Interpretations of KARE with the quantifier antecedents by Turkish speaking learners of Japanese

This paper discusses Turkish speaking learners of Japanese’s (JFL) interpretations of overt pronouns (OP), reporting the results of an experiment employing a multiple choice task. It is well-known that Japanese OPs such as kare cannot have a bound variable (BV) reading (Saito and Hoji 1983). Kanno (1997) reports that English speaking JFL learners accepted the BV reading of null pronouns 81.5% of the time while those of OPs only 13%. This was interpreted as evidence for obeying the Overt Pronoun Constraint (OPC, Montalbetti 1984). However, Masumoto (2008), Pimentel and Nakayama (PNa, 2012a) and Kahraman and Nakayama (KN, 2013) report that their English and Turkish speaking JFL learners with comparable proficiency to Kanno’s study, accepted the BV reading with OPs 61%, 56%, and 69% of the time, respectively. Their experiments employed a narrative-based truth-value judgment task while Kanno’s task was a multiple choice task. Therefore, the difference may be attributed to the task difference. To examine this possibility, Pimentel and Nakayama (PNb, 2012b) employed Kanno’s task and test sentences (as in (1)) as well as PN’s test sentences (as in (2)). They found that English speaking JFL learners incorrectly accepted the BV reading with OPs 58% of the time. This indicates that the inconsistent findings between the above mentioned studies cannot be attributed to task difference. The present study attempts to confirm their finding among Turkish speaking learners of Japanese by employing Kanno’s multiple choice task with the PNb’s instrument (Total 40 sentences, 26 test stimuli). Turkish has both overt and null pronouns and overt pronouns cannot have the BV reading, as in Japanese. If L1 transfer is at work, our participants may behave differently from English speaking JFL learners in PNb (though it differs from the KN results).

Thirty-nine JFL learners (17 3rd year Japanese students, 17 4th year, and 5 5th year) from a Turkish public university participated in this study. For the sake of comparison, the results of English speaking JFL learners and native speakers of Japanese (NS) from PNb were included in our results shown in Figures 1-4. Our results show that JFL learners with the lowest proficiency (the 3rd yr group) accepted the BV reading 8.8% of the time (answer (a) for both (1) and (2) in Figure 1) or 15.4% when answers (a) and (c) were combined (Figure 4). This finding is different from PNb. Furthermore, it is different from KN’s finding that Turkish speaking JFL learners with comparable proficiency to Kanno’s study accepted the BV reading with OPs 69% of the time. Why are the results of these studies very different? There are three possibilities: a) L1 transfer, b) OPC at work, and c) our participants’ proficiency may be higher than Kanno’s and PN/KN’s. If (a) is correct, why did KN not show a similar trend? If (b) is correct, why were the results from Masumoto, PNa, PNb, and KN? Given almost flat performances across levels (15-23% in Figure 4; i.e., correct answer (b) 77-85% of the time as in Figure 2), it appears that our lowest level participants’ proficiency may have been higher than Kanno’s and PNb’s. Since our participants have not taken Japanese Language Proficiency Tests (unlike the KN participants), it is rather difficult to assess their proficiency precisely and compare it with the KN participants. This explanation is supported given the fact that the PNb 3rd yr participants’ error rate goes down from that of the 2nd year.

In conclusion our results show that at least the 3rd year Turkish speaking learners of Japanese were treating the quantifiers as impossible antecedents for the OPs in the test sentences. Since their performance did not seem to change much as the proficiency level of the learners increased, they seem to have this knowledge by the 3rd year level. More research is necessary to find out the reasons for the inconsistency among these studies.
Example test sentences

(1) Dare-ga sensyuu kare-ga waapuro-o tukatta to itteiru n desu ka.
Who-NOM last week he-NOM word processor-ACC used that said that COP Q
‘Who do you suppose lent the English-Japanese dictionary yesterday?’
   a) same as dare       b) another person     c) both (a) & (b)

(2) Dono doraibaa-mo de paaato no mae de dare-ga takusii-o tomeru to itte imasu yo.
Which-driver-too department GEN front at he-NOM taxi-ACC stop that is saying.
‘Who stops the taxi?’
   a) same as dono doraibaa-mo b) another person c) both (a) & (b)

References