

Finlandiya joins NATO: Patterns of evaluation in Turkish media registers

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Abstract

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Finland reconsidered its longstanding policy of military non-alignment, ultimately deciding to apply for NATO membership. As a NATO member since 1952, Türkiye played a key role in this process, which sparked extensive discussion in Turkish media. This study investigates how Finland and its NATO accession are evaluated across two Turkish media registers – *Sözcü* news reports and *Ekşi Sözlük* interactive discussions – through a corpus-based approach grounded in register theory. The research explores how the situational characteristics of each register shape the expression of evaluative language, both overt and covert. Employing keyword and concordance analyses combined with qualitative interpretation, the study examines evaluative and non-evaluative uses of language, with particular focus on the term *country* and its surrounding context on a positive-negative axis. The findings reveal that news reports tend to express evaluation subtly, often embedding it in covert forms that align with societal norms and values. In contrast, interactive discussions rely on more direct and explicit evaluative language. The analysis highlights how patterns of evaluation are shaped by the communicative functions of each register. Portrayals of Finland also diverge: news media frame Finland's foreign policy in a largely positive light while expressing criticism of its domestic leadership, whereas online discussions emphasize Finland's military strength and quality of life, yet raise scepticism about its NATO membership. Overall, this study illustrates how differing media registers contribute to distinct constructions of a country's portrayal.

Keywords: Turkish media registers, Finland's NATO accession, keyword analysis, concordance analysis, evaluation patterns, media representation.

1. Introduction

NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) is a military alliance that has progressively expanded since its establishment in 1949. After World War II, Finland maintained a policy of military non-alignment, which has been regarded as practical “for a small country next to a great power” (Penttilä 1994: 7). Nevertheless, Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine prompted Finland to initiate NATO membership, seeking the collective defence promised by Article 5 of the NATO treaty (www.nato.int). This marked a significant shift in Finland's security policy. Türkiye, a NATO member since 1952, initially opposed Finland's bid, leveraging its veto under Article 10, which requires unanimous consent for new members (www.nato.int). Türkiye's stance played a critical role in Finland's membership process (Kanniainen 2022; Visala & Kajander 2023), which became a prominent topic in Turkish media shortly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and remained so until Finland's official

accession. This media attention was the main motivation for examining patterns of evaluation in Turkish media registers – news reports and interactive discussions – during the 13-month period between Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (24 February 2022) and Finland’s official NATO accession (4 April 2023).

This study adopts the term *register* to refer to the text varieties. The choice of the categories *news reports* and *interactive discussion* is based on register frameworks developed for English (Egbert et al. 2015), Finnish (Laippala et al. 2019), and Turkish (Erten-Johansson et al. 2024). The aim of examining these two registers is to capture both institutional and public perspectives on Finland’s NATO membership process in Turkish media. These registers represent distinct communicative purposes, production contexts, and patterns of evaluation, making their comparison particularly valuable for understanding how evaluation varies across text types.

Registers are defined by three components: situational context, typical linguistic features and the relationships between these elements (Biber & Conrad 2019). This study focuses particularly on situational context, which refers to the conditions under which a text is produced and received. This includes factors such as whether the text is spoken or written, whether the audience is present and participating in the interaction, as well as communicative purposes.

Differences in situational context across registers are closely linked to how evaluation is employed within them. In this study, *evaluation* refers to the expression of an attitude toward a person, situation or other entity (Hunston & Su 2019: 572). The analysis draws on Thompson & Hunston (2000) to identify both overt (explicit) and covert (implicit) forms of evaluation, and to distinguish between positive and negative evaluations. These patterns are examined in relation to the situational characteristics of each register, as conceptualized by Biber & Egbert (2018).

Although evaluation has been widely studied in corpus linguistics (e.g., Thompson & Hunston 2000; Conrad & Biber 2000; Martin & White 2005), relatively little research has investigated how evaluative language varies systematically across registers, particularly in media representation. Existing work on evaluation often focuses on a particular register (e.g., Bednarek 2006; 2016), without accounting for how register-specific features influence evaluative choices. This study addresses these gaps by combining a register perspective with an evaluation-based approach to examine how Finland and its NATO accession are portrayed in Turkish media. In doing so, it contributes not only to understanding Turkish media’s framing of Finland but also to broader discussions on how evaluative language operates across media registers.

In response, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do situational characteristics of media registers shape the use of evaluative language in Turkish media?
2. How do register-specific features of evaluation contribute to the representation of Finland and its NATO membership process in Turkish media?

To address these questions, the study employs keyword analysis and concordance analysis in the *Sözcü* newspaper and *Ekşi Sözlük* interactive discussions. Keywords serve as linguistic indicators of discourse (Baker 2018), making them useful tools for uncovering

underlying patterns of representation. The analysis centres on the keywords and how they interact with evaluative language along the concordance lines. In examining the representation of Finland, particular attention is paid to the term *country*. This term was chosen because it appears consistently as a shared concept across news reports and interactive discussions, providing semantic richness and ideological importance for the concordance analysis.

2. Review of literature

2.1. Evaluation in corpus linguistics

Evaluative language involves two key components: modality and another element that is referred to by different terms, such as evaluation, appraisal, or stance. Modality typically conveys judgments about the truth or likelihood of statements (e.g., *It may rain*) and is usually expressed through grammatical structures (Thompson & Hunston 2000). In contrast, evaluation relates to opinions about people or things and is conveyed through various linguistic items. As Partington et al. (2013) observe, evaluation is a fundamental aspect of nearly all linguistic communication, making it highly relevant for corpus-based research.

According to Thompson & Hunston (2000: 6), evaluation serves three key functions: (1) to convey the speaker's or writer's opinion, reflecting the value system of that person and their community; (2) to construct and maintain interpersonal relations with the audience; and (3) to organize discourse. Of these, the first two functions – expressing opinion while reflecting the value system of the individual or their community and shaping audience relations – are particularly relevant to the analysis of Turkish media registers in this study.

The concept of evaluation has been approached in different ways across linguistic traditions, particularly within corpus linguistics. For example, Conrad & Biber (2000) refer to it as 'stance', a concept that captures how speakers and writers express personal attitudes, feelings and evaluations. Following this approach, Hyland & Tse (2005) investigated stance markers in academic writing, focusing on *that*-clause constructions in a corpus of 240 research article abstracts. Their findings highlight the prevalence of these structures as a means of conveying authorial evaluation – an insight relevant to the study of stance across registers. While not entirely aligned with Conrad & Biber's (2000) framework, Haddington (2004) examined stance in a different register by analysing how it is constructed and negotiated in news interviews. His study showed that stance taking in news interviews is a dynamic, intersubjective process in which speakers construct and display their stances through a combination of linguistic resources and sequential turn design.

A different theoretical perspective was offered by Martin & White (2005). Working within the Systemic Functional Linguistics tradition, they introduced the 'appraisal' framework to capture evaluative language, which is composed of three core components: *attitude*, *engagement*, and *graduation*. Together these elements explain how individuals express opinions, take stances and adjust the intensity of meanings. Building on this approach, Su (2016) integrated corpus methods with appraisal theory to examine consumer reviews in online media. By analysing millions of online comments, Su proposed a framework of evaluation comprising four parameters, which are *quality*, *satisfactoriness*, *recommendability* and *worthiness*.

While Su's (2016) study focuses on evaluation in online reviews, Bednarek (2016) applied corpus linguistic methods to media discourse, examining how stance and news values are constructed in online news stories shared via social media. The corpus, consisting of 100 most shared news items on Facebook, was analysed to identify the linguistic realization of news values such as *eliteness*, *superlativeness*, *unexpectedness*, *negativity* and *timeliness*. The study found that *negativity* was more salient than *positivity* in news items. This corpus-based approach to a media register highlights how news values and stance are shaped by platform dynamics and audience engagement, showing how evaluation plays a key role in the digital dissemination of news.

To contextualize these empirical insights within a broader theoretical framework, Thompson & Hunston (2000) outlined two main approaches to the study of evaluation: the separating approach, which highlights the differences between opinions about entities (typical of *appraisal*) and those about propositions (typical of *stance*), and the combining approach, which emphasizes their similarities. This study adopts the term *evaluation*, following Thompson & Hunston (2000), as it captures the integrative perspective and serves as an overarching category that includes related concepts.

The registers in the aforementioned studies – such as interviews, news reports and online reviews – exhibit distinct situational characteristics. These include information about who produces the text, who it is intended for, the context of production and the communicative purpose. As the present study focuses on evaluation in news reports and interactive discussions, Table 1 outlines the situational characteristics of these two registers, drawing on the framework proposed by Biber & Egbert (2018).

Table 1. Situational characteristics of news reports and interactive discussions

Registers	Author	Audience	Production circumstances	Purpose
News reports	News writer	Readers interested in news	Usually preplanned, professionally edited, and time sensitive	Report on recent events
Interactive discussion	Discussion participants	Readers interested in the topic of discussion	Limited preplanning, not professionally edited, interactive, usually time sensitive	Answer questions, discuss opinions

Understanding these features requires examining how evaluation is realized in language. Thompson (1997: 65) describes evaluation as “parasitic on other structural elements”, appearing through lexical markers, grammatical structures or broader textual elements. Some markers are explicit and easily identifiable, while others are more implicit, relying on shared cultural values. Similarly, Thompson & Hunston (2000) distinguish between overt and covert evaluation. Overt evaluation may take lexical forms, such as adjectives and nouns, or grammatical ones, such as comparatives. Textual strategies can also signal an evaluation. For example, concluding paragraphs in newspaper editorials often present preferred solutions to issues raised in the preceding part. In contrast, covert evaluation

lacks clear linguistic markers and relies on shared cultural values, prompting the audience to infer what is being evaluated as positive or negative.

Addressing this distinction, Bednarek (2006) presents a comprehensive analysis of how evaluation operates in news reports, challenging the notion that such texts are purely objective. Drawing on corpus linguistic methods, she examines the lexical and grammatical features, such as evaluative adjectives, modal verbs, and epistemic expressions, through which journalists convey attitudes, assumptions, and values. Her study shows that evaluation in news can be covert, encoded through linguistic choices that guide readers' interpretations while maintaining a stance of neutrality. By uncovering the subtle ways in which news constructs particular representations in media, Bednarek highlights the ideological role of evaluation in conventionally factual reporting.

In addition to varying in overtness and covertness, evaluation also functions across multiple semantic dimensions, or parameters. Thompson & Hunston (2000: 25) identify four core parameters: good-bad (positive/negative), certain-uncertain, expected-unexpected and important-unimportant (relevant/irrelevant). However, they argue that all these ultimately derive from and relate to the central positive-negative axis. While this axis has often been examined through overt evaluative markers, Hunston (2011) provides an in-depth account of how evaluation is realised through recurrent lexico-grammatical patterns.

Building on the foundational framework of evaluation by Thompson & Hunston (2000), register by Biber & Egbert (2018) and the aforementioned studies in corpus linguistics, the present research extends evaluation analysis to the Turkish media context. It compares news reports and interactive online discussions about Finland's NATO accession. This enables an exploration of how evaluative language manifests differently across registers during a major geopolitical event, thereby filling a gap in corpus-based evaluation research.

2.2. Media representations

Representation is a process in which concepts, people or nations are associated with particular meanings, and media representation involves the simultaneous act of presenting, representing, producing and reproducing (Paasonen 2010: 40). Corpus linguistics techniques have been instrumental in examining media representations across various studies. For instance, Gabrielatos & Baker (2008) analyzed keywords related to refugees and asylum seekers in British news media, revealing predominantly negative representations and the emergence of nonsensical terms. Likewise, Baker (2010) studied portrayals of Islam in British tabloid and broadsheet newspapers, finding that tabloids often employed emotional tones emphasizing British interests, while broadsheets provided more nuanced coverage, discussing Muslims across a broader range of contexts.

The representation of countries within foreign media discourse has been a focus on various studies. For example, Bang (2003) used a corpus linguistics approach to analyze depictions of North Korea and the United States in the South Korean press. His findings revealed that North Korea was predominantly portrayed through a stereotypical image, while the US military presence in South Korea was represented ambiguously, as both a necessity and a potential threat. Bang (2009) expanded this line of research and examined collocational and semantic patterns in the US press, analyzing premodifiers of the keywords such as *country* and *countries* in relation to the countries including China,

Japan, North Korea and South Korea. The study identified two recurring semantic themes, asymmetry and stereotyping, in the representations of foreign countries.

Although research on the contemporary portrayal of Finland in foreign media is limited, some notable studies have addressed it. Hiltunen (2018), for example, examined Finland's country branding work in China, focusing on how the nation is perceived in comparison to other Nordic countries. The study employed a brief online questionnaire completed by 1,004 respondents. The findings indicated that Finland's image in China was predominantly positive, particularly associated with its nature and well-known brands.

More recently, Nakagami (2023) investigated the representation of Finland on Japanese social media by analysing 364 tweets posted between September 2020 and November 2022. The study identified a wide range of themes associated with Finland, including its nature, history, national defence, language, education system, work-life balance and national mindset. Overall, Finland was portrayed positively as a small yet strong country and an exemplar of a fair society and fulfilling lifestyle. Given that the dataset extends several months beyond Russia's invasion of Ukraine and overlaps with discussions about Finland's NATO application, NATO also emerged as a relevant theme. In this context, Finland was portrayed as a country possessing military capabilities.

Geopolitical events like the invasion of Ukraine and NATO expansion have intensified the focus on media registers. For example, Kobilke et al. (2023) examined tweets in English, German and Russian about the invasion, revealing that English-language tweets frequently framed NATO as responsible for resolving the conflict, a viewpoint that was less common in Russian-language tweets. Zollmann (2024) analysed news media in the US, UK and Germany on the invasion of Ukraine, concluding that NATO's eastward expansion was often downplayed in the reporting.

In the Turkish media landscape, *Sözcü* newspaper has been utilized in various studies. Miettinen (2021) examined the representation of Syrian women in Turkish media, including *Sözcü*. Her study uncovered different forms of marginalization in these representations. Avcı & Bonyadi (2024) examined portrayals of Afghan and Ukrainian refugees in newspapers with differing political orientations, such as *Sabah* and *Sözcü*. Their analysis revealed more favorable depictions of Ukrainian refugees compared to Afghan refugees. Additionally, Dalaman (2023) analyzed the image of Germany in Turkish newspapers over recent years. Among the results was that Germany received significantly more coverage than other countries considered to have important relationships with Türkiye, such as the United States, France, or Greece.

The interactive discussion platform *Ekşi Sözlük* has also been widely utilized. While much of the existing research has focused on specific topics within the discussion forum – such as hate speech, as explored by Öztekin (2015) and Yaşa & Öksüz (2020) – recent studies have examined the forum in the context of country representations. For example, Tunçer (2020) examined portrayals of Chinese people on the forum during the COVID-19 pandemic, uncovering a prevalence of negative stereotypes and preconceived attitudes. *Ekşi Sözlük* has also been employed in the studies of polarization studies, particularly related to the Russia-Ukraine War. Gürocak (2023), for instance, analysed entries and found that discussions were polarized, structured around a dichotomy of opposition to Ukraine/NATO/USA versus Russia. The former cluster of views often included themes like imperialism and fascism, while the latter was associated with dictatorship and fascism.

Drawing on these studies of media representation in international contexts and Türkiye, the present research explores how Finland is represented within Turkish media

registers of news reports in *Sözcü* newspaper and interactive discussions in *Ekşi Sözlük* forum. It examines evaluation patterns observed in the dataset's keywords. It specifically focuses on the term *ülke* 'country' in context across two registers. Although *ülke* 'country' frequently appears in joint references to Sweden and Finland, the analysis considers only instances where the term refers to Finland to capture its distinct representation. Through this focus, together with the keywords drawn from the dataset's emphasis on Finland, the study addresses a current gap in representation research on the country.

3. Data and methodology

3.1. Data

News reports, a primary form of journalistic material, typically report on recent events in a structured, pre-planned and professionally edited format (Biber & Egbert 2018). Interactive discussions take place on online platforms, such as forums, where users contribute, respond, and engage (Erten-Johansson et al. 2024). These platforms often serve as spaces for self-expression, with content that is typically evaluative and subjective (Lehti et al. 2020).

The data used in this study were sourced from *Sözcü* newspaper and *Ekşi Sözlük* discussion forum. *Sözcü* (meaning 'Spokesperson') is among the most widely read newspapers in Türkiye (Bek 2023) and is noted for its critical stance toward the government (Polat et al. 2018). Its nationalist and secular positioning enables it to critique both domestic authorities and Western institutions. Compared to many other newspapers, *Sözcü* typically maintains a more consistent and fact-based tone, making it especially appropriate for this study.

Ekşi Sözlük ('Sour Dictionary') is one of Türkiye's most frequently visited online discussion forums. It serves as a space where users from diverse ideological backgrounds share their views openly (Abuşoğlu & Aydoğan 2023). Its format enables real-time and diverse commentary, providing insight into public opinion. The use of pseudonyms, wide-ranging topics, interactivity, and long-lasting content are key features that make *Ekşi Sözlük* a valuable subject of study (Akar 2025). These dynamics illuminate not only what is said, but also how informal and affective modes of engagement shape public reactions to events like Finland's NATO bid.

We selected *Sözcü* and *Ekşi Sözlük* to represent two distinct yet influential modes of media in Türkiye: institutional journalistic reporting and interactive online commentary. We limited our newspaper selection to *Sözcü* to focus on how an established journalistic voice and dynamic public discussions portray Finland and its NATO accession. Including additional newspapers would have risked unbalancing the dataset. Given the scope of this article, these two carefully chosen media register sources offer methodological clarity and analytical contrast.

All texts containing the words *Finlandiya*, *Finli* or *Fin* ('Finland', 'Finn', 'Finnish', respectively) published in *Sözcü* newspaper and *Ekşi Sözlük* discussion forum between the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine (24 February 2022) and the day Finland officially joined NATO (4 April 2023) were collected. The *Sözcü* corpus was compiled article by article, with each news item manually saved as a separate text file. After manually annotating and cleaning the texts to remove noise, the articles were merged into a single corpus. Similarly, the *Ekşi Sözlük* corpus was constructed by manually saving each relevant

post. The posts were annotated to remove noise and metadata, including usernames, ensuring anonymization. Ethical considerations were addressed by working with publicly accessible data from *Sözcü* (sozcu.com.tr) and *Ekşi Sözlük* (eksisozluk.com).

The data collection resulted in a corpus of 189 news reports, totalling 61,783 words, and 245 discussion forum entries, totalling 18,912 words. Although representativeness may be a concern with relatively small corpora, we enhanced representativeness by focusing exclusively on texts from news reports and interactive discussions that reference Finland within the specified period. This allowed us to “reduce the breadth of our inquiry, while at the same time sharpening its focus” (Mautner 2019: 8).

3.2. Methods

3.2.1. Keyword analysis

Keyness refers to the statistical significance of certain words within a text or group of texts, indicating their relevance and centrality to the main themes, while excluding irrelevant details (Scott & Tribble 2006: 56). The concept of keyness underpins keyword analysis, a quantitative method used to explore text characteristics by identifying and ranking keywords in a target corpus compared to a reference corpus, based on statistical measures and frequency calculations (Scott 1997; Scott & Tribble 2006).

In this study, we focused on comparing two specific registers – news reports and interactive discussions – within the same timeframe. Rather than using a general reference corpus, we compared these corpora directly to each other to identify distinguishing features of each register. Keywords were identified using AntConc 4.3.0 (Anthony 2024), applying the log-likelihood test with significance threshold of $p < 0.05$. This ensured that the identified keywords were unlikely to result from random variation (Anthony 2022).

Keywords provide a manageable list of terms that highlight the linguistic elements most characteristic of a corpus. However, their connection to discourse is not inherently direct. As potential linguistic signposts of discourse – defined by Burr (2015: 74) as “sets of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events” – keywords require interpretation within their textual and situational context.

The current study presents the top 50 keywords from each register and examine them in relation to evaluation and situational characteristics. For evaluation, we draw on the framework of Thompson & Hunston (2000), and for situational characteristics, we follow Biber & Egbert (2018). While keywords themselves may not readily encode evaluation, their significance emerges in the situational characteristics of registers. These characteristics shape both the presence of keywords, and the evaluative language associated with them. The keywords in this study were manually examined and categorized to distinguish between evaluative and non-evaluative meanings in accordance with the adopted analytical frameworks.

Using keyword analysis, intriguing similarities and differences between registers may be observed. However, keyword analysis necessitates contextualization, and this is achieved through close reading of concordances (McEnery 2016).

3.2.2. Concordance analysis

A concordance is “a list of all the occurrences of a particular search term in a corpus, presented within the context that they occur in; usually a few words to the left and the right of the search term” (Baker 2006: 71). Concordance analysis is a fundamental component of corpus linguistics particularly for integrating quantitative analysis with qualitative examination of language and discourse in context (Hunston 2022). Beyond this, concordance lines serve as important tools for exploring media representations, offering insights into societal structures and dynamics. This is because language plays a crucial role in shaping power relationships, roles and institutions as well as identities (Gillings & Mautner 2024).

The present study examines concordance lines to analyse the relation between situational characteristics of registers and evaluative patterns (Section 4), and how this relation is realized in the representation of Finland (Section 5). In the latter, the analysis specifically focuses on concordance lines containing the term *ülke* ‘country’. This keyword was chosen, because it emerged – although in different morphological forms – as a shared concept in both news reports and interactive discussions referring to Finland.

In news reports, this term primarily appears as *ülkenin* ‘of the country’, ‘that the country’. In Turkish, a noun marked with the genitive suffix can function either as a noun in the genitive case or as the subject of a subordinate clause (Van Schaaik 2020: 566). Both functions were considered in the analysis, and *ülkenin* was translated as ‘of the country’ or ‘that the country’, depending on the structure of the sentence. In interactive discussions, *ülke* appears as the nominal predicate at the end of a sentence, defining Finland. Accordingly, it was translated as ‘it is the country that...’

In news reports, *ülke* ‘country’ refers solely to Finland in 23 concordance lines and jointly with Sweden in 112 lines. Although joint references are more frequent, the analysis prioritised the individual mentions of Finland to better capture its distinct representation. This approach also aligns with interactive discussions, where *ülke* appears in 64 concordance lines referring to Finland. 12 of the 23 lines were non-evaluative in news reports, while 13 out of 64 lines exhibited no evaluative meaning in interactive discussions. As the focus is on Finland’s representation, these non-evaluative lines were excluded, leaving 11 concordance lines from news reports and 51 from interactive discussions for the analysis, as illustrated in Table 2.

This analysis draws on Thompson & Hunston’s (2000) framework, which approaches evaluation on a positive-negative axis through lexis, grammar, and text. Lexical evaluation is typically conveyed through adjectives, adverbs, nouns, verbs and related phrases, while grammatical evaluation may appear through modals, adverbs and other evaluative structures. At the textual level, the function and impact of evaluation can be shaped by its specific positioning and role within the text. At all levels, some markers express evaluation explicitly, while others do so more implicitly.

Applying this framework, the analysis identified six positive and five negative instances in news reports, suggesting a roughly balanced distribution of evaluations surrounding *ülke* referring to Finland. In interactive discussions, 28 positive and 23 negative occurrences were found, indicating that Finland is represented slightly more positively in this register. Table 2 presents the distribution of positive and negative evaluations across the two registers.

Table 2. Evaluation surrounding *country* in concordance lines of registers

Number of concordance lines						
	News reports			Interactive discussions		
Non-evaluative	12			13		
Evaluative	11	Pos.	Neg.	51	Pos.	Neg.
		6	5		28	23
Total	23			64		

Following this, recurring contextual patterns were grouped into themes to explore the contexts in which Finland is portrayed positively or negatively. A set of occurrences were classified as a theme when similar patterns recurred at least three times. Instances occurring fewer than three times were categorized under *other*. Based on this classification, the main themes in news reports were *foreign policy* and *domestic leadership*, whereas in interactive discussions, the dominant themes were *military strength*, *quality of life* and *NATO membership*.

In presenting the findings, examples were selected for their clarity and representativeness of the identified theme. Two examples were included per theme to maintain conciseness and coherence. As one dominant theme was identified for both positive and negative representations in news reports, four examples were included from this register. In interactive discussions, six examples were selected in total, as positive representations encompassed two distinct themes.

The findings in this study are presented in two sections. Section 4 investigates the interplay among the keywords, illustrating the situational characteristics of news reports and interactive discussions, together with evaluative aspects. The examples in this section are numbered (1-6). Section 5 focuses on the concordance lines containing *ülke* ‘country’ and examines Finland’s representations along a positive-negative axis. The concordance lines corresponding to this section are provided in examples (7-16).

4. Findings: Evaluation and situational characteristics in registers

This section presents the top 50 keywords from news reports and interactive discussions, categorized according to their evaluative and non-evaluative meanings (see Table 3). When multiple inflected forms of the same word appeared (e.g., *üyelik* ‘membership’ and *üyeliğine* ‘to the membership of’), the nominative form was used in the table. For keywords with more than one possible meaning, all primary meanings are listed and separated by slashes. This was particularly relevant for interactive discussions, where many discourse organizers lack clear one-to-one English equivalent. For clarity and ease of reading, Table 3 includes only the English translations of the keywords. The full keyword list in the original Turkish, together with their English equivalents, is provided in the Appendices. All examples are presented in Turkish, followed by their English translations.

Table 3. Top 50 keywords in news reports and interactive discussions grouped by evaluative and non-evaluative meanings

	Non-evaluative keywords	Evaluative keywords
News reports	<i>Sweden, NATO, Finland, Türkiye, Erdoğan, president, foreign affairs, and, minister, s/he said, Stoltenberg, expressions, prime minister, Marin, explanation, membership, following, Haavisto, Çavuşoğlu, country, s/he used, which s/he has done, participation, secretary, Madrid, Biden, mutual, was found, summit, Niinistö, international, s/he did, regarding, about, tripartite, related to, member, Ankara, Hungary, press, s/he spoke.</i>	<i>security, approval, terrorism, fight.</i>
Interactive discussion	<i>a/an/one, see, country, for/to, there is/are, saying, education, she/he/it/that, people, man, military service, etc., entry, Finnish language, thing/stuff, car, language, for example, everybody, edit, Finns, which has been/is, water, food/to eat, lilies, children, every/each, piece, NATO, mi (a question particle), your.</i>	<i>as/like, nice/beautiful, even, but, and things like that, very/many, till/as...as/about, the most, no/there isn't/there aren't, already/anyways, compulsory, not, big, again, little, let it be, debe (yesterdays' most liked entry), powerful.</i>

As shown in Table 3, keywords in news reports are predominantly non-evaluative, whereas evaluative language occurs more frequently in interactive discussions. To interpret evaluation in context and its relationship with register variation, the following analysis examines each register's situational characteristics – namely, author, audience, communicative purpose and production context – following Biber & Egbert's (2018) framework.

Examples (1-6) illustrate how these register-specific features influence the presence and form of evaluation on the overt-covert axis. In each case, the keywords listed in Table 3 appear in *italics*. Additionally, further evaluative items co-occurring with the keywords are shown in **bold**. When a word functions as both an evaluation item and a keyword, it is shown in ***bold italics***. For clarity, each example is labelled with its register and evaluative orientation, indicating whether the evaluation is overt or covert (e.g., news reports – covert evaluation).

Examples (1-3) are drawn from news reports. The combination of keywords with implicitly evaluative language grounded in readers' societal norms and values illustrates how news reports reflect the situational characteristics of the register.

(news reports – covert evaluation)

- (1) Haziran ayında *Türkiye, İsveç ve Finlandiya*, *NATO zirvesinde Ankara*'nın **meşru güvenlik kaygılarını** ele alan ve her iki ülkenin *NATO üyeliğinin* önünü açan bir mutabakat zaptı imzalamıştı.

'In June, *Türkiye, Sweden, and Finland* signed a memorandum addressing *Ankara*'s **legitimate security concerns** at the *NATO summit*, paving the way for both *countries*' *NATO membership*.'

Example (1) displays covert evaluation. The reference to *Ankara* (representing the Turkish government) situates the report within a national frame, while *NATO zirvesi* 'NATO summit' introduces a diplomatic context associated with legitimacy, negotiation, and formal intergovernmental agreement involving *İsveç* 'Sweden' and *Finlandiya* 'Finland'. The report initially seems neutral, since the keywords – like country names, *NATO* and *summit* – are listed as non-evaluative in Table 3. Nevertheless, the adjective *meşru* 'legitimate', which characterizes the Turkish government's security concerns, functions as an evaluative marker. These concerns are linked to terrorism in the Turkish context. Terrorism is a deeply sensitive issue in *Türkiye*, one that carries collective emotional weight due to its historical and social implications. Consequently, characterizing *Türkiye*'s concerns as 'legitimate' invokes and reinforces widely accepted national beliefs. The evaluative stance, though covertly conveyed, thus emerges through the interplay of these keywords and the deeply embedded societal values that influence readers' interpretations.

A similar strategy of covert evaluation in news reports appears in the coverage of Finland's stance on the extradition of individuals accused of terrorism, as shown in (2):

(news reports – covert evaluation)

- (2) Konuyla (teröristlerin *Türkiye*'ye iadesi) ilgili son olarak *Finlandiya* Adalet Bakanı Anna-Maja Henriksson önemli *açıklamalarda bulundu*. Henriksson, *Erdoğan*'ın çağrılarına yanıt olarak, ülkenin mevcut mevzuatına ve Suçluların İadesine İlişkin Avrupa Sözleşmesi'ne dayanarak karar vermeye devam edeceğini *söyledi*.

'Recently, *Finland*'s Justice Minister Anna-Maja Henriksson made important statements regarding the issue (the extradition of terrorists to *Türkiye*). In response to *Erdoğan*'s calls, Henriksson said that the *country* would continue to make decisions based on the existing legislation and the European Convention on Extradition.'

Example (2) includes non-evaluative keywords such as *Finlandiya* 'Finland', *bakan* 'minister', *açıklamalarda bulundu* 'made statements' and *söyledi* 's/he said'. The absence of explicitly evaluative terms grounded in official statements makes the report appear neutral. However, covert evaluation emerges through the framing of Finland's position. The Justice Minister's remark that Finland "would continue to make decisions based on the existing legislation" underscores procedural adherence and institutional restraint. Among the keywords listed as non-evaluative in Table 3, *açıklama* 'statement' and *söyledi* 's/he said' are frequently used in news reports. In this example, their combination

with *mevcut mevzuat* ‘existing legislation’ foregrounds legality and continuity by framing Finland’s decision as rooted in law. This framing implicitly contrasts Finland’s stance with Türkiye’s in relation to terrorism. Although Finland’s actions as presented as legally justified, the societal context enables Turkish readers to interpret this legal framing as indirectly evaluative. It suggests that Finland’s response to Türkiye’s extradition requests appears insufficient or uncooperative. Such an interpretation draws upon shared societal values in the Turkish context, where firm responses to terrorism are seen as matters of security. The covert evaluation, therefore, relies on the readers’ attunement to these values.

At the centre of the news items in example (3) is *Prime Minister Marin*, comprising two non-evaluative keywords. This example illustrates, however, how evaluation can be embedded within the narrative structure of biographical reporting, reflecting cultural resonances relevant to Turkish society.

(news reports – covert evaluation)

- (3) **2018’de çocuk sahibi olduğu Markus R  ikk  nen’le 2020’de evlenen Ba  bakan Marin’in gece hayatına d          , son d  nemde Finlandiya’da b  y  k tarti  malara yol a  tı. Daha   nce de festivallere ve barlara giderek devlet i  lerini ihmal etmekle ele  tirilen Marin’in son olarak arkada  larıyla e  lendi  i, i  ki i  ip dans etti  i partinin videosu olay olmu  tu.**

‘Prime Minister Marin, who married Markus R  ikk  nen in 2020, with whom she had a child in 2018, has recently been at the center of significant controversy in Finland due to her fondness for nightlife. Previously, she had been criticized for neglecting governmental duties by attending festivals and bars, and most recently, a video showing Marin partying, drinking, and dancing with friends caused a public uproar.’

In example (3), the reference to the keywords *Ba  bakan Marin* ‘Prime Minister Marin’ establishes an institutional frame that prompts readers to assess her behavior not as a private individual but as a public figure representing state authority. This framing heightens the evaluative potential of the subsequent descriptions through the phrases such as *gece hayatına d          * ‘fondness for nightlife’, *ihmal etmekle ele  tirilen* ‘criticized for neglecting’ and *olay olmu  tu* ‘caused a public uproar’. The inclusion of personal details – such as having a child before marriage – further introduces a covert evaluative dimension for Turkish readers. In Turkish society, premarital parenthood is often perceived as conflicting with prevailing social norms. When combined with the emphasis on Marin’s official status, these details subtly invite moral judgment. Consequently, the evaluative meaning emerges through the interaction between the biographical narrative and the keywords (*Ba  bakan* ‘Prime Minister’, *Marin*) that foreground criticism and public controversy. This enables the report to convey an evaluative stance implicitly, relying on readers’ societal values for interpretation.

As displayed in (1-3), news reports convey covert evaluation that aligns with the situational characteristics of the register. These implicit evaluations are built on shared societal norms and values, subtly influencing how readers interpret the content. Examples (4-6) illustrate a different mode of evaluation, characteristic of interactive discussions, in combination of the relevant keywords.

(interactive discussions – overt evaluation)

- (4) **tüm** iskandinav *ülkeleri* **arasında belki de en “gerçekten” samimi** olan *insanları* barındıran *ülkedir*. **zaten** kendilerini **pek de** iskandinav *ülkesi* olarak saymaz buranın *insanları*.

‘Among all Scandinavian countries, it is **perhaps** the one that has *the most* “truly” **sincere** people. People of this place do not **really** consider themselves a Scandinavian country *anyways*.’

In example (4), evaluation centres on the keyword *insanlar* ‘people’, which is categorized as non-evaluative in Table 3. However, the lexical items surrounding this keyword transform it into a clearly evaluative expression. Intensifiers such as *en* ‘the most’, *gerçekten* ‘truly’, and the adjective *samimi* ‘sincere’ highlight evaluation, and discourse markers like *belki* ‘perhaps’ and *zaten* ‘anyways’ contribute to a subjective tone. Through these features, evaluation is expressed overtly. This example illustrates how even seemingly neutral keywords such as *insanlar* ‘people’ can acquire strong evaluative meanings within the context of online discussions.

A similar pattern of overt evaluation appears in example (5), reflected by the keywords:

(interactive discussions – overt evaluation)

- (5) **hiç bana** *finlandiya eğitim* sistemi de **demeyin**. nüfus yoğunluğunun, işsizliğin, öğrenci başına düşen bütçe miktarının bu kadar farklı olduğu *bir ülkenin eğitim* sistemini **falan** örnek alamaz *türkiye* **manyak olmayın**.

‘Don’t mention the Finnish education system to me. Türkiye can’t take as an example a country’s education system *and things like that* where the population density, unemployment, and the budget per student are so different. **Don’t be crazy**.’

In (5), *eğitim* ‘education’, another keyword from Table 3, becomes the focus of explicit evaluation. Although non-evaluative in isolation, it is embedded within a highly charged discourse characterized by imperatives (*demeyin* ‘don’t mention’, *manyak olmayın* ‘don’t be crazy’), direct address (*bana* ‘to me’), and colloquial markers such as *falan* ‘and things like that’. These features highlight the speaker’s personal involvement and enhance the evaluative force of the statement. The evaluative meaning arises from the combination of interpersonal engagement and colloquial style, which transforms *eğitim* ‘education’ into a vehicle of opinion rather than a non-evaluative phenomenon.

Similarly, explicit evaluation emerges in example (6). The focus here shifts to linguistic comparison, realized in the keywords such as *dil* ‘language’ and *Fince* ‘Finnish’:

(interactive discussions – overt evaluation)

- (6) her resmi tabela (özellikle güney’de), anons ve yazışma iki resmi *dil* olmasından kaynaklı hem *fince* hem isveççedir. ilk başlarda **kafa karıştırıcı** ama sonra *dilleri* ayırt etmeye başlıyorsunuz. *fince* öğrenmesi **kolay bir dil değil ancak** türklerin **bariz avantajı var**.

‘Every official sign (especially in the south), announcements, and correspondence are in both *Finnish* and Swedish because of two official *languages*. At first, it is **confusing**, but then **you** start to distinguish between the *languages*. *Finnish* is **not an easy language** to learn, **but** Turkish people have a **clear advantage**.’

In example (6), lexical items such as *kafa karıştırıcı* ‘confusing’, *kolay değil* ‘not easy’ and *bariz avantaj* ‘clear advantage’ overtly convey participant’s evaluative attitude toward the Finnish language. These adjectives and descriptive phrases functions as markers of evaluation. Additionally, the use of the second-person form *başlıyorsunuz* ‘you start to’ directly engages the audience, creating a conversational, and participatory tone that is typical of online discussions. This direct address appears to invite the reader into the evaluative perspective of the forum participant.

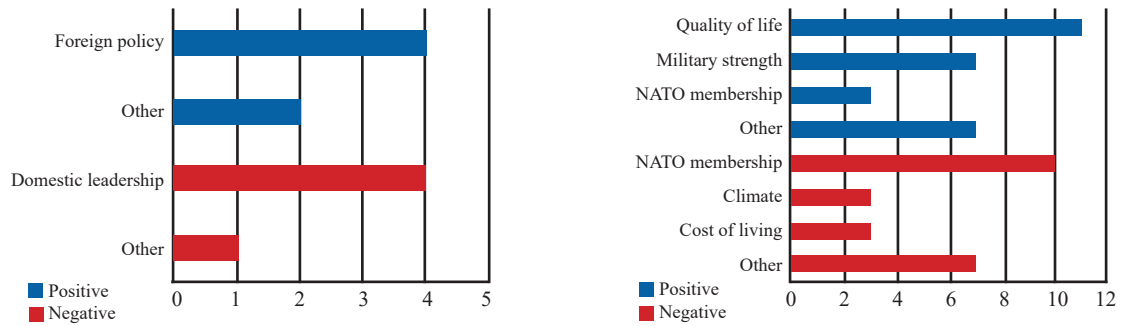
Taken together, examples (4–6) reveal that evaluation is not only frequent but also integral to making meaning in interactive discussions. In addition to already evaluative words as expressed in Table 3 (e.g., *en* ‘the most’, *zaten* ‘anyways’), keywords such as *insanlar* ‘people’, *eğitim* ‘education’, and *Fince* ‘Finnish language’, words originally classified as non-evaluative in Table 3, become carriers of evaluation through their co-occurrence with lexical items, discourse markers, and grammatical constructions that convey opinion. These patterns underscore the influence of register: whereas news reports, as illustrated in examples (1-3), typically convey evaluation covertly, drawing on readers’ shared social and cultural values, interactive discussions foreground overt evaluation expressed through personally charged expressions. This contrast highlights how situational parameters – author, audience, production circumstances, and communicative purpose – shape not only *what* is evaluated but also *how* evaluation is realized. Building on these findings, Section 5 turns to how Finland is represented across concordance lines of these registers, showing how covert and overt evaluative patterns position the country along a positive–negative axis.

5. Findings: Representation of Finland in Turkish media registers

This section examines how the evaluative patterns identified in registers contribute to the representation of Finland in the concordance lines surrounding the keyword *ülke* ‘country’. This keyword is the focus in this section, as it appeared as a shared concept in both news reports and interactive discussions referring to Finland. The categorization of themes and selection of examples used to demonstrate the representations are discussed in the article’s concordance analysis section (3.2.2).

Figure 1 illustrates the frequency and distribution of concordance lines for patterns associated with *ülke* ‘country’ across two registers. It presents the thematic patterns along a positive-negative axis for news reports (left) and interactive discussions (right).

Figure 1. Patterns of themes associated with *ülke* ‘country’ in news reports (left) and interactive discussions (right).



Based on the frequency of concordance lines forming each pattern, the most prominent recurring themes in news reports were *foreign policy* and *domestic leadership*. In interactive discussions, the strongest themes were *quality of life*, *military strength* and *NATO membership*. Although *climate* and *cost of living* also appeared in this register, their frequencies were too low to form consistent patterns and were therefore excluded from the analysis. Similarly, positive evaluations of *NATO membership* did not occur often enough to form a pattern, whereas negative evaluations formed a distinct and recurring pattern.

Section 5.1 provides detailed discussion on positive representation of Finland, focusing on the themes *foreign policy* in news reports, and *military strength* and *quality of life* in interactive discussions. Section 5.2 turns to negative representations, where the themes relate to *domestic leadership* in news reports and *NATO membership* in interactive discussions. Consistent with the earlier examples, keywords from Table 3 are shown in *italics*, while evaluative items are highlighted in **bold** in examples (7-16). For clarity, each example is labelled with its register, evaluative orientation (positive or negative), and corresponding theme (e.g., news reports – positive – foreign policy).

5. 1. Positive representations of the *country*

In this section, examples (7-8) present instances of positive evaluation from news reports.

(news reports – positive – foreign policy)

- (7) *Finlandiya’nın açıklaması, Rusya’nın Ukrayna’yı işgalinin ardından ülkenin güvenlik politikası alanında **ciddi bir politika değişikliğine** gittiğini **gösteriyor**.*

*‘Finland’s statement **points out** that the *country* has undergone **an important policy change** in the field of *security policy* following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.’*

In example (7), the keyword *ülke* ‘country’ refers to Finland in a context emphasizing strategic change and responsiveness. The verb *gösteriyor* ‘points out’ is not attributed to any quoted source but reflects the newspaper’s own interpretive stance. This framing signals the outlet’s interpretation rather than a report of facts, subtly guiding readers to view Finland’s actions positively. The description of *ciddi bir politika değişikliği* ‘an

important policy change’ construct Finland as a rational and responsive international actor, capable of adapting its security policies in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Through these lexical items, the report conveys a covertly positive evaluation of Finland’s adaptability and responsibility, positioning its foreign policy decisions within a framework of legitimacy and competence.

The newspaper’s evaluative stance is also evident in example (8).

(news reports – positive – foreign policy)

- (8) Kremlin yönetimi, *Finlandiya ve İsveç*’i NATO’ya *katılmanın* ağır askeri sonuçları olacağı *konusunda* uyarılmıştı. *Finlandiya* **geri adım atmazken**, *ülkenin* **halkın da desteğiyle** gelecek haftalarda NATO’ya başvurması bekleniyor.

‘The Kremlin administration had warned that there would be serious military consequences for *Finland and Sweden joining NATO*. While *Finland* **does not back down**, it is expected that the *country* will apply to *NATO* in the coming weeks **with the support of its people**.’

In (8), *ülke* ‘country’ functions as the acting subject (*başvurması bekleniyor* ‘it is expected to apply’), emphasizing Finland’s agency and involvement in the NATO application. The phrase *geri adım atmazken* ‘while not backing down’ highlights determination, while *halkın da desteğiyle* ‘with the support of its people’ highlights national unity in its foreign policy. The contrastive mention of *İsveç* ‘Sweden’ only once further foregrounds Finland’s steadfastness and distinct resolve. These linguistic choices construct a positive evaluation of Finland, portraying it as courageous, determined and supported by its citizens, and reinforcing an image of strong foreign policy within the context of NATO accession.

Taken together, examples (7-8) highlight Finland’s competence and strategic responsibility on international stage. Through lexical choice and contextual cues, the news reports portray Finland as a rational, proactive and steadfast actor, capable of adapting and maintaining its foreign policy. These representations convey a positive evaluation.

Examples (9-12) present instances of positive evaluation from interactive discussions. Specifically, examples (9-10) illustrate the theme of military strength, while (11-12) exemplify the theme of quality of life.

(interactive discussions – positive – military strength)

- (9) 1939 yılında kendinden asker sayısı olarak **3 kat fazla** olan rus güçlerine **karşı** gerçekleştirdiği ve **kazandığı** kış savaşı ile **ünlü ülke**.

‘The *country* which is **famous** for the winter war it fought and **won** in 1939 **against** the Russian forces, which were **3 times more** than its own soldiers.’

In (9), *ülke* ‘country’ refers to Finland as an object of admiration. The lexical choices *kazandı* ‘won’ and *ünlü* ‘famous’ convey overt positive evaluation, portraying Finland as brave, capable and historically triumphant despite facing a significantly larger military force (*3 kat fazla* ‘3 times more’). Evaluation arises from the achievement-focused narrative, through which *ülke* embodies competence and enduring strength. The reference

to the 1939 Winter War in this entry may also be read as indirectly legitimizing Finland's current NATO membership, suggesting continuity between the country's historical resilience and its contemporary strategic decisions.

(interactive discussions – positive – military strength)

(10) ordusu **çok güçlü** bir ülke.

‘A country whose army is **very strong**’

In example (10), Finland is evaluated directly through the description of its army as *çok güçlü* ‘very strong’. The brief, emphatic construction emphasizes Finland's military capability in a highly direct manner, conveying overt positive evaluation without the narrative or historical framing seen in example (9). This statement foregrounds the country's strength and competence explicitly, offering a straightforward admiration of Finland's armed forces and reinforcing the country's image as capable and formidable.

The subsequent examples (11-12) shift toward lifestyle-related positive evaluations.

(interactive discussions – positive – quality of life)

(11) türkiye'den gidildiğinde **kültür şoku** yaşatan *ülke*. kamusal alan açısından dünyada kendinizi **bu kadar rahat, korunaklı, özgür** hissedebileceğiniz *ülke* sayısı *çok* yoktur.

‘The country **that causes culture shock** when departing from Türkiye. *There are not many countries* in the world where you can feel **this much comfortable, protected, and free** in public spaces.’

In example (11), *ülke* ‘country’ is the focal point of experiential evaluation. Although *kültür şoku* ‘culture shock’ initially signals a challenging or disorienting experience, it is immediately counterbalanced by the adjectives *rahat* ‘comfortable’, *korunaklı* ‘protected’ and *özgür* ‘free’, which reframe the experience as overwhelmingly positive. The contrast with Türkiye heightens the evaluative impact, positioning Finland as a desirable exception – a country where an idealized sense of comfort, security and freedom is attainable. Through this contrastive framing, *ülke* embodies both admiration and aspirational value, highlighting Finland as exemplary from the perspective of the forum participant's experiential and societal expectations.

The sense of exceptional public life associated with Finland appears to extend to working life as well:

(interactive discussions – positive – quality of life)

(12) beyaz yakalı bir göçmen için **açık ara** yaşanılacak **en iyi** ülke.

‘**By far the best** country to live in *for a white-collar migrant*.’

Finally, example (12) presents an emphatic endorsement of Finland. *Ülke* ‘country’ is evaluated positively through intensifiers *açık ara* ‘by far’ and *en iyi* ‘the best’, which explicitly emphasize its desirability. In this context, Finland is portrayed as the ideal environment for white-collar migrants, positioning the country as a symbol of quality and well-being. This overt evaluative framing reinforces Finland’s image as a highly desirable destination, consolidating admiration and highlighting its appeal to prospective residents.

Taken together, the examples (9-12) reveal that interactive discussions portray Finland not only as a nation with a strong army but also as an ideal destination for individuals, often using emotionally charged and aspirational language. This register emphasizes personal engagement and explicit evaluation in contrast to the more detached and implicit tone of news reports, which focus primarily on Finland’s foreign policy in the context of its NATO accession process (examples 7-9).

5.2. Negative representations of the *country*

In this section, examples (13-14) present instances of negative evaluation from news reports.

(news reports – negative – domestic leadership)

- (13) Bir sosyal medya kullanıcı duruma, “*Ülkenin başbakanının cep telefonu yanında yoktu ve ulaşılamıyor. Savaş çıkarsa ve Sanna bardaysa Tanrı yardımcımız olsun*” ifadelerini kullanarak **tepki göstermişti**.

‘A social media user **reacted to** the situation by using the *expressions* “*The country’s prime minister’s mobile phone was not by her side, and she is unreachable. If a war breaks out and Sanna is unavailable, may God help us.*”

In (13), *ülke* ‘country’ locates the critique within Finland, linking the perceived shortcoming in leadership directly to national context. Although the negative evaluation originates from a third-party source – likely a Finnish individual (*Tanrı yardımcımız olsun* ‘May God help us’), the newspaper’s choice to quote this post, together with the reporting verb *tepki göstermişti* ‘reacted to’, constructs Finland as the site of ineffective leadership. By embedding the criticism through *ülke*, the news item extends the evaluation from the individual leader to the country. Although the news report avoids direct judgment by citing an external source, this framing implicitly guides Turkish readers to perceive Finland as ineffectively governed.

A similar function of criticism through an external source is observed in (14):

(news reports – negative – domestic leadership)

- (14) İngiliz Daily Mail gazetesi, görüntüdeki kadınlardan birinin önceki gün *Marin*’in dans ettiği *ülkenin* eski güzellik kraliçesi Sabina Särkkä olduğunu iddia etti.

‘The British newspaper Daily Mail claimed that one of the women in the image was Sabina Särkkä, the former beauty queen of the *country* with whom *Marin* had danced the previous day.’

In example (14), *ülke* ‘country’ connects the portrayal of Marin’s private behaviour to Finland’s national image. By framing a personal moment of leisure within a national reference, the report turns an individual episode into a reflection on political leadership. The emphasis on glamour and social activity, rather than governance, implicitly challenges Marin’s professionalism and, by extension, Finland’s image. The attribution to an external source of newspaper (*Daily Mail*) enables the report to present the critique without directly expressing judgement while covertly reproducing negative evaluation. Through *ülke*, the criticism is nationalized: Marin’s conduct becomes emblematic of Finland’s leadership, extending the implications of individual behaviour to the country’s political image.

Together, examples (13-14) illustrate that news reports demonstrate negative evaluation by framing *ülke* ‘country’ through its domestic leadership, in ways that subtly undermine political authority. Covert strategies such as source attribution and selective quoting are used in this register. These contrasts set the stage for examining how evaluation operates in interactive discussions, as illustrated in examples (15-16).

(interactive discussions – negative – NATO membership)

- (15) *nato üyeliği için resmen başvurmuş ülke. durduk yerde rusya’nın gazabına uğrayacaklar.*

‘The *country* that has officially applied for *NATO* membership. They will **incur** Russia’s **wrath for no reason at all.**’

In example (15), *ülke* ‘country’ serves as the subject of criticism, conveying an emotionally charged negative evaluation. The phrase *durduk yerde* ‘for no reason at all’ frames Finland’s action as irrational and unprovoked, while *Rusya’nın gazabına uğrayacaklar* ‘They will incur Russia’s wrath’ dramatizes the potential consequences of the NATO application, amplifying the sense of risk. These lexical choices convey overt negative evaluation, positioning Finland as making unwarranted political decisions and emphasizing the speaker’s subjective engagement with the issue.

Finally, example (16) intensifies the evaluative language, introducing culturally specific expressions unique to Turkish.

(interactive discussions – negative – NATO membership)

- (16) *yüzünü aşırı güvenilirliğiyle bilinir nato’ya dönmüş... sabah sabah ayı yüreği yemiş ülke.*

‘The *country* which has turned toward *NATO*, an alliance famed for its extreme reliability... the *country* **which ate bear heart at the crack of dawn.**’

In example (16), *ülke* ‘country’ is associated with culturally nuanced negative connotations, conveyed through idiomatic and personalized expressions unique to Turkish. The idiom *sabah sabah* ‘at the crack of dawn’ signals untimeliness or an inappropriate moment for action. *Ayı yüreği yemek* ‘to eat a bear heart’ appears to be a personalized variation of the original idiom *yürek yemek* ‘to eat a heart’, that implies excessive boldness or audacity. The inclusion of *ayı* ‘bear’ may carry symbolic meaning, potentially alluding to Russia, as the bear has historically and culturally been used to represent Russia in various popular

and political contexts. Through these idiomatic and culturally embedded expressions, Finland is framed in a negative light, while embedding the evaluation in culturally specific metaphors that enrich the critique.

Taken together, examples (15-16) show that interactive discussions portray Finland as a country making questionable, untimely or overly bold moves during its NATO accession process, which invites criticism of its membership. Evaluation in this register typically reflect informal, personal, and emotionally expressive characteristics. This contrasts sharply with news reports (examples 13-14), where negative evaluation is more covert, source-mediated and framed through the actions of Finland's leadership, maintaining a factual and detached tone.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between the situational characteristics of registers, as conceptualized by Biber & Egbert (2018), and patterns of evaluation, drawing on Thompson & Hunston's (2000) framework. Focusing on *Sözcü* news reports and *Ekşi Sözlük* interactive discussions, the study explored how evaluative patterns contribute to the representation of Finland and its NATO membership process, covering the period from Russia's invasion of Ukraine to Finland's accession to NATO.

A clear and strong relationship emerges between the situational characteristics of registers and the evaluative language they display. Essentially, evaluation is shaped by register: the way evaluation is realized is closely linked to the communicative context in which it occurs. In this respect, news reports and interactive discussions exhibit contrasting patterns. In news reports, evaluation is primarily institutional and covert, shaped by the need to address a general audience and maintain an appearance of objectivity. In contrast, interactive discussions, with their topic-focused participants, allow for direct, overt and personal evaluation. This form of evaluation in interactive discussions is supported by the frequent use of idioms and personal expressions, which are largely absent in news reports.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research. The presence of evaluative language in interactive discussions – also observed in other corpora and languages (e.g., Biber & Egbert 2018; Erten-Johansson et al. 2024) – confirms that evaluation exhibits consistent forms and functions across contexts. In support of this, the keywords listed in Table 3, along with examples (4-6), (9-12) and (15-16) illustrate this pattern. Similarly, the results from news reports align with Bednarek's (2006) argument that news reports are not entirely objective and free from evaluation, as evidenced in examples (1-3), (7-8) and (13-14).

Evaluations serve to guide, influence and potentially manipulate others' perceptions (Thompson & Hunston 2000). This reflects the convergence of the individual and social functions of evaluation, as speakers and writers promote value systems and attempt to convince audiences regarding what is acceptable or unacceptable, as observed by Partington et al. (2013). In the present study, however, the key difference was found to lie in how evaluation is expressed. News reports predominantly utilize implicit strategies that embed evaluation in a seemingly neutral tone. Such covert evaluation relies on shared societal values, subtly directing readers toward interpretations – an observation consistent with Thompson (1997) and Thompson & Hunston (2000). In collectivist societies such as Türkiye (Ayçiçeği-Dinn & Caldwell-Harris 2011), the influence of these shared values in shaping covertly evaluative language may be particularly pronounced. By contrast, interactive discussions, where participants openly express opinions, tend

to rely on explicit evaluative strategies, often enabled by the anonymity afforded by usernames. While societal values may still inform these overt evaluations, participants do not necessarily aim to persuade a broad audience in the same way as institutional news.

The relationship between situational characteristics of news reports and interactive discussions and their evaluative patterns contributes to the portrayal of Finland along a positive-negative axis. In news reports, positive and negative evaluations, though limited in number (6 versus 5 instances, respectively), were nearly balanced. Covertly positive evaluations centred on Finland's successful and measured management of foreign policy, often framed as appropriate and diplomatically sound, as examples (7-8) show. Negative evaluations appeared primarily in references to the domestic leadership of the country, particularly the private life and scandals involving Prime Minister Sanna Marin during the accession process, as examples (13-14) display.

Interactive discussions revealed a wider range of evaluative themes, with a slightly predominance of positive over negative representations (28 versus 23 instances, respectively). Positive evaluations frequently highlighted Finland's military strength and quality of life, framing it as an attractive country to live and work. Notably, the focus on military capability and living standards, as examples (9-12) show, parallels some themes identified in Nakagami's (2023) analysis of Japanese Twitter discussions on Finland. On the other hand, negative evaluations in the Turkish discussions expressed scepticism regarding Finland's NATO membership, as examples (15-16) illustrate. These critical views were often emotionally charged and personalized, occasionally casting doubt on Finland's motives for joining the alliance.

An intriguing contrast emerged between the two registers in terms of their evaluative themes: while Finland's NATO accession is portrayed positively in news reports through its well-managed foreign policy, it tends to receive more critical evaluations in interactive discussions. In the latter, Finland's military strength – highlighted both through historical references and mentions of its capable army – is evaluated favourably. However, this positive view does not extend to its NATO membership. Regarding that NATO is fundamentally a military alliance, one might expect Finland's strong army to be viewed as an asset to NATO and, by extension, to Türkiye. Yet, this was not reflected in the data. A possible explanation is that, within online discussions, NATO is perceived more as a political than a military organization, which may shape the negative evaluations surrounding Finland's membership. This interpretation aligns with Gürocak's (2023) analysis of *Ekşi Sözlük* discussions on the Russia-Ukraine War, where NATO was often framed within a polarized Ukraine/NATO/USA versus Russia axis, and associations with notions of imperialism and political interference. Such perceptions may influence the negative evaluations of Finland's NATO membership, regardless of its military strength. Conversely, the absence of similarly negative patterns in the news reports may be attributed to political considerations. As news reports are more closely aligned with formal political developments, they may have reflected the expectation that Türkiye would ultimately approve Finland's membership. This likely influenced the more measured and diplomatically aligned stance adopted in the coverage of the news.

Another noteworthy contrast concerns the representation of living and working conditions in Finland. In interactive discussions, these aspects are evaluated positively whereas they are largely absent from news reports, which focus almost exclusively on Finland's NATO accession process. This divergence suggests that the positive portrayal of Finland's quality of life in interactive discussions emerges independently of news media influence. Conversely, the narrow focus of news reports on NATO-related topics may

have shaped the nature of online discussions. This is particularly noteworthy given that Finland's well-managed foreign policy during its NATO accession process is portrayed covertly positively in news reports. The negative evaluations surrounding Finland's image in the context of NATO within interactive discussions may be linked to the period when Finland was frequently mentioned alongside Sweden in the news. It is important to note that this study focused exclusively on references to Finland in news reports, without considering joint mentions with Sweden.

The selection of *Sözcü* as the newspaper and *Ekşi Sözlük* as the interactive discussion forum may have influenced the findings. Although *Sözcü* is known for its oppositional stance to the government, this does not necessarily imply opposition on all issues. In the case of Finland's NATO accession process – a matter in which Türkiye played a significant role – *Sözcü* may align with the government regarding shared societal values in the context of international political events. Regarding *Ekşi Sözlük*, the platform's specific digital discourse norm – *debe* ('yesterday's most liked entry') – which also emerged as a keyword, may have shaped the evaluation patterns concerning Finland. The prominence of entries featured in *debe* could have enhanced their algorithmic visibility, thereby influencing participant engagement, both positively and negatively.

This study advances corpus linguistics by integrating a register-based approach to enhance the understanding of how evaluation is shaped by communicative context. By revealing the connection between situational characteristics of registers and patterns of evaluation within Turkish media, the findings contribute to analyses of how countries are represented in foreign media – specifically, the portrayal of Finland and its NATO membership process in Turkish media registers. Future research could extend these insights by examining additional registers, different media platforms, or cross-linguistic contexts, thereby offering further perspectives on how evaluation functions across registers.

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Appendix A. The top 50 keywords of news reports

News reports

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>İsveç</i> ‘Sweden’ | 26. <i>yaptığı</i> ‘which s/he has done’ |
| 2. NATO | 27. <i>katılım</i> ‘participation’ |
| 3. <i>Finlandiya</i> ‘Finland’ | 28. <i>sekreteri</i> ‘secretary of’ |
| 4. Türkiye | 29. Madrid |
| 5. Erdoğan | 30. Biden |
| 6. <i>cumhurbaşkanı</i> ‘president’ | 31. <i>ortak</i> ‘mutual’ |
| 7. <i>dışişleri</i> ‘foreign affairs’ | 32. <i>söyledi</i> ‘s/he said’ |
| 8. <i>ve</i> ‘and’ | 33. <i>bulundu</i> ‘was found’ |
| 9. <i>bakanı</i> ‘minister of’ | 34. <i>zirvesi</i> ‘summit of’ |
| 10. <i>dedi</i> ‘s/he said’ | 35. Niinistö |
| 11. Stoltenberg | 36. <i>uluslararası</i> ‘international’ |
| 12. <i>ifade</i> ‘expression’ | 37. <i>mücadele</i> ‘fight’ |
| 13. <i>başbakanı</i> ‘prime minister of’ | 38. <i>etti</i> ‘s/he did’ |
| 14. Marin | 39. <i>açıklama</i> ‘explanation’ |
| 15. <i>açıklamada</i> ‘in the explanation’ | 40. <i>yönelik</i> ‘regarding’ |
| 16. <i>üyelik</i> ‘membership’ | 41. <i>konusunda</i> ‘about’ |
| 17. <i>ardından</i> ‘following’ | 42. <i>ifadelerini</i> ‘expressions of’ |
| 18. Haavisto | 43. <i>üçlü</i> ‘tripartite’ |
| 19. Çavuşoğlu | 44. <i>ilişkin</i> ‘related to, concerning’ |
| 20. <i>güvenlik</i> ‘security’ | 45. <i>üye</i> ‘member’ |
| 21. <i>onay</i> ‘approval’ | 46. Ankara |
| 22. <i>terör</i> ‘terrorism’ | 47. <i>açıklaması</i> ‘explanation of’ |
| 23. <i>ülkenin</i> ‘of the country’, ‘that the country’ | 48. <i>Macaristan</i> ‘Hungary’ |
| 24. <i>üyeliğine</i> ‘to the membership of’ | 49. <i>basın</i> ‘press’ |
| 25. <i>kullandı</i> ‘s/he used’ | 50. <i>konuştu</i> ‘s/he spoke’ |

Appendix B. The top 50 keywords of interactive discussions

Interactive discussions

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>gibi</i> ‘as, like’ | 26. <i>değil</i> ‘not’ |
| 2. <i>güzel</i> ‘nice, beautiful’ | 27. <i>araba</i> ‘car’ |
| 3. <i>bile</i> ‘even’ | 28. <i>zorunlu</i> ‘compulsory’ |
| 4. <i>ama</i> ‘but’ | 29. <i>büyük</i> ‘big’ |
| 5. <i>bir</i> ‘a/an, one’ | 30. <i>dil</i> ‘language’ |
| 6. <i>bkz</i> ‘see’ | 31. <i>yine</i> ‘again’ |
| 7. <i>falan</i> ‘and things like that’ | 32. <i>mesela</i> ‘for example’ |
| 8. <i>ülke</i> ‘country’ | 33. <i>herkes</i> ‘everybody’ |
| 9. <i>çok</i> ‘very, many’ | 34. <i>az</i> ‘little’ |
| 10. <i>için</i> ‘for/to’ | 35. edit |
| 11. <i>var</i> ‘there is/are’ | 36. <i>finliler</i> ‘the Finns’ |
| 12. <i>diye</i> ‘saying’ | 37. <i>olduğu</i> ‘which has been/is’ |
| 13. <i>eğitim</i> ‘education’ | 38. <i>suyu</i> ‘water of’ |
| 14. <i>kadar</i> ‘till, as...as, about’ | 39. <i>yemek</i> ‘food, to eat’ |
| 15. <i>yok</i> ‘there isn’t/aren’t, no’ | 40. <i>zambaklar</i> ‘lilies’ |
| 16. <i>o</i> ‘she/he/it/that’ | 41. <i>çocuklar</i> ‘children’ |
| 17. <i>insanlar</i> ‘people’ | 42. <i>olsun</i> ‘let it be’ |
| 18. <i>en</i> ‘the most’ | 43. <i>insanların</i> ‘of people’ |
| 19. <i>zaten</i> ‘already, anyways’ | 44. <i>her</i> ‘every, each’ |
| 20. <i>adam</i> ‘man’ | 45. <i>tane</i> ‘piece’ |
| 21. <i>askerlik</i> ‘military service’ | 46. <i>debe</i> (<i>dünün en beğenilen entry’si</i> ‘yesterday’s most liked entry’) |
| 22. <i>vs</i> ‘etc.’ | 47. <i>güçlü</i> ‘powerful’ |
| 23. entry | 48. <i>NATO’ya</i> ‘to NATO’ |
| 24. <i>Fince</i> ‘Finnish language’ | 49. <i>mı</i> (a question particle) |
| 25. <i>şey</i> ‘thing/stuff’ | 50. <i>sizin</i> ‘your’ |

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