
Character maintenance in heritage Turkish. An inter-generational analysis of subject pro-drop in Turkish heritage language narratives

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This talk investigates the choice of referring expressions (REs) used to maintain subject characters in narratives of different generations of Turkish heritage speakers (HSs) in Germany. While Turkish is a pro-drop language, where subject characters are usually maintained with a null pronoun in pragmatically unmarked contexts, German is a non-pro-drop language that uses overt pronouns to maintain subject characters.

Previous studies on subject pro-drop in HLs that are spoken by speakers with a non-pro-drop majority language (ML) have reported mixed findings. While some studies have shown that HSs show higher frequencies of overt subject pronouns than monolingual control groups (Koban Koç 2016), others found no significant differences between HSs and monolinguals and/or first-generation speakers (Azar et al. 2020).

The narratives for the corpus analysis presented in this talk were elicited by the wordless picture book ‘Frog, Where are you?’ (Mayer 1969). The preliminary results reveal that the third-generation HSs used significantly more overt pronouns compared to second- and first-generation speakers. This finding indicates that the younger generation of HSs is more vulnerable to language change (due to ML transfer) than the older generations. Moreover, the third-generation speakers used a high number of lexical NPs to maintain subject characters and less word order variation than the older generations. Consider for instance the example in (1).

- (1) a. *Oğlan korku-yor gibi*
Boy fear-PROG.3 like
‘The boy seems to be afraid.’
b. *Oğlan bir taş-ın üst-ün-de*
Boy a stone-GEN top-3.sg.-LOC
‘The boy is on a stone.’

In sum, the data indicates a trend towards more routine and less creative patterns among the narratives of the younger generation.

References: • Azar, Z., Özyürek, A., & Backus, A. (2020). Turkish-Dutch bilinguals maintain language-specific reference tracking strategies in elicited narratives. *International Journal of Bilingualism* 24(2), 376–409. • Koban Koç, D. (2016). Social variables and Turkish subject pronoun use in New York City: The effect of language contact. *Poznań Studies in Contemporary Linguistics*, 52(3), 431–453. • Mayer, M. (1969). *Frog, Where are you?* New York: Dial Press.