, who consist of many transgender women, created a secret way of communication to create safer spaces of communication.

Due to social media and globalization, the LGBTQ has gained more visibility in Turkey. Today, there are a few openly LGBTQ persons work in municipal administrations (Zulfikar, 2016). Although it seems like LGBTQ rights are increasing, what is felt is completely the opposite. With the government in Turkey being conservative, former family minister Aliye Kavaf called homosexuality a disease (Magid, 2017). Although the government's primary concern is to create a pious generation, starting with the first ever pride parade in Istanbul with only 30 participants in 2003, the number of participants exponentially increased each year with 100.000 people attending in the year of 2013: therefore, making Gay Pride Istanbul the biggest march in the Muslim World (DW, 2014). However, Turkish authorities canceled Pride in Istanbul for each consecutive year since 2016 for security concerns. People who defy the ban and still march for the pride were met with tear gas and water cannons as well as occasional arrests. These incidents were followed by some other recent anti-LGBTQ actions by the government, such as the ban access of the gay dating app “grindr,” the ban on the LGBTQ film festival and cancellation of a Netflix show due to a queer character in the script (DW, 2020).

There has been a growing public visibility of homosexuality and gay identities for the past two decades (Engin, 2015); saying that, according to a global study conducted in 2013 by the Pew Research Center, %9 of Turks thinks homosexuality “should be accepted by society,” which is 5% lower than the year 2007. However, with the digital age blooming around the globe and also in Turkey, the lives of gay personas on YouTube and Instagram have caught the attention of millions. Started mostly with the famous queer Instagram influencer who has over three million followers on Instagram, Queer movement has been experiencing a wave of young, queer social media stars using certain linguistic features and fashion styles in order to be more visible.

This latest change in Turkey must have had an influence on the new generation of the country that in 2019, %25 of people in Turkey said homosexuality “should be accepted by society.” This new trending wave on digital platforms with more people embracing their sexuality eluding binary gender norms has also brought the secret Turkish queer slang back into the limelight. Until recently, only a small part of Turkish society knew Lubunca existed, now it is going viral, contributing to the visibility of LGBTQ identity in society.

## **2.8 Lubunca**

Queer communities have been known to develop their own language, drawing upon the languages of minorities with which they come in contact. There are a number of queer slang varieties that have been well-documented throughout the years around the world. Polari (Baker, 2002) – once spoken in London – and Kaliarda (Montoliu, 2005) – currently spoken in Greece – Bahasa Gay (Boellstorf, 2004)- all are mostly embedded within the matrix language (Myers–Scotton, 1993). Queer languages typically involve different degrees of lexical substitution in which queer neologisms replace words in the matrix language. These varieties almost always draw most of their grammar and lexicon from the matrix language; however, they generally contain large amounts of borrowing from other languages (Barret, 2018). While many other gay languages, as mentioned above, gained recognition, Lubunca has received only limited mention in the scholarly literature on queer varieties (Kontovas, 2012; Kyuchukov & Bakker, 1999), and, moreover, the current status of lexicon or grammar use has yet been researched.

Lubunca is a secret queer language that has been used by the LGBTQ community in Turkey since the late Ottoman era (Magid, 2017). It was created as a certain type of argot – as a secret way of communication – among trans sex workers in Turkey. It originated around Beyoglu and Sisli districts in Istanbul where a great portion of the trans female population lives and works.

Although Lubunca is known to have started primarily in Istanbul, it seems to have gained popularity in other big cities due to the emergence of social media and the migration of significant queer communities.

The etymology of the word Lubunca, which is derived from the word lubun, is a shortened form of the word lubunya that means queer. The word Lubunya, the speakers of Lubunca, is considered to be an encompassing term for feminine-acting, masculine-desiring people who were assigned male at birth. The name comes from the word lubun, which is believed to be derived from the Romani word “lubni”, female prostitute. The gypsy minority-speaker of Romani- being one of the major ethnic groups that exist in Turkey, it is no surprise that Lubunca endowed from Romani, even the name of the language itself (Kontovas, 2012).

Due to the lack of documentation, it is not certain when Lubunca was created. The linguistic traces suggest that it was in use by the end of the Ottoman period in the early 1900s. Although there is not much written documentation regarding Lubunca, there is evidence that the contact between speakers of minority languages and queer communities in Istanbul produced Lubunca as a result of unregistered sex work during the last years of the Ottoman Empire and the beginning of the Turkish Republic. The reason for Lubunca to be created was to build a safe habitus for mostly trans women as a protection shield for them to avoid police because, as mentioned in the previous section, Turkish government does not permit anyone assigned male at birth to legally register as a sex worker. Therefore, Lubunca was born to urgent need. However, the fundamental reason for speaking Lubunca among most of the queer population has changed from needing to create a safe space in which to survive to exhibiting visibility and aligning within LGBTQ community. In other words, Lubunca was considered to be an unrevealed expression of

the natural linguistics habitus of the marginalized queer community in 1980s; however, today Lubunca is owned as a symbol of the Turkish queer movement.

The lexicon of Lubunca mostly consists of Romani-derived lexemes, mainly of nouns, describing people, body parts, and everyday objects, and verbs, such as a fair number related to sex or social interaction (Kontovas, 2012). Romani contributes the largest amount of vocabulary to Lubunca; Matras (2002 as cited by Kontovas, 2012) explains, Romani is often adopted by marginalized elements within the ethnolinguistic majority because of the identification of Roma as “successful conspirators against social order” (p. 249).

One important characteristic of Lubunca is that speakers of Lubunca do not usually employ a phonology that differs significantly from Turkish phonology, which means that loanwords from languages with non-Turkish-like phonology into Lubunca are adapted accordingly. Additionally, the basic morphology of Lubunca does not differ extensively from spoken varieties of Istanbul Turkish; however, it does exhibit a number of segments which are not usual in other varieties of Turkish. For example, the suffix -oş, often attached to or replacing the endings of other nouns and names, e.g., Mehmet (male name in Turkish) gets the suffix – oş and becomes Memoş (Kontovas, 2012).

As a result of Lubunca being more popularly used by the LGBTQ community and the members of the mainstream/social media, a more contemporary approach needs to be taken so as to look into how Lubunca is embedded in conversations today by popular LGBTQ persons on Social media. Examining famous queer YouTubers’ integration of Lubunca into their speech for identity and visibility purposes would also reveal the changing nature of Lubunca.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **3.1 Overview**

In studying linguistic variation in different speech communities, Eckert (2012) considers the second wave of studying sociolinguistic variation to be centered around ethnographic analysis. Ethnographic research relies heavily on observation. Therefore, this study will combine qualitative research methodology, the aim of which is to “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3), with ethnographic analysis which rely on observation. Since this thesis collects data from a digital platform, YouTube, digital ethnography (Androutsopoulos, 2011) is employed to analyze the informant<sup>1</sup>'s linguistic behaviors facilitating a flexible approach that accounts for novel and developing phenomena (Boellstorff, 2013). Given the internet is a cultural space that encourages diverse interactions, digital ethnography is an appropriate methodology in extracting insights when searching the rich existence of cultural life and self-representation.

YouTube has been chosen for data analysis for several reasons; (1) YouTube has become an open platform that creates relevant contexts for identity construction by allowing the possibility for viewers to interlink and to establish relationships with their equals (Pérez-Torres et al., 2018 cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011); (2) YouTube is a free space, which means anyone can broadcast any content as long as it does not violate community guidelines. This freedom of content creation,

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<sup>1</sup> Informant is chosen over the word “participant” here because the selected youtubers do not actively participate in this study.

especially by LGBTQ youtubers, has founded a space for cultural production (Fink & Miller, 2013) that traditional media does not offer. Raun (2014) in his analysis on transgender vlogs, illustrates that the camera serves as an external interlocutor, “a companion you can trust and tell everything,” indicating a feeling of liberation derived from intimate connections that are enabled by technology (p.165).

Briefly, it is necessary to acknowledge my positionality in relation to the project and the informants. I am an active advocate for the LGBTQ community in Turkey and am ally in their struggle for recognition, equal status, and equal rights. As a researcher, I carefully watched each YouTube video of each informant and gained as much knowledge about each informant and the LGBTQ community as possible. It was important for me and for this project to become familiar with the informants and the community in order to provide respectful and appropriate interpretation of the data. It is my hope that this thesis and my research will contribute positively to the Turkish LGBTQ community.

In the following section, I will first discuss the methodological orientation of this research and later introduce the concept of YouTube for research purposes and review the research ethics. After covering the broad terms and concepts. I will give clarification to a few definitions that are used in the research process, e.g., YouTube celebrity. And lastly, I will talk about the video selection and the data collection processes before moving to the results and discussion section.

### **3.2 Methodological Orientation**

To meet the study's aims, I turn to a combination of methods and approaches to language study; supported by digital ethnography and the theory of indexicality, computer-mediated discourse analysis is applied as the main approach to elucidate how categories of sexuality and identity are forged in and through discourse.

### ***3.2.1 Computer-mediated Discourse Analysis***

Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) is an approach that researches online interactive behavior. In the broadest sense, CMDA encompasses any analysis of “online behavior that is grounded in empirical, textual observations” (Herring, 2004, p.2). Since CMDA provides a set of theoretical lenses to make observations and interpret the results of empirical analysis (Herring, 2004), it fits with the purpose of this study in analyzing YouTube data. This specific approach to computer-mediated discourse analysis is informed by a linguistic perspective. That is, as Herring (2004) puts it, CMDA interprets online behavior through the lens of language, and its understandings are grounded in observations about language and language use (Herring, 2004). CMDA has been selected as the main/overarching approach in this study because it is flexible and can be supplemented by surveys, ethnographic observation, or any other methods. CMDA could either be qualitative or quantitative; however, what lies at its core is the analysis of logs of verbal interaction (Herring, 2004).

In addition, CMDA can be used to study any linguistic phenomena including lexical choice, sentence structure, and language mixing. To simply put, CMDA is applied to analyze any language content that occurs through a digital medium because content analysis is the basic methodological device of the approach. Lastly, CMDA works well to analyze a virtual community, which, in this study, is the LGBTQ vloggers in Turkey. CMDA works well to seek answers to both research questions of this thesis because through discourse analysis the linguistic variables could be detected in indexing sexuality and the code-mixing practices could be analyzed on a lexical and sentential level.

### ***3.2.2 Digital Ethnography***

To support CMDA, digital ethnography (Androutsopoulos, 2011) was employed to analyze the informant's linguistic behaviors through the help of observations. Broadly, ethnography as an approach is methodologically flexible and adaptive. It does not confine itself to specific procedures or fit in a rigid framework. Since there is a lack of pre-existing online discourse research in Turkey, digital ethnography gives the researcher room to explore any methodological possibilities to seek answers to the research questions. Digital ethnography is a method of “representing real-life cultures through combining the characteristic features of digital media with the elements of story” (Underberg & Zorn, 2013, p. 10). For example, virtual worlds on digital platforms, like YouTube, are an example of cultural realities “existing in the online sphere that are worthy of ethnographic insight” (Kaur-gill & Dutta, 2017, p.2). Therefore, digital ethnography is an approach for fostering understandings of meanings and cultural experiences that enable and are enabled by the digital medium (Hine, 2000).

YouTube data consists of hints about the informants' lives and their upbringings, and because digital ethnography as an approach is considered to be insightful when investigating about the cultural life and representation on digital platforms, its application in this research is particularly valid. Moreover, Hine (2002) describes the internet as “culture and cultural artefact” (cited in Kaur-gill & Dutta, 2017, p.3) and a space where any sort of social interaction may occur. Therefore, it validates the effectiveness of doing ethnography. To make sense of identity constructions online, and building online personas on digital mediums, ethnography analysis plays a vital role (Kaur-gill & Dutta, 2017).

### *3.2.3 The Theory of Indexicality*

The theory of indexicality is the last approach that is employed to support CMDA in this research. The first reason is that the studies that explore indexicality typically focus on the basic question of how speakers use language to “help activate social personae” that are visible (Queen, 2007, p.13). Since I examine the linguistic markers that might index sexual identity and a digital persona, the focus of the theory of indexicality fits with the purpose of the first research question of this thesis. Foulkes (2006) dictates that indexicality is the phenomenon of a sign pointing to some object in the context in which it occurs. Indexical features in speech are those aspects of linguistic structure that correlate with non-linguistic factors. These factors include cross-speaker differences in gender, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, group affiliations, regional background, and individual identity (Foulkes, 2006).

Another reason I apply the theory of indexicality as an approach is because the current study consists of the analysis of the use of a gay slang variety in identity construction.

“The social meaning of “slang” cannot be read off directly from its semantics or the demographic distribution of its use. Instead, like all linguistic resources, slang gains its semiotic value only within the sociocultural context in which it is used. Indexicality is, therefore, a fundamental concept in understanding how slang-or indeed any linguistic form-comes to be associated with gender and other social categories” (Bucholtz, 2002 cited in Jaffe, 2009, p.5).

Through applying CMDA as the overarching approach, the study is supported by two other approaches: digital ethnography and the theory of indexicality. Digital ethnography helps to explore the identity construction in the analysis of code-switching practices of the vloggers in their

digital platforms through observations of the informants. With the use of the theory of indexicality, the study examines the linguistic variables and their roles in indexing sexuality.

### **3.3 YouTube**

YouTube is a video-sharing website that was founded in 2005. By November 2007, it was already the most popular entertainment website globally (Burgess & Green, 2009) and was bought by Google in 2006 for 1.65 billion USD. It is a video platform allowing its users to watch or upload videos, share content, subscribe to channels, and comment. YouTube became the largest and the most popular user-generated content video system worldwide (Cha et al., 2007). Its slogan “broadcast yourself” has created a new phenomenon: YouTube celebrity, which has come to the foreground of popular culture.

#### ***3.3.1 YouTube for Research Purposes***

YouTube has been chosen for data analysis for several reasons. YouTube has become an open platform that creates relevant contexts for identity construction by allowing the possibility for viewers to interlink and to establish relationships with their equals (Pérez-Torres et al., 2018). YouTube is a free space, which means anyone can broadcast appropriate content. This freedom of content creation, especially by LGBTQ youtubers, has enabled the foundation of a space for cultural production (Fink & Miller, 2013) that traditional media (press and television) does not offer. YouTube liberated the voice of the queer community through building an intimate connection.

#### ***3.3.2 Defining YouTube Celebrity***

A YouTube celebrity is an individual whose fame stems directly from their activities on the site. The archetypal YouTube celebrity text is the video blog or vlog. Most conventionally, vlogs involve an individual in a setting, talking into a stagnant camera. The topics range from humorous

anecdotes from the vloggers' day-to-day lives to highly personal and emotional revelations. In these vlogs, the video creators present themselves to the public on YouTube, and these vlogs serve one's self-presentation. Vlogs are shared in exchange for quantifiable signifiers of popularity: video views, subscribers, comments, thumbs up, and shares to other digital platforms, which in turn can be translated into "celebrity status and monetary gain" (Burgess & Green, 2009 as cited in Lovelock, 2017, p. 89).

Globally, LGBTQ+ vloggers have become highly visible due to providing real-life simulation (Lovelock, 2017). According to Gay Times magazine, in the U.S., the most popular YouTube personalities are almost completely LGBTQ youtubers like Tyler Oakley, Connor Franta and Ingrid Nilsen (Lovelock, 2017). Turkey also seems to be catching up with this trend because one of the most famous vloggers in Turkey is a queer youtuber who has 647.000 subscribers with over 3 million views per video.

### **3.4 Ethics**

Per the definition used by The Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) that offers a guide for the institutional review board (IRB), no human participants were included in the study. The research project fell under the 45 CFR, the category of research work that is exempt from IRB review as it involves "the collection or study of existing data . . . if these sources are publicly available" (OHRP, 2018, p.24). Given these circumstances, the use of publicly available information should not pose an ethical dilemma. Furthermore, YouTube's privacy standards alert users through Google (YouTube's parent company) for an agreement to use and protect personal information. It does not impose restrictions on how individuals within or outside of the platform may use the data made available via the platform. YouTube's (2020) "Community Guidelines" establish ground rules to keep the YouTube community protected. More importantly, every person

who joins YouTube is required to review and agree on the guidelines. The copyright agreements were examined to see if there was any limitation from YouTube to conduct the research. The policy dictates if the data falls under “fair use”. Different countries have different rules about when it’s okay to use material without the copyright owner’s permission, it does not violate the community guideline. For instance, in the United States, works of commentary, criticism, research, teaching, or news reporting can be considered fair use (YouTube, 2020).

### **3.5 The Video Selection Process**

Nine YouTube channels were identified for potential inclusion based on extensive research through YouTube and Turkey’s only queer magazine, *Gzonemag*. Comprehensive analysis was required because while some of the youtubers have directly declared their sexual identity on their digital platforms, the others have not, instead they chose to disclose their sexuality via other mediums, such as interviews or comments. Pseudonyms are used for each informant. It is also important to note that I will be using the pronoun “they<sup>2</sup>” for each of the informants because Turkish is a gender-neutral language and none of the informants have commented on their pronoun preferences in English.

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<sup>2</sup> Turkish is a gender-neutral language, which means that there is only one pronoun “o” for he/she/it pronouns in English.

**Table 1**

*Sample Analyzed Channels \* Number of Followers on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2020*

YouTube Name	Number of Subscribers*	Most Viewed Video
Deniz	676K	4.2M
Devrim	235K	3.6M
Su	96.3K	768K
Toprak	64.1K	386K
Evren	60K	698K
Simu	30.4K	355K
Ay	9.19K	8.6K
Berk	5.96K	331K
Anil	2.28K	1.7K

According to Burgess and Green (2009), youtuber's influence can be measured by the number of subscribers and the number of video views on their channel. As such, the list has been filtered for youtubers with 50k and above subscribers, resulting in the 5 youtubers below.

**Table 2***Final List of Channels. \* Number of Followers on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2020*

YouTube Name	Number of Subscribers	Most Viewed Video
Deniz	676K	4.2 M
Devrim	235K	3.6 M
Su	96.3K	768k
Toprak	64.1K	386K
Evren	60K	698K

The selected videos have been included in the “Popular Videos” playlist, given that they are the most viewed by the channel's audience. The selected videos from each channel were the most viewed video and the most recent one. Some of the most viewed videos date back to 2018-2017; therefore, I also analyze the most recent video of each youtuber. It is important to include data from a recent video, given that identity construction is dynamic and continuously negotiated, which means it could be subject to change. The final corpus consisted of a total of 10 videos with two videos from each selected channel. The videos have been transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. It should be noted that each video is approximately 20 minutes. Before moving forwards, I will provide a brief description of the informants.

***Deniz***

Deniz is a 26-year-old former make-up artist. They become famous through sharing make-up videos on Snapchat and Periscope in 2015. After gaining fame, they started working as a DJ at beach clubs in Turkey and became even more famous. They have over 3 million followers on Instagram. Deniz is best friends with Evren and they together have many vlogs. Deniz shares

weekly vlogs on their channel about travelling, cooking etc. Deniz often mentions their admiration for the Kardashians and Beyonce. Deniz also look up to Hollywood lifestyle, which they often talk about in their vlogs.

### ***Devrim***

Devrim is a 21-year-old Vlogger, whose most viewed video details their story of being disowned by their father after they came out as gay. They claim to be the first male make-up vlogger in Turkey with 235K subscribers. Devrim shares make-up videos as well as daily or weekly vlogs. They generally discuss how his family is very conservative and follows Turkish customs and traditions. Their word choices and the topics Devrim covers in their vlogs reflect a more traditional and a conservative persona. Devrim now owns a nail spa.

### **Su**

Su is a 19-year-old youtuber from Istanbul. Su became popular after being a trending topic on Twitter due to the comments they made on certain subjects in their YouTube channel. Su is studying film studies at one of the most prestigious universities in Turkey. They are mostly known for their twerk, a dance or dance move involving thrusting hip movements and a low, squatting stance, videos. Su claims to be a poet since the age of 10 and often shares their poems in various magazines in Turkey. Su generally shares their memories of high schools and talks about relationship drama and break-ups. Su's youTube channel mostly revolve around topics, such as talking about a memory or ranting session for an ex-boyfriend.

### **Toprak**

Toprak is a 20-year-old make-up youtuber from Istanbul. Toprak has become popular with their make-up videos and their fight with Devrim online. Toprak and Devrim were best friends prior to their YouTube careers. Toprak jokingly claims they taught Devrim everything about make-up and

that Devrim stole Toprak's vlog ideas. Similar to Devrim, they generally discuss how their family is very conservative and lives up to Turkish customs and traditions. The same linguistics choices are observed in Toprak's speech as well. Toprak started their channel with only sharing make-up videos, but they now share videos of them talking about memories and conflicts with other people. Although Toprak and Devrim started YouTube together with the same niche, Toprak, based on audience, is not as popular as Devrim.

### **Evren**

Evren is a 28-year-old vlogger and a social media personality. Evren has a different channel concept than the rest of the informants. They meet with one of their subscribers each week that has been randomly selected and promises a make-over. Evren takes the selected subscriber to the hairdresser, skin care specialist and a stylist, then films the entire process for their channel. Evren has become extremely popular due their friendship with Deniz. They have gone through multiple plastic surgeries to look like the barbie doll figure Ken. Evren is considered as the "Ken Doll" of Turkey due to their resemblance.

### **3.7 Data Collection**

As I identified the videos for the final collection, I created a database of their hyperlinks. Documentation and data collection processes have two main steps: transcribing the speech and transcribing it into the phonetic alphabet. As the next step in the data collection process, I transcribed the portions of the videos that included translanguaging in English and Lubunca. The first round of transcription consists of data with translingual practices. It is important to note that YouTube offers transcripts for several languages, which means transcripts of the videos only a click away. However, Turkish transcripts are not available for the target vlogs for this study. For the second round of transcription, I transcribed the parts of the speech in which I found a different

deployment of a particular phonetic sound. Based on the auditory observation, I identified common phonetic variables of the informants; slightly rounded flapping [ɾ], aspirated /s/, and the prolonging of the vowels /o/, /ö/, /a/, /i/ including the hyper-articulation of /yor/.

Using Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 2017), I perform acoustic phonetic analysis of informants' wordlist tokens of /s/, /o/, /ö/, /i/. Tokens that included selected vowels were labeled in a TextGrid. Measurements were taken using LPC formant tracking at the midpoint of vowels (with a maximum formant value set at 5000 Hz, and the number of formants set at 5 Hz). The script records the first and second formants; the maximum, minimum, and mean f0 for the hyper-articulation; and the duration of the vowel. First, I measure the duration of a few selected words from each informant containing the fricative /s/ in onset and medial as a variable because /s/ is aspirated heavily in both positions. I later look into the selected rounded vowels /o/ or /ö/ for the duration and /yor/ for hyperarticulation. The last phonetic variable identified in the acoustic analysis is rounding of sound "r", producing a slightly rounded [ɾ] instead of Turkish [r] sound. For clarity and practical purposes, I transcribed words that includes the sound [ɾ] into the phonetic transcription using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), the most widely used phonetic transcription standard in the world.

In the next section, I present the results of the analysis along with the discussion. I have divided the next section into two parts. The first part focuses solely on the sociophonetic variables, which also adds on the results of Kosaner & Sargin's (2016) study. The second part discusses code-mixing and its implications in identity construction.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The identification of gay-sounding speech arises from hearing a combination of specific lexicon and phonetic variables. The first part of the analysis will discuss the phonetic aspects, and the second part of the study will explore lexicon through code-mixing of the informants.

#### **4.1 Sociophonetic Variables**

Before moving forward, it is important to point out the reference point of the phonetic variables discussed in this section. As reviewed in Chapter 2, there are only two studies conducted on the sociophonetic variables of Turkish gay men. While Ay (2017) does not identify the phonetic variables of the participants, Kosaner & Sargin (2016), as a part of his research, provides a list of the variables that were considered gay sounding by the participants.

Therefore, with a very limited reference point, I identified the common phonetic variables of the five youtubers through audial analysis and compared them with their findings. The results roughly match: however, there is one more variable I detected while analyzing the data: the heavy aspiration of the voiceless fricative /s/. In this section, I will share the results of the Praat findings and discuss the most salient phonetic variables of the informants; pronunciation of [r] instead of [r], heavy aspiration of fricative /s/, exaggerated vowel lengthening and hyper articulation of -yor.

##### ***4.1.1 Vowel Lengthening***

One common linguistic feature all the informants share is vowel lengthening. This linguistic feature occurs in especially rounded vowels, such as o, ö, u, ü, but it can also be observed in unrounded vowels, as in a, i and ı. Vowel lengthening is almost always present in the -yor

(progressive) morpheme with a deletion of the sound /r/. Every informant lengthens the vowel /o/ in the morpheme -yor which is produced as [yo::], with an extra length and emphasis on the sound /o/. Informants seem to lengthen the vowel /o/ in order to compensate for the deletion of postvocalic /r/. It should be noted that the deletion of postvocalic /r/ is a common linguistic feature among Turkish speakers. However, when in syllable-final position, like in the progressive suffix -yor, no compulsory vowel lengthening occurs. (Wetzels & Sezer, 1986). For example, ‘gidiyor’ [he/she is going] would read as ‘gidiyo’ with no extra lengthening, which means that it is not necessary based on Turkish phonology. It can be understood from this example that exaggerated lengthening of vowels is a salient variable that can be observed among the informants.

Another linguistic feature that occurs in the suffix -yor is the hyper-articulation. Before further discussing how hyper-articulation occurs among the informants, it is important to describe what it entails. Hyper-articulation is the exaggeration of the speech sounds (Whalen et al., 2004) and through hyper-articulation phonetic, components become more distinct (De Jong et al., 1993). This linguistic phenomenon can be observed through expanded vowel space and lengthening. According to Aylett (2005), hyperarticulated items receive heavier stress and experience changes in fundamental frequency. Therefore, I also look at -yor morphemes within the vowel space and fundamental frequency on Praat.

**Table 3***F1 and F2 Formants and Duration*

Name	Vowel	F1	F2	Duration
Deniz	a	805	1596	1407 s
	o	590	865	1324 s
	i	325	2966	1450 s
Devrim	a	776	1544	1006 s
	o	546	798	1200 s
	i	341	2749	1302 s
Su	a	843	1580	1423 s
	o	510	843	1386 s
	i	303	2903	1567 s
Evren	a	795	1522	1416 s
	o	760	915	1324 s
	i	346	2430	1356 s
Toprak	a	797	1402	912 s
	o	503	793	946 s
	i	276	1988	1116 s

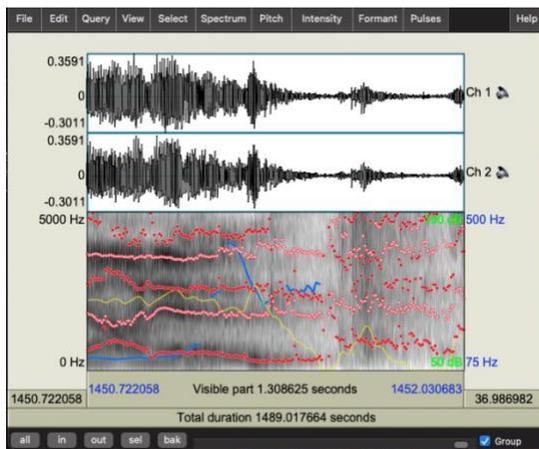
The format listings in Table 3 were identified by running the word “yani” for /a/ and /i/ vowels and the -yor morpheme for /o/ sound on Praat because analyzing /a/ and /i/ sounds through a shared word would provide more accurate results. The word “yani” means “i mean” in Turkish and can be used as a filler; therefore, this word was one of the most commonly used lexemes among the informants.

The sound /a/ in “yani” is an allophone that is considered as the long /a/ in Turkish. In one study, it was observed that while male participants produced this allophone in F1 700 and F2 1400 female participants produced the same allophone in F1 800 and F2 1600 (Davutoglu,

2010). To provide a clarification on what formants stand for; the first formant (F1) in vowels is related to vowel height, which means the higher the vowel, the lower the first formant would be. The second formant (F2) in vowels is related to degree of backness, which means the more front the vowel is, the higher the second formant is. In figure 1, it can be observed that F2 formant of /a/ sound of Deniz’s speech is high as 1569. If this study is taken as a reference point, the informants seem to have produced the allophone /a/ closer to female vowel formants. It seems likely that the speech patterns reflect learned employment of the phonetic space. Bent et al. (2004) find that gay, lesbian and bisexual speakers learn to “model learn the speech of opposite sex speakers in specific respects” (p.1908). Gay men display more expanded vowel spaces than the heterosexual participants (Bent et al., 2004), which indicates that prolonging of vowels is not unique to Turkish and was observed in American English, too.

**Figure 1**

*Sample Spectrogram of the Production /a/ and /i/*



*Note.* This spectrogram shows the pronunciation of the word “yani” produced by Deniz

The blue dots on the spectrogram represents the pitch, and it can be seen that the pitch sees a peak in the production of /a/ sound in “yani”, then experiences a decrease towards the end. The last part of the spectrogram, which is the /i/ sound, looks like a linear line with short sound

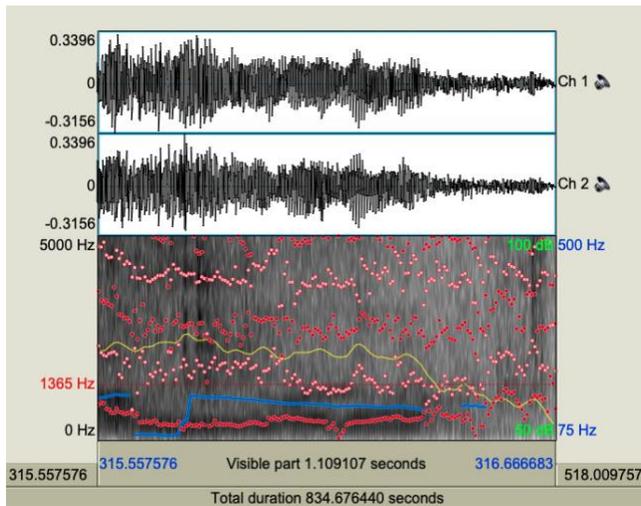
waves. Through Praat, without even measuring the formants, the length of the vowel can be observed by simply looking at the spectrogram.

In American English, the F2 formant for the sound /æ/ is around 1660 whereas F2 formant for /a/ is around 1100. This indicates that although there is no /æ/ sound in Turkish, the production of /a/ sound in “yani” is closer to the production of /æ/ sound in American English.

Additionally, almost all the informants share similar duration with F1 and F2 formant measurements, except Toprak. While the vowel lengthening and hyper-articulation can be audially observed in Toprak’s speech, when analyzed in Praat, the extent of the prolonging and the articulation is not as salient and distinct as the other informants. The F1 and F2 formants of Toprak’s speech are closer to male speech formants provided in Davutoglu’s study (2010).

**Figure 2**

*The Spectrogram of Hyper-articulation of -yor*



*Note.* Hyper-articulation of -yor morpheme produced by Evren.

In figure 2, hyper-articulation can be observed in Evren’s speech through pitch and intensity measurements. The pitch range is F0 167.67 on the lengthened vowel. Changes in the loudness are also linked to hyper-articulation, and the yellow line represents intensity which accounts for the loudness of the speaker. It can be observed that with the rising pitch (blue line), the intensity (yellow line) also rises, which signals hyper-articulation. Another rampant

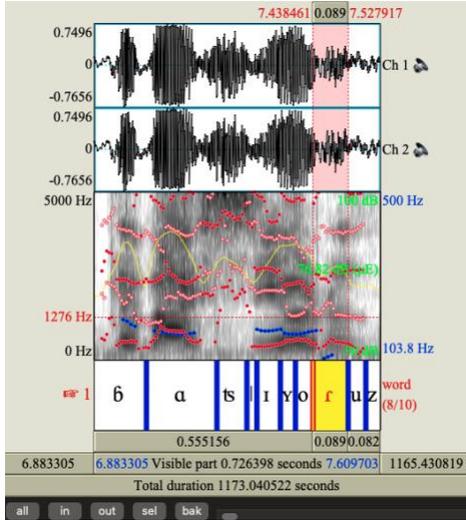
component of hyperarticulated speech is vowel lengthening. The lengthening of /o/ can also be observed in the spectrogram with longer sound waves. It is also important to look into the context hyper-articulation was observed because hyper-articulation can be used for several reasons; 1) to signal new information (Aylett, 2005), 2) to eradicate previously assumed confusion (Whalen et al., 2004), 3) to index something important or serious (De Jong et al., 1993). However, none of these reasonings were present in any of these contexts where Praat analysis was used, which points out informants employ hyper-articulation as a means to express their dispositions.

#### ***4.1.2 Production of [ɾ] Instead of [r] Sound***

Each informant uttered the word “gerçekten” [really] in their YouTube videos at least once. After a thorough audial analysis, it can be observed that each of the informants has produced the /ɾ/ sound in a slightly more rounded manner. The IPA transcription reads as follow, /gɛɾʃɛkten/ rather than /gɛɾʃɛkten/ with a Turkish /ɾ/ sound. The informants produce a flapped /ɾ/ with a slight roll. It is important to mention that the sound produced by the informants is not as rolled as the North American English /ɹ/.

**Figure 3**

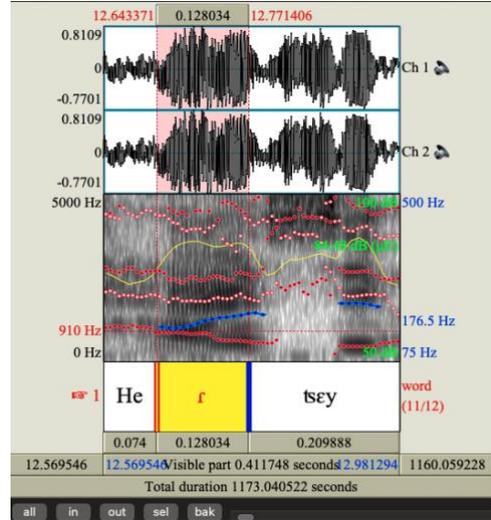
*Spectrogram of Syllable-initial /r/*



*Note.* Başlıyoruz [we are starting] produced by Evren

**Figure 4**

*Spectrogram of Syllable-final /r/*

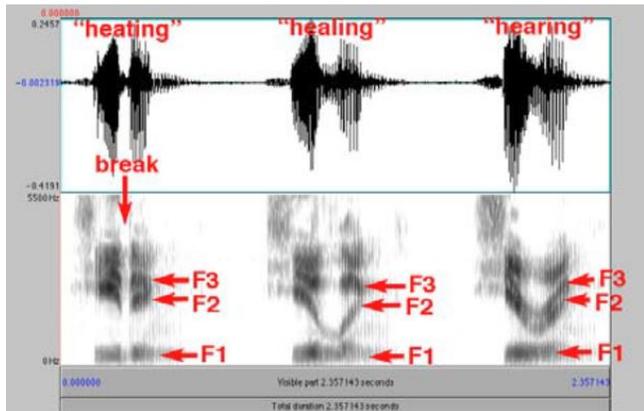


*Note.* Her şey [everything] produced by Devrim

Two spectrograms are provided here as an example because the production of the /r/ sound was similar among the informants with no exceptions. The duration of the sound /r/ would differ in seconds, but the articulation types, which can be observed in the waveforms, are the same. The duration of the /r/ sound in Figure 3 is 0.089 seconds and 0.128034 in Figure 4. As can be seen from both figures, there is no break in the waveform which occurs due to the tongue stopping the airflow in Turkish /r/. Wilson (2008) notes that the letter “r” in the word heating is pronounced as /r/ in North American English, and this corresponds to the articulation and the production of “Japanese R”, which is the equivalent of Turkish R.

## Figure 5

### *Formant Differences in /r/, /l/ and /ɹ/*



*Note.* This figure has been adopted from Wilson (2008)

As can be seen in Figure 5 adopted from Wilson (2008), it can be noticed that in the waveform, there is a break where the tongue stops the airflow in the production of /r/. When three figures are compared based on the shapes of the waveforms, it can be observed that /r/ sound in Evren and Devrim's speech do not have the break and looks more like the rolled /ɹ/ as in 'hearing' in Figure 5. The sound /ɹ/ in NAE is articulated while the tongue tip is curved up towards roof of the fronto-palatal region of the mouth whereas Turkish /r/ is articulated when the top of the tongue taps the alveolar ridge with a brief interruption of airflow. It is important to add that it is not common for Turkish speakers to produce a rolled /r/ sound. For example, in a study conducted in Turkey, 88.8% of the PhD students had problems in the pronunciation of /ɹ/ in North American English (NAE). Only 5 of the 45 participants could articulate the /ɹ/ phoneme in the correct form because that they hold an MA degree from USA universities (Demirezen, 2012a).

Informants might produce a more rolled /r/ because of the influence of American culture and how they might connect American culture and therefore English to modernization. English language and the English sounds have become the symbol of modernity, wealth, social class and westernization. Being gay in Turkey is sometimes referred as a deficiency or a kind of

degeneration as a result of the westernization. Therefore, it is often believed that westernization and modernization of the Turkish society result in such “behavior” which is not approved or supported. English being seen as the representation of the modernity seems to be connected to the pronunciation of a more rolled /r/. The production of rolled /r/ could stem from the urge of resistance through the imitation of NAE /r/ or it could also be the admiration of the west in enacting a ‘cool’ persona.

Another reason could be the imitation or borrowing of Tikice (the Tiki way of speaking) since Tikice is often “popularly believed to have been influenced by the speech of Turks who have spent time in America or are obsessed with aspects of American culture” (Kontovas, 2012, p.35). One of the most popular tv shows (Avrupa Yakası) in Turkey portrayed a tiki girl as one of the leading characters in the beginning of the 2000s. When I examine how she was portrayed phonologically to get better grasp of the phonological and phonetic similarities between Tikice and Turkish gay speech, I found the sound rolled /r/ is always present in her speech, and she is portrayed as a young woman who has lived in Europe and U.S. There is currently no study that looks into the phonetic features of Tikice. For this reason, I can only draw assumptions based on my own observations. I will discuss the connection between Tikice and Turkish gay speech patterns in more detail later in the section.

#### ***4.1.3 The Duration of the Voiceless Fricative /s/ and /ʃ/***

Until this point, the two variables mentioned above have been also listed as what sounds gay in Turkish by Kosaner & Sargin (2016). However, the duration of /s/ as a linguistic variable in Turkish has never been brought to attention. Deriving from the popular stereotype of a gay man's lisp, several studies have demonstrated the correlation between the acoustic features of sibilants in an individual's speech and the perception of sexual identity (e.g., Linville 1998 and Levon, 2007).

In other words, sounding gay in English has been significantly associated with higher peak /s/ frequency and longer /s/ duration values.

Stereotypical lisps use an interdental /s/ which is also eminent in English (Crist, 1997; Mack, 2010). Lising can be realized in the durations of aspiration of /s/. I look at both the onset and syllable-final /s/ or /ʃ/ as a variable because based on the audial observation, they are both aspirated heavily. For example, previous investigations (Linville, 1998; Mack & Munson, 2012) showed that the word-final /s/ was used as the distinguishing factor between gay and heterosexual speakers in NAE. The reason why the duration of /s/ has not been identified as a ‘gay-sounding’ variable in Turkey could stem from other variables being more salient and more affirming. However, when we look at the duration and the peak frequency, it can be observed that 4 of the 5 informants produce a longer variant of /s/ in syllable-initial and final positions. However, Toprak has relatively shorter /s/ durations compared to other informants, although the friction of /s/ is still salient in an audial observation.

**Table 4**

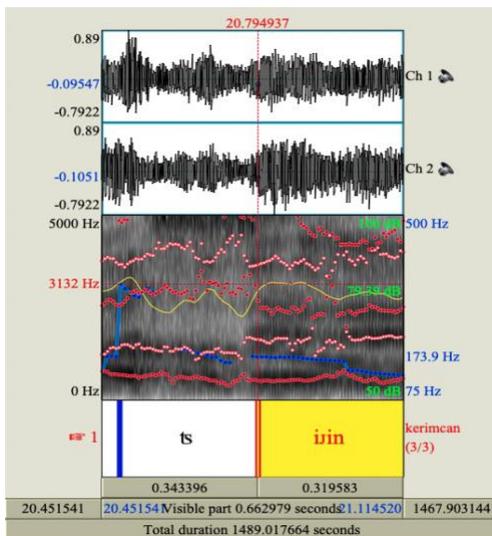
*Duration Times of /s/ or /ʃ/ in Syllable-final and Initial Positions*

Name	Duration of /s/ or /ʃ/	
	syllable-initial	Syllable-final
Deniz	0.343396	0.324751
Devrim	0.387325	0.213748
Su	0.365478	0.197356
Evren	0.3402871	0.276792
Toprak	0.215647	0.114199

As can be seen in Table 4, the duration times of syllable-initial /s/ is longer than the syllable-final /s/. This could be due to producing a higher pitch in syllable-initial forms. When we look at the two waveforms below, it can be observed that the syllable-initial /ts/ is higher in pitch (3132 Hz) than the syllable-final /ts/ (1223 Hz). This does not fit in the stress rule of Turkish because Şirin (produced word) is a female name, and in Turkish, and special names receive stress on the last syllable. This is consistent with Maniwa, Jongman, and Wade's (2009) and Mack and Munson's (2012) finding that /s/ tokens are intentionally hyper-articulated; therefore, they have a higher peak frequency. Previous studies also show that gay men produce /s/ with a higher frequency. When the stress rule and the previous studies in NAE is considered, the same argument seems to be accurate for Turkish gay speakers, too. In fact, these previous findings in NAE seem to be consistent with the current results.

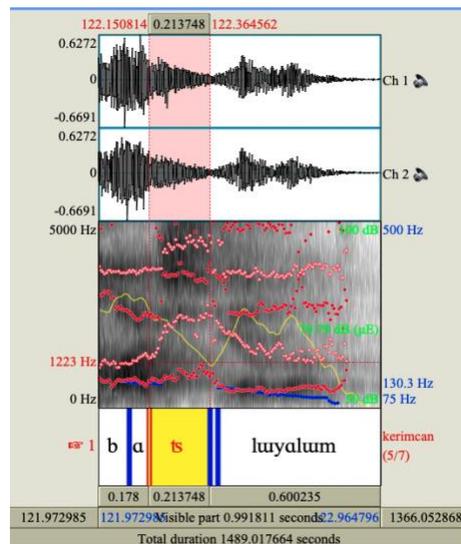
**Figure 6**

*Duration of /ts/ in Onset Position*



**Figure 7**

*Duration of /ts/ in Syllable-Final*



As can be observed in Figure 6, syllable-initial /ts/ sound duration is even longer than the rest of the word. It is also longer than the /ts/ sound in syllable-final position. In NAE, it has been observed that the acoustic features of /s/ differ between men and women. Schwarts (1968) also mentioned that listeners can accurately judge a speaker's sex by only listening to the isolated voiceless fricatives. Unfortunately, it is not possible to know whether the production of /s/ sound differs among Turkish speakers based on sex. However, exaggerated aspiration of /s/ and /ʃ/ (voiceless fricatives) is a distinct phonological feature of Tiki Turkish.

It can be observed that Tiki speech shares the same phonetic features with the informants in this study. Tiki girl concept emerged in the beginning of 2000s in Turkey. Although its popularity faded away, it is important to talk about the speech patterns of a typical tiki girl since most of the findings match with the linguistic variables of Tiki speech.

A typical tiki woman is a white-collar worker in her twenties or early thirties and comes from the upper-class. As mentioned before, Tikice seems to display the same phonological features as the gay speech. While there is no formal evidence to support these claims, a famous columnist in Turkey wrote about these phonological features in his column in one of the most popular newspapers in Turkey (Aytug, 2009). In the article, he complains about this variation, which he calls the Tiki Turkish, by saying that the Turkish youth speaks a different language; instead of “e,” they produce a sound between /a/ and /e/ (which is a similar sound to /æ/ in NAE), exaggerated aspiration of /s/ and /ʃ/ (voiceless fricatives), and elongation of back vowels. These phonetic variables are also observed in the informants’ speech in this study. The cooccurrence of the above features in Tiki and gay speech could derive from borrowing, cross-borrowing or imitation among speakers of both varieties of certain features of American English. Zwicky (1997) argues that gay speech patterns may be learned as a special speech register for the gay culture. He continues by

saying this learning could start when people came to identify with a LGBTQ peer group. This could be the reason that five of the informants produce the same variables as salient. Whether Turkish gay speech is affected by the Tiki dialect or the American culture itself is unknown. However, one guess would be that Tiki dialect has emerged in 2000s, and gay speech has been around since 1980s. Since there is no documentation of the dialect, it might be possible to seek an answer to this question through looking into old Turkish movies with LGBTQ characters and analyze their speech patterns.

Additionally, Tiki speech could be considered as an equivalent of the valley girl speech in American English. Valley girl speaker stereotype is generally depicted as white, young females from the upper-class (Ploschnitzki, n.d.), which resembles the typical stereotype of a tiki girl in Turkey. This clarification is needed because valley girl speech is tied to California and shares similar linguistic features with the California Vowel Shift (CVS). There has been a number of studies that demonstrated a connection between certain type of identities and the features of the California Vowel Shift, such as gang membership (Fought 1999, Mendoza-Denton 2008 as cited in Eckert, 2008) or the “drama queen” persona (Eckert, 2008). The most recent, Podesva (2011), explored the connection between CVS and gay identity and found that CV indexes a set of social meanings like laid back and fun. These meanings are linked to the stereotypical character types, such as valley girl or surfer dude. He argues that “the CVS indexes ‘fun’ and ‘laid-back’ meanings that derive from stereotypical California character types (valley girl, surfer, stoner, slacker), whose circulation led to the enregisterment of Californian ways of speaking” (Podesva, 2011, p.11). Additionally, he finds that CVS is deployed to construct a “partier” gay persona. Just like Podesva’s informant, Deniz, in particular, indexes a ‘partier’ persona through employing the same linguistic features of a stereotypical tiki girl.

## 4.2 Code-Mixing

Code-mixing indexes different types of social membership beyond the memberships indexed by the monolingual varieties involved (Auer, 2005). To better understand this approach to language and identity, we need some background information. To provide accurate analysis, I will discuss some background information about the informants based on observations gained from reading their biographies and watching their videos.

### Deniz

Deniz is the first social media influencer that deployed Lubunca in his social media account in Turkey. His attitude and the integration of Lubunca words in his speech caught the attention of millions and started a queer movement. In the summer of 2016, Deniz cemented the Lubunca saying, “Ablan star bebeğim,” that has become so popular that they trademarked the phrase. In an interview, a trans activist addresses this popularity and its relation to Lubunca; they explains that in Lubunca, *Abla* directly translates as “a feminine old gay person” although in Turkish it means “older sister” (Magid, 2017). Before Deniz and the advent of YouTube and Instagram, Lubunca was primarily used among LGBTQ sex workers, particularly transgender women. In the interview, a transgender activist explains; “Lubunca was born to urgent need,” and “It was created by transgender women” (p.2). Clearly, Deniz started a wave in social media that Lubunca no longer retains its secrecy while being reclaimed for fun and visibility.

Deniz deploys Lubunca and English most frequently compared to other LGBTQ youtubers (17 Lubunca and 36 English words in an approximately 20-minute-long vlogs). They does not only insert Lubunca and English in their speech, but they also integrates the two in written communications. The explanation section of their YouTube videos always starts with the salute “Hi, Bitches”;

(1) Hi Bitches! Bu videomda Los Angeles'ta araba nasıl yıkanır size gösteriyorum(!)

(Hi Bitches! In this video, I will show you how to wash a car.)

Deniz starts with “Hi, Bitches,” then continues explaining what the video content is in Turkish. Below, you will see an example of code-mixing between English and Turkish. This particular extract has been chosen because Deniz uses “by the way” and “whatever” frequently in their speech.

(1) Saat akşam 6 ve ben daha kahvaltı etmedim, yemin ediyorum, I swear the god by the way, ve açlıktan oluyorum. Ondan sonra naparız hiç bi fikrim yok, ondan sonrasına bakıcaz. See you later alligator or whatever.

(It's is 6 pm and I haven't even had breakfast yet, I swear. I swear the God by the way, and I am starving. I have no idea what we will do later, we will see. See you later alligator or whatever.)

Additionally, Deniz deploys California Vowel Shift (CVS) while using English words. Podesva (2011), in his study of vowel variation in the speech of one gay man from California, discusses the set of social meanings indexed by the CVS in his gay “partier” persona. A similar situation is also present in Deniz's case. Deniz construes a partier persona through the usage of English words using CVS, which indexes them being “fun” and “laid back” and has its roots in the stereotypical character types, such as valley girl. As we can also infer from Deniz's code-mixing that these meanings can be used in constructing particular varieties of gay identity. Using certain words (*e.g. bitch, whatever, by the way*) might also mean some kind of an interpretation of how a valley girl should sound.

(2) Ama biz ilk olarak Beyonce'nin evine gidicez. Ondan sonra, inanılmaz bir dünya:.  
Düşünsene:, Beyonce bizi görürmüş, Hi guys come here::.

(But we will first go to Beyonce's house. Then, it is an unbelievable world. Imagine,  
Beyonce sees us, Hi guys come here)

(3) Neyse **naş**ladık gittik Beyonce'lere!

(Anyway, we **naş**-ed we went to Beyonce's!)

[Lubunca words are written in bold.]

The Lubunca word *naş* is a word derived from Romani verb *nas* which means “go, get lost.”

Deniz deploys a past tense morpheme that exists in Turkish to adjust the Lubunca word into Turkish morphology. From a more constructivist point of view, Deniz's use of Lubunca could be considered a case of what Rampton (1995) calls crossing: the act of speaking a variety which is not “owned” by the speaker but rather “belongs” to a group which they cannot rightfully claim to be part of (as cited in Auer, 2005, p. 408).

The alternating use of Lubunca does not constitute a claim to membership in the trans community (by whom Lubunca was created and actively used) but rather, deploying Lubunca represents an index of not belonging to Turkey's societal norms, underpinned by the belief in heteronormativity. In particular, conceived to express the needs of a socially repressed group, Lubunca, as used by Deniz, reflects a form of humor; moreover, the camp performances (twerking constantly, excessive use of hand gestures and constantly flapping his hand fan) in their videos also reinforces Deniz's targeted identity.

(4) Böyle Deniz Los Angeles'a yerleşti, Los Angeles'a gitti falan gibi şeyler duyuyorum,  
bazı basit magazin sayfalarında. “basit,” by the way, keşke öyle bir şey olsa.

(I hear things like Deniz moved to Los Angeles from some of the cheap paparazzi accounts. [*magazin* means paparazzi media, it is a borrowed word in Turkish that has altered the meaning somehow] “cheap” by the way, I wish there was such thing).

(2) Nasıl buna bu kadar çözüm bulmuyorlar, çare bulmuyorlar böyle luxury bir şehirde inanılmaz, bence tek **madiligi** homeless insanlara yardım edilmemesi buranın; btw say hi guys, these bitches my friends from Istanbul by the way.

(I cannot understand how they don't find any solution to this in such a luxurious city. I think this is the only **madilik** (badness) thing: them (he is talking about the rich people in LA) not helping the homeless people. By the way, say hi guys, these bitches my friends from Istanbul by the way.)

*Madi* (it is used as a noun and an adjective) and *madilik* (the suffix -lik makes the word a noun) is a Lubunca word that means "badness" in its literal translation. It has derived from the Romani word *Matii* which is used as a swear word.

When Deniz interacts with his close friend (also close in age) Evren, the exchange of Lubunca words is evident. Interestingly, Evren does not use Lubunca in their YouTube videos; however, when interacting with Deniz, Evren enacts that part of his identity and deploys Lubunca words. This can be observed in immigrant situations in Europe or in the Americas, “where the ‘majority language’ is neutral with respect to ethnic belonging<sup>4</sup> and the ‘minority language’ is a potential symbolic carrier of ethnic (or other) self-identification” (Auer, 2005, p.405).

In Evren’s case, Lubunca is the symbolic carrier of other self-identification that is enacted only in interactions with Deniz. This explains the identity enactment is achieved through code-mixing. Another point worth mentioning, is that Evren predominantly uses English words in a fashion context.

Evren (in his video with Deniz):

(3) Transparan bir tricot, Turkuaz bir jean, clutch çanta. Bunun link’ini koymak ister misin? belki almak isteyen olur?

(Transparent tricot, Turquoise jean, a clutch bag, do you want to include the link for these?)

(5) 9 yıldır hep best friend'dik inanamıyorum. Biliyorsun, **but** [in interaction with Deniz.]

(We have been best friend for 9 years, you know. **But.**) [*But* is a Lubunca word meaning means “very”.]

This type of code mixing is present only in interactions with Deniz. Despite having vlogs with both Devrim (another YouTuber that will be discussed later) and Deniz, Evren does not demonstrate code-mixing between Lubunca and Turkish when conversing with Devrim. It can also be observed that Evren limits the use of English words when in conversation with Devrim. This highlights that the focus is on how speakers do group membership and social identities, not on who speakers are (Auer, 1998). Because “social identities here are achieved; they are what speakers ‘bring about’ in interaction rather than what analysts ‘bring along’ to the analysis” (Auer, 1998, p. 261).

Unlike Deniz, Devrim uses different varieties of resources, sometimes subtly, to negotiate their social identity to ascribe and resist group membership and sexual identities. It seems like Devrim avoids using any Lubunca words to disaffiliate himself with the “lubunya” persona and its associations while Deniz uses the word *lubunya*, a queer person, in his speech quite frequently when addressing their friends or themselves, affirming membership to *lubunyas*.

(6) Hiç bana korkuyorum falan deme lubunya. [ Deniz in his most viewed video to Evren]

(Don't tell me you are afraid, lubunya)

(7) Kız önüne bak lubunyana ferro!

(Watch out girl, you Lubunyo Ferro!) [“Lubunyo ferro” is a word play that resembles the name “Tiziano Ferro”, who is an Italian singer popular in Turkey. This is the first time I have encountered such word play with the word *lubunya*.]

While Deniz constantly portrays a Lubunya identity subtly or directly, Devrim seems to be avoiding any terms that index the Lubunya identity. To seek out answers for the possible reasons behind different word choices by different gay youtubers, it seems essential to explore language preferences. Language preference, in this case code-mixing between English-Turkish, Turkish-Lubunca, or all of them, “may be affected by political and ideological considerations” (Auer, 1984, p.306 as cited in Cashman, 2005). In addition, speakers may have “episodically based preferences related to their interlocutor’s roles or age” (Auer, 1984, p. 47) which explains the differences between the speech patterns of Devrim and Deniz, and clarifies the similarities Devrim and Su, another youtuber that will be discussed in the following parts. In this way, “language preference is a membership categorization device; it is a resource used by speakers to ascribe and accept or reject membership in groups, or ‘collections of things’, the negotiation of which constitutes practical social action” (Cashman, 2005, p. 307). Devrim and Deniz’s language choices show their membership indexation to different groups.

### **Devrim**

When Devrim’s Vlog discourse is analyzed within the frame of corpus analysis, it can be seen that Devrim uses words related to the religion of Islam more than other youtubers. In almost every three sentences they utters sentences like, “Allah inandırın”, (may god make you believe) “Allah’ıma bin şükürler olsun” (many thanks to god), “Allah’ın izniyle” (If god allows), “Allah’ın emri ve peygamberin kavliyle” (with the order of God and the words of the prophet). These word chunks are indexical signs, linguistic structures that point to aspects of the communicative context, such as social positionings. Specific linguistic forms can be ideologically associated with particular social identities indirectly by indexing interactional stances, like mitigation or assertiveness, that in turn index identities (Ochs, 1992). Moreover, these indirect indexicalities allow for the creation of

multiple indexical links to various linguistic forms, such as the integration of religious and traditional Turkish sayings. Devrim's case illustrates the sociopolitical force of ideologically constructed social boundaries that give symbolic meaning to linguistic practice.

In a comparison analysis, when looked into the corpus of Deniz and Evren, the use of such words can be barely seen in Devrim's speech (0 Lubunca words, 2 English words in approximately 20-minute-long vlogs). Without sidestepping from the main argument of my analyses, the reason I emphasize the word choices of the informants is that Devrim never uses any Lubunca words and rarely code-mixes between Turkish and English. In his YouTube channel, Devrim portrays a more traditional and conservative Turkish person. It is also important to note that Devrim's preference of greeting their subscribers is also in Turkish, "Merhaba, bebekler" (Hey, babies), differs from other Youtubers who prefer to code-mix between English and Turkish. Although gay slang varieties are known to "function as a bond among gays, signaling one's identification as a member of the gay community" (Stanley, 1974, p. 385), it can be seen that in this case several different ethnographic and demographic factors should also be considered. One explanation for this could be due to Lubunca's origins. With its deep-rooted connections to the trans sex industry, a group who have been dismissed from society and subject to discrimination, Devrim might be wishing to disassociate himself with the potential negative connotations of the language. Devrim seems to negatively affiliate Lubunca with a certain type of identity; therefore, they may try to index a non-membership to the group.

### *Su*

Su code-switches between English and Turkish in a similar way as Devrim (0 lubunca words, 18 English words in approximately 15-minute-long vlogs). One distinctive feature of his preference in the written language is that Su deploys code-switching along with stylistic

orthographic variation that represents an enregisterment of African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

(1) Hello Hello Helloğğğ GÖRLL Ben geldim Su 🍷 Bugün bana çok sorduğunuz soruları cevapladım.. Şimdiden Keyifli seyirler öptümüm byyyiiii 😊

(Hello hello hello(ğ) gurl, I came Su. Today I answered the frequently asked questions.. Enjoy the video. Kisses byiiii)

[This is a Q&A (Question and Answer) video that has been viewed the most.]

There are a few important linguistic innovations here. First, Su deploys vernacular phonological constraints in written language. For example, They adds the sound /ğ/ to the word “hello”, making it “helloğ” (hello::), to indicate the way he pronounces the word. The sound /ğ/ in Turkish is used for lengthening the vowel that comes before it. One common phonetic feature among the informants is that they tend to lengthen the round vowels with a disposition of the sound /ğ/, which is not a characteristic of Turkish phonetics. What differs Su from the others is his use of this particular orthographic style in his written language.

Another distinctive linguistic/orthographic feature is the use of ‘ö’. Su uses a certain type of written stylistic variation to substitute the equivalent sound of “u” in English with ‘ö’ in Turkish. Su utilizes the indexical potential of orthographic variation to deploy a style and personae. These observations suggest that Su is not attempting to accurately represent the systematicity of AAVE phonology, but rather they has stylistically appropriated the sound schwa /ə/ as /u/ as in “gurl” into Turkish phonology which has the equivalent sound of /u/ in Turkish phonetics as /ö/. AAVE features prominently in mainstream gay culture and form much of contemporary gay slang in the U.K (Illbury, 2019). There is no such study in Turkey; however, it is evident Su shadows AAVE with appropriation to Turkish phonetics to evoke a “sassy Black women” identity (Illbury, 2019,

p.4). These observations suggest that Su is not attempting to precisely represent the features of AAVE phonology, but rather they stylistically appropriates a subset of features from the variety with adjustment to Turkish phonology.

(2) ESKİ SEVGİLİMİN YENİ SEVGİLİSİ STALKLADIM | Aşırı Fake Love İçeriyor GörLL



(I stalked my ex-lover |It includes fake love gurl.)

Su inserts the same linguistic features here. They greets their subscribers with the same unique linguistic choice; “Hey, gör!” They also utilizes multi-model codes through inserting emojis and random capitalizations. In this example, the particular emoji of a peach “🍑” stands out because the peach represents buttocks. The previous studies show that the demonstration of nudity through a naked body image (Dovchin, 2019), as in the representation of a peach emoji, is common among gay men, driven by their desire to emphasize empowerment and self-verification through body importance and self-presentation (Lemke & Merz, 2018 as cited in Dovchin, 2019).

(3) Hello hello hello gurl, bugün bunu yapıyoruz just kidding just kidding.

(Hello, hello, hello gurl, this is what we are doing today, just kidding, just kidding.)

Su also deploys Turkish morphological features as seen in the following example:

(4) Görllerimle video cekiyoruz. Anyways, Gör!l!

(We are shooting with my gurls. Anyways, gurl!)

[The suffix -ler in Turkish is the plural -s in English and -im and -le are also bound morphemes that mean *my* and *with*.]

(5) Ağzım yandı bitch. .... Neyse arkadaşlar heart break yaşadım bunu gördüğümde.

(My mouth got burnt bitch... Anyway, friends I had a heart break when I saw this.)

Here we observe a multi-layered meaning making processes and multi-semioticity as in Dovchin’s (2019) case. As also discussed by Milani (2018) in queer linguistics, the interaction between the

verbal, the visual, and other semiotic modes, which are embedded within the discourse by the LGBTQ community, are important in identity negotiation.

The use of Lubunca is also very limited in Su's case. They barely uses Lubunca words but occasionally refers to people as "lubunya". However, one common feature is that Su and Devrim (also close in age) have multiple "mukbang" videos. Mukbang (먹방), [mo k bahng] is a Korean word coined from the Korean words "eating" (meokneun) and "broadcast" (bangsong). It is a Korean vlogger trend that rose to popularity in 2010. During a mukbang broadcast, hosts converse with viewers and express their pleasure, giving the impression that they are eating together (Dictionary.com). Consistent use of code-mixing of Mukbang videos can be observed in the same age group vloggers.

Su uses code-mixing in the Mukbang Video explanation:

(6) FANTEZİLER FETİŞLER BAŞIMA GELENLER 2 | Fileli Çoraplar Gruplar Neler Var Neler kamqwjma | MUKBANG

(Fantasies, fetishes and things that happened to me 2| Fishnet Stockings, threesome and more kamqwjma | Mukbang) [*Kamqwjma* resembles a random laugh in Turkish written slang.]

Devrim's most recent video as of November 28<sup>th</sup> is also a mukbang video.

(7) ÖYKÜ BERKAN İLE MUKBANG - OKULDA KAFA YEDİM!

(Mukbang with Oyku Berkan- I got punched at school!)

## **Toprak**

Lastly, Toprak, who is another male make-up vlogger, has numerous Mukbang videos. Their digital persona is quite similar to Devrim with respect to the linguistic choices and lexicon. Toprak also portrays the image of a traditional Turkish person; for example, they uses Turkish music in their videos, and mostly inserts religious and traditional sayings in their speech. This does

not necessarily mean that Toprak is religious; however, similar to Devrim's, Su's word choices imply a more conservative and traditional Turkish persona.

(1) Amin, Allah hepinizin sonunu hayır etsin.

(Amen, May Allah bless our path.)

(2) Omg, çok güzelmiş patates.

(Oh my god, fries are delicious.)

One interesting observation is that Toprak avoids curse words or slurs in their speech; instead, Toprak switches to English when they uses a curse word. Other than slurs or curse words, the integration of English words are very limited and there are no Lubunca deployment (0 Lubunca words, 13 English words in approximately 20-minute-long vlogs).

(3) Tırnakların mide bulandırıcı falan filan, blab la, blab bla talking shit.

(They say your nails are disgusting, blab la, blab la talking shit.)

Code mixing practices change based on the informant's interactions. Their upbringings, subscriber demographics and the digital personae they try to portray affect the linguistic choices of each informant. It can be observed that the emergence of a speakers' desired presentation of self-yields to different types of codemixing regardless of their sexuality. Figures of identity allow informants to portray identity in interaction, which explains the differences of codemixing practices in different interactions.

The findings somewhat support Levon's (2010) claims and furthers his analysis with a cross-linguistic examination of another gay slang variety. Similar to what Levon (2010) explored in his study, it is clear that not all gay men in Turkey use Lubunca. Some of them, as can be observed among famous gay youtubers, do not deploy Lubunca although the people they interact with do. As in the case of Devrim, they constantly vlogs with Evren who employs Lubunca

occasionally with Deniz, but Devrim never uses the slang variety. Gay youtubers seem to differ in style, and therefore in speech. Devrim portrays a more westernized identity style by their digital persona and his choices of words, whereas the other informants portray a more conservative, nationalistic identity and do not deploy Lubunca as much. It seems like Devrim and Toprak's speech conforms more to Turkish sociolinguistic gender norms while Su, Evren and Deniz's speech subverts them. For that matter, the findings pose a problem for an analysis of Lubunca as a secret language since those who use the variety are doing so to increase the visibility of Lubunca and the lubunya persona. This study also supports the claims of Boellstorff (2004), who stated that the gay slang variety of Indonesia has been used by the popular culture making it no longer a secret language.

There seems to be a connection between Lubunca and Tiki dialect. It is obvious that the phonological features align to a great extent; however, there is also an alignment on a lexical level. There is one lexeme in Lubunca that has been adjusted by the Tiki dialect, and due to the mainstream media, by many others. The word "kezban" means inexperienced and rural, and it was often used to refer to sex work. In Tiki dialect, "kezban" seems to be used commonly to belittle females who come from the lower-class and rural areas. This suggests that Tikice speakers adopted the word that was used mostly by Lubunca-speaking community and helped the spread of the word in the mainstream society. However, with the decrease in Tiki dialect speakers, the word "kezban" is no longer used as commonly as before, and it is also considered as politically incorrect.

Findings suggest a correlation between the level of saliency of the linguistic variables and the level of code-mixing between Lubunca and English in informants' speech. For example, F1 and F2 formants in Toprak's speech are the lowest among the other informants, and the slightly

rounded flapped /r/ sound is not as distinct as the /r/ sounds produced by the other informants. Toprak is also the one who never code-mixes between Lubunca and Turkish, and rarely uses English. Moreover, Deniz, who code-mixes between Lubunca and English the most, deploys the most salient phonetic variables amongst the informants with an F2 range of as high as 2966, with 1450 duration time. While phonetic variables each informant deploys is connected to their sexual identities, translingual practices between Lubunca, Turkish and English seem to be connected to their ideological stance.

The correlation between the level of code-mixing and the saliency of the linguistic variables suggests a connection between different categories of linguistic choices. Informants draw on various linguistic resources in constructing an identity. They innovate and transform English in variable strategic and creative ways, and YouTube acts as an alternative discursive space, “where their marginalized voices come into social contact by means of liberally expressing their desire to perform who they are as gay men” (Dovchin, 2019, p.64). Therefore, fixed categories like gay and straight are inadequate for explaining the range of phonetic variation and the language choices observed in this study. As Munson (2011) points out, even widely used scales of sounding gay to sounding heterosexual lack ethnographic validity in some contexts; therefore, it seems likely that a more detailed ethnographic study is needed in explaining identity. Having said that, to look at online linguistic behaviors of the informants, digital ethnography, developed specifically to examine the multiple interactions across online communities, was employed. With the help of digital ethnography, speech patterns could be observed and the connection between these patterns and their identities could be analyzed. It seems likely that translingual practices of the informants is connected to their ideological identities more than their sexual identities.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### **5.1 Limitations**

There are two limitations to this study: the lack of research on sociophonetic variation in Turkish and the lack of the history of Lubunca and the current lexicon. The core sociolinguistic studies such as variation in social-class, gender or age is missing in the literature of Turkish sociolinguistics. The foundational work in sociophonetic variation and sexuality in Turkish needs to be completed. Previous studies, such as core studies like female and male speech, would inform the current study to a great extent. Additionally, a more recent documentation of Lubunca seems to be necessary in analyzing the code-mixing practices of LGBTQ youtubers in this study. Lubunca might have evolved and gained new words or meanings to already existing words since the unofficial documentation of the variety by some of the members of the LGBTQ in Turkey and also Kontovas (2012). There might also be another creation of a linguistic habitus among transgender sex workers, now that Lubunca can be understood by more people. It is also possible that Lubunca might disappear in the near future like Polari did. However, the study of Lubunca should be embraced by not only linguistics but also sociology and politics because LGBTQ community adopts Lubunca as a political stance and make it visible as a way of resistance against the current government and what it stands for.

## 5.2 Implications and Future Research

This thesis's contribution to sociolinguistics is threefold.; first, it contributes to the literature by answering Stanford's (2016) call for more diverse variationist data, and by demonstrating the importance of language choice and variation in identity negotiation. Second, Lubunca has been examined a few times as a linguistic phenomenon to some extent (Kontovas 2012; Kyuchukov and Bakker 1999); however, its increasing prominence in today's society has never been discussed or analyzed. Lastly, it supports some of the claims made by Levon (2010) and Boellstorf (2004) in their analyses of the gay slang varieties, *Oxtchit* and *Bahasa gay* in the construction of identity, which eventually serves for the goal to develop generalizable theories that can model sociolinguistic phenomena across a variety of cultural and historical contexts.

The literature review identified a clear gap for the variationist studies conducted in under-researched languages and the translingual practices in the construction of identity from a global perspective. Another gap in the literature was the work that encompassed countries in which belonging to LGBTQ community is considered taboo, with previous studies having focused on speakers from the United States of America and a small number of other countries including Puerto Rica, Indonesia, and Israel. This study tackles the production of these variables (e.g., how and why people employ a distinct phonetic variable to enact sexual identity) and also brings awareness for the understanding of language variation in production in its local context.

Drawing from Stanford's (2016) hypothesis that states "the farther we move from the traditionally studied communities, the more likely we will see fieldwork results that challenge existing notions and principles" or provide support for them, this thesis is a good start to reconsider any generalizable assumptions (p. 528). The study acts as a powerful confirmation that even within a particular community, there are differences in speech that index different type of identity,

whether be it ideologically, performance based, or sexually oriented. For this very reason, the combination of two major linguistic features of the selected speakers, phonetic variation and translingual practices, in explaining identity construction seems to be proven necessary before coming into conclusion that certain linguistic variables or language use index sexual identity.

This study is the first in attempting to analyze the sociophonetic variation of Turkish gay speech to some extent. Additionally, the study finds similarities between the stereotypical gay speech in NAE and Turkish, such as the duration of voiceless fricative /s/. Sociophonetic analysis also shows that there might be a connection between Tiki and the gay speech, such as the production of /a/ closer to /æ/, exaggerated aspiration of /s/ and /ʃ/ (voiceless fricatives), the elongation of rounded vowels and hyper articulation of -yor morpheme. It seems likely that many features associated with Tiki dialect might have spread from the original group of speakers, upper class cis-gendered females, to other social groups and dialects of Turkish, in this case the gay speech. The connection shows the theoretical value of examining a non-English and non-Western culture because this study might open further questions in NAE, e.g Podesva (2011) or challenge some of the studies that have been conducted.

In order to better understand the role of Lubunca and English, this study expands the discussion of gay slang varieties by incorporating critical ideas embedded within the debates of identity performance. It broadens the scope of the inquiry to include an examination of how Lubunca and English are used online and for what purposes. Moreover, this study argues that Lubunca, once used as a secret language for a safe linguistic habitus, is now being used for fun and visibility. The increasing visibility of the language suggests it is shifting from a secret language to a social register. The use of Lubunca and English, as observed in the cases of five gay youtubers, acts as a resistance to Turkey's moralistic censors since it creates a gendered self

that does not align with hetero-normative standards of Turkey. Lubunca not only defines an identity indexing a certain membership but also proves the aspiration of LGBTQ persons to be visible within a larger straight society. English, they produce unique meanings indicating the necessity for further extensive research on the role of Lubunca and English in gay men's code-mixing practices, capturing the limitless possibilities it gives them in contravening sociolinguistic and sociocultural boundaries.

The study has also opened up forum for further research into the role of English among gay man, specifically how sociolinguistic identities manifest in digital settings as well as the linguistic features of code-mixing in English and Turkish, such as the adaptation of AAVE phonological and morphological features in written orthographic variation. Given that the use of non-standard spellings is an overtly conscious activity that requires the violation of heavily standardized rules (Sebba, 2007), youtubers utilize digital platforms to deploy and construct identities through the appropriation of semiotic resources.

This thesis is only scratching the surface of the use of Lubunca today by examining the digital practices and identity negotiation among gay men and the role of sociophonetic variation in sexual identity. I hope the present study will be the start of the scrutiny of sexuality and variation in the Turkish language and will stand as a testament in encouraging other researchers to explore variation and language choices in other lesser-studied languages

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