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Linguistics

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B O Ğ A Z İ Ç İ U N I V E R S I T Y P R E S S

Contents

Foreword ix

PHONOLOGY - PHONETICS

Türkiye Türkçesi'ndeki ünlülerin sesbilgisel özellikleri 3
Mehmet Akif Kılıç

Interaction between syllable structure and vowel length:
Example from Turkish /a/ 19
Handan Kopkallı-Yavuz

Turkish internal vowel harmony revisited 27
Karl Zimmer & Aylin C. Küntay

MORPHOLOGY

Historical development of passives in Turkish 37
Mevlüt Erdem

Syntactic head or morphological buffer?
The dual status of *ol* 49
Aslı Göksel

From lexical class to syntactic function:
A sketch of Turkish word structure 59
Geoffrey Haig

A description of the Turkish verb as a process
and sentences without explicit verbs 69
Mehmet Ali Yavuz

SYNTAX – NATURAL LANGUAGE PROCESSING

Extractability and the nominative case feature on tense 81
Gülşat Aygen

Gapping and word order in Turkish 95
Cem Bozşahin

A typology of Turkish double-verb constructions Éva Ágnes Csató	105
What Turkish NPIs teach us Meltem Kelepir	111
Unmasking the sentential subject constraint in Turkish Jaklin Kornfilt	121
A Syntactic annotation scheme for Turkish Kemal Oflazer, Bilge Say Dilek, Zeynep Hakkani-Tür	131
Adjunct clauses in Turkish Balkız Öztürk	143
A computational analysis of information structure in Turkish Filiz Yılmaz Bican	151
<i>Bir</i> 'One' Hitay Yüksek	165
SEMANTICS - DISCOURSE	
Postpositions in Turkish: Adverbial use and aspectual properties Yeşim Aksan & Mustafa Aksan	175
The functions of relative clauses in Turkish conversational discourse Ayşen Cem-Değer	185
Aspectual interpretation at sentence level: A preliminary account through Turkish data Mine Güven	195
Quantification and Information Structure Sarah D. Kennelly	203
A new look at conditional constructions in Turkish Celia Kerslake	215

<i>Time slips, life flows, death arrives...</i> The metaphorical construal of human life in Turkish Şeyda Özçalışkan	227
--	-----

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Acquisition of noun and verb categories in Turkish F. Nihan Ketrez & Ayhan Aksu-Koç	239
--	-----

Describing the use of Turkish morphology in two aphasic patients and observing their spontaneous recovery: A case study İlknur Maviş	247
--	-----

Codability effects on the expression of manner of motion in Turkish and English Şeyda Özçalışkan & Dan I. Slobin	259
--	-----

Metalinguistic development in preschool children Hatice Sofu	271
---	-----

BILINGUALISM

The conversational functions of code switching: English-Turkish Güler Acar-Türker	283
--	-----

Temporal anchoring of texts in Turkish of first and second generation Turkish immigrants in France Mehmet Ali Akıncı	289
--	-----

Language use and attitudes of Turkish immigrants in France and their subjective ethnolinguistic vitality perceptions Mehmet Ali Akıncı & Kutlay Yağmur	299
--	-----

DIALECTOLOGY

A note on vowel rounding in the Trabzon dialects Bernt Brendemoen	313
--	-----

Pronominal systems in the transitional varieties of the Turkic dialects in East Anatolia, Iraq and Western Iran Christiane Bulut	321
--	-----

TURKIC

- Proto Oghuz case morphology 339
Claire Bower & Gülşat Aygen
- Formation of the secret vocabulary of Eynu,
a Modern Uyghur-based secret language
spoken in southwestern Xinjiang 349
Tooru Hayasi
- The specific lexicological features of South Siberian Turkic
(On the lexico-semantic group of emotional verbs) 357
Timour Kozyrev
- Word order variations of existential sentences
in Gagauz and Turkish 365
Yuu Kuribayashi
- The static dative as a South Siberian areal feature 373
Irina Nevskaya & Astrid Menz
- Agreement allomorphy in Sakha (Turkic) 385
Nadya Vinokurova
- DP as a processing domain: Evidence from Sakha 393
Nadya Vinokurova & Edith Kaan

WORKSHOP

- The linguistic manifestations of discourse structure 403
Ümit Deniz Turan & Filiz Yılmaz Bican
- Effect of discourse markers on Turkish discourse segmentation 411
Meltem Turhan Yöndem
- Temporal organization and discourse structure 419
Deniz Zeyrek
- The interaction of discourse segmentation and reference 429
Ümit Deniz Turan

POSTERS

Language choice among Turkish-Dutch bilingual teenagers Nadia Eversteijn	441
Variation in Turkish mothers' style F. Nihan Ketrez	447
Dil-beyin probleminin dilbilim açısından ele alınması Sadiyeva Gülmira Arif kızı	453
Interactional power strategies of Turkish females and males in same and cross-gender conversational dyads Meryem Şen	459
Mothers' intentional communicative language to Turkish children with delayed and normal language development Seyhun Topbaş, İlknur Maviş & Sertan Özdemir	469
Verb compounding as an equivalent for verb prefixation in Turkish and Uzbek Johan Vandewalle	479
Türk dillerinde sayı sistemi Sevim Yılmaz-Önder	485
Subject index	495
Author index	501

Temporal anchoring of texts in Turkish of first and second generation Turkish immigrants in France

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I. Introduction

Developmental progression in narration from picture-description to thematic organization is accomplished through different ways. One way of organizing a narrative is to maintain an anchor tense (or favored tense) throughout the text. Lots of studies concerning the use of tense in narratives (Aksu-Koç 1994, Bamberg 1987, Hickmann & Roland (1992), Sebastian & Slobin (1994), Stephany 1994) show that the present is used as the anchor tense in many languages, with differences between young subjects and adults: children prefer the past as the anchor tense and adults the present. Our earlier research (Akıncı 1998, 1999), Akıncı & Kern (1998) concerning the study of Turkish and French spoken by bilingual Turkish-French children aged 5 to 10, born of immigrant parents in France, has shown a lack of clear and consistent "anchor tense". This means that these children have not yet established a unified narrative thread, where grammatical tense serves to establish text cohesion and coherence, providing a temporal anchoring which is consistently distinct from time of speech. However, these results only focused on bilingual children living in France and again on one task only. Therefore, it is interesting to show what the tendencies are for the second generation adolescents and the immigrant Turks in France on the one hand, and the differences between two tasks, on the other hand.

The aim of this paper is to outline the developmental profile of temporal anchoring of texts of first and second generation Turkish immigrants in France. There are two different tasks consisting of two different texts: narratives (*Frog, where are you?* Mayer 1969) and free language productions (talking about daily experiences). According to Stephany (1994:2) the *Frog story* "is especially well suited to studying the development of tense and aspect" and the pictures help the narrators to construct a complex narration. But what about free production?

Throughout the analysis, we will compare the temporal anchoring in the texts produced by Turkish immigrants in France with that of two control groups from Turkey. The purpose of the study is to answer the following questions:

1. What's the anchoring tense used by first and second generation Turkish immigrants in France in two types of text?

2. What are the differences between the immigrants and the monolingual Turkish speakers, and between the first and second generations immigrants? Does the second generation exhibit influence of their dominant language, i.e. French?

We adopt a functional-conceptual approach (Berman & Slobin (1994)). Our analysis focuses on form and function relations in a comparative perspective. Taking into account our earlier research on the development of temporality by bilingual children in France and various studies on the development of narrative ability in Turkish (Aksu-Koç 1994, Aarssen 1996) as well as specifics of both texts (narrative and expository), we can make the following hypotheses for anchoring tense:

- all texts will contain a consistently favored tense or anchor tense;
- for the frog stories, the anchor tense will be the present, while for free texts, it will be the di-past, because this tense serves for reporting on direct experiences in the past.

II. Method

2.1. Subjects

The subjects for this study were selected from the Turkish immigrant communities in Lyon and Grenoble (in the region Rhône-Alpes). In order to track intergenerational differences and the effect of education, the subjects were selected from different age groups. In order to control for the factor “gender”, we tried to include equal numbers of males and females. Table (1) presents the number of subjects, their mean ages and age ranges.

Table 1: Age, number, mean age, range of the subjects

Population	Turkish immigrants in France			Monolingual		
Generation	Second		First	Low Education	High Education	
Group	Secondary school		High school Group A3	Adult Group B	Adult Group C1	Adult Group C2
	Group A1	Group A2				
Number	11	11	12	20	15	14
Mean age	12;01	14;06	17;05	45;05	34;02	30;04
Range	11;05-13;02	13;05-15;08	16;02-18;08	34;00-55;00	19;01-46;07	17;01-51;08

The second generation subjects are sons and daughters of the first generation immigrants in France. Secondary school subjects were all born in France. Group A1 subjects are in 1st and 2nd grade and those in A2 are in 3rd and 4th grade of the French secondary school system.¹ Concerning high school subjects, only 3 of them were born in Turkey, but they came to France before the age of 2.

As for group B, all the subjects are adult speakers of Turkish and were chosen from among the first generation Turkish migrants. They were all born in Turkey. The majority of the men arrived in France before 1975 and most of women before 1984. All males are factory or unskilled laborers. All of the women are housewives, but when the recordings were made, many of the women were learning French in social contexts, and some of them were participating in Turkish courses directed by a Turkish teacher. As for schooling, none of the men studied beyond primary school, and of the women, one was illiterate; the others had completed primary school.

First generation Turks were matched with people from similar social and cultural background in Turkey. Therefore, the monolingual control groups were chosen from a little town in Çivril (Denizli district) on the basis of education. Group C1 includes low-educated monolingual working class adults (all females are housewives, all of them have completed primary school and of the males, four have dropped out of high school to work). Group C2 includes better educated subjects from middle-class or white collar suburbs (10 of them are teachers at *ilköğretim* (elementary school) and four females are university students).

2.1. Material and procedure

Narrative texts were elicited using the picture book without words, *Frog, where are you?* (Mayer 1969). In order to obtain the free language productions, we asked the subject to tell us an event they remember very well or they will never forget. If they said they don't remember any event, we oriented them. Therefore, we asked the groups of secondary school students to tell us about a fight they had at school or about a trip they had made with their parents or classmates. It was not necessary to ask any questions beyond the first to the high school students or the monolingual control groups, but we did ask the first generation migrant adults to tell about how they first came to France.

The recordings were made during the summer and autumn of 1999 for all the subjects. All subjects received identical instructions, following Berman & Slobin (1994:22), especially for the frog stories. A uniform format was applied across the sample in order to transcribe the texts.

III. Results

3.1. Text lengths

Before presenting the results concerning the temporal anchoring of texts, the length of the texts produced will be discussed. Table (2) gives the length with total number of clauses, mean number of clauses per subject for each group and the range for number of clauses.

Table 2: Clause lengths of the subjects for both texts
(FS: frog stories; FT: free texts; E-: low education; E+: high education)

Population	Turkish Immigrants in France						Monolingual Turks					
Generation	Second						First		E-		E+	
Group	A1 N=11		A2 N=11		A3 N=12		B N=20		C1 N=15		C2 N=14	
Text	FS	FT	FS	FT	FS	FT	FS	FT	FS	FT	FS	FT
Total clauses	517	243	502	532	640	594	1834	1225	1264	777	962	801
Mean clause/sub.	41	22	46	48	53	50	92	72	84	52	69	57
Range clauses	25-128	15-32	22-66	12-220	28-86	13-83	56-129	27-177	38-134	18-108	41-100	21-162

Differences in text length were observed between first generation migrants and all the other groups, except C1 for *frog stories*. First generation immigrant adults and the low-educated control group subjects produced statistically significant longer texts in both tasks.² Results for the two groups with long texts (B and C1) are due to the fact that in the frog stories, they gave more details about the environment of the protagonists, providing a description rather than telling a story. Concerning the free texts, only the first group (i.e. A1) produced statistically significant shorter texts than the adults (B, C1, C2).³ Although length of the free texts seems to be high for the first generation migrants, the differences are not significant when compared to the A2 and A3 second generation groups or to the two control groups. The high mean number of clauses per subject is due to the texts of a few subjects, who had so much to say about their first experience with France, that they wanted to tell it all. We suppose they tell these stories often.

For the second generation frog stories, we observed differences between texts of boys and girls, though the difference is only significant for group A2 ($F(1,9) = 10.05, p < .01$); where boys have longer narratives than girls. Taking both texts and all groups into account, the differences are not significant.

3.2. Temporal anchoring of texts

According to Aksu-Koç (1994:333), "one of the criteria for well-formedness of a narrative is the choice of a consistently favored tense". In the present context this was defined as the tense of at least 75% of the clauses in a given text. Earlier research on narratives has shown that the number of narratives in which there is not a consistently favored tense (referred to as exhibiting 'mixed tenses') decreases as children grow older. Concerning the monolinguals of high SES in Istanbul, Aksu-Koç (1994:334) has demonstrated that by the age of 9, all speakers manipulate tense/aspect in accordance with the demands of a thematically organized and cohesive narrative. In her study, the majority of the 9 year-olds and adults prefer the present as anchor tense, though some of them used di-past or miş-past (three 9 year-olds and four adults), which can also be used as the dominant or anchor tense. However none of them used mixed tenses.

In a recent research (Akıncı 1998, 1999) we showed that the Turkish-French bilingual children similarly begin their Turkish narratives with mixed tenses. All of the 5- year-old subjects make use of mixed tenses in their Turkish narratives. There are no instances at all of narratives with the past tense as the anchor tense for the age groups 5 to 8. The results are essentially the same for them: mixed tense is the anchoring tense in their narratives. However, children begin to use present tense more, and one subject in each of the age group 9 and 10 used the past tense as dominant tense.

Table 3 shows the anchoring tenses in Turkish frog stories and free texts in the present study:

Table 3: Proportion of anchoring tenses in Turkish of first and second generation Turks in France and monolingual Turks, per group and text

Population	Turkish Immigrants in France								Monolingual Turks			
Generation	Second						First		E-		E+	
Group	A1 N=11		A2 N=11		A3 N=12		B N=20		C1 N=15		C2 N=14	
Text	FS	FT	FS	FT	FS	FT	FS	FT	FS	FT	FS	FT
Present	63.5	9	54.5		66.5		45		73.5		64.5	
Di-Past	9	45.5		63.5	8.5	66.5		53		40	14.5	50
Miş-Past			9		8.5				6.5		6.5	
Mixed	27.5	45.5	36.5	36.5	16.5	33.5	55	47	20	60	14.5	50

Table 3 shows that second generation adolescents make use of the present tense in their frog story narratives. The results are essentially the same across the subgroups, though the mixed tense is important for the secondary school groups,

with respectively 27.5% and 36.5%. One subject in each A1 and A2 group and two in group A3 used the past tense as the dominant tense. The majority of the adolescents, however prefer to anchor their narratives in the present. This is not the case for the first generation adults, insofar as only 45% of them use the present as anchor tense, and 55% the mixed tense. According to table (3), the distribution of anchoring tense in the first generation migrant adults does not follow the same trajectory as observed by Aksu-Koç (1994). The results of the control groups are more closely related to those of high SES monolingual Turks of Istanbul analyzed by Aksu-Koç. However, the mixed system persists in both control groups. One subject in each group used the *miş*-past as anchor tense, and only one in group C2 used the *di*-past tense.

It could be argued that a preference for the *progressive present* is a function of the task, which involves looking at the pictures while telling the story. Erguvanlı-Taylan (1987), studied this question. Adults were asked to retell a segment of a Turkish movie immediately after viewing it. In this task, 70% of the subjects used *present -iyor* as the anchor tense, 10% used the *habitual present* and only 20% *di-past* tense. Note that in the task of the frog story the narrators see the pictures during the narrations, not before them, as in the film retelling.

As Berman & Slobin (1994) argued the choice of a consistently favored tense was taken as criterion for a well-formed narrative. In Turkish, the subjects can select to anchor their texts in either present or past tense. However, the picture-based nature of the frog story makes a present tense perspective fully appropriate, "since the events depicted in the book can be viewed as ongoing and narrators can choose to treat the pictures as depicting a currently unfolding sequence of events" (Berman 1994:174). The majority of our subjects, except the first generation migrant adults, provide a consistent temporal thread to the frog story texts by anchoring them in the present tense. We observed that for the adult migrants who anchored their narratives in mixed tenses, alternation between present and *miş*-past is frequent and serves a sequencing function, as the first example shows:

- (1) Bm-48;11d⁴ 3b 022 köpek kavanozun içinde kafasını **sokmuş**
/dog/jar-GEN/in/head-POSS-ACC/put-M.past-3sg/
'the dog put his head in the jar'
- 023 herhangi bir şey **arıyor**
/something/one/thing/search-PROG-3sg/
'it is searching for something'
- 024 çocuk ise yanında [sol elini kaldır=] sağ elini **kaldırmış**
/child/be-HYP-3sg/left/hand/lift= right/hand-POSS-ACC/
lift-M.past-3sg/
'as for the boy [he lifted his left hand] he lifted up his
right hand'
- 025 **bağırıyor**
/cry-PROG-3sg/
'he cries'

This subject systematically uses the *miş-past* to express inferred information and the present to mark the ongoing events. Clauses 22 and 23 can be read as coordination where the *-miş* of the first clause functions as the perfect describing a result state and is under the scope of the present tense of the main clause 23. This applies also for clauses 24 and 25. The percentages of mixed tenses in the stories of the two control groups (i.e. 20% for C1 and 14.5% for C2) compared to high SES monolingual Turks (Aksu-Koç 1994) demonstrate the differences between literacy-related activities. The fact that more adolescents have an anchor tense compared to their parents can be explained by a pragmatic transfer from their dominant language (French) to Turkish. What the adolescents appear to be transferring from French is something not related to the language per se, but a task attitude acquired in school, a literacy related ability to construct a narrative around a picture book. Therefore, their results are close to those of the monolingual control groups.

Because of the specifics of the task, we predicted for free texts that the anchor tense will be *di-past*. As Table (3) shows, this turned out to be the case for only two groups: A2 and A3. For all of the groups, *di-past* and mixed tense proportions are approximately the same, except for low-educated reference group, for whom the mixed tense dominates. Only one 13 year-old subject chose the present tense to tell about his daily experiences. His text was very short (only 16 clauses) and contained many nominal predications and existential forms, which explain his score.

The majority of the subjects who preferred the mixed tense format for talking about their most memorable event shift between the two past tenses, and in a few cases also use the present. This allowed them to move between narrative and other time for digressions, asides, retrospection or inferential event, as example (2) illustrates:

(2) Bm-43;11-a	128	işte [üç] saat üçte gelecek diyola /here/three/hour/three-LOC/come-FUT-3sg/say-PROG-3pl/ 'here three at three a clock they say it will come'
	129	bilmem ne diyola /know-HAB-1sg/what/ say-PROG-3pl/ 'I don't know what they say'
	130	biz o arada bekliyoruz /we/that/moment/wait-PROG-1pl/ 'we at that moment are waiting for'
	131	saat üç oldu /hour/tree/be-D.past-3sg/ 'it became to be 3 a clock'
	132	tren geldi /train/come-D.past-3sg/ 'the train came'
	133	Grenoble'ye bindik /Grenoble-DIR/get-D.past-1pl/ 'we got on (the train) to Grenoble'

IV. Conclusions

The differences this study has shown to exist between the two texts and the various groups of subjects suggest that when we examine one particular domain with only one task in one particular set of subject group, the conclusions are necessarily limited in scope and can not be valid for another task, group or age group. In our earlier research on the development of tense and aspect of bilingual children in France, in which we used only frog stories, we have come to the conclusion that the "absence of the use of past tenses in Turkish stems from a lack of exposure to those tenses in narrative texts" (Akıncı 1999). But this study demonstrates that after the age of 14, the bilingual second generation subjects use tense just as monolingual-high educated adults do.

The lack of a clear and consistent anchor tense shows that the Turkish immigrants do not have a unified narrative thread. We can argue that social class attitude toward literacy-based activities play a very important role for the migrant adults. But how can we explain the existence of mixed tense narratives for the high-educated control group? Concerning the free texts, reliance on *di-past* tense can be a criterion to evaluate the texts as wellformed, inasmuch as *di-past* serves for reporting on direct experiences in the past. Indeed, the results confirm this hypothesis. However, the percentage of mixed tenses is very high, compared to frog stories.

Another significant point is the fact that, until the end of secondary school, second generation adolescents' Turkish is close to the language of their parents, which in turn, is similar to that of low-educated monolingual Turkish adults. Therefore, education is a very important factor in the development of the use of tense in the language of the second generation Turkish adolescents. Especially scores of the high-educated second generation adolescents are similar to those of high-educated monolingual Turks. Obviously, before any conclusion concerning the migrant's narrative thread, the findings of this paper must be completed by the study of the function of the tenses, the distribution of tenses in different parts of the narrative.

Notes

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¹ In French school system students begin their secondary studies in 6th grade at 'Collège d'Enseignement Secondaire' till 3rd grade, then they continue at 'Lycée' in 2nd to finish their studies at Terminal, last year before university.

² The statistical tests used here are ANOVA: frog stories ($F(5,77) = 11.44, p < .0001$; free texts ($F(5,74) = 2.79, p < .02$).

³ Groups A1/B ($F(1,26) = 20.50, p < .0001$; Groups A1/C1 ($F(1,24) = 8.76, p < .006$; Groups A1/C2 ($F(1,23) = 10.43, p < .003$;

⁴ Each subject was assigned a code. The first letter (with or without a number) indicates the group: A1, A2, A3, B, C1 and C2 (see table 1). Following the group code, the miniscule letter (m/f) indicate the sex of the subject. Then the numbers are giving the subject's age in year;month. The final letter code the subjects individually.

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