

# **What do Children's Errors in Object Relative Clauses in Turkish Reveal about Language Acquisition?**

Duygu Özge

*Department of Foreign Language Education, Middle East Technical University*

Recently, Özcan, 2000; Kornfilt, Hermon, and Öztürk (2009); and Özge, Marinis, and Zeyrek (2009) reported data from different production tasks eliciting RCs in Turkish children. In these studies, while children presented significantly better performance in subject-RCs they used a greater number of avoidance strategies and made more errors in object-RCs (see also Ekmekçi, 1990 and Slobin, 1986).

In the present study, we present a detailed qualitative analysis of children's errors derived from these studies to provide insights about the difficulty in the acquisition of object-RCs. We illustrate that erroneous responses involve consistent changes, reflecting children's attempts to avoid difficult structures and to approximate towards adult-grammar.

In their ungrammatical responses, children adapt -YAN as an object-relativizer and assign nominative-case rather than genitive-case to the subject NP (1). This pattern shows -YAN is a better choice as a relativizer and nominative-case is a better choice as a subject-marker, so they avoid -DIK and genitive-case in line with Özge et al. (2009). We will show this is not simply a processing effect since children actually hear "NP1-NOM verb-YAN NP2-NOM" in adult-grammar with different meanings (2).

Another modification they make is to insert a pronoun or full NP-ACC in the extraction-site in addition to changing the participle and the case-marking (3). In adult-grammar, one finds object-RCs with -YAN rather than -DIK and with a resumptive-pronoun "kendisi" (4a and 5a) but not the ones in 4b-4c and 5b. Children wrongly replace the resumptive-pronoun 'kendisi' with a personal-pronoun 'o' and change the word-order into SOV. Thus, their utterances are mirroring, albeit incorrectly, classical resumption in adult Turkish.

We argue children's errors reflect the process of sorting out a very complex input (i.e., utterances for which there is positive evidence in the environment) and matching which lexical/morphological items can be used to express which meanings.

## Appendix

(1)

*Target:*

Köpeğ-in kovala-dığ-ı kedi  
dog-gen chase-DIK-Poss3sg cat-null  
“The cat that the dog was chasing”

*Response:*

Köpek kovala-yan kedi  
dog-NOM chase-YAN cat-NOM

(2)

a.

Arı sok-an kız hastane-de.  
bee-NOM sting-YAN girl-NOM hospital-LOC  
‘The girl whom a bee stung is in the hospital.’

b.

Kedi kovala-yan köpeğ-i hiç sev-me-m.  
Cat chase-YAN dog-ACC at all like-NEG-1sg  
‘I do not like dogs that chase cats at all.’

(3)

*Target:*

Köpeğ-in kovala-dığ-ı kedi  
dog-gen chase-DIK-Poss3sg cat-null  
“The cat that the dog was chasing”

*Response:*

\*Köpek o-nu/kedi-yi kovala-yan kedi  
\*dog-NOM 3sgpron-ACC/cat-ACC chase-YAN cat-NOM  
“The cat that the dog is chasing the cat/him”

(4)

a.

Kendisi-ni	köpek	ısır-an	adam
Himself-ACC	dog-NOM	bite-YAN	man-NOM

“The man<sub>i</sub> whom the dog bit him<sub>i</sub>”

b.

*O-nu	köpek	ısır-an	adam
*3sgPron-ACC	dog-NOM	bite-YAN	man-NOM

“The man<sub>i</sub> whom the dog bit him<sub>i</sub>”

(5)

a.

Köpeğ-in	kendi-si-ni <sub>i</sub>	kovala-dığ-ı	adam <sub>i</sub>
dog-gen	kendi-3sg-ACC	chase-DIK-Poss3sg	man-NOM

“The cat that the dog was chasing him”

b.

*köpek	kendi-si-ni <sub>i</sub>	ısır-an	adam <sub>i</sub>
*dog-NOM	kendi-3sg-ACC <sub>i</sub>	bite-YAN	man-NOM <sub>i</sub>

\*“The man<sub>i</sub> whom the dog him<sub>i</sub> bit”

c.

*Köpeğ-in	o-nu <sub>i</sub>	kovala-dığ-ı	adam <sub>i</sub>
*dog-gen	Pron3sg-ACC <sub>i</sub>	chase-DIK-Poss3sg	man-NOM <sub>i</sub>

“The cat that the dog was chasing him”

## References

- Ekmekçi, Ö. (1990). Acquisition of relativization in Turkish. *Fifth international conference on Turkish linguistics*, SOAS, London University, England.
- Kornfilt, Hermon, and Öztürk (2009). Asymmetries in the First-Language Acquisition of Subject and Non-Subject Head-Final Relative Clauses in Turkish. To appear in the *Proceedings of the Sixth Workshop on Altaic Formal Linguistics (WAFL 6)*, Nagoya University, Japan.
- Özcan, F. H. (2000) Production of Relative Clauses in the Acquisition of Turkish: The Function of Parallel Function Hypothesis. A. Göksel and C. Kerslake (eds.) *Turcologica: Studies on Turkish and Turkic Languages*, 46, 307-316,, 2000
- Özge, D., Marinis, T. and Zeyrek, D. (2009). Production of relative clauses in monolingual Turkish children. To appear in *the Proceeding Supplement of the 34<sup>th</sup> Boston University Conference on Language Development (BUCLD 34)*, Boston University, USA.
- Slobin, D. I. (1986). The acquisition and use of relative clauses in Turkic and Indo-European languages. In D. I. Slobin & K. Zimmer (Eds.), *Studies in Turkish linguistics*, (pp. 277-298). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.