THE USE OF TURKISH CASE MARKERS BY ADULT LEARNERS OF TURKISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE¹

Muzaffer Pınar BABANOĞLU²

Reyhan AĞÇAM³

Abstract

This study investigates the use of Turkish case markers by learners of Turkish as a second language. Four cases in Turkish language (e.g. *accusative, dative, locative* and *ablative*) were examined as the linguistic items of the study. The research data were gathered from L2 learners of Turkish who were studying at a state university in southern part of Turkey as foreign students through the grammaticality judgment task (GJT) and the scrambled sentence task (SST) developed by the researchers, and quantitatively analyzed. Research findings have indicated that the students have a slight difficulty in unscrambling sentences that required the use of multiple case markers, and that the ablative and locative case markers proved the most and least challenging markers for them to use, respectively. The study is hoped to contribute to the existing literature via its findings and practical implications on teaching Turkish as a second language.

Keywords: Case markers, Turkish case markers, Turkish as a second language

TÜRKÇE İSMİN HALLERİNİN TÜRKÇE'Yİ İKİNCİ DİL OLARAK ÖĞRENEN YETİŞKİNLER TARAFINDAN KULLANIMI

Özet

Bu çalışma Türkçe ismin hallerinin Türkçe'yi ikinci dil olarak öğrenen yetişkinler tarafından kullanımını incelemektedir. Türkçe dilindeki ismin belirtme (–i hali), yönelme (–e hali), kalma (–de hali) ve çıkma (–den hali) hal ekleri çalışmada dilbilgisi ögesi olarak incelenmiştir. Veri toplama sırasında Türkiye'nin güney bölgesinde bir devlet üniversitesinde yabancı öğrenci olarak eğitim gören Türkçe öğrenenlerden, araştırmacılar tarafından geliştirilen dilbilgisel yargılama ve karışık cümle düzenleme testleri yoluyla elde edilen veri nicel analiz ile değerlendirilmiştir. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre öğrenenler, birden fazla hal ögesi içeren karışık cümle düzenlemede az düzeyde zorlandılar. Daha belirgin olarak çıkma hali (–den) en fazla problemli hal iken kalma (–de) hali en az zorlayıcı olan hal formudur. Çalışma sonunda, araştırma sonuçlarına göre Türkçe'nin ikinci dil olarak öğrenimi üzerine pratik uygulama önerileri verilmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: İsmi halleri, Türkçe ismin halleri, İkinci dil olarak Türkçe

¹ The preliminary results of this study were orally presented at 5th International Language in Focus Conference, Thessaloniki, Greece May 3 – 5, 2018.

² Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Mersin Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Eğitimi, e-posta:pinarbab@hotmail.com

³ Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Eğitimi, e-posta: reyhanagcam@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The development of inflectional morphology in L2 has always had a particular interest ever since morpheme studies had begun to show impact on L2 research (Hopp, 2012). The acquisition of morphology has been a challenging phenomenon for adult L2 learners (Brown, 1973, Clashen, et.al., 1994, Haznedar, 2006); hence, inflectional morphology (verbal and nominal) is problematic for L2 learners (Haznedar, 2006).

Linguistic case is a grammatical category determined by the syntactic or semantic function of a noun or pronoun. It is defined as “a system of marking dependent nouns for the type of relationship they bear to their heads” (Blake, 2001, p. 1) and as “a formal device associated with a noun phrase that signals the grammatical role of that noun phrase” (Moravcsik, 2009, p. 231). Case markers basically add meaning to the word without changing its root which marks roles of nouns, pronouns and noun phrase constituents. Case marking is an area where morphology and syntax work together to produce a comprehensible input. Errors in marking a particular case committed by L2 learners simply indicate that the case in concern has not being fully acquired (Sabia, 2003).

The Turkish case markers are used to indicate possession, location, direction and time in which noun endings are changed due to the each case.

Table 1. Case markers in Turkish (Ketrez, 2012, p. 27)

		Bare noun	Noun _{Possessive}	Pronoun
Nominative	-Ø	kedi	kedisi	ben
Accusative	-(y/n)ı/ı/ü/ü	kedi-yi	kedisi-ni	ben-i
Dative	-(y/n)e/a	kedi-ye	kedisi-ne	ben-a
Locative	-(n)de/(n)da/te/ta	kedi-de	kedisi-nde	ben-de
Ablative	-(n)den/(n)dan/ten/tan	kedi-den	kedisi-nden	ben-den
Instrumental	-(y)la/e	kedi-yle	kedisi-yle	ben(im)-le
Genitive	-(n)in/ın/ün/un/im	kedi-nin	kedisi-nin	ben-im

In L1 Turkish, case markers are acquired successfully from early stages spreading over time through generations. In addition, the dative and ablative cases emerge earlier than the accusative case which appears later but used more productively (Sofu, 1989). Mert (2003) states that, in teaching Turkish case markers, suffixation is brought to forefront instead of emphasizing the language elements which are attendant for each case category and this condition causes difficulty in learning case system because Turkish is a language which has substantiality to express a linguistic category not just with a suffix but with particularly assigned linguistic elements (p.28). For example:

1. (a) Ali okul+dan geldi.
- (b) Çocuklar sıkıntı+dan patladı
- (c) Şu taraf+tan gitti.
- (d) Onlar+dan biri buraya geldi.

The attendant element (-t/dan) is used in 1(a) as ablative, in 1(b) as cause, in 1(c) as instrument and in 1(d) as accusative meaning. Studies show that errors of most of L2 learners of Turkish form different proficiency levels are related to negative transfer from their native language and this fact highlights the importance of teaching assigned linguistic elements (Mert, 2003).

Concerning the acquisition of case markers in general Sabia (2003) points out that cases are acquired in the order of nominative-accusative-genitive-dative and that dative was found to be the most difficult case. Some of previous attempts to investigate case markers in L2 point out that some sense of difficulty has been encountered especially by learners of Turkish as a second language. Gürel (2000) investigated the acquisition of case system in Turkish by English-speaking learners and reported an average of low performance shown by the candidates, and relatively higher performance by the intermediate and advanced learners in comparison to the beginners. Likewise, Sabia (2003) studied errors in case markers by Russian L2 learners and concluded that misrepresentation of words and phrases in learner's mental lexicon caused case-marking errors. She also reported a limited amount of L1 transfer of certain production rules. In a similar study, Haznedar (2006) reported low performance of a learner of Turkish in case marking and informed that the learner faces difficulties only with the surface realization of the case. Papadapoulou et al. (2010) scrutinized Turkish word order and case morphology by Greek learners and reported results in parallel with Gürel (2000) and Haznedar (2006). In a more recent research, Altunkol and Balci (2013) examined the acquisition of Turkish grammatical morphemes by foreign students and found that they were more successful in the use of ablative and locative cases.

As noted before, case markers basically add meaning to the word without changing its root which marks roles of nouns, pronouns and noun phrase constituents. Errors with particular cases made by L2 learners are an indicator of that the cases in question have not been fully acquired (Sabia, 2003). This particular research was set out to examine the use of case markers by Arabic-speaking learners of Turkish to see whether the acquisition of the case in Turkish is troublesome for Turkish L2 learners. Arabic and Turkish differ in some linguistic aspects, primarily within the case system (Table 2).

Table 2. Linguistic features of Turkish and Arabic (Jäger, 2010).

Linguistic features	Turkish	Arabic
Word order	SVO	VSO
Inflection	Agglutinative	Fusional
Morpheme	Clearly identifiable morphemes	Morpheme boundaries are difficult to identify
Case	Nominative Accusative Dative Ablative Genitive Instrumental	Nominative Accusative Genitive

As an agglutinative language, Turkish has a different language structure and a richer case system than the fusional Arabic language. Melanlıoğlu (2012) identified the Turkish case-endings as one of the most difficult linguistic forms to teach Turkish L2 learners.

This study was motivated to examine the use of four Turkish case-markers (*dative*, *accusative*, *ablative* and *locative*) by Syrian undergraduate students studying at a Turkish state university in Turkey in order to see whether they correctly judge the sentences containing case markers, and whether there are traces of L1 transfer in their L2 production. Related research questions are as follows:

- 1- Do Syrian adult learners of Turkish as a second language use Turkish case-markers correctly?
- 2- Is there L1 interference in the use of Turkish case-markers by Syrian adult learners of Turkish as a second language?

Methodology

Participants

Participants of the research were 34 Syrian students attending different undergraduate programs (Faculty of Arts and Sciences) at a state university in Turkey who had been living in Turkey as immigrants and learn/use Turkish as a second language at the time of data collection. It is noteworthy that the participants formerly received an intensive Turkish course at the Centre for Turkish Teaching (TOMER) for a year/ 24 hours a week in which core skills are emphasized as a preparatory Turkish program since medium of instruction is Turkish at the attended university.

Data Collection and Analysis

A grammaticality judgment task (GJT) and a scrambled sentence task (SST) were used to test the participant students' linguistic knowledge about Turkish case markers. Schütze and Sprouse (2014) emphasize that "judgment data play a crucial role in linguistic investigation because they provide information not readily available from other kinds of data; most importantly, they distinguish possible from impossible utterances among those that have never been naturally produced" (p. 4). Although their reliability were questioned by some researchers (Gass, 1994, Mandell, 1999; Tabatabaei & Dehghani, 2012) whether they actually reflect learners grammatical knowledge, GJTs have still credit in Second Language Research providing valid data for L2 research (Bley-Vroman, et.al., 1988, in Tabatabaei & Dehghani, 2012) and are frequently used to elicit explicit and implicit knowledge of learners (Gutiérrez, 2013).

Participants were asked to choose among given options (including noun/ noun phrases with case markers) (e.g. accusative, dative, ablative and locative) which consisted of ten GJT set of which has been elaborated below:

1. Doğru olan cümleyi seçiniz. (Choose the correct sentence.)

- a) Ayşe masa○ tabak koydu. (nominative_incorrect)
Ayşe table- plate put-Past/3 Sg
- b) Ayşe masada tabak koydu. (locative_incorrect)

- Ayşe table-locative plate put-Past/3 Sg
- c) Ayşe masaya tabak koydu. (dative_correct)
- Ayşe table-dative plate put-Past/3 Sg
- d) Ayşe masadan tabak koydu. (ablative_incorrect)
- Ayşe table-ablative plate put-Past/3 Sg
- e) Ayşe masayı tabak koydu. (accusative_incorrect)
- Ayşe table-accusative plate put-Past/3 Sg

SST was used as another experimental procedure to uncover the participants' target language knowledge and cognition. In the present study, the task in concern consisted of five scrambled sentences that included noun/ noun phrases with case markers, as exemplified below:

1. Cümleyi düzenleyiniz. (Put the words into the correct order.)

- *Scrambled sentence:*

Yarın / saatlerde / Ankara'da / ol-acağ-ım/ bu.

Tomorrow time-LOC.Ankara-LOC. be-Future/ 1 sG this/that

- *Expected response:*

Yarın bu saatlerde Ankara'da ol-acağ-ım.

Tomorrow this/ that time-LOC. Ankara-LOC. be-Future/ 1 SG

At that time tomorrow, I will be in Ankara.

In SST, the participants were asked to put the words into the correct order and to place the case forms in correct positions within the sentence. It is significant to note that Turkish word order is Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) whereas Arabic (participants' L1) is Verb-Subject-Object VSO; hence, the SST task was intended to evaluate the participants' ability to set the L2 word order. Their responses to the items in GJT and SST were identified and reported in percentages for binary data (correct/incorrect) in the results and discussion section.

Results & Discussion

Initial analysis was administered to the students' responses to GJT items and their frequency distribution was presented in a system of grammatical correction where there are two sections as correct and incorrect. Responses were also divided to case categorization to see the distribution of correct and incorrect responses to the items that included four cases, as shown in Table 3:

Table 3. GJT frequency and percentages.

Items	Correctly arranged		Incorrectly arranged	
	f	%	f	%
Dative	23	68	11	32

Locative	28	82	6	18
Ablative	19	56	15	44
Accusative	21	62	13	38

(Total participant n: 34)

As illustrated in Table 2, the overall frequency of each case showed a correctness of more than %50 where locative case was the mostly chosen one as correct (%79) while the item that required the use of the ablative case proved the most troublesome for the students (%56).

The accusative and dative cases were correctly judged by the participants at high rates between intervals of 60%-70% (Accusative: 62%; Dative: 67%) as also depicted in Figure 1 which shows the general picture of overall percentages of correct and incorrect usages in GJT.

The ablative case requires the use of the suffix –den/dan (from, off, about, by), which is more transparent than other cases indicating a variety of meanings (i) ii) and given in GJT for learners to judge (iii).

- i. evden : from house (place)
- ii. -den/dan bahsetmek: talking about ...
- iii. Sample from GJT (item 9):

“What is this kid talking about?”

- a) Bu çocuk neø bahsediyor? (nom._incorrect)
- b) Bu çocuk ne(y)den bahsed-iyor? (*correct*)

This kid what-about (ABL.) talk-Prog./3 SG

- c) Bu çocuk neyi bahsediyor? (acc. incorrect)
- d) Bu çocuk neyde bahsediyor?(loc. incorrect)
- e) Bu çocuk neye bahsediyor? (dat. incorrect)

In SST, the participants were expected to put the scrambled sentence into correct order to see if they would regulate a sentence containing case-ended forms in proper positions and if they could successfully come up with the sentences in the appropriate Turkish word order (SVO; subject-verb-object) whereas their L1 is a VSO (verb-subject-object) language. Table 4 illustrates the scores of correctly and incorrectly arranged scrambled sentences:

Table 4. SST correctly and incorrectly arranged sentence frequency and percentages.

Items	Correct		Incorrect	
	f	%	f	%
1	34	100	0	0
2	33	97	1	3
3	33	97	1	3
4	23	67	11	32
5	22	64	12	35

(Total participant n: 34)

Sentences as 1 that contain one case marker such as example (a) were correctly arranged by the participants.

(a) ‘bu/ **onu** / arayacağım / akşam.’ Scrambled sentence (**onu**: direct object pronoun in accusative case)

‘Bu akşam **onu** arayacağım’ Correct form of arranged sentence

‘I am going to call *him/her* tonight.

More complex sentences that included multiple case markers as in 4 and 5 (example b) were done correctly by around %60 of learners; yet, about %30 of them were faced with difficulty in positioning the case forms within the sentence

(b) ‘Yarın / **saatlerde** /Ankara’dan/ olacağım/ gelmiş/bu. Scrambled sentence (saatlerde: locative case indicating time/ Ankara’dan: ablative case indicating place)

‘Yarın bu **saatlerde Ankara’dan** gelmiş olacağım.’

‘I am going to have come at this time tomorrow’

Although participants have put forth a small number of mistakes in average, they mostly followed SVO Turkish word order while unscrambling the sentences.

Conclusion

The present research yielded results that confirm those previously reported in the related literature. For instance, it was revealed that Arabic L1 learners of Turkish have difficulty in using case markers, which largely overlaps with past research (Gürel, 2000; Haznedar, 2006; Papadapoulou et al., 2010). In a similar scope, this study examined the use Turkish case-markers (dative, accusative, ablative and locative) by Syrian students attending a Turkish state university in order to see whether they judge sentences containing case markers correctly, and whether there are traces of L1 transfer in terms of Turkish case system or word order. The findings indicated that ablative case was the most challenging case to use for the participants, followed by locative case. This particular result contradicts with those informed in Altunkol and Balci (2013). Another striking finding of the study was that the participants tended to mark Ablative case instead of accusative case. It might be partially attributed to L1 transfer due to the linguistic differences between their first and second languages. More specifically, Arabic lacks a particular ablative case that Turkish has; therefore, the students might have preferred to use the ablative case where they were supposed to use the accusative case. This finding approves Sabia (2013) who previously reported transfer in L2 Russian for case marking. Nonetheless, it could be reported that the participant students encountered no problem with the use of Turkish word order (SOV). Erdocia and Laka (2018, p. 8) state that when L1 and L2 differ, that may result in negative transfer from L1 and “non-native speakers never process the grammatical structures of L2 in a native-like manner, mostly if they already can do it transferring the cues of their L1 grammar.”

When the present research questions are revisited, the explanations are given as following:

RQ1. Do Syrian adult learners of Turkish as a second language use Turkish case-markers correctly?

Ablative and accusative cases seem to be challenging for learners whereas they can judge most of locative and dative cases correctly.

RQ2. Is there L1 interference in the use of Turkish case-markers by Syrian adult learners of Turkish?

The current research has indicated an L1 effect in the use of case marking for the Arabic-speaking L2 learners of Turkish due to the fact that the ablative case does not exist in their L1. They, on the other hand, did not commit a systematic error in constructing sentences in Turkish (SOV language) even though their L1 follows a quite different word order (VSO). Erdocia et al. (2014) underline that typological differences (e.g. VO/OV) can be a relevant influence behind L1/L2 differential features that are distinctly processed by L2 speakers due to processing strategies from native language to non-native or difficulty to acquire some divergent grammatical structures.

The study provides some practical implications based on the afore-mentioned findings. Initially, the case morphology in Turkish may be introduced to adult second language learners of Turkish via a variety of classroom activities. Additionally, linguistic differences between Turkish and Arabic may be highlighted through consciousness raising activities. As noted in Melanlıoğlu (2012), the order of case markers in Turkish should be clarified while teaching

besides considering the points which are underlined by Mert (2003) and Alyılmaz (2010) the case system should be thought emphasizing the all linguistic elements forming each case category.

Future Improvements

The research was limited to the data obtained from a limited number of participants with Arabic L1. It was also limited to the instrumentation (e.g. content of tasks) and the analysis results were offered only in percentages. Hence, future attempts may require the participation of adult learners of Turkish with different L1 backgrounds, using a variety of tasks (e.g. sentence construction, picture recognition and speaking tasks) and consideration a developmental sequence (e.g. beginner, elementary and advanced learners) for more fruitful and generalizable results.

REFERENCES

- Altunkol, E. and Balci, B. (2013). The usage of turkish grammatical morphemes by learners of Turkish as a second language. Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: LNG2013-0711.
- Alyılmaz, S. (2010). Türkiye Türkçesinde Bulunma Hâli Kategorisi, Dil Araştırmaları, S. 7, Ankara, s. 107-123.
- Blake, B. J. (1994). Case. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Blake, B. J. (2001). Case (2nd ed.). Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Erdocia, K., Zawiszeński, A., and Laka, I. (2014). Word order processing in a second language: from VO to OV. J. Psycholinguist. Res. 42, 475–494. doi: 10.1007/s10936-013-9280-4.
- Erdocia, K. and Laka, I. (2018) Negative transfer effects on L2 word order processing. Frontiers in Psychology, 9(337). doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00337.
- Hopp, H. (2012). The development of L2 morphology. Second Language Research, 29(1), 3-6.
- Haznedar, B. (2006) Persistent problems with case morphology in L2 acquisition. In: Conxita L (ed.) Interfaces in multilingualism: Acquisition and representation. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 179–206.
- Gass, S. (1994). The reliability of second-language grammaticality judgments. In E. Tarone, S. Gass, & A. Cohen (Eds.), Research methodology in second language acquisition (pp. 303-322). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Gutiérrez, X. (2013). The construct validity of grammaticality judgment tests as measures of implicit and explicit knowledge. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 35(3), 423-449. doi:10.1017/S0272263113000041.
- Gürel, A. (2000) Missing case inflection: Implications for second language acquisition. In: Howell C, Fish SA, and Keith-Lucas T (eds) Proceedings of the 24th Boston University Conference on Language Development (BUCLD) 24. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press, 379–90.

- Güven, E. (2007). ‘Yabancıların Türkçe öğrenirken ad durum eklerinde yaptıkları hataların çözümlenmesi ve bu hataların giderilmesine yönelik öneriler.’ MA thesis, Dokuz Eylül University, İzmir.
- Jäger, G. (2010). Languages of the world: Morphological language classification. Retrieved from: <http://www.sfs.uni-tuebingen.de/~gjaeger/lehre/ws0910/languagesOfTheWorld/morphologicalTypology.pdf>.
- Ketrez, F.N (2012). A student grammar of Turkish. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Mandell, P.B. (1999). On the reliability of grammaticality judgement tests in second language acquisition research. *Second Language Research*, 15(1), 73-99. Retrieved from: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.880.6794&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.
- Melanlıoğlu, D. (2012). Yabancılar Türkçe öğrenenlerin hâl eklerinin öğretimine ilişkin görüşleri: nitel bir araştırma. *Turkish Studies*, 7(4), 2401-2411.
- Mert, O. (2003). Türkçe’de Hâl Kategorisi ve Öğretimi, Atatürk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi, S. 21, Erzurum, s. 25-32.
- Morasczik, E.A.(2009). The distribution of case. In Malchukov A and Spencer A. (eds). *The Oxford handbook of case* pp: 231-245. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Papadopoulou, D., Spyridoula V., Vassilios S., Kaili, H., Prokou, S., and Revithiadou, A. (2011). Case morphology and word order in second language Turkish: Evidence from Greek learners. *Second Language Research* 27: 173– 205.
- Sabia, I. (2003). Case-marking errors in L2 Russian and production rules. Master of Arts, 2003, University of Georgia in Partial, Athens, Georgia.
- Schütze, C., & Sprouse, J. (2014). Judgment data. In R. Podesva & D. Sharma (Eds.), *Research Methods in Linguistics* (pp. 27-50). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139013734.004.
- Sofu, H. (1989). Acquisition of case markers in Turkish: A cross-sectional study. Unpublished MA thesis, Çukurova University, Adana.
- Sofu, H. (1995). Acquisition of lexicon in Turkish. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Çukurova University, Adana.
- Tabatabaei, O. & Dehghani, M. (2012). Assessing the reliability of grammaticality judgment tests. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 31, 173-182.