

ACQUISITION OF PREPOSITION STRANDING AND PIED-PIPING IN *WH*-QUESTIONS BY ADVANCED LEVEL TURKISH EFL LEARNERS

Burcin Yapıcı *

Abstract: The study investigated the preference of Turkish EFL learners for preposition stranding and pied-piping in constructing *wh*-questions and whether they experience problems in the acquisition of null-preposition constructions. A 15-item elicited production test was given to 43 Turkish learners with an advanced English proficiency level. The participants were asked to make *wh*-questions out of the words that were put in mixed order. The results showed that there was no significant difference between preposition stranding and pied-piping in their preferences in constructing *wh*-questions; however, they erroneously omitted the prepositions in *wh*-questions. The results did not provide enough evidence to support the hypothesis that L1 transfer was responsible for the preference for preposition stranding or pied-piping and null-preposition constructions in *wh*-questions.

Keywords: preposition stranding, pied-piping, *wh*-questions, EFL, L1 transfer

1. Introduction

This paper is concerned with the way Turkish learners of English as a Foreign Language (henceforth EFL) learners acquire structures involving preposition stranding (PS) and pied-piping (PIP) in *wh*-questions. PS occurs in English when prepositions are stranded in *wh*-questions (1a). English permits the movement of the preposition with the *wh*-phrase as well, which accounts for the PIP construction illustrated in (1b).

- (1) Every sentence begins with a capital letter.
a. Which letter does every sentence begin **with**?
b. **With** which letter does every sentence begin?

Although English allows both PS and PIP, there are other languages (such as Turkish, Japanese and Persian) that do not allow PS. Second language (henceforth L2) learners of English whose native language (L1) lacks PS show a preference for this type of structure. The present study extends the investigation to L2 English in an L1 Turkish context and aims to find out the preference of Turkish learners of English for PS or PIP constructions in *wh*-questions.

L2 learners of English can also go through a “null preposition” stage when they omit the preposition in PS constructions (as in 2).

- (2) *Which school do you go __?

The present paper also investigates to what extent advanced Turkish EFL learners omit prepositions in *wh*-questions of English.

* Osmaniye Korkut Ata University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, burcinyapici@osmaniye.edu.tr.

2. *Wh*-questions in Turkish

Turkish is a *wh*-in-situ language; therefore, *wh*-phrases do not obligatorily move to the beginning of the sentence as exemplified in (3):

- (3) Kapıyı kim kapattı?
 door-ACC who shut-PST
 ‘Who shut the door?’

3. *Wh*-phrases ‘who’, ‘what’ and ‘which’ in Turkish

Wh-phrases such as ‘who’ and ‘what’ in Turkish act as the complement of a postposition (Görgülü 2006) in the following cases: *kim ile* ‘with whom’, as in (4), and *ne için* ‘for what’, as in (5).

- (4) Kim ile gittin?
 who with go-PST-2SG
 ‘Who did you go with?’
 (5) Ne için bekliyorsun?
 what for wait-PROG-2SG
 ‘What are you waiting for?’

The discourse-linked (D-linked) *wh*-phrase ‘which’ (Pesetsky 1987) is followed by an NP as in (6), in which *ev* ‘house’ is inflected with the locative case-marker *-de*.

- (6) Adam hangi ev-de oturuyor?
 man.NOM which house-LOC live-PRS
 ‘Which house does the man live in?’

As shown above, the *wh*-phrases *kim*, *ne*, and *hangi* in Turkish always precede the case-markers and postpositions in *wh*-questions.

4. Turkish case markers and postpositions

As put by von Heusinger & Kornfilt 2017: 1), “Turkish is a nominative-accusative language with case suffixes”. Case-markers in Turkish show the relationship between the noun phrase and other constituents in the sentence (Göksel & Kerslake 2005: 154).

The five case-markers of Turkish are illustrated in *wh*-question forms in (7):

- (7) a. Accusative (-y)I
 Öğretmen kim-i çağırdı?
 teacher who-ACC call-PST.3SG
 ‘Who did the teacher call?’

- b. Dative (-y)*A*
 Öğretmen ne(-y)e baktı?
 teacher what-DAT look-PST.3SG
 ‘What did the teacher look at?’
- c. Locative -*DA*
 Hangi oda-da uyudu?
 which room-LOC sleep-PST.3SG
 ‘Which room did he sleep in?’
- d. Ablative -*DAn*
 Parayı kim-den ödünç aldın?
 money who-ABL borrow-PST.2SG
 ‘Who did you borrow the money from?’
- e. Genitive (-n)*In/-Im*
 Kadın kim-in mektubunu okudu?
 woman whose-GEN letter-GEN read-PST.3SG
 ‘Whose letter did the woman read?’

The comitative/instrumental marker (-y)*LA* also shares some properties with case-markers (Göksel & Kerslake 2005: 154), and it is illustrated in (8):

- (8) Çocuk hangi oyuncak-la oynadı?
 child which toy-COM play-PST.3SG
 ‘Which toy did the child play with?’

As can be seen, the comitative/instrumental marker constitutes a postpositional phrase.

In Turkish, there is no preposition. Postpositions in Turkish take the noun phrase as a complement, as exemplified in (9):

- (9) Makarnayı kimin için hazırladın?
 spaghetti-ACC whom for prepare-PST.2SG
 ‘Whom did you prepare the spaghetti for?’

As shown above, postpositions in Turkish constitute postpositional phrases, and they follow a complement.

5. Differences between English and Turkish *wh*-questions

Whereas *wh*-phrases move to a designated position in English, they do not have to move in Turkish and a *wh*-phrase in Turkish mostly precedes the predicate (Kornfilt 1997), as shown in (10) and (11) below:

- (10) Dün okul kantininde kim-e bağırdın?
 yesterday school canteen-GEN-LOC who-DAT shout-PST.2SG
 ‘Who did you shout at in the school canteen yesterday?’

- (11) Patron sabah **ne hakkında** konuştu?
 boss morning what about talk-PST.3SG
 ‘What did the boss talk about in the morning?’

When *wh*-phrases are complements of prepositions in English, they can either leave their prepositions behind (i.e. preposition stranding) as in (12a) or move with their constituents (i.e. pied-piping) as in (12b).

- (12) a. Whom did you talk **to**?
 b. **To** whom did you talk?

As Turkish is a postpositional language, it does not allow preposition stranding (as in 13a). It only allows pied piping (as in 13b).

- (13) a. *Kardeşi kimin kavga etti **ile**?
 brother-POSS.3SG whom-GEN fight make-PST.3SG with
 b. Kardeşi kiminle kavga etti?
 brother-POSS.3SG whom-GEN-COM fight make-PST.3SG
 ‘Who did his brother fight with?’

6. Previous studies on preposition stranding, pied piping, and null-prepositions

The acquisition of PS and PIP by non-native speakers of English and the omission of the prepositions in *wh*-questions have been studied by several SLA researchers (Mazurkewich 1985, Bardovi-Harlig 1987, Klein 1993, Kao 2001, Sadighi et al. 2004, Rezai 2006, Salehi 2011, Makvandi & Gorjian 2014). In an early study on the acquisition of PS and PIP by L1 speakers of fifteen different languages, Bardovi-Harlig (1987) investigated which of these two constructions in English dative *wh*-questions and relative clauses is acquired first. The results showed that PS (marked) was acquired before PIP (unmarked) in both *wh*-questions and relative clauses by adult L2 learners of English. In another study of English on the learning of PS and PIP in L2 English, Kao (2001) tested whether Japanese EFL learners would prefer PS or PIP in the acquisition of English prepositional verbs. She reported that Japanese speakers of L2 English whose L1 does not permit PS, also preferred PS (marked) over PIP. Sadighi et al. (2004) conducted a study in an L1 Persian context and investigated the learners’ progress in PIP and PS in L2 English. They found that Iranian EFL learners whose L1 does not allow PS like Japanese showed a greater tendency to use PS than PIP in English interrogatives and relative clauses. In a similar and relatively recent study, Rezai (2006) tested Persian speakers of L2 English and found that they used more PS constructions than PIP ones. These researchers hypothesized that salience of the input (the availability of data) may be responsible for this preference.

Although neither Bardovi-Harlig (1987) nor Rezai (2006) focused on null-preposition constructions in their studies of the acquisition of PS and PIP structures, the test results of both studies showed that L2 users omit prepositions from the relative clauses and

wh-questions in English. Sadighi et al. (2004) also showed in their study that Iranian EFL learners attempted to omit the prepositions in interrogatives and relative clauses. Kao (2001) investigated whether the null-preposition construction occurs in second language acquisition (henceforth SLA). Supporting the studies above, the results showed that L2 and EFL learners use null-preposition constructions.

7. Methodology

7.1 Research questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

- (i) Which of these two constructions: PS or PIP is preferred by adult Turkish EFL learners?
- (ii) Do adult Turkish EFL learners go through a null-preposition stage?
- (iii) Is L1 transfer responsible for the preference for PS or PIP and null-preposition constructions?

7.2 Participants

43 Turkish students participated in the study on voluntary basis. The participants were EFL learners who were in the second semester of their third year at the time of the study in the Department of Foreign Language Education. They had studied English for 10 years. The proficiency level, number of the participants, their age range and mean are provided in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Participants' profile

Proficiency level	Number	Age range	Age mean
Advanced	43	18-23	21

7.3 Data collection tools

An elicitation test was designed to collect data from 43 Turkish-speaking learners of English. The test included 15 sentences: *wh*-questions with prepositions that are counterparts of case-markers (i.e. *at, in/on, to, from*) and with those of postpositions in Turkish (i.e. *with, about*). The questions were prepared by the researcher omitting the required preposition for each item (for the test items, see Appendix).

7.4 Design and procedure

The 15-item test was administered in two classes in the department. The first group involved 19 students, and the second group involved 24 students. The test was conducted by the researcher in the first 20 minutes of the students' regular course hours.

At the very top of the test paper, brief information about the aims of the study was provided. However, providing the participants with the full aims of the study was avoided, lest the results might be affected. In this respect, they were only acknowledged that the aim of the study was to uncover the construction of *wh*-questions by Turkish adult learners of English.

The researcher asked the participants to make *wh*-questions in the Simple Present Tense out of the words in mixed order. The reason for restricting their choice to the Simple Present Tense was to get them to focus on the construction of *wh*-questions rather than spending their time and energy on finding the appropriate tense as well.

Although it was not mentioned in the instruction that participants were required to use the appropriate prepositions, the students asked the researcher during the test whether they could use missing elements. Then, the researcher informed that they could use any missing constituent if they found it necessary. In addition, they were reassured that the data would only be used for research purposes and that the results would not affect their academic success.

8. Results

8.1 The results for preposition stranding and pied-piping

The results for learners' preference for PS and PIP are shown and analyzed based on their mean values. Figure 1 shows that the EFL learners preferred PS more frequently than PIP; however, the paired samples *t*-test revealed that learners' preference for PS ($M = .52$) and PIP ($M = .32$) did not differ significantly in their use of prepositions in English *wh*-interrogatives, $t(42) = .06, p < .05$.

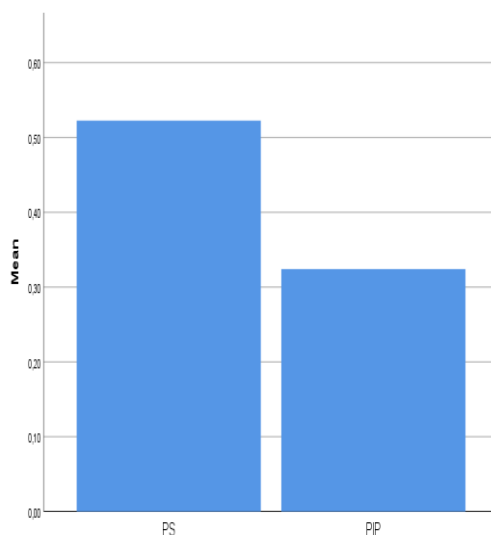


Figure 1: Preference for preposition stranding and pied-piping

8.2 Results for null prepositions

The results for learners' tendency of omitting prepositions in English that correspond to CM and PP in Turkish are shown and analyzed based on their mean values. Figure 2 shows that the learners omitted prepositions more frequently in English that correspond to CM in Turkish than PP. The paired samples *t*-test also revealed that learners' tendency of omitting prepositions in English that correspond to CM ($M = .17$) and PP ($M = .12$) differ significantly, $t(42) = .01, p < .05$.

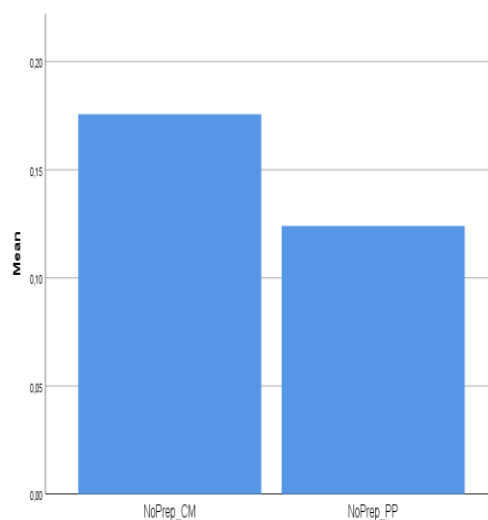


Figure 2: Omission of English prepositions corresponding to Turkish case marker and postpositions

The results showed that the learners most frequently omitted the preposition *to* in English that corresponds to the dative case marker in Turkish. For example, 34% of the participants did not use *to* in the question *Which concert does Sarah go_?*, and 23% of the participants did not use *to* in the question *Which party do you go_?*

8.3 Results for learners' preference for preposition stranding and pied-piping in English that correspond to case-markers and postpositions in Turkish

The results for learners' preference for PS and PIP with prepositions in English that correspond to CM and PP in Turkish are shown and analyzed based on their mean values.

The results for learners' preference for PS and PIP with prepositions in English that correspond to CM in Turkish are shown and analyzed by comparing the frequency of learners' preference for using PS and PIP with prepositions in English that correspond to CM in Turkish. Figure 3 shows that learners preferred PS more frequently than PIP with prepositions in English that correspond to CM in Turkish. On the other hand, the paired samples *t*-test revealed that learners' preference for PS ($M = .51$) and PIP ($M = .31$) did not differ significantly with prepositions in English that correspond to CM in Turkish, $t(42) = .06, p < .05$.

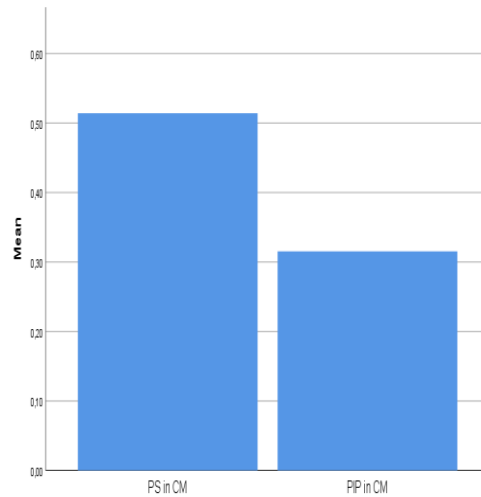


Figure 3: Preference for preposition stranding and pied-piping with English prepositions corresponding to Turkish case markers

The results for learners' preference for PS and PIP with prepositions in English that correspond to PP in Turkish are shown and analyzed by comparing the frequency of learners' preference for using PS and PIP with prepositions in English that correspond to PP in Turkish. Figure 4 shows that learners preferred PS more frequently than PIP with prepositions in English that correspond to PP in Turkish. On the other hand, the paired samples *t*-test revealed that learners' preference for PS ($M = .52$) and PIP ($M = .34$) did not differ significantly with prepositions in English that correspond to PP in Turkish, $t(42) = .11, p < .05$.

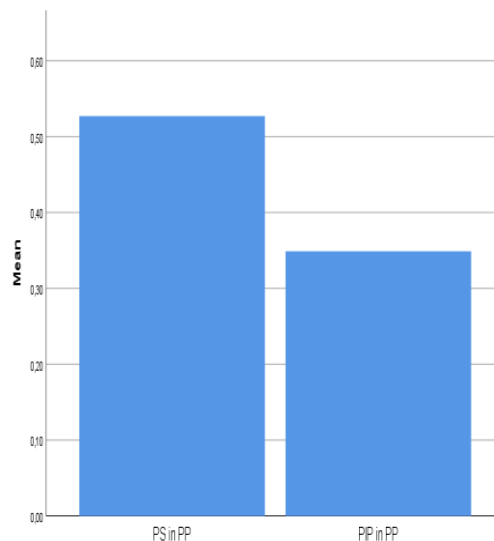


Figure 4: Preference for preposition stranding and pied-piping with English prepositions corresponding to Turkish postpositions

8.4 Discussion

The results showed that the Turkish EFL learners did not show any preference for either PS or PIP. As for their tendency to use null-preposition constructions, the results revealed that the learners omitted prepositions in *wh*-questions in English. The omission of the preposition in *wh*-questions whose prepositions are the counterparts of the case-markers in Turkish significantly outnumbered that of postpositions in Turkish. The results did not show a significant difference between the learners' use of PS and PIP with prepositions in English that correspond to case-markers or postpositions in Turkish. In addition, neither the use of PS with prepositions in English that correspond to case-markers and postpositions in Turkish nor those of PIP showed significant difference.

Contrary to the results obtained through previous studies (Bardovi-Harlig 1987, Kao 2001, Sadighi et al. 2004, Rezai 2006), the present study showed that Turkish EFL learners do not seem to favor using either PS or PIP strategy in *wh*-questions although their native language does not allow PS. These researchers argued that a possible account for this preference could be the input saliency in L2. In other words, L2 students are exposed to PS more than to PIP in English. For this reason, non-native speakers of English tend to use the salient structure more often than the one which is less frequent in the input. However, in the current study neither strategy was used more frequently than the other by the Turkish participants. These findings are in line with Makvandi & Gorjian's (2014) results which suggested that Persian monolinguals and Arab bilingual high achiever EFL speakers showed similar performance on English PS and PIP structures.

The results showed that Turkish EFL learners omit the preposition in *wh*-questions, in line with the results obtained in previous studies (Bardovi-Harlig 1987, Kao 2001, Sadighi et al. 2004). The frequency of null-preposition constructions in *wh*-questions with prepositions that are the counterparts of case-markers in Turkish was significantly higher than those of postpositions. Therefore, there is the possibility of negative transfer because unlike postpositions, case-markers are attached to the noun and cannot behave as a separate element in a construction in Turkish.

It was also showed that the causing factor for the preference for PS or PIP and null-preposition constructions could not be L1 transfer; there was no significant difference between learners' use of PS in *wh*-questions with prepositions that correspond to postpositions and case-markers and between PIP in *wh*-questions with prepositions that are the counterparts of case-markers and postpositions in Turkish.

9. Conclusions

The syntactic differences between Turkish and English could affect these Turkish EFL learners to experience acquisition problems of prepositions in *wh*-questions such as using null-preposition constructions.

The study showed that advanced level EFL learners are syntactically aware of the fact that English allows both PS and PIP. Therefore, they use both strategies irrespective of their native language, which does not allow PS.

The findings of the study demonstrate that negative transfer is responsible for the non-native speakers' acquisition problems of using prepositions in English. One such problem that the study dealt with is that of omitting the prepositions in *wh*-questions. The results of the study showed that EFL learners use null-preposition constructions in *wh*-questions.

The mixed results of the study concerning L1 transfer suggest that more comparative research is required, which would shed light on the SLA field in terms of the relationship between PS and PIP as well as null-constructions and the language transfer issue.

References

- Bardovi-Harlig, K. 1987. Markedness and salience in second-language acquisition. *Language Learning* 37: 385-407.
- Göksel, A. & Kerslake, C. 2005. *Turkish: A Comprehensive Grammar*. London: Routledge.
- Görgülü, E. 2006. Variable *Wh*-words in Turkish. Unpublished MA thesis, Boğaziçi University, İstanbul.
- von Heusinger, K. & Kornfilt, J. 2017. Partitivity and case-marking in Turkish and related languages. *Glossa: A Journal of General Linguistics* 2 (1): 1-40.
- Kao, R. 2001. Where have the prepositions gone? A study of English prepositional verbs and input enhancement in instructed SLA. *International Review of Applied Linguistics* 39: 195-215.
- Klein, E. C. 1993. *Toward Second Language Acquisition: A Study of Null-prep*. Dordrecht: Kluwer
- Kornfilt, J. 1997. *Turkish*. London: Routledge.
- Makvandi, S. & Gorjian, B. 2014. A comparative study of learning preposition stranding strategies among Arab bilingual versus Persian monolingual EFL learners. *International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World* 7: 326-343.
- Mazurkewich, I. 1985. Syntactic markedness and language acquisition. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 7: 15-36.
- Pesetsky D. 1987. *Wh*-in-situ: Movement and unselective binding. In E. Reuland & A. ter Meulen (eds.), *The Representation of (In)definiteness*, 98-129. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Rezai, M. J. 2006. Preposition stranding and pied-piping in second language acquisition. *Essex Graduate Student Papers in Language and Linguistics* 8: 110-128.
- Sadighi, F., Parhizgar, M. & Saadat, M. 2004. Preposition pied-piping and preposition stranding constructions in the interlanguage grammar of Iranian EFL Learners. *Asian EFL Journal* 6: 1-33
- Salehi, M. 2011. The acquisition of pied-piping and preposition stranding by Iranian learners of English. *The Iranian EFL Journal* 7: 85-99.

Appendix

Distribution of test items

Case-markers in Turkish	Locative: <i>at, in/on</i> (1 item for each, 3 items in total)	Dative/Ablative: <i>to, from</i> (3 items for each, 6 items in total)
	Which hotel/Alex/stay/? (Q1) Which chair/Emily/sit/? (Q13) Which bed/the baby/sleep/? (Q8)	Which party/you/go/? (Q10) Which concert/Sarah/go/? (Q2) Which country/your brother/travel/? (Q7) Which library/they/borrow/the book/? (Q5) Which university/Turkish students/graduate/? (Q12) Which country/Nicolas/come/? (Q15)
Postpositions in Turkish		Comitative/ Instrumental: <i>with, about</i> (3 items for each, 6 items in total)
		Which friend/Lauren/go/to the cinema/? (Q4) Which toy/the baby/sleep/? (Q6) Which teacher/Jeffrey/discuss/his problems/? (Q14) Which topic/the students/talk/? (Q3) Which problem/you/often/think/? (Q11) Which child/the mother/complain/? (Q9)