



ACCUSATIVE CASE AS BOTH “CAUSE” AND “SOLUTION” FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING PLATEAU IN TFL*

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ABSTRACT

This study explains why accusative case has been chosen and how it could be used as a strategy to overcome language-learning plateau (Yin, n.d.; Richards, 2008) where the learners of Turkish as a foreign language (TFL) hit at B1-threshold level mostly. Here, the students who learn TFL through English have problems in the learning process, because they tend to misuse accusative case in terms of the accordance with the verbs while constructing sentences. Thus, in order to give the students systematic orientation about the usage of Turkish accusative case, it is necessary to mediate the connection with the other components of a sentence through contextuality, expression of definiteness and transitivity. Based on this background, action research (Patton, 2002; Johnson, 2002; Creswell, 2012; Mertler, 2012) was conducted to solve the specific problem of correct using accusative case within TFL courses. Semi-structured interviews, quiz, course notes were collected as data instruments from both students and instructor in two semesters. Data were analyzed inductively and common difficulties and mistakes were determined to develop a kind of solution to cope with language-learning plateau. Consequently, the students' attention was drawn to the internalization of the concepts within real life situations, and then a verb list was prepared to help them to figure out the semantic and pragmatic functionality of the accusative cases with the usages of the verbs. Moreover, the strategy of verbalizing (Galperin, 1992 as cited in Negueruela & Lantolf, 2006; Williams et al. 2013) the accusative cases with the usages of verbs was given as a solution for the language-learning plateau.

STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

Introduction

The notion that integrating grammar into language skills rather than a product as an instructional process is fundamental to foreign language instruction is very familiar to all of us. So, how to teach

* Bu makale Crosscheck sistemi tarafından taranmış ve bu sistem sonuçlarına göre orijinal bir makale olduğu tespit edilmiştir.

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grammar and to what extent to teach are still kept in agenda of discussions over teaching foreign language. Learning a foreign language, which belongs to a totally different language family, is desperately in demand of analysis of linguistic structure, and perceiving the mentality of target language.

Since Modern Turkish is an agglutinative language, which is composed of consecutive suffixes with regard to vocal/consonant alternations. E.g. *evimizdekiler* = *ev-imiz-de-ki-ler* (the ones who are at our home). It is required to do instruction in the logic of suffix alignment in a way of deriving or forming words, and the classification of sentence structures according to structure, predicate, meaning and word order.

Herein, our objective is to make students understand how suffixes function and their relations to other words in a sentence. In order to make a sentence not only grammatically, but also meaningfully correct, suffixes should be appropriately attached to words. It is crucially important to know exact suffix combinations for referring the right concepts and entities at the right place in the right time (Sağır, 2002, p. 44).

Furthermore, teaching the components of a sentence in terms of functionality and appropriate utterances would be more meaningful for adult learners, and this would lead them to raise their awareness in grammar structures. Yet adult learners like to make comparisons and connections between languages. Subsequently, they are eager to use their productive skills such as in writing assignments full of complex sentences.

For instance, at first sight, the object clause difference between these two sentences could be easily guessed via suffixes in Turkish: 1. She promised her husband to cook: “*Kocasına yemek yapmaya söz verdi*”. 2. She convinced her husband to cook: “*Kocasını yemek yapmaya ikna etti*”. But which argument structure of the verb that determines the type of suffix can be confusing for foreign language learners.

Purpose

This study explains why accusative case has been chosen and how it could be used as a strategy to overcome language-learning plateau (Yin, n.d.; Richards, 2008) where the learners of Turkish as a foreign language (TFL) hit at B1-threshold level mostly. Here, the students who learn TFL through English have problems in the learning process, because they tend to misuse accusative case in terms of the accordance with the verbs while constructing sentences.

We observed the learners who are in the transition phase of moving to B2 level cannot use accusative cases precisely in a sentence even though they know the rules of thumb of accusative case suffixes. This prevents them to speak and write accurately because they do not comprehend how accusative cases function within the context of verbs. So, this factor causes them to lose their motivation which is required for developing linguistic competence.

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Thus, we claim that “learning accusative cases within the context of the verbs” would provide a strategy to overcome the language-learning plateau at B1 level for TFL. In other words, we studied how suffixation of accusative cases could be accorded with some certain verbs and this could be taught more effectively in order to overcome language-learning plateau. Moreover, in order to give more clear systematic orientations about the usage of Turkish accusative case, we classified the general functions and implementations of Turkish accusative cases, which are presented in some main reference books on TFL as “contextuality, expression of definiteness and transitivity.”

Methodology

Participants

The participants were 15 foreign students aged 16 to 32 attending a state university TÖMER Turkish course. The Turkish course lasted for two terms of 2013-2014 academic year and they had 4-houred classes for 5 days in a week. With the second term, prominently, they had overall review of A2 level and then moved to B1 level. Throughout these two terms, the participants studied the course-books *Gazi Tömer Yabancılar için Türkçe; A1 Temel Düzey and A2 Temel Düzey* (Gazi TÖMER, 2013).

Data collection

Four different instruments were selected to be used. The first data collection instrument was a written semi-structured interview and the participants were asked four open-ended questions in order to determine participants’ perceptions about making sentences in Turkish. Secondly, a quiz which was taken from the course book *Yabancı Dilim Türkçe 1* (Yılmaz & Sözer, 2007) was employed in order to see participants’ basic knowledge about adding accusative case suffixes to nouns. Additionally, another semi-structured interview was conducted with the Turkish teacher of the group in order to seek her opinions with regard to teaching Turkish to foreigners. Lastly, at the beginning of the second semester, the notebooks on which the students had been taking notes during Turkish classes since the first semester were collected. And, the notebooks were examined to determine what kind of mistakes the students make on the accusative case.

Theoretical framework

Action research (Patton, 2002) was conducted to solve the specific problem of correct using accusative case within TFL course. Within purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally selected this group of students who are “information rich” (p.230) and sited to understand the impact of using accusative case on language-learning plateau. The data were inductively analyzed to discover recurring items which lead to misusing accusative cases. All phases of data collection were designed to provide the most accurate understanding possible of the research (Johnson, 2002, pp.72-74). Consequently, language-learning plateau effect at B1 level was expanded on accusative case with regard to its syntactic and contextual functionality. To validate findings, triangulation of data was strengthened through collecting different types of data and checking data independently by two researchers at different times (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2002).

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Data analysis

Based on the results of the interviews, they try to make sentences through modelling the examples given in the classroom and the internet via Google translation. And while making compound sentences, they encounter the difficulty of being lack of coherence and fluency, and putting the components in a correct order. Moreover, they are not able to choose the correct case ending. With their anxiety for daily communication, they prefer to use short and simple sentences rather than long and complex sentences in order to avoid accuracy and fluency problems. In addition this, they develop a kind of solution to cope with the grammar rules that first, they think about the meaning in English and then look for the correct equivalent in Turkish, instead of wasting too much time.

As the result of the quiz and notebook writings, the mistakes made by the participants are gathered mainly on the nonuse of accusative case marker and secondly, the use of accusative case markers in the wrong form and getting confused with other case suffixes and finally overuse of accusative case marker

Findings

Overall, when the reasons of the mistakes are examined, there appear three common points:

- a) Being unable to differentiate among possessive suffix and accusative case marker.
- b) Being unable to detect the object of the sentence.
- c) Being unable to understand the function of Turkish accusative marker.

Even if they reach the B1 level, they still cannot use accusative case suffixes automatically and unconsciously in their oral communication even if they succeed in the written tasks about accusative case suffixes. And, this gets them demotivated to go on learning and triggers the language-learning plateau. Apparently, the typological difference between the target language “Turkish” and the language that is the medium of instruction “English” is an important factor that cause the students have difficulty in learning Turkish. Like the example “I love you – I hate you”, some pattern may not have the exact correspondence in English and that causes them to get confused.

Results & Discussion

The present study draws attention to the strategy of verbalizing (Galperin, 1992 as cited in Negueruela & Lantolf, 2006) the accusative cases with the usages of the verbs as a solution for the language learning plateau in TFL learning because, verbalization would provide the connection between form and meaning of the grammatical items. So, drawing attention to the accordance of verbs, and how they are deployed through accusative suffixes in real life situations, would give internalization of grammatical structure rather than memorizing the rules and this would lead to conscious conceptual mediation, or in other words, conscious focus on semantics and pragmatics. Briefly, giving systematic and coherent explanations and relevant concepts

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between verb and accusative suffix within the context of communication would help internalization of grammatical meanings such as direct object, case endings and possessive suffix (Williams et al. 2013).

Keywords: Language-learning plateau, accusative case, Turkish as a foreign language, verbalization.

YABANCI DİL OLARAK TÜRKÇE ÖĞRENİMİNDE PLATO ETKİSİNİN SEBEBİ VE ÇÖZÜMÜ: BELİRTME HALİ

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Türkçeyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen kişilerin çoğunlukla B1- Eşik Düzey seviyesinde yakalandıkları dil öğrenme platosunu (Yin, n.d.; Richards, 2008) aşmada, belirtme halinin neden seçildiği ve nasıl bir strateji olarak kullanılabileceğini açıklamaktadır. Burada Türkçeyi İngilizce üzerinden öğrenen yabancı öğrenciler, cümle kurarken belirtme halini yanlış kullanmaya eğilimli oldukları için öğrenme sürecinde sorunlar yaşamaktadırlar. Bu yüzden, Türkçedeki belirtme halinin kullanımı ile ilgili sistemli bir yönlendirme vermek için, bağlamsallaştırma, belirlilik halinin ifadesi ve geçişlilik gibi hususlarla cümlelerin diğer öğeleri arasında bir bağ kurmak önemlidir. Buradan yola çıkarak yabancı dil olarak Türkçe derslerinde özellikle belirtme halinin doğru kullanımı sorununu çözmek için eylem araştırması (Patton, 2002; Johnson, 2002; Creswell, 2012; Mertler, 2012) uygulanmıştır. Öğrencilerden ve eğitmenlerden yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler, küçük sınav, ders notları veri araçları olarak iki dönem boyunca toplanmıştır. Veri, tümevarımsal bir şekilde incelenmiş ve ortak zorluklar ve hatalar, dil öğrenme platosuyla başa çıkacak bir çözüm olarak geliştirilmek üzere belirlenmiştir. Sonuç olarak, öğrencilerin dikkati gerçek hayattaki kavramların içselleştirilmesine çekilmiş ve daha sonra öğrencilere yardım amaçlı, fiillerin kullanımındaki belirtme hallerinin anlambilimsel ve edimbilimsel işlevselliğini belirlemek için bir fiil listesi hazırlanmıştır. Ayrıca, fiillerin kullanımı ile belirtme hallerinin sözelleştirilmesi (Galperin, 1992 aktaran Negueruela & Lantolf, 2006; Williams et al. 2013) stratejisi, dil öğrenme platosu için bir çözüm olarak verilmiştir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Dil öğrenme platosu, belirtme hali, yabancı dil olarak Türkçe, sözelleştirme.

1. Introduction

In recent years, as a result of the rising requirement for a world-wide standardized international frame in foreign language teaching, most European countries have adapted their foreign language education policies in accordance with Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) that aims to “provide a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe” (Council for Cultural Commission, 2001, p. 1).

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Thus, many institutions in Turkey that instruct Turkish as a foreign language (hereafter TFL) have also started to benefit from CEFR in their teaching process. As an outcome of this adaptation process, the instruction of TFL, like many other languages over Europe, was also organized into six common reference levels: A1(Breakthrough), A2(Waystage), B1(Threshold), B2(Vantage), C1(Effective Operational Proficiency), C2(Mastery) in Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council for Cultural Commission, 2001, p. 23). By means of these reference levels, what knowledge and language skills are supposed to be gained in order to become an efficient language user is indicated for each level (Erdem, Gün, Şengül, & Şimşek, 2015).

Considering this new organization of TFL teaching, out of six levels, the present study mainly focuses on B1-Threshold level because B1 level is a crucial stage not only in TFL learning but also in the learning process of all other languages by functioning like a bridge that links the gap between simple and complex language usage (Cambridge University, 2014). As the result of this critical transition phase, most learners tend to hit the language-learning plateau (Richards, 2008) at B1 – Threshold level and stop learning.

This study will explain why accusative cases have been chosen and how they could be used as a strategy to overcome language-learning plateau. Since Turkish is an agglutinative language, to express each unit of meaning (tenses, plurality - singularity, negative – affirmative etc.) an affix is added to the stem under certain phonological rules. Thus, affixes have a crucial role in Turkish language as Jean Deny also points out with his famous statement; “To learn the affixes means to learn Turkish” (Deny, 1934 as cited in Akdoğan, 1993, p.6). Therefore, Turkish as an agglutinative language contains various kinds of affixes due to its typological structure. And, the accusative case suffixes (as a main focus of this study) belong to the group of “nominal case endings”. Basically, nominal case endings are the suffixes that are conjugated with the nouns in a sentence in order to show their functionality and relation to each component of the sentence (Kononov, 1956 as cited in Özkan, 1992; Aksan, 1980 as cited in Akdoğan, 1993). Turkish has six nominal cases; “nominative case, accusative case, dative case, locative case, ablative case, genitive case.” These all have certain markers (except from the nominative case) and make the noun that they are attached to indicate a different meaning in the sentence.

Thus, in our case, the students who learn TFL through English have problems in the learning process because of the consecutive suffix alignment of Turkish that does not exist in English. Up to this point, many studies that have been conducted on suffixation problems and many researchers (Özkan, 1992; Akdoğan, 1993; Güven, 2007; Melanlıoğlu, 2012) support this case by emphasizing that nominal cases are the subject that TFL learners struggle with the most while learning. Moreover, these studies also state that out of all nominal cases, the accusative cases indicate the highest rate of mistakes while constructing sentences and the learners admit that accusative cases are the most complicated case endings in terms of the accordance with the verbs. This triggers one of the most common behaviors observed in foreign language learners who hit the language-learning plateau (Richards, 2008; Yi, n.d.).

In this study, we examine “accusative case suffixes” in terms of language-learning plateau due to considering the typological structure of Turkish language. Since the accusative case suffixes have a crucial effect on language-learning plateau even though there exist other syntactical factors.

To conclude, the study aims to investigate these two questions;

1. Does learning the accusative case suffixes help us to overcome the language-learning plateau in B1-Threshold level of TFL?

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2. What type of strategies can we use to teach the accusative case suffixes more efficiently at this level?

2. Language - Learning Plateau at B1-Threshold level

The phenomenon of language-learning plateau is a common problem that most foreign language learners experience in their learning process. In other words, it can be defined as a temporary cessation in learning development of L2 learners who are at the transition phase of going to a more advanced level after reaching a certain degree (Al-Shormani, 2013). Although the language-learning plateau is a challenge faced by learners of every language, the "certain degree" that L2 learners get stuck while moving to a higher language degree differs from one language to another. To illustrate, C1 level is the most crucial stage for the learners of English as a second language (ESL) and they mostly hit the language-learning plateau while passing from intermediate to advanced level, whereas TFL learners get stuck at the transition phase of moving from A2 to B1 level because of the typological structure of Turkish language. Therefore, B1 level is a critical transition process for TFL learners and plays an important role for learners' further progress to the upper intermediate (B2) and advanced (C1) level.

To be more precise, at the very beginning, every input in target language is new and challenging for learners. Therefore, they are highly motivated to learn and use these new inputs by trying to perform in the target language. Throughout this period, the learners tend to constantly learn new linguistic items because, high motivation and curiosity save them from blocking the production. So, the learners' progresses are clear and prominent till a certain degree that they feel themselves satisfied with their cumulative knowledge (Yi, n.d.).

Nevertheless, this progress that goes fast and without a noticeable hitch throughout the first levels, and it starts to decelerate when the learners reach the transition phase of B1 level of TFL learning. From there on, moving forward from A2-Waystage level to B1-Threshold level and then integrating to B2-Vantage level becomes quite challenging for the learners.

In this study, we observed the learners who are in the transition phase of moving to B2 level cannot use accusative cases precisely in a sentence even though they know the rules of thumb of accusative case suffixes. This prevents them to speak and write accurately because they do not comprehend how accusative cases function within the context of verbs. So, this factor causes them to lose their motivation which is required for developing linguistic competence.

However, Richards (2008) and Yi (n.d.) also state that the language -learning plateau in foreign language learning development is not permanent and can be overcome under certain pedagogical procedures, learning strategies and techniques.

Similarly, in our study, we claim that "learning accusative cases within the context of the verbs" would provide a strategy to overcome the language-learning plateau at B1 level for TFL. In other words, we studied how suffixation of accusative cases could be accorded with some certain verbs and this could be taught more effectively in order to overcome language-learning plateau. The list of these verbs was prepared with the examples given in the books of *Gazi TÖMER* (2013) and *Case Suffixes in Turkish: Verbs Examples and Exercises with Answers* (2012) by Hakan Yılmaz. We used Hakan Yılmaz's book as a supplementary material to give backup for the usages of verbs with case suffixes. It is important to raise awareness on the grammatical and contextual functioning of these verbs with accusative case in order to construct meaningful sentences. Therefore, the verbs which have been frequently discussed within the scope of plateau effect in the classroom will be provided in the Appendix C.

So, in the next section, the accusative case suffix and its function in a sentence will be analyzed to have a better understanding before giving recommendations about how we could teach accusative cases more efficiently in order to avoid plateau effect which could appear at B1-Threshold level.

3. How accusative cases function in a sentence

According to the definitions of some linguists, “The accusative case is the case in which the noun is affected by the verb in a transitive sentence. The noun with the accusative case is the object of the sentence due to the fact that it is affected by the action indicated by the verb and made by the subject of the sentence” (Korkmaz, 2009, p. 277). So, the accusative case plays a crucial role by connecting the noun to the verb directly and consequently turning the noun into the definite object of the sentence. The accusative case marker is indicated by adding the vowel “-I” to a noun, but according to the vowel harmony, there are also these variations; “-ı, -i, -u, -ü.” Additionally, if the accusative case markers are attached to vowel-ending words, they are used with the buffer “-y” like “-yı, -yi, -yu, -yü” (Lewis, 2000; Ketrez, 2012).

(1) Ali vazo kırdı. “Ali broke a vase.”

(2) Ali vazoyu kırdı. “Ali broke the vase.”

(In the second sentence, the noun “vase” is specific and known).

As seen in the sample sentences above, the basic function of the accusative case in a Turkish sentence is providing the sentence with a semantic feature called “specificity”. Specificity is a kind of definiteness that can be indicated by deducing the meaning from the context or grammatical marking on a noun or noun phrase (NP) and it shows that the noun or the noun phrase has a particular referent (Hedberg et al., 2009; Aygen, 2007; von Heusinger & Kornfilt, 2005; von Heusinger, 2002; Nilsson, 1978-1979). As Enç (1991) also mentions that, in contrast to other languages, in Turkish, “The ambiguity is resolved through case marking: NPs with overt case morphology are specific, NPs without case morphology are nonspecific.” (p. 4). For example, as in the sentence (1), the object (vase) of the sentence has no a particular referent. However, in the sentence (2), this ambiguity is cleared up by the attachment of accusative case suffix -(y)u and the vase that Ali broke has a certain referent.

In addition to examining the semantic functions of the accusative case, it is also necessary to examine syntactic functions, because the meaning of a sentence in Turkish is affected by the word order. Therefore, the accusative case suffix that is attached to the object of the sentence is related to both semantics and syntax. For instance, in Turkish sentence structure, “when the object is not adjacent to the verb, the object doesn’t necessarily have definite meaning” (Ketrez, 2012, p. 36). And, if the object does not have a definite meaning, the accusative case is not used in the sentence. Here, the meaning of the object is affected by both structure and word order:

(3) Ben radyo dinliyorum. (Subject +Object +Verb) “I am listening to radio.”

(4) Radyoyu ben dinliyorum. (Object +Subject +Verb) “I am listening to the radio.”

It is obvious that the emphasis put on these two sentences is different. In the sentence (3), the focus is on the object (radio); “I am listening to radio, not something else.” On the other hand, in the sentence (4) the particular focus is on the subject (I /ben) that listens to the radio; “I, not someone else, am listening to the radio.”

Gürel (2000) also supports this idea in her article by stating that “Non-specific determiner phrases must be adjacent to the verb. However, there is no such adjacency requirement for specific objects” (Gürel, 2000, p. 381). For instance,

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(5) Ayşe kitap okudu.

(5a) *Kitap Ayşe okudu.¹

"Ayşe-a book -read-past-3rd person singular" "A book - Ayşe - read-past-3rd person singular"

(6) Ayşe kitabı okudu.

(6a) Kitabı Ayşe okudu.

"Ayşe- the book - read-past-3rd person singular"

"The book -Ayşe -read-past-3rd person singular"

In the sentence (5), the object (kitap) is non-specific. So, there appears a meaningless sentence when we change the verb-adjacent position of the object (kitap). The sentence (5a) "Kitap Ayşe okudu" is not a meaningful sentence in Turkish. On the contrary, in the sentence (6), the object (kitabı) is specific. Therefore, the sentence (6a) "Kitabı Ayşe okudu." still has a meaning even though the object (kitabı) is not adjacent to the verb in the sentence (6a).

However, the meaning of the sentence (6a) differs from the sentence (6) even though it is still meaningful after the scrambling of the word order of the sentence. This situation is indicative of the rule "The position immediately preceding the verb is the place where you have the focused information" (Ketrez, 2012, p. 233). The focus in the sentence (6) is on the word "kitap" that is adjacent to the verb but, in the sentence (6a) the focus is on the word "Ayşe". That is, the sentence means that the person who read the book is Ayşe, not somebody else.

Considering the syntactic structure of Turkish, the phenomenon of scrambled word order is very common in Turkish sentences. "Turkish is a head-final language with free-word order. The unmarked word order is Subject(S)+Object(O)+Verb(V). Scrambling is allowed both pre-verbally and post-verbally" (Gürel, 2000, p. 381). In other words, the syntactic order would be varied in Turkish. "Six different word orders of the subject, object and verb are possible like SVO, SOV, VSO, VOS, OSV, and OVS" even if the first sentence structure is the most neutral one Subject(S)+Verb(V) + Object (O) (Akdoğan, 1993, p. 124). These varieties in the word order of Turkish cannot be seen in English because "English is a head-initial, SVO language with strict word order" (Gürel, 2000, p. 381).

Consequently, this difference in the positions of the units in a Turkish sentence causes great confusion for the students learning Turkish through English which has a relatively fixed syntactical order. This confusion appears especially while the foreign students are learning the usage of the accusative case marker because it is strictly related to the direct object and transitivity of the verb.

4. Mediating the connection with the other components of a sentence

The Turkish accusative case has no real equivalence in English because the definite article "the" is the main indicator of the objectivity in English. So, the students that learn Turkish as a foreign language through English medium classes have some problems to understand the concept of Turkish accusative case.

Therefore, it is important to give students systematic orientations about the usage of Turkish accusative case. To make it more clear, we classified the general functions and implementations of Turkish accusative cases, which are presented in some main reference books on TFL as "contextuality, expression of definiteness and transitivity."

¹ Incorrect expressions were written with asterisk.

4.1. Contextuality – Relation to the other nouns

Firstly, it is seen that accusative cases are used with some specific contexts that Öztopçu (2006, pp. 186-188) stated;

- After proper nouns:

Ahmet'i çok iyi tanıyorum. “I know *Ahmet* very well.”

- After pronouns:

Seni çok özleyorum. “I miss *you* very much.”

- After nouns with possessive suffixes:

Cep telefonumu gördün mü? “Have you seen *my cell phone*?”

- After nouns modified by demonstratives:

Bu kitabı okuyor musun? “Are you reading *this book*?”

- After nouns modified by quantifiers such as “her (every), bütün (all) and bazı (some)”:

Bütün gazeteleri okudular. “They have read *all the newspapers*.”

4.2. The Expression of Definiteness

Göksel and Kerslake (2005, pp. 175, 221, 383-384) state the accusative case in terms of whether the object of the sentence is definite or not.

- The first and main usage of the accusative cases is that the accusative case occurs on the direct object in a sentence. It usually makes the object definite, that is, it functions as “the” in English. It is dropped when the object is indefinite.

Ece şarkı söylüyor. “Ece is singing *a song*.”

Ece şarkıyı söylüyor. “Ece is singing *the song*.”

Accusative case marker is also necessary where a non-definite direct object precedes the verb but does not occupy the immediately pre-verbal position.

Bu kitapları tavan arasına koyabiliriz. “We can put these books in the attic.”

Torbaları buraya bırakabilirsiniz. “You can leave *the bags* here.”

- If the direct object is an indefinite or plural generic.

Ayşe hastaneleri sevmez. “Ayşe doesn’t like *hospitals*.”

Aslı'nın öğrencilerine karşı davranışı (sevgi dolu) bir anneyi hatırlatır. “Aslı’s attitude towards her students reminds *a loving mother*.”

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▪ A bare generic direct object is particularly likely to be accusative – marked where (a) it denotes animate beings, and (b) the subject of the sentence is itself a bare generic.

- a) Kurt *kuzuyu* yer. “The/A wolf eats *the/a* lamb.”
 b) Öğretmen *öğrenciyi* anlar. “The/A teacher understands *the/a* student.”

▪ If the direct object refers to a member or members of a previously mentioned or implied group.

Buzdolabının *dışındakiler* bozuldu. “The food outside of the fridge spoiled.”
İki soruyu çözemedim. “I couldn’t solve *two (of the)* questions.”

▪ For time locations less than thirty minutes after the hour, the word “geçe” follows the number of minutes, which in turn follows the accusative – marked form of the hour numeral.

Saat altıyı çeyrek *geçe* eve geldim. “I came home at quarter *past* six.”

▪ The accusative –marked form – mAyI, this form occurs where the noun clause is the direct object of any transitive verbs.

Ahmet *yüzmeyi* öğrendi mi? “Did Ahmet learn how *to swim*?”

▪ In informal usage with a small number of main verbs, notably bil – “to know (how)”, öğren- “to learn” and sev – “to like”, the noun clause is sometimes marked with – mAsInI rather than –mAyI, with no change in meaning.

Ahmet *yüzmesini* öğrendi mi? “Did Ahmet learn how *to swim*?”

▪ When a transitive work is causativized, the subject of the transitive verb gets the dative case. The object retains its accusative case.

Ali *Ahmet*’i okuldan aldı. “Ali picked *Ahmet* up from the school.”

Orhan *Ali*’ye Ahmet’i okuldan aldırdı. “Orhan made *Ali* pick Ahmet up from the school.”

▪ When the object is modified by a relative clause or a modifier that has –ki.

Kapıda duran *çocuğu* tanıyor musun? “Do you know *the boy who* is standing at the door?”

Kapıdaki *çocuğu* tanıyor musun? “Do you know *the boy who* is at the door?”

▪ Another example of the general usage of accusative case with a relative clause sentence, Ketrez (2012, p. 230) follows as;

The accusative marker –ı on the head noun *arkadaş* is transferred to the relative clause marker- possessive unit.

Kampüste rastladığım *arkadaşı* tanımadım. “I didn’t recognized *the friend* whom I run across in the campus.”

Kampüste *rastladığımı* tanımadım. “I didn’t recognized *the friend*

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whom I run across in the campus.”

- Moreover, Lewis (2000, p. 248) mentions below another usage of the accusative case with “bir” in terms of the expression of definiteness as well.

Although the noun which is attached to accusative case suffix expresses the definiteness, “bir” may give the meaning of “a” not the numerical “one” depending on the context.

Numeral “one”: “Her gün *bir gazete* okuyorum”.

The Definite Object: “Her gün *bir gazeteyi* okuyorum.”

Both may be translated as “Every day I read *a newspaper*”, but the second one, unlike the first, implies that “I always read *one particular newspaper* every day.”

4.3. Transitivity

In this part, Özsoy (2002, pp. 209-210) elaborates the function of the accusative case with the transitivity. She focuses on the passive structure of the verb that takes the accusative case.

- In the passive structure of the verbs that assign the accusative suffix -(y)I to their complements, the object of the active verb loses its accusative marker and becomes the subject of the passive sentence. The verb is marked with the appropriate form of the passive suffix – Il and the person/ number markers that agree with the subject. The subject of the passive verb is marked with the nominative case suffix.

Mühendis *bina planı-nı* çizdi.

“The engineer drew *the building plan*.”

Bina planı mühendis tarafından *çiz-il-di*.

“The building plan *was drawn* by the engineer.”

- In those cases in which the causative suffix is attached to intransitive verbs, the result is a transitive structure with the subject of the intransitive verb being marked with -(y)I accusative marker.

Apartman sakinleri gürültüden bıktı.

“*The residents* got tired of the noise.”

Gürültü apartman sakinlerin-*i* *bık-tır-dı*.

“The noise *made the residents tired* of the noise.”

After framing the functionality of accusative case and how it has been tackled by some referential sources, next section will show research design which was based on action research to seek answers for overcoming language-learning plateau.

5. Methodology

5.1. Participants

The participants were 15 foreign students aged 16 to 32 attending a state university TÖMER Turkish course. However, ten of them attended our study throughout two terms. The

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participants, came from various countries like Africa, Asia and Europe like Mauritania, Zambia, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Persia, Syria, Kosovo and Bosnia – Herzegovina, were taking Turkish classes before starting their departments the following year. The data collection process of our study was conducted during these Turkish classes at TÖMER. They all had high English proficiency levels and English was also the medium of instruction in the Turkish classes. However, none of them had taken Turkish classes before. The Turkish course lasted for two terms of 2013-2014 academic year and they had 4-houred classes for 5 days in a week. At the beginning of the first term, the participants were at the A1 level and then progressed to A2 towards the end of the term. With the second term, prominently, they had overall review of A2 level and then moved to B1 level. Throughout these two terms, the participants studied the course-books *Gazi Tömer Yabancılar için Türkçe; A1 Temel Düzey and A2 Temel Düzey* (Gazi TÖMER, 2013).

5.2. Data collection

In the data collection process of the present study, four different instruments were selected to be used. The first data collection instrument was a written semi-structured interview (Appendix A). The participants were asked four open-ended questions: 1. How do you study in order to make Turkish sentences? 2. What type of difficulties do you encounter while making Turkish sentences? (For instance, putting the components of a sentence in an order, putting case endings in appropriate places etc.) 3. What type of Turkish sentences do you prefer to use in your daily life? 3 How do you make sentences during classroom activities? By this means, it was aimed to determine participants’ perceptions about making sentences in Turkish.

Secondly, a quiz (Appendix B) which was taken from the course book *Yabancı Dilim Türkçe 1* (Yılmaz & Sözer, 2007) was employed in order to see participants’ basic knowledge about adding accusative case suffixes to nouns. The Quiz included two sections. The first section consisted of twenty fill-in-the gaps questions and the participants were asked to complete the gaps with the correct form of accusative case suffix (-ı, -i, -u, -ü or -yı, -yi, -yu, yü).

e.g. “Şu ceket..... almak istiyorum.”

Şu ceket(i) almak istiyorum. “I want to buy *that* jacket.”

In the second section of the quiz, the participants answered fifteen questions that were more complex than the first part. They were demanded, at first, to put the words into the correct order and make a meaningful sentence after that, add the correct accusative case marker to the correct word in the sentence. So, in the second section, participants’ knowledge about the semantic function of the accusative case was tested.

e.g. “o /odası / her gün / temizlemek”

O her gün odasını temizliyor. “S/he cleans *her/his* room every day.”

Additionally, another semi-structured interview was conducted with the Turkish teacher of the group in order to seek her opinions with regard to teaching Turkish to foreigners. The interview was implemented at the end of the two terms to be able to hear the teacher’s overall opinions about the students’ whole learning process from beginning till the end of the two-term course. The interviews with the teacher were audiotaped and held in Turkish. The responses were transcribed and translated into English adhering to their original meaning.

Lastly, at the beginning of the second semester, the notebooks on which the students had been taking notes during Turkish classes since the first semester were collected. And, the notebooks were examined to determine what kind of mistakes the students make on the accusative case.

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5.3. Theoretical framework

The main aim of the this research is to identify the boundaries of the usage of accusative case in which language-learning plateau is likely to reside, and to exhibit the prominent factors that might stop learning progress. Therefore, action research was conducted to solve the specific problem of correct using accusative case within TFL course. Action research enables change process in which students become “directly involved in order to gather the information and study it by themselves.” (Patton, 2002, p.221). Within purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally selected this group of students who are “information rich” (p.230) and sited to understand the impact of using accusative case on language-learning plateau. The data were inductively analyzed to discover recurring items which lead to misusing accusative cases. All phases of data collection were designed to provide the most accurate understanding possible of the research (Johnson, 2002, pp.72-74). Consequently, the important outcome from the action research is to plan an action to solve the problem and “recommend changes to practice” (Creswell, 2012, p.591). Since “the action plan is essentially a proposed strategy for implementing the results of the research” (Mertler, 2012, p.43), language-learning plateau effect at B1 level was expanded on accusative case with regard to its syntactic and contextual functionality. To validate findings, triangulation of data was strengthened through collecting different types of data and checking data independently by two researchers at different times (Creswell, 2012, Patton, 2002).

5.4. Data analysis

By implementing the interviews of both students and teacher, we firstly aimed to determine the common difficulty that the students have while constructing a sentence. Moreover, we detected the strategy and the techniques that the students use to overcome these difficulties.

As the result of the interviews, the common problems of the students are the word order of the sentence and the placement of suffixes. Most of the students complain about having difficulty on using the units of the sentence in the correct order. Also, they all especially emphasize that learning and using suffixes accurately is the most difficult part and they state that out of all suffixes, accusative cases are the most complicated one.

Based on the results of the interviews, they try to make sentences through modelling the examples given in the classroom and the internet via Google translation. And while making compound sentences, they encounter the difficulty of being lack of coherence and fluency, and putting the components in a correct order. Moreover, they are not able to choose the correct case ending. With their anxiety for daily communication, they prefer to use short and simple sentences rather than long and complex sentences in order to avoid accuracy and fluency problems. In addition this, they develop a kind of solution to cope with the grammar rules that first, they think about the meaning in English and then look for the correct equivalent in Turkish, instead of wasting too much time.

As the result of the quiz and notebook writings, the mistakes made by the participants are gathered mainly on the nonuse of accusative case marker and secondly, the use of accusative case markers in the wrong form and getting confused with other case suffixes and finally overuse of accusative case marker

Overall, when the reasons of the mistakes are examined, there appear three common points:

- d) Being unable to differentiate among possessive suffix and accusative case marker.
- e) Being unable to detect the object of the sentence.

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f) Being unable to understand the function of Turkish accusative marker.

a) Being unable to differentiate between possessive suffix and accusative case suffix.

For the first factor, it is clearly seen in students’ sample sentences below that the student adds only the possessive suffix and forgets to add the accusative case marker. That is a common situation for the foreign students because more than one suffixes’ coming together complicates the conjugation for them. For instance, in the first sentence, it is seen that the students adds only the accusative case marker “-ı” by skipping the possessive suffix “-ın” and makes the mistake “resimi” instead of “resmini.”

S.1 *Filiz *senin resimi* gördü.

Filiz *senin resmini* gördü. “Filiz saw *your photo*.”

Furthermore, some students may confuse the third person singular possessive marker “-ı” with the accusative case marker “-ı” because they both are marked with the same morpheme. As seen in the below sentence, the student attaches only the third person singular possessive suffix “-ı” to the root “oda” by thinking that is the accusative case marker “-ı” and makes the mistake of using missing accusative case marker.

S.7 *O her gün *odası* temizler.

O her gün *odasını* temizler. “S/he cleans *her/his room* every day.”

b) Being unable to detect the object of the sentence.

In this factor, the students do not understand the meaning of the sentence well due to the flexibility of word order in Turkish. As a result of this reason, they cannot detect the direct object of the sentence.

For example; in the sentence below, the sentence is given as “dökmek/ çay/ bebek/ yere” and asked to make a meaningful sentence by putting the words into the correct order and then, add the accusative case marker to the direct object. However, the students adds the accusative case marker to the word “bebek” instead of the direct object of the sentence “çay” due to the fact that they do not understand the meaning of the sentence.

e.g. “dökmek/ çay/ bebek/ yere”

S.2 **Bebeğin* yerine çay döktü.

Bebek yere *çayı* döktü. “Baby spilled *the tea* over the floor.”

c) Being unable to understand the function of Turkish accusative marker.

In this case, it is seen that the students do not comprehend the function of the accusative case and unable to place it correctly so, they do not use the accusative case marker when it is necessary. For instance, in the sentence below, the students only put the words into the correct order and do not add the accusative case marker.

e.g. “özlemek/ evim / ben / çok”

S.3 *Ben *evim* çok özledim.

Ben *evimi* çok özledim. “I missed *my home* so much.”

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In the interview that we had with Turkish teacher of the group at the end of the year, she also confirms that the accusative cases are the subject that the foreign language students have the most difficulty and the pattern on which they make mistakes most frequently. She states that the students get confused with choosing the correct case suffix. They have to think about the case thoroughly before forming the noun. They concentrate on each suffix one by one as if they solve a puzzle. Even if they reach the B1 level, they still cannot use accusative case suffixes automatically and unconsciously in their oral communication even if they succeed in the written tasks about accusative case suffixes. And, this gets them demotivated to go on learning and triggers the language-learning plateau. She explains the reason why the students have the most difficulty with the case endings, she says;

*“That is because; Turkish case ending does not have an exact correspondence in English. Therefore, the students have to memorize them and it is really challenging to keep in the mind all case endings. For example; they ask the reason why we say “**Seni** seviyorum (I love **you**)” but “**Senden** nefret ediyorum (I hate **you**).”*

As seen in the statement of the teacher above, the typological difference between the target language “Turkish” and the language that is the medium of instruction “English” is an important factor that cause the students have difficulty in learning Turkish. Like the example “I love you – I hate you”, some pattern may not have the exact correspondence in English and that causes them to get confused. For instance; the object “you” is used in the same form while saying both “I love **you**” and “I hate **you**.” However, in Turkish, “you” is in accusative case as saying “I love you” while, it is in the ablative case as saying “I hate you.”

6. Conclusion

This study concerns the accusative cases as one of the main factors that cause TFL learners who hit the language-learning plateau to prevent their ability of transforming the language knowledge into linguistic competence, and subsequently get demotivated to go on studying Turkish. However, we claim that at the same time, studying accusative cases with accorded verbs and pragmatical foundation of communication can be used as a learning strategy to overcome the language-learning plateau in TFL learning. As the case is considered reversely, if accusative cases are taught within a context of certain verbs, it will support learners’ verbalization by helping them construct sentences more easily and spontaneously during the conversation. Moreover, being able to verbalize fluently and accurately in target language will motivate the students. Galperin (1992, as cited in Negueruela & Lantolf, 2006) mentioned the significance of verbalization of concepts for learning that “to promote internalization of the concept, speaking is necessary to liberate students from the immediate concrete experience and to transform learning actions and concepts from the material to the ideal plane” (p.81). Thus, the present study draws attention to the strategy of verbalizing the accusative cases with the usages of the verbs as a solution for the language learning plateau in TFL learning because, verbalization would provide the connection between form and meaning of the grammatical items. So, drawing attention to the accordance of verbs, and how they are deployed through accusative suffixes in real life situations, would give internalization of grammatical structure rather than memorizing the rules and this would lead to conscious conceptual mediation, or in other words, conscious focus on semantics and pragmatics. Briefly, giving systematic and coherent explanations and relevant concepts between verb and accusative suffix within the context of communication would help internalization of grammatical meanings such as direct object, case endings and possessive suffix (Williams et al. 2013).

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Appendix A

The Written Semi-structured Interview for Participants’ Perceptions about Making Sentences in Turkish.

- 1) How do you study in order to make Turkish sentences?
- 2) What type of difficulties do you encounter while making Turkish sentences? (For instance, putting the components of a sentence in order, putting case endings in appropriate places etc.)
- 3) What type of Turkish sentences do you prefer to use in your daily life?
- 4) How do you make sentences during classroom activities?

Appendix B

The Quiz for Testing Participants’ Basic Knowledge about Adding Accusative Case Suffixes to Nouns. (The test was retrieved from the book *Yabancı Dilim Türkçe 1*)

Section I

Lütfen akuzatif eki kullanınız./ Fill in the blanks with the correct accusative suffix.

1. Bu kitap..... dün aldım.
2. Şu ceket..... almak istiyorum.
3. O araba..... istiyor musun?
4. Bu masa..... sil, lütfen!
5. Şebnem’..... tanıyorum.
6. Türkiye’..... gördük.
7. İzmir’..... gezdik.
8. Tiyatro..... arıyorum.
9. Hangi müzik..... seviyorsun?
10. Hangi gazete..... okuyorsun?
11. Hangi film..... seyrettiniz?
12. Hangi dil..... konuşuyorsun?
13. Melda benim kitap..... okuyor.
14. Necip bizim kek..... yedi.

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15. Filiz senin resim..... gördü.
16. Mehmet sizin adres..... bilmiyor.
17. Çocuklar..... seviyorum.
18. Futbolcular..... herkes tanıyor.
19. Hayvanlar..... koruyoruz.
20. Bütün işler..... bitirdiler.

Section II

Lütfen akuzatif eki (-ı, -i, -u, -ü) kullanınız ve cümle kurunuz./ Make a sentence by adding the correct accusative suffix.

1. onlar/ dün/ sarı araba/ almak
.....
2. bu konu/ biz/ anlamak/ çok iyi
.....
3. dün gece/ ben saat 02.00'de/ bitirmek/ ödevim
.....
4. dökmek/ çay/ bebek/ yere
.....
5. gezmek/ bütün ülkeler/ o / Asya'da
.....
6. bütün kelimeler/ biz/ ezberlemek/ geçen kursta
.....
7. senin/ telefon numaran/ çok geç/ biz/ hatırlamak
.....
8. Steve Mc Quine/ imzalamak/ resmi
.....
9. özlemek/ evim/ ben/ çok
.....
10. onlar/ evim/ benim/ çok/ beğenmek
.....
11. çocuklar/ süslemek/ odaları/ dün/ akşam
.....
12. o/ tanımak/ burada/ herkes
.....
13. çöpçüler/ temizlemek/ her gün/ bütün caddeler
.....
14. o/ odası/ her gün/ temizlemek
.....
15. o/ tanımak/ burada/ hiç/ kimse
.....

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Appendix C

The verb list including the verbs that were frequently discussed during the classes and the examples given in the books of *Gazi TÖMER (2013)* and *Case Suffixes in Turkish: Verbs Examples and Exercises with Answers (2012)* by Hakan Yılmaz.

VERBS	GAZİ TÖMER A1-A2	HAKAN YILMAZ
Almak (to buy sth, to take sth)	Ben meyve sebzeleri alıyorum.	Biz bu arabayı aldık.
Aramak (to call sb, to look for sb/sth)	Filmden sonra seni arayacağım.	Biz bu oteli arıyoruz.
Beklemek (to wait for sb/sth)	Sonraki treni bekledim.	Biz seni iki saat bekledik.
Dinlemek (to listen to sb/sth)	Beni dikkatle dinledi.	Bu müziği dinledin mi?
Geçmek (to pass sth)	Yediyi çeyrek geçiyor.	Kaplumbağa tavşanı geçti.
Kırmak (to break sth)	Üzerine yumurtaları kırın.	Çocuk bardağı kırdı.
Sevmek (to like sb/sth, to love sb/sth)	Sütü çok seviyorum.	Ali Ayşe’yi seviyor.
Sormak (to ask for sth)	Mehmet üniversiteyi tanımak için kantini soruyor.	Adresi şu adama sorduk.
Söylemek (şarkı) (to tell sth, to say sth, to sing)	Eşyaların adlarını söyleyiniz.	Bu şarkıyı Ahmet söylüyor.
Tanımak (to know sb/sth)	Hakan, yurt ve çevresini çok iyi tanıyor	Ahmet’i tanıyor musun?
Vermek (to give sth to sb)	Şimdi, siz bana banka kartınızı verin.	Bu çiçeği Ali verdi.
Yapmak (to do sth, to make sth)	Bu makineyi ben yaptım.	Alışverişi on beş dakikada yapıyorlar.

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