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Transfer From L1 to L2: Interlanguage at Work[1]

Dönercan Dönük[2]
Mersin University, Turkey

Esin Tezbaşaran[3]
Mersin University, Turkey

Abstract

Related research shows second language (L2) learner uses the principles of first language (L1) to have access to the mental grammar of L2. A Turkish learner is expected to transfer the linguistic components of L1 to L2 during translation. This research statistically investigates if there is a linear relationship between the morpho - syntactic units that are raised to the consciousness level and their translation. The findings show that the learners who attended Turkish classes know the rules, but have not internalized them to be able use them effectively in translation.

Keywords: *first language, second language, positive transfer, interlanguage, universal grammar*

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[2] Instructor, Mersin University Education Faculty, ELT Department. **Email:** candonuk@mersin.edu.tr
[3] Lecturer, Mersin University Faculty of Educational Sciences Measurement and Evaluation Department. **Email:**esin@mersin.edu.tr

Introduction

The studies related to second language acquisition (SLA) take their roots in first language acquisition (FLA), which is mostly based on the child language acquisition. Therefore, the precondition of research in SLA is to see how the same process operates in FLA, and the implications of such a process is an invaluable tool to be used in SLA and SLL (Second language learning) learning as a classroom practice. Besides, the outcomes of crosslinguistic research imply that for a sound classroom teaching, it is necessary to know how the practice of teaching can be grounded on these implications. The morpheme order studies (Brown, 1973; Devescovi et al., 2005; Kern, 2007) and related studies (Burt & Dulay, 1974; Aksu-Koç & Slobin, 1985) and bilingual acquisition research (De Houwer, 1990) all pinpoint the universal order of the acquisition of morphemes, which is the backbone of grammar. The findings obtained from these researches also hint at the existence of an inborn, universal, species specific linguistic competence proposed as Universal Grammar (UG) by Chomsky (1986).

Chomsky, making the distinction between language competence and performance on the basis of UG asks the three famous questions:

1. What constitutes knowledge of language?
2. How is knowledge of language acquired?
3. How is knowledge of language put to use?

UG also distinguishes the core components of the language competence as principles and parameters. Thus, it states that all human beings inherit a universal set of principles and parameters, which bear the similar and different aspects of a given language. These principles and parameters are supposed to constrain the number of possible grammars that can be generated out of input. The core of human language must primarily consist of these two parts. The principles are unvarying and applicable to all natural languages while parameters possess a number of open values underlining the differences between languages.

UG, as a mental, internal mechanism of language acquisition process is comprised of two separate parts as we stated above. The principles common to all languages are the shared lot of all linguistic systems, and they are transferred positively from one language to another. Parameters, on the other hand, are the variations that display different properties. Besides UG, which is implicitly encoded as knowledge of language in the subconscious mind of the language learner, knowledge about language and Knowledge about Grammar (KAG) as stated by Borg (1999) also emerge as the explicit knowledge within the scope of the concept of language. In other words, language knowledge is comprised of two components: knowledge of language (covert, implicit knowledge in the form of UG) and knowledge about language (overt, explicit, meta-linguistic knowledge).

UG, which exists in four logical possibilities in the human mind is also indirectly related to second language learning (SLL) according to SLA research : Full access to UG (Flynn, 1996), No Access to UG (Meisel, 1997), Partial access to UG (White, 2000), Indirect access to UG (Schacter, 1996). These differing views as to the availability of a UG in second language learning seems to have changed course towards a more modular view of sub modules of UG rather than the availability of it (Mitchell & Myles, 1998).

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As for the Turkish learners of English, a lot of research indicates the existence of access to UG (Bulut, 1996; Aydın, 2001). This finding seems to confirm the claim made by Smith (1994) that second language itself is modular, and that a range of learning mechanisms contributes to the different parts or components of a language. To Mitchell & Myles (1998), some general learning mechanisms that may be operating at least for adult learners of a second language has also led to some further ideas as originally proposed by Mc. Laughlin (1987). The information processing related to UG proposed by Hawkins et al. (1994) seems to point out the existence of two complementary mechanisms which together develop L2 fluency as well as L2 knowledge.

The transfer from L1 to L2 as a key issue realizes as negative transfer (parameterization to UG) in the scope of error analysis. Errors are internal, for they are neither target-like, nor L1-like. These learner internal errors are owing to the interlanguage (Selinker, 1992), both as a system and its sub systems. The notion of interlanguage lays emphasis on two aspects: the learner language is a system in its own right, and it is dynamic which evolves over time.

The study we have designed aims to see whether meta-linguistic awareness; more specifically, KAG contributes to the positive transfer from L1 to L2 or the inherently coded knowledge of language as universal grammar interferes with the transfer from L1 to L2 in terms of universal principles and parametric variations. The design of the research relies on the findings of the focused items in the forms of morphemes, which constitute the main lot of the Turkish grammar, for the language itself is accepted to be agglutinative (Katamba, 1993). The onset of the research relies on some classroom observations of the students during the translation practice, which led the researchers to discover that universal grammar can be a help for the positive transfer from L1 to L2.

The research aims to find answers to the following questions:

1. Is there a relationship between the learners' Turkish conscious knowledge of morpho-syntactic structures and their translation counterpart in the target language?

    1. a. Is there a significant relationship between the total Turkish test scores and the total translation scores in the whole group, and by grades?

    1. b. Is there a significant relationship between each Turkish grammar item and the related translation grammar item in the whole group, and by grades?

2. Does the overt knowledge about grammar in L1 contribute to the positive transfer from L1 to L2 for Turkish learners of English as a second language?

    2. a. Is there a significant difference between the grades in terms of total Turkish test scores and total translation test scores?

    2. b. Is there a significant difference between the grades in terms of Turkish grammar item scores and translation grammar item scores?

3. Which grammar items do Turkish learners of English find difficult and which ones do they find easy in both languages?

    3. a. What is the power index of each grammar item of the Turkish Test compared to those of Translation Test for the second grade?

    3. b. What is the power index of each grammar item of the Turkish Test compared to those of Translation Test for the fourth grade?

Methodology

Subjects

The study group consists of the second and fourth grade students of Mersin University Education Faculty ELT Department. The study was started with the second and fourth grade students (total 140) in the year 2007-2008, 79 of the participants are second grade students while 61 were in the fourth grade. The study was repeated with a different group (total 142) in the year 2008-2009. 58 second grade students, 84 fourth grade students. The fourth grade students attended 'The structure of Turkish' classes while the second grade was not given these courses due to the omission of this class from the curriculum framework. Both groups of students attended translation courses and contextual grammar courses given by the same instructor with the same content.

Instruments

The research is comprised of two tests as research tools: the Turkish recognition test, and the Turkish-English translation test. Both tests have been prepared by the researchers in a context of situation to be used for adults. The Turkish test checks for items at the recognition level, while the translation test requires the translation of a passage into English, which has the same test constructs of the given morphemes at the Turkish test.

Both tests bear some morpho-syntactic items such as adverbial clause morphemes, voice, modality, etc. The participants are supposed to recognize the given item in the Turkish text to take a score in the Turkish part, and translate the item at the same category into English to take a score in the translation part. For instance, a participant who is supposed to recognize the adverbial morpheme, -ErEk, in the Turkish test has been scored with 1 in the Turkish test, and the same participant was expected to see the similar participle morpheme, and translate it into English correctly to be scored with 1 in the translation text. In both tests the same twelve morpho - syntactic structure items, each considered as the grammar item, have been used (passive, impersonal passive, reciprocal, reflexive, causative, lexically passive, lexically reciprocal, lexically reflexive, causative inchoative, modality, adverbial clause morpheme, adjectival clause morpheme).

Test Application and Data Analysis

The statistical analysis was made with SPSS 11.5 software program. The relationship between Turkish Tests and Translation Tests was analyzed through Pearson's Correlation Coefficient. The correlation between the sub tests has been analyzed by phi coefficient, because each sub test has been scored as 1-0. The difference between the Turkish and translation test scores was analyzed by Independent Samples t-Test. Because of the scoring (1-0), the difference of the grammar item scores between classes was analyzed by Chi-Square Test. In addition, to find out the easy and difficult items for Turkish learners of English in both languages, the item power index was calculated for each item.

Findings

Grammar as an important component of language learning has been the focus of this research. The participants' overt knowledge about L1 grammar and L2 grammar (KAG) through translation studies are the entities the research questions have been based. The study tries to find out if there is a relationship between the KAG of the participants in terms of L1 and L2 as well as the effect of the power index of each item as regards levels of difficulty. The findings of the study are presented in the order of the research questions:

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1. Is there a significant relationship between the learner's Turkish conscious knowledge of morpho-syntactic structures and their translation counterpart in the target language?

1.a. Is there a significant relationship between the total Turkish test scores and the total translation scores in the whole group, and by grades?

There is not a significant relationship between the total Turkish test scores and the total translation scores regardless of the grade, r (140) = -0.021, p=.807. The second application has also supported this finding r (142) = 0.058, p=.495. Besides, in the first application, there is not a significant relationship between the scores of the students both at the second grade and at the fourth grade r (79) = 0.066, p =.565; r (61) = -0.211, p=.102. The second application confirms that there is not a relationship between the test scores of second and forth grade, respectively, r (58) = 0.100, p=.457; r (84) = 0.068, p= .541.

1.b. Is there a significant relationship between each Turkish grammar item and the related translation grammar item in the whole group, and by grades?

In the first application, there is a significant relationship between the Turkish test and the translation test only at the lexically passive grammar item. r (140)= -0.271, p=.001. Besides, this relationship has turned out to exist because of the second grade r (140)= -0.490, p<.001. Out of the overall group, there is not a significant relationship between the Turkish and English grammar items of the two grades (*Table 1*). The second application confirms the findings of the first application in terms of sub tests except lexically passive voice morphemes (*Table 2*) which has difference in the first application but not in second one. A common ground for both applications is that there is no variation in the causative inchoative sub test; both the second and the fourth grade students answered the causative inchoative test item correctly.

Table 1.

The relationship between the Turkish and the translation tests for the whole group and by grades (1st Application)

Sub Tests	Second Grade	Fourth Grade	Whole
Passive	0.07	-0.060	0.027
Impersonal passive	-0.196	-0.068	-0.133
Reciprocal	0.162	-0.038	0.079
Reflexive	0.015	-0.081	-0.029
Causative	0.139	0.077	0.113
Lexically passive	-0.490*	**	-0.271*
Lexically reciprocal	-0.123	-0.045	-0.087
Lexically reflexive	0.091	-0.213	-0.049
Causative inchoative	**	**	**
Modality markers	-0.167	-0.186	***
Adverbial Clause morpheme	-0.050	**	-0.035
Adjectival clause marker	**	-0.070	-0.044

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**There is no variation.

***Expected count less than 5.

Table 2.

The relationship between the Turkish test and the translation test for the whole group and by grades (2nd Application)

Sub Tests	Second Grade	Fourth Grade	Whole
Passive	**	-0.043	-0.032
Impersonal passive	-0.048	0.017	0.004
Reciprocal	-0.121	-0.052	-0.093
Reflexive	0.113	-0.039	0.029
Causative	-0.068	-0.062	-0.069
Lexically passive	0.025	0.062	0.048
Lexically reciprocal	0.220	0.206	0.051
Lexically reflexive	0.100	-0.013	0.031
Causative inchoative	**	**	**
Modality markers	0.045	-0.135	-0.065
Adverbial clause morpheme	**	**	**
Adjectival clause morpheme	-0.036	-0.047	-0.044

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**There is no variation

2. Does the overt knowledge about grammar in L1 contribute to the positive transfer from L1 to L2 for Turkish learners of English as a second language?

2. a. Is there a significant difference between the grades in terms of total Turkish test scores and total translation test scores?

There is a significant difference between the second and fourth grade students in terms of the total Turkish test scores, t (138) = 2.147, p=.037 While the mean score of the Turkish test of the second grade is 6.81 out of 12, that of the fourth grade is 7.36 out of 12. The second application confirms this finding, t (140) = 4.255, p<.001 (second grade mean: 6.31; fourth grade mean: 7.50).

There is a significant difference between the second and fourth grade students in terms of the total translation test scores, t (138) = 2.253, p= .026. While the mean score of the translation of the second grade is 8.99 out of 12, that of the fourth grade is 9.44 out of 12. However, this difference has not been observed in the second application, (second grade mean: 9.30; fourth grade mean: 9.43), t (140) = -.675, p= .501.

2. b. Is there a significant difference between the grades in terms of Turkish grammar item scores and translation grammar item scores?

There is not a significant difference between the second and fourth grades for many Turkish grammar items, the only difference to be in the reflexive verb X^2 (1, N=140) = 6.768, p= .009. The findings reveal that while 41. 8 % for the second grade students recognized the reflexive voice morpheme, this ratio increases to 63.9% in the fourth grade.

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In the second application, there is a significant difference between the second and fourth grade students in terms of reflexive verb, X^2 (1, N=142) = 9.837, p= .002. While 29.3 % of the second grade students recognized the reflexive voice morpheme, this ratio is 56% in the fourth grade. Besides the reflexive verb, in the second application there is a significant difference between the grades in terms of impersonal passive, reciprocal, and causative inchoative verbs, respectively, X^2 (1, N=142) = 4.440, p= .035, X^2 (1, N=142) = 13.685, p= .001, X^2 (1, N=142) = 5.147, p= .023.

As for the translation grammar items, the only differences to be observed are reciprocal and modality morphemes. While the ratio of the students who recognized the modality markers is 15.2 % in the second grade, this ratio is 31.1 % in the fourth grade. 2 x 2 chi square analysis revealed that this is a significant difference, X^2 (1, N=140) = 5.084, p= .039. Only 13.9% of the second grade students recognized the reciprocity marker, while this ratio increases to 44.3% in the fourth grade students, which reveals that there is a significant difference between the classes in terms of morpheme recognized, X^2 (1, N=140) = 16.021, p= .001. In the second application, there is a significant difference in the impersonal passive morphemes, X^2 (1, N=142) = 16.021, p= .001. While 48.3 % of the second grade students recognized this morpheme to be translated into English, in the fourth grade this ratio is 66.7%.

3. Which grammar items do Turkish learners of English find difficult and which ones do they find easy in both languages?

3. a. What is the power index of each grammar item of the Turkish Test compared to those of the Translation Test for the second grade?

The first application for the second grade students shows that according to the item power index results, there is a difference between the KAG of L1 and L2 learning as regards 5 grammar items out of 12 (reciprocal, modality, lexically reflexive, lexically reciprocal, and lexically passive).While reciprocal and modality items seem to be easy in the Turkish test (0.86, 0.68 respectively) they turn out to be difficult items in terms of the translation test (0.14, 0.15 respectively). The reason for this is the KAG of the students in terms of Turkish. Turkish learners know the reciprocity marker by means of the Turkish overt grammar lessons at high school, and modal markers are the focus of the L1 and L2 overt grammar lessons. On the other hand, lexically reflexive, lexically reciprocal, and lexically passive seem to be easy items in terms of the translation test (0.76, 0.96, 0.99 respectively), but difficult items for the Turkish test (0.03, 0.37, 0.05 respectively). Particularly, lexically passive items in English (L2) have been found easy by the participants unlike the Turkish counterpart of it.

This result can be interpreted on the grounds that Turkish overt grammar lessons do not include the lexicalization patterns as a further process that requires further insight into the verb (Talmy, 1991). The verb is classified according to the overt voice markers, (-Iş, -Il,-In, etc.), some of which cannot be differentiated without a context (e.g. *asıl*- to be hung, to pull one's full weight, *yıka-n*- to be washed, to wash oneself (Tietze, 1989; Erdal, 1991). Let alone the lexical meaning, Turkish needs to make this distinction in the first place. As a conclusion, it is natural that Turkish learners cannot recognize verbs of lexical meaning, for KAG of the Turkish learner does not include these items.

Reflexive and Impersonal Passive structures turn out to be at the moderate level of difficulty or at a level ranging from moderate to hard at the two tests; though causative, adverbial clause, passive, causative inchoative and adjectival clause grammar items can be interpreted as structures that students have knowledge about for both L1 and L2 (*Figure 1*). The study highlights the possible threats for the teachers while teaching the verb systems, for it unveils the verb systems comparatively in L1 and L2. It can be said that Turkish learners,

though not successfully, have mastered the reflexive verbs (0.42 in Turkish test, 0.51 in translation test) and impersonal passive (0.32 in Turkish test, 0.58 in translation test) structures equally in both languages. This can be attributed to the fact that neither of these items are easy to learn for L2 learners, nor are they overtly taught in L1 and L2. Impersonal passive structures are often used with intransitive verbs in Turkish (e.g. pikniğe gidildi; etc.) unlike English, which rarely uses it. Moreover, reflexive verbs are often confused with passive verbs, for they both share the same overt marker, *-In* as Medio/ Medial -Reflexive Passives as suggested by Tietze (1989) and Erdal (1991). On the other hand, the emergence of adverbial clauses, adjectival clauses and passives can be linked to their being the most overtly focused items in both languages.

Figure 1.

Item Power Indexes of Morphemes for Second Grades by Tests (1st Application)

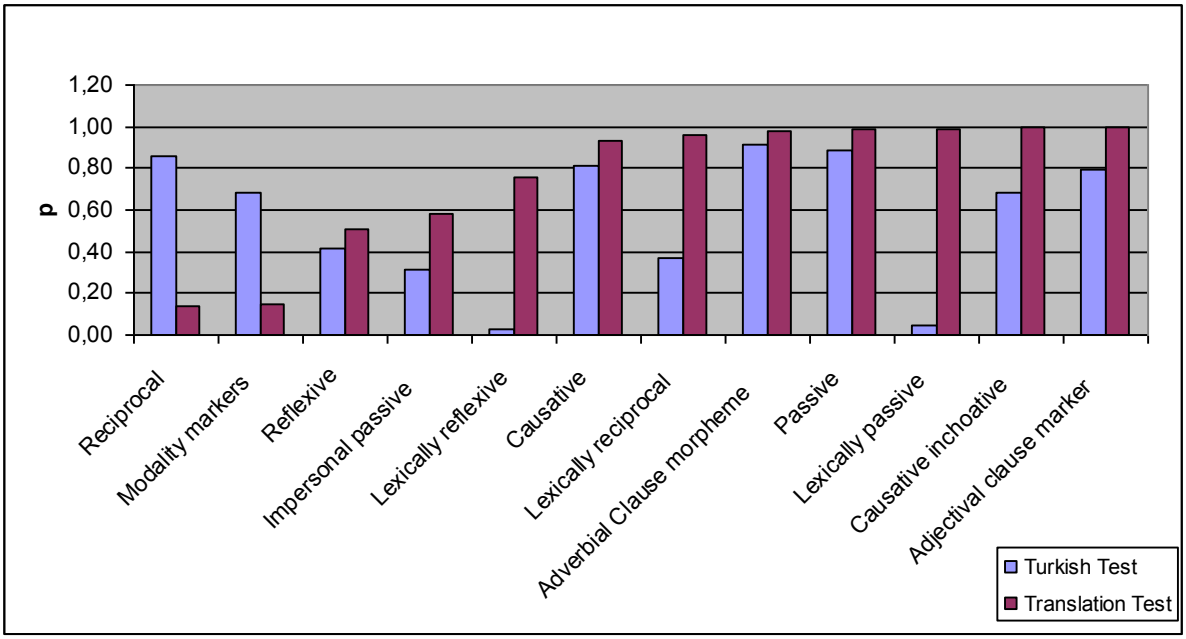

Figure 2 shows the item power index of the grammar items in terms of both tests for second grade students in the second application. The first and second applications give consistent results. Lexically reflexive, lexically reciprocal and lexically passive items can be easily noticed, which means students have overt knowledge about these structures in the translation test (0.84, 0.93, 0.98 respectively). The overt knowledge of these items in the Turkish test-particularly lexically reflexive and lexically passive (0.05, 0.40, 0.03 respectively) seem to be very difficult structures. Although the other interpretations are in the same vein, reciprocal and causative inchoative tests seem to have been found more difficult compared to the first application in the Turkish test (from 0.86 to 0.67; from 0.68 to 0.41 respectively).

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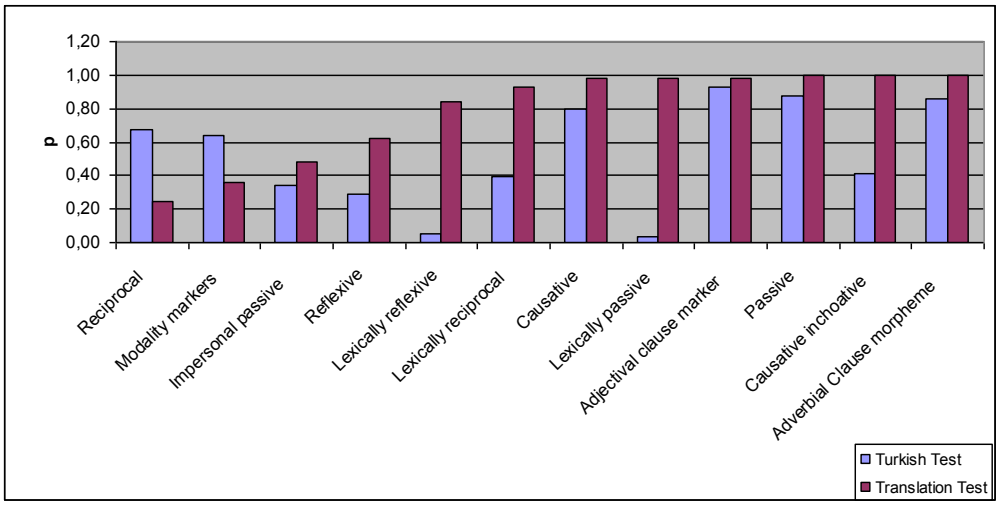
Figure 2.

Item Power Indexes of Morphemes for Second Grades by Tests (2nd Application)

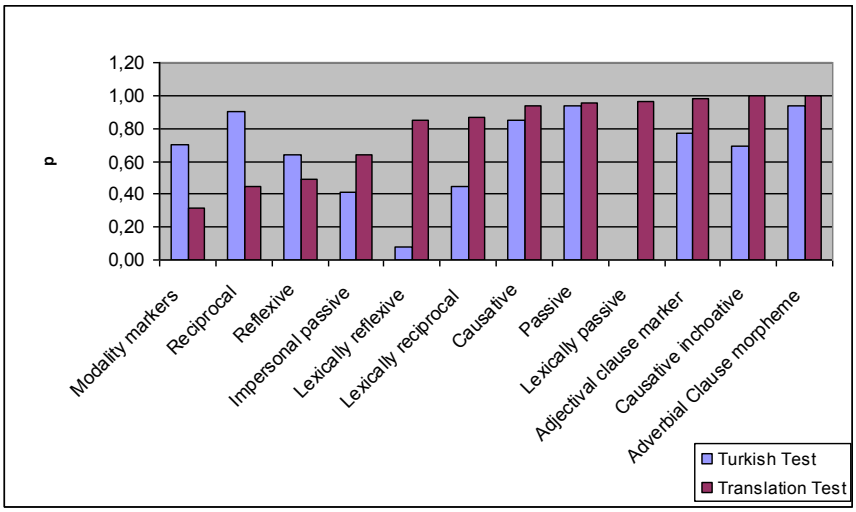


3. **b.** What is the power index of each item of the Turkish Test compared to those of Translation Test for the fourth grade?

According to the item power index of the 4th grade results, modality, reciprocal, lexically reflexive, lexically reciprocal, lexically passive items are contrary to each other in both tests. According to this, modality and reciprocal items are comparatively easier at the Turkish test than those of the translation test (0.70, 0.90 respectively). However, the translation test includes these items as moderately difficult ones (0.31, 0.44 respectively). However, lexically reciprocal, lexically reflexive, lexically passive items emerge as easy structures at the Translation Test; thus, L2 (0.87, 0.85, 0.97 respectively). Lexically reciprocal is at the moderate level at the Turkish test, lexically reflexive and lexically passive structures seem to be rather difficult items (0.44, 0.08, .0). Reflexive and impersonal passives can be said to be items with moderate level difficulty for both tests. Causative, Passive, Adjectival Clause, Causative Inchoative and Adverbial Clause items are relatively easy in the Translation Test, but they seem to be easy items in both test types (*Figure 3*).

Figure 3.

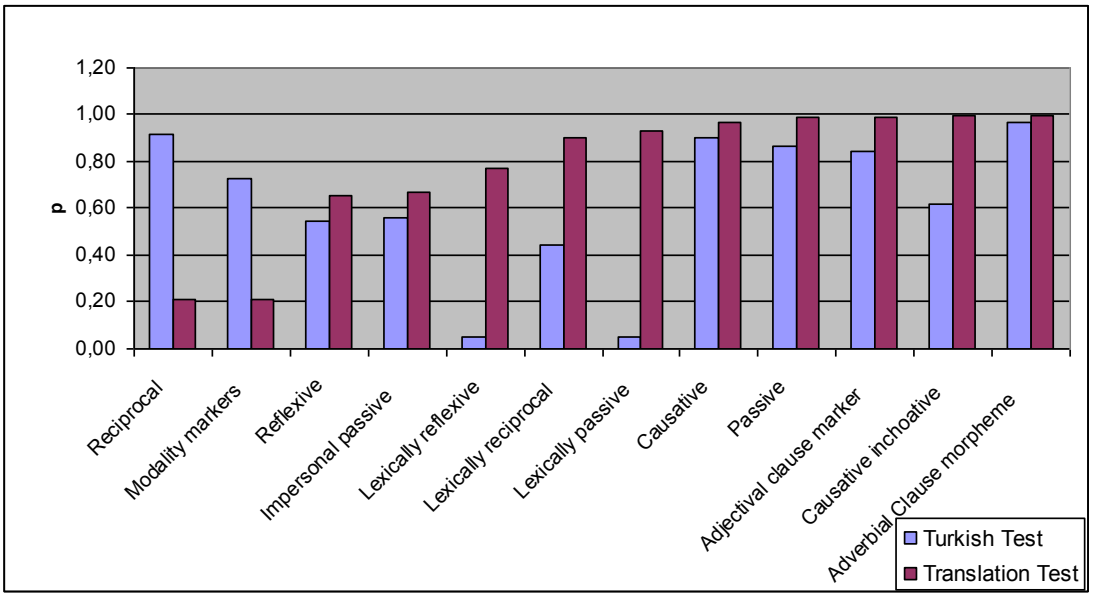
Item Power Indexes of Morphemes for Fourth Grades by Tests (1st Application)



The results of the second application of the fourth grade are consistent with the first application (Figure 4). The only distinction, though does not change the overall interpretation of the results, the item power index for the reciprocal and modality structures displays a slight change, with these items becoming more difficult at the translation test for the second application (from 0.44 to 0.21; from 0.31 to 0.21 respectively).

Figure 4.

Item Power Indexes of Morphemes for Fourth Grades by Tests (2nd Application)



Discussion and Conclusion

The first finding as an answer to the first research question reveals that there is not a significant relationship between the total Turkish test and total translation test scores regardless of the grade in both applications. Moreover, there is not a significant relationship between the Turkish and translation tests in both applications on the basis of the grades. This means that even when the grades are taken into consideration, a significant relationship has not been found in overall test scores.

The first research question also asks about the existence of a significant relationship between the Turkish grammar items and their translation test counterparts. Turkish lexically passive morpheme displays a significant relationship in the fourth grade, which hints at the importance of the overt teaching of this lexical category. The other striking finding is that both group participants have been able to succeed in recognizing the Turkish causative inchoative structure in both applications. This sub test as a semantic category is the common lexical category that took place in the syllabus of the both grades under the ergative verbs category in their grammar class; in other words, they were taught overtly in the English grammar classes. This implies that the overt instruction of such a semantic category has been helpful for the learners to remember this structure. As a result, it can be said that the fourth grade learners are familiar with the given Turkish morphemes at the recognition level, and can transfer these to the use of English at the production level.

The finding as an answer to the second question implies the effectiveness of the overt instruction on positive transfer from L1 to L2. The finding revealing the significant difference

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signals that well planned and systematic instruction of parametric variations on the basis of morpho-syntactic structures could serve as a contribution to the overall success in the transfer from L1 to L2.

As a further specification, the question asking whether there is a significant difference between the grades in terms of Turkish grammar items and their translation test counterparts reveals the need for the homogenous content of the metalinguistic instruction given in the mother tongue. The finding that there is not a significant difference between grades as for the grammar items of translation hints at the universality of a grammar that is shared by all speakers of the same language. As UG claims, the principles of the core mental grammar might share the commonality in both groups: those who were instructed overtly in L1 and those who were not, but the overt instruction given as individual grammar items obviously have not gone any further than rote learning; it has not been so internalized as to be transferred positively and be used in the target language. This can be interpreted as that the overt teaching of L1 at the syntax-semantics level has been raised to the consciousness level of the learners, but such knowledge of language as individual grammar items need to be highlighted for the better transfer from L1 to L2. Unless treated otherwise, these items become fossilized and the learner begins to use the rule governed, self-determined interlanguage that is neither L1, nor L2 like. Bloom, et al (1979) noted that "The emphasis on knowledge as involving little more than remembering or recall distinguishes it from those conceptions of knowledge which involve "understanding", "insight", or which are phrased as "really know", or "true knowledge". In these latter conceptions it is implicitly assumed that knowledge is of little value if it can not be utilized in new situations or in a form very different from that in which it was originally encountered." (p. 29).

As the grammar items that reveal the existence of the difference between the grades, reciprocal, reflexive verb and modality marker morphemes are the representatives that take place in the syllabus of the early Turkish grammar instruction. These three structures were clearly fortified at the university level and, thus made a difference. Though not recurrent, that the recognition ratio of the impersonal passive morpheme and the reflexive voice morpheme by the fourth grade is higher than that of the second grade can again be attributed to the effectiveness of the overt instruction of these lexical categories. The mostly ignored and overlooked part of the Turkish instruction, lexical category (e.g. lexically causative) does not seem to pose a threat, for they seem to have been transferred from L1 to L2 effortlessly. The study clearly presents the possible threats and pitfalls for the teachers while teaching the verb systems.

The third question as an overall evaluation of the first and second questions checks the difficulty levels of the items in both tests, and findings are consistent with the results of the other two questions.

Educational implications of the research are as follows:

1. Learners use the L1 core grammar in order to have access to L2 in the lexical forms if there is a match (UG principles) in terms of their emergence in the form of both languages (lexically causative in both L1 and L2: e.g. 'gönder-' 'to send').

2. If there is a mismatch (UG parametric variations) the learner resorts to the conscious knowledge of the same form in L1. For this to realize, there is a need for the form- focused instruction in both languages to raise the form to the consciousness level of the learner.

3. The type of instructed focus on the form should be limited to parametric areas, not all the core grammar should be on the agenda of the learner; thus reducing the content of the grammar instruction to a considerable extent.

4. If such a course of action is followed in the overt teaching of grammar (the grammar that is based upon syntax-semantics interface on the basis of parametric variations of UG), the transfer from one language to the other can be facilitated, also preventing the possible interlanguage errors.

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