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ORAL NARRATIVE DISCOURSE OF ANAPHORIC REFERENCES OF TURKISH EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract

Narrative discourse of EFL learners has long been the concern of many studies in the field of applied linguistics. As an extension to such studies, the present research aims to compare the use of reference forms in the oral narratives of Turkish EFL learners and native speakers of English; particularly the study examines the similarities and differences between the use of anaphoric references and the use of definite article *the*, which is not found in Turkish. A movie was watched by native and non-native English speaking participants. The participants then commented on various themes of the movie. Comments involving anaphoric reference forms were analyzed through SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Results of the analysis illustrate that native and non-native productions have rather similar nature in terms of type and quantity of anaphoric references. No “such+a(n) noun” or “such+plural noun” references in the narratives were encountered. In addition, Turkish EFL learners’ use of the definite article *the*, which is supposed to be a major obstacle for Turkish speakers of English as an anaphoric reference, exhibits native-like quality, which means that the Turkish EFL learners have overcome this obstacle and mastered the use of the definite article in terms of anaphoric reference use.

Introduction

Though critical thinking about and analysis of situations/texts is as ancient as mankind or philosophy itself, discourse analysis gained its popularity in the postmodern period (Lemke, 2004). As Bressler (1999) suggests drawing on post-structuralist theories particularly on the ideas expounded in Jacques Derrida’s *Deconstruction*, discourse analysis was re-born in the sixties. While the structuralists had referred to the principles of Ferdinand de Saussure and tried to discover the overall system (langue) that accounts for an individual interpretation of a text, which thereby would lead to the conclusion that “meaning and the reason for meaning can be both ascertained and discovered” (Bressler, 1999:114). The advent of deconstruction theory and practice in the late 1960s was a challenge against the assumption that a text’s meaning can be discovered through the analysis of the overall system; on the contrary a text is loaded with many meanings and no definitive interpretation of text is possible (Bressler, 1999). Discourse analysis re-appeared in the late 1960s as a meeting point between, at least, four branches of the humanistic sciences, such as linguistics, psychology, anthropology and sociology, and it is now used to handle issues at the intersection of sociolinguistics,

psycholinguistics, philosophical linguistics, and computational linguistics (Brown & Yule, 1983).

Discourse analysis can be applied to any text, that is, to any problem or situation. It has no definite guidelines to follow because it is basically an interpretative and deconstructing reading. Being aware of any text's multiple meanings, discourse analysis does not provide definite answers, but rather expands our personal horizons (Palmquist, 2004).

Researchers, however, have recognized some subsections and research areas in analyzing the discourse which is described in the simplest terms as verbal expression in speech or writing. In the first place, drawing a distinction between analyses of spoken discourse, which is sometimes called "conversational analysis" and analysis of written discourse, which is sometimes called "text linguistics"* Richards *et al* (1992:111) summarize what discourse analysis deals with:

- a. how the choice of articles, pronouns, and tenses affects the structure of the discourse i.e. how cohesion is created
- b. the relationship between utterances in a discourse
- c. the moves made by the speakers to introduce a new topic, change the topic, or assert a higher role relationship to the participants.

Since our aim with this study is cohesion, particularly anaphoric references, we think it would be appropriate to provide a brief account of cohesive types. Yet, before going on to describe the cohesive ties in a text, we should bear in mind that Halliday & Hasan (1976) argue that although cohesion is also achieved through a variety of lexical and grammatical relationships between items within sentences in the text, semantic relation among the words is the foremost cohesive marker. The cohesive relationship that particularly interests Halliday and Hasan is those of *reference* [Exophoric, Endophoric (Anaphoric and Cataphoric references)], *substitution*, *ellipsis*, and *lexical relationship*. When we take the conjunctions into consideration we could postulate that there are five main types of cohesive ties:

1. Reference: Reference is regarded by Halliday and Hasan (1976: 31) as:

. . . the specific nature of the information that is signaled for retrieval. In the case of reference the information to be retrieved is the referential meaning, the identity of the particular thing or class of things that is being referred to; and the cohesion lies in the continuity of reference, whereby the same thing enters into the discourse a second time (qtd in. Schnese, 2001).

- a) Exophoric (or outward) reference: This is used for referents which refer outside the text; e.g. think of a classroom situation: When the teacher asks one of the students "stand at the door". "The door" in this sentence is an example of exophoric reference.
- b) Endophoric Reference: While exophoric reference refers to something outside the text, Endophoric reference signals something in the text; it is either anaphoric, referring to preceding text; or cataphoric, referring to text that follows. "Anaphoric reference occurs when the referent has appeared at an earlier point in the text. Cataphoric reference occurs when the referent has not yet appeared, but will be provided subsequently" (Eggins, 1994; qtd in. Schnese, 2001).

2. Substitution: Substitution is created when you refer to a word previously mentioned by substituting another word, especially the pronominal usage of *one*; e.g. John has a red car. James has a blue one.

3. Ellipsis: When a previously mentioned word is subsequently left as the context helps the reader understand what is being referred to; e.g. Janet has an exam in May. Wendy has too.

4. Conjunction. “A familiar type of explicitly marked relationship in texts is indicated by formal markers which relate what is about to be said to what has been said before—markers like *and*, *but*, *so*, and *then* (Brown&Yule, 1983:191); e.g. Although I studied all night, I still could not pass the exam.

5. Lexical. Lexical relation is created via repetition (either fully or partially) of the words, the use of synonyms (or near synonyms). We must also consider superordination and hyponymy (Brown&Yule, 1983). For example when we look at this lexical set: rhinoceros, giraffe, horse, monkey, animal, snake, and alligator; animal is the superordinate; rhinoceros, giraffe, horse, monkey, snake, and alligator are hyponyms of animal and they are near synonyms of each other.

Since the advent of discourse analysis several studies have been conducted either focusing on interlinguistics or intra linguistics topics; and also on oral or written discourse. An example of a written discourse study is the article written by Liu (2000), in which he discusses the problem of lack of cohesion in the writings of ESOL students. Overlooking another important element responsible for basic text cohesion (that of content lexical ties), many teachers continue to focus mostly on teaching the use of functional connectives such as conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs; Liu, however, suggests that the ties which involve the use of repetition, synonymy/antonym, and superordinates/hyponymy among other tools, are an essential cohesive device in native speakers’ speeches and writing.

Recent studies of Kang (2004) and Strauss (2001) are examples for oral discourse research. While Kang has shown how discourses of Korean speakers of English are less coherent and cohesive than those of native speakers’; Strauss, referring mainly to radio call in shows, telephone conversations and television interviews, refutes the long held views about the usage of demonstratives such as *this*, *that*, and *it*. Contrary to the common belief that choice of demonstrative reference terms in oral discourse depends on the proximal/distal distinction, native speakers’ choice of demonstrative has much to do with the concept of focus, that is, the use of *this*, *that*, and *it* signals “high focus”, “medium focus,” or “low focus”, respectively.

Since the *resurrection* of discourse analysis a great deal of research has been conducted either intra linguistically or cross linguistically. We still believe there is much void in the field to be occupied because so far we have not run into any cross linguistic study focusing on anaphoric reference use. It is hoped that this study will open new perspectives and supply significant insights for those interested in language sciences.

Looking for similarities and differences between oral narratives of Turkish speakers of English and native speakers of English, we are interested in the cohesive relationships between words and sentences. The present study was designed to investigate Turkish EFL learners’ ability to use anaphoric references in their discourse; particularly whether the discourse of native speakers and that of Turkish speakers do exhibit significant differences and/or similarities in terms of cohesive markers utilized in their discourse.

Research Questions

In this study, we aimed to respond to the following questions:

- What types of anaphoric references are employed by both Turkish speakers majoring English and native speakers of English?
- What particular reference type(s) dominate(s) the oral discourse of both groups, and why?
- To what extent do the oral narratives of both groups display similarities and/or contrasts regarding anaphoric reference use?

Data Collection

This study was carried out with the participation of both Turkish students majoring English at the ELT Department, University of Çukurova, and native speakers of English. A movie titled *Mickey's Christmas Carol* based on the novel *Christmas Carol* by the famous English novelist Charles Dickens was used to elicit oral narratives from the participants. Having watched the movie the participants were asked to provide an oral comment of the movie. Being interviewed individually, the Turkish participants, treated as the target group (TG), were invited to a language lab classroom, where their narratives were audio-recorded and then transcribed on a personal computer by the researchers. The four native speakers of English, treated as the control group (CG), were asked to present their narratives in the researchers' office, which were also audio-recorded and then transcribed on a personal computer. Each interview session with the participants lasted 5-7 minutes.

Participants

The participants in this study are categorized into two groups: (1) Turkish 1st-year students of English studying at the ELT Department, University of Çukurova (TG), all being trained to be prospective English teachers (n=39; 32 females, 7 males; 21-25 years of age range). Since they already are students of the English Language Teaching Department, they were all enrolled in an obligatory, first-semester speaking class. The other group consists of four native speakers of English (CG), all females, of 20-23 age range, all university graduates with education major.

Instrument

The movie, *Mickey's Christmas Carol*, was chosen because the relatively small number of characters in the movie (Ebenezer Scrooge, Bob Cratchit - Scrooge's overworked employee - and the ghosts, being the major persona), and the relatively less complex plot of the novel made it easy for the participants to refer to the persons, things, and events in the movie.

Data Analysis

The data collected for this study was analyzed observing percentages of anaphoric reference use with the help of SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). A nonparametric chi-square analysis was carried out to observe differences in frequencies of occurrence of anaphoric references. A value which is $p \leq 0.05$ will be considered statistically significant. Emerging results will be presented in tabular forms.

Classification of Anaphoric Reference Forms

In the simplest terms anaphoric reference forms mean words and phrases that refer to the previously stated information, the information which referred to is called a referent (Badalamenti & Stanchina, 2003). In this study we have analyzed the reference forms as classified by Badalamenti and Stanchina (2003); namely, they recognize four kinds of reference forms: a) *the* + noun phrase b) pronouns c) demonstrative pronouns and determiners: *this/that* + singular/noncount noun, *these/those* + plural noun d) reference forms with *such a/an* + singular noun, *such* + plural or noncount noun. Following are some examples of reference forms analyzed in this study (the italicized forms are the verbatim utterances of the participants):

- Alma agrees that men and women communicate differently in our society. She believes **the observation** is true based on her personal experience.

When he enters in, he comes across with spirit of Marley who is his previous partner. The spirit tells: I lost many things and that will happen to you.

- Phonology and semantics are areas of linguistics. **They** are concerned with language sounds and meanings, respectively.

Scrooge sits and counts his money at his desk, and people come and ask money for the poor, and he still does not let them. He just tells them they wouldn't be poor anymore.

Mr. Scrooge (...) is so rich but (...) he is also too (...) mean (...),he is rude (.....),selfish

- Two of the gender differences seem especially true to me. **These/These differences** will be the topic of my paper.

Christmas Carol is a story about a man who became obsessed with money and did not give it away; he became very selfish. This main character's name is Scrooge...

I'll talk a little about Mickey's Christmas Carols. ... This is a very ... cute and fun animated film

- I read several studies about how young boys are often encouraged to be aggressive and competitive. I think **such an upbringing** would influence a boy's behavior when he gets older (Badalamenti & Stanchina, 2003: 102).

No parallelism to the example above was found in our study.

Results and Discussion

The distribution of frequencies of reference forms and their percentages in the oral narratives of TG members appear in Table 1 below. As noted, the total number of reference forms in narratives of TG is 510.

Table 1: Distribution of reference forms in the narratives of TG

Reference Types	Frequency	%
Such a/an Such+plural	0	0
The+Noun Phrase	82	16,1
Personal Pronouns	376	73,7
Demonstrative Adjectives/Pronouns	52	10,2
Total	510	100,0

As shown in the table, the dominant preference in using an anaphoric reference form is for pronouns (376 pronouns constituted about 74% of the total anaphoric references). *The+noun phrase* type references and demonstratives have 16% and 10% values, respectively in the total distribution. Bearing in mind that the participants were commenting on a movie, we think that the dominance of the pronouns in the narratives should not be surprising because it is the characters who first come to mind when the issue is a movie. In a sense people talking on a movie answer the following questions:

- Who is the main character and who are the other characters?
- How are the (main and other) characters portrayed?
- How does the main character lead the events? How does the main character drive what happens in the movie (the plot)?
- How does the main character affect the other characters? What changes would occur in other characters' lives if it were not for the main character?

When we conducted a chi-square analysis of categories of reference forms we saw that the pronouns are the most employed reference forms, with a statistically significant value ($p=0.000$). Although Turkish is a pro-drop language with a unisex third person pronoun, TG members seem to have mastered the difference between *he*, *she*, and *it*. We, nevertheless, should emphasize that the issue handled is not as simple as the difference between three

third-person pronouns in English. Researchers in SLA, especially those focusing on the Universal Grammar theory of Chomsky have conducted studies to observe the effects of changing parameters in the acquisition of second and third languages. White (1985), for instance, tested 73 adults learning English, 54 of whom were native speakers of Spanish a [+pro-drop language] and 19 native speakers of French a [-pro-drop language]. When subjects were asked to judge the grammaticality of 31 written sentences, Spanish speakers were less successful than French speakers, which proved, according to White, (1) Spanish students did show evidence of [+pro-drop] carry over into English and (2) although the [+pro-drop] parameter is the marked form, Spanish speakers will continue to use the marked form until they have received negative evidence of [-pro-drop] in the L2 (qtd. in Alejandrio, 2005). So, Turkish speakers' *prima facie* success in mastering [-pro-drop] parameter is highly promising for their L2 acquisition struggles.

Regarding the use of definite article, there have been a lot of studies focusing solely on the acquisition of this article in English. "The English article system, which includes the indefinite article *a(n)*, the definite article *the*, and the *zero* (or *null*) article is one of the most difficult structural elements for ESL learners, causing even the most advanced non-native speakers of English (NNS) to make errors" (Ekiert, 2004:1). Master (2002) postulates three reasons for the errors of NNS:

1. articles are among the most frequently occurring function words in English making continuous rule application difficult over an extended stretch of discourse;
2. function words are normally unstressed and consequently are very difficult, if not impossible, for a NNS to discern, thus affecting the availability of input in the spoken mode;
3. and the article system stacks multiple functions onto a single morpheme, a considerable burden for the learner, who generally looks for a one-form-one-function correspondence in navigating the language until the advanced stages of acquisition (qtd. in Ekiert, 2004).

The definite article in English is used for a variety of aims, e.g. in sentences or clauses where we define or identify a particular person or object; to refer to objects we regard as unique; with names of geographical areas and oceans, etc. What we are interested in in our study is the use of definite article as an anaphoric reference; to refer to something which has already been mentioned. Lacking a definite article is the most striking difference between Turkish and most other Indo-European languages. Our TG members, however, seem to have overcome this great handicap in their struggle to acquire a second language. The reasons accounting for this success may vary: For one thing, articles in English are invariable. That is, they do not change according to the gender or number of the noun they refer to, e.g. as in German.

When we look at the results of the native speakers' narratives we see that they are not much different from the narratives of the NNS. The distribution of frequencies of reference forms and their percentages in the oral narratives of CG appear in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Distribution of reference forms in the narratives of native speakers (CG)

Reference Types	Frequency	%
Such a/an Such+plural	0	0
The+Noun Phrase	10	16,4
Personal Pronouns	39	63,9
Demonstrative Adjectives/Pronouns	12	19,7
Total	61	100,0

Surprisingly, as with the narratives of Turkish speakers, we have not observed any *such+noun* type of anaphoric references in the narratives of the four native speakers. Thus we can conclude that since it is quite usual to run into *such phrases* in written discourses *such+noun* anaphoric reference types are of a more intellectual platform such as essays, articles, stories, etc. Regarding the other anaphoric references personal pronouns occupy a prevailing status (having nearly 65%) among other reference forms. They are the most employed reference forms with a statistically significant value ($p= 0.000$) according to the chi-square analysis of categories of reference forms. And as with the narratives of Turkish speakers, although *the+noun* type reference forms have the same percentage values, demonstrative adjectives and pronouns display quite different percentages.

In passing, one point should be mentioned: while we have observed a lot of similarities between the narratives of the two parties in terms of anaphoric reference use, the narratives of the Turkish participants still lacked the ‘*taste*’ of a native speaker’s narrative. The most underlying difference between the two narratives is the choice of vocabulary and the fillers, which deserve to be handled in further research.

Conclusion

The results of this study on the use of anaphoric reference forms in the narratives of Turkish participants and native speakers demonstrate two major points: (a) there are no great differences between native speakers’ and Turkish participants’ narratives in terms of anaphoric reference usage; (b) pronouns are the mostly employed anaphoric reference forms in the narratives of both groups.

As to the conclusions of the study, however, the audience should be warned that the study was restricted to speakers of Turkish who are studying at the same university and have a similar level of proficiency in English and only four native English speakers. The findings from this study shed further light on the difficulties of using *such+ a(n)* and *such+plural* anaphoric reference forms in the narratives of native and non native English speakers.

In sum, this study shows that Turkish speakers are quite competent in using anaphoric reference forms appropriately; they, however, need more training to develop their active vocabulary and oral language skills effectively in order to avoid repetitions and employ more native-like fillers in extended discourse. Furthermore, this study has implications for speaking courses in EFL/ESL settings; namely, the ESL/EFL teachers should better understand the speaking problems of their students and help them to achieve a target-like use of oral discourse strategies.

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* A similar distinction is also made by Michael Stubbs in *Discourse Analysis: The Sociolinguistic Analysis of Natural Language* (1989). Stubbs refers to eminent linguists such as Goffman, Widdowson, Halliday, and Hasan in his elaboration on the distinction between text and discourse. Stubbs implicitly holds that since discourse analysis is an umbrella term covering both conversational analysis (which sounds like an ethnomethodological and too narrow approach) and text analysis, he favors the term *Discourse Analysis* over other terms.