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“IT IS KIND OF COOL AND I PREFER SPEAKING ABOUT STUFF LIKE THIS.”

TURKISH EFL LEARNERS’ USE OF VAGUE LANGUAGE IN SPEAKING

BY

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ABSTRACT

Vague Language – a less precise form of language we deliberately use - has been of interest to many researchers over the last two decades since it is highly significant in everyday language.

This study sets out to determine how Turkish L2 learners' use of vague language differ from native English speakers (NESs) in terms of frequency, and to reveal correlation between the proficiency level and gender of Turkish L2 learners and their use of vague expressions.

Data indicated the most and least frequently used vague expressions in the following five types of vague expressions: (i) placeholder words, (ii) vague category identifiers, (iii) vague quantifiers, (iv) approximators, and (v) hedging expressions. A careful scrutiny of the data illustrated differing frequencies of use of some of these vague expression categories. The participants of the study were 27 male students with a low and high level of English, 24 female students with a low and high level of English and Turkish L2 speakers of English and English L1 speakers. The current analysis provides significant insight into different patterns of vague expression use in terms of English learner's level of English and gender, and thus constitutes pioneering research in the subfield of VL use specific to Turkish learners of English.

The results suggested that there are some certain sets of vague expressions, which are pervasive feature of the English L1 speakers' speech, employed by both female and male Turkish L2 learners with the aim of managing the fluency of conversation.

Considerably, while VL is mostly used in conversations, ironically it is not thoroughly included in English course books and taught at schools.

Key Words: Vague Language, Turkish L2 Learners, Turkish Male and Female L2 learners, Native Speakers of English.

KISA ÖZET

Günlük hayatta kullandığımız dilde önemli ölçüde yer alan bulanık ifadeler son 20 yıldır araştırmacıların dikkatini çekmektedir.

Bu çalışma İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen Türk öğrencilerin ve ana dil olarak İngilizce konuşan kişilerin bulanık ifadeleri kullanma sıklığını ve bulanık ifadeleri kullanmanın Türk öğrencilerin İngilizce seviyeleri ve cinsiyetleri arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Veriler (i) yer tutucular, (ii) bulanık ulam belirleyiciler, (iii) bulanık niteleyiciler, (iv) yaklaşıklık ifadeleri ve (v) söylem yumuşatıcılar gibi ifadeleri içeren her bir kategoride en sık ve en seyrek kullanılan bulanık ifadeleri ortaya koymuş ve veriler detaylı olarak incelendiğinde söz konusu bulanık ifade kategorileri arasındaki sıklık farkları da ortaya çıkmıştır. Çalışmaya katılan 27 erkek ve 24 kız öğrenci düşük ve yüksek düzeyde İngilizce bilen erkek öğrenciler, düşük ve yüksek düzeyde İngilizce bilen kız öğrenciler ve ana dil olarak İngilizce konuşan alt gruplardan oluşmaktadır. Mevcut analiz, bulanık ifadelerin farklı İngilizce öğrenen bireyin İngilizce düzeyine ve cinsiyetine göre kullanımına ilişkin kesin bir iç görü sunmakta ve bu nedenle de İngilizce öğrenen Türklere özel bulanık dil kullanımı alanında öncü bir çalışma niteliği taşımaktadır.

Sonuçlar, İngilizceyi anadil olarak konuşanların konuşmalarında sıkça rastlanan ve İngilizceyi ikinci dil olarak öğrenen hem kız hem de erkek öğrenciler tarafından konuşmayı akıcı hale getirmek üzere benimsenen belirli bulanık ifadeler olduğunu göstermektedir. Bulanık ifadeler en çok karşılıklı konuşmalarda kullanılırken, bu

kullanımların İngilizce ders kitaplarında hak ettiği şekilde yer almadığı ve okullarda öğretilmediği bir gerçektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bulanık İfadeler, İngilizceyi Yabancı Dil Olarak Öğrenen Kız ve Erkek Türk Öğrenciler, Ana Dil Olarak İngilizce Konuşanlar.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
IRR	Calculating Inter-rater Reliability
SLL	Second Language Learner
KWIC	Key-word-in-context
NES	Native English Speakers
OANC	Open American National Corpus
SGFE	Spoken Grammar Form of English
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
VL	Vague Language

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Globalization has fostered the spread of English to such an extent that today nearly a billion people around the world speak English as a second language. This means that in today's world, there are more people speaking English as a second language than there are native speakers (Tapia, 2010).

Taking this vital role attributed to English into consideration, the need for learning English and speaking it fluently has ascended in various fields. For this purpose, in order to develop second language learners' ability to hone the communicative competence, communicative language teaching practices have been adopted and strictly applied by English language programs far and wide. In connection to this increasing global motivation, various English Language schools and particularly private colleges and universities in Turkey have started to offer an extensive variety of English courses over the last 50 years. As a result English has become the most studied and eventually most popular medium of education in Turkey. However, this situation brought about some problems. Dogancay and Aktuna (1998) assert;

> "In Turkey English carries the instrumental function of being the most studied foreign language and the most popular medium of education after Turkish. On an interpersonal level, it is used as a link language for international business and for tourism while also providing a code that symbolizes modernization and elitism to the educated middle classes and those in the upper strata of the socioeconomic ladder" (p.37).

However, they also assert that after years of studying English, most of the Turkish L2 learners still experience serious difficulties in speaking. This ironic situation brings to mind the question: Why the majority of the Turkish L2 learners in Turkey fail to have specific conversation skills? Bearing these potential problems in mind, this study tries to shed light on how vague language (VL), 'which is present in a great deal of language use', is used in L2 learners in Istanbul, Turkey (Channell, 1994). It is presupposed that if this highly significant feature of spoken English is analyzed thoroughly, it may provide possibilities to both EFL teachers and L2 learners to diagnose the speaking difficulties that they are experiencing (Gao & Zhu, 2006). Majority of EFL teachers in Turkey in private school setting try to employ communicative approaches and methods in their classes, they encourage their students to use more of daily language and expressions so they do not to have any comprehension problems while interacting and communicating with English native speakers and other people speaking English. Most of the Turkish students studying or travelling abroad have been told by native speakers that they sound too blunt when they ask for something or try to explain something. This is not because Turkish students cannot speak proper English; this is because their English performance / speaking and their competence / knowledge of English lack some expressions which are in this case VL as it causes ambiguity. According to my experiences as an Engish teacher with my students so far, VL and daily language and expressions including any vagueness and ambiguity have always caused confusion in my classes and and I realized the fact that I should sometimes focus more on VL and expressions in my classes to clarify the meaning and prevent from misunderstanding and confusion. These misunderstandings and confusion may result from the fact that the majority of the English language teachers in Turkey (both native and non-native) seem to fail to

teach VL in their classes in spite of its vital importance. The majority of these teachers suppose that VL may lead to misunderstandings and communication breakdowns. Even though, it may cause ambiguity, if used appropriately it helps people to save their faces and be more polite while speaking (Channell, 1994). It is unfortunate that in language classes, VL can be considered as empty fillers used by speakers while conveying their messages. However vague expressions have a vital role in the communication of a particular message as the goal of a particular utterance is to convey a vague meaning or vagueness itself.

The use of VL encompasses different disciplines and a range of social contexts from domestic environments to institutional settings. It has received further attention in recent years, and several studies on this topic have been conducted. For example, Gao and Zhu (2005) assert that, the widespread use of vague language for varied purposes and in varied settings shows that vagueness is as important as explicitness in language use. To the same extent, Cutting (2007) affirms that vague language is a central feature of daily language.

Even though the majority of scholars have not reached to a clear-cut consensus on VL's definition, Channell's categorization has been the most cited work so far. Channell (1994) asserts;

"An expression or a word is vague if:

a) it can be contrasted with another expression or word which appears to render the same position
b) it is purposely and unabashedly vague
c) the meaning arises from intrinsic uncertainty."

Correspondingly, in this present study I adhered to Channell's VL definition and VL categorization.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Learning a new language is a challenging and demanding process and is difficult for language learners at the very beginning to make progress and associate new input with existing knowledge. To master the new language being learned requires learners to devote most of their time and energy and accordingly their patience to the language. For language learners to communicate ably in the language they learn, they have to practice and study as hard to learn alternative words to support their expressions and understanding of the new language.

In the process of learning new things, learners might encounter words which are either not used in the learner's native language or which do not have the same usage that may foster uncertainty and ambiguity. This situation is additionally complicated by the reality that, as a means of communication, a given language is not a homogeneous code with a homogeneous group of speakers. That is, languages show differences from one region to another, from one community to another, from one social group to another. Besides, languages determine the structure of the real world as perceived by human beings. In linguistics, according to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (1929);

> "An individual's thoughts and actions are determined by the language or languages the individual speaks and the varying cultural concepts and categories inherent in different languages affect the cognitive classification of the experienced world in such a way that speakers of different languages think and behave differently."

Thus, it is even possible to see differences between groups of even the native speakers of a particular language. Also, differences and variations between individuals are common in language, and these variations sometimes cause

inexplicitness and vagueness (Cheng & Warren, 2001). The reason of these variations is that individuals, regardless of what dialect they speak, control a range of speech styles and employ a variety of language according to its use in social situations. For example, when speaking in a formal setting contrary to an informal setting, individuals are more likely to be extra careful with the grammatical accuracy of their sentences, their pronunciation and use of words.

In language learning, clarity and distinctiveness have an important role. Language learners are prone to search for discreteness and comprehensibility in the language learning process, while they seek similarities and equivalents between the target language and their native language (Ely, 1989). Particularly, having an understanding of discreteness and comprehensibility in different skills like reading, writing, speaking and listening is essential to learn a language. This can be provided by closeness and equivalents in the target language and mother tongue. Within the merits of the four skills that are stated above, learners make an effort to be accurate and understand each word with the correct meaning. This tendency to focus on accuracy in language learning makes learners' progress of understanding VL slower (Cheng & Warren, 2001). That is to say, compared to native speakers, second language learners are less inclined to inexplicitness and use VL (Ely, 1989). There are some certain factors preventing L2 learners from using VL in their discourse. De Cock, Granger, Leech and McEnery (1998) attribute this situation to three causes: systematic differences in the way vagueness is expressed in their mother tongue and in L2; lack of teaching VL in classroom; finally lack of contact with native speakers. L2 learners' inability to use VL properly and exposure to VL from native speakers hinder their understanding and affect their accuracy and fluency and their conversation greatly in a way that results in communication breakdown. The

importance of VL for L2 learners to have a successful communication is addressed by several studies of pragmatic competence which described VL as a crucial building block in L2 learners' successful communication and how VL can help L2 learners to pragmatically manage communication (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). As VL includes vagueness and ambiguity in its expressions, sometimes depending on the linguistic competence of L2 learners, VL becomes the source of confusion and causes interruptions in the comprehension process of L2 learners and increases their stress and relatedly causes some serious breakdowns in communication. When L2 learners feel more secure and relaxed and when the conversation they have with native speakers stays within the limits of their L2 competence, what refers to the fact that when L2 learners do not get exposed to a harder and more complex language and they have some common and close expressions, they take part in the conversation more and become more willing and cooperative in speaking.

This, however, is not to say that L2 learners never use VL. On the contrary, many are intrigued by native speakers' use of VL and often try to imitate it in their own speech (Channell, 2000). Accordingly, VL has an influence over the thinking and communication processes which is created by learners. However, this creates a problem; learners may not be necessarily aware of the vagueness and implicitness of the VL they use. When learners try to grasp the target language in the course of their acquisition process, they often stumble when confronted with the ambiguities and uncertainties presented by natives' use of VL (Channell, 2000).

Vagueness can often be seen in the use of language that is widely employed in both speaking and writing and, thus, the correct use of VL can greatly improve learners' communicative competence since this includes not only a learner's grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, and phonology, but, from a

sociocultural perspective on language, also the social knowledge about how and when to use language, including VL, in an appropriate context (Gao & Zhu, 2005). VL cannot be described as "bad" or "good" independent of contextualization. Evaluating VL as appropriate or inappropriate depends on its connection to contexts and situations. The appropriate selection of VL is what really matters and counts and also creates an important aspect of pragmatic competence / the ability to use language effectively in a contextually appropriate fashion. Jucker, Smith and Lüdge (2003) propose that some contexts require precise language, for example, a high degree of precision is ordinarily needed to achieve the goals of a medical report, a legal contract, or an academic paper. However, the same type of precision from a politician, in a radio interview, or for partners during a casual chat would be counter-productive and it might be off-putting and / or misleading. For this reason, learners' understanding of the nature and the role of vagueness in language use is an important factor and investigating VL will contribute to knowledge in the field in the Turkish context as the use of VL is critical to an understanding of language itself.

1.3 Research Aims and Questions

This study aims to analyze the use of VL in conversations by L1 speakers of Turkish learning English as second language and NES. It is assumed that in different courses including language learning and teaching, the majority of Turkish students have an educational background dominated by an accuracy-oriented learning style, which may have hindered Turkish L2 learners from gaining communicative and speaking skills (Küçük & Cepni, 2004). As a result, they may not have learned VL and avoided using these expressions in their speaking. Thus, in light of these

presuppositions, Turkish L2 learners may use useful VL less frequently than NES. Considering these facts, the current study has the following objectives:

(a) to determine how Turkish L2 Learners' use of vague language differ from NES in terms of frequency.

(b) to determine the frequency and distribution of vague expressions in Turkish L2 learners' conversations during interviews,

(c) to reveal correlation between the proficiency level and gender of Turkish L2 learners and their use of vague expressions,

Furthermore, this study focuses on the analysis of the VL in conversations of Turkish L2 learners. Specifically it addresses the following research questions:

1. How does Turkish L2 Learners' use of vague language differ from NES in terms of frequency?
2. To what extent do Turkish L2 learners use different expressions to indicate vagueness in conversations?
3. Is there any correlation between their gender and their use of these expressions?
4. Is there any correlation between their proficiency level and their use of these expressions in terms of frequency?

1.4 Hypotheses

The following hypothesis is formulated to be examined in the study:

There is a direct correlation between the proficiency level of Turkish L2 English learners and their use of these expressions.

1.5 Justification

The purpose of using vague words or expressions in speaking is universal, and as mentioned above with VL, speakers intended to create a less formal and less direct idea. For example, when we go out with a friend, we are likely to say, "See you around 10" or "See you at 10ish" rather than "See you at 10 o'clock". We also employ vague expressions and words when we describe things in conversations; for

example, “It was kind of boring” rather than “It was boring,” and we employ these words and expressions, when we talk about groups or sets. For example, “Would you like an orange juice or a coke, or something?” The examples show that vague words and expressions create the implicitness and are rather unclear (Crystal & Davy, 1975). However, a study conducted by Chafe (1982) shows that regarded as a significant attribute of both spoken and written English, vagueness is crucial for the vocabulary of informal conversation because it is considered an important feature of spoken and written language and is often the aspect of language that permits its flexibility in communication and its ability to perform social functions (Ondari & Michieka, 2012). It is often noticed by language teachers that although advanced students of English may use English lexically, phonologically and grammatically in a correct way, their English may still sound literary in style and theatrical to a native speaker as a result of incapability of including and using appropriate pragmatic functions, including vague expressions (Channell, 1994). At this point Channell (1994) points out that the curricula of EFL text books, which scarcely include exercises for teaching the use of VL in casual conversation to students, should include vague expressions which are central and crucial to informal spoken English and aim to explain socially significance and usage of VL in context (Evison, McCarthy & O’Keeffe, 2007). Within the context of this study, the importance of vagueness in some expressions used by L2 learners in spoken language is examined.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Vague Language Overview

People, scholars, researchers, and linguists hold opposing beliefs about VL. While one group supports the idea that VL is actually 'bad' language, and people should avoid using it, others as a counter argument affirm that VL is frequently used in everyday conversations, and it actually helps people in many ways such as: showing power or politeness, giving or withholding the right amount of information, ensuring self-protection. (Channell 1994)

Jucker *et. al* (2003) explicitly summarize these different perceptions on VL as follows:

> "It is commonly assumed that vagueness is a defect to be avoided whenever possible. However, several linguists have criticized this notion for being too plain view of language" (p.1738).

However McCarthy (2006) asserts that, "vagueness is central to informal conversation, and its absence can make utterances blunt and pedantic and the vague tokens exhibit pragmatic integrity and play central interactive roles, even though their syntax is incomplete and dependent." Similarly, Williamson (1994: 4869, cited in Juker et al. (2003) confirms that;

"Vagueness is a desirable feature of natural languages. Vague words often suffice for the purpose in hand, and too much precision can lead to time wasting and inflexibility." (p.1738)

Thus, it is quite clear from these statements that traditional beliefs about VL have changed since the mid-1990s. The majority of linguists now acknowledge the vital importance of it. So, what is exactly vague language?

2.2 What is Vague Language?

VL was previously seen as being implicit. Grice (1975), for example, defined it as conversational implicature where speakers defy "cooperative principle" and the hearer grasps the implied meaning. Peirce (1902) defined vagueness as follows:

> "A proposition is vague where there are possible states of things concerning which it is intrinsically uncertain whether, had they been contemplated by the speaker, he would have regarded them as excluded or allowed by the proposition By intrinsically uncertain we mean not uncertain in consequence of any ignorance of the interpreter, but because the speaker's habits of language were indeterminate, so that one day he would regard the proposition as excluding, another as admitting, those states of things. Yet this must be understood to have reference to what might be deduced from a perfect knowledge of his state of mind, for it is precisely because these questions never did or did not frequently, present themselves that his habit remained indeterminate" (p.748).

In accordance to this principle, speakers try to send understandable communicative messages within the context of any particular conversation, and hearers assume that speakers are doing this. According to Cotterill (2007), the usage and definition of the vagueness in literature can change for this reason. He adds that there is no precise distinction of the term.

VL as a matter of fact goes along with ambiguity, but it is important to define the notion truly and understand the difference between ambiguity and vagueness. In both of the cases for the hearers it is hard to make a clear understanding between them. Ambiguity is an expression with two or more different meanings, and vagueness, on the other hand, is an utterance in which different meanings are not clear and cannot be identified easily (Boakye, 2007). At this point, "The lady hit the man with an umbrella." is an example of ambiguity. This sentence is ambiguous as it can be understood in two or more possible senses or ways and raises a set of questions: "Is the lady using an umbrella to hit or is she hitting the a man who is carrying an umbrella?". As an example of VL, Channel (1994) gives an answer to the question "What time will you be home from work?" Considering the workload or traffic, the most logical and truthful reply for which she would have evidence would be "about six o'clock". From this, the hearer would infer that she could not say exactly what time she would be home.

One of the most distinctive analyses about VL made by Channell (1994) and this comprehensive study shows that vague words and phrases can be divided into three categories which are: vague additives, vagueness by the choice of words, and vagueness by implicature, and then she suggests the following list:

- "Vague additives: In these cases a word or phrase is added to what would otherwise be a precise statement, to result in a vague reading. (e.g approximators, tag, vague category identifiers)
- Vagueness by choice of vague words: Here, speakers choose words which are always, and unabashedly vague, such as thingummy and whatsit. For quantities, there exist such terms as loads of and heaps of

- Vagueness by implicature: This is where an apparently precise sentence can be used and understood to have a vague meaning.
- Vagueness by implying: This is where a correct sentence may have a vague meaning."

Different scholars use different terminology for each category; however, Channell's list has been the most detailed and clear one so far. Thus, in order to avoid confusion I adopted Channell's categorization with minor modifications and used the following list in identifying the vague propositions in the recordings:

- "Placeholder words: things, stuff, something
- Vague category identifiers: or something like that, stuff like that something like that, or something, somewhere, probably, in a way, maybe, and so on
- Partial specifiers: at least, at most, less than, not more than under, over
- Vague quantifiers: lots of, oodles of, masses of, many, a touch of, a scrap of, few, seldom, some, several, sometimes
- Number approximations: about, 5 or 6, around, approximately
- Prefixes and Suffixes: table-like, native-like
- Hedging expressions: sort of, kind of, technically, practically (Channell, 1994, p. 18).

2.3 Vague Language Categories

Approximators: "*about, approximately"*, and "*or so",* as in "*around eight*, *approximately one- third"*, and "*seventeen or so"*. For example, a car dealer wants to sell a car but will say "There are approximately three cars that are on sale in this neighborhood." By doing this, the dealer exercises caution. Even though he may know the prices of the other cars and the real number of

them, he uses approximation to give a number which would not be used against him even if he did not count them correctly.

Vague Adverbs: *"somehow, sometimes, sort of, and somewhere".*

Vague Determiners: "*some, that one, just"* For example, "He is just a little boy, he doesn't know anything." The intention in this sentence is to degrade the boy.

Vague numbers: In language sometimes numbers are used in an indefinite way such as *threeish, and thirty something*. They are the vague versions of the numbers that actually mean thirty or three.

2.4 Functions of Vague Language

Vagueness can be used as a conversational strategy and it embodies various linguistic and interactional functions. Channell (1994) in her study examined these functions by analyzing a variety of spoken and written texts taken from Birmingham Collection of English Texts and Oxford Corpus of English Language. She predominantly used conversation analysis in analyzing these texts and discovered that native speakers use VL in order to:

- "show lack of knowledge
- avoid being offensive
- avoid being derogatory or pretentious
- withhold information deliberately
- avoid showing uncertainty or a lexical gap
- protect oneself or somebody/something else."

Moreover, Channell discusses the theory of conversational implicature and explains Grice's cooperative principle. As Grice defines, cooperative principle is making your contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged (Grice, 1989). He then proposes the following maxims:

Maxim of Quantity: be informative but not over-informative,

Maxim of Quality: tell the truth or things that can be proved,

Maxim of Relevance: be relevant to the topic,

Maxim of Manner: avoid ambiguity and be clear.

These maxims establish what speakers should do to communicate successfully and conveniently. Speakers choose not to use one of the maxims sometimes and instead use another one to create a conversational implication. Conversational implicatures, which are not linked to the particular words and phrases in a speech or utterance, are pragmatic inferences. They are not entailments and presuppositions. However they arise instead from contextual factors and the understanding that conventions are observed in conversation. In conversations what is meant often goes beyond what is said. Grice (1989) to whom theory of conversational implicatures attributed, calls this "implicature" because it is breaking or skipping one of the maxims and choosing or using another maxim to create a specific effect (Channell, 1994). To enlighten this remark there is a conversation below;

Speaker A: Oh! What a gorgeous shirt. How much did it cost, Shelley?

Speaker B: It cost like three hundred dollars or so.

Speaker A: It's a good deal.

In this context, the approximate price is not used, but it does not create a notion of conveying more information. Here maxims of quantity are obscured. However, it gives an effect that even if they knew that it cost three hundred and twenty-five dollars, the conversation would not get them any further. In another example, a teacher can give some information about a book and say "We are going to cover about four or five of them (subjects) but we'll have enough time just for three of them today." After all a teacher is aware of the number of subjects but here it's the students who understand that teacher violates the maxim of quantity for a particular purpose. Obviously, the teacher knows the number of subjects and intentionally he/se has ignored the maxim of quality (telling the definite number of subjects) for a specific effect. As Channell (1994) affirms "..vague expressions may be used to enable speakers to follow these maxims" (p.33). Conversely, speakers may choose not to follow these maxims in order 'to create specific effects' (Channell, 1994). Conversational implicatures is classically a type of figurative language in that the speaker violates the cooperative principle which describes how effective communication in conversation is achieved in common social situations, that is, how listeners and speakers must act cooperatively and mutually accept one another to be understood in a particular way (Grice, 1975). According to this principle, the hearer is able to understand the implied meaning on the assumption that assume that the speaker is being cooperative, and thus they make conversational implicatures about what is said. For example, in a conversation a speaker can use vague expressions to hide the real information or obscure the actual numbers of a place and price etc. as in the examples "around 6 o'clock" and "about four or five of them" provided above. The usage of VL expressions such as "around and about" can show a specific number but the number would not matter for the context. Speakers can protect their

ideas by using approximate quantities or qualities, if they do not know the exact number or if the numbers vary. Instead of telling an exact number of a thing, speaker can tell a number that will be around the real number. In addition, based on her extracts, Channell (1994) states that if a person lacks information or sufficient amount of vocabulary about any given topic or any subject, they use vague expressions. She also adds that VL has a useful aspect because it can make speakers talk to each other about a specific subject which they do not do not know exactly. It encourages speakers to talk without too much information and knowledge on the topic by using the expressions and they still tend to look for other meanings that could be implied by the sentence. In a conversation speakers make their contributions as informative as required and avoid overinformativeness as it may be confusing. Overinformativeness, however, is merely a waste of time. Using VL helps speakers secure the conversation and the intended meaning without revealing too much of what is known about the subject and protect their ideas and their understanding of what is said as listeners can make some inferences out of the conversation in a related context without getting confused.

2.5 Interactive aspects of VL

Using the conversational analysis method Jucker et al., (2003) investigated how students at California State University in Long Beach interact with each other during four pre-designed tasks. There were seven pairs of students – 10 females and 4 males. They were grouped as the following: strangers, friends and single-sex groups. Results indicated that they used VL for the following reasons:
Uncertainty at the time of speaking

- "lack of information about a given quantity, quality or identity,

- deliberately withholding information,
- giving the right amount of information,
- maintaining fluency,
- directing hearer's attention to the most relevant information,
- conveying different levels of certainty regarding the propositional content of an utterance,
- conveying the newsworthiness or expectedness of a statement,
- power, politeness and self-protection,
- establishing a social bond" (Adopted from Jucker et al., 2003: 1766).

In addition to the functions that Channell listed in section 2.4, Jucker et al., (2003) here includes information on how speakers convey information and establish a social bond among them by using VL. As it can be seen clearly, apart from being a politeness strategy and helping speakers talk to the point by not being over-informative, there are several other interactive aspects of VL.

2.6 Vague Language and Native Speakers

Sometimes VL is seen inappropriate because it is associated with a lack of precision or clarity though it is frequently used by both native and non-native speakers of the language very often (Ely, 1989). L1 speakers have the tendency of using VL in situations, where they are unable to give specific information at that precise moment in the conversation. Sometimes the reason for this is either giving false information or erroneous information (Channell, 2000). Additionally, VL is inclined to be used as a social softener by the native speakers. This strategy relies heavily on pragmatics to convey the intended meaning while still utilizing the

semantic meaning as a way to avoid losing face. Native speakers find brief descriptions too bold and because of this, in order to soften the tone of exact and overconfident descriptions, native speakers use VL in their sentences (Channell, 2000).

As mentioned above, "pragma linguistic" and "socio pragmatic" terms help us to grasp the significance of the relationship amidst VL and native speakers. Pragma linguistic and socio pragmatic terms try to address different kinds of pragmatic malfunctions. The first term "pragma linguistic" refers to the strength or power of the utterance and it deals with the understanding of the intention behind the words. Meanwhile, the second term "socio pragmatic" is relevant to sociolinguistic competence which refers to gathering a grasp of the appropriate meanings within different contexts.

2.7 Vague Language and Non-native Speakers

According to De Cock et al., (1998), people who speak English as their second language do not adopt VL and they do not use it in the conversations. Similarly, Channell (1994) explains that most L2 problems occur when English L2 learners are too occupied with grammar, accent and lexis when creating the sentences. According to the finding of the studies conducted on non-native speakers' use of vague expressions in English, non-native speakers of English do not use VL on a large scale and native speakers of English tend to use vague expressions four times more frequently than non-native speakers of English do (Metsa-Ketela, 2006; De Cock et al., 1998). Linguists have realized the need to apply the findings from studies on vagueness to TEFL Cutting (2007) asserts that;

"However, as there is a great deal of problems regarding teaching conversation to L2 learners, teaching vagueness has been either postponed or

completely ignored. Even though, the importance of teaching VL has been acknowledged by numerous scholars or linguists, a practical framework for teaching VL has not been proposed" (p.10).

Generally non-native speakers are not accustomed to the lexical form of VL and using it in a proper context would be hard because VL is not taught in the lessons in a proper or systematical way (Channell, 1994). To create this awareness VL should be taught at schools. VL is an essential part of casual conversation, but despite its importance, VL does not receive as much attention as it requires in EFL course books that focus spoken grammar although native speakers of English use VL very often in their conversations, it is hardly ever formally taught in English classrooms. VL from the pragmatic perspective is beneficial to English Language Teaching, for a good command of some pragmatic functions of VL and a full awareness of using VL improves students' communicative competence.

2.8 Teaching Vague Language

The functions and elements of VL must be taken into account when trying to teach a second language. The role of VL for effective classroom communication is indispensable. Concordantly, one of the most important features that have to be considered about VL is the selection of appropriate communicative competence. Moreover, VL is present in everyday talk. When a learner understands the meaning of lexis and grammatical structures of a second language, it does not necessarily mean that he will understand how VL is used. Pragmatic knowledge is based on the way individuals communicate meaning and focuses on how they produce contextually appropriate utterances. If the learner lacks pragmatic knowledge and competence, it is not possible to understand and use VL appropriately.

Being aware of the importance of vagueness and teaching the pragmatic purpose of vagueness can facilitate and improve the teacher practices and contribute to the communicative competence of students and develop their conversational skills. The studies that have been carried out on the importance of vagueness have mainly focused on how native speakers speak English.

Linguists have realized the need to apply the findings from studies on vagueness to TEFL (Cutting, 2007). However, since there is a great deal of problems regarding teaching conversation to L2 learners, teaching vagueness has been either postponed or completely ignored. Even though, the importance of teaching VL has been acknowledged by numerous scholars or linguists, a practical framework for teaching VL has not been proposed. For example, Channell (1994) that VL merits specific attention in the description of English as well as in the teaching programs. However, regarding teaching materials or strategies she only gives a newspaper activity example at the end of her book. This activity is quite insufficient and contradictory in itself because she sees vagueness as a pervasive feature of colloquial language; however, the activity she suggests has been specifically designed for written discourse (see Appendix A for the whole activity). Brown (1979) also suggests that L2 learners should be taught how to be imprecise, but he fails to explain how. Similarly, Crystal and Davy (1975) and Carter and McCarthy (1997) affirm that if L2 learners make use of VL appropriately, it can be assumed that they have mastered wide-ranging socio-linguistic skills successfully. However, they do not mention how they can specifically master these skills. Correspondingly, Carter and McCarthy (2006) advise that vague word clusters need to be taught to L2 learners since they frequently occur in everyday conversations. However, a specific activity example has not been included in the study. Concerning this important

setback in TEFL, Cutting (2007) assures that since the mid-1990s applied linguists have realized the need to apply the findings from studies on vagueness to TEFL. Ironically, despite this rising awareness, there has not been enough effort to apply these findings to TEFL over the last decade. At this point, Eggins and Slade (1997) assert that there is still lack of adequate materials for teaching casual conversation to learners of English as a second or foreign language. Respectively, Carter (1998) affirms that several English language course books do not exhibit many examples of vague language, even though it is always pragmatically highly significant, and nearly always enables polite and non-threatening interaction.

Throughout the literature, there have been a number of studies emphasizing the importance of teaching conversation, and a few studies highlighting the importance of integrating VL into TEFL settings. On the other hand, the majority of these studies fail to address specific conversational skills or speaking strategies, and to give suggestions on how to teach them.

Among these studies, the ones Jordan (1997) and Brown and Levinson (1987) conducted offer more exemplary and specific methods. However, they basically focus on integrating vagueness into written discourse. Therefore, the examples they provide concentrate on helping L2 learners to improve their writing skills. Thus, teaching conversation again has not been taken into consideration.

For example, Jordan (1997) recommends that English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers make their students aware of written vague language so that they can incorporate hedges, modals (expressing possibility, probability), adverbs and approximators. He then exemplifies some exercises on teaching hedging in academic writing. One of these exercises is as follows:

> Look at the following sentences taken from an economics book:
>
> **a)** "It is also likely to appear in the development of institutions...
>
> **b)** The ideal of economic development tends to be associated with different policy goals...
>
> **c)** Perhaps greater clarity can be brought to the meaning of economic development...
>
> How would the above three sentences be written if we wanted to make them definite and not tentative?" (Jordan, 1997) (See Appendix B for the full exercise)

It appears that even though the activity focuses on a specific aspect of VL – hedging (being cautious in writing), the presentation of the material and especially the way the question has been designed carry the implication that VL is an unwanted feature in written discourse, therefore it should be avoided. If the final goal is to have L2 learners notice the importance of VL, then a vice versa approach should have been adopted. For example, three definite statements could be given, and students could be asked to make these statements indistinct. Hamp-Lyons and Heasley (1984) suggest another exercise on teaching hedging in written discourse:

> Decide on an order for the sentences below, starting with the one which shows the most commitment to the statement and ending with the one which shows the least commitment.
>
> i) The earth is probably round.
>
> ii) The earth is possibly round.
>
> iii) The earth is round.
>
> iv) Perhaps the earth is round
>
> v) The earth is undoubtedly is round.
>
> vi) It is said that the earth is round. (cited in Jordan, 1997: 243)

This activity is a noticing task in which students are asked to decide on the commitment level of each statement. However, one of the most important problems

in this activity is that L2 learners are not given any context about these statements, and they do not know why they need to rank these statements. So, even though students are somewhat exposed to VL in these both exercises, there is no specific linguistic or sociolinguistic focus in them. Karaata (2009) relatively underpins that VL is an important component of Spoken Grammar Form of English (SGFE). He asserts that lexicogrammatical units such as 'really, actually, well, indeed, you know, I mean' are frequently used in natural conversation. The three main research questions in his study are as follows:

> Do the teachers of English in Turkey use features of spoken grammar in their own communication (speech)?
>
> Do they teach these features to their students in their classes? If yes, how often?
>
> From which source(s) did they learn these features of spoken grammar, if at all they did?

The respondents in this study were 189 Turkish teachers from several different universities, primary and high schools. They were randomly selected. He conducted a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Before participants answered the questionnaire, and participated in the semi-structured interview. Karaata introduced them a PowerPoint presentation addressing some ambiguous terms of SGFE.

The results of the study indicated that in their own communication English teachers used respectively lexicogrammatical units, vague language and ellipsis most frequently. As for teaching, they taught respectively lexicogrammatical units, vague language and ellipsis most frequently. Thus, the results indicated that 'the more a

teacher uses any SGFE in his/her personal communication, the more s/he teaches it' (Karata, 2009). However, again there was no teaching material focus in the study.

To sum up, there have been various studies on teaching conversation and some on teaching vagueness specifically. However, the majority of these studies fail to address which language areas should be taught, to whom, how and why. Thus, determining effective language learning materials in teaching conversation is a matter of judgment and depends on both eclectic teachers' stance and students' needs.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The main focus of the current study is Turkish L2 English learners' use of VL in conversations. The research questions which need to be answered are as follows:

1. How does Turkish L2 learners' use of vague language differ from NES in terms of frequency?
2. To what extent do Turkish L2 learners use different expressions to indicate vagueness in conversations?
3. Is there any correlation between their gender and their use of these expressions?
4. Is there any correlation between their proficiency level and their use of these expressions in terms of frequency?

The data of this study was analyzed quantatively. In the current study, in order to gather data, I prepared a set of questions on random topics and conducted individual interviews with each of the participants. The settings of this study were different universities in and around Istanbul. The data from 51 participants were gathered and interpreted and analyzed quantitatively.

3.1 Participants

Aged between 19 and 23, the participants in the study were 51 Turkish first, second, and third-year ELT students from various private universities in and around Istanbul, Turkey. 24 of the participants were female, whereas 27 of them were male. Nearly all of the participants took a year of English preparatory courses at high school and learned English for four to five years but have never been to an English-speaking country.

In qualitative research, determination of representative sample size involves what a researcher wants to obtain from that particular study and there are substantially differing views on this particular subject. For example, Labov (1972) points out that in order to obtain reliable findings, a researcher needs to collect data from at least twenty-five different speakers. However, in this current study, I based my study on Patton's (2002) hypothesis which confirms that the extent of qualitative research does not have a significant rule.

As a result of simple time constraints, 51 participants were randomly chosen from ELT departments of different universities in accordance with Dörnyei's (2003) assertion that, "random sampling minimizes the effects of any extraneous or subjective variables that might affect the outcome of the survey study" (p.73).

3.2 Instrumentation

3.2.1 Questions

In order to collect the data, I prepared a set of questions on random topics and conducted individual interviews with the participants for 630 minutes in total and asked these questions to each of the participants. With the subjects' consent having been obtained, these interviews were recorded (See Appendix C for the questions).

3.2.2 Selection of the Questions

I intended to have a friendly and informal conversation with the students and to serve this aim; the questions were chosen to help students talk about themselves, their ideas, and what they do. Besides, in order to get more information and to encourage participants to give more detailed information related to their second language, I mixed close and open –response questions. The questions prepared by me were tested with 5

students chosen randomly from only ELT department. As a result of the data obtained, I adjusted some questions. The set of the questions prepared by me included 12 questions on different subjects and I encouraged the participants to use informal language in a casual conversation to be able to obtain the samples of VL.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

3.3.1 Corpus

As the main focus of this study is to analyze the frequency of the participants' use of VL, naturally occurring samples of language data are required. Accordingly, in order to compare the frequency of VL use of Turkish L2 English learners and NES, a corpus and audio-recorded spoken data were needed. As a result a number of conversations were recorded and transcribed. The spoken data amounted to approximately 22600 words obtained from out of nearly 6 hours of recordings and was created to represent the informal nature of communication in a face-to-face setting and employed in the data analysis process. Furthermore, for collecting spoken discourse, it is almost impossible to record all of the conversations and interactions in participants' daily lives.[1] In this study, Open American National Corpus (OANC), which includes approximately 50 million words, was employed to determine the frequency of the use of VL of NES and Turkish L2 learners of English. To handle a big corpus like OANC, only the part of the corpus that includes spoken English was included in the present research.

[1] There are two significant principles with regard to constructing a corpus: representativeness and sampling. McEnery, Xiao and Tono (2006) point out that these principles are used to separate a corpus from an archive. In other words, focusing on two different aspects, an archive is a group of words and texts that are put together randomly, whereas a corpus provides some focused insight into a specific genre.

3.3.2 Tools

This study used two computational tools: AntConc and a computer program, Zila Word to Text Converter, for text analyses. AntConc processed the text and calculated frequency counts of words, while Zila converted the word files to text in order for AntConc to work properly. The use of software helped with text analyses of the current 28,510 -word corpus and the extracted part of OANC corpus. [2]
The frequency counts were randomly normalized to a text length of approximately 700 words in order to enable comparison between the spoken data and the corpus.

3.3.3 Recordings

The recordings were gathered from 58 participants, consisting of approximately 6 hours of audio-recorded data. Since the main focus of the study is to determine the frequency of Turkish L2 English learners' use of VL, I excluded the parts where I was speaking from the corpus, as I used some vague expressions and did not want to affect the result of the study.

When analyzing these 6-hours of recorded data, I performed conceptual analysis (CA), also called *"content analysis"*. In CA, a concept is chosen and the analysis determines quality and the presence of the concept (Busch et al., 2005). The VL in the recordings were identified, analyzed and quantified.

[2] AntConc is a concordance program created by Laurence Anthony from Waseda University of Japan. AntConc 3.4.3w version for Windows was employed for the purpose of this current study. The computer program is used to create key-word-in-context (KWIC) lines, distribution plots, word frequencies, and keywords. In this study, AntConc was only employed to calculate the frequency counts of certain lexical items, that is, VL in both corpora.

3.3.4 Transcription

In analyzing the recorded data, orthographic transcription was used. The orthographic transcription is based on word-for-word record of what was uttered by the speaker. Factors such as hesitations, false starts, repetitions and such were also put into written form. However, the noise coming from background was not always included in the transcriptions. This method of transcription is usually employed in corpora used for research and studies in which pronunciation is not a matter of question (Gibbon, Moore & Winski, 1997). Based on Channell's (1994) categorization, the places where Turkish L2 learners of English used VL were transcribed after the recordings were listened to carefully several times. In order to understand the context in which VL was used, preceding and following utterances were also transcribed.

3.3.5 Grouping the Participants

To determine the frequency of Turkish L2 learners' use of vague expressions and the correlation between their proficiency level and their use of these expressions, the students were divided into two groups: high achievers and low achievers. In order to group students according to their English levels, two trained raters who are also English instructors in a private university in Istanbul, myself and one of my co-workers, listened to and scored the conversations separately (see appendix D for the Speaking Rubric). Each rater scored the participants' speaking out of 100. The scores given by each rater was analyzed and the inter-rater reliability of $r=0,776$, $p=0,000<0,001$ was found.

		Grade 1	Grade 2
Scorer 1	Person Correlation	1	,776**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	52	52
Scorer 2	Person Correlation	,776**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	52	52

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3.3.5 Correlation Coefficient between Scorers

(r=0,776, p=0,000<0,001) shows that there is a strong relationship between grades given by raters.

3.4 Data Analysis

3.4.1 Calculating Inter-rater Reliability (IRR)

In order to obtain consistent observational rating, the majority of studies and research designs need the assessment of inter-rater reliability (IRR) (Hallgreen, 2012). In this study, an inter-rater reliability analysis using the Kappa statistic was employed to determine consistency among the raters. Cohen's Kappa ranges from 0 to 1 where large numbers indicate better reliability, values close to (0) or below 0 (negative numbers are also possible) suggest that agreement is attributable to chance alone (Landis & Koch, 1977). The scores given by each rater is analyzed and the inter-rater reliability is (r=0,776, p=0,000<0,001)

3.4.2 Chi-Square Tests and Percentage Calculations

During the process of analyzing the data gathered from the recordings, chi-square ($\chi 2$) tests were employed in order to determine the potential correlations between the analyzed variables. The chi-square test was used both to discover the

differences between the observed and the expected frequencies in one or more categories and to determine significant differences between the expected frequencies and the observed frequencies in one more categories (Maben, 2000).

In this study, the results of the calculations obtained from $\chi 2$ tests are presented in section 4 in both table and graph formats. According to the context of the current study, $\chi 2$ tests were used to look deeper into the correlation between the VL use of high achiever and that of low achiever participants, and also between the VL use of Turkish L2 learners and that of NES.

3.4.3 Conceptual Analysis

This study was grounded in conceptual analysis which is based on the existence of selected terms in a text or a number of texts. For this reason, the VL categorized by Channell (1994) were identified, quantified, calculated and analyzed. The current study adopted the research methods undertaken by Boakye (2007), who investigated gender differences in using VL and gained productive results. As the aim of the current study is to determine the frequency of the VL use of Turkish L2 learners and the correlation between the VL use of NES and that of Turkish L2 learners, employing the same (analysis) method was deemed useful and suitable.

Weber (1990) points out that the classification procedure should be reliable in terms of consistency in order to obtain valid and reliable inferences from more texts. That is, the same text should be coded in the same way by different people.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS and ANALYSIS

This chapter sets out the results in relation to the research questions and the hypothesis. First, the overall results from analyses according to the frequency of the vague words and expressions used by the NES and Turkish L2 learners and next the compilation of all the Turkish participants' frequency of use of the VL in English as a second language will be reported which will be followed by an analysis. Finally, the results will be reported according to the gender and proficiency level accompanied with statistical analysis.

This section of the chapter will evaluate the results of figures relevant to different terminologies for the use of VL. These terms are placeholder words, vague category identifiers, vague quantifiers, approximators, hedging expressions and vague prefixes and suffixes.

4.1 The Results of the First Research Question

The table below summarizes the frequency of the vague words and expressions used by the NES and Turkish L2 learners. In some parts, specific dialogues were pulled out of the transcription, and illustrated in order to shed more light on the analyzed aspect of VL.

	NES TOTAL	Turkish L2 Learners							
		High Achievers		Low Achievers					
		Males	Females	Males	Females	**Males Total**	**Females Total**	**Turkish L2 Learners TOTAL**	**VL by NES & Turkish L2 Learners TOTAL**
Vague Quantifiers	495	109	80	55	99	164	179	343	838
Placeholder Words	372	50	65	29	39	79	104	183	555
Vague Category Identifiers	275	43	47	34	34	77	81	158	433
Hedging Expressions	221	30	29	11	16	41	45	86	307
Approximators	198	25	20	10	16	35	36	71	269
TOTAL Number of VL	1561	257	241	139	204	396	445	841	2402

Table 4.1 Distribution of VL use of NES & Turkish L2 Learners

The results summarized in this table, address our first research question that how Turkish L2 learners' use of VL differs from that of NES . In our 10 hourly recorded data, there were 2402 (out of 22600 words in total) vague words and expressions in total. So, in 630 minutes vague propositions were used in total which was a percentage of 10.67 %. As it can be clearly seen from table 4.1, in 630 minutes Turkish L2 learners used only 841 vague expressions (3, 72 %). Moreover, drawing on researcher's observations in OANC corpus, the NES used 1561 vague expressions (6, 9 %) and they were more natural and represented the colloquial language more

clearly. On the other hand, the majority of the Turkish L2 learners did not noticeably failed to use vague words and expressions but their conversations were more formal in their nature. Table 4.2 and figure 4.1 represent the most frequently used vague words by the two groups.

Vague Words	NES	Turkish L2 Learners
Things	145	80
May	53	36
Some	121	84
TOTAL	319	200

Table 4.2 Most frequently Vague Words by NES & Turkish L2 Learners

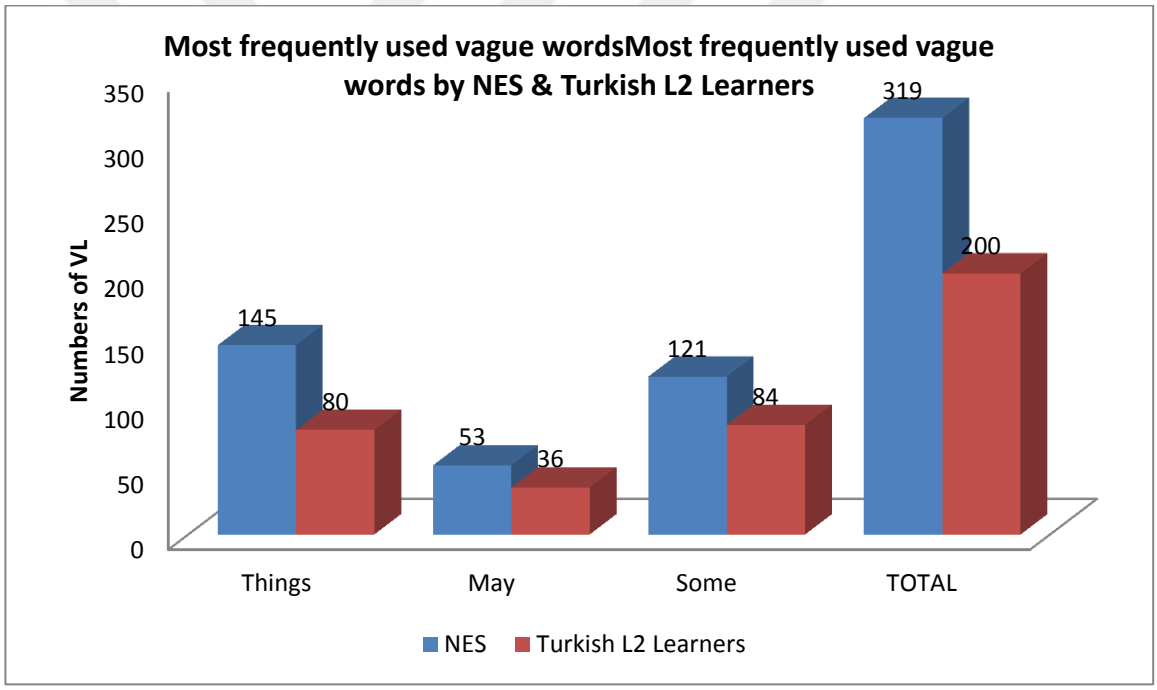

Figure 4.1 Most frequently used vague words by NES & Turkish L2 Learners

4.1.1 Vague Quantifiers Used by NES and Turkish L2 Learners

According to the results, vague quantifiers constituted the biggest part of the data (34,7 %). Vague quantifiers are used in order to state quantity or amount of something without specifying the actual number or the quantity. Channell categorizes these words as: 'lots of, oodles of, masses of, many, a touch of, a scarp of, few (fewer, fewest), seldom, some, somewhere, several and sometime' (1994).

In the data, the NES used 495 (59,1 %) vague quantifiers in total, and the Turkish L2 learners used 343 (40,9 %) vague quantifiers. Thus, in respect to this category, the difference between NES and Turkish L2 learners was significant by far.

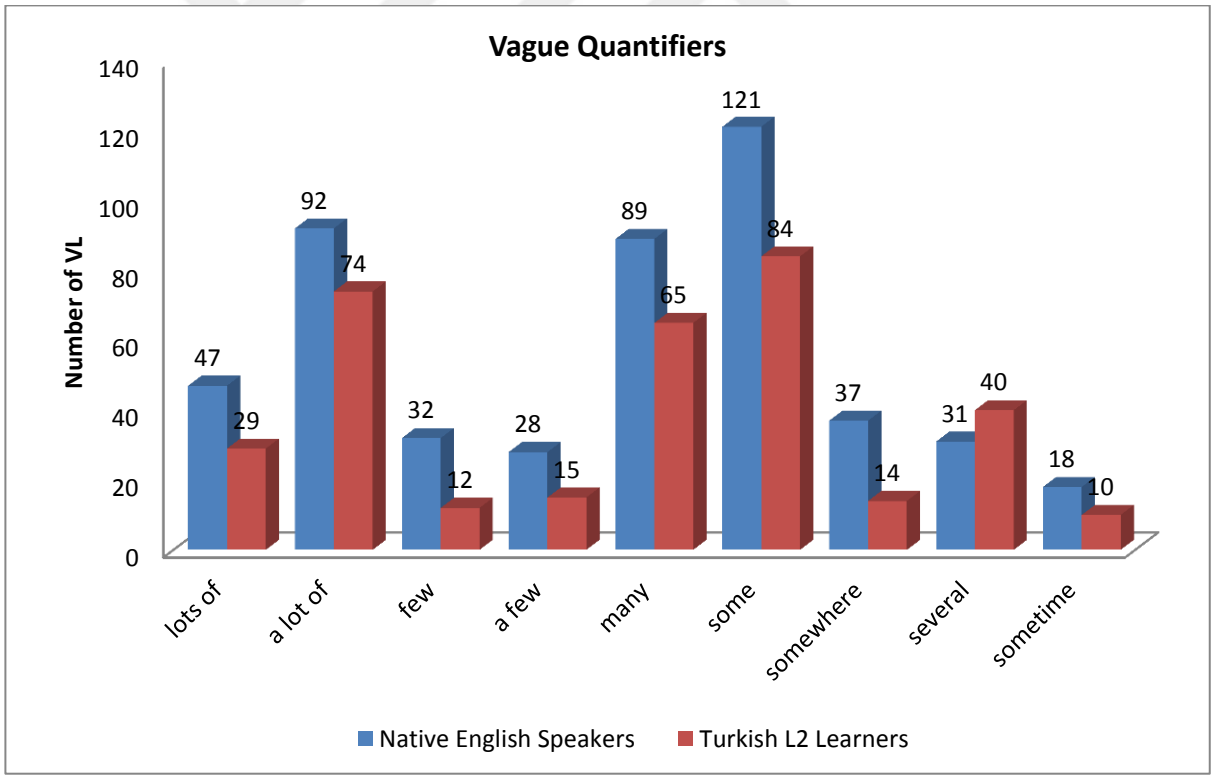

Figure 4.1.1 Vague Quantifiers Used by NES and Turkish L2 Learners

Turkish L2 Learner 2: *Social networks provide* ***many*** *kinds of services and benefits to its users like helping them to connect with new people.* ***Some*** *of*

the reasons for the popularity of social networking sites are opportunity to meet new people and job market.

In this extract the speaker uses “many” in reference to number of services and benefits of social networks and “some” in reference to the reasons of the popularity of social networking sites. The speaker avoids giving too much information and overinformativesness and he / she may also imply that his / her knowledge about the topic is limited.

4.1.2 Placeholder Words Used by NES and Turkish L2 Learners

According to the results gained from the conceptual analysis, placeholder words constituted second biggest part of the data. These words are: thing, something, stuff, ones, you name it and what you call it (Channell, 1994). Out of 2402 vague expressions, 555 of them belonged to this category with a percentage of 23, 1 %.

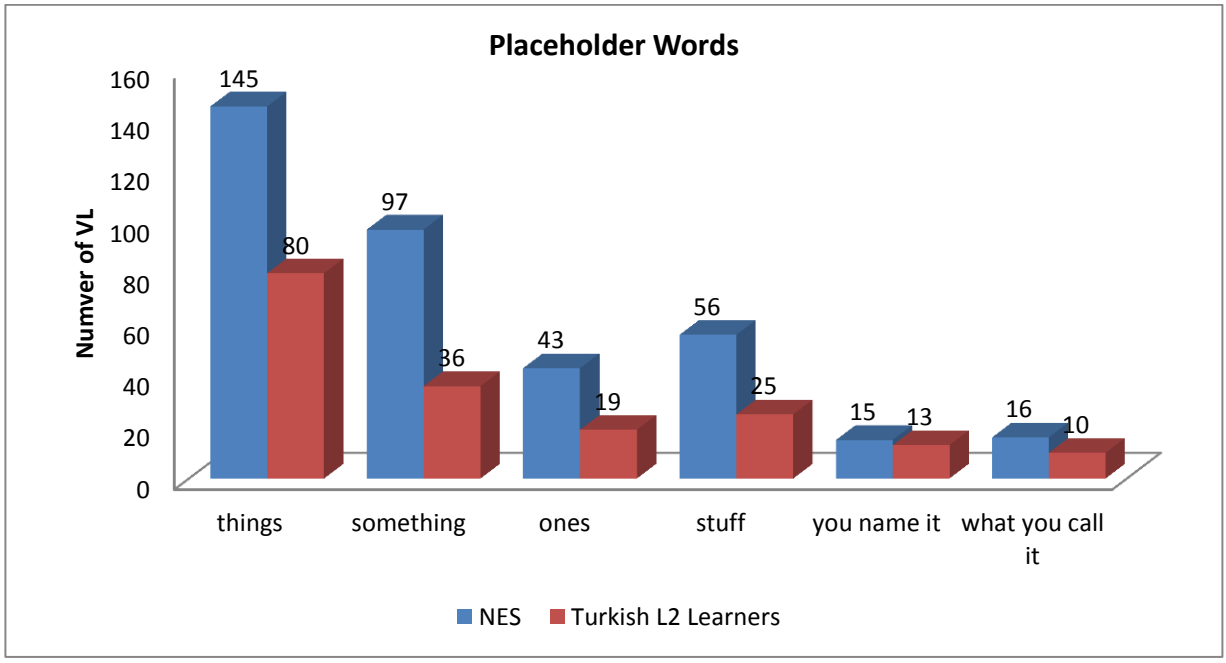

Figure 4.1.2 Placeholder Words Used by NES and Turkish L2 Learners

In many instances, the NES and Turkish L2 learners used the most frequent placeholder “things” as in the following examples:

> ***NES.1:*** *Do you remember anything that, um, I mean, there are always books that I liked, I always had to read everything but uh, there were certain* ***things*** *that I liked more than others, do remember anything you liked in particular, um, about stuff you had to read maybe in your class or um,* ***things*** *like that?*
>
> ***NES.2:*** *Are there particular stories either, either family stories that you might tell or stories about, um, you know* ***things*** *that have happened to people in the past? Or maybe stories that, you know, some people just make up stories to tell. Are there any particular stories that your family tells now?*
>
> ***Turkish L2 Learner 1:*** *Last several years I have been going on holidays with my boyfriend… We share the same ideas about having rest and in a way we like exact the same* ***things*** *in life.*
>
> ***Turkish L2 Learner 2:*** *Beril has been my closest friend since ..erm.. my childhood. We almost do the same* ***things****. Therefore, I do all my plans with her. Almost every weekend with Beril, we go to concerts, parties, and erm..clubs. in short erm.. where entertainment is, we're there.*

In these examples, the vague word “things” by NES conveyed the referential contents which were respectively “books and different kinds of reading materials” and “stories and experiences other people had in the past” and the vague word “things” by Turkish L2 learners referred to “the hobbies and activities liked and done together”. Jucker et al., (2003) emphasize that ‘speakers can be so vague as to use expression that convey no referential content in themselves but that instead invite the listener to infer a referent’. Crystal and Davy (1975) refer to this no referential content as ‘total vagueness’. However, in the given examples above, there were specific referential points. Additionally, the common shared knowledge among the participants indicated that they negotiated meaning quite successfully. Evison et al.,

(2007) affirm that in order to use VL successfully, speakers must have expectations about what their co-participants know, and that such expectations are negotiated within social space.

There might be several other reasons for using these placeholders. In the data, one of the obvious reasons why NES use these expressions was to avoid uttering face-threatening statements (self-protection). As Channell (1994) emphasizes, "one may prefer not to use placeholders in order to avoid using an offensive or a taboo word". Moreover, Clark & Wilkes-Gibbs (1986) propound, one may have this particular word / words in his/her vocabulary knowledge but may prefer to use a specific vague placeholders in order to establish a common ground.

Looking at the percentage of the use of these placeholders, it was observed that 372 (67 %) of these propositions were used by the NES, and 83 (32.9 %) of them by the Turkish conversation teachers. Thus, it indicated that the NES Ts in our sample used placeholders more often than Turkish conversations teachers.

4.1.3 Vague Category Identifiers Used by NES and Turkish L2 Learners

In the data, vague category identifiers were also considerably pervasive. They were the third most frequently used expressions. Channell (1994) lists these expressions of fuzziness as: *something like that, or something, somewhere, probably, in a way, maybe, and so on.* Out of 2402 vague words and expressions, 433 (18 %) of them were vague category identifiers. While 275 (63, 5 %) of these expressions were used by NES; 158 (36, 4 %) were used by Turkish L2 learners indicating that the NES used these expressions 2 times more than Turkish L2 learners.

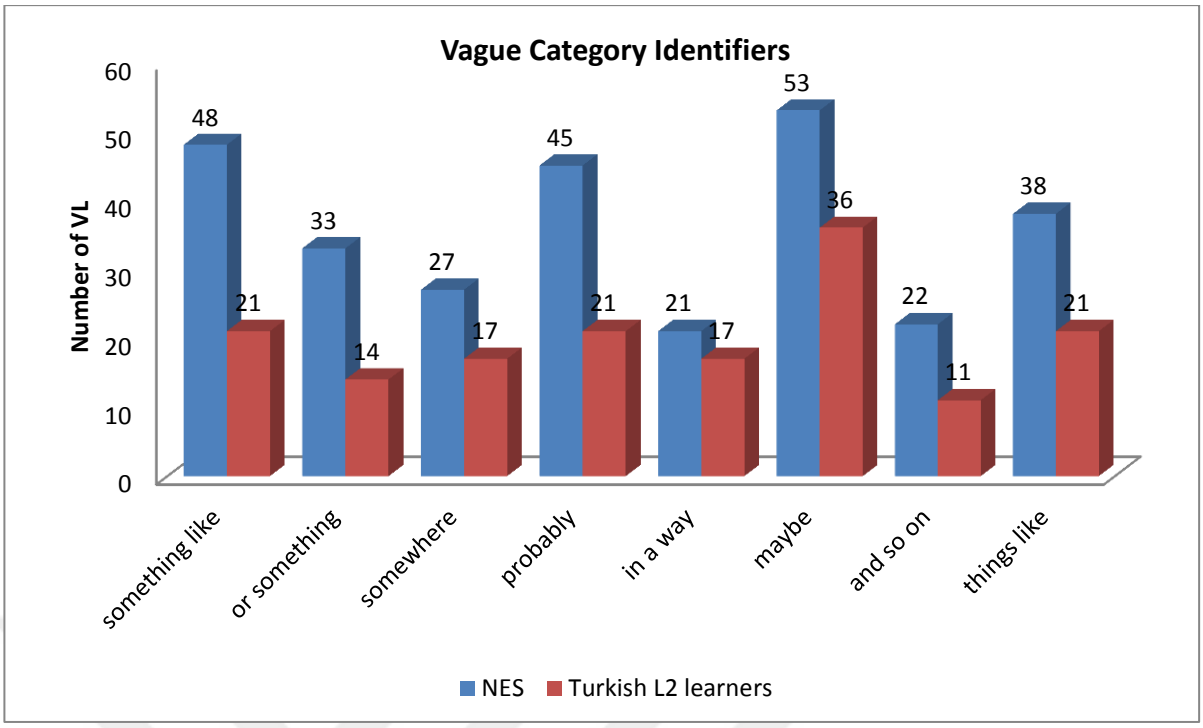

Figure 4.1.3 Vague Category Identifiers Used by NES and Turkish L2 Learners

Dines (1980) refers to these expressions as 'set marking tags' since she considers that these expressions mark the previous sets/sentences/expressions. In our data, the most frequently used vague category identifier was 'maybe' (20, 5 %), (89 out of 433 instances). The next most-commonly-used expression was "some" as in somewhere or something. Following "some", "probably" was one of the most frequently used vague category identifiers by Turkish L2 learners (13, 2 %), (21 out of 158 instances) as in the examples:

> ***Turkish L2 Learner 1:*** *I have a two social network twitter and instagram.* ***Probably*** *two.. I use these accounts because I learn many things. I follow many people and I use to communication with lots of people such as ..erm.. my friend.*
>
> ***Turkish L2 Learner 2:*** *..but when you ask me what will happen if you don't have communication with your friends or family members, I can say nothing.* ***Probably*** *nothing will happen.*

Jucker et al. (2003) call probably the adverb of likelihood. They assert;

"Vague expressions of likelihood do not just carry information about the speaker's judged probability of an event. Rather, they appear to be used to manage the listener's focus and the listener's assumptions, so that the listener may strengthen or weaken assumptions appropriately"

4.1.4 Hedging Expressions Used by NES and Turkish L2 Learners

The role of hedges in written discourse and particularly in academically and scientifically oriented language use has become a point of considerable interest for researchers (Hamamcı, 2007). Moreover, Prodromou (2008) reported that 'sort of' (as a hedge) is one of the most common two-word phrases in academic spoken English and they are pervasive in colloquial language. Hedges are expressions such as *sort of, kind of* and *a bit*. These expressions have also been called 'down toners' and 'under-statements' (Prince, Bosk & Frader, 1982; Hübler, 1983) in the literature. They are typically used in order to increase the vagueness level of a proposition.

In the data, the NES used 221 (71, 9 %) hedging expressions in total, and the Turkish L2 learners used 86 (28, 1 %) hedging expressions. Thus, in respect to this category, the difference between NES and Turkish L2 learners was significant by far.

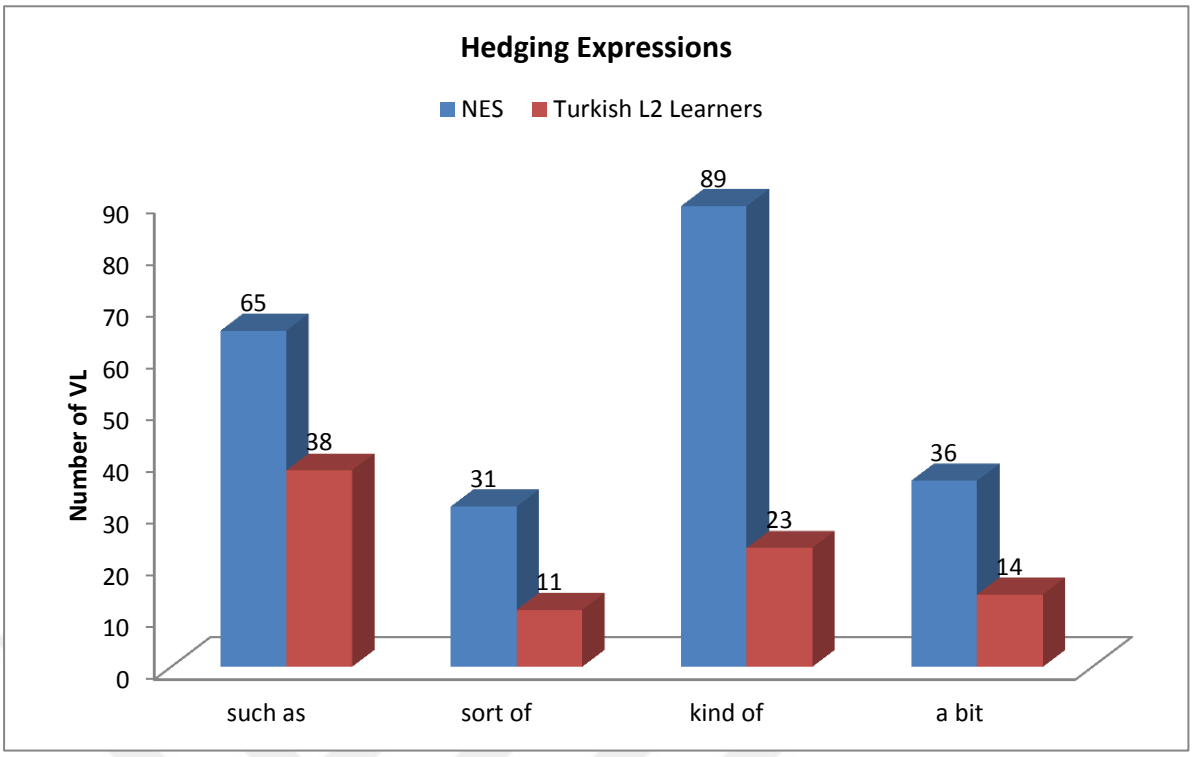

Figure 4.1.4 Hedging Expressions Used by NES and Turkish L2 Learners

In line with the functions of VL, these expressions are mainly used when speakers become self-protective and when they *avoid committing* to a particular argument, or and assessment. Moreover, speakers using these expressions indicate that the item, topic or the person described is ill-matched with the concept that they are trying to explain. The following examples illustrate the use of *kind of* as a hedging device:

> ***Turkish L2 Learner 1:*** *I don't know if I can consider driving as a hobby but this what I like doing when I have free time. I have almost no free time because of school nowadays and it is kind of killing me.*
>
> ***NES 1:*** *...we'll be discussing how it feels to get older. Well...It is* ***kind of*** *depressing but...er...I really want to discuss about it. What do you think?*

It appears that NES 1 really wants to discuss about 'getting older'; however, the subject is considered depressing and the other speakers may disagree

with her. He / She avoids committing and says ‘kind of’ to indicate that she does not totally think that the topic is depressing.

Hedging can be used as a politeness strategy. Brown and Levinson (1987) have drawn attention to face threatening acts in their study. They emphasize that these acts cause speaker(s) to lose their face. Therefore, quite often speakers avoid going on-record, and they mitigate their utterances. Whilst mitigating, they employ a number of politeness strategies. According to Brown and Levinson (1987) hedging is one of these strategies.

4.1.5 Approximators Used by NES and Turkish L2 Learners

In the data, there were 5 approximators (about, 1 or 2, approximately, nearly, around) and NES used 198 (70, 7%) approximators in total, and the Turkish L2 learners used 82 (29,3 %) approximators. Thus, in respect to this category, the difference between NES and Turkish L2 learners was significant by far.

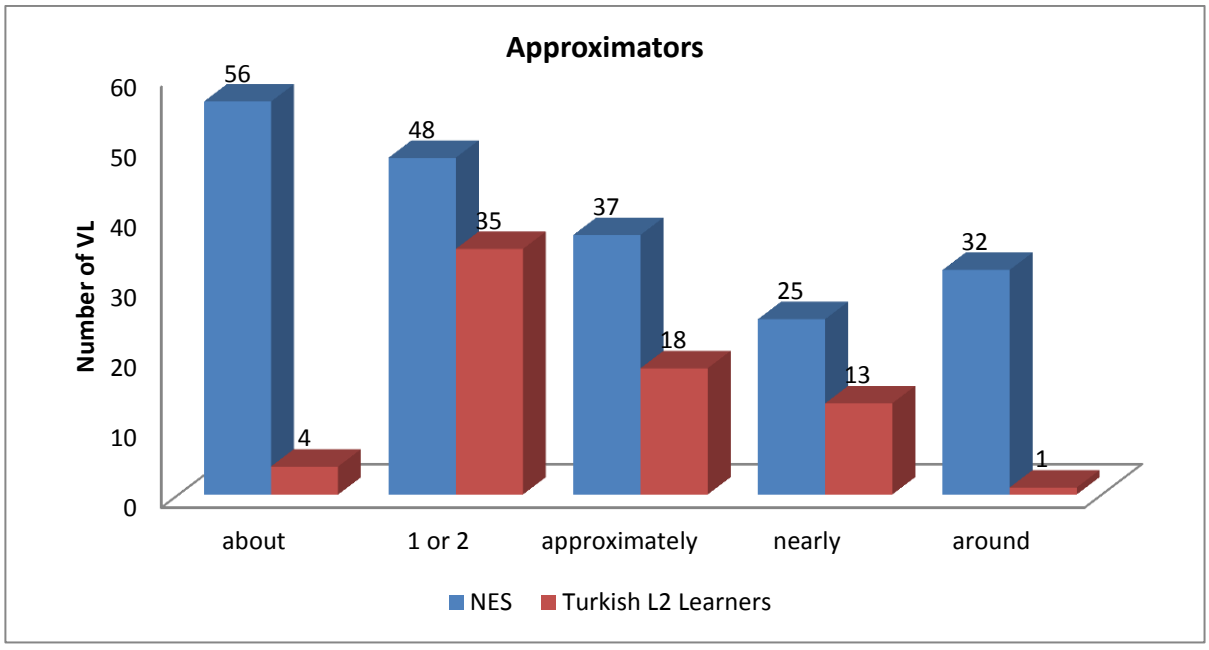

Figure 4.1.5 Approximators Used by NES and Turkish L2 Learners

As Cutting (2007) asserts that, ‘vague approximators are used to refer vaguely to amounts, times and dates’. There was a considerable difference between the two groups. In the data approximators were used when they typically referred to vague amounts. The majority of the NES use these approximators when they typically refer to vague *amounts*. In respect to the data, NES and Turkish L2 learners used collective nouns and vague quantifiers more frequently than number approximations. Cutting (2007) highlights that, ‘approximators can perform relational functions, such as mitigating face-threatening acts, and politeness devices’. Moreover, Sadock (1977) emphasizes that when deciding on the approximation level of an utterance, speakers need to take the context into consideration which relates to socio-linguistic knowledge, communicative competence and Grice’s maxims of quality and reference.

Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan (1999) emphasize that, ‘approximators convey imprecision’ and the majority of the Turkish L2 learners shied away from using imprecise expressions.

> ***Turkish L2 Learner 1: Around*** *3 hours, generally on the way, I look at my friends’ photos. I like spending my time by reading.*
>
> ***Turkish L2 Learner 2:*** *Well, I don’t remember all of them, but* ***about*** *5~. Its facebook, ieskok, draugas . I don’t remember the others.*
>
> ***NES 1:*** *And I went a little bit too far I said, uh, "And besides, you know, when kids get up to* ***around*** *30, a classroom size of 30, these teachers could never do it without an assistant."*
>
> ***NES 2:*** *At about,* ***about*** *three weeks later, then arrived a group of* ***about*** *four at my brother's house, and told him, that they were coming to, to be, that is to take control of the place, where we lived.*

NES 2: *Yeah, um, when we kept her, I gave her, she had one about, about, well, it's always nap time like 10:30 in the morning* ***around*** *10:00one around 2:00 or 3:00 and then one at nighttime.*

The motive behind using "about" and "around" might be anything. The participants might have basically lacked specific information or they may have deliberately chosen to say *around and about* to withhold the information. It may even be a politeness strategy that they were applying drawing on a previous dialogue between them. Thus, it was practically difficult to identify speakers' intentions. However, the conceptual analysis indicated that the NES in the data used these expressions more often than Turkish L2 learners.

4.1.6 Vague Prefixes and Suffixes

Channell (1994) refers to vague prefixes and suffixes as additives, and she then explains that these propositions are added to what would otherwise be a precise statement. One of the examples of these suffixes is for example '–like', any word ending with the suffix '–like' is believed to be vague. As data indicate, none of the participants in both groups used these vague propositions.

4.2 The Results of the Research Questions Related to Frequency of VL, Gender and English Proficiency of Turkish L2 Learners

The results obtained from the conceptual analysis indicated that the NES used VL more often than Turkish L2 learners. Based on the data obtained from OANC and semi-structured interviews with Turkish L2 learners, it showed that VL was not as pervasive in Turkish L2 learners' speech as NES and use and frequency of VL in these learners showed some differences according to the gender and English proficiency of these learners as in the figure 4.2

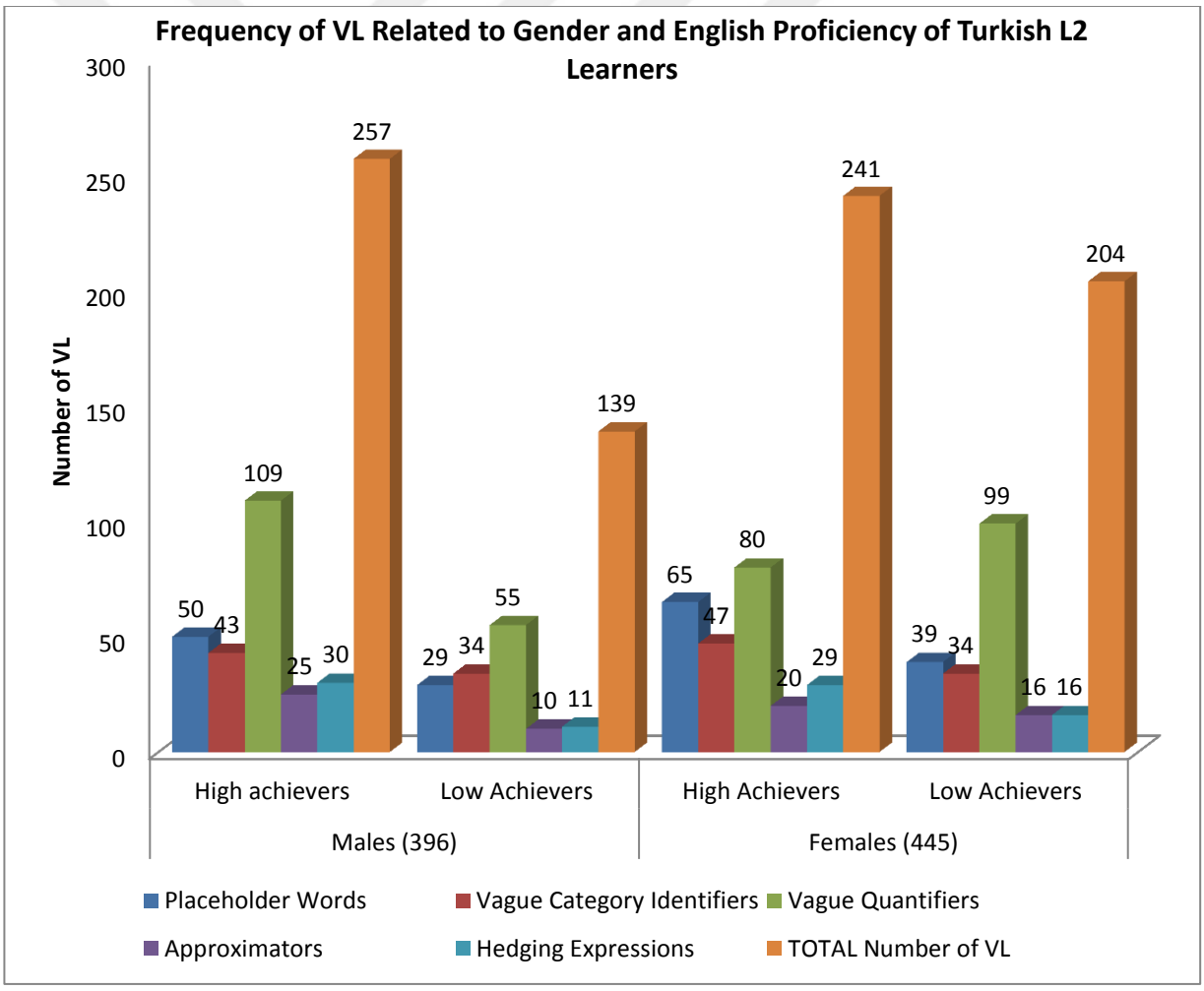

Figure 4.2 Frequency of VL Related to Gender and English Proficiency of Turkish L2 Learners

The section below includes the figures, tables and examples of VL employed by Turkish L2 learners.

4.2.1 Vague Quantifiers Used Turkish L2 Learners

4.2.1.1 Total Vague Quantifiers

Figure 4.2.1.1 shows the compilation of the frequency of the use of vague quantifiers by Turkish L2 learners. Whereas the most widely used form is *some* with a percentage of 24, 4 %, the least widely used form is *sometime* (2, 9 %). Turkish L2 learners employed "*some*, *a lot of* and *many*" more frequently than any other quantifiers. The total frequency of the usage of *some*, *a lot of* and *many* make up 65 % of the total number of forms / utterances used by participants.

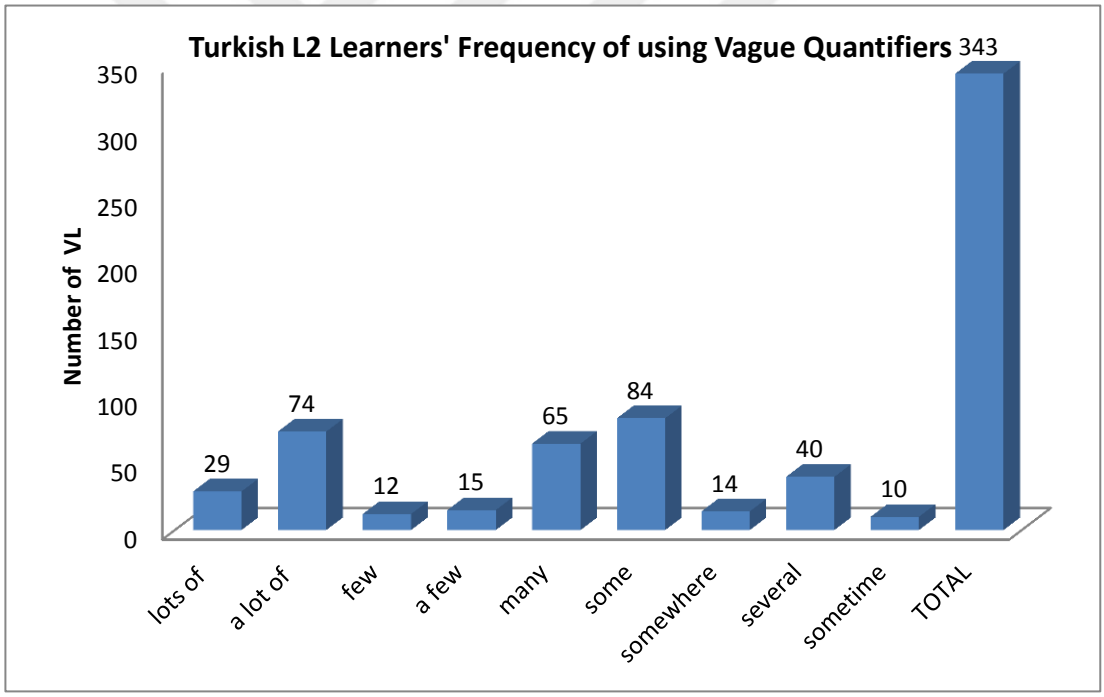

Figure 4.2.1.1 Total Vague Quantifier

4.2.1.2 Vague Quantifiers by Category

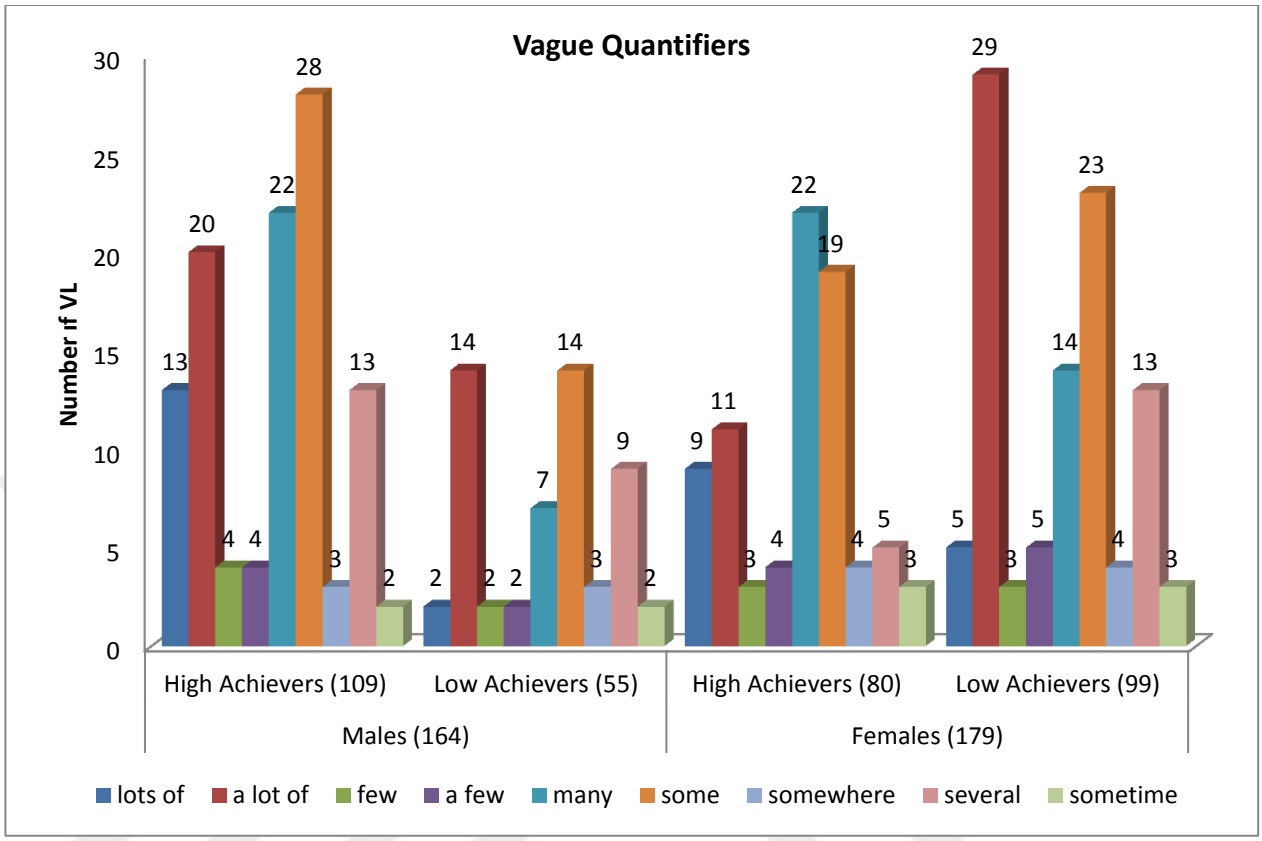

Figure 4.2.1.2 Vague Quantifiers by Category

Figure 4.2.1.2 shows the Turkish L2 learners' frequency of the use of selected vague quantifiers based on Turkish L2 learners' gender and level of English. It is seen that the most frequently used forms are *some* (24, 4 %), *a lot of (21, 5%)* and *many (18, 9 %)* respectively. It is seen that male participants with a higher level of English use vague quantifiers more frequently than the other 3 groups.

> ***Female Participant 1:*** *I watch* ***some*** *TV programs such as documentaries and stuff or read something interesting. Whenever I have time I try to do it.*
>
> ***Male Participant 1:*** *I have bungalow house there. There is* ***a lot of*** *threes such as ..erm.. apple trees, cherry trees and orange trees.*

As data indicated female participants with a lower level of English use vague quantifiers more frequently than male participants with lower level of English and female participants with a higher level of English do. Female participants with low level English employed a lot of (72, 5 %), several (72, 2 %) and some (54, 7 %) vague quantifiers respectively more frequently than female participants with high level English.

Table 4.2.1.2 Level of English and Vague Quantifiers Cross Tabulation

		Vague quantifiers									
		lots of	a lot of	few	a few	many	some	somewhere	several	sometime	Total
Level Of English	High	22	31	7	8	44	47	7	18	5	189
	Low	7	43	5	7	21	37	7	22	5	154
Total		29	74	12	15	65	84	14	40	10	343

In general participant with high level of English employed vague quantifiers 10,2 % more frequently than the other group.

Table 4.2.1.2 Level of English and Vague Quantifiers Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
PearsonChi-Square	16,433[a]	8	,037
LikelihoodRatio	16,838	8	,032
Linear-by-LinearAssociation	,228	1	,633
N of ValidCases	343		

a. 1 cells (5,6%) have expected countless than 5. The minimum expected count is 4,49.

(χ 2=16,433, sd=8, p=0,037<0,05) shows that there is significant difference between students with a high level of English and students with a low level of English in terms of the frequency of their use of vague quantifiers. That is to say, the frequency with which quantifiers were used by students with a high level of English is significantly high.

4.2.2 Placeholder Words Used Turkish L2 Learners

4.2.2.1 Total Placeholder Words Used Turkish L2 Learners

Placeholder words, according to the results, constituted second biggest part of the data obtained from Turkish L2 learners. Whereas “things” is the most widely used form with a percentage of 43,7 %, “something” is the second most widely used form with the percentage of 19,6 % and “what you call it” is the least frequently used form with the percentage of 5,4 %.

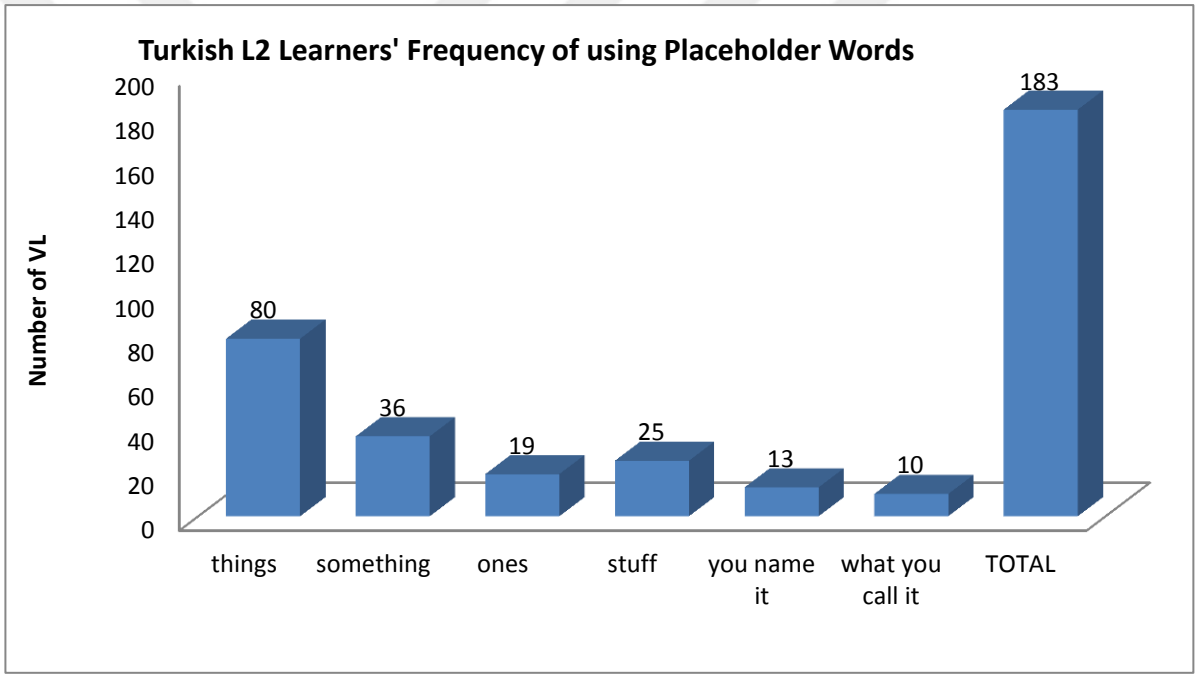

Figure 4.2.2.1 Placeholder Word Used by Turkish L2 Learners

4.2.2.2 Placeholder Words by Category

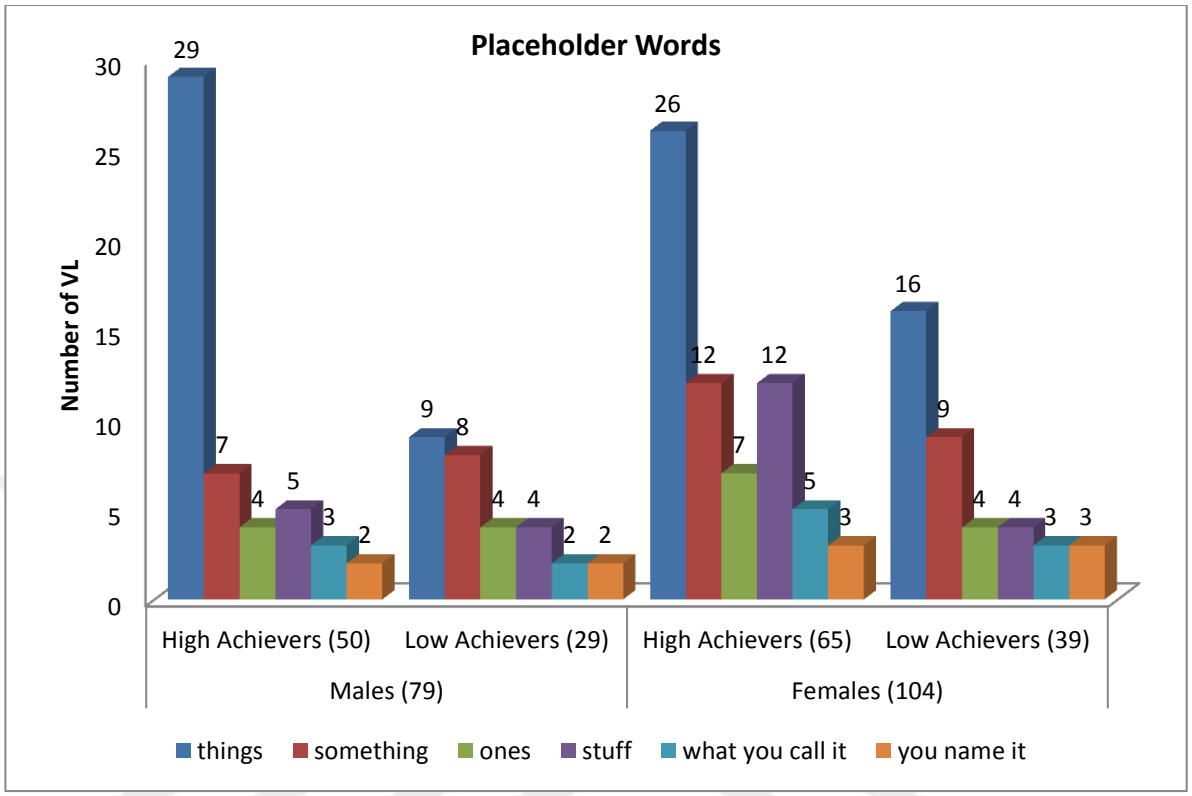

Figure 4.2.2.2 Placeholder Word by Category

Figure 4.2.2.2 shows the frequency of the use of selected vague placeholder words based on Turkish L2 learners' gender and proficiency of English. Firstly, it is seen that the students with a higher level of English use place holder words more frequently than the students with a low level of English. Furthermore, the female participants with higher level of English use placeholder words more frequently than other male and female participants and female participants in general use placeholder words with the percentage of 56, 83 % more frequently than male participants do with the percentage of 43, 17 %. Whereas the most widely used word-form by both male and female participants was *things*, the less widely used form "*you name it", "things"* was used eight times more than "*you name it"* as in the following examples:

Female Participant 1: *One. It is, it's Facebook. Why do I have it? I have been asking myself this question for all the years of my FB account..erm.. existence. I don't really know why I have it, I don't have any vital purpose of having Facebook account. From time to time, people post interesting* ***things*** *like sayings, ideas or photos. Other than checking those mentioned above, I don't find FB attractive.*

Male Participant 1: *I have Facebook, Lastfm and Instagram. Facebook is a site where you can chat with your friends easily and have opinions about lots of* ***things.*** *Lastfm is a site of music. You can listen to it, you can find different genres, composers bands and etc. Instagram, well I don't use it much but you can share pictures and look at the pictures that are being shared.*

In the examples above the word-form "things" conveys referential contents such as examples of the things shared on social media and opinions of the speaker on various subjects. As data showed, the word-form "things" was frequently used with vague quantifiers such as a lot of, lots of, many and some. In the examples below the word-form "you name it" was used by speakers when they could not remember the words they wanted to use and employed this word-form to have some more time to remember and organize what they wanted to say.

Female Participant 2: *I like the sun, beach and sunbathing. Yeah I think ..erm..that's why.Erm… I think ..erm..I am kind of erm,yeah, lazy and not a great fun of ..****you name it****.. erm.. swimming but yeah I guess, I am .., I mean, I just like summer and yeah.*

Male Participant 2: *I check my mobile phone every 5-10 minutes. When I don't have my phone with me I feel ..erm..****you name it****.. uncomfortable it is maybe because I think ..erm..that my loved ones cannot reach me when necessary. That's why, we get used to using mobile phones and reaching anybody anytime.*

Table 4.2.2.2 Level of English and Placeholders Cross tabulation

		Placeholder Words						
		things	*something*	*ones*	*stuff*	*you name it*	*what you call it*	Total
Level of English	High	55	19	11	17	8	5	115
	Low	25	17	8	8	5	5	68
Total		80	36	19	25	13	10	183

In general participant with high level of English employed placeholder words 25 % more frequently than the other group.

Table 4.2.2.2 Level of English and Placeholder Words Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
PearsonChi-Square	3,957[a]	5	,556
LikelihoodRatio	3,922	5	,561
Linear-by-LinearAssociation	,721	1	,396
N of ValidCases	183		

a. 2 cells (16,7%) have expected countless than 5. The minimum expected count is 3,72.

As far as statistical analysis is concerned, the table above illustrates that there is no statistical significant difference (2=3,957, sd=5, p=0,556>0,05) between students with a high level of English and students with a low level of English in terms of the frequency of their use of placeholders.

4.2.3 Vague Category Identifiers Used Turkish L2 Learners

4.2.3.1 Total Vague Category Identifiers

Vague category identifiers, according to the results, constituted third biggest part of the data obtained from Turkish L2 learners. Whereas “may” is the most widely used forms with a percentage of 22, 7 %, “and so on” is the least frequently used form with the percentage of 6.9 %.

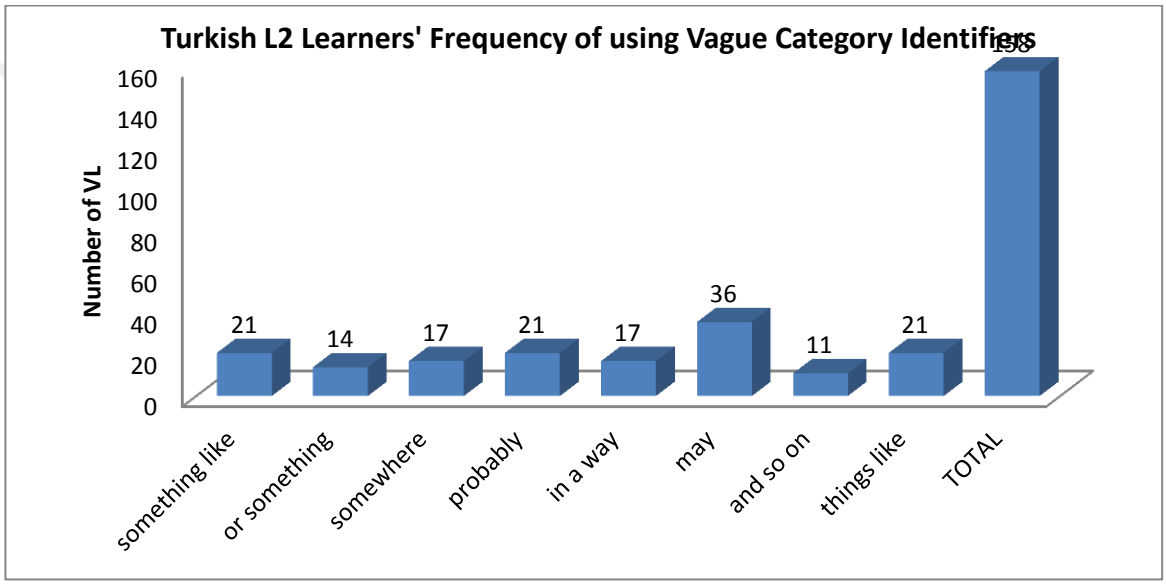

Figure 4.2.3.1 Total Vague Category Identifiers

4.2.3.2 Vague Category Identifiers by Category

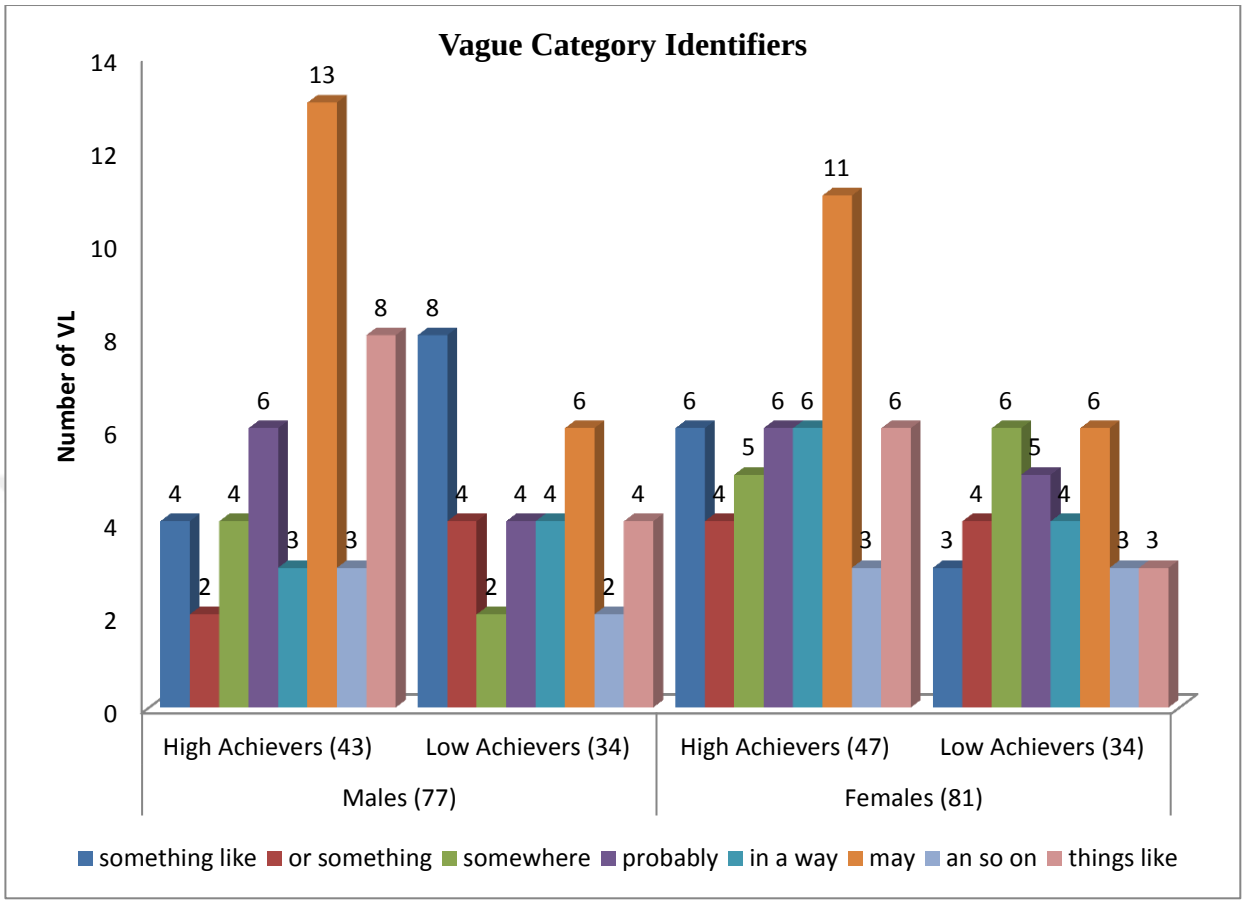

Figure 4.2.3.2 Vague Category Identifiers by Category

Figure 4.2.3.2 shows the frequency of the use of selected vague category identifiers based on Turkish L2 learners' gender and level of English. It is seen that the most frequently used word "*may"* is employed more by male participants with a percentage of 52, 7 % than female participants in general. Female participants with a higher level of English use vague category identifiers more frequently than male participants in general and female participant with lower level of English. While "*may"* is the most frequently used form by male participants with a higher level of English (36, 1 %), male participants with a lower level of English used "*something like"* most frequently with a percentage of 38 % as in the following examples:

Female Participant 1: *It makes me relaxed and renews my energy. I* ***may*** *sound as a crazy person, driving in Istanbul with a massive traffic, huh? However, this is what it is and driving makes me feel happy.*

Male Participant 1: *Cyber bullying, becoming friends with the wrong people and things like these are quite possible. This* ***may*** *end or damage your life and affect your psychology because people put nice stuff and posts such as "I am on holiday. I have a boyfriend and if you don't have these things it depresses you and feel unhappy.*

Table 4.2.3.2 Level of English and Vague Category Identifiers Cross tabulation

		Vague Category Identifiers								
		sth like	or sth	somewhere	probably	in a way	may	and so on	things like	Total
Level of English	High	10	6	9	12	9	24	6	14	90
	Low	11	8	8	9	8	12	5	7	68
Total		21	14	17	21	17	36	11	21	158

In general participant with high level of English employed vague category identifiers words 13,9 % more frequently than the other group.

Table 4.2.3.2 Level of English and Vague Category Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
PearsonChi-Square	4,324[a]	7	,742
LikelihoodRatio	4,356	7	,738
Linear-by-LinearAssociation	2,972	1	,085
N of ValidCases	158		

a. 1 cells (6,3%) have expected countless than 5. The minimum expected count is 4,73.

(χ 2=4,324, sd=7, p=0,742>0,05) shows that there is no difference between students with a high level of English and students with a low level of English in terms of the frequency of their use of vague category identifiers.

4.2.4 Hedging Expressions Used Turkish L2 Learners

4.2.4.1 Total Hedging Expressions

Figure 4.2.4.1 shows the compilation of the frequency of the use of hedging expressions by Turkish L2 learners. Whereas the most frequently used form is "*such as"* with a percentage of 44, 1 %, the least widely used one is "*sort of"* (12, 7 %). The frequency of the usage of "*such as"* makes up of 45% of total number of hedging expressions used by participants.

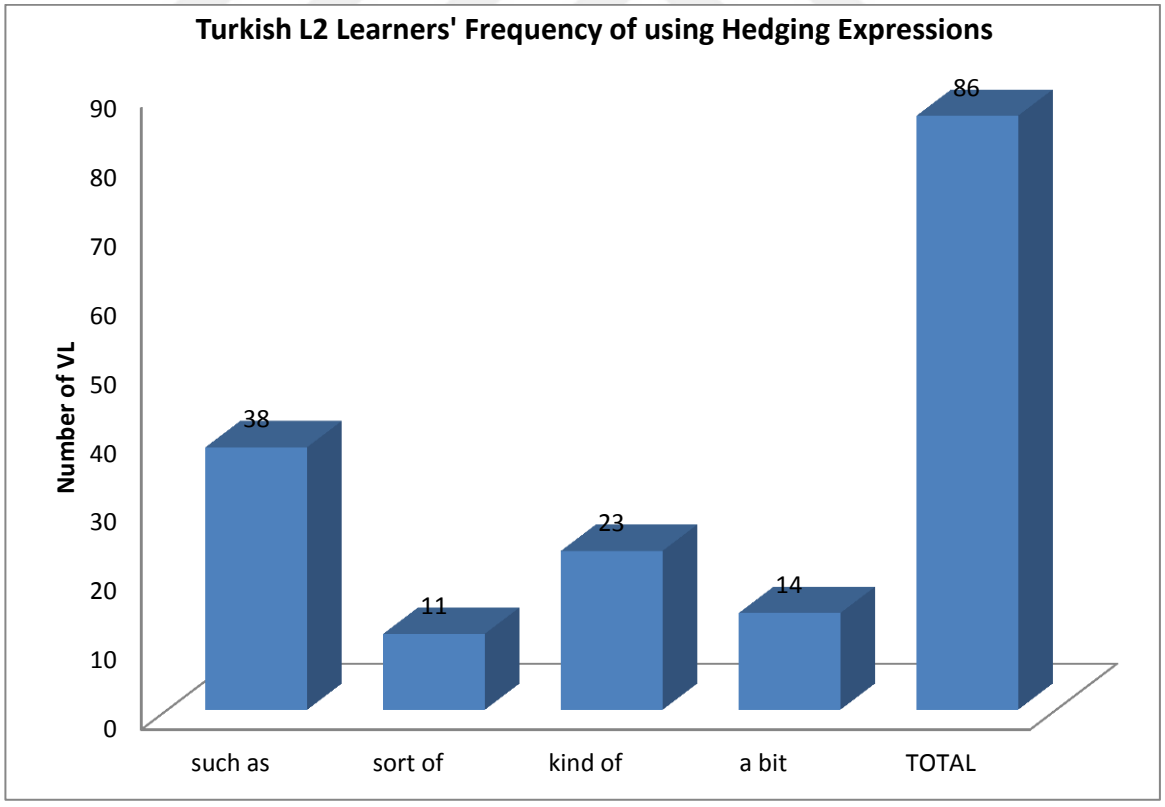

Figure 4.2.4.1 Total Hedging Expressions

4.2.4.2 Hedging Expressions by Category

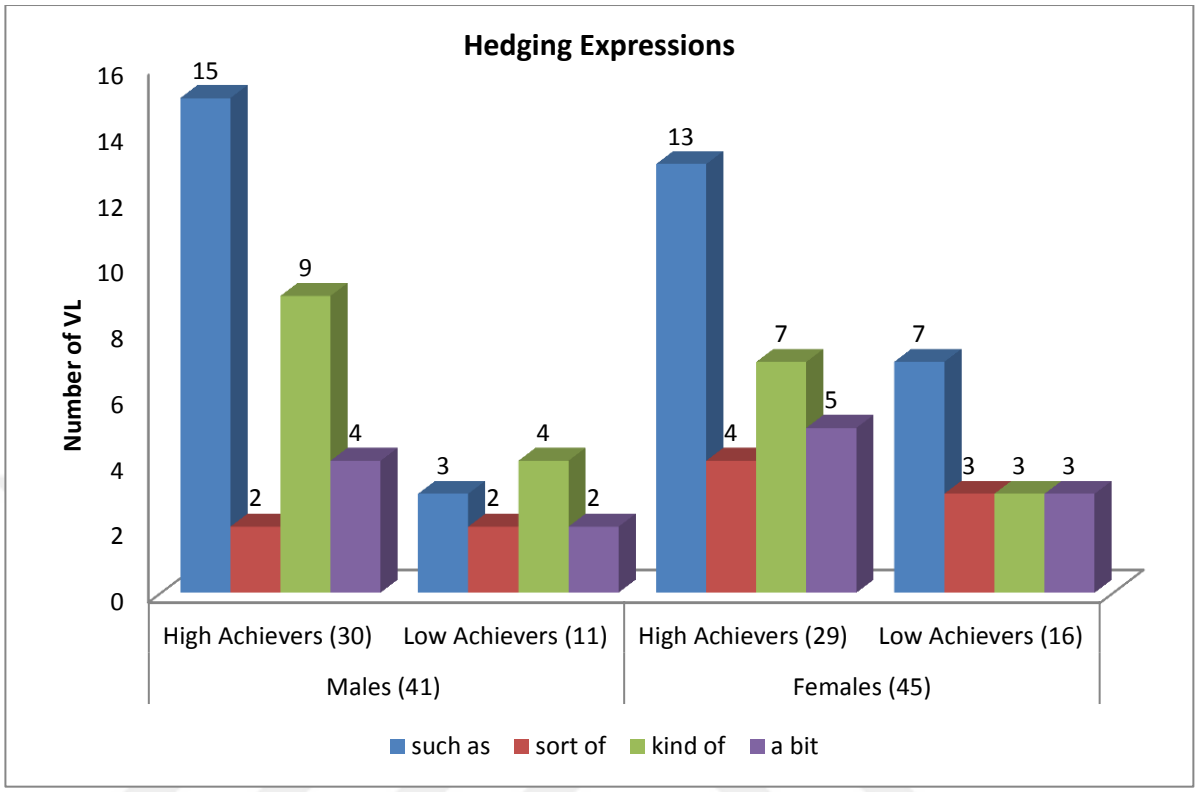

Figure 4.2.4.2 Hedging Expressions by Category

Figure 4.2.4.2 shows the frequency of the use of selected hedging expressions based on Turkish L2 learners' gender and level of English. It can be seen that students with a higher level of English use significantly more hedging expressions (68, 6 %) than students with a lower level of English do (31, 3 %).

> ***Female Participant 1:*** *Today erm, there are many applications in many areas* ***such as*** *..erm.. travel, meals, entertainment, games, music, pictures. We can reach these kinds of thing easily with help of the application we have on our mobiles.*
>
> ***Male Participant 1:*** *For example we make many things* ***such as*** *..erm.. swimming, playing volleyball, basketball, watching movie etc.*

Female participants employed hedging expressions 4,6 % more frequently than male participants. While *such as (44, 1 %)* is the most widely used form, *sort of (12, 7 %)* is the least widely used one.

Table 4.2.4.2 Level of English and Hedging Expressions Cross Tabulation

		Hedging Expressions				
		such as	sort of	kind of	a bit	Total
Level of English	High	28	6	16	9	59
	Low	10	5	7	5	27
Total		38	11	23	14	86

In general participant with high level of English employed vague category identifiers words 37,2 % more frequently than the other group.

Table 4.2.4.2 Level of English and Hedging Expressions Chi-Square

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	,816[a]	2	,665
Likelihood Ratio	,824	2	,662
Linear-by-Linear Association	,651	1	,420
N of Valid Cases	86		

a. 1 cells (16, 7%) have expected countless than 5. The minimum expected count is 4,40.

(χ 2=0,816, sd=2, p=0,665>0,05) shows that there is no difference between students with a high level of English and students with a low level of English in terms of the frequency of their use of hedging expressions.

4.2.5 Approximators Used Turkish L2 Learners

4.2.5.1 Total Approximators

Figure 4.2.5.1 shows the compilation of the frequency of the use of approximators by Turkish L2 learners. Whereas the most widely used form is *1 or 2 (with different variations)* with a percentage of 49, 2 %, the least widely used one is *around* (0 %). Turkish L2 learners employed *"1 or 2 (with different variations) (49, 2), approximately (25, 3 %) and nearly (18, 3 %)"* respectively. The Total frequency of the usage of *"1 or 2 (49, 2), approximately (25, 3 %) and nearly (18, 3 %)"*make up 92 % of the total number of forms / utterances used by participants.

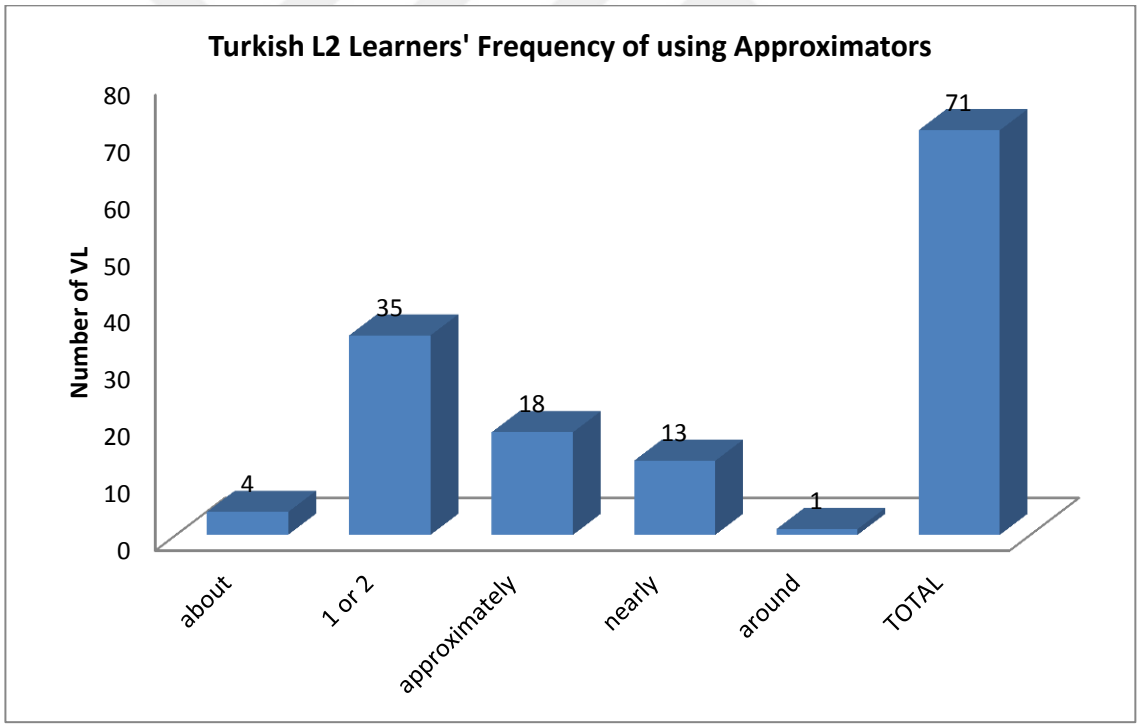

Figure 4.2.5.1 Total Approximators

4.2.5.2 Approximators by Category

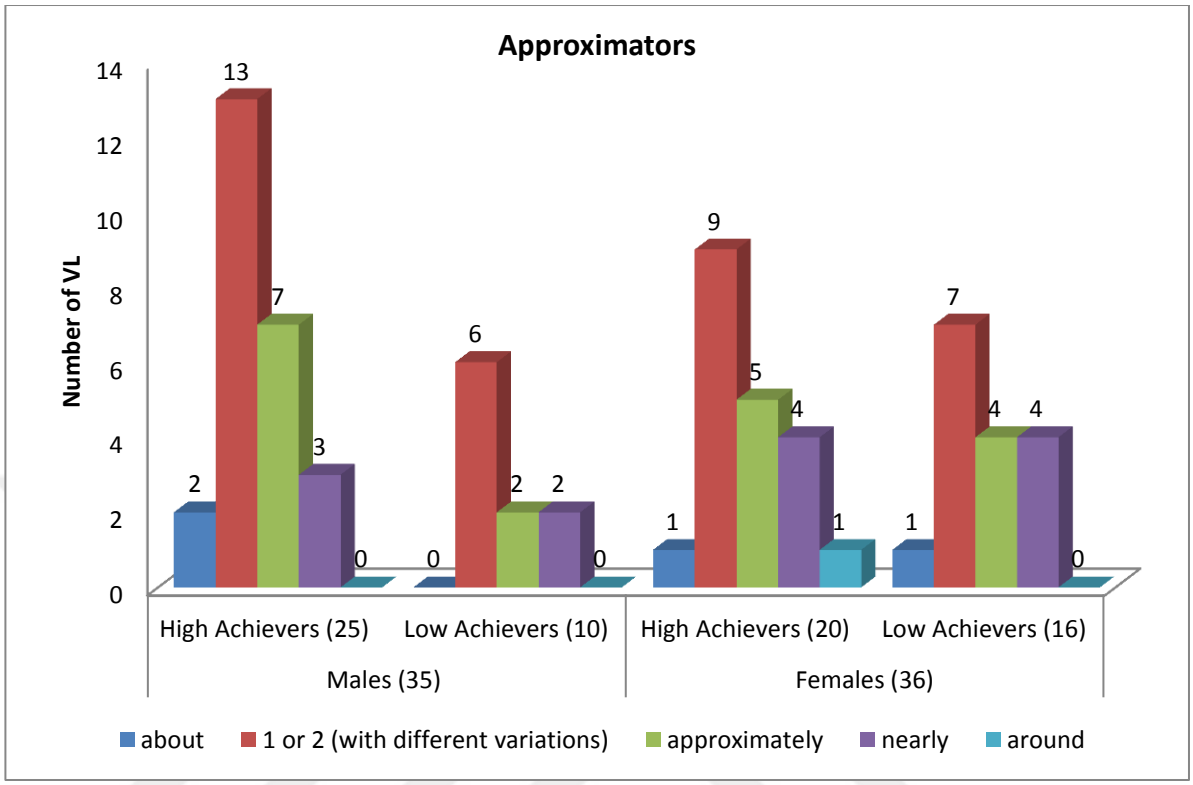

Figure 4.2.5.2 Approximators by Category

Figure 4.2.5.2 shows the frequency of the use of approximators based on Turkish L2 learners' gender and level of English. As data indicates, the most frequently used word form is "*1 or 2 (with different variations)*" with a percentage of 49, 2 %. None of the participants employed around in their speech. It is seen that students with a higher level of English use more approximators (63, 3 %) than students with a lower level of language do (36, 7 %).

> ***Female Participant 1:*** *Probably* ***2 or 3 hours*** *a day. I usually check my e-mails. I read the newspaper and I read the international breaking news on the internet.*
>
> ***Male Participant 1:*** *I cannot exactly say how much time I spent online but approximately* ***two or more hours*** *I spent my time online. I do lots of things online.*

Males with a higher level of English use approximators more frequently than the other 3 groups. However, in respect to this category, the difference between males and female participants was not significant by far.

Table 4.2.5.2 Level of English and Approximators Cross tabulation

		Approximators					
		about	one or two (with different variations)	approximately	nearly	around	Total
Level of English	High	9	22	12	7	5	55
	Low	7	13	6	6	6	38
Total		16	35	18	13	11	93

In general participant with high level of English employed vague category identifiers words 18,2 % more frequently than the other group.

Table 4.2.5.2 Level of English and Approximators Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
PearsonChi-Square	1,681[a]	4	,794
LikelihoodRatio	1,673	4	,796
Linear-by-LinearAssociation	,469	1	,493
N of ValidCases	93		

a. 1 cells (10,0%) have expected countless than 5. The minimum expected count is 4, 49.

(χ^2=1,681, sd=4, p=0,794>0,05) shows that there is no difference between students with a high level of English and students with a low level of English in terms of the frequency of their use of approximators.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Restatement of the Problem

A number of studies on language and conversation were conducted from the 1960s to 1980s, but the majority of these studies often ignored or treated vague language cursorily. For example, theorists such as Goffmann (1976), Grice (1975), Gumperz (1982) even Lakoff (1975) made indirect references to VL in their studies. In 1975, Crystal and Davy acknowledged that lack of precision is one of the most important features of the vocabulary of informal conversation. Channell's book on Vague Langue has ushered in a new era in the way of analyzing VL. Her categorization of the vague words and expressions has been the most detailed and cited one so far. She (1994) affirms;

> "Vagueness in communication is part of our taken-for-granted world… and is present in a great deal of language use" (p.4).

Following Channell's framework, linguists such as Dörnyei and Thurrell (1994), Cutting (2007), and Thornburry and Slade (2006) have come to realize that VL is prevalent in native speakers' colloquial language and it is a critically important speaking strategy which is used communicatively competent speakers. They affirm that it should be integrated into L2 classes. Ironically, studies on its use in English teaching programs have been scarce. Additionally, to what extent VL is taught in L2 classes and is employed by L2 learners has not been fully explored.

Thus, this study has attempted to analyze the VL use of NES and Turkish L2 learners. As data indicates in this study, for instance, Turkish L2 learners do not use VL on a large scale, whereas NES tend to use vague expressions approximately 30 % more frequently.

Focusing on the use of VL and vague expressions by Turkish students, the figures and tables in this study show the results of the VL terms. These terms are placeholder words, vague category identifiers, vague quantifiers, approximators and hedging expressions.

The study focused on the use of the relative VL terms based on variables such: male vs. female students, students with high proficiency vs. students with low proficiency and Turkish L2 learners vs. NES . The results of the study show that Turkish L2 learners and English native speakers, male and female students use vague expressions differently. Besides, there are significant distinctions in the use of VL between students with a low level of English and a high level of English who use VL more often and correctly. Furthermore, female students tend to use some vague expressions such as *a lot of, a few, approximately* more frequently than male students, whereas male students tend to use some vague expressions such as *like, several, thing, things* more frequently than female students. However, sometimes both male and female students tend to use the same vague expressions like *may, in a way, and so on.* The relation between gender and VL is a sociolinguistic issue, which requires further research for a complete analysis.

In this study, the data show that female students use placeholders more frequently than male students and that both male and female students with a high level

of English use placeholders more frequently than their respective counterparts with a lower level of English.

The data collected on the frequency of use of vague category identifiers did not yield such results; only slight variations were found in this category. Generally, it can be seen that both male and female participants use approximately the same amount of vague category identifiers like *something like, or something, somewhere, probably, in a way*.

The data on the frequency of vague quantifiers according to gender and level of English shows patterns unlike that for placeholders and for vague category identifiers. Namely, whereas male participants with a higher level of English use vague quantifiers more frequently than male participants with a lower level of English; the inverse was true for females: female participants with a lower level of English use vague quantifiers more frequently than female participants with a higher level of English. As vague quantifiers like *several, some, a few, many, etc.* refer to non-numerical quantities this data on the frequency of vague quantifiers shows that the female participants with a lower level of English had no need to be precise and had no precise information to offer in the related context. When the data on males and females with a high level of English are compared to each other, it is seen that male participants with a high level of English use more vocabulary than female participants with a high level. This means that male participants with a higher level of English performed better when expressing their ideas and contributed to the conversation more than female participants with a higher level of English.

With regard to the frequency of use of approximators, both males and females with a higher level of English used them more frequently than their respective

counterparts with a lower level of English, while females with a higher level of English used them more than their male counterparts. This means that females with a higher level of English tend to slightly more indirect and less assertive and precise while speaking than their male counterparts.

With regard to the frequency of use of hedging expressions, like with approximators, both males and females with a higher level of English used them more frequently than their respective counterparts with a lower level of English. Unlike the case with approximators, however, no substantial difference was detected in the use of hedging expressions between females and males with a higher level of English. This shows that both females and males with a higher level of English soften what they said and yet made it less direct and assertive at the same time.

The data on the frequency of vague quantifiers like *a lot of, many, some*, vague category identifiers like *something like* and placeholders like *ones* shows that Turkish L2 learners use these expressions to manage the fluency of conversation and avoid giving too much detail about the things they talked about and also because their English proficiency did not allow more specific and deliberate vocabulary.

Based on the analyses, the semi-structured interviews, the potential reasons of the less frequent use of vague expressions by Turkish L2 learners in this study can be summarized under the following four headings:

1. Coming from behaviorist language learning backgrounds thereby overvaluing accuracy and grammatically correct sentences.
2. Accuracy-oriented Turkish education system.
3. Lack of knowledge about alternative vague words and expressions.
4. Cultural intolerance to ambiguity and vagueness.

Conversely, the most popular reasons of using these expressions by NES may be summarized as follows:

1. Genuine lack of knowledge.
2. Deliberately withholding information to avoid misunderstandings.
3. Trying to be polite therefore mitigating opinions by using hedges.
4. Avoiding being over-informative in casual conversations (being sociolinguistically adept).

To sum up, while Turkish L2 learners' tendency in avoiding using VL is bound to being intolerant to imprecision, NES s are more likely to use VL in employing different speaking strategies. This may indicate that Turkish L2 learners fail to make use of appropriate speaking strategies whilst speaking whereas NES s use plenty of these strategies.

5.2 Limitation and Suggestions for Further Studies

In addition to the conclusions that this study has allowed me to draw, the findings have also yielded several recommendations which may be taken into account when conducting similar studies on this topic.

A corpus may give researchers a chance to observe a language as a creation rather than provide a full picture of a language. Therefore the current study used a corpus, which was essential for the purposes of the study and the data obtained from the conversations of Turkish L2 learners, i.e. VL use in L2. It is also important to note that corpus studies make linguistic analysis more objective and provide extensive information on the topic (McEnery et al., 2006). However, as Greene (2013) highlights a corpus is limited by the variety of factors such as discourse genres, topics, registers, vocabulary,

sentence types, dialects, emotional expression and variety of participants and other factors beyond the control of the researchers.

Other limitations are as follows; to achieve the aim of the study and due to the nature of the conversation questions prepared, 51 ELT students from different universities were included in the study and the data obtained from the conversations with these students were analyzed. To avoid subjective generalizations, Channell's VL categorization was employed in analyzing the recordings obtained from the conversations with these students. Each one of the conversations with students was audio-recorded. The conversations of the students who gave up speaking in the middle of the conversations were discarded.

5.3 Discussion and Implications

This study aims to shed light on the use of VL by Turkish L2 English speakers, the effect of gender, L2 level, and native vs. non-native speech. Considering that the use of VL by Turkish L2 speakers has not been examined in much detail before, this study holds a significant place in terms of pioneering research. In this regard, by contributing to the foundation of its subfield, this study aims to enable, encourage, and inspire more extensive studies in the future and help researchers focus on the use of VL in a wide variety of settings and in regards to a broad array of skill sets, from speaking with different audiences and with different purposes to writing in a spectrum of formal and informal contexts. The conceptual analysis in the present study was limited to the small sample size – 51 participants. Even though the sample size in such studies is decided by the researcher and his / her aim, using a larger sample size in the conceptual analysis would provide more enhanced results. In accordance with the

sample size in this study, in the conceptual analysis how and to what extent 51 Turkish L2 learners used VL was analyzed. The sample size of this study was rational in order to obtain a representative sample of our target population, a larger population or two corpora involving the written/spoken texts of native speakers and Turkish L2 learners could be employed to obtain more reliable results. Parallel studies of native speakers of other languages who are L2 English learners would be particularly insightful. Furthermore, future studies can consider variables beyond native and non-native speakers of the language, sex and level of English. For example, age, level of education, use of VL in one's native language, experience in English, method of English-language education received, and familiarity with the conversation subject can all be considered.

In addition to instances of VL use, this study aims both to help teachers gain more awareness in terms of teaching VL to students and to encourage students to incorporate VL more effectively especially in speaking as an important communicative skill. Effective use of VL, i.e. to grasp it when used and to perform it in appropriate contexts is also a necessary part of L2 acquisition: it contributes to acquiring pragmatic competence.

The findings of this study revealed some recommendations which may be considered while conducting similar studies on this topic. As VL is included in everyday conversations and enable speakers of English to have a better understanding of the conversations, VL language, considering the needs of learners, would be

included in the process of L2 teaching including course books and other teaching / learning materials. [3]

As part of this study, I was not able to evaluate the participants' course books and learning materials. In consequence, further research could be conducted at designing efficient and practical teaching materials including necessary amount of VL that learners would need in their daily life conversations.

I hope that this study will contribute to the literature on VL and increase the awareness of both teachers and course book writers to prepare more materials including VL to increase the quality of L2 learners' conversations and help L2 learners be better equipped with well-built conversation skills.

The study revealed gender differences and the relation between female and male participants which is a sociolinguistic issue as regards VL use. Females used some certain vague expressions more than males. Males and females displayed preferences for certain vague expressions – an indication of gender construction. For instance, females used more placeholders and vague expressions, whereas males made use of more approximators in their utterances. The current study also provides more insight into the use of VL and, I hope, will lead to a better understanding of VL in communication. In the study, both female and male participants used VL to maintain the conversation when they did not know or had forgotten the name of people or objects they wanted to talk about. They also employed some certain vague expressions like *you name it, what you call it* and *ones* as discourse markers to manage the conversations and not to cause any more confusion and become less precise in other words not to cause intolerable pragmatic failures which occur when speakers are too

[3] Therefore, course book units should also include VL.

vague. Effective use of VL in appropriate contexts of both female and male participants with a higher level of English, at this point, showed that participants and managed to benefit from and acquired pragmatic competence in lack of which it is not possible to understand and use VL appropriately.

Finally, this paper is to demonstrate the functions of VL through analysis of vagueness in conversation and between Turkish female and male L2 learners and English native speakers under the guidance of pragmatics, Grice's Cooperative Principle and Conversational Implicature in particular. The study shows that VL in communication plays important roles in terms of managing a fluent conversation. VL improves the flexibility of communication, enhances the persuasiveness of communication and ensuring the accuracy of information whereas its negative functions cover misleading listeners and making them subject to false understanding. As VL is one of the basic attributes of natural language and vagueness in communication is part of our taken-for-granted world… and is present in a great deal of language use (Channel, 1994), VL should be integrated into L2 classes and the functions and elements of VL also should be considered when trying to teach a second language.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A)

Reproduced here is an ordinary account of a fairly ordinary event from the Nottingham Evening Post. The following are some suggestions for using it.

1. Locate all the vague words and expressions (consult the working definition of vague language in Chapter 1).

2. For each one, assign meaning (sources: dictionaries, this book, your intuitions, people you ask, the subsequent development of the text).

3. Account for the presence of each occurrence – why this now? (see Chapter 8).

4. Substitute for each vague occurrence something as completely precise as you can make it. What happens to the text?

Scrap yard fire engulfs cars

A huge pile of cars caught fire as a scrapyard worker used cutting gear and a welding torch yesterday. Fireman believe petrol ignited in the tank of one the cars waiting to be broken up. It took fire crews more than four hours to bring the blaze, in a mound of 150 vehicles, under control. Thick black smoke was seen for two miles around the fire, at scrap car firm Mill Lane Commercial, in Crompton Road, Ilkeston. About 20 firemen from Ilkeston and Heanor used several thousands of gallons of water to douse the flames and drew water from the River Erewash three quarters of a mile away. Firemen, led by senior divisional officer, Alan Marshall, said about 150 cars – piled in rows about eight cars high

– were destroyed – but ten times that number were saved from the flames. Nobody was injured in the blaze, which began at 2pm and took until 6.30 pm to put out. Station officer Neil Gibbins, of Ilkeston station, said the wind made it difficult to direct the water onto the source of the fire. 'The flames took a grave hold in the centre. Cars are very good for burning, with the petrol tanks and spare wheels, which were blowing up several times,' he said.

Digger

A Digger was used to separate the piles of cars and make the firemen's job of tackling the flames easier. A turn-table ladder from Derby was used and a water-carrier which

can hold 2000 gallons. It had to make several runs for more water. A spokesman said there was plenty of thick black smoke from burning tyres, which could be seen for up to two miles around.

5. Translate either the vague parts, or the whole text, into another language. Consider what this reveals about cross-linguistic comparison of English with the other language. If you have difficulty with the translation, do not suppose that this necessarily reflects badly on your competence – it is more likely to be a demonstration of the inadequacies of the teaching methods and syllabuses you experienced as a learner, which are likely to have ignored the existence of vague language.

6. Carry out an analysis of the text using any theoretical model(s) you which can handle text (for example, systematic grammar, discourse analysis). Consider how well it illuminates the vague occurrences you have already identified.

(Channell 1994, 206-08)

APPENDIX B)

VL EXERCISES

A feature of written academic English is the need to be careful (i.e. to indicate 'less than one hundred per cent certainty'). The purpose of such writing is to show that one is generalising or desires to be cautious, or even that one might possibly be wrong (though it is not likely!).

Note: The three preceding words in italics are examples of such language in use.

The most usual ways of expressing caution or lack of certainty are by means of verbs (e.g. appears to/seems to/tends to/may/might) and adverbs (e.g. perhaps/possibly/probably/ apparently). For an explanation of this see Unit 10 (page 62).

a) The following sentence is a definite statement: Industrialisation is viewed as a superior way of life.
b) To make it more tentative or cautious we can change or add some words: Industrialization tends to be viewed as a superior way of live.

Exercise

Now look at the following sentences taken from an economics book:

a) It is also likely to appear in the development of institutions...
b) The ideal of economic development tends to be associated with different policy goals...
c) Perhaps greater clarity can be brought to the meaning of economic development...

How would the above three sentences be written if we wanted to make them definite and not tentative? (Jordan, 1997)

Second example;

a) Decide on an order for the sentences below, starting with the one which shows the most commitment to the statement and ending with the one which shows the least commitment.

i) The earth is probably round.
ii) The earth is possibly round.
iii) The earth is round.
iv) Perhaps the earth is round
v) The earth is undoubtedly is round.
vi) It is said that the earth is round.

b) One of the sentences above uses a different method to reduce the degree of commitment to the truth of the statement. Which one? Explain how it is different. (Hamp-Lyons and Heasley 1987) p 243 (English for Academic Purposes R.R Jordan 1997)

APPENDIX C

CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

1. What is the most enjoyable type of holiday for you? Why? Where do you like having your holiday?
2. Who do you like to go holiday with? Why? How do you guys spend your time together?
3. Can you describe your favorite pastime/hobby? How often do you do it?
4. Why is it so enjoyable? How do you feel when you do it?
5. How much time do you spend online? What do you do? How do you like spending your time?
6. Why are social networks so popular nowadays?
7. Approximately how many social network accounts do you have? What are they? Why do you have these accounts?
8. What are the positive/negative effects of social networks?
9. Some people believe that social networks ruin real friendship. What do you think?
10. How often do you check your mobile phone? How do you feel when you don't have your mobile phone with you? Do you agree with the aide a that people are becoming telephone addicts?
11. Could you live without a telephone?
12. What would happen if for some reason our telephones no longer worked?

Rubric for the Assessment of Speaking

	5 NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	10 SUFFICIENTLY ACHIEVED	15 NOTABLY ACHIEVED	20 OUTSTANDINGLY ACHIEVED
VOCABULARY	Uses only basic vocabulary and expressions	Uses limited vocabulary and expressions	Uses a variety of vocabulary and expressions, but makes some errors in word choice.	Uses a variety of vocabulary and expressions.
GRAMMAR	Uses basic structures, makes frequent errors.	Uses a variety of structures with frequent errors, or uses basic structures with only occasional errors	Uses a variety of grammar structures, but makes some errors.	Uses a variety of structures with only occasional grammatical errors.
FLUENCY	Hesitates too often when speaking, which often interferes with communication.	Speaks with some hesitation, which often interferes with communication.	Speaks with some hesitation, but it does not usually interfere with communication.	Speak smoothly, with little hesitation that does not interfere with communication.
COMMUNICATION	Purpose isn't clear; needs a lot of help comunicating; usually does not respond appropriately or crearly.	Tries to communicate, but sometimes does not respond appropriately or clearly.	Stays on task most of the time and communicates effectively; generally responds appropriately and keeps trying to develops the interaction.	Stays on task and communicates effectively; almost always responds appropriately and always tries to develop the interaction.
PRONUNTIATION	Frequent problems with pronunciation and intonation.	Pronunciation and intonation errors sometimes make it difficult to understand the student.	Pronunciation and intonation are usually clear/accurate with a few problem areas.	Pronunciation and intonation are almost always very clear/accurate.

Zero can be given in any of the above dimensions when the student's performance falls below the criteria "Needs improvement".