

Uygun, S., & Felser, C. (2019). *Subject-verb agreement marking in Turkish heritage speakers*. Paper presented at the Workshop "Turkish in Europe", University of Hildesheim, Hildesheim, Germany. 12 July.

Subject-verb agreement marking in Turkish heritage speakers

In Turkish, 3rd person plural subjects normally appear with verbs that are unmarked for number, rendering these verb forms indistinguishable from the singular form. The plural morpheme *lar/ler* is preferentially omitted from the verb, especially in spoken discourse, so as to avoid repeating the same morpheme that also marks plurality on nouns. Plural suffix omission in Turkish is also affected by semantic factors including the degree of subject animacy (Bamyacı et al., 2014; Schroeder, 1999).

Previous studies reveal that Turkish heritage speakers accept overt plural marking more readily than non-bilingual native Turkish speakers (Bamyacı, 2016; Lago et al., 2018). The present study investigates to what extent bilingual speakers are sensitive to grammatical, surface-level and semantic constraints, and whether age of acquisition of German affects Turkish heritage speakers' judgement of plural agreement marking. We tested 39 non-bilingual Turkish speakers resident in Turkey and 46 early (n=25) or late (n=21) Turkish/German bilinguals resident in Germany using a scalar acceptability judgement task. Our experimental stimuli were created by manipulating both subject animacy and subject position, to test the effect of subject-verb distance on the acceptability of overt plural marking on the verb. The judgement task was implemented as a web-based questionnaire, with the bilingual speakers tested under supervision and the non-bilingual controls tested remotely.

Besides confirming the general preference for unmarked verb forms, participants' judgement patterns were affected both by animacy and by subject-verb distance. While late bilinguals displayed a similar rating pattern with the native controls, significant differences were observed between early bilingual speakers and non-bilingual controls, suggesting that early bilinguals' judgements are more affected by surface-level constraints on agreement marking compared to those of non-bilingual Turkish speakers. We conclude that early bilingualism onset can affect the relative weighting of non-grammatical constraints on agreement marking.

Word count with title: 300

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