

Cross-linguistic influence in the online processing of Turkish post-verbal word order variations by Turkish-English heritage bilinguals in Canada

Gözde Mercan
University of Toronto

How individuals decode the structure of the sentences that they hear or read so quickly and automatically to reach their interlocutor's intended meaning has been a central question in the field of psycholinguistics. Although real-time sentence processing by monolingual speakers and foreign language learners has been subject to a wealth of experimental investigation, there is relatively little psycholinguistic research on the online sentence comprehension processes of heritage speakers (Bayram, Rothman, Di Pisa, and Slabakova, 2020).

The present study aims to shed new light on this issue by investigating the online processing of word order variations of post-verbal arguments in Turkish by (adult) heritage speakers. While most studies on Turkish as a heritage language have focused on European settings (with a particular emphasis on Germany and the Netherlands), this study will be the first to investigate cross-linguistic influence from English to Turkish during online sentence comprehension in heritage speakers in Canada.

To recruit a relatively large number of (minimum 30) participants from various Anglophone regions of Canada, a web-based self-paced reading task will be administered to Turkish-English heritage bilinguals. The study will involve the cross-linguistic structural priming paradigm (Loebell and Bock 2003; Hartsuiker, Pickering, and Veltkamp, 2004) in which the participants will first read a prime sentence in English. The prime sentence will involve a ditransitive verb such as “give” and will be in either the prepositional object (1a) or the double object (1b) condition.

- (1) a. The man gave [a book] [to the woman]
- b. The man gave [the woman] [a book]

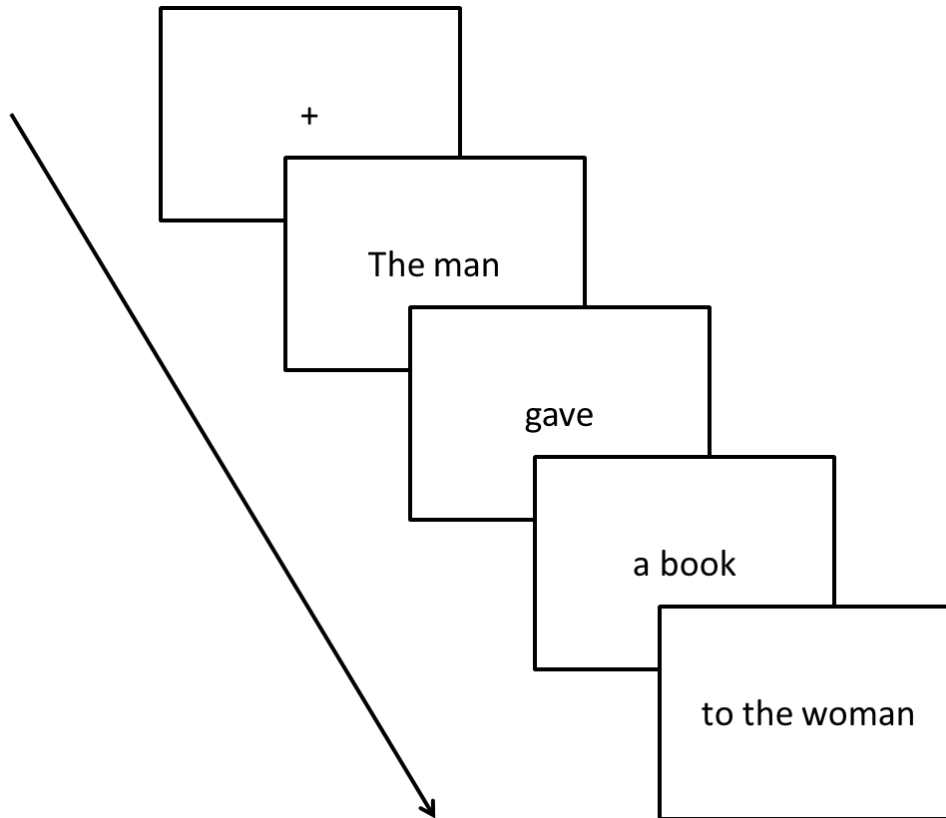
Then, participants will read a target sentence in Turkish. The verbs in the targets will be translation equivalents of those in the primes. The word order of the post-verbal arguments may correspond to that in the prime (matching condition) or not (unmatching condition). Accordingly, the target sentences will involve either the post-verbal ACC-initial word order (2a) or the DAT-initial word order (2b).

- (2) a. Korsan verdi [kolye -yi] [prens-es-e]
 pirate gave [necklace-ACC] [princess-DAT]
 “The pirate gave the necklace to the princess”
- b. Korsan verdi [prens-es-e] [kolye -yi]
 pirate gave [princess-DAT] [necklace-ACC]
 “The pirate gave the princess the necklace”

Participants will read the sentences segment-by-segment on their computer screen and press a key to call for the next segment. Their reading times of the critical words will be recorded and provide a measure of structural priming and processing difficulty. The experiment will be created on Ixcel Farm (<https://spellout.net/ibexfarm/>). After the experiment, each participant will also fill in an electronic language background questionnaire.

References

- Bayram, F., Rothman, J., Di Pisa, G., & Slabakova, R. (2020, March 25). Current Trends and Emerging Methodologies in Charting Heritage Language Bilingual Grammars. Preprint. Retrieved from <https://psyarxiv.com/pa83g/>
- Hartsuiker, R. J., Pickering, M. J., & Veltkamp, E. (2004). Is syntax separate or shared between languages? Cross-linguistic syntactic priming in Spanish/English bilinguals. *Psychological Science*, 15, 409-414.
- Loebell, H., & Bock, K. (2003). Structural priming across languages. *Linguistics*, 41(5), 791–824.



Sample self-paced reading task procedure