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# Are We Aware of What We Wear? The Awareness of Pre-Service Turkish Language Teachers About T-Shirt Catch-Phrases

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## Abstract

The present study, conducted with the phenomenology method, a qualitative research design, aimed to determine the awareness of pre-service Turkish language teachers about the catchphrases printed on t-shirts that individuals notice or do not notice in daily life or do not pay much attention even if when they notice them. The study sample included 39 volunteering pre-service teachers (19 males and 20 females), attending the department of Turkish language education during the 2018-2019 academic year. The sample was determined with the convenience sampling method. An interview form that included open-ended questions and a questionnaire that aimed to determine participant demographics were applied to the sample. Furthermore, t-shirt texts in several foreign languages were determined by the author and the pre-service teachers were asked whether they knew the Turkish translations of these texts and whether they preferred foreign language or Turkish texts. Descriptive analysis was conducted on the responses of the pre-service teachers. Since these responses were considered important, direct quotes were included in this paper. The study findings demonstrated that 69% of the pre-service Turkish language teachers did not care about the texts on the t-shirts they purchased and prioritized the model of the t-shirts. Since this was a non-negligible rate, it was suggested that the study would contribute to the literature and raise awareness.

**Keywords:** Turkish Language Education, Lingual Degeneration, T-Shirt Texts, T-Shirts with Turkish Text

## 1. Introduction

It is known that the most important means of communication is language in a society. Furthermore, the language of a nation is the philosophical and commentary wealth of that nation. If a nation thinks only in the native language, it becomes independent and would have the chance to transfer its culture. On the other hand, the culture, which is the way of life manifested in the perceptions, interests, attitudes and behaviors of a nation and developed over the centuries, the sum of material and spiritual values that have been passed down from generation to generation, is the reflection of the emotions and thoughts that surround individuals in every stage of life (Göçer, 2012).

It is known that language is the carrier of culture. Culture lays the groundwork for a language to demonstrate its possibilities. Language is manifested in concrete products via the cultural values in a society. Thus, every topic of conversation is a reflection of the culture in social life through language.

The traces of the cultural values of a society are manifested in the language, which best reflects the characteristics of the very society. Thus, language is known as the most important tool that ensures the continuity of the culture as well as serving as a transmitter of the culture (Akarsu, 1998).

Culture and language are the most important main dynamics that ensure the continuity of a nation. It is known that several societies that could not preserve their native language and cultural values in history were erased from the history. These societies could not preserve their native language, and they were alienated to their culture, which was the foundation of their identity, over time (Gürbüz, 2017).

One of the most important elements that sustain a society is not only technological and civil developments, but also national and moral values. These values are passed on to future generations through language. Thus, a nation that cannot protect its native language from the influence of foreign languages is alienated to its culture and values. The new generations would not know the past of the nation and preserve national values.

Since ancient times, people felt the need to express themselves and expressed themselves through various methods. This need was initially reflected in cave wall paintings and extended to the clothing worn in daily life. Such clothing is known to be a form of visual communication. It could be suggested that the most common clothing that assumed this role is the t-shirts.

T-shirts, which were described as "generally short-sleeved, cotton sportswear" (<https://sozluk.gov.tr/access> 15.12.2020) in the Turkish Language Association Dictionary, are the most preferred comfortable and healthy, easy to wear, clean, and carry clothing that prevents sweating by allowing the body to breathe more, and facilitates human movement, and the most common product after underwear. This clothing is called "T-shirt" due to its T-shaped form (Ok, 2007).

A T-shirt we wear reflects our likes, dislikes, hobbies. Thus, the face of the T-shirt is a mobile canvas. Anything one desires could be written and painted on a t-shirt, emotions and ideas could be communicated on this mobile canvas. This canvas travels to several places with its owner and conveys its message to several individuals (Ok, 2007). It is impossible to ignore a product with such a great power of expression.

Individuals send messages to other parties via the texts, prints or images on the t-shirts they wear. Not everyone notices the meaning of the foreign language texts on these t-shirts, mostly worn in summer months. Some prefer these t-shirts because they do not care about such things, while others only care about the model of the t-shirt. Perhaps an ordinary citizen is not very sensitive to these details. However, pre-service teachers, especially the pre-service Turkish language teachers, should have the knowledge and sensitivity about these. The idea behind the present study emerged when pre-service teachers could not tell the meaning of the texts on their t-shirts in the classroom. It was suggested that such a study would contribute to the training of a more sensitive generation in t-shirt selection, one of the most purchased products in daily life.

### *1.2 The Aim of the Study*

The present study aimed to investigate the awareness of the pre-service Turkish language teachers about the texts displayed on t-shirts.

## **2. Method**

The research design, study sample, data collection instruments, and data analysis are discussed in this section.

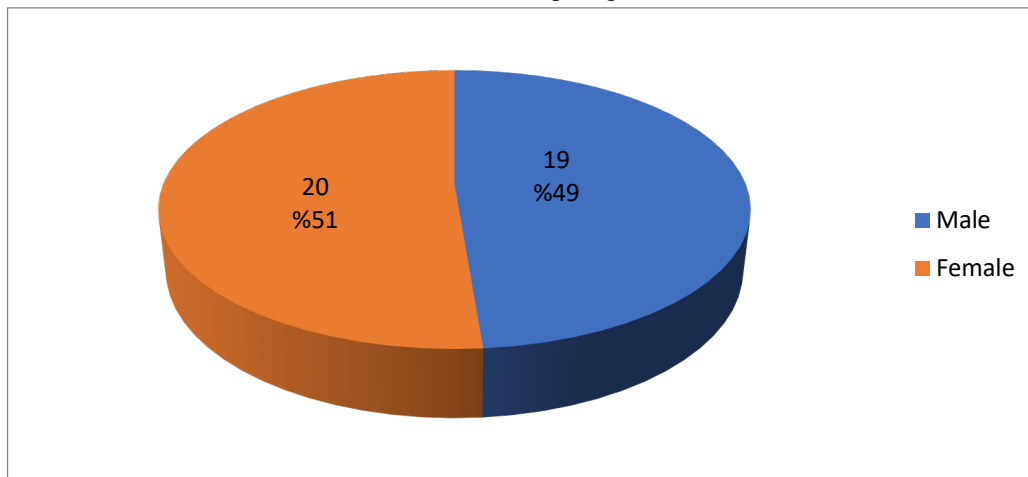
### *2.1 The Research Design*

The current research is qualitative study and conducted with adequate processes. The phenomenology approach, a qualitative research design, was employed in the study. Since the phenomenological approach focuses on known phenomena that are not known in detail and phenomena could be experiences in various forms such as events, experiences, perceptions, trends, concepts and situations in the world (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008), the above-mentioned approach was adopted in the study.

## 2.2. The Study Sample

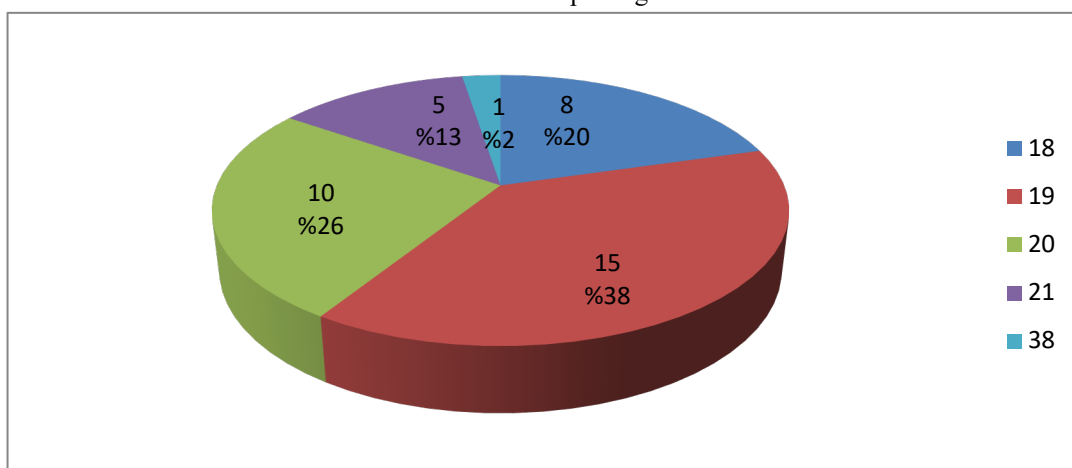
The study sample included freshman students attending the Department of Turkish Education. Thirty-nine pre-service teachers responded to the call to complete the semi-structured interview form that included open-ended questions. Participant demographics are presented in Charts 1 and 2.

Chart 1: Participant gender



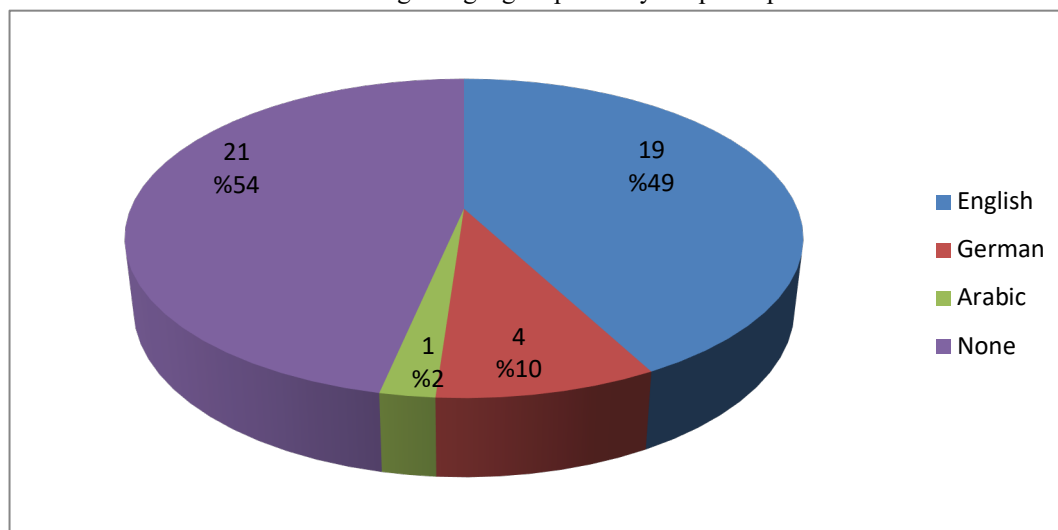
As seen in Chart 1, 51% of the study sample were female and 49% were male pre-service Turkish language teachers.

Chart 2: Participant age



As seen in Chart 2, 38% of 39 pre-service Turkish language teachers were 19 years old, 26% were 20 years old, 20% were 18 years old, 13% were 21 years old, and 2% were 38 years old.

Chart 3: Foreign languages spoken by the participants



\*Certain participants spoke 2 foreign languages.

As seen in Chart 3, 54% of the participants did not speak any foreign language, 49% spoke English, 10% spoke German, and 2% spoke Arabic.

### 2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

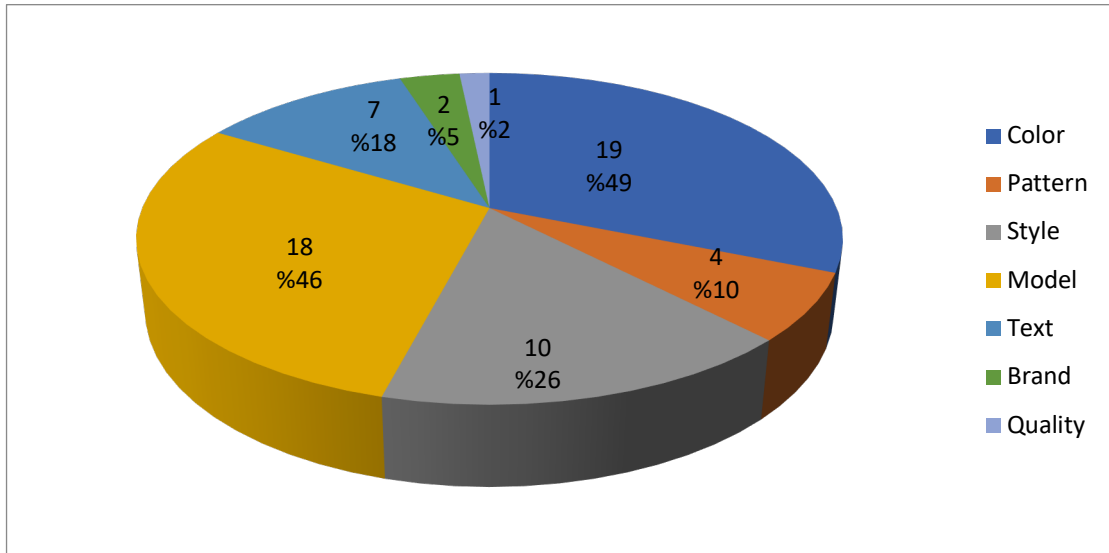
In the study, the perceptions of the pre-service Turkish language teachers about t-shirt texts were determined based on the data collected with a semi-structured interview form that included open-ended questions during the 2018-2019 academic year fall semester. The interview form was developed based on the review of the form (expert opinion) to determine the face validity. The reliability of the study was determined with the below-mentioned reliability formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). The study data were analyzed independently by the author and a field expert. With the comparison of these analyses, and when there was an agreement between the author and the field expert, the reliability study was finalized. The reliability of the study was determined as 93% with the formula. A reliability coefficient of above 70% is considered reliable (Miles & Huberman, 2016).

The interview form included two sections. The first section included participant demographics. The second section included open-ended questions that aimed to determine the awareness of pre-service Turkish language teachers about the texts displayed on t-shirts. In the study, the data were presented with an organized manner including interpretations for easy comprehension and reuse. Direct quotes were also included to demonstrate the participant responses more clearly. In the process, “M” depicted female participants and “M” depicted the male participants. The interview form included two sections. The first section included participant demographics. The second section included open-ended questions that aimed to determine the awareness of pre-service Turkish language teachers about the texts displayed on t-shirts. The study data were analyzed with the descriptive analysis technique. The study data were presented with an organized manner including interpretations. To reflect the views of the participants, the positive and negative views of the pre-service Turkish language teachers on the T-shirt texts were represented with direct quotes.

### 3. Findings

In this section, the study findings are presented. The study group responses to the interview questions are presented in the charts below.

Chart 4: What is your primary concern when purchasing a t-shirt?



\*Certain participants included more than one choice.

As seen in Chart 4, 49% of the participants paid attention to the color of the t-shirt 46% paid attention to the model, 26% paid attention to the style, 18% paid attention to the text on the t-shirt, 10% paid attention to the pattern, 5% paid attention to the brand, and 2% paid attention to the quality when buying t-shirts. Certain participant responses are presented below:

“I pay attention to the fit and how it looks on top of my pants.” (10M)

“The model because people should wear what suits them.” (11M)

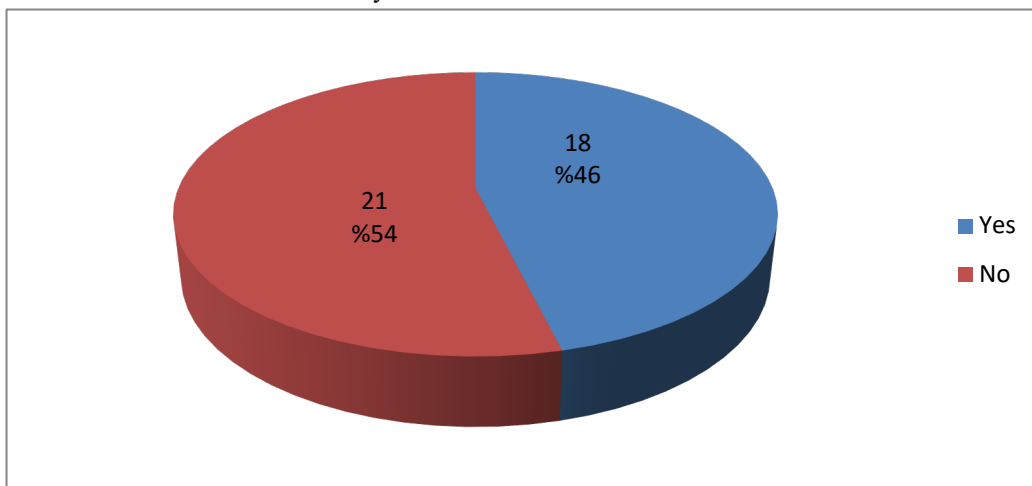
“The color. I do not prefer the ones with writing.” (12M)

“Since I usually wear them in summer, I prefer light and pleasant colors (blue and tones), the t-shirts that fit me perfectly, with a printing of my favorite historical buildings and short literary phrases.” (15M)

“If it has a picture, I pay attention to what the picture evokes, if it has a text in a foreign language, I pay attention to the meaning.” (19M)

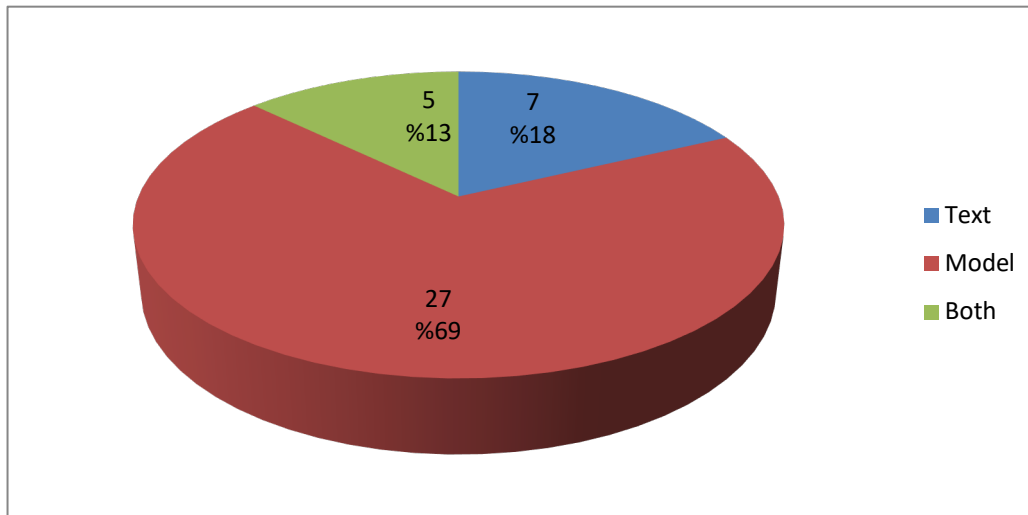
“I make sure that there are no foreign texts the meaning of which I do not know.” (27F)

Chart 5: Did you ever have a t-shirt with a Turkish text?



As seen in Chart 5, 54% of the participants never had a t-shirt with Turkish text, and 46% had.

Chart 6: Is the text on t-shirts or the t-shirt model important for you? Why?



As seen in Chart 6, 69% of the participants were not interested in the t-shirt text and they paid attention to the model of the t-shirt. It was observed that only 18% of the participants cared about the text on t-shirts during purchase. 13% of the participants stated that they paid attention to both the model and the text during purchase. Certain participant responses are presented below.

“Actually, the text on a t-shirt is important. But today, it is more important that the T-shirt attracts attention, in other words, the model.” (2M)

“Generally, the model. I like Polo t-shirts, so I pay attention to the model of the t-shirt.” (3M)

“The model matters. The text on the t-shirt does not matter if it suits my taste.” (5M)

“I do not pay much attention to the text. I purchase based on the model.” (13M)

“Both are important. I pay attention to the model to see if it is beautiful, I check the text out to determine if it is something bad.” (14M)

“First, the model is important. However, if there is text, the model is more important for me. If the text is absurd, I would give up.” (19M)

“Usually, the model because I am never concerned about the meaning.” (24F)

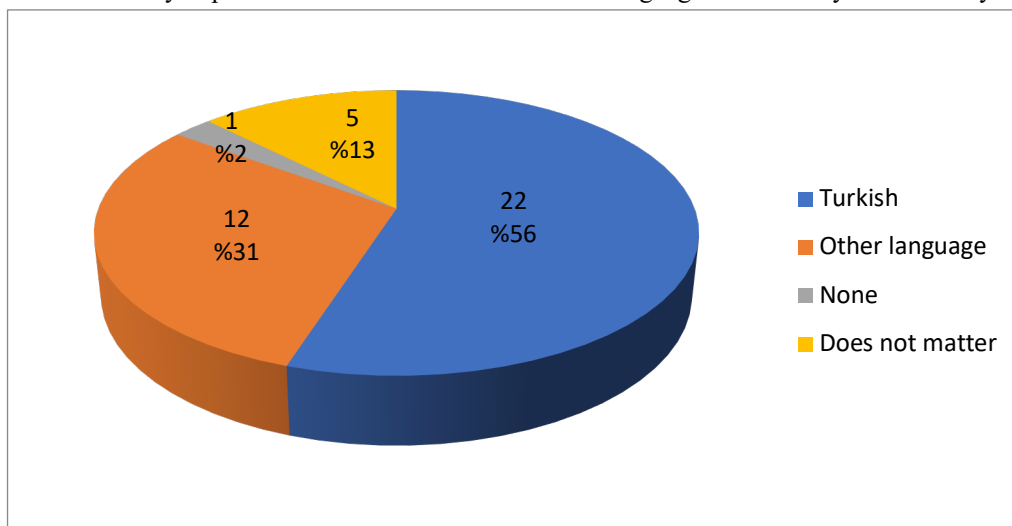
“The text is important. Because it may be inappropriate.” (27F)

“The model, because I usually think most people would not understand [the text].” (31F)

“Both are important. But even if it is a comfortable t-shirt, I would not buy it if the text is nonsense.” (37F)

“I pay attention to the text. What it means is important because I will carry it on me.” (38F)

Chart 4: Would you prefer a text in Turkish or in another language on a t-shirt you would buy? Why?



As seen in Chart 4, 56% of the participants preferred the text on the t-shirt to be in Turkish. 31% of the pre-service Turkish language teachers stated that they would prefer the text on the t-shirt to be in another language. It did not matter for 13% of respondents, while 2% preferred neither. Certain participant responses are presented below.

"I prefer it in Turkish. I personally do not admire foreigners. That is why I prefer Turkish." (3M)

"It should be in Turkish. It is important to know the meaning." (5M)

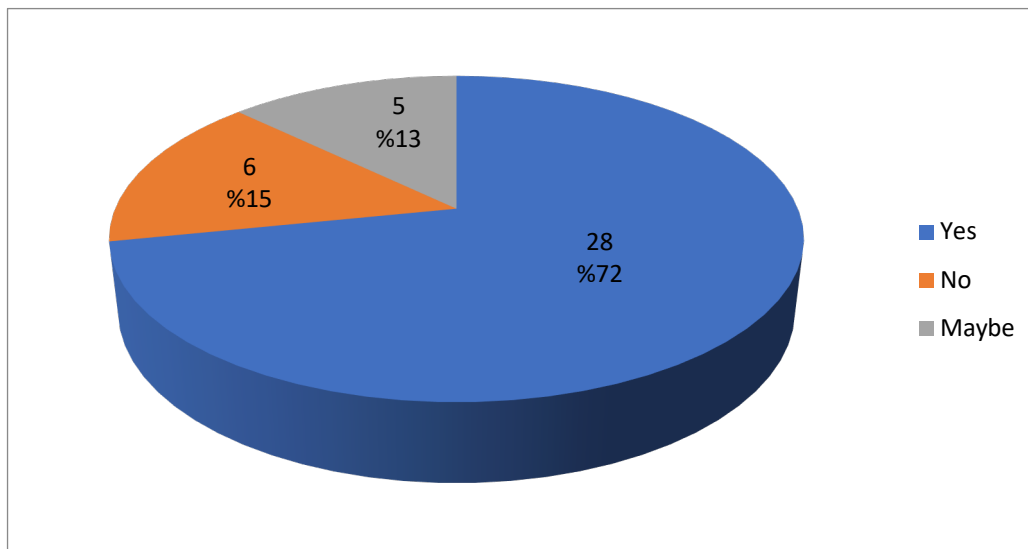
"I prefer it to be in a foreign language, I love English. (7M)

"Since the translation of some English phrases is more striking than Turkish, I also have t-shirts with English texts on them. But the text should be in Turkish." (10M)

"I would prefer Turkish. But on an appealing t-shirt, I do not care about the language of the text." (18M)

"I do not prioritize Turkish because I do not want to wear something that everyone can understand." (37F)

Chart 5: Do you think t-shirt texts should be in Turkish? Why?



As seen in Chart 5, 72% of the pre-service Turkish language teachers stated that t-shirt texts should be in Turkish, 15% stated that they should not be in Turkish. 13% stated that they could be.

"Yes, it should be. Native language texts instead of a foreign language could help the development of our language." (2M)

"Let it be in Turkish. The place we live in is Turkey and the language we use should be Turkish. Let us not popularize admiration of the foreigners." (3M)

"Some of them should be in a foreign language. Because when translated into Turkish, they have a different meaning." (19M)

"I think they should be in Turkish. But I do not prefer these. Since it is our native language, many people would notice it when we walk on the street, and this would be disturbing. But since not everyone is fluent in a different language, it may not attract the attention." (29F)

"Not necessary. People should express themselves the way they want to." (7M)

#### 4. Concluding Remarks, Discussion and Recommendations

In this section, the analysis results are interpreted, and associated discussions and recommendations are presented. The following conclusions were reached for the study sub-problems:

1- Among the pre-service Turkish language teachers, 49% paid attention to the color, 46% paid attention to the model, 26% paid attention to the style, 18% paid attention to the text, 10% paid attention to the design, 5% paid attention to the brand, and 2% paid attention to the quality when purchasing t-shirts.

2- 54% did not own a t-shirt with a text in Turkish, while 46% did.

3- 69% did not care about the text on the t-shirts they buy and prioritized the t-shirt model, while 18% cared about the text.



4- 56% preferred Turkish text on their t-shirts, 31% preferred texts in another language, 13% did not care, and 2% preferred neither.

5- 72% stated that these texts should be in Turkish and 15% stated that these texts should not be in Turkish.

Literature review revealed that there were no empirical studies on t-shirt texts. Ok (2007) investigated the expressionist patterns on printed t-shirts. In the study, it was reported that t-shirts are used for different purposes and are important visual communication elements. Ok's study is important since it revealed the communication power of the t-shirts, consistent with the present study findings.

Ayata (2012) analyzed the clothing in general, and t-shirts in particular, based on five categories: 1. Foreign Place Names, 2. Brand Names, 3. Innocent Foreign Texts, 4. Obscene Texts, and 5. Turkish Texts. In the study, it was emphasized that foreign texts, photographs and signs that people carry on the t-shirts without realizing the features that contradict to Turkish culture and Islamic beliefs.

Küçükbezirci (2014) reported that individuals send messages to other parties via the texts, prints or images on the t-shirts they wear. Thus, it was determined that although these messages look like conscious, a substantial number of people do not recognize what is written on their clothing, do not research, only like the color or model, or say that they wear it because it was given as a gift. Thus, the findings reported by Küçükbezirci are consistent with the present study results.

The following could be recommended based on the study results:

- Empirical studies should be conducted to raise awareness about t-shirt texts. These studies could reach masses and the awareness of a higher number of people could be raised.
- Such studies should also be conducted with the primary, middle and high school students, and their awareness should be raised as stated in the proverb "as the twig is bent, so grows the tree."
- It is necessary to raise awareness of both students and parents. As is known, not everyone is fluent in a foreign language; thus, they may not know what the t-shirt text means or may not pay attention to the text. However, if they are informed, parents would at least wonder what these tests mean when they buy t-shirts for their children, and they would stop buying clothes with texts the meaning of which they do not know.
- In the study, it was observed that almost half (54%) of the university students did not speak any foreign language. Thus, it is important to encourage students to learn at least one foreign language.
- It is the duty of everyone, especially teachers, to own national and moral values, to preserve our language and culture against degeneration. It is important to conduct this type of studies with teachers, who train future generations, to raise awareness.

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