

Review Two

Review of “The Second Language Acquisition of Turkish”, edited by Ayşe Gürel and published by John Benjamins, Amsterdam, Language Acquisition and Language Disorders, 59, 2016. vi, 351 pp. DOI: 10.1075/lald.59, hardbound ISBN 9789027253224.

by

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Summary

Ayşe Gürel’s “The Second Language Acquisition of Turkish” is an edited volume whose purpose is to represent research on this less commonly taught and studied second language (L2) and address a number of open issues in the field of Turkish language learning and teaching. The eleven chapters in this volume are a menagerie of studies concentrating exclusively on adult L2 speakers, setting aside investigations of Turkish child language development, adult heritage speakers, and language attrition. In the Introduction written by the editor, Gürel first highlights a few important aspects pertinent to the Turkish language related to the issues discussed in the volume: the origins and geo-linguistic distribution of Turkish; a growing interest in Turkish as a taught and learned L2; and key morphological, phonological, syntactic, and discourse/pragmatic characteristics of the language. The Introduction ends with a summary of the 11 chapters and their legacy to the broader field of second language acquisition (SLA).

The remainder of the book is organized into four parts made up of eleven chapters, and a conclusion. Each part includes studies of the acquisition and processing of language. While Part I, II, and III focus on the acquisition L2 phonology, morphosyntax, and discourse/pragmatics respectively, Part IV homes in on the L2 processing of morphosyntactic elements. In the Conclusion, Gürel

suggests future directions and discusses pedagogical implications of the works in the volume.

To follow is a brief summary of the eleven chapters and the conclusion.

Chapter 1, “The effects of purely phonological and phonosyntactic issues”, by Öner Özçelik, reports two studies. In the first study, Canadian English and French speakers’ L2 development of Turkish lower-level prosody was tracked in order to test whether first language (L1) phonological features like [\pm foot] transfer to L2 and access to Universal Grammar (UG) is possible. The author claims their results to uphold both of these predictions. The acquisition of higher-level prosody by English speakers of Turkish is the focus of the second study. Although the L1-L2 differ for the parameter-setting and usage of prosodic structures, participants are purported to be able to re-set parameters to the L2 value and adopt L2-like prosody.

In Chapter 2, Öner Özçelik and Rex Sprouse test adult instructed English learners of Turkish dependence on orthographic and auditory stimuli in developing phonological competence. By means of a multiple-choice test, the authors exploit canonical suffixation, normally guided by vowel harmony, and non-canonical exceptional suffixation patterns, as in loanwords from Persian, Arabic, and other European languages, to measure accuracy in choice of a suffix. Their results show with good confidence that across proficiency levels, bi-modal presentation of stimuli leads to higher accuracy scores in choice of a suffix reflecting the canonical pattern compared to auditory presentation alone. More advanced learners, however, outperform beginners in both the canonical and non-canonical suffixation conditions, and depend less on orthographic presentation to make accurate decisions on non-canonical suffixation.

Chapter 3, titled “The acquisition of TAM markers in L2 Turkish” is a study of the acquisition of Turkish tense, agreement, and mood markers by intermediate and advanced Greek speakers. The authors Hasan Kaili, Aytaç Çeltek, and Despina Papadopoulou,

compare L2 speakers with natives on written and oral production of *-yor, -r, çek/cek* verbal morphemes which encode tense, aspect, and modality. Their results show L2 speakers are more accurate in use of tense and aspect than modal markers consistent with work in other richly inflected L2s like Italian (Giacalone-Ramat, 1992) and French (Howard, 2002). They conjecture part of the difficulty participants experience with use of L2 verbal inflectional morphology is due to differences in the lexicalization of the relevant abstract features between L1 and L2.

In Chapter 4, “The causative and inchoative morphology in L2 Turkish under the Feature Reassembly Approach”, is a revisiting of Silvina Montrul’s article originally published in 2001 in *Second Language Research*. In this chapter, Montrul describes her study of the L2 acquisition of two classes of Turkish causative verbs by adult English, Spanish, and Japanese learners. She tests the semantic and morphological acceptability of sentences comprising the two verb classes by means of a picture judgment task, controlling for transitivity and morphological realization. One generalization emerging from Montrul’s findings is that the L1 morphological patterns resulting from causative/inchoative combinations with verb transitivity influence L2 judgment of equivalent patterns in the L2.

Chapter 5, “Someone judges every sentence: Third language acquisition of quantifier scope in Turkish” by Şıla Ay and Özgür Aydın, is an investigation in L1 Japanese L2 English L3 Turkish. This study had the objective of identifying the nature of language transfer in the interpretation of quantifier scope in Turkish SOV and OSV sentences. After comparing the L3 speakers with native speakers on a picture-matching rating task modelling the two sentence types, the authors found: (1) surprising evidence of neither L1 nor L2 transfer in the L3 group; (2) the native interpretations differed from predictions based on the literature.

In Chapter 6, “Syntax/semantics/pragmatics of yes/no questions in second language Turkish”, Martina Gračanin-Yuksek and Bilal Kırkıcı examine the acquisition of Turkish yes/no questions by adult speakers from a number of L1 backgrounds. More

specifically, the authors tested a cross-sectional sample of L2 speakers at three different proficiency levels to ascertain whether their knowledge of separate syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic constraints on the question marker *mi/mi* in different sentential positions differs from native speakers. Results of a rating task used for each of the three grammatical domains revealed that L2 syntactic and semantic competence exceeds pragmatics, in line with claims that internal interfaces are less vulnerable than external (Tsimpli and Sorace, 2006).

In “Cross-linguistic effects in the use of suggestion formulas by L2 Turkish learners” Yasemin Bayyurt and Leyla Martı examine native-nonnative differences in use of suggestions in L2 Turkish. The results of a discourse completion and written task reveal considerable differences in sensitivity to the social contexts between native and advanced English speakers of Turkish. This study indicates L2 speakers struggle with the acquisition of speech acts even after considerable instruction in the L2.

In Chapter 8, “Explicit apologies in L2 Turkish”, Çiler Hatipoğlu researches the quantitative and qualitative features of explicit apologies in Turkish produced by L1 Russian and Arabic speakers in study abroad contexts. She also attempts to define how L2 speakers adjust their pragmatic competence to suit the L2. Evidence is shown to support the claim that L1 language and culture affect the rate and success with which L2 speakers identify target-like means and strategies for contextually appropriate apologizing.

In Chapter 9, “Processing morphology in L2 Turkish: the effects of morphological richness in L1” Serkan Uygun and Ayşe Gürel examine the processing of Turkish nominal inflection via an unprimed lexical decision task completed by L1 Russian and English speakers at two different proficiency levels, intermediate and advanced. The L1 choice in this study is meaningful insofar as the authors hypothesize that the closer the L1 and L2 are typologically, the more similar the processing pattern. Their results, instead, show that cross-linguistic influence is not warranted, but that proficiency level has a much greater effect on the type of pattern observed. More

specifically, the advanced L2 group tended to reflect a full-listing pattern like the native speakers, while the intermediate group relied more on decompositionality. These findings imply that the L1's morphological structure does not play a dominant role in L2 morphological processing.

In Chapter 10, “Non-native syntactic processing of case and agreement: evidence from event-related potentials”, the three authors, Özgür Aydın, Mehmet Aygüneş, and Tamer Demiralp report on a neurolinguistic study comparing syntactic processing in L1 and L2 speakers taking L1-L2 language distance and L2 proficiency into account. In this study, event-related potentials were measured during the processing of grammatical and ungrammatical sentences with either subject case or finite and non-finite subject-verb agreement violations. Aydın, Aygüneş, and Demiralp found that an increase in L2 proficiency implies more native-like processing of subject-verb but not case agreement, and that lower proficiency learners are subject to a finite/non-finite effect in that their performance is only sometimes native-like.

Chapter 11, “Structural priming in L2 Turkish: A study of possessive noun phrases and noun clauses”, by Gözde Mercan, is a psycholinguistic experiment in structural priming. The author sets out to test whether L2 speakers of Turkish from a variety of L1 backgrounds, ranging in proficiency from intermediate to advanced, have a single syntactic possessive representation for possessive marked NPs and noun clauses with nominalized verbs. Her findings somewhat suggest L2 speakers have separate syntactic representations for these structures, despite them being equally possessive-marked.

The volume closes with Ayşe Gürel's Conclusion where she reviews the methods used by the studies in the volume and addresses three important limitations thereof, all connected to homogeneity of participant sample: controlling for L1, using sizeable groups by proficiency level, and establishing an L2 standardized proficiency test. Next, Gürel discusses implications of the 11 studies for the general field of SLA, mainly from a generative perspective. She relates the

implications to critical issues in the field such as the L2 endstate (Sorace, 2003), persistent variability (White, 1991), access to UG (White 2003), and feature reconfiguration (Lardiere, 2008). Finally, she addresses three important aspects emerging from the studies in the volume for the teaching of L2 Turkish: (1) selecting appropriate teaching approaches based on difficulty of L2 feature; (2) taking developmental readiness (Pienemann, 1985) into account; (3) the relevance of markedness theory (e.g., Doughty, 1991). The book concludes with some suggestions for the planning of L2 Turkish language programs and pedagogical activities.

Evaluation

As one of very few researchers in Turkey to conduct research on L2 Turkish grounded in generative grammar, Gürel's edited volume is deservedly state-of-the-art to Turkish and international audiences. The volume is unique with its focus on an agglutinative richly inflected language like Turkish and how its intrinsic characteristics affect the acquisition process. Furthermore, the book successfully fulfils its purpose by capturing the full range of issues it promised to address, reporting studies utilizing a wide array of behavioral and physiological measures. The book displays great breadth of inquiry while the editor's evaluation of the studies reflects impressive knowledge of generativist SLA and key notions in the literature of research-informed L2 teaching.

Issues core to the contemporary generative approaches to SLA are dealt with well in at least four of the chapters: Chapter 2 tests prosodic transfer from L1 to L2 (Goad and White, 2009); Chapter 3 describes UG access and L1 transfer in the development of L2 functional categories (Schartz and Sprouse, 1996; Vainikka and Young-Scholten, 2006); Chapter 6 and 7 look at the development of internal versus external interfaces (Tsimplici and Sorace, 2006); Chapter 3 and 4 reflect persistent variability and difficulty in reconfiguring features from the L1 to L2 (Lardiere, 2008). This book is the pinnacle of a research program bravely developing in a social and political context that does not sufficiently embrace the very

values of cultural and linguistic diversity needed to conduct research on SLA and improve current Turkish language teaching practices.

There are, however, a few areas of improvement worthwhile noting which represent potential avenues for future scientific inquiry into the L2 and L3 acquisition of Turkish. Chapter 5 by Ay and Aydın is (potentially) the only study in the volume looking at L3 acquisition. As such, this chapter, in my view, would have been better placed in a volume dedicated to L3 acquisition which, as Ay and Aydın underscore, has in the last decade grown to become a field in its own right. Related to L3 acquisition is a widespread experimental problem in L2 research, namely the potential intervening effect of L2 English on L3 Turkish. Many non-anglophone L2 Turkish learners, be they naturalistic or instructed learners of the target language, tend to have some knowledge of English which acts as a temporary, and often permanent, vehicle for everyday communication in a culture where interaction with locals would otherwise not be possible. Thus, several of the studies in this volume, like many other studies on lesser known L2s, should better inform readers of the degree to which English as a vehicle language intervenes on the development/acquisition of L2 Turkish.

Related to unwanted experimental effects are three other important variables the editor correctly identifies in her conclusion to the volume: L1 effects, proficiency effects, and proficiency tests. In chapters 6, 10, and 11, for instance, the authors had difficulty recruiting participants belonging to one or two specific L1 backgrounds and in chapter 11, the L2 proficiency groups forming the sample are fairly uneven in size. From an experimental point of view, results in these studies will suffer from undesirably unequal variance in the dependent variable and non-parametric distributions. As the editor explains, these problems are due, on the one hand, to the incipient status of foreign/second language study in Turkish, and on the other, to the relatively small number of foreigners accessible for the purpose of recruitment to research. One solution to the above would be to conduct research with those linguistic minorities that make up Turkey's rich cultural and historical heritage. The Kurdish, Greek, and French minorities are some notable examples. Another

way around this sampling impasse in studies is conducting rigorous studies of L2 Turkish as a foreign language around the rest of the world. Thirdly, there is the issue of access to a standardized proficiency test, perhaps one in tune with Europe's Common Framework Reference for languages. The problem of access to a reliable and valid standardized proficiency test, though, is not as insurmountable as the aforementioned difficulties in sampling homogeneously in terms of L1 and level of proficiency. Many studies nowadays, and the one in Chapter 4 by Silvina Montrul, make use of cloze tests which are widely held to be valid measures of L2 proficiency, provided they are carefully designed.

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