EXPRESSING THE FUTURITY IN TURKISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Assist. Prof. Dr. Türkay Bulut
Halic University
Faculty of Science and Letters
English Translation Department
Istanbul-Turkey

Abstract

The central aim of this study is to elucidate how adult native speakers of English studying Turkish as a second language perceive and produce the primary future markers in their interlanguage. Specifically, we have investigated how future time references in English are transferred, and how the differences marked by will, be going to, aorist and the present progressive are perceived in Turkish. The question stems from the point that Turkish is marked in the sense that verbs are inflected for the future tense (-(y)AcAk suffix); whereas, in English, morphologically speaking, we cannot talk about a future tense since there is no inflectional ending. The findings revealed that the participants demonstrated more sensitivity to pragmatic constraints rather than morphosyntactic features.

Keywords- English, Interlanguage, Simple Future Tense, Turkish

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 1980s, the effects of the mother tongue (L1) on the second language (L2) acquisition have been investigated in various linguistic levels such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and the like. It is generally believed that adult L2 learners find morpholexical correspondences in L2 to those in their L1, basing on the semantic meaning or grammatical function. They first discover and then form a mental representation for a specific construction when exposed to L2 input. They engage in the way features of the L2 are brought together as lexical items while constructing the L2 grammar (Slabakova, 2009; Montrul & Yoon, 2009).   In White's words, "L2 learners will sometimes have to associate existing L1 features with different lexical items, or a new class of lexical items, in the L2" (2009, p. 174). In line with Lardiere (2009)**,** we strongly believe that acquiring a second language is a process of finding out the way the lexical items of L2 are brought together. During this process, L2 acquirers remap their L1 features into those of L2.   To investigate this assumption, we focus on how adult native English speakers acquire the interpretation of the future tense in L2 Turkish. We believe that the participants will figure out how the future tense is realized, which is assembled differently in English and Turkish.

2. FUTURITY IN ENGLISH AND TURKISH

There has been a long debate whether English has a future tense or not. Morphologically speaking, there is no future tense in English due to the absence of inflection on the verb (for more detailed discussions, see Comrie, 1985; 1989; Dahl,1985; Declerck, 1991; Anderson, 1992; Bergs, 2010). The question should be whether we refer to a morphological class or a semantic one when we define the term "tense". Sezer (2001) defines tense as a syntactic category which contains affixes (or clitics) indicating tense, aspect, or mood. In some languages, as in English, there is no way to express the futurity morphologically; in others, as Bergs (2010) puts forward, there are future morphemes "as in Latin (-b-) or Turkish (-eceg-)" (p.217).

According to Comrie (1985), future time reference and mood are closely related. That is to say, we use modals to express futurity due to the frequent combination of present meaning and the future. Therefore, it is hard to find an answer to the question what a future tense is; however, from morphological perspective, Turkish or French gets more future-tense-points than English. What we should bear in mind that tense is deictic in the sense that there is a relationship between the occurrence of the tense and a specific reference time.

_____

Assist. Prof. Dr. Turkay Bulut has been the chairperson of the translation department at Halic University since 2006. Her major study field is Linguistics, specifically second language acquisition and contrastive grammar.

There are structured inventory of constructions in languages and different constructions express different concepts. In English, futurity is achieved by the modals *will/shall* (1), the periphrastic Be+going+Vinf construction (2), the simple present tense (3), and the present progressive tense (4):

1. I will complete the project soon. (for a mild prediction; for a promise);
2. I am going to water the flowers. (for a more definite plan);
3. The plane arrives at 5 tomorrow. (for scheduled, fixed, timetabled events); and
4. I am flying to New York next Monday. (for the strongest form of prediction)

In Turkish, on the other hand, verbs are inflected for the future tense by attaching the *-(y)AcAk* suffix to verb stem as in (5):

5. Hasan yarin odev-in-i bitir-ecek

Hasan tomorrow assignment-3 sg.-Acc. Finish-Fut.

"Hasan will finish his assignment tomorrow"

Sometimes, native speakers of Turkish also use the aorist as a promise as in (6):

(6) Yarin   san-a   ugra-r-im

Tomorrow you-Dat.   Drop by-Aor-1.sg.

"Tomorrow I will drop by at your place"

(Actually: "Tomorrow I drop by at your place")

This usage "commits the speaker less than the regular future tense suffix" (Kornfilt, 1997, p. 341).   The –*(y)AcAK* suffix creates more definiteness when compared to the aorist usage. In informal Turkish, sometimes the present progressive tense is used to express the futurity, creating the sense of great commitment just as the –*(y)AcAK* suffix as in (7):

(7) Gelecek hafta   gel-iyor-um

          Next   week   come-Pres. Prog.-1.sg

                "I am coming tomorrow

In this study, we hypothesize that the learners will perceive the sense of commitment and definiteness and produce the pragmatically appropriate sentences and that the syntax of the sentences will not be the determining factor. There will be no negative transfer from English.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 The Participants

Twenty English native speakers participated in this study. They were from Australia (f=2), New Zealand (f=1), South Africa (f=1), The United States of America (f= 9), and England (f=7). They were either undergraduate or graduate students at various public or foundation universities in Istanbul, Turkey during the academic year of 2009-2010. Their mean age was 22, and the mean of their duration in Turkey was 18 months. They were taking intensive Turkish language courses (five hours per day) offered at the universities.

3.2 The Instruments and the Procedure

The central aim of this study is to elucidate the interlanguage of English adult learners of Turkish in terms of the simple future tense. The data come from two tasks: a translation task (TT) and a judgment task (JT). In TT, the participants translated 10 Turkish root sentences (four aorist; two present progressive and four with *-(y)AcAk* suffixes) into English. In JT, they rated five sentences (one aorist, two present progressive, and two -(y)AcAk suffixes) as "natural", "I am not sure", or "unnatural" on a three-point scale. Readers should refer to the text below for the items utilized in both tasks. The reason for utilizing fewer items in the tasks was to eliminate the fatigue effect on the participants. The students completed the tasks in their classroom where their instructors and the researcher were present. They were told to ask any unknown words not given in the glossary. It took their 40 minutes all together to complete both tasks. There were no distractions at the time of test taking period. Then, all the nominal data obtained from the JT were coded and entered into the SPSS program (Version 11.5). Due to the small group, we utilized a non parametric test, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov one-sample test, which assesses the degree to which an observed pattern of categorical frequencies differs from the pattern that would be expected on the null hypothesis. For the data obtained from the TT, we grouped the productions of the participants and then found the frequencies.

4.   RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Findings obtained from TT

First we would like to present the data obtained from the translation task (TT), in which the participants translated ten Turkish sentences into English.

Aorist Verbs:
Four items in this task contained aorist verbs (Items 1-4):

Item 1. Gelecek hafta Osman'a her seyi   ver-ir-im.
   Next week   Osman-Dat. Everything   give-Aorist-1 sg.
   Actually: "Next week I give Osman everything."
Student Translations:
"Next week I'll give Osman everything." (f= 18); "I am going to give everything to Osman next week." (f= 2)

Item 2. Gelecek hafta san-a   gel-ir-im.
   Next week   you-Dat.   Come-Aor.-1 sg.
Actually: "I come to you next week."
Student Translations:
"I will come to your place next week." (f=17); "I am going to come to you/to your place next week." (f=3)

Item 3. Bu yaz sonu   bura-dan   gid-er-iz.
 This summer end   here-from   go-Aor.-1 pl.
Actually: "We go from here this summer."
Student Translations:
"We will go away from here this summer." (f=15); "We are going …"(f=2); No translations (f=3)

Item 4. Belki gelecek sene Avrupa'ya gid-er-im
        Maybe   next   year Europe-Dat.   Go-Aor.-1 sg.
Actually: "Maybe next year I go to Europe."
Student Translations:
"Maybe I will go to Europe next year." (f= 19); "I might go…… " (f=1)

The majority of the participants used "will" in their translations. In English, the aorist with the future meaning is only possible for timetabled events as in "the plane leaves at 5 tomorrow"; the event is scheduled, definite. However, in Turkish, there is little sense of commitment when the aorist is used. Besides, native speakers of Turkish sometimes express willingness and promise with the aorist, which has a similar function with the English modal "will". The participants seem to have been sensitive to the meaning since almost all of them used "will", not the aorist in their translations. Item 4, with the adverb "belki" (maybe), the sense of definiteness is very low, and the participants correctly interpreted the possibility and used "will" accordingly. This might indicate that it is the meaning conveyed in the sentence that determines the tense choice of the learners, not the suffix on the verb.

Present Progressive:
The verbs in Items 5 and 6 were inflected with the suffix –yor for the definite plans for future. As mentioned above, in colloquial Turkish, this present progressive form can be used with future function instead of the –(y)AcAK suffix as this is the case in English.

Item 5. Gelecek Cuma   ogrenci-ler-im-e   bu test-i   ver-iyor-um.
        Next   Friday student-plural-1 sg.- Dat.   this test- Acc.   give-Pr. Prog.-1sg.
Actually: "Next Friday I am giving this test to my students."
Student translations:
"Next Friday I am giving this exam to my students." (f=15); "I am going to ….." (f= 5)

Item 6. Tren   saat 5-te   gel-iyor.
        Train hour 5-Loc.   come-Pr. Prog.
Actually: "The train is coming at 5."
Student translation:

"The train comes at 5 tomorrow." (f=18); "The train is coming at 5 tomorrow." (f=5)

In this respect, English and Turkish share the same features. For Item 5, out of 20 participants, 15 of them used the present progressive, and the rest preferred the progressive structure. In Item 6, we included a timetabled event on purpose to see whether the participants would use the aorist as it is the case in English. Though the verb was inflected with the –yor suffix which again evokes the meaning of definiteness, the majority of them preferred the structure in their L1.

246

For these two items, we can claim that the meaning was perceived by the participants and that they emphasized the same definiteness.

-(y)AcAk suffix:

The last four items contained the *-(y)AcAk* suffixes and were structured to see whether the participants would prefer *will* or *to be going to* in their translations:

Item 7. Belki bu kitap-lar-i   **burada**   **birak-acağ-im**
    Maybe this book-Pl.-Acc.   here   leave-Fut.-1 sg.
Actually: "Maybe I will leave these books here."
Student translations:
"Maybe I'll leave these books here." (f=20)

Item 8. Bulut-lar-a bak. Yağmur yağ-acak.
    cloud-Pl. look. Rain rain-Fut.
Actually: "Look at clouds. It will/is going to rain."
Student translations:
"Look at the clouds. It is going to rain." (f=19); "…. It'll rain." (f=1)

Item 9. Galiba Tom biz-e   **gel-ecek**
    Maybe Tom we-Dat.   come-Fut.
Actually: " Maybe Tom will come to us."
Student translations:
"Maybe Tom will come to us." (f=19); No translation (f=1)

Item 10. Belki Tina   **ben-i**   **ara-yacak.**
    Maybe Tina   I-Acc. call-Fut.
Actually: "Maybe Tina will call me."
Student translations:
"Maybe Tina will call me." (f=20)

In Items 7, 9, and 10, there were the indicators of probability as "belki" and "galiba" (maybe), which we believe led the participants to use the modal "will", not the periphrastic construction; however, for Item 8, due to the discourse (indicating the clouds), nearly all of them used the periphrastic structure in their sentences. This finding also indicates the pragmatic sensitivity of the learners. They seem to search for the meaning of the future definiteness while translating the items from Turkish into English. The morphological structure of the verb does not seem to be the determining factor. This finding is in line with our assumptions.

4.2 Findings obtained from JT

The second task we utilized was a judgment task (JT), which consisted of five Turkish sentences. Two of them (Items 1 and 2) were unnatural in Turkish because the meanings created by the adverbs in these sentences do not match with the inflections of the verbs. The participants were asked to read each sentence first and then rate them by ticking 1 (natural), 2 (I am not sure), or 3 (unnatural). Items 1 and 2 were unnatural for the native speakers of Turkish; whereas, Items 3 (informal), 4, and 5 were acceptable. While entering these ordinal data into SPSS, we coded the choice 2 as choice 3 with the belief that by being not sure, the participant doubts the naturalness of the sentence, meaning that s/he finds it unnatural. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov one-sample test was used for the statistical analysis due to the small sample size.

Item 1. Bak bir yer-e git-me yarin.   **Kesinlikle san-a**   **gel-ir-im.**
    Look a place-Dat.   go-Neg.   tomorrow.   Definitely you-Dat. Come-Aor.-1 sg.
Actually: "Look! Don't go anywhere tomorrow. I will definitely come to you."
The aorist (*-r*) was significantly refused by the participants (natural: f= 6; unnatural: f=16; K-S 1.960; p: .001). Normally, a native speaker of Turkish would attach either the *-yor* or the *-(y)AcAk* suffixes to the verb due to the strong commitment created by the adverb "kesinlikle" (definitely) but never the aorist suffix since the aorist committed the speaker less.

Item 2. Belki gelecek Pazar aile-m-e   **gid-iyor-um.**
    Maybe next Sunday   family-1 sg.-Dat.   go-Pr. Prog.-1 sg.
Actually: "Maybe next Sunday I will go to my family."

Similarly, Item 2 was odd in the sense that the present progressive is used which does not match with the uncertainty emphasized by "belki" (maybe). They seem to be aware of the oddness since 16 participants significantly ticked the unnatural choice (K-S:2.178; p.000).

Item 3. Herşey tamam.   Cuma Bulgaristan-a ucu-yor-um.
         Everything   OK.   Friday Bulgaria-Dat.   fly-Pr. Prog.-1 sg.
Actually: "Everything is OK. I am flying to Bulgaria on Wednesday."
This sentence sounded natural to 16 participants. The difference between the natural and unnatural choices was statistically significant (K-S: 2.178; p: .000). This is the colloquial usage in Turkish, which is very similar to that of English. The action is definite so the speaker can use either the *-(y)AcAk* suffix or the present progressive (informal) in English.

Item 4. 2015-de Istanbul-un   nufusu   ne ol-acak?
          2015-Loc. Istanbul-Gen.   population   what be-Fut.
Actually: "What will be the population of Istanbul in 2010?"
12 out of 20 participants accepted the sentence natural (K-S: 1.739; p. 005).

Item 5. Film   saat 8 de   basla-yacak.
          Train   hour 8-Loc.   start-Fut.
Actually:" The film starts at 8"
Similarly, majority of the participants (f=14) significantly judged this item as natural (K-S: 1.960; p .001) though such scheduled event is expressed in the simple present tense in their L1.
The participants' significant refusals of the odd items and acceptance of the pragmatically and grammatically natural ones may indicate that they have developed pragmatic competence in Turkish and that they do not transfer the syntax of their L1 over into their L2.

5. CONCLUSION

In this article, we have tried to describe and analyze the conceptualization of Turkish future by the adult native speakers of English studying Turkish as a second language. Our findings seem to support our hypothesis that while expressing the futurity; the participants were not under the influence of their mother tongue. They seem to have depended on the semantic and pragmatic features, not the inflections on the verbs. This supports the view that the different expressions can be captured as constructions which include pragmatic features. To comment with more confidence on the generalizations of its findings, we need more qualitative and quantitative data from a larger sample.

REFERENCES

Anderson, R. S. (1992). A-Morphous Morphology. Cambridge, MA: CUP.

Bergs, A. (2010). Expressions of futurity in contemporary English: A construction grammar
        perspective. English Language and Linguistics, 14 (2), 217-238.

Comrie, B. (1985).Tense. Cambridge, MA: CUP.

Comrie, B. (1989). Language Universals and Linguistic Typology: Syntax and Morphology, Oxford:
        Blackwell.

Dahl, O. (1985). Tense and Aspect Systems, New York: Basil Blacwell.

Declerck, R. (1991). Tense in English: Its Structure and Use in Discourse. New York: Routledge.

Kornfilt, J. (1997). Turkish. London: Routledge.

Lardiere, D. (2009). Some thoughts on the contrastive analysis of features in second language
        acquisition. Second Language Research, 25 (2), 173-227.

Montrul, S. & Yoon, J. (2009). Putting parameters in their proper place. Second Language Research, 25
        (2), 291-311.

Sezer, E. (2001). Finite inflection in Turkish. In E. Erguvanlı Taylan (Ed.), The verb in Turkish (pp.
        1-46). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Slabakova, R. (2009). Features or parameters: Which one makes second language acquisition easier, and
        more interesting to study. Second Language Research, 25 (2), 313-324.

White, L. (2009). Some questions about feature re-assembly. Second Language Research, 25 (2), 173-
        227.