

## “How do you know she’s a woman?”

### Features, prototypes and category stress in Turkish KADIN and KIZ

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This paper examines Turkish words for girls and women in order to investigate the relationship between categorization, culture and personal interaction. In doing so, it serves as a test case for a model which attempts to integrate prototype and featured-based categorisation based on a distinction between *defining* and *typical* features, both of which are subdivided into *strong* and *weak* features (the latter being more heavily dependent on context). I also consider a phenomenon I term *category stress* resulting from situations where there is a conflict between feature-based and prototype categorisation.

**Keywords:** Turkish, categorization, prototype, stress

#### 1. Introduction

It has become a common-place observation that different cultures categorise phenomena in different ways. We “cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way” (Whorf 1956:214). If we can avoid the armchair cultural linguistics of the “Eskimos have twenty words for snow” variety, a comparison of categories across cultures can reveal much, not only about the cultures involved, but also about the nature of categorisation itself.<sup>1</sup> This is perhaps clearest where ‘natural kinds’ and ‘functional kinds’ (Lehrer 1990:372) overlap. It may not come as a surprise that some languages draw no distinction between a turtle and a tortoise, or a solicitor and a barrister, but when the boundaries of such basic concepts as ‘man’ or ‘woman’ are drawn differently, we might expect this to be indicative of a difference in attitudes towards these concepts which is not merely linguistic.

The categories WOMAN and GIRL provide a good example of the interaction between ‘natural’ and ‘functional’ kinds. Humanness (as distinct from humanity)

and femaleness (as distinct from femininity) can be regarded as the result of natural discontinuities. Apart from a few extremely fuzzy cases, one requires no specific cultural apparatus to perceive what is or is not human or female. In contrast, the other major element in the categorisation of these terms in English is adulthood, which is not only culturally specific but also context-specific: someone may be referred to as a 'girl' in one context and a 'woman' in another, and choosing the appropriate term requires considerable sociolinguistic competence.

Of course, there is much more to the category, WOMAN, than the supposedly simple features of [+HUMAN][+FEMALE] and [+ADULT]. However, as I shall argue later, there is some value in adopting such a traditional semantic analysis alongside the more current prototype-based view. In deciding whether a particular human female should be classed as a woman or a girl, simply looking for the presence or absence of the feature [ADULT] is obviously simplistic; nevertheless, we can assume that, in English, our idea of adulthood, and the extent to which it applies to a particular person in a particular context, is the most important factor in the equation.

In other languages and cultures, though, adulthood may not be the most significant factor involved. The Turkish terms, KIZ and KADIN approximate to 'girl' and 'woman' respectively, but to refer to an unmarried woman as a KADIN would be a serious *faux pas*, since the most important factor in distinguishing between KIZ and KADIN is not age but sexual experience; all things being equal, a KIZ is a virgin and a KADIN is not.

It is important to bear in mind that there is an asymmetry between terms for men and women here. Not only is sexual experience not important in the transition from *oğlan* ('boy') to *erkek* ('man'), in fact the former term is rare: when it is necessary to specify a male child, the term *erkek çocuğu* ('man child') is more common. *Erkek* seems to have only one defining feature, [+MALE], since it is commonly used for male animals as well (e.g. *erkek köpeği* – 'dog' as opposed to 'bitch').

In traditional semantic terms, this cultural difference in categorisation can be explained quite simply: in both English and Turkish a woman is [+HUMAN] [+FEMALE], but the languages differ in ascribing the feature [+ADULT] in one case, and [–VIRGIN] in the other. This approach is, however, inadequate in explaining examples such as "I'm going out with the girls", which in English may be uttered by a seventy-year-old, or in Turkish where *kız* can be used to greet any female friend, irrespective of age.

- (1) *N'aber, kız?*  
 what news girl?  
 ?"How's things, girl?"

Furthermore, there are terms such as 'International Women's Day' or 'women's sports', which in both languages refer to all female humans, not just adults or non-virgins.

On the other hand, a 'fuzzy' prototype-based analysis is on its own equally inadequate. A middle-aged, unmarried woman (spinster) is almost as far-removed from the prototype of *KIZ* as she is from that of *GIRL*, but outside certain specific contexts, she still may not be placed in the *KADIN* category: category boundaries, while changeable, are often anything but fuzzy.

In this study of the terms *KIZ* and *KADIN*, I will argue that both feature-based and prototype-based models are necessary in order to explain categorisation acts; however, instead of a simple binary feature bundle I use a variable weighted feature approach that involves a distinction between 'defining' and 'typical' features (which indicate category membership and prototypicality respectively), and a further distinction between those features that remain fairly constant and those whose salience varies according to context and communicative intent. Furthermore, I also propose the concept of 'category stress', which can be seen as a kind of cognitive dissonance resulting from disparity between feature-based and prototype-based categorisation processes. This may result from a number of factors, both contextual and cultural; it also often results in infelicitous categorisations or a search for alternative categories. Thus, in situations where the "strictly speaking" use of *KIZ* would apply to an item far removed from the prototype (as in the middle-aged spinster example), alternative terms such as *bayan* or *hanım* (both roughly meaning 'lady') may be used.

## 2. Views of categorisation

Since the publication of Lakoff's (1987) *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*, it has become common to divide theories of categorisation into traditional, feature-based semantics in one camp, and cognitive approaches based on prototypes, metonymy and metaphor in the other, with Aristotle cast as the villain of the piece (Wierzbicka 1990: 364). However, Aristotle himself had a more sophisticated view of categorisation than is commonly supposed, and, with his distinction between 'essential' and 'accidental' attributes was the first to introduce the idea that not all features are of equal importance. The problem with the Aristotelian view lies not so much in the distinction between essential and accidental attributes as in its failure to realise that some accidental (i.e. non-defining) attributes are anything but accidental. To give one of Aristotle's favourite examples, "white man" (*Metaphysics*, VII(6):1031), the attribute 'white' is obviously not essential to being a man, but falls within an accepted colour-range that is probably an element in the process of categorising a creature as a 'man': "white man" and "black man" indicate dif-

ferences between men, but “green man” or “purple man” imply something odd is going on (maybe what we are referring to is not actually a man but a leprechaun or an alien, or maybe the colour term is being used metaphorically). If we view features as “focal values in a continuous cognitive space” (Jackendoff 1992:205), we need some set of rules for determining their relationship and relative importance, rather than simply lumping them together.

The realisation that not all features are created equal gave rise to the “weighted feature-bundle” approach (Coleman & Kay 1981). A simple feature bundle fails to describe the internal structure of a category, nor does it give an accurate picture of its relationship with other categories (Langacker 1987:19–20). Therefore an alternative is to rank features from most to least essential. However, while the idea of assigning different weightings to features is useful, it is still necessary to draw a distinction between types of feature in terms of those that define a category and those that establish centrality within that category. For this reason Lehrer (1974) proposed a distinction between ‘obligatory’ and ‘optional’ features, and similar approaches have been adopted by Lipka (1986), and Wierzbicka (1985). What these approaches have in common is an attempt to reconcile feature- and prototype-based categorisations.

From a different perspective, Jackendoff (1983) and Pustejovsky (1995) have also addressed this problem. Jackendoff in particular suggests that the combination of an atomistic feature-based system with preference rules can explain “categories with fuzzy boundaries and family resemblance properties à la Wittgenstein and Roth” (1992:206). In any case, it is obvious that mere resemblance to a prototype is in itself insufficient as a basis for categorisation. As Wierzbicka (1990:350) points out, resemblance does not explain why “an ostrich is a bird but a bat is not”, as the latter is in many ways closer to our celebrated prototypical robin than the former. Furthermore, Cruse (1990:388) argues, “It is not easy to see how the boundaries of a category can be derived from its prototypes.”

Another problem is raised by context. Cruse points out that “It is at least possible that different criteria are used with different categories, and perhaps even different criteria on different occasions of judgement with the same category, under different sorts of contextual pressure” (1990:384). Following Hymes,

the role of language as a device for categorizing experience and its role as an instrument of communication cannot be so separated, and indeed, the latter includes the former. This is the more true when a language, as is often the case, affords alternative ways of categorizing the same experience, so that the patterns of selection among such alternatives must be determined in actual contexts of use.

(Hymes 1972:33)

It is clear, then, that categorisation is partly determined by contextual factors and partly by the speaker’s state of mind and intention in communicating.

A categorisation act may also be influenced by a scenario: “a culturally defined sequence of actions; a story schema” (Palmer 1996:75). Holland and Skinner claim that female American students’ categorisations of types of men are based on “a taken-for-granted relationship between males and females”, and that by using specialised terms, such as ‘jock’, ‘nerd’ and so on, women “relate types to a set of scenarios in which the prototypical male/female relationship is disrupted” (1987: 103). Disruption of a scenario results in what I have termed ‘category stress’, and often occurs in the search for alternative categories. In this case, such categories as ‘jock’ or ‘nerd’ could be seen as a way out when a male fails to meet the requirements of the scenario (e.g. by spending the whole of a date talking about football or computers). Our middle-aged unmarried Turkish woman is another example, since in the prototypical scenario she would have married sometime between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five (Atalay 1992:271), and would have made the transitions from [+VIRGIN] to [-VIRGIN] and [-ADULT] to [+ADULT], more-or-less simultaneously. In Turkey, as in many cultures, the concepts of adulthood and marriage are intertwined, especially for women; marriage provides a rite of passage that enables the normally fuzzy boundary between child and adult to become much more clear-cut. A late, or a very early marriage can thus give rise to category stress.

Finally, it is important to remember that diachronic factors are also important in categorisation and category stress; in fact historical linguistics as a field is largely concerned with the process of change in categories, such as amelioration and so forth. Societies change, and their languages change with them “through time and incessant patter” (Palmer 1996: 6), although there is frequently a time lag. Because cultural models organise large amounts of information successfully and are thus resistant to change (Holland & Skinner 1987: 105), the result is category stress.

From this review of the literature, we may raise the following hypotheses:

1. Both features and prototypes play an important role in categorisation; neither approach on its own is adequate.
2. Features are not of equal importance in assigning items to a category, and can be broadly grouped into ‘defining features’ and ‘typical features’.
3. While the status of some features remains fairly constant, that of others varies according to a number of contextual and communicative factors.
4. Contextual and cultural factors may lead to disparity between feature- and prototype-based categorisation (category stress).

In the rest of this paper I will test these hypotheses using the terms *KIZ* and *KADIN* as benchmarks. With the exception of example (13), which is presented as a “theoretically possible” sentence, the phrases and sentences used are examples of Standard Turkish. These data include utterances by friends and relatives (referred to by their initials) and popular media.<sup>2</sup> Some examples come from concordances

provided by Petek Kurtböke from her “Ozturk Corpus” (for a more detailed description of the data-collecting procedure and results of the concordancing, see Turner 1998).<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Defining features of KIZ and KADIN

I have claimed that in assigning items to the categories KIZ and KADIN, the feature [ $\pm$ VIRGIN] is more important than [ $\pm$ ADULT], in contrast to the English categories GIRL and WOMAN, where the reverse is the case. However, this claim obviously needs to be tested if it is not to fall into the “twenty words for snow” category.

The first case is that the question given in (2) would receive an answer based on the referent’s sexual experience or marital status rather than age; it can function either as “Is she a virgin?” or “Is she married?”

- (2) *kız mı, kadın mı?*  
 girl INT. woman INT.  
 “Girl or woman?”

In the prototypical scenario, loss of virginity and marriage coincide, but in practice, of course, they often do not. It is therefore necessary to establish which criterion – [ $\pm$ VIRGIN] or [ $\pm$ MARRIED] – is more important in categorising such peripheral cases. After all, in some languages, such as Greek, it is marriage which makes one a woman (*gineka*), rather than a girl (*kopela*). An example that illustrates the priority of [ $\pm$ VIRGIN] is given in (3).

- (3) *Sen orta-okul-da-yken kadın ol-muş-sun*  
 you middle-school-LOC.-while woman become-said-2ndSING.  
 “They say you became a woman when you were at Middle School.”  
 (Comedian “Huysuz Virjin” to singer Ajda Pekan, *Star TV*, 11/7/98)

*Kadın olmak*, ‘to become a woman’, is also defined as ‘to have one’s hymen broken’ (Türk Dil Kurumu 1998). Additionally, the medical test to establish virginity (still legal, though widely condemned) is colloquially known as, *kız kontrolü*, ‘girl test’.

We may conclude, then, that [ $+$ VIRGIN] is a more important feature of KIZ than [ $-$ ADULT], though not as vital as [ $+$ HUMAN] and [ $+$ FEMALE], since it may on occasions, be over-ridden, as we shall see later. [ $+$ VIRGIN] in KIZ and [ $-$ VIRGIN] in KADIN are defining features, but weak ones; an absence of strong defining features, such as [ $+$ HUMAN] and [ $+$ FEMALE], marks its usage as clearly metaphorical, as in the case of, *kız neyi*, the smallest size of reed flute (*ney*), which is a metaphorical extension of the KIZ category.

#### 4. Typical features

If [ $\pm$ ADULT] is not of prime importance in distinguishing between *KIZ* and *KADIN*, it is obviously important in establishing centrality in a category, and thus may be termed a 'typical feature'. I would also argue that it is a 'strong' typical feature, in that in some contexts it may override [ $\pm$ VIRGIN].

One case is where someone is not a virgin, but is nevertheless very young. An example was provided by the media furore surrounding the marriage of Sarah, a fourteen-year-old English tourist, to a Turkish waiter. Had Sarah been Turkish this might not have been worthy of comment, since in this area of Turkey (Kahramanmaraş) marriage at this age, though illegal, is still common; she would thus have made the normal transition from *KIZ* to *KADIN*. However, once the case made the press, Sarah was largely referred to as *kiz* rather than the technically accurate *kadin*. When I pointed this out to a Turkish-speaker, the reaction was "well, I suppose strictly speaking she is a *kadın*, but ..." (ŞH). Similarly, outside medical contexts, children who are the victims of rape are generally referred to as *kız*, as would a girl who had broken her hymen accidentally (TK, AA).

What seems to be happening here is a disruption to the normal scenario, or, as I have called it, category stress. Lack of a typical feature is not usually enough to justify exclusion from a category, but extreme cases can change the weighting of features, so that a strong typical feature can override a weak defining feature. In the case of Sarah, her age was seen as sufficiently atypical as to override the [ $-$ VIRGIN] feature, and placing her in the *KIZ* category, added to the sense of moral outrage that draws on other typical features (or connotations) of *KIZ*, such as innocence and vulnerability. These are associated with the feature [ $-$ ADULT] but probably more so for girls than boys. On their own, these weak typical features would not be sufficient to override a defining feature, but may add their weight to this process in combination with [ $-$ ADULT].

Not all cases need be as extreme as that of Sarah, though, and there is a fair degree of latitude in whether to refer to a married woman as *kadın* or *kız*. In addition to the absolute age of the person referred to, her age relative to the speaker can play a part. An older woman may refer to a younger woman as *kız* irrespective of the marital status of the latter.<sup>4</sup>

It is, however, very rare for the reverse to occur – i.e., for [ $+$ ADULT] to override [ $+$ VIRGIN]. Outside contexts in which [ $\pm$ ADULT] becomes irrelevant (which will be discussed later), I have observed hardly any instances of virgins being referred to as *KADIN*.

Another typical feature of *KIZ* is [ $+$ INTIMATE], since one thing girls prototypically do is form close peer friendships. The phrase *kız kıza* ("girl-to-girl") conjures up images of intimate conversation, while *erkek erkeğe* has the same connotations as its English equivalent, "man-to-man": the emphasis is less on intimacy (though

that may be involved) and more on honesty, or in competitive situations, fairness (*erkek erkeğe dövüşmek* translates as “fight fairly”). *Kız kıza* is a popular title for websites dealing with “girl-talk” (e.g. Turkstudent.net 2005) and the peer intimacy aspect has been used to market products. As we have seen in the case of “going out with the girls”, in both English and Turkish [+INTIMATE] can be regarded as a strong typical feature, since it may override both [+VIRGIN] and [-ADULT], though this is not true for all languages.<sup>5</sup> In Turkish a woman going out with her workmates may say a sentence like (4), even though nearly all the ‘girls’ in this case were married or divorced. Interestingly, there seems to be no male equivalent (cf. “going out with the boys/lads”). Again, then, we see an asymmetry between gender-specific terms.

- (4) *kız-lar-la gid-iyor-um* (NT)  
 girl-PL.-with go-PROG.-1stsing.  
 “I’m going with the girls”

There seem to be two processes at work in this apparent miscategorisation, along with other examples, such as *hadi kızlar!* (‘Come on, girls!’). The first is that the presence of even one unmarried woman in the group would make the use of *KADIN* infelicitous; the second is the peer-friendship element. As in English, the term would probably not be used by an outsider, especially a male one, since what would be understood there would not be [+INTIMATE] but [-ADULT]; in other words, it would be seen as patronising.

The case is clearer when only one person is being addressed. As we saw earlier, *N’aber kız?* (‘How’s things girl?’), may be used to greet any female friend, though its use is probably rather more common in female-female than male-female exchanges.

*KIZ* is also used paternalistically, emphasizing the [-ADULT] feature, and this use is particularly common with the first person singular possessive (*kızım*, ‘my girl’). This may well be a metaphorical extension of the polysemic meaning of *KIZ* as ‘daughter’, which I will discuss later. Like the intimate use, it may be felicitous or infelicitous depending also on whether the speaker is seen as occupying an appropriate social/discourse role. Older friends, relatives and sometimes even strangers are often expected to play a fatherly/motherly role, so this use of *KIZ* or *KIZIM* may be appropriate, but it can equally well be seen as condescending. For example, in a television debate (*Siyaset Meydanı*), an older male participant repeatedly addressed a young woman with whom he was arguing as *kızım*, and although she did not verbally object, her anger was visible. As a viewer put it:

- (5) *Görü-yor mu-sun nasıl aşağılı-yor* (NT)  
 see-PROG. INT.-2ndsing. how lower-PROG.  
 “Do you see that? He’s really putting her down.”

Note that there is no danger of infelicity when referring to a third party as *kız*, as mentioned earlier.

## 5. Context and topic

### Women and men

We have seen how context and communicative intent can cause a strong typical feature to override a weak defining feature. In addition, strong contextual or topical pressure may sometimes simply eliminate a weak defining feature, such as the aforementioned 'International Women's Day' example. As in English, topic-based categorization based on "women as opposed to men" results in *KADIN* being stripped down to its strong defining features [+HUMAN] and [+FEMALE].<sup>6</sup> Thus, it is possible to say *kadın*, to someone who would normally be a member of *kız*,

- (6) *Dünya Kadın Gün-ün kutlu olsun*  
 world woman day-2ndPOS. celebrated be-3dIMP.  
 "Congratulations on 'International Woman's Day.'"  
 (NT, to NH, opening telephone conversation)

Similar cases arise when *KADIN* is found in collocation with *erkek* ('man') or with *haklar* ('rights') as in the following examples:

- (7) *kadın mi, erkek mi?* (ŞH)  
 woman INT. man INT.  
 "Male or female?"
- (8) *kadın ve erkek iş-çi-ler-i* (Ozturk Corpus)  
 woman and man work-er-PL.-POS.  
 "male and female workers"
- (9) *köprü-ler-in altı-ndan, kadın hak-lar-ı-ndan, kadın-erkek eşit-liğ-i-nden yan-a çok su-lar geç-tiğ-i için*  
 bridge-PL.-GEN. under-ABL. woman right-PL.-POS-ABL. woman-man equal-ness-POS.-ABL. side-DAT. very water-PL. pass-PART.-POS. for  
 "As for women's rights and male-female equality, much water has flowed under the bridge."  
 (Milliyet, 7/12/92)

This raises the question of whether we have a case of polysemy: one distinct meaning of *KADIN* as [+HUMAN][+FEMALE] and [-VIRGIN], and another meaning as simply [+HUMAN] and [+FEMALE]. However, as Wierzbicka (1992: 14) argues, "polysemy must never be postulated lightly". Since all members of the first *KADIN* category postulated are automatically members of the second, it might be more parsimonious to assume that there is just one *KADIN* category, and this category

may expand, in certain cases, by losing the [-VIRGIN] feature. The same applies, of course, to English WOMAN, where the [+ADULT] feature is dropped under the same circumstances.

### Other collocations

Common collocations to do with services have the effect of eliminating the [ $\pm$ VIRGIN] distinction. No one would assume that a *kadın kuaförü* ('women's hair-dresser') would only cut the hair of married women. Similarly, it is rare to think that sexual experience is a prerequisite for seeing a *kadın doktoru* ('gynaecologist'), and if one were thrown out of a *kız yurdu* ('girl's hall of residence') for not being a virgin, it would be on moralistic rather than semantic grounds. The first two cases employ the 'women as opposed to men' sense of KADIN, while with *kız yurdu* [-ADULT] overrides [+VIRGIN].

In the case of occupations, the prototypical member of the collocated category pushes out exceptions. Thus a *kadın doktor* (without the accusative/possessive *-u* suffix) simply means 'female doctor'. Aside from the use of *kadın* to mean woman as opposed to man, it is the case that most doctors are married, and the small number of doctors in the KIZ category is insufficient to warrant use of the phrase *kız doktor*.

A similar consideration applies in the case of *kız öğrencisi*, which literally means 'girl student' but in practice conveys, 'female student'. Turkish tends to force a choice between KIZ and KADIN for 'female', since the literal word for female, *dişi*, is generally only used for (i) animals, (ii) as an insult through metaphorical extension (BÇ), (iii) as a way of emphasising female sexuality, again perhaps using the animal metaphor, or (iv) in collocations that are seen as somehow 'odd', such as *dişi Rambo*, 'female Rambo' (*Milliyet* 27/3/99). Prototypically female students are members of KIZ, and this is even extended to those students who obviously do not belong to this category. The following television news headline illustrates this:

- (10) *Profesör-ler, kız öğrenci-ler-i kullan-ıyor*  
 Professor-PL. girl student-PL.-ACC. use-PROG.  
 "Professors are using girl students." (Star TV News, 2/2/98)

'Use', in this case, means 'have sex with', referring to a scandal at Izmir University. Obviously if the students in question have been 'used', they are not strictly speaking members of KIZ, but the collocation overrides this and perhaps also adds to the sense of outrage. There is also a certain ambiguity here, though, since there may be a sense that the professors are actually deflowering students, who would, at the time, be classed as *kız*. Note that again the asymmetry applies: the male counterpart of *kız öğrencisi* is *erkek öğrencisi* ('man student'), not *oğlan öğrencisi* ('boy student'), as seen in example (11).

- (11) *Brighton College, yaklaşık 500 erkek ve kız öğrencisi olan Brighton College close-to 500 man and girl student-POS. being yatılı bir okuldur boarding a school-is "Brighton College is a boarding school for around 500 male and female students."* (Promeths.com 2005)

Collocation requires lexical conformity almost by definition. It is therefore not surprising that collocations are based on prototypical instances, and these exclude atypical cases.

## 6. Causes and effects of category stress

I have argued that category stress occurs when there is a disparity between the results of feature-based and prototype-based categorisations. Sometimes this disparity is inconsequential, as when we call something a cup because it is used for drinking, even though it may actually look more like a bowl. However, with categories like *WOMAN* and *KADIN*, there is more at stake. The prototypes have more psychological impact; miscategorisation can have undesirable consequences; and difficulty in categorisation is more stressful. All three defining features of *WOMAN* have a direct impact on social identity, and fuzziness or ambiguity, in that any of these can result in discomfort, humour or even fear. How these reactions can be exploited, consider: *Lolita* ([±ADULT]), *Twelfth Night* ([±FEMALE]), or *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* ([±HUMAN]).

Normally, we would expect category stress to be a rare phenomenon; if this routinely occurred at the boundaries of categories, such categories would probably be altered over time to avoid confusion or infelicitous usage. It would be premature to say whether features are abstracted from prototypes, or that prototypes are constructed from commonly occurring features. In either case, the two work in parallel, otherwise they would not work at all. Nevertheless, at the periphery of a category there are bound to be some items that strike us as 'odd', like flightless birds or promiscuous priests.

A more interesting cause of category stress is social change. I have stated that there is usually a lag between social change and linguistic change, and this is probably greater the more socially and psychologically salient a particular aspect of the cultural model is. In Turkey, the main causes of category stress in *KIZ* and *KADIN* are the rise in the average age of marriage and cultural Westernisation. In the past, early marriage was the norm, but now it is rare for women to marry before the age of twenty.<sup>7</sup> Despite the strong social sanctions still in operation, this has inevitably

led to an increase in pre-marital sexual activity amongst young women (something which had always been considered normal in young men).

As previously mentioned, one occasional result of category stress is humour. An ostrich is seen as a funny kind of bird, and a promiscuous priest might be the subject of a joke.<sup>8</sup> An example of this in the case of *KIZ* is the following line spoken by a stereotypical ‘schoolmarm’ in a comic film:

- (12) *Yaş-ım otuz beş. Ve kızım. El değ-me-miş...*  
 age-GEN.1st thirty five and girl-1st hand place-NEG.-PART.  
 “My age is thirty-five. And I am a ?girl. Undefined...” (Hababam Sınıfı)

This is quite culture-specific humour, arising from the contrast between the strict definition (‘she is a girl’) and the prototype (‘she is not what one would expect on hearing the word’), plus the fact that one would not normally allude so obviously to one’s virginity.

A more common effect of category stress is alternative categorization – i.e., use of a different word. *Hanım* and *bayan* are both acceptable alternatives, though somewhat formal. These can be used when one is not sure of the status of the person in question, although it is also common for older, unmarried women, in order to avoid the [–ADULT] implications of *KIZ*.

*Bayan*, although literally meaning ‘lady’ (and also a formal title similar to ‘Ms’) seems to be becoming a neutral term with defining features [+HUMAN] and [+FEMALE] with a typical feature [+ADULT].<sup>9</sup> It is, for example, the normal term used in sports, such as in (13),

- (13) *tek bayan-lar-da* (Ozturk Corpus)  
 single lady-PL.-LOC.  
 “In the women’s [tennis] singles.”

An extreme example of *bayan* shedding its ‘ladylike’ associations is

- (14) *bayan terörist-i* (TRT News)  
 ?lady terrorist-POS.  
 “female terrorist”

However, this use was still greeted with amusement by a Turkish colleague (AA), which seems to indicate that escaping from one form of category stress may lead to another.

As for the features of *KIZ* and *KADIN* themselves, it is possible that these may eventually change to reflect changes in the cultural model. However, given the continued importance given to virginity in Turkish society as a whole (rather than the progressive urban elite), this seems highly unlikely in the near future.

## 7. Caveats and conclusions

Perhaps because of the fluid nature of 'meaning', it is all too easy to think up a semantic theory and find language examples that seem to justify it. In using *KADIN* and *KIZ*, I have deliberately chosen terms and contexts that place considerable strain on a semantic model, and an ability to perform successfully in interpreting the linguistic data should not be taken as proof of the validity of that model, but merely serve as an indication that it has potential. In particular, it should be stressed that this model makes no claims with regard to neurology; it attempts to explain linguistic behaviour in cognitively plausible terms, but does not presume to assert that the brain processes semantic information in exactly the same way as the model proposes.

A point worth emphasising is that the use of traditional semantic notation should not be interpreted as support for the idea of atomistic binary features. Features are themselves categories, and are subject to fuzziness, prototype effects, metaphorical extension, and so forth. Writing, for example, [+VIRGIN] is simply a convenient way of indicating that in the view of the person performing the categorisation act, the item to be categorised fits their minimum criteria for virginity. Even such an apparently non-gradable category as *VIRGIN* has peripheral members, such as "technical virgin"; criteria for membership may also vary across cultures, so strictly speaking I should have used the term [ $\pm$ BAKİRE] rather than [ $\pm$ VIRGIN].<sup>10</sup>

Assignment of a positive or negative sign to features is also somewhat arbitrary. [+FEMALE] could be, and often is, written as [-MALE]. My choice of the former is simply a reflection of an assumption that femaleness is not perceived simply as the absence of maleness. I retained the conventional [-ADULT], rather than using [+CHILD], because children may be viewed teleologically as potential adults, while women are not viewed as potential men. In the case of [+VIRGIN] a positive rather than a negative feature was used because in both English and Turkish virginity is seen as a positive attribute or even a possession; something that may be 'lost' (English) or 'broken' (Turkish). This may not only be due to the cultural importance attached to virginity, but also to the physical existence of the hymen.

It would also be possible to develop the model further to give a better idea of the internal structure of a category. Some features are subordinates of others; for example [+VIRGIN] implies [+HUMAN], since one would not normally speak of a virgin cat. Similarly, some features are typical features of categories alluded to by other features; for example [+VULNERABLE] is a typical feature of [CHILD] – i.e., [-ADULT].

One application of the model that has not been much examined in this study is its use in describing metaphor. For example, the item *kız neyi* (the smallest *ney*, or reed flute) is clearly metaphorical, as in (15),

- (15) *kız gibi araba*  
 girl like car  
 “beautiful new car”

In *kız neyi*, the weak typical feature [+SMALL], itself a typical feature of [-ADULT], is used to create the metaphor; in (15) a metaphorical extension of [+VIRGIN] is used – *kız gibi* is explained as *bozulmamış* – literally meaning ‘unbroken’ or ‘unspoiled’ (AH). We can postulate, therefore, that a metaphor may not simply involve a transfer of features from a source to a target domain, but a creative metaphorical extension of features themselves: a kind of ‘meta-metaphor’. This follows naturally from the assumption that features are themselves categories.

This type of feature-based approach could be useful in distinguishing between deeply-buried metaphors, and ‘obvious’ metaphors of the *kız neyi* or ‘female joint’ type. It is possible that the obviousness of the metaphor has an inverse relationship to the number and strength of features transferred from the source to the target domain; it may also depend on whether features are transferred “as is” or are themselves metaphorically extended. For example, when Captain Kirk says of the *Enterprise* “She is a beautiful woman, and I love her!” he is deliberately confusing an object with a human. The starship lacks the features [+HUMAN] [+FEMALE] and [+ADULT], and the metaphor succeeds by taking the one feature [+FEMALE] and metaphorically extending it. On the other hand referring to a pet as ‘she’, rather than the customary ‘it’ for animals, is less obviously metaphorical, since it possesses at least one defining feature of WOMAN [+FEMALE] in its original feature-bundle, rather than being an extended form.

The notion of category stress is, I have suggested, of use in illuminating some types of sociolinguistic behaviour, language change and even art (as in the *Twelfth Night* example), whether or not it is coupled to the particular feature analysis discussed here. Categorisation, as I have argued, reveals much about culture and I would suggest that ‘stressful’ categorisation acts may be particularly revealing. In fact, my interest in the KADIN and KIZ categories, and a realisation that virginity is not only socially but linguistically significant followed from the following embarrassing exchange (in English) with a Turkish student:

- (16) Author: “*She’s a nice woman.*”  
 Student: “*How do you know she’s a woman?*”

## Notes

1. The idea that Eskimos have twenty words for snow is a linguistic ‘urban myth’ ably exploded by Geoffrey Pullum in *The Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax* (1991).

## 2. Subjects referred to are:

- AA: Female, 25, English teacher  
 BÇ: Male, 19, student  
 AH: Male, 55, news photographer  
 NH: Female, 25, travel agent.  
 ŞH: Female, 45 (?), housewife  
 TK: Female, 28, English teacher  
 NT: Female, 28, ceramics teacher

All are native speakers of Turkish, living in Ankara and born in either Ankara or Izmir.

3. The Ozturk Corpus is collected from Australian Turkish community newspapers. With a few exceptions (Kurtböke 1996) which are not relevant to this study, the corpus can be seen as representative of Standard Turkish.

4. I recently noticed my wife doing this, and when asked why, received the answer "I don't know – probably because she's ten years younger than me."

5. In Greek, for example, an adult female does not 'go out with the girls', but with the women – *ginekes* (Sophia Piperis, personal communication, 1998).

6. This also eliminates the asymmetry of *kadın* and *erkek*, by providing *erkek* with the feature [+human], since we are obviously not talking about 'women as opposed to male creatures of any species'. Incidentally, *erkek*, the commonest term for 'man', is never used in the sense of 'human being'. Occasionally its near-synonym, *adam*, is used like this, but normally one would say *insan* ('person'). Similarly, the problem of the ambiguous male third person pronoun does not arise, since Turkish pronouns have no gender.

7. For example, in 1991 only 28% of female 15 to 19-year-olds were married, compared to 82% of women in the 50–54 age range who had married at 19 or younger (calculated from figures in Atalay 1992:271).

8. It is interesting that jokes may employ both stereotypes and peripheral category members, as in the Turkish joke about the frustrated housewife and the blind imam (unfortunately so culture-specific as to be virtually untranslatable).

9. One may refer to a child as *bayan*, but it is normally modified as *küçük bayan*, 'little lady'.

10. The Turkish for 'virgin', *bakire* (from Arabic), simply means a female with an unbroken hymen, so a technical virgin is still a virgin. This can in turn lead to category stress, since the importance placed on the hymen encourages a lot of 'technicality', in a manner reminiscent of 1950's America.

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