SYNTACTIC VARIATION OF ZERO OBJECT (NON-SUBJECT) RELATIVE CLAUSES: A CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Nesne Konumundaki Sıfat Cümleciklerinin Söz Dizimsel Çeşitliliği: Karşılaştırmalı Dil Bilimsel Bir Bakış

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Abstract

Research into relative clauses has been an enigma in theoretical, developmental, applied and cognitive linguistics has been an enigma, although considerable progress has been made. Relative clauses are often defined as complex structures since they require various processes at cognitive and ethnosyntactic level. This study aims to compare zero object relative clauses based on six different languages from four different language families. Languages of Cukurova Arabic, English, French, German, Russian and Turkish were examined. It is important to show syntactic variations of relative clauses in different languages to question universals because disregarding syntactic variations poses a serious problem in certain linguistic theories. The findings of the study show that even the same languages from the same family show syntactic variations. Each language has its own construction of zero object relative clauses. These variations should be subsumed within a constructionist approach.

Keywords: Syntax, object relative clauses, syntactic variation, constructions

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Öz

Sıfat tümceleri ile ilgili araştırmalarda önemli gelişmeler yaşanmasına rağmen, bu cümlecik tipleri hala kuramsal, gelişimsel, uygulamalı ve bilişsel dil bilim alanlarında çözülmesi zor bir alan olarak görülebilir. Sıfat tümceleri hem bilişsel hem de etno-söz dizimi seviyesinde farklı süreçleri gerektirdiği için karmaşık yapılar olarak tanımlanabilir. Bu çalışma dört farklı dil ailesinden altı dile dayanarak nesne konumundaki sıfat tümcelerini incelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Çukurova Arapçası, İngilizce, Fransızca, Almanca, Rusça ve Türkçe dilleri analiz edilmiştir. Evrenselleri sorgulamak için sıfat tümceleri ile ilgili sözdizimsel varyasyonları göstermek önemlidir, çünkü sözdizimsel varyasyonları dikkate almamak, belirli dilbilim kuramlarında ciddi bir sorun teşkil etmektedir. Araştırmanın bulguları, aynı aileden gelen aynı dillerin bile sözdizimsel varyasyonlarını gösterdiğini göstermektedir. Her dil kendine özgü nesne konumundaki sıfat tümceleri yapısına sahiptir. Bu varyasyonlar, konstruksiyonist bir anlayış içerisinde sınıflandırılmalıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Söz dizimi, nesne konumundaki sıfat cümlecikleri, söz dizimsel varyasyon, konstrüksiyon

Introduction

Syntax has been viewed as one of the core properties of human mind compared to animal minds (Chomsky, 1965). Universal grammar presupposes that language in human mind is hard-wired for syntax that contains universal principles (Chomsky, 1972, 1975). It is highly critical to ask what is meant by 'universal'. In this sense, one needs to define universality in linguistics. Syntactic variations may not stand for universality, which means that variations are not equal to universality (Diessel & Tomasello, 2007; Diessel, 2005). In other words, universal properties are supposed not to contain variations (Chomsky, 1986, 2000). If an entity is universal and absolute, then ambiguity should be absent in syntax (Diessel, 2005). However, it is a well-known fact that concepts are not thoroughly and completely projected onto syntax. In addition, universality is supposed to be fixed, absolute and immune to diachronic and synchronic changes (Chomsky, 1965). However, language is always exposed to changes at each level. Wiechmann (2015) maintains that entrenchment and usage of certain structures determine constructional configuration because frequency and entrenchment might help certain structures reconfigure themselves. There seem possible variations and configurations while forming relative clauses. Thus, relative clauses can be conceptualized as constructions that may represent certain schema that help generalize these constructions (Wiechmann, 2015). It seems unlikely that a certain structure in a certain language can be universal. Therefore, the following questions beg for answers to elucidate the enigma. The main questions would be:

1. What is the definition of the term 'universal' in linguistics?
2. Can syntactic variations refer to universality?
3. Can universality contain variations?
4. Can ambiguity in syntax be universal?
5. Can a change in a certain structure be universal in a language that belongs to same family?
6. Can a change in a certain structure be universal in a language diachronically?
7. Can a change in a certain structure be universal in a language synchronically?
8. Can a change in a certain structure be universal in a language dialectically?

These aforementioned questions are hard to answer. However, even if some researchers perceptibly notice diversity and variations, they tend to be misled by their theoretical background to conceptualize these variations as universals. Unlike the universal grammarian idea, cognitive linguistics and construction grammar perceive syntactic variations as semantically related constructions (Diessel & Tomasello, 2007; Diessel, 2005; Goldberg, 19965, 2006). What is interesting is that even some researchers who

have found variations in relative clauses based on the tenets of semantics or syntax tend to find universals in languages. It is quite thought-provoking that universals become centric in understanding language, specifically syntax (Keenan and Comrie, 1977).

This paper intends to examine relative clauses cross linguistically. The main tenet of this study is to demonstrate that not every unit as concepts in mind is projected onto syntax. Therefore, some structures have to be interpreted through context. In addition, there are possible grammars considering different flexibility scale in different languages. It is almost impossible to know whether variations can be subsumed under the umbrella of universality.

Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature and based on the sentences created by the researcher taking psycholinguistic and cognitive linguistic facts into consideration. Different relative clause examples from four different language families were collected. Cukurova Arabic, English, German, French, Russian and Turkish examples were included. While choosing the sentences, the researcher took some criteria into consideration. A list of 50 sentences was created. These 50 sentences were divided into 5 categories (see Appendix). Each category denoted a case. Five cases were taken as a basis. These cases were nominative, accusative, dative, ablative and instrumental. Each sentence was composed of words that contained only literal meaning to show order of object relative clauses more clearly. However, to sample the universe, only five sentences were used in this study.

Findings

The languages in this study depict variations at different levels. English, unlike the other languages, has a richly developed distinctive relative clause system because almost all properties of concepts related to adjective clauses are projected onto syntax. Although it is possible to reduce relative clauses in English, it seems almost impossible to reduce relative clause structures in Cukurova Arabic, French, German and Russian. In addition, English can move prepositions while referring to relative clauses at syntactic level. Prepositions in relative clauses in English show the categorical distinction of our concepts. However, in Turkish all object relative clauses are used only in accusative forms. Therefore, it can be said that there is no categorical distinction. However, one can comprehend what is meant through interpretation and contexts.

Table 1: Aspects of zero object relative clauses in four language families

Languages	Obligatory Relativizer	Omittable Relativizer	Preposition	Suffix
Cukurova Arabic	√		√	
English	√	√	√	
French	√		√	
German	√		√	
Russian	√		√	
Turkish				√

It can be seen from Table 1 that Turkish does not use any relativizer or preposition except for the suffix –DIK. However, unlike the other languages in this study, English can omit relativizer and project the meaning only with a preposition. German, Russian, French and Cukurova Arabic have to use relativizers and prepositions to convey cases. However,

unlike the languages in the other language family groups in this study, Turkish uses the same suffix to reflect zero object relative clauses.

Data

Turkish

Agglutination and vowel harmony are the main features of Turkish that is standardized as SOV word order. However, this word order may change considerably in practice. Another important feature of Turkish is that it has five cases (accusative, locative, ablative, dative and instrumental). Each case takes different suffixes in object position (Kornfilt 2000a, 2000b).

In Turkish the zero object relative clauses takes /-dık/ suffix (Aksu-Koc and Slobin, 1995; Ekmekçi, 1990; Kornfilt, 1997; Underhill, 1972). Participle in Turkish contains consonant mutation rules besides vowel harmony (-dik, -duk, -dık, -dük). In canonical word order in Turkish take various suffixes in accordance with the case, whereas these suffixes are dropped when they are used in non-subject relative clause constructions. It can be interpreted that semantic content plays a more important role than syntactic role that may be challenged.

1. Yaşadığım   şehir çok güzel

   Live- accu partc-1st prn   city very nice

2. İndiğim   araba ucuzdu

    get out accu part 1st prn   car   cheap past

3. Gittiğim   kafe güzeldir

   Go- accu part 1st prn   cafe beautiful

4. Konuştuğum   adam zengindir

    Speak accu part 1st prn   man   rich

5. İzlediğim   film çok güzel

Watch accu part 1st prn   film very nice

English

English uses a few inflectional morphemes and is composed of SVO word order. English, unlike Turkish, reflects each aspect of conceptual meaning onto surface syntax. One can easily notice what goes in object relative clauses in English considering the movements. Zero relative clauses in English may leave out a relative pronoun in the object or the object of a preposition in the dependent clause. Zero relative clauses in English except for accusative case need a preposition without which sentences may sound odd because of

deletion or omission of a preposition.

6. The city I live in is very beautiful

7. The car I go out of was cheap.

8. The cafe I went to is beautiful.

9. The man I spoke with is rich.

10. The film I watched is nice.

Except the accusative case in 10th example, the other examples show that English reflects the other cases through prepositions. It can be remarked that the distinction in conceptual meaning is fully projected onto syntax.

German

German makes a distinction through articles, gender and number (Bader & Meng, 1999). However, the articles cannot be moved. Therefore, the default structure cannot be reduced (Fleischer, 2004) English offers five different possibilites to denote modifier meaning. German, in this sense, is quite limited while referring to relative clauses.

11. Die Stadt, wo Ich wohne ist schön

   The city where I live   is nice

12. Das Auto, das Ich aus der bekam war billig.

   The car that I   out of got was cheap

13. Das Kafe, wo Ich gegangen bin ist schön

   The cafe   where went is nice

14. Der Mann, den Ich sprach ist reich.

   The man whom I spoke is rich

15. Der Film, den Ich sah ist schön

   The film which I saw is nice

Çukurova Arabic

Classic Arabic, modern standard Arabic and colloquial Arabic are the main three types of Arabic language. Cukurova Arabic contains a regional variety and is one of colloquial Arabic languages similar to Latakian Syrian Arabic (Shaheen, 2013) in which the relativizer yalli/lli is used and cannot be left out in non-subject relative clauses. Latakian Syrian Arabic and Cukurova Arabic, in this sense, differ phonologically. While Cukurova Arabic uses ((ı)llızi / (ı)llıdi) as a relativizer, Latakian Syrian Arabic uses yalli/lli as a relativizer (Shaheen, 2012). Smilar to the feature in Latakian Syrian Arabic, in Cukurova Arabic as well, the relativizer ((ı)llızi / (ı)llıdi) cannot be omitted. In addition, the preposition cannot be left out. Thus, similar to Russian, German, French languages, Cukurova Arabic retains both the relativizers and prepositions in object (non-subject) relative clauses.

16. L-bele(y)d (ı)llızi / (ı)llıdi / (ı)l ʻışt fi, ktīr keyyis.

   The city   that   I live in very nice

17.S-siyyêre / L-'arabayt (ı)llızi / (ı)llıdi / l nzılt mınne(h), kene(y)t rxîsa. "

    The car   that   got out of   was   cheap

18.L-kafeyt (ı)llızi / (ı)llıdi / l rîht 'ley(h)a, keyyse(y).

    The cafe that   I went to   nice

19. Z-zelımt (ı)llızi / (ı)llıdi / l hkeyt mı'u(h), (hu) zengîl.

    The   man   that   I spoke with   rich

20. L-film (ı)llızi / (ı)llıdi / l tfırract 'ley(h)a, ktîr keyyse(y).

    The film   that   I watched   very nice

French

French uses different relativizers. However, unlike English, one cannot omit relativizers in French (Hawkins & Towell, 2015; Vergnaud, 1974). In addition, one has to retain prepositions and relativizers in French. Thus, it seems that zero object relative clauses seem unlikely in French due to the compulsory addition of relativizers.

21.La ville où j'habite est très agréable

    The city where I live is nice

22. La voiture dont je suis descendu n'était pas chère

    The car of which I descended is cheap

23. Le café où je vais est beau

    The cafe where I go is beautiful

24. L'homme avec qui/avec lequel je parle est riche

    The man with whom   I speak   is rich

25. Le film que je regarde est excellent

    The movie that I watch is nice

Russian

Russian is a synthetic language. There are six cases in Russian (nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive, instrumental, prepositional). To compose a relative clause sentence one should use relative pronoun. The pronouns agree with the gender, number of antecedents. However, unlike regular adjectives, it does not agree with that noun in case; rather, it reflects the case of its function in the subordinate clause. Therefore relative pronouns take certain suffixes depending on the case, number and gender (Levy, Fedorenko, & Gibson, 2013). In that condition relative pronouns cannot be omitted in object relative position and therefore it is impossible to form a Zero Relative Clause. Depending on the case, relative pronoun can take the preposition referring to English as "with", "in", 'about' ((Levy, Fedorenko, & Gibson, 2013).

Russian is different in all these respects. In Russian you may use only который; you may neither substitute что nor omit который. Thus, the translation would be Мужчина *с которым я разговаривал, богатый.*

26. Город, в котором я живу очень красивый.

     City, in which (suff- "ом" accus. Signular form) I live very beautiful.

27. Машина на которой я выезжаю дешевая.

     Car on (prep." На" suff. "Ой" female. Singl) which I go out cheap.

28. Кафе, в которое я ходил, красивое.

     Cafe in (prep. "В") which (suff "oe" neutral gender.) I went, beautiful .

29. Мужчина с которым я разговаривал, богатый.

     Man with (prep "с") whom (suff "ым" masc.signl) I spoke, rich.

30. Фильм,который я посмотрел хороший.

     Movie , which (suff "ый" masc.signl) I watched, nice.

Discussion and Conclusion

The data show that different languages behave differently while projecting conceptual meaning onto syntax. Therefore, it is doubtful to postulate that universal grammar exists and acts in the same fashion in all languages (Dąbrowska, 2015). If one happens to come up with hundreds of syntactic variations from different languages, these kinds of variations cannot be assigned to universal grammar, although Chomsky (1965) insistently rejects these variations and interprets these variations as superficial because Chomsky (1975) tends to support the idea that universal grammar cannot be elucidated and unearthed through variations. However, historical linguistics and corpus-based data from different languages always challenge the parameters and principles in UG (Wiechmann, 2015). UG, while explaining the nature of language, acts tautologically. Popper (2005) asserts that even one different variation in data may challenge any universality. Tautological propositions cannot refer to universality when one different example is found. Fitz, Chang and Christiansen (2011) emphasize the fact that linguistic experience in acquisition of complex sentences still remains pivotal because distributional properties of relative clause constructions as input might be predictive. Thus, usage-based approaches may help understand these constructions more soundly. Neighboring structures can be analyzed to understand the nature of these constructions. Semantic, pragmatic and syntactic levels can be considered together to account for the configurations of relative clause constructions (Fitz, Chang and Christiansen, 2011; Karmiloff-Smith, 2018). Progressive modularization can also be an explanation for the production of relative clauses (Karmiloff-Smith, 2018). Thus, cognitive flexibility, entrenchment, frequency and connectionist accounts can produce alternative explanations to understand these constructions. However, although the same construction at semantic level is entrenched, it is natural that various syntactic constructions emerge and are produced. Thus, ethno-syntax (Wierzbicka, 2002) can be an alternative explanation that shows that syntactic variations of object relative clauses from different language families can emerge.

Studies on relative clauses have been fruitful since the debates started by generative grammar (Chomsky, 1965; Hawkins, 1999). Keenan and Comrie (1977) emphasize that relative clauses are understood within the framework of Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy. Another theory about relative clauses is Linear Distance Hypothesis (Hawkins, 1989; Tarollo & Myhill, 1983) that claims that the number of the words between the head and the gap provides the prediction of accessibility. The asymmetric construction and ordering of relative clauses may cause processing and comprehension difficulties. It is clear that some constructions in relative clauses are easier to process, comprehend and produce. Another problem often ignored is that studying relative clauses in different language is still underrepresented.

Structural Distance Hypothesis is another theory emphasizing the fact that structural distance composed of the nodes could elucidate the accessibility difficulty (O'Grady, 1999). In this theory, structural distance is prioritized because nodes play a pivotal role.Another hypothesis is word order difference hypothesis that maintains that standard word order tends to be more accessible than non-canonical word order (MacDonald & Christiansen, 2002). Hamilton (1995) concentrates on SO Hierarchy Hypothesis and stresses processing difficulties by considering discontinuities (OS > OO = SS > SO). Besides these hypotheses, there are other theories that deal with exemplars patterns and usages based on frequency (Croft, 2001; Diessel 2007, Gennari & MacDonald 2008; Wiechmann, 2015). Terzi and Nanousi (2018) also found that object relative clauses are more difficult to process in agrammatics. Wiechmann (2015) claims that zero relative clauses are the most frequently produced relative clause types in English resting on the corpus data from the ICE-GB. Thus, it can be interpreted that these types of relative clauses are frequently used structures (Wiechmann, 2015). The possible cause of this omission may stem from entrenchment. If a construction is often encountered, it is possible that relativizers will be left out because a frequent use of a certain structure is thought to mold language.

Future studies can emphasize the importance of variations in relative clauses because each variation may refer to different conceptualization of different constructions that may not be related to universal grammar at all. Production of certain items or clauses in a language may not mean that all of them are based on a specific and modular structure. It is even possible to question and doubt whether relative clauses that have densely engaged minds of linguists exist in all other languages.

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Appendix

Sentences that Represent Zero Object (Non-Subject) Relative Clauses

N	English	Case
1.	The house I live in is nice	Locative
2.	The car I slept in was comfortable	Locative
3.	The cafe we drank coffee at was nice.	Locative
4.	The hotel we are going stay at is nice.	Locative
5.	The day I am happiest on is Sunday	Locative
6.	The table I am sitting by is near the window.	Locative
7.	The sofa I am lying on is comfortable	Locative
8.	The university I am studying at is very big.	Locative
9.	The pool I am swimming in is dirty.	Locative

10.	The bathroom I am showering in is small.	Locative
11.	The car I got out of was cheap.	Ablative
12.	The dress I took off was red.	Ablative
13.	The box I took the book out of was small.	Ablative
14.	The forest I drove away from was big.	Ablative
15.	The bed I got out of was comfortable.	Ablative
16.	The tooth I pulled out was decayed.	Ablative
17.	The village I came from was nice.	Ablative
18.	The prison I escaped from was small.	Ablative
19.	The university I graduated from was nice.	Ablative
20.	The supermarket I stole the apple from was big.	Ablative
21.	The cafe I went to was nice.	Dative
22.	The man I am looking at is handsome.	Dative
23.	The students I gave the exam to were smart.	Dative
24.	The sofa the child climbed upon was big.	Dative
25.	The forest I drove into was nice.	Dative
26.	The table I put the book onto was big.	Dative
27.	The woman I showed the book to was rich.	Dative
28.	The man I am looking at is handsome.	Dative
29.	The river I jumped into was nice.	Dative
30.	The man I passed the salt to was rich.	Dative
31.	The man I talked with was rich.	Instrumental
32.	The girl I walked with was kind.	Instrumental
33.	The friend I went out with was ill.	Instrumental
34.	The family I communicate with is friendly.	Instrumental
35.	The rival we played against was good.	Instrumental
36.	The knife I cut the bread with was sharp.	Instrumental
37.	The group I travelled with was fun.	Instrumental
38.	The plane I flew by was big.	Instrumental
39.	The man I ate food with was poor.	Instrumental
40.	The friend I studied with was smart.	Instrumental
41.	The film I watched was nice.	Accusative
42.	The house I sold was small.	Accusative
43.	The woman I saw was beautiful.	Accusative
44.	The book I wrote is exciting.	Accusative
45.	The museum I visited was nice.	Accusative
46.	The dicitonary I use is effective.	Accusative
47.	The man I love is rich.	Accusative
48.	The book I read was fun.	Accusative
49.	The car I drive is old.	Accusative
50.	The telephone I bought is cheap.	Accusative