Sercan seems to Sena to be a Linguist! The raising Constructions in L2 English

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the acquisition of the raising constructions in L2 English by Turkish native speakers. Raising constructions are the constructions when a subject/object of a subordinate clause is moved to the subject/object position of a so-called "higher" clause thus categorized as "raised" (Callies, 2008). While there are 3 types of raising constructions in English, there is only one in Turkish. Since Turkish only allows Subject-to-Object Raising (henceforth SOR) (Callies, 2008), we focus on the acquisition of Subject-to-Subject Raising (henceforth SSR), which seems to be typologically rare as it involves what is called A-movement over an experiencer that occupies a place structurally lower compared to the subject. Therefore, in this paper, we hypothesize that the acquisition of SSR will be problematic for Turkish native speakers, entertaining two different approaches, namely Differential Markedness Hypothesis and SSR being rare even in languages allowing them to occur.

Keywords: *Raising, SSR, SOR, L2 Acquisition*

1 Introduction

Natural Languages employ different ways of clausal complementation. Clauses are either tensed or tenseless, also known as finite or non-finite–clauses [1] respectively. The examples of finite and non-finite clauses can be seen below:

Finite: I know [that Can is rude]
Non-finite: I want [Can to be kind]

In this paper, on the other hand, we will mainly focus on matrix clause and non-finite embedded clauses from which there is an instance of movement to the matrix clause. However, before that, it is worth mentioning the embedded clauses having three types based on their functions in the syntactic projection and that they can occupy structurally different places exemplified in (1).

(1)   a. Anna has been taking a walk [in the forest, for years]
                           Adjunct
      b. She said [that John kissed her]
                   Complement

In the literature, these categories behave differently in certain syntactic tests like *do-so, one-replacement, preposing, and coordination*, each of which is illustrated in (2):

(2)   a. * Mehmet relied on Erinç, and Ece did so on Yusuf.
      b.   Baran danced on the stairs and Laura did so on the stage.
      c. * The student of linguistics was smarter than the one of translation.
      d.   The student with green hair was smarter than the one with black hair.
      e. * The student with brown hair and of linguistics liked the class.
      f.   The teacher with red hair and with blue eyes was quite handsome.

These examples show that in English complements, specifiers and adjuncts behave differently. Since *do-so, and one-replacement* can only target N' and V' and are unable to target complements, the ungrammaticality of the sentences in (2 a,c,e) is revealed.

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[1] For more recent discussion on finiteness, look at Todorović & Wurmbrand, (2016), Wurmbrand, et. al. (2020). Lohninger & Wurmbrand (2020).

Having established that, we now turn into the raising constructions that seem to be lexically restricted. To illustrate this, in English, raising is made possible with predicates; *seem, appear, happen, be likely, assume, believe, consider, expect, need, like, prefer, want, find, difficult, easy, hard, impossible* etc. In the next section, we focus on the syntactic properties of raising constructions as well as control. Then, we provide crucial differences between these two.

2 Raising Constructions in English

This section briefly summarizes the Raising Structures in English. According to Callies (2008), there is a cross-linguistic variation in the aforementioned constructions such that while some languages (English, German, French) have three types of raising, which are subject to subject raising, subject to object raising, and tough movement (also known as object to subject raising), some languages (Modern Greek, Polish, Hungarian, Czech) have SSR and SOR, and some of them (Hebrew, Turkish, Lebanese Arabic, Egyptian and Armenian) only have SOR. Raising in English is attested with predicates such as: *seem, appear, happen, be likely* etc. However, these predicates are not the same for each and every language; therefore, cross-linguistic differences should be taken into consideration. In the subsections, we will briefly discuss the types available in different languages.

2.1 *Subject to Subject Raising (SSR)*   Considering subject to subject raising, verbs *seem* and *appear* are the two most prominent ones according to Biber et al. (1999). Syntactically, this type of movement is rare because one would expect (3b) to be ungrammatical as it violates Relativized Minimality, which is introduced by Rizzi (1990), as a way of explaining locality condition on movement, which simply means that a head cannot move over the top of head. The subject of the infinitival clause (John) raises across the experiencer (to Mary), which c-commands the infinitival complement.

(3)   a. John$_i$ seems [t$_i$ to sing well]
       b. John$_i$ seems to Mary [t$_i$ to sing well]

Torrego (1996) suggests that in English, raising over an experiencer is possible as the experiencer is adjoined to the lower clause, and XPs in adjoined positions do not count as potential antecedents for an NP trace (Torrego, 1996; 104). Although it is possible, it is rare since there are problematic aspects to it, one of which is that it lacks independent evidence in the syntactic tree (in English the experiencer directly merges with T), and the other is that it is not clear how the correct word order is obtained. Subject to Subject raising constructions are schematically shown as:

[TP1 [Spec DP$_i$] seem/appear [TP2 t$_i$ to t$_i$ v VP]]]

<div align="right">(Yoshimura, et al., 2016)</div>

(4)   a. John seems to sing well.
       b. It seems that John sings well.

In (4a), the DP argument is syntactically raised from a lower subject position to a higher subject position, thus becoming the subject DP of the matrix clause in (4b). Raising constructions involve A-movement, which means that the subject of the embedded clause raises to the subject position of the matrix clause. However, Pollard & Sag (1994) note that all the predicates triggering subject-to-subject raising do not behave the same such that while the predicate *seem* can take a sentential complement, some other raising verbs cannot take it as shown in (5).

(5)   a. It seems to Mary that she will have an exam.
       b. *It started that Mary understood.

2.2 *Subject to Object Raising (SOR)*   SOR typically occurs with cognition verbs such as *assume, believe* or *consider* (also termed as believe-type verbs), verbs of intention, desire or decision such as *expect, need, like, prefer* or *want*, and verbs of discovery, e.g. *find* (Biber et al. 1999: 696).

(6)   a. We believe that John will leave.
       b. We believe John to leave.

In (6a), subject of the embedded clause, which is John in this case, is moved to a higher position in the matrix clause, becoming the object of the matrix clause.

The predicates allowing object raising do not behave in an uninformed way in respect to the selection of complements like SSR. To be more precise, while some object-raising verbs such as *expect* can take a sentential complement, some others do not such as *let, make, prevent*.

(7)   a. We expect Mary to understand the problem.
      b. We expect [that Mary understands the problem].
      c. We let Mary sleep.
      d. * We let [that Mary sleeps].

What is more interesting is that object raising verbs behave differently in relation to the finiteness of the complement as argued in Abeille (2020) when fronting occurs, only the finite complementation is attested as shown in (8).

(8)   a. That Mary understood, I did not expect.
       b. * Mary to understand, I did not expect.

(Adapted from Abeille, 2020: 7)

2.3 *Tough Movement (TM)*   Tough movement is also known as Object to Subject Raising. According to Mair (1987), there is only a small group of adjectives that frequently occurs with TM such as *difficult, easy, hard, impossible, interesting*, etc.

(9)   a. [To please them] is difficult.
      b. It is difficult [to please them].
      c. They are difficult [to please].

Extraposition applies to (9a), and results in the insertion of the expletive subject *it* into the matrix subject position, constructing (9b). Then, TM applies to (9b) and *them* raises the object of the embedded clause into the subject position of the matrix clause in (9c).
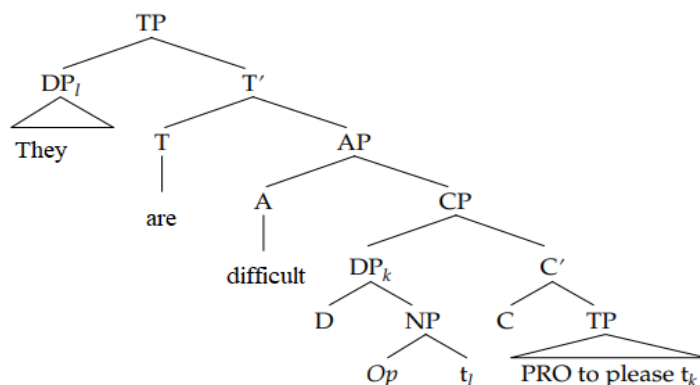
3 Raising Constructions in Turkish

When it comes to Turkish, only Subject to Object raising is allowed (Callies, 2008). Kornfilt (1977) and Aissen (1974) argue that in Turkish, Subject to Object Raising is acquired by successive passive applications; "Passive-SOR-Passive". The first passive application takes place in the embedded clause, and the second application takes place in the matrix subject.

(10)   a. Kız vur-ul-du san-ıl-ıyor
          Girl shot-PASS-Past believe-PASS-Pres.

          (The girl is believed to have been shot)
       b. PRO kız-ı vur-ul-du san-ıyor.

          PRO girl-ACC shot-PASS-Past believe-Pres.
          (PRO believes that the girl has been shot)

(Kornfilt, 1977)

In her study (1977), Kornfilt argues that in (10a), the underlying embedded object *kız* functions as the matrix subject, and there are two applications of passives; one in the embedded clause in (10b) and one in the main clause (11c).

(11)   a. Source: PRO [PRO kız-ı vur-du] san-ıyor
                       girl-Acc shot-Past believe-Pres.

       b. 1st cycle: PRO [kız vur-ul-du] san-ıyor
                girl-Nom. Shot-PASS.Past believe-Pres.

The passive in the embedded subject causes the subsequent agent to be deleted.

       c. 2nd cyle: [kız vur-ul-du] san-ıl-ıyor.
               Girl shot-PASS-Past believe-PASS-Pres.

Second passive application takes place in the main clause, promoting the clausal object. After two successive passive applications, *kız* behaves as the subject of the matrix clause, and in (11b). *kız-ı* is in the object position of the matrix clause, thus raising from the subject to object.

4 Raising Available Cross-Linguistically

In the next session, we discuss the types of raising available cross-linguistically, independent of the languages under investigation in this study. After this section and the given Czech data, we will have compared the 3 types of languages that allow different types of raising constructions; English allowing SSR SOR, and TM; Turkish allowing SOR, and lastly Czech allowing SSR and SOR.
SSR example from Czech:

(12)   a. Petr se zdál být spokojený
           Petr-NOM seemed be-INF dissatisfied-NOM
           Petr seemed to be dissatisfied

    SOR example from Czech:

       b. Viděl jsem Honzu podporovat Marii
          seen AUX-1.SG Honza-ACC support-INF Marie-ACC
          I saw Honza supporting Marie

                                                (Czech data taken from Przepiórkowski, 2004)

Przepiórkowski (2004) argues that in Czech, subject raising constructions involve case transmission between the matrix subject and predicative complement. Case transmission also takes places in the object raising.

5 Control

Control is a dependency between two argument positions in which the referential properties of the overt controller determine the referential properties of the silent (zero) controllee (Polinsky & Potsdam, 2006). Within the Minimal Distance Principle (Chomsky & Lasnik, 1993), it is stated that the referential PRO must have a controller, co-indexed with a c-commanding antecedent, as it can be seen in (13). In addition to PRO being obliged to be bound to a controller, in the central PRO Control assumptions, every argument receives only one theta-role and the PRO is caseless.

(13)   John$_i$ wanted [PRO$_i$ to stay at home]
   Controller Controllee

5.1 *Subject Control*   When the subject DP of the main clause is co-referential with PRO, we call these constructions subject control constructions.

(14)   James$_i$ tried [PRO$_i$ to be happy].

In (14), the subject of the predicate and the implicit subject of the infinitival clause have the same denotation. Therefore, the silent element in the control structure is the base-generated empty category PRO, according to Chomsky & Lasnik (1993), which is considered to be the most established approach to control.[2]

5.2 *Object Control*   When the main clause object is co-referential with PRO, we call these constructions object control constructions.

(15)   John asked James$_i$ [PRO$_i$ to be happy][3]
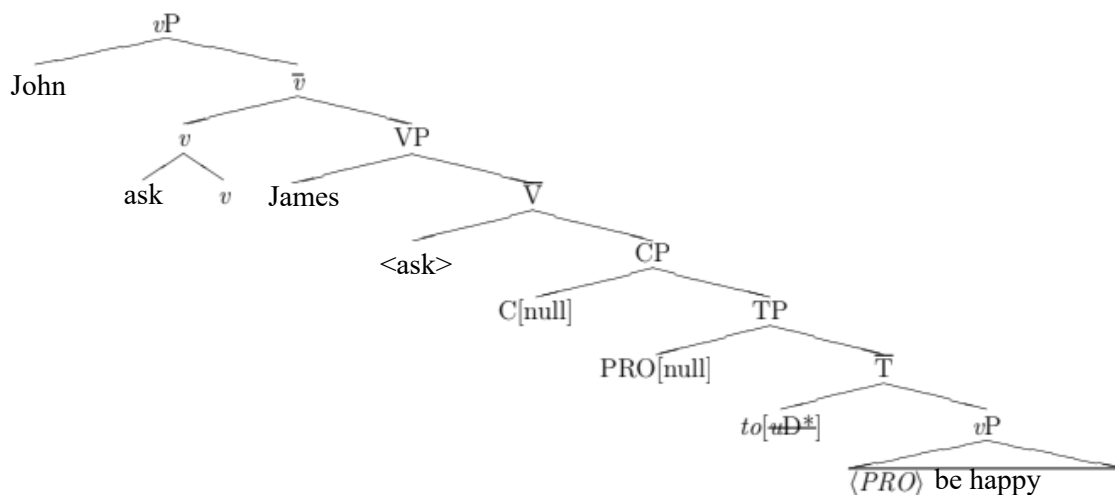
5.3 *Raising or Control?*   Although raising and control constructions are superficially very similar, their derivation in the syntactic projection is rather different and in order to show that they have different syntactic behaviors, we apply some structural tests adopted from the literature. To begin with, investigating main clause predicate is one of the ways that can help us determine whether it is raising or control construction. The most notable way to distinguish raising from control is to investigate theta grids associated with the matrix predicate. If the matrix predicate assigns an external theta role, it is not a raising construction.

(16)   a. John is likely to cry
        [_____ is likely [John to cry]].   (Raising)
          No theta role   Agent

        b. John is reluctant to cry
         [John$_i$ is reluctant [PRO$_i$ to cry]].   (Control)
          Experiencer   Agent

In (16 a), there is nothing about John that is likely, what is likely is John's crying.
    Another way to distinguish raising from control is to put the expletive subject "it" in the sentence. "The co-occurrence with the expletive is an indication that raising verbs do not assign an external theta role to their argument, thus patterning just like other unaccusative verbs" (Polinsky, 2013).

(17)   a. John appeared to his friends [to be nervous]

        b. It appeared to his friends that John was nervous.

    Another way that distinguishes raising and control is the idiom test. Idiomatic expressions give a non-literal meaning attached to the phrase. As for the idiom "The cat is out of the bag", the intended meaning is a secret getting widely known without intending to. If the idiomatic expressions lose their intended meanings, it is a control construction; however, if the expression retains the meaning, it is a raising construction.

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[2] In the literature, there are also other assumptions to show that control structures involve movement. See Polinsky & Potsdam (2006) and Polinsky (2013) for further readings on the division between these two.
[3] The full syntactic derivation of the sentence in (15) is not shown (only to the vP layer is present) due to the space restrictions.

(18)   a. The cat is out of the bag. (Original form)

     b. The cat appears to be out of the bag. (Raising Construction as the sentence still retains the idiom's meaning)

     c. The cat is eager to be out of the bag. (Control Construction since it lost the meaning.)

To sum up, we have mentioned 3 ways to distinguish raising constructions from control constructions and these are: thematic role assignment test, expletive test, and idiom test. In her study, Johansson (2015), mentions 2 more tests which are the clausal subject test and the passivization test which we do not apply in this paper owing to the space limitations.[4]

6 Literature Review

As for the acquisition of Raising Constructions, Callies' study (2008) examines the frequency of occurrence and contextual use of raising constructions in the written production of advanced German and Polish learners of English. Callies (2008) concludes that many students simply avoid using TM constructions. He also shows that several interlanguage phenomena are at play in the advanced learner variety: avoidance, resulting in an underrepresentation of linguistic structures, transfer of training and unawareness or lack of knowledge of raised structures' discourse functions.

Choe's study (2015) states that Korean language allows SSR to occur, however English L2 learners whose native language is Korean have difficulty comprehending structures that involve raising over an experiencer as they are said to be typologically rare. In her study, Choe shows that as the proficiency in English increases, so does the rate of the acquisition of raising constructions. Her study supports Eckman's (1977) Markedness Differential Hypothesis, as well. Our study is in line with the findings of Choe and Deen's study (2016) "Children's difficulty with raising". In this study, they observe that the difficulty of children's raising acquisition is reduced when the experiencer is moved to the beginning of the sentence. Both L2 English learners of Korean speakers and the L1 English speaking children had a better understanding of (19b).

(19)   a. John seems to James to be angry.

     b. To James, John seems to be angry.

In another study, Kirby (2009) proposes that children's acquisition of raising to object and object control verbs is accomplished through semantic scaffolding and conducts two experiments (semantic anomaly and grammaticality of embedded expletives) in order to test her propositions; in the thematic and grammatical roles, children assume a canonical alignment which results in agent subjects and patience object, and children assume a default clausal shape of contiguous subject and predicates. The results of the experiments suggest that L1 English children are not able to distinguish the verb classes syntactically, but they scaffold their judgements by parsing the smallest semantically independent proposition in each utterance.

7 Hypotheses

Based on the knowledge that the Turkish language only allows Subject to Object Raising (SOR) to occur (Kornfilt, 1977; Callies, 2008), in our study, our focus is on the acquisition of Subject to Subject Raising, which seems to be typologically rare as it involves what is called A-movement over an experiencer that occupies a role structurally lower compared to the subject. Therefore, based on the prediction that its acquisition is to be problematic compared to the SOR raising and the consideration of Turkish only allowing SOR (Callies, 2008), we hypothesize that Turkish learners of English have wrong interpretations and theta role assignment as illustrated in (20b).

(20)   a. [Jane$_i$ seems to Jack$_j$ [t$_i$ to be nervous]]

     b. *[Jane$_j$ seems to Jack$_i$ [t$_i$ to be nervous]]

In (20a), the subject NP is said to be semantically related to the predicate *be nervous* in the embedded clause. However, syntactically, it is the subject of the matrix clause, having moved from the subject position of the

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[4] For further discussion about these two tests, please look at Johansson (2015).

embedded clause as it is an instance of so-called A-movement. However, in (20b), we seem to have the subject of the embedded clause, which moves to the object position of the main clause, leaving the TRACE behind, which is coindexed with the object NP. On the other hand, this interpretation is wrong based on the native speakers' judgements. Besides, it should be noted that the verb *seem* does not assign a theta role to the subject of the sentence.

We also hypothesize that our study is in line with Markedness Differential Hypothesis by Eckman (1977). To explain what it is, Markedness Differential Hypothesis predicts that structures in the target language which are different from structures in the native language and that are more marked than those structures are difficult to acquire. Choe (2015) conducts a study on raising over an experiencer in English L2 acquisition that supports this hypothesis. Choe suggests that English raising over an experiencer would be problematic for L2 learners of English whose native language is Korean, considering the fact that the structure is not allowed in Korean. In conclusion, Choe's findings confirm this suggestion, and the study is in line with Markedness Differential Hypothesis by Eckman (1977).

The participants are expected to interpret SOR structures without a problem. However, when it comes to SSR structures, the participants are expected to have problems interpreting the sentences. We also hypothesize that as the increase in the proficiency level means the increase in the exposure to the language, we assume that advanced learners of English are better at interpreting the subject DP/NP of the matrix clause co-referential with the predicate of the embedded clause.

8 Methods

In order to test our hypothesis of Turkish learners of English having wrong interpretation and theta role assignment, we conducted an offline experiment on three groups of L2 English learners that have different levels of proficiency in English. The data is collected from 56 (28 each for levels A2 and B2) students (ages 18-22) of the Preparatory School of English (levels A2-B2) and 28 second year students (ages 20-30) of the department of Translation and Interpreting in English (levels C1-C2) at Istanbul Aydin University. The levels of the students are determined based on the *Cambridge English Placement Test*. The participants are given a questionnaire consisting of 50 items including 30 fillers and 20 experimental items including SSR and SOR constructions. The participants are asked to give an answer to each item, illustrated in (21).

(21)		
Subject Raising	Merlin seems to Arthur to sing well. / Who sings well?
Object Raising	Tyler finds Dylan to be better at math. / Who is better at math?
Control	Rachel tells Phoebe that she is tall. / Who is tall?

8.1 *Procedure:* To test our hypothesis, we conduct an offline experiment. Each group of L2 English learners are first given a consent form to be read and signed, and then a questionnaire having 20 experimental items, consisting of 10 SSR and 10 SOR constructions, as well as 30 filler items consisting of control and the other type of constructions[5]. All participants have learned English through formal instruction. For 50 items in total, the task is a self-paced reading task to be completed in 20 minutes at most. The experiment is administrated in the form of a paper and pencil task, in a quiet classroom environment. Participants are naive in terms of the aim of the study. After the data collection sessions, the results are gathered in an excel table to be statistically analyzed on SPSS.

9 Results

Firstly, we want to investigate the acquisition of the raising constructions by Turkish native speakers learning English as L2. More specifically, in this study, we focus on the acquisition of SSR constructions. As they are not allowed in Turkish, we hypothesize that their acquisition will be problematic. To test this, we conduct an offline experiment, and our results show the following:

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[5] We used predicates such as *think* in a sentence such as "Olivia thinks that Mary is pretty".

% Correct
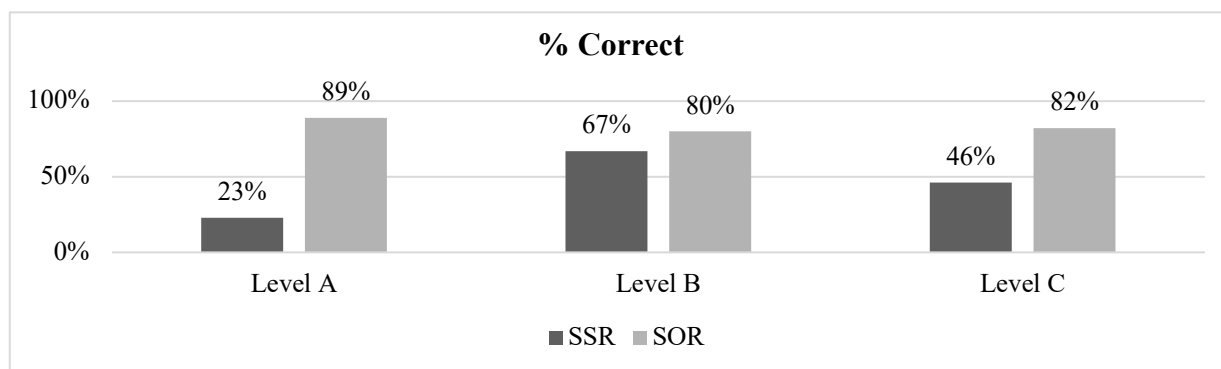
Comparison between SSR and SOR in 3 levels of L2 English speakers

Comparison between SSR and SOR in Level A: The value of z is -10.4371. The value of p is <.00001. The result is significant at p <.05 and also at p <.01. Comparison between SSR and SOR in Level B: The value of z is -3.5535. The value of p is .00038. The result is significant at p <.05. Comparison between SSR and SOR in Level C: p is < .00001. The result is significant at p < .05.

10 Discussion

In our study, we try to explore whether L2 English speakers whose native language is Turkish can comprehend constructions that involve raising over an experiencer. Due to these constructions being cross-linguistically rare (Torrego, 1996), it is expected that the comprehension of them will be difficult for L2 speakers of English. In light of the results we get from our experiment conducted on three different groups who have different proficiency levels in English, it is shown that every group is almost equally successful when determining the correct answers for the 10 SOR items in our questionnaire, as we have previously predicted in the beginning of our study, which shows that Turkish native speakers of L2 English are able to interpret and assign the correct theta roles for the given SOR structures. This shows us that there might be an effect of the native language (transfer phenomenon), meaning their success is likely due to their native language, Turkish, also allowing SOR structures to occur. Besides, it should be noted that SOR seems to be more common in languages, which means that they are not really rare, both typologically and syntactically following the Theta Roles Hierarchy, to which SOR poses no challenge. However, when we analyze the percentages of the correct answers given for the 10 SSR items within each of the experimental groups, it is shown that the percentages among them are not as close as they were for the SOR items, meaning none of the groups were as successful at interpreting the SSR sentences as they were in the SOR items. This is also something we have predicted in the beginning of our study and we can entertain two possible reasons: the reason is that the participants' native language Turkish not allowing SSR constructions to occur, and connected to this is the Markedness Differential Hypothesis (Eckman, 1977, 2004), which predicts that structures in the target language different from structures in the native language and that are more marked than those structures are difficult to acquire. When the success for the SOR and SSR items are compared, we see our hypothesis of the study being in line with the Markedness Differential Hypothesis (Eckman, 1977, 2004) as SSR constructions are marked. Again, for our SSR results, according to our hypothesis of advanced learners of English being better at interpreting the subject DP/NP of the matrix clause co-referential with the predicate of the embedded clause as a result of the increase in the proficiency level meaning the increase in the exposure to the language, the success of the groups should have been as Level C > Level B > Level A, however, we see that it is Level B > Level C > Level A instead, which means that our hypothesis is wrong. The reason why Level C participants performed more poorly than Level B participants for the SSR items can be because of them seeing the sentences as ungrammatical or just simply not being able to interpret them, nevertheless, it is a matter that can be investigated further. With the data we collected, it is not plausible to consider or entertain any possible reasons why this is the case. Comparing the results for both SOR and SSR structures of each proficiency level within itself, it can be said that Level A and Level B performed as expected, only Level C participants were expected to have the highest success percentage for the SSR constructions. Therefore, the next question that should be answered is what can be the reason(s) of SSR being really challenging for L2 speakers of English. In order to answer this question, we draw our attention to the acquisition of SSR in L1. We see that SSR is not common in child-directed speech, either as reported by Hirsch (2011), which shows that the acquisition of SSR is really delayed in the course of L1 development. These aforementioned constructions are really delayed especially when they include an experiencer argument, which is also the case in our study. Another similar construction that involves movement is passives, especially verbal passives. Their acquisition is also late (Wexler, 2004; Hirsch, 2011; Karakaş, 2019). Hirsch (2011) finds similar patterns in terms of the delay of the acquisition in both structures, claiming that there exist similar developmental curves, thereby (late) SSR and verbal passive development being linked. Another

consideration could be to compare raised and unraised constructions with the same predicates that especially allow Subject-to-Subject Raising to see if there would be a difference just as L1 English since L1 acquirers of English have no problems comprehending unraised versions (Hirsch, 2011). Finally, it is worth considering the fact that the experimental items we have for SSR include movement over an experiencer, meaning that the experiencer argument serves as a syntactic intervener for SSR. Why this poses a challenge for the aforementioned constructions is that as captured by Minimal Link Condition (Chomsky, 1995) and Relativized Minimality (Rizzi, 2001), any instance of syntactic movement is to obey a strict locality constraint, where the phrase that moves should be the one that is the closest goal to a c-commanding probe. Therefore, if the experiencer c-commands the embedded clause in the syntactic structure, this situation makes the experiencer to be the best candidate for the movement instead of the subject of the embedded clause, which is actually the one that moves. If it cannot move, then it should block the movement, which makes English raising constructions more interesting and worth more investigation. For further research, it can be suggested that one should look more into the cases where the intervening element is not an experiencer so as to see if the experiencer argument is the source of the difficulty and one should compare the acquisition of verbal passives and SSR in order to see the parallelism between these two, taking into consideration the effect of frequency reported for passives (Kline & Demuth, 2010), syntactic complexity (Wexler, 2004; Hirsch, 2011) as well as semantico-pragmatic considerations (Karakaş, 2019).

11 Conclusion

In this study, we investigated whether Turkish native speakers learning English as second language have difficulty acquiring raising constructions. Also, since Turkish has SOR but not SSR, we wanted to see whether there is an effect of native language (transfer phenomenon). We assumed that advanced learners of English are better at interpreting the subject DP/NP of the matrix clause, co-referential with the predicate of the embedded clause since the increase in the proficiency level means the increase in the exposure to the language. There are some limitations of this study, one of which is the data collection method. We collected our data offline. We could have collected our data online, which would enable us to reach more participants, therefore we could have gotten more varied results. Finally, considering our results, we can say that being more marked, SSR raising is quite difficult for Turkish native speakers of L2 English and as we hypothesized, this study is, in fact, in line with the Markedness Differential Hypothesis (Eckman, 1977, 2004).

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