

CONTRIBUTION OF GRAMMATICAL FUNCTION AND SEMANTIC ROLE TO DISCOURSE PROMINENCE: EVIDENCE FROM LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION AND LANGUAGE PRODUCTION IN TURKISH

It is widely accepted that highly prominent discourse referents are picked up by reduced anaphoric forms, whereas less accessible referents are picked up by more explicit forms (Ariel, 1990; Gundel et al., 1993; Grosz et al., 1995). Turkish is a language that allows both null subject pronouns and pronominal subject pronouns. It has been argued that *pro* typically refers to the subject referent and personal pronoun *o* typically acts as a topic-shifter (Öztürk, 2001; Enç, 1986; Erguvanli-Taylan, 1986; Turan, 1996; Turan, 1998). However, previous studies of subject pronouns in Turkish have mainly focused on contexts in which the subject referent is at the same time the agent referent so that it is unclear whether grammatical function (subject vs. object), semantic role (agent vs. patient), or both determine referent accessibility in Turkish. I report a language comprehension study (Experiment 1) and a language production study (Experiment 2) conducted to investigate the effects of grammatical function and semantic role on discourse prominence in Turkish.

Experiment 1 manipulated verb type (subject-experiencer verb vs. object-experiencer verb) and pronoun type (*pro* vs. *personal pronoun o*). The 32 experimental items consisted of a context sentence containing a psych verb (see 1a/2a) and a target sentence containing an ambiguous subject pronoun (see 1b/2b). The 20 filler items contained verbs of transfer and the pronoun was resolved to the goal referent through world knowledge. 60 native speakers of Turkish were asked to read both sentences and to determine the subject of the target sentence. Results only revealed a reliable effect of verb type, $\beta = -2.20$, $SE = 0.54$, $z = -4.1$, $p = 0.001$. In constructions with subject-experiencer verbs, pronouns were interpreted as referring to the subject referent much more often than referring to the object referent. In constructions with object-experiencer verbs, both referents were roughly equally often selected as antecedent.

In Experiment 2, items were presented such as in (1a) and (2a). 90 native speakers of Turkish were asked to read the sentences and to continue them with a naturally sounding sentence. Preliminary results show an object bias and an experiencer bias. Object referents were more likely to be mentioned again in the subsequent discourse than the subject referent. However, participants used *pro* more often when referring back to the subject referent than when referring back to the object referent.

To summarize, the findings indicate that both grammatical function and semantic role reliably contribute to the prominence of discourse referents in Turkish. Overall, the findings challenge the view that prominence is reflected by reduced anaphoric forms alone.

- (1) a. **[Gökhan]**_{Exp} dünkü kahvaltı daveti sonra-sın-da **[Naz-ı]**_{Stim}
Gökhan yesterday's breakfast invitation after-CMP-LOK Naz-ACC
- büyüleyici gülüş-ün-den dolayı gün boyunca **düşle-di.**
 charming smile-POSS.3SG-ABL because of all the day dream-PST.3SG
- b. *pro/o* sekiz-de mail at-tı.
 pro/o eight-LOK email throw-PST.3SG

'Gökhan dreamed after the breakfast invitation yesterday all the time of Naz because of her charming smile. She/He wrote at 8 pm an e-mail.'

- (2) a. [Mete]_{Stim} uyumsuz davranış-lar-ı-yla [Seher-i]_{Exp}
 Mete rude behaviour-PL-POSS.3SG-with Seher-ACC
- geçen haftaki grup çalışma-sın-da çok kızdır-dı.
 last week's group work-CMP-LOK very anger-PST.3SG
- b. pro/o birden grup-tan ayrıl-dı.
 pro/o suddenly group-ABL separate-PST.3SG
- 'Mete angered during the group work last week Seher through his rude behaviour. She/He left suddenly the group.'

References

- Ariel, Mira. 1990. *Accessing noun phrase antecedents*. London: Routledge.
- Enç, Mürvet. 1986. Topic switching and pronominal subjects in Turkish. In Dan. I. Slobin & Karl Zimmer (eds.), *Studies in Turkish linguistics*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 195-208.
- Erguvanlı-Taylan, Eser. 1986. Pronominal versus zero representation of anaphora in Turkish. In Dan. I. Slobin & Karl Zimmer (eds.), *Studies in Turkish linguistics*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 209-231.
- Grosz, Barbara J., Scott Weinstein & Aravind K. Joshi. 1995. Centering: A framework for modelling the local coherence of discourse. *Computational Linguistics* 21(2). 203-225.
- Gundel, Jeanette K., Nancy Hedberg & Ron Zacharski. 1993. Cognitive status and the form of referring expressions in discourse. *Language* 69(2). 274-307.
- Öztürk, Balkız. 2001. Turkish as a non-pro-drop language. In Eser Erguvanlı-Taylan (ed.), *The verb in Turkish*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 239-259.
- Turan, Ümit Deniz. 1996. *Null vs. overt subjects in Turkish discourse: A centering analysis*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania dissertation.
- Turan, Ümit Deniz. 1998. Ranking forward looking centers in Turkish: Universal and language specific properties. In Marilyn A. Walker, Aravind K. Joshi & Ellen F. Prince (eds.), *Centering theory in discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 139-160.