ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

REPETITION IN CHILD-DIRECTED QUESTIONS; A COMPARISON OF TURKISH AND ENGLISH LANGUAGES

Çocuğa Yöneltilen Sorularda Tekrarlama; Türkçe ve İngilizce Dillerinin Karşılaştırılması

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ABSTRACT

The studies for repetition in Child-directed Speech (CDS) have focused mostly on affirmative and negative sentences without discrimination and the children in these studies have been the ones who can produce one or two words. There is a gap in the field of Turkish language acquisition for studies which analyze speech directed to children at earlier ages. In order to contribute to the field, the present study has investigated if there are common variation sets in child-directed Turkish questions at early ages or not and whether there are different variation sets in English and Turkish questions. As Turkish data, the conversations between Eylül (1:3) and her caregivers have been recorded for two months by the researcher and English data (Morgan, 1:3) has been obtained from CHILDES database. The analysis has revealed that addition of specific reference and reordering are the most common variation sets in Turkish questions. However, in English questions, the most common sets are lexical substitution, rephrasing and deletion of specific reference. Child directed questions in English tend to be economical, whereas, Turkish questions provide more cues about the structure of language by presenting them to the child by repetition.

Key Words; Variation sets, repetition, child-directed speech, questions, early language acquisition.

ÖZ

Çocuğa yöneltilen dil üzerine yapılan çalışmalar çoğunlukla ayrım yapmadan olumlu ve olumsuz düz cümlelere odaklanmıştır. Türk dili edinimi alanında erken yaşlardaki çocuğa yöneltilen dili inceleyen çalışmalarda eksiklikler bulunmaktadır. Alana katkıda bulunmak amacıyla, bu çalışmada çocuğa erken yaşlarda yöneltilen Türkçe sorularında yaygın olarak kullanılan tekrarlamaların olup olmadığını incelenmiş, İngilizce ve Türkçe sorularında tekrarlamalar açısından bir fark olup olmadığı karşılaştırılmıştır. Türkçe veri, Eylül (1:3) ve ebeveynleri arasındaki diyaloglar iki ay boyunca araştırmacı tarafından kaydedilmiş, İngilizce veri (Morgan (1:3) ise CHILDES veri tabanından alınmıştır. Verilerin analizi, Türkçede, özel referans ekleme ve yeniden sıralama tekrarlamalarının kullanımının yaygın olduğunu ortaya çıkarmıştır. İngilizce sorularında ise, en yaygın kullanılan tekrarlamaların, kelime değiştirme, yeniden ifade etme ve özel referansın çıkarılması olduğunu göstermiştir. Çocuğa yöneltilen İngilizce sorularının daha az cümle ögesi ve tekrarlama yapıları içerdiği; Türkçe soruların ise tekrarlama yoluyla çocuğa dilin yapısı hakkında daha fazla ipucu sunduğu bulgularına ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler; Türkçe, İngilizce, Tekrarlama yapıları, karşılaştırma, çocuğa yönelik konuşma, erken dil edinimi

Introduction

Child-Directed Speech (CDS) differs from adult speech in many ways. Words might be easier; there may be no direct feedback for the mistakes and some structures might be repeated to assure that child understands the utterance. These techniques all help children acquire a language. The earliest studies on repetitious structures in CDS were carried out in early 1970s. Broen (1972)

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studied CDS with ten different mothers, children of whose ages ranged between eighteen to twenty-six months, to see whether there were any significant differences among the language mothers used for their children and adult speech. The results indicated that mothers used smaller vocabulary range and they often repeated what they previously said with or without variation. Variations were not meaningless. They were used on purpose in order to transmit a communicative intent or to recall a particular object or event. Snow (1972) was interested in 'motherese' speech and she compared the speech directed to two-year-old and ten-year-old children. Analysis revealed that the language directed to very young children is shorter, simpler and less confusing. There was a different finding in this study as well. When mothers did not expect a response from their children, they did not modify their language as much as they did when they expected a response. This indicates that even single word responses from children make caregivers use a simpler language when they communicate with their children; therefore, child responses are important determinant of CDS. Kate (1980) studied speech of thirty-six mothers to their children when they were six, thirteen and twenty-six months old. He compared this speech to the speech of unfamiliar people to these children to see the differences in 'motherese' speech. Then, he compared this speech to the speech that was directed to the same children two years later. Speech to infants was found much easier. However, when they grew-up and had the status of language-learning children, as they became an actual conversant rather than potential one, the speech that was directed to them became more complex. Hoff-Ginsberg (1986; 1990) studied CDS by looking at its contribution to the syntactic growth of the child language. The common finding among these studies is that simpler structures, clarity and repetitious structures in CDS could help children acquire their first language.

Many studies that are related to CDS have been done in English. In Turkish, Kuntay and Slobin (1996) examined the speech of one Turkish mother to her child who was in one-word period and the recordings of speech started when the child was 1:8 and went on until 2:3 years old. Their study is broad in that they examined nouns, verbs, rhetorical devices, repetitious structures that the mother used. They introduced the term 'variation sets' with this study and many more studies have been conducted with these sets in mind. They defined variation sets as neighboring sequence of repetitions with a variation as a result of an intention (Kuntay and Slobin, 1996). They, further, stated that these sets have a vital share in child's learning his/her first language and the language that they hear has these sets most of the time. Variation sets provide such tips for the child as; which constituents can be omitted, which elements have similar functions and thus can replace the others, and which word order variations are possible. Kuntay and Slobin asserted that 'verb' is at the center of a variation set with other optional constituents. These optional constituents can scatter in accordance with some rules for different intentions (Björkenstam et al., 2016). Three variation sets are;

1. Lexical substitution and rephrasing,
2. Addition and deletion of specific reference,
3. Reordering

Kuntay and Slobin (1996) give the purpose of a variation set as "underlying a variation set there is constant intention such as prompting the child to recall a particular event." Therefore, it has many cues for a child about the nature of the language that is learned. The results of their study indicated that 25-30% of Turkish CDS occurred in variation sets. A striking finding was that there was no evidence of simplification for morphological complexity in Turkish CDS. Turkish might have some features that are different from other languages which will be discussed later in the paper. Björkenstam et al.(2016) studied repetition in Swedish CDS with variation set perspective by collecting the data from eighteen parent-child interactions. They tried to find out whether varying forms pertain just to the wording or other features in sentences such as prosody or non-verbal cues or not. The results revealed that variation sets occur according to a generalized definition as provided by Kuntay and Slobin (1996). As children grew older, variation sets occurred less.

Turkish is different from many other languages in that it has free word order and many possible morphological variations. On the contrary, Turkish children can use and understand these variations even at early ages. These features have attracted attention of many researchers all around the world. However, not many researches have been conducted, yet. There is a gap in the field in Turkish acquisition at one-word stage of early acquisition of Turkish. Moreover, repetition and variation sets have been generally studied for declarative sentences or without making discrimination for declaratives, negatives or interrogatives. For these reasons, this study aims to reveal common variation sets in Turkish Child-Directed Questions (CDQs). Besides positive sentences, questions also provide many cues for children who are learning the language. As the word order in questions is generally free in Turkish, these variation sets might provide cues for children about possible places for different constituents in a question.

Research Questions

1. Are there any common variation sets in child-directed Turkish questions at one word stage?
2. Is there a difference between variation sets in English CDQs and Turkish CDQs?

Method

The Turkish data for the study was collected in eight weeks starting from October, 2017 until the end of November, 2017. A colleague of the researcher has a child whose name is Eylül and she was 1:3 years old when the recordings began and was 1:5 when they ended. Most of the time, her father recorded the interaction; however, at some points her mother also asked some questions as well. Her father had been informed about the study and been asked to be as natural as possible without trying to manipulate the research. Recordings were mostly done in play-time in the evenings and each of them lasted for about ten to fifteen minutes. In total, there were eight recordings which lasted between ten and fifteen minutes. The family was a middle-class family in Turkey with a father who was an English instructor at one of the universities in Turkey and a mother who was a secretary at a hospital. After recordings were obtained, all of them were transcribed and repetitious questions that caregivers asked were analyzed in accordance with Kuntay and Slobin's variation sets (Kuntay and Slobin, 1996). The analysis was checked by a peer in Ph.D. class and the whole analysis was checked by the teacher of the 'First Language Acquisition' class that the researcher took at the time of the study. While transcribing the recordings, father's and mother's questions were transcribed because Eylül could use just simple holophrases which could be understood by her caregivers. As the interaction was natural, even if it was recorded for fifteen minutes on average, real interaction was not that much in most situations; therefore, some structures were not transcribed. In total, there were a hundred and ten questions that were directed to Eylül thirty of which have a repetitious nature and eighty questions were asked without any repetition or variation sets.

The English data was taken from CHILDES database and the link of the webpage can be found in the 'references' section. Morgan was 1:3 years old when she was recorded. The interaction among Morgan, her father and mother was recorded in 1997 and uploaded to the CHILDES database. It was in total one hour four minutes. The recording is again natural in that it was recorded in the garden of family house and interaction was between mother and the child most of the time with some others present. However, the others did not ask many questions and did not speak to the child. The data was chosen because it was similar to the Turkish data in that the children's ages were same and the interlocutors were similar; children, father and mother. The Turkish data was in total one hour and twenty minutes while the English data was one hour and four minutes. The transcribed recordings were obtained from CHILDES database and questions were analyzed. In Turkish data, 75 questions that have repetition and in English data, 78 repetitious questions were analyzed. The analysis was checked by the same peer and the teacher of the class as well. The comparison was done by counting number of variation sets in accordance with the three

phenomena introduced by Kuntay and Slobin (1996). The length and purpose of these variation sets was also analyzed.

Analysis

Lexical Substitution and Rephrasing

Table 1. *Frequency of Lexical Substitution and Paraphrasing*

Language	*f*
Turkish	11
English	24

In English, repetition in questions was frequently done by substituting a lexical component or rephrasing the question as can be seen from the examples 1 and 2 below;

(1)
    MOT: see that <u>birdie</u>
    MOT: see the <u>bird?</u>
    MOT: you see <u>her</u>?
    MOT: see <u>the bird</u>?

In the example above, in second question 'that birdie' was substituted by 'the bird'. And the third question was used for the same intention; however, the question was rephrased by changing order and adding a reference 'you'. In the last question the reference 'you' was deleted again. As it can be seen from the example, more than one variation set can be used for repetition of a particular question. In English data, lexical substitution and rephrasing was observed more than the Turkish one. However, one example for each variation set will be provided in order not to extend the length of the study.

(2)

FAT: 'Ga'lar nerde?	*'Where are the balls?'*
FAT: Toplar nerde kızım?	*'The balls, where daughter?"*
FAT: 'Ga' nerde hani?	*'The balls where?"*

In the example above, 'Ga' was used by the child for 'ball'. In Turkish it means 'top'; however, the child used 'ga' as she heard 'gol' used instead of 'ball' most of the time. 'Gol' is used as Turkish equivalent of 'score a goal' in English. In the second question, the word 'toplar (balls)' was used as substitution for 'Ga' and addition of specific reference; the word 'kızım (daughter)' was used. In the last question, 'toplar (balls)' was again substituted by 'ga' and reference 'kızım (daughter)' was deleted. In English, repetition is usually done by using one or two variation sets. However, in Turkish it was much more complex with two or more variation sets most of the time. In the example above, lexical substitution, reordering, addition of specific reference and deletion of specific reference were all present. In Turkish, lexical substitution and rephrasing was evidenced less than English data.

Addition of Specific Reference

Table 2. *Frequency of Addition of Specific Reference*

Language	*f*
Turkish	15
English	19

The numbers of addition of specific reference were not much different in two languages. It was used as a common variation set. For example;

(3) MOT: Morgie, did you have blueberries?
     MOT: did you have blueberries <u>for breakfast</u>?

In example above, repetition was made by adding specific reference 'for breakfast' to make the meaning clear for the child. The frequency of adding specific reference was higher in English CDQs.

(4) MOT: Benim telefonumu niye çıkardın kızım?
(Why did you take out my mobile daughter?)
MOT: Niye <u>şarjdan</u> çıkardın?
(Why did you take out from <u>charger</u>?)

In Turkish example above, specific reference 'şarjdan (from charger)' was used in the second question. However, that is not the only variation set. 'Benim telefonumu (my mobile)' and 'kızım (daughter)' were deleted in second question as well. Two variation sets can be found in this example; addition and deletion of specific reference. Variations sets like these were counted separately for the analysis.

Deletion of Specific Reference

<div align="center">Table 3. <i>Frequency of Deletion of Specific Reference</i></div>

Language	f
Turkish	3
English	15

Deletion of a constituent in the previous question is the variation set which has one of the biggest differences between two languages. There were three instances in Turkish CDQs whereas there were fifteen instances in English CDQs. For example;

(5) MOT: See that car?
MOT: Car?

This is just one example for English CDQs. There are fourteen other examples in the transcribed dialogue. It can be concluded that some focused constituents are repeated frequently in English CDQs. Let's have a look at Turkish;

(6) FAT: Fatma nerede?
(Where is Fatma?)
FAT: Fatma?

Deletion of particular constituents is not as frequent in Turkish CDQs as it is in English CDQs. In three examples in transcribed dialogues, focused constituent was repeated with intonation to form a question.

Reordering as Variation Set

<div align="center">Table 4. <i>Frequency of Reordering</i></div>

Language	f
Turkish	9
English	0

Reordering was the only variation set that was used merely in Turkish. This might be due to free word order in Turkish questions. There are many ways to ask a particular question in Turkish and when CDQs are examined; the mother and father in the Turkish data tried to present all possible forms of questions by using reordering as a variation set. In English, there were no instances for reordering of sentence constituents as variation set. That might be due to specific places of constituents in questions and specific word order. In Turkish, reordering was observed as in the following example;

(7) FAT: Birinin adı ayva mıymış?
   (Is the name of one of them quince?)
   FAT: Ayva mıymış birinin adı?
   (Is quince the name of one of them?)

(8) FAT: Nereye gitti top?
   (Where has the ball gone?)
   FAT: Top nereye gitti?
   (The ball, where has it gone?)

As it can be seen from the two examples above, CDQs provide some clues for children about the possible variations of word order. As there are many ways to make a question by changing word order with the same meaning, the mother and father in the data tried to provide all possible examples by asking questions of different variations.

Exact Repetition

Table 5. *Frequency of Exact Repetition*

Language	*f*
Turkish	5
English	7

Exact repetition means repeating the same question without changing anything. This kind of repetition was observed in both languages. It is particularly done to help children understand the question well or to assure that they hear the question if their attention is on something else. In English, for example;

(9) MOT: Margie, you wanna slide?
   MOT: You wanna slide?
   MOT: You wanna slide?

In this example, the child was playing with a toy; therefore, the mother repeated the question to assure that the child hears the question. In Turkish;

(10) FAT: Eylül nerede?
   (Where is Eylül?)
   FAT: Eylül nerede?
   (Where is Eylül?)

In Turkish example, the father was playing hide and seek game and repeated the question by using intonation. There is no intention in exact repetitions when they are compared to other variation sets provided by Kuntay and Slobin (1996).

Conclusion

As languages have some distinct features, child-directed speech may also have some differences. The present study focused on child-directed questions in Turkish and compared the variation sets in these questions with variation sets in English. These sets are valuable for children because they provide some cues about the language that they are learning. Three variation sets that were introduced by Kuntay and Slobin (1996) are; lexical substitution and rephrasing, addition and deletion of specific reference and reordering. These sets help children see;

1. Which constituents can be omitted,
2. Which elements have similar functions and thus can replace another,

3. Which word order variations are possible.

The first research question of the study was whether there were any common variation sets in Turkish child directed questions in one word stage or not. Analysis revealed that addition of specific reference and reordering are the most common variation sets. All three types of variation sets were observed in the data; however, these two were the most frequent. Deletion of reference has not been observed in the analysis as much as the others. It was more frequent in English CDQs. Exact repetition, which means repeating questions without change, was also seen in some instances. On the other hand, the purpose of using exact repetition was only to attract attention of the child.

The comparison of variation sets in CDQs for Turkish and English revealed some differences. Lexical substitution and rephrasing and deletion of specific reference were most common variations sets in repeated English CDQs. Reordering was not observed in English whereas it was common in Turkish questions. This indicates that free word order and constituent variation in questions are presented to children at very early ages. As places for constituents in questions are specific in English, reordering as a variation set was not observed in the data. Variation sets in Turkish CDQs were more complex than English CDQs. In English questions, deletion and addition of specific reference and lexical substitution were used in order to provide cues for child for which constituents can be omitted and which elements can replace each other. Repetitious questions were simple in nature. Turkish also had these variation sets in many instances but as the changing word order was also provided, the questions were complex and many variation sets were presented one after another as in the examples;

(11)   FAT: O 'ga' mı kızım? Bak bakalım o 'ga' mı? 'Ga' olabilir mi? 'Ga' nerde?
(Is it 'ball', girl? Let's see if it is 'ball'? Can it be a 'ball' Where is the ball?

All these questions are uttered as one sentence. By reordering, variations are presented to child. However; in English, variation sets are utilized to make the questions simpler. For example;

(12)   MOT: Is that tasty?
MOT: Is it tasty?
MOT: That tasty?

As can be seen from the example above, lexical substitution and rephrasing and deletion of specific reference were used. This example indicates that in English variation sets are commonly used in order to make the meaning more specific for the child. However, in Turkish it has a purpose to provide all possible variations for the child.

Some differences were found between two languages as mentioned above. As languages have distinctive features, transmitting these features to a child who has just started learning the language can be done by variation sets and repetition. This repetition may help Turkish children be proficient at using and understanding the language from the very early ages. Yet, this study is small scale and more studies should be conducted with more participants. There are two children in the present study whose ages are both 1:3. Studies with more children should be conducted so as to have better sights about the issue. Social status of families was not taken into consideration in the present study. There is a need for other studies which takes social status into consideration as well.

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Link for English Data from CHILDES Database; http://childes.talkbank.org/browser/index.php?url=Eng-NA/Brent/c1/010304.cha