Dutch influence on Turkish constructions in Turkish-Dutch contact

Languages in contact influence each other in several ways (Thomason 2001). This influence can be in different structural forms varying from individual lexical items (e.g. codeswitching, Backus 1996) to whole syntactic patterns (e.g. word order changes, Thomason 2001, Winford 2003). However, little is known about what happens to multi-word collocations in case of contact. In this presentation, we provide a synchronic overview of multi-word collocations that are copied from Dutch onto Turkish as spoken in Holland (NL-Turkish).

Following traditions in cognitive linguistics (Langacker 1987, Croft 2001), we assume that there are no clear-cut borders between lexicon and syntax. Instead, there is a continuum where the maximally specific side is represented by lexicon and the maximally schematic side by syntax. In between are the partially schematic units.

[Ik weet het niet] (I know that not) “I don’t know” is a frozen expression used as a filler in spoken Dutch. Turkish also has a similar expression: [ne bil-e-yim] (what know-opt-1sg) “I don’t know”. The structural difference between the two is that Turkish does not make use of a subject pronoun. In NL-Turkish, however, a subject pronoun is added to the fixed expression as in [ben ne bil-e-yim] (I what know-opt-1sg). This sounds unconventional to Turkish speakers in Turkey (TR-Turkish) since the additional pronoun is perceived as contrastive, which is not the intention.

The Dutch construction of [school/vak doen] (school/course do) “do a course/go to school” construction has wide-range of uses from completing an educational level (e.g. basisschool doen “primary.school do”) to taking a course (e.g. Engels doen “English do”). Instead of this particular construction, different constructions with different verbs (e.g. okul-a git- “school-dat go, İngilizce gör- “English see”) are used in Turkish. NL-Turkish, on the other hand, copies this construction from Dutch onto Turkish with its wide range of uses (e.g. okul yap “school doen”, İngilizce yap “English do”). These uses are unconventional for TR-Turkish speakers since they invoke different meanings such as “literally building a school” (for [school doen]).

The third form is somewhat more syntactic: a particular form of reported speech construction. In Dutch, the reported speech construction has one frozen form [S ZEGGEN DAT reported clause (with a finite verb)] “S SAY THAT reported clause (with a finite verb)”. Turkish, on the other hand, has different constructions with different reporting verbs (e.g. de-mek “say” söyle-mek “say-inf.”) in which the reported sentence can be formed with finite and non-finite verbs and with a different order: [S reported clause (with a finite verb) SAY] or [S reported clause (with a non-finite verb) SAY]. In NL-Turkish, a Dutch-like reported speech construction is taking over. This new way of reporting sounds unconventional for TR-Turkish speakers due to the violation of word order and the finiteness of the reported clause.

Although Dutch influence leads to creation of unconventional constructions, not all of them are conventionalized in the NL-Turkish community. We will discuss the social factors that are influential in this conventionalization process. Our data will be drawn from spoken corpora collected from the Turkish community in Holland and in Turkey.