Production Divergence without Representational Deficiencies: The Use of Passives in Turkish Heritage Speakers' Turkish and German

Abstract

Divergence of adult heritage speaker (HS) grammars from monolingual norms have been well attested (see, for instance, Montrul, 2008, 2016). This is also the case for Turkish as a heritage language in various bilingual contexts. Adult HSs of Turkish have been found to use less clausal linkage and subordination, replacing them with simple conjunctions, which is regarded as failure to acquire certain features of Turkish grammar and to attain a non-monolingual-like level of proficiency (Backus, 2004; Treffers-Daller, et al., 2008; Verhoeven, 2004). However, recent work has challenged the assumption that all HS differences reflect a process of incomplete acquisition (e.g., Rothman, 2007; Pascual y Cabo and Rothman, 2012; Putnam and Sánchez, 2013; Kupisch and Rothman, 2016), suggesting that diverging adult HS grammatical outcomes may be reflective of alternative paths inherent to language development in bilingual environments. However, determining how and why adult outcomes of heritage speaker (HS) bilingualism obtain the way they do is difficult because it requires the reconstruction of developmental paths from end-state data.

In an effort to address this issue we examine HSs of Turkish in Germany at an early age of development (age=12,7; n=22), as well as monolingual controls of the same age group in Turkey (age= 12,3; n=20) and Germany (age=12,1; n=20), using a structured elicitation task (see Figure 1) for production of passives to see whether HSs have the representation of passives in their mental grammars. We also investigate the relative weight of factors (age at time of testing, immigration status of the Turkish parents (first or second generation), and literacy in the L1) that potentially contribute to the formation of HSs' grammatical competence. The data were analyzed in SPSS using a logistic mixed model.

The results show that all HSs have the underlying representation for passives in both Turkish and German. While the HS group produces passives in both of their languages, the rate is similar to that of the monolingual German group (see Figure 2). However, the model showed a significant effect of only literacy level ($F (3,596) = 6.119$; $p < .001$); all other main effects and interactions were not significant (all $ps > .1$). Literacy level had a positive influence on passive production, such that a higher the level of L1 literacy correlated with greater numbers of produced passives as compared to the HSs with no literacy (see Figure 3). We discuss these results pertaining to explicating ultimate attainment outcomes in heritage language acquisition in relation to larger debates in the field. That is, although there are differences on the surface as regards use, the heritage speakers have the same underlying mental representation and morphological/morphosyntactic exponents in both their L1 and L2.

Figure 1. Passive Elicitation Task Pictures (14 different sets, 28 contexts for passives)
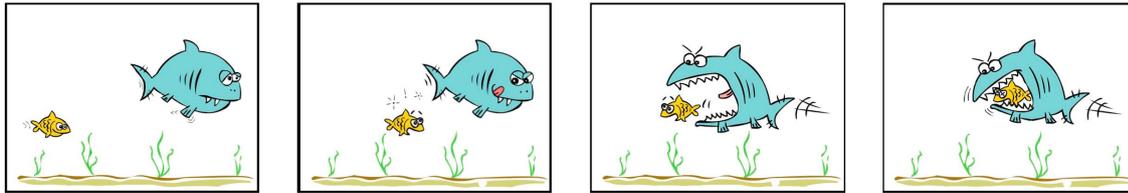
R: What is happening to the small fish in picture 3/4?

Picture 3:

*P: küçük balık kovala-**n**-ıyor.*
   *small fish   chase-**Pass**-Pro-3sg*
  Der kleine Fisch wird gejagt.
  The small fish be-Pass-3sg chase-past participle
 "The small is being chased."

Picture 4:

*P: küçük balık ye-**n**-iyor.*
  *Small fish   eat-**Pass**-Pro-3sg*
  Der kleine Fisch wird gefressen
  the small fish be-Pass-3sg eat-past participle
 "The small fish is being eaten."

Figure 2. Passive production by group (left column is absolute number of productions, max=28)
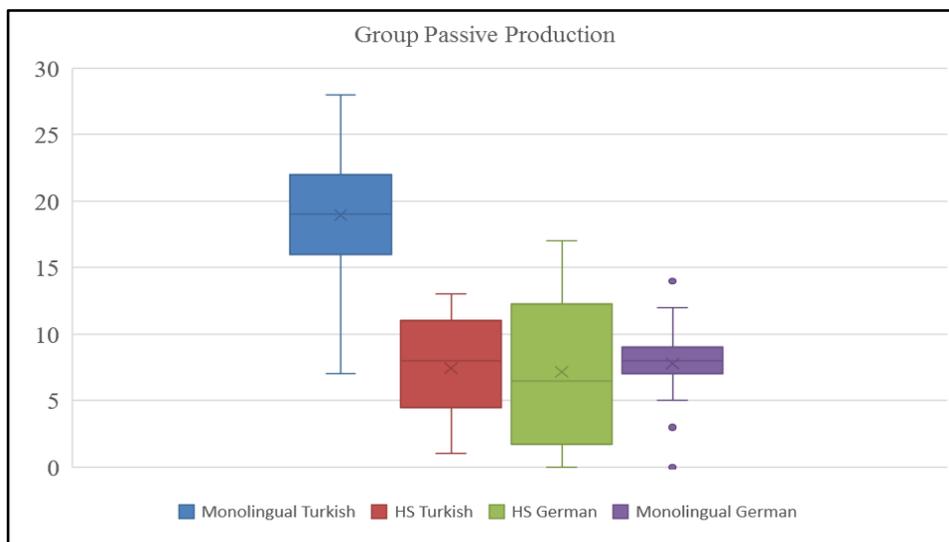

Figure 3: Figure Individual passive production by literacy level by HSs in Turkish