

Entrenchment of innovative language usage in Dutch-Turkish bilinguals: An experimental study

Recent corpus studies have shown that the Turkish spoken by Dutch-Turkish bilingual speakers in the Netherlands contains innovative language use – constructions and expressions that are unconventional in Turkish as spoken in Turkey but that are used quite frequently in the Netherlands (Doğruöz & Backus, 2009; Backus 2013). In this study, we used acceptability judgments to find out to what extent unconventional usage is entrenched in the competence of individual Turkish speakers, and the degree to which it is shared across speakers in the Netherlands. To this end, we designed a sentence rating experiment (cf. Doğruöz & Gries, 2012). A total of 135 participants, divided over three speaker groups (Dutch-dominant bilinguals, Turkish-dominant bilinguals, and Turkish monolingual speakers) judged 86 sentences, some of which were taken from our corpus of spontaneous speech, and some of which contained unconventional structures. They were asked to state whether or not they liked these sentences, and to adjust them if they did not. We expected bilingual speakers, especially Dutch-dominant bilinguals, to rate unconventional stimulus items as relatively conventional, and that the Turkish monolingual control group would reject them rather forcefully. We also expected that bilingual speakers would occasionally adjust conventional sentences, while Turkish monolingual speakers would do the same for unconventional items.

Our results indicate that innovative language usage is accepted more often by the Dutch-dominant bilinguals than by the other two participant groups. We conclude that the propagation of the changes Dutch Turkish is undergoing is advancing, and that measuring the degree of entrenchment of innovative uses is a good way of obtaining data on the rate of change in bilingual contexts.

References:

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